Roadmap to a resource-efficient Europe

The European Commission has published a roadmap outlining measures to encourage more efficient use of natural resources in the EU. Industry welcomed the roadmap while environmentalists called for more specific indicators and targets, and faster progress.

Commission roadmap

In September 2011, the Commission adopted a Roadmap to a resource-efficient Europe, outlining ambitions for the EU economy to grow up to 2050 in a way that respects resource constraints, protects biodiversity, and provides high living standards with reduced environmental impact.

The roadmap is part of the flagship initiative for a resource-efficient Europe which the Commission launched in January 2011, under the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. It follows a consultation with stakeholders on opportunities and barriers to more efficient use of resources, and on the potential of public policy tools.

The roadmap is intended as a first step towards a coherent framework across policy areas. It proposes "milestones" for 2020 regarding consumption, production, waste management, research and innovation, subsidies, taxation, construction and transport, among others. The roadmap also lists measures to be taken in the shorter term. The Commission plans to make further proposals to implement the roadmap.

Reactions

The Council welcomed the roadmap, saying that the proposed milestones were "a good basis for further discussion" among Member States. Analysts have noted national variations in implementing energy-efficiency measures, with some Member States seeking to dilute those policy proposals that would impose extra costs on business or government.

Environmentalists criticised the roadmap for lacking clear indicators, targets and concrete proposals. The Commission defended the application of the consumption-to-GDP ratio as a temporary indicator of material resource productivity, saying that the absence of comparable data on resource use has delayed the development of specific indicators. Measuring water and land use is particularly difficult.

The European Federation of Waste Management and Environmental Services welcomed the roadmap and urged the EU to fund public-private partnerships to encourage adherence to higher standards in waste management. PlasticsEurope, another industry group, praised the roadmap's focus on the environmental impact of products over their life-cycle and on treating waste as a valuable resource. The chemical industry also supported the roadmap's aims and life-cycle focus.

The European Economic and Social Committee urged the Commission and Member States to establish "coordinating machinery" to monitor and encourage progress in implementing the roadmap. A task force at the European Policy Centre noted that resource efficiency required the removal of subsidies that shield polluters from the true cost of exploiting resources. Economists also recommended facilitating resource management in public procurement.

The roadmap on resource efficiency is one of several Commission roadmaps on related issues such as energy, transport and a low-carbon economy. Commentators warned that such proliferation of roadmaps risks confusing future policy. On the other hand, roadmaps can extend the time horizon for policy-makers and reassure private investors. Policy coordination is necessary to account for links among resources, as shortages and price fluctuations are likely to spread from one resource to others.

European Parliament

The EP's committee on the environment, public health and food safety agreed an own-initiative report on the Commission roadmap. In September 2011, Parliament adopted a resolution on an effective raw materials strategy for Europe. A workshop on resource efficiency held at the EP in January 2012 discussed challenges and best practices.

Author: Kalin Ivanov
E-mail: kalin.ivanov@europarl.europa.eu **Tel**: 48676

120306REV1