

COM4-030

Brussels, 4 July 2000

OPINION

of the Committee of the Regions

of 14 June 2000

on the

Communication from the Commission

on the global assessment of the European Community programme of policy and action in relation to the environment and sustainable development, "Towards Sustainability"

(Fifth Environmental Action Programme)

(COM(1999) 543 final)

The Committee of the Regions

Having regard to:

- the Communication from the Commission setting out the global assessment of the European Community programme of policy and action in relation to the environment and sustainable development (Fifth Environmental Action Programme) COM(1999) 543 final;
- the decision taken by the Commission on 2 December 1999 to ask the Committee of the Regions for an opinion on this matter under Article 265, 1st paragraph of the EC Treaty;
- the decision taken by the bureau of the Committee of the Regions on 2 June 1999 to instruct Commission 4 - Spatial Planning, Urban Issues, Energy and Environment - to prepare the Committee's opinion on the matter;

- the draft opinion (CdR 12/00 rev. 2) adopted by Commission 4 on 11 May 2000 (**rapporteurs: Mrs Jacobs, NL, PSE and Mrs Siitonen, FIN, EPP**);

WHEREAS: the Treaty establishing the European Union demands that environmental consideration have to be integrated in the Community policies, in particular to ensure a sustainable development;

adopted the following opinion at its 34th plenary session on 14-15 June 2000 (meeting of 14 June) unanimously:

1. The Committee of the Regions' views concerning the Communication:

1. The Committee of the Regions notes that the European Commission, with its Fifth Action Programme has made only modest progress towards improving the quality of the environment in a number of fields. The Committee realises that there were unfavourable circumstances which frustrated the progress towards the targets for sustainability such as insufficient or slow implementation of legislation, lack of integration into other policies and no real commitment among the relevant stakeholders.
2. The Committee draws attention to the fact that the views of the regional and local authorities as well as urban environmental issues failed to receive the attention they deserve in the Global Assessment. It is surely a well-known fact that the regional and local authorities, as being responsible for water supply, sewage-treatment, waste-management, urban and regional transport policy and the protection of public health, have considerable influence on matters relating to climate change, biodiversity and the state of the environment in general.
3. The Committee supports the idea of shared responsibility set out in the Fifth Environmental Action Programme. Shared responsibility necessitates more open working methods where interested players, the "stakeholders in environmental problems", are also able to participate and take responsibility for framing objectives and means of action.
4. The Committee shares the European Commission's concern over the safety of nuclear power stations in states bordering on the EU. The Committee notes that the Global Assessment makes no reference to what is being achieved by EURATOM in the field of nuclear safety in East-European states.

2. The Committee of the Regions' recommendations concerning the Global Assessment and a 6th Environmental Action Programme:

1. The Committee calls for the European Commission to frame a methodology for environment policy whereby the objectives and means of action are developed stage by stage in dialogue with the interested parties, including organisations which represent the local and regional level.
2. The Committee proposes that eco-efficiency be added to the remit of the European Environment Agency. In this way the regions, cities and target groups could be helped to reach their sustainability targets, and their choices, which could impact on their natural resources, could be facilitated. Additionally, the Committee proposes that the European Commission develops an eco-efficiency-oriented approach to management of natural

resources. At the Fifth conference of environment ministers of the European regions, to be held in September 2001, the ministers will also be looking at the subject of sustainable management and eco-efficiency and drawing up specific contributions.

3. When implementing the Kyoto Protocol the Committee believes that regional emission reduction plans and targets are also needed to complement national strategies and to better achieve the national targets. The Committee welcomes the idea of developing an emissions trading system as an instrument for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. To be most effective this system should not only take into account the EU-member states, but also the candidate countries.

Recognition must be given to the role of woods and forests. Action must be taken to promote rational management of these resources, which are critical for environment policy. This means planning that covers large areas, encouraging co-operation between land owners and the establishment of land-owner associations, offering technical assistance to businesses, establishing large-scale forest management agencies and enhancing the multifunctionality of forests.

4. Results of Local Agenda 21 processes and the European Cities and Towns Campaign have been, in some cases very promising but in general too modest. An integrated sustainable development policy for urban areas taking into account not only the ecological but also the economical and social aspects of sustainability is urgently needed¹. The Committee believes that the European Commission should stimulate the integration of nature and environment education into general education and teaching programmes.
5. The Committee repeats its statement² that, regarding waste generation, the highest priority should be given to prevention and to providing incentives for more efficient methods for classifying waste origin. In addition to this the European Commission should give priority to the promotion of an active product policy, as stated in the Global Assessment. The Committee believes it important to extend this product policy to imported goods from countries outside the EU, because of their effects on waste generation and waste processing.
6. As clean water is a resource, which is short supply, this should be reflected in the price.
7. The European Commission should formulate a soil-pollution protection policy, comprising Directives and criteria in respect of both preventive measures and clean-up measures. The clean up of the soil in polluted areas should be an EU-wide priority.
8. The Committee emphatically advocates the promotion of environmentally friendly modes of transport, for example by introducing multi-modal interchanges in the European transport network and the use of alternative energy.
9. In addition to a rapid adoption of a Noise Framework Directive the Committee strongly calls for EU-measures aimed at car manufacturers and other producers of means of transportation, to ensure the lowest levels of noise from these products, in the interest of public health and to improve the quality of urban environment.
10. The Committee takes the view that the agricultural sector has to place quality before quantity and that the promotion of certified local traditional products and organic farming should be the underlying principle of a European agricultural policy geared to

sustainable development.

11. The Committee urges the European Commission to take a strong line on the risks involved in the use of Genetically Modified Organisms (GMOs) in the interest of the health of European citizens and the quality of the environment.
12. The Committee takes the view that the European Commission needs to gear its policy, more than has hitherto been the case, towards improving the quality of tourism, rather than expanding tourism, focusing efforts on innovative tourist activities linked to enhancement of the environment, the development of traditional local resources and the rediscovery of remote rural areas.
13. The Committee believes that the European Commission should pay more attention to the threats arising from outside the EU, such as nuclear waste, the dumping of chemical and other weapons, and waste water which is polluting rivers and oceans, particularly the Baltic and the Mediterranean. On the other side EU member-states should be fully responsible for their own nuclear and other waste instead of planning waste export to Russia and other countries outside the EU.
14. In a number of earlier opinions the Committee called for stimulating a more active role for regional and local authorities in formulating and implementing environmental policy in the regions and municipalities of the applicant states. The Committee would reiterate this urgent recommendation in the context of the present Global Assessment and with a view to the preparation of the Sixth Action Programme. The European Commission should strongly promote co-operation and the exchange of experience and expertise through twinning arrangements between regions and municipalities in the EU and the applicant states.
15. The EU should widely stimulate the exchange of information, good practices and experiences in the environmental field by using modern information technologies (Internet applications).
16. The Committee supports the proposal to improve transparency in the new Sixth EAP - strategy with a number of guiding principles and global directives. This 6th Programme should be directly followed up by negotiations in all Member States between the European Commission, the national government and regional and local authorities.
17. In the Committee's view it is not enough to note in the Global Assessment that slow progress is being made in the integration of environmental policy into other policy areas³. The Global Assessment, or the Sixth Environmental Action Programme, should also indicate **how** the integration process is to be advanced with a view to achieving sustainable development in all sectors in a more effective and a more rapid way.

Brussels, 14 June 2000

The President

The Acting Secretary-General

of the

of the

Committee of the Regions

Committee of the Regions

Jos Chabert

Vincenzo Falcone

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