Thematic strategy on the sustainable use of natural resources

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report drawn by Kartika Tamara LIOTARD (GUE-NGL, NL) in response to the Commission communication on a Thematic Strategy for Sustainable Use of Natural Resources. The report was highly critical of the communication, saying that that it lacked "a clear vision" on how to meet the overall objective and that the proposed action platform would not be able "to persuade the public or political decision-makers to pursue the crucial goals for which it provides".

Noting that the Thematic Strategy fails to pursue the objectives of the European Community's 6th Environmental Action Programme, the committee called on the Commission to make the Strategy more effective, to establish goals and targets at political and sectoral level for resource efficiency as well as to speed up the work on appropriate tools to maintain progress. The Commission was also urged to set binding targets and timetables for natural resources by developing and implementing best practices for every production chain and by achieving a quantitative greenhouse gas reduction of at least 30% by 2020 and 80% by 2050 against 1990 levels.

In addition, the committee encouraged the Commission to propose Community policies in order to foster stakeholder interaction and promote application of life-cycle assessments and/or other methods among companies as well as to develop CO2 targets on national and sectoral basis. MEPs said that the EU should "aim to be the world leader in eco-efficient technologies", and stressed that R&D efforts must be geared towards our understanding of how natural systems work so as to structure production and consumption systems along biological lines, thereby improving resource productivity and reducing pollution.

Among its other recommendations, the committee urged the Commission to perform within three years an assessment of the possibilities and instruments for decoupling natural resource use from economic growth and to add other indicators for assessing the use of natural resources, based on various aspects of the quality of life, such as public health conditions, social inclusion, social awareness of the decision-making processes and an environmental 'footprint'. The report also called on the EU to ensure that all Community instruments and legislation contribute to the conservation of natural resources both within and outside the EU. For example, the Union should encourage the establishment of resource strategies in non-EU countries, which should also be reflected in its funds and aid policy. The committee also stressed that market instruments and subsidies, particularly of a fiscal nature, can be used to reduce the use of environmentally damaging resources, particularly by gradually reducing any subsidies to unsustainable activities and supporting the introduction of ecotaxes.

In addition, MEPs considered that the EU should do everything possible to provide consumers and producers with proper information on the sustainable use of natural resources and that environmental education should form part of elementary education. Lastly, the report called on the Commission to develop, within three years, a methodology to measure the environmental impact of every production chain and to monitor on a three-yearly basis the progress in improving resource efficiency.