Resolution on climate change – a European strategic long-term vision for a prosperous, modern, competitive and climate neutral economy in accordance with the Paris Agreement

2019/2582(RSP) - 14/03/2019 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 369 votes to 116 with 40 abstentions, a resolution on climate change – a European strategic long-term vision for a prosperous, modern, competitive and climate neutral economy in accordance with the Paris Agreement, welcoming the Commission's communication on the subject.

The resolution was tabled by the EPP, S&D, ALDE, Greens/EFA, GUE/NGL, and EFDD groups.

Parliament endorsed the objective of net-zero greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2050 and urged Member States to do the same as part of the Future of Europe debate at the special EU summit in Sibiu in May 2019. According to the IPCC 1.5° special report, limiting global warming to 1.5°C with no or limited overshoot implies reaching net-zero GHG emissions globally by 2067 at the latest. In order to have a good chance of keeping global temperature below 1.5°C by 2100, the Union needs to strive towards reaching net-zero GHG emissions by 2050 at the latest.

Pathways for the European mid-century zero emissions strategy

Underlining that that Europe can lead the way to climate neutrality by investing in innovative technological solutions, empowering citizens, and aligning action in key areas such as energy, industrial policy and research, Parliament pointed out that, according to the Commission's estimates, EU GDP is expected to increase more under zero-emissions scenarios than in scenarios with smaller emissions reductions. Members welcomed the inclusion of two pathways (out of eight) aimed at reaching net-zero GHG emissions by 2050 and the Commission's support for these. They considered that the EU net-zero strategy should prioritise direct emission reductions and actions conserving and enhancing the EU's natural sinks and reservoirs, and should only aim for the use of carbon removal technologies where no direct emission reduction options are available. Further action by 2030 is needed if the Union is to avoid relying on carbon removal technologies that would entail significant risks for ecosystems, biodiversity and food security, as also confirmed by the IPCC 1.5° special report.

Social aspects of climate change and a just transition

Members highlighted the Commission's finding that, if handled well, a just transition towards net-zero GHG emissions has the potential to create a net gain of jobs in the Union – economy-wide employment will increase by 2.1 million additional jobs by 2050 under a net-zero emissions scenario compared to an employment increase of 1.3 million additional jobs under the 80 % emission reduction scenario. They reiterated their appeal for a specific allocation of EUR 4.8 billion for a new Just Energy Transition Fund to be introduced into the Multiannual Financial Framework 2021-2027 in order to support workers and communities in regions adversely affected by this transition.

Intermediate targets

Parliament recognized that the decade from 2020 to 2030 would be of crucial importance if the EU were to reach net-zero by 2050. It supported an update of the Union's nationally determined contributions (NDCs) with an economy-wide target of 55 % domestic GHG emission reductions by 2030 compared with 1990 levels. It would also be beneficial for the EU to establish a further interim emission reduction target by 2040 that can provide additional stability and ensure that the long-term 2050 target is met.

Sectoral contributions

Emphasising that net emissions will have to be reduced to close to zero in all sectors of the economy, Parliament called on the Commission to develop pathways to climate neutrality for all sectors, stressing the importance of the 'polluter pays' principle in this regard. It highlighted the role of the transport sector and the need to pursue greater ambition in the use of carbon capture and storage (CCS) and carbon capture and utilisation (CCU).

Energy policy

Members pointed out that achieving a net-zero GHG economy will require considerable additional investments in the EU's energy system and related infrastructure compared to today's baseline, in the range of EUR 175 to 290 billion a year. They called on Member States to implement the Clean Energy Package without delay, and stressed the need to decarbonise the power sector. They called on the Commission to present a new and integrated EU industrial climate strategy for energy-intensive industries in support of a competitive net-zero emissions heavy industry transition.

Research and innovation

Parliament underlined its position that Horizon Europe must contribute at least 35 % of its expenditures to climate objectives as appropriate and as part of the general Union objective of mainstreaming climate actions.

Financing

Members considered that the 2021-2027 MFF should, before its adoption, be evaluated in the light of the objective to reach a climate neutral economy by 2050, and that a standard test to ensure that expenditure under the EU budget is climate-proof must be established. They regretted the fact that fossil fuel subsidies are still increasing and amount to around EUR 55 billion per year and called for a phase out all European and national fossil fuel subsidies.

The role of consumers

Parliament called on the Commission to explore policy options as soon as possible, including on environmental taxation, in order to encourage behavioural change. It stressed the need to reduce resource waste and highlighted the cost efficiency of circular economy measures, as well as the importance of green public procurement and ecodesign. Members considered that the work on a reliable model for measuring the climate impact based on consumption should be continued.

The EU and global climate action

The resolution called for the EU to increase its own climate financing and to work actively to encourage Member States to increase their climate aid (development aid rather than loans) to third countries, which should come in addition to overseas development assistance. It also called on the Commission to continue and intensify cooperation and support in the development of carbon pricing mechanisms outside Europe in order to pursue increased emission reductions and an improved level playing field worldwide.