

Energy: cooperation with developing countries.

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Anders WIJKMAN (EPP-ED, S) on the Commission communication. It felt that the Commission's plans were not ambitious enough and was particularly critical of the fact that no additional resources were being proposed to meet the huge challenges posed by this sector. The Commission was urged to address the problem of extra funding and to consider setting up a special EU Sustainable Energy Fund using resources from the EDF. The report underlined that energy must be considered as a "cross-cutting issue" with a high development potential, especially for poverty eradication. Two types of intervention deserved particular attention: (1) policy development and investment at village level; and (2) policy development and investments to address resource efficiency, environmental and climate concerns in the modern sector. While acknowledging that access to electricity was much needed for the rural poor, the committee felt that priority should be given in the short term to other less costly forms of energy, like solar heaters, wind pumps, improved cooking stoves, biomass briquettes, etc., which could make a huge difference to people's daily lives and were often more appropriate to the level and structure of demand at village level than conventional alternatives. The Commission was also urged to pay special attention to the development of different forms of solar energy in many developing countries. The report further recommended increasing Community expenditure on R & D in the energy sector, giving primary importance to energy efficiency and renewable energy and ensuring the transfer of know-how. Amongst other benefits, the use of renewable energy sources could help to reduce dependence on expensive imports of fossil fuels and thereby to improve balance of payments; moreover, renewable energy projects could have a significant impact on job creation. The committee also called for immediate steps to remove subsidies and other supports for environmentally harmful technologies and to develop mechanisms to address externalities, like pollution, to enable alternative energy technologies to compete in the market on a more equal basis. While acknowledging that the development of alternative energies was important, the committee nevertheless pointed out that it was essential to limit the OECD countries' consumption of fossil fuels in order to restore the balance of use and enable developing countries to use and have access to them. It stressed the importance of global environment policy-making, "first and foremost through the United Nations", and underlined the need for all countries, including the USA, to ratify the Kyoto Protocol. The Commission was also urged to lend support to the proposal of establishing a World Energy Charter, whose main objective would be energy policy-making for sustainable development at global level. Lastly, the report was critical of the fact that the transportation sector, the cause of many problems, was largely overlooked in the communication and called for it to be included in the Commission's strategy. Pollution as well as congestion could be reduced through enhanced fuel efficiency, mass transit systems, bus rapid transit, the use of biofuels, etc.