

P6_TA(2006)0272

Sustainable development strategy

European Parliament resolution on the revised sustainable development strategy

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS) adopted by the Göteborg European Council of 15 and 16 June 2001 and to the Johannesburg Action Programme adopted by the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002,
- having regard to the Commission Communication on 'the Review of the Sustainable Development Strategy: A Platform for Action' (COM(2005)0658),
- having regard to the Presidency Conclusions of the Brussels European Council of 16 and 17 June 2005, and its own previous resolutions on the matter,
- having regard to the questions for oral answer to the Commission and the Council,
- having regard to Rule 108(5) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. having regard to the persistence of unsustainable trends in many areas, such as land use and land resources, transport, climate change, fisheries, use of fossil fuels and depletion of biodiversity,
- B. emphasising the importance of the three central and related objectives of environmental protection, social equity and cohesion and economic prosperity, and having regard to the need to ensure that these three components of sustainable development are properly integrated and implemented at EU and world levels,
- C. having regard to the policy-guiding principles that must underpin sustainable development, in particular those of quality of life and solidarity within and between generations,
- D. emphasising the need for a shift in culture towards a society based on sustainable development principles, requiring policies of a long-term nature aimed at decoupling economic growth from use of natural resources,
- E. whereas a significant proportion of the European population continues to suffer severe economic and social problems, such as poverty, unemployment and social exclusion and whereas the most socially deprived people often experience the worst conditions in terms of their social environment, including poor housing and health; having regard also to the dramatic demographic changes in the EU and the converse trends in the least developed countries,

Overall Assessment

Lack of ambition

1. Expresses its disappointment at the lack of progress in developing and following up the SDS adopted in Göteborg in 2001;
2. Considers that the Commission's platform for action on the review of the SDS is overly cautious and weak, and in its present form will not succeed in mobilising public opinion and policy-makers behind the vital tasks that lie ahead;
3. Welcomes, however, the valuable work of the Austrian Presidency in seeking to relaunch the SDS, in strengthening the proposals from the Commission, in pulling together existing targets and indicators within a single and more coherent framework, and also in attempting to put forward some new concepts;

Link with the Lisbon Strategy

4. Considers that the adoption of cross-cutting strategies such as those adopted in Cardiff, Lisbon and Göteborg is only of value if it is followed by a coherent and consistent overarching process;
5. Notes 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;
6. Notes, in this context, the many complementary features of the new SDS and the Lisbon Strategy, such as their common goals of improved competitiveness, the creation of more and better-quality jobs, greater social inclusion, environmental protection and risk prevention;
7. Suggests that concrete steps be taken to ensure that their implementation is timely and properly coordinated, notably by means of compatible monitoring and review procedures;
8. Suggests, moreover, as a concrete step towards effective coordination of the Lisbon and SDS Strategies, that the necessary transformation of the energy and transport systems, which has 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;
9. Notes, moreover, the decision of the 2006 Spring European Council to hold an energy review annually at the Spring European Council, and that work on this should also fit into the wider framework of the SDS and of the Lisbon Process;

Reinforcing the Strategy

Reinforcing the objectives: setting clear intermediate and long-term objectives and targets

10. Notes that the term 'sustainable development' has the advantage of being a truly cross-cutting economic, social and environmental objective; considers, moreover, that it needs to be made as precise as possible in the light of the different interpretations of the term;

11. Concurrency, in this context, 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);
12. Requests that the Commission review the objectives and targets to ensure the highest possible level of ambition and ensure that they are measurable and specific in order to enable a precise and detailed evaluation of progress to be carried out;
13. Emphasises the importance of public health issues and protecting biodiversity in the light of the ambitious objective of reversing by 2010 the loss of biodiversity in Europe and the world, and suggests 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;
14. Emphasises the importance of gender equality in sustainable development; underlines the fact that the common goals of the Lisbon Strategy and the SDS cannot be attained without addressing current inequalities and making better use of the potential of both men and women; underlines, therefore, the fact that social inclusion must be understood in its broadest sense, including the gender dimension;
15. Considers, therefore, that a limited number of intermediate and long-term targets should either be reconfirmed or established, should be based on the precautionary principle and be ambitious and realistic in nature, and should then be properly and systematically applied and monitored; believes that 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;
16. Supports the proposed new emphasis on seeking to measure resource efficiency through application of environmental resource accounting; suggests that special efforts should be made to monitor closely the ecological footprint of the EU in the world, analysing environmental impact from both the consumption and the production end, and setting as a target that the EU footprint be systematically reduced;
17. Welcomes, moreover, the Commission's proposal for a European Year of combating poverty and social exclusion; urges the Commission to put forward more specific initiatives and efficient implementation measures to enable real progress to be made; points in this connection, by way of example, to the Commission's initiative aimed at analysing the impact of an ageing society, which seeks to achieve concrete solutions based on the participation both of the various levels of political decision-makers in the EU and of civil society;

Improving the quality of growth as a precondition for the SDS

18. Considers 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; believes, therefore, that agreement needs to be reached on a limited set of key sustainability indicators to be presented and widely

discussed at the yearly review of the SDS; considers that 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.);

19. Calls for the further development of the European social model and for recommendations, on the basis of that model, that the Member States take action to counteract the 'unsustainable' trends of poverty, social exclusion and the consequences of the ageing of society; considers that, to this end, social situation indicators should be developed which would then be included in the sustainability impact assessment; emphasises that Europe needs a macroeconomic framework to support sustainable development, strengthening environmentally friendly internal demand, employment and social cohesion;
20. Considers that sustainable development should be seen more as an economic opportunity than as a constraint, and as a spur to technological innovation and investment; calls, therefore, upon the Commission to ensure effective coordination of the Union's growth strategies, integrating information and communications technologies and resource-efficient technologies for sustainable development and 'smart growth' both at home and abroad;
21. Believes that a society built on knowledge, awareness and participation, as well as on inclusion and interpersonal relationships, should be promoted that goes beyond the Lisbon Agenda; considers that this will represent a higher quality society and one that, through extended support for ICT, can reduce demand for energy and other natural resources;

Reinforcing sustainability governance at national, EU and international level

22. Believes that the SDS requires systematic monitoring if it is to be properly implemented;
23. Resolves to hold a regular plenary debate on the objectives and targets contained in the Sustainable Development Strategy, based on contributions from all of its relevant committees, so that Parliament can state its views on progress and priorities for the SDS in time for these to be taken fully into account in the European Council reviews of the SDS; considers, furthermore, that it should hold regular dialogue with the Member States' national parliaments and the parliaments of the constitutional regions, on a general or bilateral basis, in order to examine best practice on sustainable development, as well as to exchange experiences of both Europe-wide and national implementation of the SDS;
24. Emphasises 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; underlines, furthermore, the need for action on the SDS at regional and local level, as well as at the level of individual citizens, with reinforcement of education, participatory processes and public awareness of sustainable development principles;
25. Considers that 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;

26. Believes that action at EU level needs to be complemented by action at international level, with a view to encouraging the promotion of sustainable development principles around the world, not least in the rapidly developing countries, with a view to promoting economic growth and reducing poverty while saving scarce resources and protecting the global environment;
27. Calls, therefore, for more systematic annual monitoring of progress towards meeting the targets in the Johannesburg Action Plan and the Millennium Development Goals;
28. Recognises that developing countries do not have to repeat polluting mistakes of the industrialised countries in the development of their economies; calls, in addition, 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

29. Emphasises 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; believes that sustainability will not be achieved without shifting the tax burden from labour to resource use and pollution;
30. Underlines 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; calls for specific research efforts with regard to the possible effects of climate change on water availability and soil quality in the Mediterranean area;
31. Emphasises the important role of science and innovation in addressing the many challenges defined in the SDS, including competitiveness; regrets that public-sector support for energy research within the EU and its Member States has been drastically reduced recently and calls for a significant increase in support for renewables and energy efficiency;
32. Recognises that climate security and the need to break dependency on fossil fuels are emerging as top priorities within EU policy-making, requiring not only ambitious domestic action to curb greenhouse gases but also significant financial support for technology cooperation with developing countries to encourage investments in energy efficiency and low-carbon technologies; emphasises the importance of energy saving, which is the single most important source of energy in Europe and one which has no negative environmental impacts;
33. Believes that the SDS objectives must be reflected in the use of the EU budget over the period from 2007-2013 and help to set the agenda for the full review of the EU's budget in 2008/2009; welcomes, in this context, the fact that the proposal for a Council Regulation laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund (COM(2004)0492) explicitly states that

the objectives of the Funds are pursued within the framework of sustainable development, but regrets that the earmarking of the assistance co-financed by the Funds does not correspond to the SDS and considers that this ought to be reviewed;

34. Insists, finally, that measures to support sustainable development objectives should not be judged just in the light of their short-term costs, but also of their longer-term benefits, and that the costs of inaction should also be fully taken into account;

o

o o

35. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and Commission.