Resolution on the revised sustainable development strategy

2006/2517(RSP) - 15/06/2006 - Text adopted by Parliament, topical subjects

In adopting a joint resolution on the revised sustainable development strategy, the European Parliament expresses its disappointment at the lack of progress in developing and following up the Sustainable Development Strategy adopted in Göteborg in 2001. It considered that the Commission's platform for action on the review of the SDS was overly cautious and weak, and in its present form would not succeed in mobilising public opinion and policy-makers behind the vital tasks that lie ahead. Parliament w elcomed, however, the valuable work of the Austrian Presidency in seeking to relaunch the SDS.

Link with the Lisbon Strategy: Parliament noted that in the Lisbon Strategy environmental objectives ought to be as important as competitiveness and job creation, while in the SDS economic sustainability and poverty reduction ought to be priorities as important as environmental goals. It suggested, as a concrete step towards effective coordination of the Lisbon and SDS Strategies, that the necessary transformation of the energy and transport systems, which had to be based on decoupling energy demand from economic growth and on modal shift towards environmentally friendly transport modes - a key objective of the SDS - should be used as a lever to boost growth, employment and exports within the Lisbon Strategy.

Reinforcing the objectives: setting clear intermediate and long-term objectives and targets: Parliament concurred with the seven key issues that have been put forward for inclusion within a revised SDS (climate change and cleaner energy, public health, social exclusion, demography and migration, management of natural resources, sustainable transport, global poverty and development challenges), and asked that the Commission review the objectives and targets to ensure the highest level of ambition and ensure that they are measurable in order to enable a precise evaluation of progress to be carried out. It emphasised the importance of public health issues and protecting biodiversity and suggested that these either be added as a new key issue within the SDS or, at least, be given special emphasis within specific sections on health and management of natural resources. Parliament also emphasised the importance of gender equality in sustainable development. It considered, therefore, that a limited number of intermediate and long-term targets should either be reconfirmed or established. They should address, in particular, current negative trends in the fields of land use and land resources, transport, climate change, fisheries, use of fossil fuels and depletion of biodiversity, and should also seek to encourage modal shift, the decoupling of economic growth from transport, and greenhouse-gas emission reductions in line with max +2°C warming as compared to pre-industrial levels.

Improving the quality of growth as a precondition for the SDS: Parliament stated that the emphasis placed on GDP in measuring progress in society should be balanced by an equal concern about the qualitative aspects of growth, as this is a prerequisite for sustainable development. Agreement needed to be reached on a limited set of key sustainability indicators to be widely discussed at the yearly review of the SDS. These indicators should pertain to fundamental aspects of the quality of life and should allow quantitative and prompt assessments of health (quality and distribution of health care, life expectancy, child mortality, etc.), awareness (education and culture, ICT access, etc.), inclusion (participation in society's decisions and social capital, etc.) and environmental quality (air and water pollution, etc.). Sustainable development should be seen more as an economic opportunity than as a constraint, and as a spur to technological innovation and investment.

Reinforcing sustainability governance at national, EU and international level: Parliament emphasised the importance of national sustainable development strategies within each of the EU Member States, and

the need for the exchange of best practice between them. Reviews of sustainability should be a central feature of all impact assessments of new EU policy measures and of 'ex post' monitoring of policy implementation. Parliament recognised that developing countries did not have to repeat polluting mistakes of the industrialised countries in the development of their economies. It called for the mainstreaming of sustainability principles into the development cooperation activities of the EU and for proper funding to be ensured in order to address global environmental challenges and needs.

Complementary measures: Parliament emphasised the need for complementary measures, such as sustainable fiscal measures and public procurement, and, as soon as possible, the elimination of unsustainable public subsidies in a number of policy areas, in particular in the fields of energy and agriculture. Sustainability would not be achieved without shifting the tax burden from labour to resource use and pollution. Parliament underlined the importance of rural development programmes and agriculture (both conventional and organic) for sustainable development, given that only economically and ecologically viable rural areas can reverse the trend of rural depopulation and thus safeguard essential infrastructures.

Finally, it emphasised the important role of science and innovation in addressing the many challenges defined in the SDS.