

COM-4/046

Brussels, 29 November 2001

OPINION

of

the Committee of the Regions

of 14 November 2001

on the

Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council

Ten years after Rio:

Preparing for the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002

COM(2001) 53 final

The Committee of the Regions,

HAVING REGARD TO the decision taken by the Commission on 31 May 2001, under the first paragraph of Article 265 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, to consult the Committee of the Regions on the matter;

HAVING REGARD TO the decision of its Bureau of 13 June 2000 to instruct Commission 4 - Spatial Planning, Urban Issues, Energy, Environment - to draw up the relevant opinion;

HAVING REGARD TO the European Commission Communication *A Sustainable Europe for a Better World: A European Union Strategy for Sustainable Development* (COM (2001) 264 final);

HAVING REGARD TO the Communication from the Commission: *The Global Assessment of the European Community Programme of Policy and Action in relation to the environment and sustainable development (Fifth Environment Action Programme)* (COM(1999) 543 final);

HAVING REGARD TO the European Commission Report *Agenda 21 - The first five years: Implementation of Agenda 21 in the EU*;

HAVING REGARD TO the Commission's Working Document on *From Cardiff to Helsinki and beyond - Report to the European Council on integrating environmental concerns and sustainable development into Community policies* (SEC(1999) 1941);

HAVING REGARD TO the Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee on *Pricing policies for enhancing the sustainability of water resources* (COM(2000) 477 final);

HAVING REGARD TO the Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on *Bringing our needs and responsibilities together - integrating environmental issues with economic policy* (COM(2000) 576 final);

HAVING REGARD TO the Commission's *Green Paper: Towards a European strategy for the security of energy supply* (COM (2000) 769 final);

HAVING REGARD TO the Communication from the Commission on *The European Union's oil supply* (COM(2000) 631 final) and the forthcoming review of the Common Transport Policy;

HAVING REGARD TO the Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the sixth environment action programme of the European Community *Environment 2010: Our future, our choice - The Sixth Environment Action Programme and the Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council laying down the Community Environment Action Programme 2001-2010* (presented by the Commission) (COM(2001) 31 final - 2001/0029 (COD)) and the Committee of the Regions' Opinion on this proposal (CdR 36/2001 fin);

HAVING REGARD TO the Environment Council Conclusions of 8 March 2001 (6752/01) on the World Summit on Sustainable Development;

HAVING REGARD TO the agreements signed by the EU at the Rio earth summit (1992) relating to climate change and biodiversity;

HAVING REGARD TO commitments made by the EU at the negotiations relating to the Kyoto protocol concerning reduction of greenhouse gas emissions;

HAVING REGARD TO the ratification by the Member States of the EU of the Kyoto protocol;

HAVING REGARD TO the Draft Opinion (CdR 37/2001 rev. 2) adopted by Commission 4 on 8 October 2001 for which the rapporteur was **Ms Sally Powell** (Member of Hammersmith and Fulham London Borough Council, UK, PSE);

WHEREAS the Treaty establishing the European Union demands that environmental considerations have to be integrated into Community policies, in particular to ensure a sustainable development.

adopted the following opinion unanimously at its 41st plenary session on 14 and 15 November 2001 (meeting of 14 November).

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

1. The Committee of the Regions welcomes the Commission's Communication as an effective start to preparing an EU contribution to the 2002 World Summit.

1.2 The Committee warmly welcomes the Commission's view that the European Union should take a leading role in the Rio+10 process, both in the preparatory process and at the Johannesburg Summit itself.

1.3 The Committee of the Regions wholeheartedly supports the European Union and the governments of the 15 Member States in their steadfast determination to ensure international ratification of the Kyoto protocol in 2001.

1.4 The Committee of the Regions shares the Commission's view that the expectations raised at the Rio Summit in 1992 have not been realised, and that substantial obstacles will have to be overcome if real progress is to be made in addressing the barriers to sustainable development in the European Union and in the world.

1.5 The Committee supports the Commission's view that the EU should support a focused agenda, concentrating on key sustainable development issues where progress can be measured.

1.6 A balanced agenda that integrates Northern and Southern concerns is needed, and the Committee is of the view that clearly defined and qualitative targets – to be established with the involvement of all relevant stakeholders – are crucial in providing guidance to individual sectors of society.

1.7 The Committee agrees with the Commission that one of the most important ways in which the Union can contribute to progress towards sustainable development will be in the enlargement process; and supports the view that a dialogue should be initiated with candidate countries on preparations for the Summit.

1.8 The Committee is disappointed that the Communication makes little mention of the contribution of local and regional authorities to sustainable development, despite Agenda 21's defining of local government as a "major group", one of the nine key partners in delivering sustainable development.

1.9 The Committee is of the view that the Communication also fails to recognise the importance of Local Agenda 21, which has been recognised as one of the most successful ways of implementing Agenda 21.

1.10 The Committee welcomes the Commission's recognition that sustainable development requires the integration of economic development, social development and environmental protection objectives.

1.11 The Committee of the Regions welcomes the Commission's decision not to establish substantive EU positions for the Summit, nor to pre-judge the outcomes of consultation.

1.12 The CoR believes that co-ordination and co-operation between the different levels of governance is essential in tackling global environmental problems.

2. The Committee of the Regions' recommendations concerning the Communication

1. General recommendations

1. The Committee sees the 2002 World Summit as an opportunity to showcase and evaluate progress made on Agenda 21 within the EU and its Member States and to re-affirm political commitment to Agenda 21 as the basis upon which the Union will pursue sustainable development in the future.

2. The Committee asks that the Commission to give further indication of the ways in which their suggested strategic objectives reflect the integrated economic, social and environmental approach; and whether they fully reflect the objectives of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy.

2. **Role of local and regional authorities**

1. The Committee of the Regions calls for an active role for local and regional authorities in formulating and promoting the European Union contribution to the Johannesburg Summit in 2002.
2. The Committee is of the view that local government delegates should be included in all Member State delegations to the Summit, and recommends that the Commission promote this view to Member States.
3. In particular, the CoR is of the view that the Communication should highlight the positive work being done under the Local Agenda 21 process, in which local authorities across the world have made much progress in engaging their communities. The 2002 Summit offers an opportunity to consider the successes of Local Agenda 21 to date, and to disseminate information and share experience of the progress that has been made.

3. **Wide participation and engagement**

1. International agreements and procedures tend to fail in the implementation stage if they lack local and regional support. The CoR asks that the Commission ensure that relevant views and information from the grass-roots level reaches and is engaged in the European decision-making process.
2. New kinds of citizen commitments are required not only in the developing countries but in EU Member States as well, and the Committee of the Regions is of the view that extensive consultation and involvement of all levels of public authorities and stakeholders is essential in preparing the Union's contribution to the Johannesburg Summit. Local and regional authorities, as the level of governance closest to the people, and in many cases leading cross-sector partnerships, have a critical role to play in this process.
3. The Committee of the Regions is of the view that, in the context of increasing globalisation and in the interests of integrating economic, social and environmental concerns, it will be particularly important to involve business in the Johannesburg Summit and in the preparatory processes. The definition of businesses involved in informing the preparations for the earth summit should be as broad as possible, taking in not only producers of goods but firms involved in promoting and stimulating the consumption of those goods. In addition to the involvement of business it is important to ensure participation in the process of consumers and users of goods and services. Production processes and their sustainability can be influenced by the choices of consumers and these will be increasingly significant in ensuring sustainable use of resources.
4. In addition to active co-operation between European regions and municipalities, active involvement of universities, research institutes, public institutions, NGOs and business should be encouraged at local and regional level. In this area the CoR could play an important role by providing a platform for discussion and dialogue on European issues at local and regional level.

4. Additional input from the Commission

1. The CoR takes the view that environmental degradation and social exclusion often go hand in hand, and that partnership at local and regional level seem to be the most effective way of fighting exclusion and promoting an integrated approach towards sustainable development. Innovative EU actions could promote the dissemination of best local and regional practices and assist in the identification of new ways of effective and broad participation and inclusion.
2. The CoR would suggest that the Commission concentrate on three important processes in developing sustainable policies: the EU enlargement, the EU's common strategy for the Mediterranean and the Northern Dimension for the policies of the Union.
3. The CoR reiterates what it has called for on previous occasions, namely for a more active role for regional and local authorities in formulating and implementing environmental policy in the regions and municipalities of the new applicant states.
4. The CoR would wish to further develop innovative co-operation for sustainable development between EU regions and regions in the applicant states. In this context the CoR proposes that a larger proportion of pre-accession assistance be used for sustainable development, by for instance, and among others, supporting public-transport measures.
5. With respect to the Northern Dimension, the CoR would draw particular attention to the fact that one of the most important challenges for sustainable development in Europe is nuclear and radiation safety, the main problem being the partly defective safety measures which exist in nuclear-power stations. The CoR recommends that the Commission, drawing on its experience to date with financial assistance in the both CEEC and NIS, should focus especially in the latter group of countries and intensify support for cases which present the greatest human and environmental risk, thereby giving these cases top priority, and if necessary supporting the decommissioning of dangerous nuclear plants.
6. Concerning the existing and already more established EU Mediterranean Policy, the CoR has already called (CdR 123/2000) for the establishment of guidelines for an interregional and transnational programme for regional and local authorities on both sides of the Mediterranean, that would put an end to the existing fragmentation and ensure greater political co-ordination and more effective use of resources. This programme should address the sustainable development of the peoples on the southern and eastern sides of the Mediterranean, with special focus on spatial planning, the environment, SMEs, employment, economic and social policy, and the management of migratory flows.
7. Particular attention should also be given to regions with more vulnerable environments, ensuring that their populations take a leading role in their economic and social development in line with environmental quality objectives and in accordance with the principles of subsidiarity and social cohesion.
8. The CoR would additionally suggest that the Commission give due consideration to agricultural policy, which remains an area where Community policies impact heavily on environmental and social sustainability. Agricultural

policy may be the subject of detailed discussion at Johannesburg, and the Commission should devote serious attention to an assessment of this impact.

9. There is an important distinction to be made between the availability and the accessibility of information. The Committee recommends that the Commission should develop models for the effective communication of economic and scientific information to help enable individuals as well as organisations and institutions to make more sustainable choices.
10. The Committee of the Regions supports the emphasis given in the Communication to the impact on sustainability of world population growth. However, it believes that the Communication should pay additional attention to the issue of economic and social sustainability in relation to demographic change, with particular reference to some of the consequences of an ageing population structure.

Brussels, 14 November 2001.

The President

of the

Committee of the Regions

The Secretary-General

of the

Committee of the Regions

Jos Chabert

Vincenzo Falcone

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