

European Parliament resolution on the environmental aspects of sustainable development (2005/2051(INI)), adopted in plenary on 18.01.2006

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its resolution of 31 May 2001 on environment policy and sustainable development: preparing for the Gothenburg European Council¹,
 - having regard to its resolution of 28 February 2002 on the sustainable development strategy for the Barcelona Summit²,
 - having regard to its resolutions of 16 May 2002 in preparation for the world summit on sustainable development in 2002³,
 - having regard to the Commission working document entitled ‘Integrating environmental considerations into other policy areas – a stocktaking of the Cardiff process’ (COM(2004)0394),
 - having regard to the Commission communication entitled ‘The 2005 Review of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy: Initial Stocktaking and Future Orientations’ (COM(2005)0037),
 - having regard to the conclusions of the Gothenburg (15-16 June 2001), Barcelona (15-16 March 2002) and Brussels (16-17 June 2005) European Councils,
 - having regard to the revised Lisbon strategy adopted by the European Council of 22-23 March 2005,
 - having regard to the Commission’s strategic objectives for the period 2005-2009 ‘Prosperity, solidarity and security’ (COM(2005)0012),
 - having regard to Decision No 1600/2002/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 July 2002 establishing the sixth Community action programme for the environment⁴ and its thematic strategies,
 - having regard to Rule 45 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety and the opinion of the Committee on Social Affairs and Employment (A6-0383/2005),
- A. whereas the Johannesburg summit in September 2002 identified five essential areas where concrete results are needed: health, energy, agriculture and biodiversity, ecosystem management, water and sanitation,
- B. whereas, despite the undertakings made at the Rio and Johannesburg summits in 1992 and

¹ OJ C 47 E, 21.2.2002, p. 223.

² OJ C 293 E, 28.11.2002, p. 84.

³ OJ C 180 E, 31.7.2003, pp. 507 and 517.

⁴ OJ L 242, 10.9.2002, p. 1.

2002 respectively, the signatory States have not taken the measures required to reverse the current tendency to overexploit resources and pollute the environment, or the dwindling of natural resources and the climate change which are the most visible results of this failure,

- C. whereas the number of natural climatic disasters has more than doubled in Europe since the 1990s and global warming is set to continue, with ever more numerous and tangible events demonstrating its impact on the viability of economies, ecosystems and human health,
 - D. whereas a new definition of growth is needed, based on responsible, efficient use of natural resources and a change in patterns of production and consumption,
 - E. whereas sustainable development is a question of solidarity between the generations, and between the countries of the North and the South, and whereas the European Union is therefore faced with a development policy choice whereby the people of the developing countries can gain access to a better life, while at the same time protecting the earth's environment,
1. Welcomes the fact that the Commission is taking stock of the sustainable development strategy in accordance with its undertaking; welcomes the sustainable development guidelines adopted by the European Council in June 2005; calls on the Commission to do everything it can to ensure that the strategy is revised as soon as possible on the basis of those guidelines, and on the Austrian Council Presidency to take the necessary steps to ensure that this revision can be adopted during the first half of 2006;
 2. Considers it regrettable that the revision of the sustainable development policy was not carried out in combination with the mid-term review of the Lisbon strategy; wishes to see the revised sustainable development strategy become the long-term strategy for Europe, defining the best political project capable of achieving its goals for a sustainable world fifty years from now, and believes that the Union's other political processes for the medium term, such as the Lisbon strategy, should be compatible with that long-term strategy;
 3. Stresses – in the light of limited financial resources – the need for an identical, efficient and systematic monitoring and review procedure for the two strategies;
 4. Considers it regrettable that most of the orientations contained in the second part of the Commission communication fail to respond to the magnitude of the challenges noted in the first part of the communication; stresses the inadequacy of some of the orientations, particularly as regards the fight against non-sustainable tendencies;

Worsening of non-sustainable tendencies

5. Concurs with the Commission's observation that tendencies running counter to sustainable development have become worse, whether they consist in overexploitation and pollution of natural resources, loss of biodiversity, aggravation of climate change, inequality and poverty, or the accumulation of public debt, both in the European Union and in third countries;
6. Supports the Commission's call for the setting of objectives to combat these negative

trends; one priority medium-term objective should be to achieve the call as formulated in the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe for the ‘sustainable development of Europe based on balanced economic growth [...], a highly competitive social market economy, aiming at full employment and social progress, and a high level of protection and improvement of the quality of the environment’, an overarching objective from which concrete intermediate objectives may be derived;

7. Believes that a strategy for sustainable development needs to permit the application of measures that are adapted to local development requirements and to the limitations and conditions of the region;

Climate change, transport, clean energy sources and control of energy consumption

8. Notes that, despite the legislation adopted and the technical progress achieved by the EU in reducing atmospheric pollution and greenhouse gas emissions, there is a risk that the Union will not attain the Kyoto protocol objectives for 2012, due to the absence of suitable measures to curb the rise in road transport;
9. Is also concerned at the large and rapid increase in air transport and polluting emissions in that sector; stresses that unless swift action is taken, the greenhouse gas reduction objectives will be jeopardised; urges the Commission to take prompt action to reduce the climate impact from aviation by creating a pilot emission trading scheme for the aviation sector for the period 2008-2012, covering all flights to and from any EU airport, and to ensure that instruments to tackle the full climate impact of aviation are introduced in parallel;
10. Calls on the Commission and the Council to step up their efforts to bring existing legislation into line with the latest scientific knowledge and to put forward solutions designed to achieve a substantial reduction in atmospheric pollution and greenhouse gas emissions in the EU by 30% of 1990 levels by 2020 and 80% by 2050, recent reports having confirmed that countering climate change requires a larger reduction in emissions in Europe and the rest of the world;
11. Supports the Commission’s proposal to transfer a large proportion of road transport to more environmentally friendly modes of transport; calls on the Commission, the various constellations within the Council, and the European Council to take rapid measures to stabilise distribution among modes of transport at the 1998 level by 2010 at the latest; believes, in more general terms, that a more environmentally friendly mobility policy calls for a profound change of policy;
12. Deplores the fact that, according to studies, Europe’s current use of natural resources is exceeding biological capacity by more than double, which means that Europe is making disproportionate demands on existing terrestrial and marine natural resources;
13. Regrets the fact that most of the Member States continue to depend heavily on fossil fuels and nuclear energy for their energy supplies; supports the medium- and long-term objectives as regards the market share of renewable and clean energy sources; regrets the Commission’s withdrawal of the proposal for a Council directive which would have permitted lower taxes on certain mineral oils containing biofuels and on biofuels themselves, although this measure was supported by Parliament;

14. Welcomes the Commission's intention to submit an action plan for biomass with a view to promoting the use of biofuels as an alternative to fossil fuels; urges the Commission to propose measures enabling solutions for developing organic energy crops in the EU;

Management of natural resources

15. Recognises that the benefits of the European Union's water protection and management policy are becoming only slowly and patchily evident and will be more visible in the medium and long term; calls on the Member States, especially those in the west and south of Europe, and the sectors concerned, in particular the agricultural and tourism sectors, to undertake measures to reduce water abstraction and guarantee water supplies for the various areas of human activity; calls on the Council and the Commission to continue to take the necessary measures in the areas of water and pollution (nitrates, pesticides, hazardous and bioaccumulative substances, and substances that disrupt endocrine function);
16. Encourages the European Union to achieve the ambitious objective of reversing by 2010 the loss of biodiversity in Europe and the world; deplores the fact that the decisions and measures adopted, at both European and international level, will not enable this objective to be achieved by the scheduled date, and that many species of fauna and flora are threatened with extinction; calls on the Commission in consequence to present an ambitious, coherent new European action plan, endowed with the necessary budget to fulfil the objectives of protecting and restoring ecosystems and biological diversity in the European Union and third countries; believes that further action is necessary to fully integrate biodiversity protection into all relevant EU policies, particularly agriculture, regional development, fisheries and development policy; calls on the Council and Commission to ensure that sufficient funds are allocated to the Natura 2000 network; furthermore, calls on the Commission to propose a system for the aquatic environment along the lines of Natura 2000;
17. Calls on the EU and the Member States, in line with the Johannesburg criteria and other Union policies, to include, under the concept of sustainable development, the conservation of the environment and of landscape, urban and historical resources which form a familiar environment and are in many cases a source of wealth;
18. Deplores the increase in the overall volume of waste, particularly packaging; calls on the Commission to ensure that the thematic strategy on waste includes new provisions aimed at reducing at source the production of waste in the medium to long term;

Land use

19. Calls for the expansion of urban areas and the improvement of infrastructures (roads, railways, ports, airports, canals, gas and oil pipelines, etc) to be undertaken on a basis of respect for cultivable land, forests and protected areas; calls on the Commission, should it find it necessary, to build on the existing legislation with a view to ensuring the optimisation of environmental impact assessments, the sustainability of the trans-European networks, and the achievement of the objective of maintaining biodiversity up to 2010;
20. Calls on the Commission to integrate soil protection into the Community's environmental measures; once again draws attention to the final outcome of any soil degradation, namely

desertification, which is affecting large parts of the Union and has obvious effects in terms of poverty, loss of biodiversity, water quality and climate change; recalls the vital role of forests in soil fixation, avoidance of erosion, CO₂ absorption and flood prevention;

21. Supports the Commission's proposal to present a thematic strategy on the urban environment, the objective of which must be to improve the quality of urban areas in order to give European town-dwellers a healthy living environment, particularly as regards air quality; takes the view that three areas take priority: development of public transport that uses clean or less polluting technologies; promotion of sustainable construction of an environmentally high quality (EHQ); and sustainable town planning that aims, inter alia, to prevent economic and social segregation and a reduction in green urban areas;
22. Notes that despite its undertakings, the European Union has still not succeeded in uncoupling growth from the exploitation of natural resources; calls on the Commission to present proposals for measures and regulations aimed at multiplying by 4 by 2010, and by 10 by 2025, resource and energy efficiency in production and consumption;
23. Stresses that rarification, pollution and increasingly difficult access to natural resources and raw materials constitute a threat to the maintenance of biodiversity, and will result in a rise in prices, the magnitude of which will destabilise more or less profoundly the economic and social systems of the European Union and third countries, and in a risk of conflict; notes with regret, therefore, the lack of any adequate response to this situation by the Commission and the European Union;

Public health

24. Deplores the gap between the assessment of the consequences of environmental degradation on health, on the one hand, and the insufficiently bold measures proposed by the Commission in its European Environment & Health Action Plan 2004-2010 (COM(2004)0416), on the other; takes the view that this orientation is not consistent with a genuine sustainable development policy aimed at reducing health risks and guaranteeing the viability of our social welfare and health systems;
25. Greets with satisfaction the REACH proposal, the aim of which is to improve protection of human health and the environment while maintaining competitiveness and promoting innovation in the European chemicals industry; hopes that legislation will be adopted which is close to the Commission's initial proposal; hopes that the date of entry into force of the new system envisaged for 1 January 2007 will not be postponed;

International

26. Calls on the Member States to extend debt cancellation to more developing countries; takes the view that environmental protection measures and mechanisms for the transfer of environmentally friendly technologies should accompany this debt cancellation programme;
27. Calls on the EU to honour its commitments under the various international conventions and to take the necessary initiatives to ensure that individual countries and the international community abide by the commitments and obligations arising from the recent global negotiations having a direct or indirect relation to the sustainable

development strategy (Kyoto, Monterrey, Doha, Johannesburg);

28. Stresses that the revised strategy must clearly state that its objective is reform of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) such as will make trade subordinate to sustainable development objectives and international commitments to environmental preservation and respect for the international conventions in the social field, including the standards laid down by the International Labour Organisation; calls on the European Union to work towards recognition and transparent application of the precautionary principle within the WTO;
29. Welcomes the outcome achieved at the Montreal Conference, where all parties - including the United States - endorsed the fight against climate change; stresses, however, that a great deal of progress remains to be made in this area; calls on those states that have not yet done so - in particular the United States - to ratify the Kyoto Protocol, which now has the force of law;
30. Calls for political recognition of the European Union's impact on consumption of global resources – its 'ecological footprint' – which, according to independent studies, generates 17% of humanity's total resource demands from just 7% of the world's population;
31. Calls for the external dimension of the EU sustainable development strategy to be the overarching framework for ensuring the coherence of all EU policies which impact on the environmental resources and sustainability policies of EU partner countries; further calls for the strategy to include specific assessment of how EU policies can assist developing countries in attaining the Millennium Development Goals by 2015;
32. Supports the Commission's proposal for the forthcoming "EU thematic Program for environment and natural resources" which should cover all EU partner countries (European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument and Development Cooperation and Economic Cooperation Instrument) in order that initiatives within the external dimensions of the Sustainable Development Strategy can be included in the next Financial Perspectives for 2007-2013;
33. Stresses the strong links between poverty and the environment and the fact that the poorest are often the principal victims of environmental degradation; notes that efforts to reduce poverty, primarily through economic growth, often ignore the need to integrate environmental considerations into policies for combating poverty; recommends therefore that specific initiatives are taken to address these poverty and environment linkages within policies and programmes, and also that economic growth needs to be de-coupled from environmental degradation by promoting sustainable consumption and production, to address both the supply and the demand in developing countries;
34. Calls on the Member States and the European Union to promote within international bodies, and above all the UN, a recognition of resources, particularly water, as global public goods;

Equipping ourselves with the tools for action

35. Welcomes the announcement by the British Presidency of the European Union that the Cardiff process is to be relaunched; calls on the Council, with the help of the Commission, to adopt genuine measures to incorporate environmental protection in other

policies;

36. Stresses the importance of incorporating the concept of sustainable development in all public policies at national, regional and local level, and at the private level within businesses, associations and NGOs;
37. Stresses that the Aalborg Charter identifies cities as key agents in sustainable development; in order to improve the EU's environmental performance, it is therefore essential to encourage sustainable and coherent urban administration and to generalise best practice at local level, notably by means of exchange networks among cities;
38. Welcomes the Commission's introduction of impact assessments for all its decisions and legislative proposals; calls on the Commission to ensure that the environmental and social aspects of this tool are reinforced and taken into greater account from now on; recalls that this tool is an aid to political decision making, but can and must never replace it;
39. Welcomes the adoption by the Commission and Eurostat of some 150 indicators, and their subdivision into three levels, as a means of evaluating implementation of the sustainable development strategy and gradual realisation of the objectives set; calls on the Commission and Eurostat to assess the indicators regularly with a view, if necessary, to bringing them into line with the way that issues and the environment develop; calls on the Commission to ensure that greater account is taken of the environment in the list of 14 indicators for the assessment of progress on the Lisbon strategy; believes this list should also include a biodiversity indicator;

Market instruments as incentives

40. Notes the Commission's proposal to supplement the traditional regulatory instruments with market instruments such as cost internalisation, ecotaxes, subsidies and the emission quota trading system;
41. Supports the Commission's call for market prices to reflect the true cost of any given economic activity, particularly in environmental terms, in order to change production and consumption patterns; takes the view that measures to this effect must be rapidly taken and applied in the road transport sector with a view to encouraging the use of collective transport;
42. Stresses that such a measure must take account of incomes, and balance needs and fundamental rights and freedoms against the quality of the environment;
43. Insists that the Commission should, in its future proposals, take full account of Parliament's resolution of 8 September 2005 on new prospects and challenges for sustainable tourism in Europe¹;
44. Stresses that the conditions for granting European subsidies and aid, particularly under the CAP, must contribute to the implementation of the sustainable development policy; urges that all subsidies for non-sustainable activities, including those in the areas of energy and agriculture, be discontinued as soon as possible;

¹ *Texts Adopted*, P6_TA(2005)0335.

45. Notes that increasing erosion and impoverishment of the soil and cultivated land are creating a long-term threat to our capacity to ensure food supplies for our fellow citizens; advocates, therefore, that a future reform of the CAP should propose moving towards a new balance of modes of cultivation, taking account of relevant experiments in other countries; believes that genetically modified plants and organisms do not, under present circumstances, offer a satisfactory response to the problems arising from the use of chemical substances in agriculture;
46. Supports the introduction of ecotaxes by the Member States; stresses that, like the other market instruments, they are an essential tool for an effective pollution reduction policy;
47. Stresses that market instruments can still release considerable potential in the area of environmental protection; emphasises, however, that such instruments, although necessary, are not in themselves sufficient in order to pursue a policy of reducing pollution and protecting the environment; calls on the Commission to develop targeted proposals;
48. Calls on the Commission to recognise, encourage and support, in the Union, in third countries and within international organisations, the development of new and more sustainable economic models such as the social and solidarity-based economy and fair trade;

Innovations

49. Endorses the Commission's proposal to invest in innovation in the area of more environmentally friendly technologies, with scientific and technical research being required to take account of environmental and social issues; finds it regrettable, however, that the Commission does not mention the share in GDP of the investment to be made in supporting the development of new environmental technologies;
50. Calls for the seventh framework programme for research to be implemented in such a way as to ensure sustainable development in as many sectors as possible and to create high-quality jobs;
51. Stresses that innovation in the area of environmental technology is an essential motor of sustainable development in the environmental sphere; points out, however, their limitations and the need to take measures to change production, traffic and consumption patterns in order to meet the environmental challenges faced;
52. Calls on the EU to step up its efforts and take the necessary decisions so that it can become the world's foremost resource- and energy-saving economy; stresses that achieving those objectives would bring about greater autonomy and security in terms of resources and energy supplies, while also uncoupling economic growth from the exploitation of natural resources;

Application of the principles of sustainable development

53. Recalls that the 'polluter pays' and precautionary principles must be affirmed as the regulatory principles underpinning public policy on public health, food safety and consumer and environmental protection;

54. Calls on the Commission and the Council to give greater thought to the substitution principle, which can be a powerful vector in stimulating research and development of new technologies that are more mindful of health and the environment;

Informing and mobilising citizens and businesses

55. Takes the view that protecting the environment calls at the same time for information, awareness-raising and education; takes the view that the strategy must be the result of a transparent process involving the citizens of Europe and that, in order for this to happen, the Aarhus Convention on access to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters¹ must be fully implemented;
56. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to continue to develop environmental education and to give it a full place on primary school curricula, and to put in place information and awareness-raising programmes directed at adults;
57. Calls for expectations to be fulfilled with regard to bringing the whole workforce into work, regardless of age and sex, in particular by making use of the opportunities for lifelong learning, in order to reinforce the actions under the sustainable development strategy;
58. Calls for lifelong learning to be developed, taking greater account in vocational training of development prospects for techniques and modes of production; stresses that this step constitutes a significant way for all workers, particularly salaried employees, to make new technologies their own, and thus adapt to a changing job market;
59. Stresses that the sustainable funding of social security systems can only be achieved by enhanced solidarity between the generations; points up the particular importance of educating citizens in a responsible manner as regards social and environmental issues; calls for the burden of labour costs to be reduced in Member States' tax systems; calls for greater coordination within Member States in order to reduce social exclusion, more effectively guarantee social security for all European citizens, and achieve the same high ecological standards everywhere;

Thematic strategies

60. Is delighted that the first thematic strategies have finally been presented; calls on the Commission to ensure that all the thematic strategies announced are adopted as rapidly as possible and, at the latest, by the summer of 2006;
61. Notes with satisfaction the adoption and revision of various Community laws, including those on environmental protection; takes the view that a good number of them, particularly the reform of the CAP and fisheries policy, do not take enough account of sustainable development objectives and continue to favour intensive production methods;
62. Calls on the Commission, in the context of its proposal for the revision of the sustainable development strategy, to put forward more ambitious proposals for the monitoring of that strategy; stresses that the revised strategy must be subject to an annual assessment, as decided at the Gothenburg European Council in 2001; calls for the assessment to be

¹ OJ L 124, 17.5.2005, p. 4.

complemented, halfway through and in case of need, by measures and proposals to ensure achievement of the goals originally set; welcomes the participation of Parliament in this assessment;

Conclusions

63. Welcomes the Commission's willingness to take measures to promote sustainable development; notes with regret, however, the gap between declared intentions and proposed policies; takes the view that, given the worsening state of the environment, the priorities for revision of the sustainable development strategy must not consist mainly in coordination and knowledge-enhancement measures, but in proposals for clear medium-and long-term measures and objectives, in instruments and in a regular control, monitoring and evaluation system;
64. Is firmly convinced that sustainable development represents a fundamental, crucial instrument for the European Union, which will promote economic and social progress, improve the quality of life and standard of living of its citizens and engender a new concept of politics in the service of liberating human beings;
65. Calls for the financial perspective for 2007-2013 to make sufficient provision for appropriate action to be taken at every level to combat unsustainable trends such as poverty, social exclusion and the consequences of the ageing of society; stresses that sustainable development must thus be a guiding principle for EU policies in all areas; recommends that the financial perspective provide for adequate funds to promote full employment, social inclusion and the eradication of poverty and to strengthen social, territorial and economic cohesion;
66. Stresses that the revised strategy implies above all a real change in our modes of production and consumption, and involves reconsidering the aims of our economic activity;
67. Points out that failure to act will come at an increasingly high price, will have ever more considerable direct consequences, and will make it even more difficult to implement the European Union's objectives as regards social progress, health and environmental protection, generating an intolerable burden for future generations;
68. Asks to be formally consulted on the Commission's proposal for a review of the Sustainable Development Strategy when it is published;

0

0 0

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