



European Economic and Social Committee

NAT/310
Climate Change -
The Role of Civil Society

Brussels, 14 September 2006

OPINION
of the
European Economic and Social Committee
on
Meeting the challenges of climate change – The role of civil society
(Own-initiative Opinion)

On 19 January 2006 the European Economic and Social Committee, acting under Article 29(2) of its Rules of Procedure, decided to draw up an own-initiative opinion on

Meeting the challenges of climate change – The role of civil society.

The Section for Agriculture, Rural Development and the Environment, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 11 July 2006. The rapporteur was Mr Ehnmark.

At its 429th plenary session, held on 13 and 14 September 2006 (meeting of 14 September), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 59 votes to one with two abstentions.

*

* *

A. Conclusions

- A.1 Climate change is a process that cannot be stopped, not at least within the next 15 to 20 years. In that perspective, we must learn to live with climate change, and seek ways and means to mitigate its effects, and to adapt.
- A.2 The discussion on climate change focuses excessively on the macro level and events in the distant future. There is a clear need for a debate on how climate change affects – and will affect – citizens in their everyday life. Climate change issues must be restructured in a way that makes them more understandable and concrete.
- A.3 The social partners and organised civil society have an essential role to play in bringing the issues of climate change to the citizens, and in promoting discussion at local level on how communities can prepare concrete steps to adapt to climate change.
- A.4 Climate change will have an impact on large sections of society. The EESC has highlighted a number of examples of this. The overall conclusion is that communities in the EU, together with the social partners and organised civil society, must take greater responsibility for preparing and planning for the consequences of climate change.
- A.5 The EESC proposes that organised civil society and the social partners together launch an EU-wide Public Dialogue on Climate Change, focusing on how climate change may affect everyday life. The principal purpose of the Dialogue would be to raise awareness and make preparations, over the next 15-20 years, when present climate change will worsen regardless of what mankind can do now.

- A.6 The EESC proposes that every EU Member State should identify and/or establish a climate change information and coordination office to promote links between local, regional and national levels.
- A.7 The EESC regrets that climate change is most often discussed in terms of far-off scenarios. Climate change is no longer mainly, or only, a matter for the distant future.

Climate change concerns us here and now.

1. **Introduction**

- 1.1 The existence of climate change is widely recognised, the nature and size of its consequences less so. One reason is the need for more knowledge from research and from scenario studies. Another is the nature of climate change itself: mainly a creeping change interrupted by more and more frequent dramatic events. A third is the fact that climate change, in public debate, is often treated as an issue for others and not for ourselves. A fourth is the focus on megatrends and far-off scenarios, which seem to blur the more concrete issues for everyday life.
- 1.2 The melting polar ice can be taken as an example. In recent months, the mass media have been fascinated by calculations that the melting ice could cause ocean levels to rise by up to 13 metres (estimation by the European Environment Agency (EEA)). Another example is the Gulf Stream: if the mechanisms steering the Gulf Stream are disrupted, there could be a sharp drop in temperatures in northern Europe. Interesting and important as they are, these stories do not motivate people to confront climate change in a more immediate and concrete way.
- 1.3 It is important to stress that the climate changes we at present observe, and are trying to handle, are just the beginning of a long process ahead. For the next 15 to 20 years, the ongoing changes in the climate will worsen for the simple reason that mankind has delivered – and is still delivering – enough damaging material in the form of greenhouse gases. Our task therefore is to prepare and adapt to climate change. However, what will happen beyond the next 15 to 20 years is also the responsibility of present generations, in the sense that firm action now can mitigate climate change in the distant future. The discussions in the framework of UNFCCC (the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change) and under the Kyoto protocol offer an opportunity for post-2012 action that must be seized. If this chance is missed, there will be further deterioration of the climate – and more drastic action to reverse the trends will be required. It is not surprising that an increasing number of governments see climate change as a very high priority. However, this is not to say that governments translate priority into action.
- 1.4 The climate change debate is largely dominated by governments and the scientific community. Environmental NGOs are doing a very good job but with meagre resources. Important large organisations such as trade unions and employer organisations are on the

whole not as active in the debate on how to meet and mitigate climate change. Organised civil society should play a key role but seems to be reluctant to assume this.

- 1.5 It is the firm opinion of the EESC that preparation for climate change and ownership of the climate change debate must be extended so as to involve actively the social partners and organised civil society at large. Climate change is entering a phase where mitigation and adaptation are becoming issues in everyday life. Climate change is no longer mainly, or only, a matter for the far-off future. Climate change is also here and now. And, therefore, it is of paramount importance that the social partners and organised civil society assert and claim their ownership of the climate change debate and preparation.
- 1.6 It is essential that the current debate on climate change integrates to a much greater extent the micro perspectives based on the situation of individual citizens, and local communities. There is a need to analyse how citizens can mitigate the effects of current climate change, be it in terms of costs (cf. energy costs), insurance, or consumer preferences, to mention but a few examples.
- 1.7 The purpose of this opinion is primarily to examine the role of the social partners and of organised civil society in analysing, planning and implementing steps for meeting the challenges of climate change. It focuses on ways and means in economic, social and cohesion terms, in a concrete, bottom-up approach.
- 1.8 The focus on the next 15 to 20 years is motivated by the fact that this is a period when climate change will continue on the basis of what we have already done. It is equally clear that we need to adapt now to the initial effects of the process while preparing for those that will be felt in the future.
- 1.9 It is often observed that the amount of reports and information on climate change is as overwhelming as it is difficult to absorb by citizens seeking answers on how climate change can and will affect their everyday life. There is an enormous amount of information on climate change, and this poses a communication challenge. It is a situation that will require political leadership, because some of the inevitable actions will no doubt involve some discomfort in everyday life.
- 1.10 It is important to stress that a number of very rewarding studies are being carried out. Of particular importance is the European Climate Change Programme, now in its second phase. Within the programme, a number of working groups have been set up to deal with emissions trading, energy supply and demand, transport, industry, agriculture and forestry, to mention just some of the issues. The Second Climate Change Programme, launched by the European Commission in October 2005, includes new working groups on adaptation, carbon dioxide capture and geological storage, aviation, and integrated approach on CO₂ emissions of light duty vehicles as well as a number of groups reviewing the implementation of previous

actions. All in all, the Climate Change Programmes are providing a wealth of analysis and information as well as the basis for a number of Council decisions.

- 1.11 Is there a need for further expansion of the Climate Change Programme? The answer is yes in the sense that there is a widespread need for more concrete information and in particular more examples of successful initiatives. Moreover, addressing climate change requires the active involvement of stakeholders, and ultimately the citizens themselves. The European Commission has sensed this need and has launched a major information and communication campaign. This initiative is highly welcome. However, there is a need to launch additional information efforts involving all Member States, coordinating work at EU, national and local levels, and, most important of all, bringing the issues to the people.

2. **The scope of the challenges of climate change**

- 2.1 Climate change will have profound effects on a number of sectors in modern societies. The effects are not limited to extreme weather conditions. A non-exhaustive list of impact areas includes floods, forest fires, infrastructure damage, agriculture restructuring, air quality problems particularly in metropolitan areas, energy supply problems, water use restrictions and impacts on industry, particularly in manufacturing industry. To this list can be added urban planning and the introduction of new architectural solutions for energy saving.
- 2.2 The fact that climate change will affect such a wide variety of cross-cutting sectors is only gradually being understood. The public support required for the necessary action is only slowly emerging.
- 2.3 Countering climate change through specific actions will in many cases have clear and sometimes unpleasant effects on the every-day lives of citizens.
- 2.4 There is a clear parallel here to the ongoing debate on the EU strategy for sustainable development. From the first stages in this debate, it has been obvious that the public is unaware of what it will really entail to improve the likelihood of sustainable development in the European Union as well as globally. The challenges ahead in sustainable development have been characterised as leading to radical changes in the way our societies work and function¹.
- 2.5 The battle against climate change is of course an integrated part of the efforts to achieve sustainable development. The battle against climate change must be, like all the efforts for sustainable development, concrete and down to earth.
- 2.6 The Lisbon Strategy is sometimes referred to as a realisation of the vision of sustainable development, seen in an initial ten-year phase. The Lisbon Strategy focuses on the economic,

¹ cf. statement by Mr Rocard at the EESC stakeholder forum in April 2001.

social and environmental pillars. It is often forgotten that, from the very beginning, the Lisbon Strategy also set out lofty ambitions regarding the environment, climate change, and sustainable development in general. Therefore, action against climate change cannot be discussed as a completely separate issue. Climate change is a key part of the wider vision and strongly linked to the overall need for action.

- 2.7 A recurrent observation concerning the Lisbon Strategy is that Member States and their governments have not given enough priority to agreed actions and investments. It can be argued that the effects on citizens of the Lisbon Strategy are not very direct and not very tangible. However, the effects of climate change – natural disasters for instance – are often extremely tangible. Citizens will have to make appropriate advance preparations to mitigate these effects.
- 2.8 Climate change is often identified only in terms of financial losses. This doesn't paint the full picture. The social dimensions of climate change have to be fully recognised. It is not only a matter of citizens losing their homes or workplaces. It is also a matter of meeting higher costs for energy and for leisure and vacations. It is also a matter of citizens being motivated to change their consumption behaviour. And, among many other aspects, there is the risk that adaptation to climate change will incur new socio-economic imbalances, with negative effects for citizens in far-off regions or with low disposable income.
- 2.9 The EESC underlines the importance of social cohesion in the battle against climate change. An extended use of economic factors for persuading citizens must be balanced against possible negative social effects. Other instruments for meeting climate change must also be weighed against the effects on social cohesion. This highlights how essential it is to involve organised civil society in the whole process of battling climate change.
- 2.10 It is necessary to further analyse the consequences of climate change for working life. These consequences include not only transitions to energy-saving production methods that economise on natural resources but also the re-location of production units according to the availability of cheap renewable energy resources. For the employees, the transition to new production methods and new service areas will highlight new demands for further skills upgrading and life-long education. Social dialogue, particularly at EU level, should highlight the social impact of climate change, and particularly its effects on working life. The social partners at EU level should make climate change a priority issue. In this context, it is important to underline that mitigating climate change does not per se lead to unemployment risks. Instead the effects of climate change can provide new job opportunities (cf. 2.13).
- 2.11 Consumers will soon feel the effects of climate change, as it will inevitably lead to changes in consumption patterns, be it for food, transport, housing or vacations. But consumers are also potential drivers for mitigating the effects of climate change – and for providing a basis for long-term action to halt climate change. The best way to achieve sustainable production patterns is undoubtedly an established and vigorous consumer movement with the capacity to

reach out to citizens. Consumers should be looked upon as the key players they are – or could be – in mitigating the impact of climate change on individual citizens.

- 2.12 The global dimension of climate change is recognised in terms of weather-related disasters in other countries, causing enormous losses in terms of human life and property. Tropical diseases can spread to new areas as a result of climate change, adding to the challenges ahead. Climate change will test the solidarity between peoples and nations. The industrialised countries will have to strengthen their capacity for providing support and help. It should be remembered that, particularly in the developing countries, it is most often the poor who have to bear the brunt of climate change. The global social dimension of climate change is of fundamental importance; it is an area where much can be done to solve problems that could otherwise easily multiply.
- 2.13 Climate change is most often debated in terms of threats and weaknesses. However, a positive opportunity is to be found in the actions to mitigate climate change. With the rapidly growing need for energy-saving production and transport, a vast new field has opened up for research, for the development of new technologies and for marketing new products. This should be an important part of the EU response to the challenges of climate change. In the framework of the Commission initiative for an integrated industrial policy, support for and orchestration of the development of environmentally-friendly technologies should have a very high priority. Here, small and medium-sized enterprises can also play a very important role.
- 2.14 Meeting and mitigating climate change can raise some unexpected issues. One example: the new emphasis on producing ethanol from agricultural products is becoming a success in some countries. As a result, the use of some crops, such as corn, is increasingly linked to ethanol production. However, the same crops are key products in supplying food assistance to famine areas in developing countries. This example illustrates the importance of avoiding one-sided solutions.
- 2.15 The scope of the challenge ahead can be illustrated by this quotation: "Science tells us that we should be aiming to limit the future global average temperature increase to 2°C above pre-industrial levels in order to limit the damage. The 2°C target implies that policies are needed both to adapt to climate change and to mitigate climate change. Despite the implementation of already agreed policies, global emissions are likely to grow within the next two decades and global reductions of at least 15% in emissions by 2050 compared to 1990 levels would seem to be necessary, and will take significant effort" (Commission Communication "Winning the battle against global climate change"²). The last part of the quotation can be characterised as a major understatement. Nevertheless, it illustrates the importance of anchoring the process at the local and regional levels, and with the citizens.

2

COM(2005) 35 final, p. 8.

3. **Ten sectors for civil society involvement**

- 3.1 Urban and community planning is a sector where important gains can be made with regard to mitigating climate change and saving energy. Good urban planning should include climate-friendly solutions to both housing and transport. Studies made have confirmed very positive energy effects depending on how buildings are positioned in the landscape or in the community³. The architectural solutions are important both for maximum use of solar energy, and for the insulation of buildings. An additional aspect is of course the importance of such solutions for shaping user-friendly and socially well-functioning villages, suburbs and metropolitan areas. It is essential that the social partners and organised civil society be involved at an early stage in urban and community planning.
- 3.1.1 The European Commission should launch consultations with regional and local authorities, and other stakeholders, concerning guidelines for urban planning in view of accelerating climate change. The EESC proposes that the Commission should produce basic information material for urban planning together with guidelines on existing successful solutions.
- 3.2 The battle against climate change will highlight the need for modernisation and insulation of existing and new buildings, together with the application of all relevant energy-saving techniques and materials. Building materials, particularly with regard to heat insulation, is an area where further initiatives are necessary. This is not only a question of making heating systems more efficient. It is also a question of insulating houses better against both high and low outside temperatures. The experiences of the hot summer in Europe some years ago should not be forgotten. Tax incentives could be used to encourage private owners to reinsulate houses and apartments. The EESC recommends that a system of energy-performance certificates be introduced, as a means of providing consumers with relevant information on the energy costs of living in a specific house or apartment.
- 3.3 Road transport is increasing rapidly in the EU. Railway systems have difficulty in matching the advantages of road transport, in terms of quick door-to-door delivery. This trend is unsustainable, both with regard to CO₂ emissions and with regard to increasing fuel prices. A decoupling between GDP growth and road transport growth is necessary, if the battle against climate change is to succeed. The practical steps to achieve this still have to be settled. A rapid freight railway system would be the logical answer, all the more so in the enlarged Union. More freight transported by railway will require huge investments. To some extent, prices can be used to encourage the transport of freight via railway. For consumers, it is essential that distribution of food products be quick and efficient. For industry, it is essential to have smooth and efficient deliveries, on time. At the same time, congested highways are substantial polluters. Non-modern fleets of trucks add to the pollution. There is no simple solution to transport issues in the wider climate change picture. Instead, what is needed is a multiple-action strategy, including support measures for railway options, and further research

³ e.g. the house-building project in Freiburg.

and development work, among them for developing efficient and environmentally-friendly truck engines capable of functioning on alternative fuels. It will be important for consumers to know the real transport cost of a particular item.

- 3.4 The travel and leisure sector will have to cope with increasingly higher energy prices, which will have an impact on both road and air transport. The price of petrol has climbed rapidly in recent years, and constitutes by now a very convincing argument for consumers to choose new solutions. The rapidly growing interest in buying smaller and more energy-efficient cars is a very promising sign. In fact, this is one of the clearest cases of win-win situations in the battle against climate change: smaller and less polluting cars, and a huge potential global market for such cars and such solutions. Tax incentives for using alternative fuels are also delivering promising results, as witnessed in some countries.
- 3.5 In this context, the volume of commuting traffic to and from metropolitan areas will require specific attention. The rapid growth of metropolitan areas, in the EU as in other parts of the world, makes it urgently necessary to try new approaches for commuting and for freight transport. Experiments with special charges for entering city centres by car have been essentially positive when combined with heavy investments in rapid and convenient public transport. Taking action against car use without supplying something comparable in return will merely cause a public outcry. Citizens will battle for the right to use car transport if alternatives are not suitable. The voices of organised civil society have a crucial role in this area.
- 3.6 The above-mentioned challenges are also part of the wider issue of reducing the import and use of fossil fuel in the European Union. The uncertainties of securing a safe supply of fossil fuels in the winter of 2005/2006 have added to the urgency of finding new solutions. Some Member States are launching ambitious programmes for drastic reductions in the use of fossil fuels and are aiming for more renewable alternatives together with new policies for promoting the use of energy-efficient solutions. In some countries, like in Sweden, governments have launched studies on how to drastically reduce imports of fossil fuels. The European Commission should launch consultations with stakeholders and Member State governments on new efforts to make a drastic cut in the EU's import of fossil fuels. By the end of the decade, all EU Member States should have launched initiatives to identify the ways and means of achieving major reductions in the import and use of fossil fuels. This could be a major contribution to the next Kyoto programme, and to halting climate change in the long term. It would also be a major technological and industrial opportunity for the European Union. Organised civil society would benefit greatly from such efforts.
- 3.7 Agriculture, and therefore food prices, will be directly affected by climate change, and the ensuing effects on energy prices. In the EU, desertification in southern areas will require special support measures, in line with solidarity under the CAP. The Commission should initiate studies on the effects of climate change on agriculture in the EU, based on national reports and analyses. It is essential to highlight the importance of research in continuing to

reduce the use of inputs in farming practices and develop substitutes for petroleum derivatives using agricultural raw materials. As for the role of agriculture in diversifying energy supply, it may well become increasingly important. Finally, it would be appropriate to encourage farmers to produce their own energy.

- 3.8 Challenges for industry present another area where advance planning and adaptation is essential. This is not only an issue for industry in lowland areas where flooding can be, or will be, a major problem. For industry, smooth and efficient solutions to freight transport needs are essential. The supply of raw materials could be limited by climate change. The supply of energy – and at reasonable prices – is essential. For industry, climate change is also providing new opportunities. The global market for energy-saving technologies will be immense. Enterprises with sufficient capacity to invest in the development of such technologies can look to a rosy future.
- 3.9 Workplace issues are another sector where advance planning for adaptation is important. With the advent of more energy-saving technologies and goods production applying such technologies, there will be a demand for further upgrading skills and competences. Some new technologies for future expansion will put heavy strains on the workforce, for example in applying nanotechnologies. Issues relating to workplace challenges are compounded by the issue of rising energy prices. There will be increasing interest in opportunities to work from home – which necessitates better ICT techniques, including broadband facilities.
- 3.10 Disaster management is yet another important area in the context of climate change. Weather-related disasters are becoming more frequent and have wider consequences. A disaster response body capable of delivering timely assistance at short notice should be established within the EU. In a number of Member States, such units already exist. What is needed is the establishment of similar bodies in all Member States, and a certain level of coordination and cooperation. In this way, the EU would have the capacity to assist the victims of weather-related disasters not only within the EU itself but also in other parts of the world.
- 3.11 Disasters caused by extreme weather conditions also place heavy demands on financial assistance, primarily from insurance companies. The frequency of weather-related disasters will place a greater strain on the insurance sector, with effects on insurance costs for citizens. The European Commission should carry out a study on these issues, with a view to safeguarding a sustained functioning insurance system.

4. **Adaptation and mitigation – but how and by whom?**

- 4.1 Communicating climate change and its consequences to the public will be a huge task. It is important to take a balanced and somewhat pragmatic approach towards raising awareness. It is not a matter of frightening citizens but of focusing on the practical work ahead in order to provide a sustained quality of life for all citizens.

- 4.2 The EESC proposes that all EU Member States should set up contact, information and coordination offices with a capacity for advisory services and for carrying out studies on adapting to and mitigating climate change. Exchange of experience with other Member States, and the distribution of such information to civil society and municipalities should be an important part of this work. Contact with local communities, social partners and organised civil society will be particularly important, as will contact with industry and enterprises.
- 4.3 The EESC proposes that an EU-wide Dialogue on Climate Change be launched on the ways and means to counter further climate deterioration, and to take steps towards adapting to the changes already taking place. This Dialogue should be supported by the institutions of the European Union, but responsibility for the practical work should lie with municipalities, educational institutions, trade unions and employers' organisations, farmers' organisations and consumer organisations and others. The EESC is willing to take active part in the dialogue, and function as a clearing-house for exchange and assessment.
- 4.4 The EESC would like to express its satisfaction that the European Commission has launched a wide-ranging EU information and communication programme on climate change. This will be a major contribution to raising awareness about climate change. The EESC's proposal on a Dialogue on Climate Change targets local communities, regions and nations, with special emphasis on the social partners and organised civil society. The two programmes would complement each other in a constructive way.
- 4.5 An essential part of the Dialogue on Climate Change would be to circulate information on examples of good practice, for instance from countries trying to draw up action plans for decreasing dependence on fossil fuels. Other types of examples could be metropolitan solutions for reducing the use of cars for commuting to city centres (London and Stockholm are just two examples).
- 4.6 The Dialogue should start in the winter of 2006/2007. It does not need any final deadline. It should be closely related to efforts to communicate the vision of sustainable development. Climate change issues will obviously provide an opportunity to make sustainable development issues more tangible.
- 4.7 No dialogue with citizens on climate change will be possible without the clear and continuous participation of stakeholders at the local and regional level. Financial support should be made available for planning and exchange. Obviously some time will be needed for capacity-building in communities and in organised civil society as well as among the social partners.
- 4.8 In 2012 there will be a follow-up UN conference on sustainable development, following on from the 1992 conference in Rio and the 2002 conference in Johannesburg. The EESC strongly recommends that the next conference, in 2012, should focus specifically on climate change and the global impact of this change. Cooperation initiated between the EESC and the ILO, as well as between the EESC and the United Nations Economic and Social Council will

provide opportunities for joint studies on the global effects of climate change. Cooperation will also help to highlight how the social partners and organised civil society could be active stakeholders in the battle against climate change.

5. **Instruments for promoting awareness and support**

- 5.1 Promoting citizen awareness of climate change and its consequences should primarily be the responsibility of the local, regional and national levels, with support and initiatives taken at EU level. The object should be to use a bottom-up approach that invites citizens to put forward the solutions they prefer and not to deliver pre-packaged answers.
- 5.2 Among civil society organisations, consumer organisations will be particularly important in mobilising consumers and in fostering dedicated involvement. Consumers exert – or can exert – considerable pressure on the market through the goods and services they purchase. For the European consumers movements this will be a real challenge.
- 5.3 The social partners will have a special responsibility for analysing the impact of climate change on working life, and in proposing relevant mitigation or adaptation strategies. The social dimension of the battle against climate change is a crucial part of the whole effort.
- 5.4 Winning the battle against climate change will not be possible without the active support and cooperation of industry and enterprises. Industry can play a key role in integrating climate change issues into planning, production, marketing and evaluation. Industries could benefit from incorporating more information on their work on climate change into their annual reports. Being active in climate change issues could prove to be a winning marketing concept.
- 5.5 In debates on the effects of climate change, many observers express support for various forms of tax or other financial incentives. There is no doubt that such motivators can produce very clear results. They should, however, be applied with some caution. For example, taxing car fuel will have a negative social impact on people in sparsely-populated areas. Charging motorists for entering core city areas in by car is having a positive impact on the overall traffic situation, but such a system has to be accompanied by new investments in public transport. Otherwise, the charge will create new socio-economic imbalances: those who can afford to, will continue to use their cars, whereas those who cannot will have to rely on a public transport system which may or may not be really efficient.
- 5.6 Another important tool for raising awareness would be the introduction of environment managing processes, such as the Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS), a voluntary scheme established under European Council Regulation 761/01. The purpose of EMAS is to recognise and reward organisations that go beyond minimum legal compliance and continuously improve their environmental performance.

5.7 By applying EMAS, individual organisations and institutions explore concrete ways to measure and reduce the environmental impact of various activities, for instance energy and materials use and travelling by car or railway or airplane. The European Economic and Social Committee could consider introducing EMAS and in particular explore the possibility of calculating the emissions caused by travelling to meetings – and then introducing compensatory measures (cf. annex with some preliminary calculations).

5.8 Another proposal under discussion is to calculate the transport cost as part of the total price for an item. This could give consumers more basic information when choosing between alternative items.

6. **A challenge for civil society**

6.1 Organised civil society at European level has been working with the issues of sustainable development ever since the Rio and Johannesburg global conferences.

6.2 Organised civil society has a unique opportunity to play a valuable role in the proposed European Dialogue on Climate Change. The contribution of civil society could focus primarily on 5 areas:

- taking active part in raising awareness of climate change and its effects;
- mobilising consumers and other vital groups to adopt clear consumption preferences that take account of the impact of climate change;
- initiating, influencing and supporting new programmes for urban planning, including housing, transport and commuting;
- acting as channels between citizens and governments, on issues of mitigating climate change and – in a longer perspective – halting present processes;
- acting in cooperation with civil society in other countries and regions to take constructive action to mitigate the effects of climate change.

6.3 In line with the statements made by the European Council, the EESC has built an inter-active network with all economic and social councils in EU Member States. The network is particularly focused on the Lisbon Strategy.

- 6.4 The EESC is open to considering an expansion of the network to include issues concerning climate change and Europe's answers to the effects of that change.

Brussels, 14 September 2006.

The President
of the
European Economic and Social Committee

The Secretary-General
of the
European Economic and Social Committee

Anne-Marie Sigmund

Patrick Venturini

*

* *

N.B.: Appendix overleaf.

Proposal for direct action by the European Economic and Social Committee on mitigating the effects of climate change

The need for direct action

In the last two years the Committee has considered and approved more than 50 opinions in which the effect of climate change has featured. These opinions have dealt with a great variety of issues – not only agriculture and energy but also migration, transport, research and technology, consumer education, flood control, fiscal measures, sustainable development and civil protection. This appendix to the own-initiative opinion on *Meeting the challenges of climate change – the role of civil society* has been drawn up because the study group firmly believes that the Committee itself **must** be seen to be taking effective internal measures concerning climate change if its opinions exhorting other organisations, institutions and national governments to take action are to have any **credibility**.

An environmental management review

In general the type of actions that need to be undertaken by the Committee can be considered under the heading of environmental sustainability. The EESC already has in place policies on social sustainability in the form of employment practices and agreements. Increasingly, all civil society organisations are encouraged to undertake an environmental audit with a view to improving their operating sustainability. Although some attention was paid to certain environment-friendly adaptations to the building and ongoing policies on recycling and energy efficiency, EESC working methods have not been submitted to a systematic environmental review. An explorative study should be made concerning the possibility of adopting an environmental management process such as the Eco-Management and Audit Scheme (EMAS), a voluntary scheme established under European Council Regulation 761/01 which aims to recognise and reward organisations that go beyond minimum legal compliance and continuously improve their environmental performance.

Our climate impact

Members and staff travel mostly by air, and aircraft emissions are the most rapidly growing source of greenhouse gas in Europe. Current research⁴ gives the following carbon equivalent emitted, on average, per passenger for a return flight between Brussels and the following cities:

⁴ *Calculating the Environmental Impact of Aviation Emissions* Dr Christian N. Jardine, Environmental Change Institute Oxford University Centre for the Environment June 2005.

Athens	.46	Helsinki	.36	Sofia	.37
Berlin	.14	Lisbon	.38	Stockholm	.28
Bratislava	.20	Ljubljana	.20	Tallinn	.35
Bucharest	.38	Madrid	.29	Toulouse	.18
Budapest	.25	Malta	.41	Vilnius	.32
Copenhagen	.17	Milan	.15	Warsaw	.25
Dublin	.17	Prague	.15		
Edinburgh	.17	Riga	.31		

Therefore, on average, when a flight is taken within Europe the EESC member or staff member is contributing a quarter of a tonne of carbon to the atmosphere together with other emissions such as nitrogen oxides, water vapour, sulphates and other particles, some of which are known to stimulate a climate warming effect (known as the radiative forcing index), doubling the carbon impact. In the case of the EESC, if a total of 5 000 European return flights are made by members and staff in one year they produce 2 400 equivalent tonnes of CO₂. Inter-continental trips are also made and these would be calculated at the appropriate rate.

Offsetting the impact

Given the nature of our work it is impractical to suggest alternative forms of transport (though an environmental review may wish to consider the practicality of limited teleconferencing) but it is quite possible to offset the damage caused by air travel on behalf of the EESC. The European Union Greenhouse Gas Emission Trading Scheme (EU ETS) is designed for large scale and industrial processes but there are now a number of programmes offering ways of compensating for the climate effect of air travel. A levy made for each flight, presently calculated at around EUR 6, would be spent on carbon offset schemes, many of which can also have significant additional environmental and social benefits. To simplify matters, the calculation would be made annually based on an average flight distance and charged as a single item against the travel heading of the following year's budget. Three main types of project could be supported:

– Tree planting and other land use projects

There is a wide range of forestry offset projects that provide carbon offsets, including community-based tree planting schemes in developing countries and native woodland creation.

– Renewable energy projects

There are a number of renewable energy projects of different scales, mainly in developing countries and Eastern Europe that can provide carbon offsets. These include hydro, wind and solar power and bioenergy projects. Other projects involve the use of renewable energy by SMEs.

– **Energy efficiency projects**

There is a considerable range of domestic and industrial energy efficiency projects that have generated offsets for sale. These include schemes to introduce energy efficient light bulbs, improve household insulation and save energy in industrial processes and all these can be directed towards poor communities.

In practical terms, the Committee could make provision in its future budgets to provide for an offset scheme for compensating emissions arranged with an established and reputable provider of such a service⁵.

In addition, the Committee should give the highest possible profile to an initiative of this kind, both to encourage public awareness of the practical steps that can be taken concerning climate change and also to encourage the other major institutions of the European Community to adopt similar schemes.

⁵ Examples of such schemes are Climate Change www.climatechange.org, Myclimate www.myclimate.org and Atmosfair www.atmosfair.de.