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The activities of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2009-2010

Contribution[1]
Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs
Rapporteur: Mr Axel FISCHER, Germany, Group of the European People's Party

1. Conclusions

The Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs congratulates the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development and in particular its rapporteur, Mr Moscoso del Prado Hernández, on the report concerning the activities of the OECD in 2009-2010. This is a comprehensive report that addresses major issues affecting global economic prospects and also deals with the OECD's specific areas of activity.

However, greater attention should be paid to environmental questions, since the very future of civilisation depends on how we succeed in preserving the environment today.

2. Proposed amendment to the provisional draft resolution

In the provisional draft resolution, insert the following paragraphs:

"1. The enlarged Assembly welcomes the work done by the OECD in the environmental field and is pleased to note a growing awareness that emergence from the economic crisis depends on the development of new environmentally friendly sources of growth.

2. In this connection, it hails the launch of the Green Growth Strategy, which pinpoints the principal obstacles to be overcome in order to foster strong and ecologically sustainable economic growth and which simultaneously offers policymakers practical tools for making the transition to a greener economy.

3. The enlarged Assembly stresses the need for the rapid adoption of tangible measures, in particular with regard to the reform of environmentally harmful subsidies (for instance, for fossil fuels), the elimination of barriers to trade in environmental goods and services, support for innovation (in accordance with the principle of precaution applied to the development of all new technologies whose environmental effects are not yet known for certain) and the dissemination of clean technologies and harmonisation of means of action at the international level.

4. It proposes devising new tools for measuring well-being, no longer focusing on material well-being alone but also taking into account the quality of the environment and the quality of life. In this connection, it refers to Recommendation 1885 (2009) on drafting an additional protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights concerning the right to a healthy environment, and recommends that the Committee of Ministers take all the necessary measures to ensure that this instrument is drawn up as soon as possible.

1. Reference to committee: standing mandate. Reporting committee: Committee on Economic Affairs and Development. See Doc. 12340. Contribution approved by the committee on 17 September 2010.

5. At the same time, the enlarged Assembly stresses the need to reach an international agreement on greenhouse gas emissions, so that the largest possible number of countries is committed to achieving a substantial reduction."

3. Explanatory memorandum

1. As already mentioned in the report of the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development, the strategic response to the economic crisis has three main themes: stronger growth, fairer growth and cleaner growth. Moving to a new model of energy and resource management is indeed the only means of achieving a return to growth that is really sustainable in the true sense of the word.

2. Mr Moscoso del Prado Hernández's report clearly states that investments that are harmful to the environment should not be made simply to support the economy, as they entail hidden costs for future generations. This essential requirement, on which the very future of society as we know it depends, could not be better summed up.

3. In his foreword to the interim report on the Green Growth Strategy (Paris, 27-28 May 2010), the OECD Secretary-General, Mr Angel Gurría, underlined that the way out of the gravest economic crisis of our lifetimes depends on the development of new sources of growth and that two opportunities can be harnessed in particular: innovation and green growth.

4. This is, moreover, why the Green Growth Strategy was launched. The OECD has a lengthy experience of tackling environmental issues from an economic perspective (including in particular climate change, biodiversity, water, eco-innovation, resource productivity, waste, safety of chemical products, biotechnology and nanomaterials, transport and agriculture). The OECD horizontal work programme on sustainable development lays the foundations for co-ordinated analysis of economic, environmental and social concerns and also aims to integrate the long-term perspective into all of the organisation's activity programmes. In the context of its Annual Meeting of Sustainable Development Experts, the OECD ensures that due attention is being paid to sustainable development by reviewing and assessing statistics and policies on a country by country basis, which enables it to propose the policies of the future. The experts also supervise specific sustainable development projects, such as determining methods of measuring sustainable development, and examine good governance practices for institutionalising sustainable development and for national sustainable development strategies.

5. According to Mr Gurría, the OECD, armed with this experience, must now have recourse to a broad, integrated mix of policy tools in order to achieve strong green growth.

6. The OECD Green Growth Strategy identifies the key barriers that must be overcome and offers decision makers practical tools for securing the shift to a greener economy.

7. Green growth today constitutes the only way of pursuing economic growth and development while preventing environmental degradation, biodiversity loss and unsustainable resource use. It builds on initiatives launched by many countries keen to achieve more sustainable development and aims to identify cleaner sources of growth, while seizing the opportunities to develop new green industries, technologies and jobs and managing the structural changes associated with the transition to a greener economy.

8. New instruments will be needed to measure well-being no longer solely in material terms, but also taking into account environmental quality, the scarcity of natural resources and the quality of life. Here, it is particularly important to support the Parliamentary Assembly's Recommendation 1885 (2009) on drafting an additional protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights concerning the right to a healthy environment. This new protocol will be perfectly consistent with Principle 1 of the Declaration of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment of 1972 (the Stockholm Declaration), which states: "Man has the fundamental right to freedom, equality and adequate conditions of life, in an environment of a quality that permits a life of dignity and well-being."

9. Green growth must therefore be regarded not as a mere short-term response to the crisis, but as part and parcel of a complex transforming dynamic for production processes and consumer behaviour.

10. Under the strategy's action framework, the implementation of green growth policies should contribute to greater economic integration, technological co-operation and reduced pressure on global non-renewable environmental resources. Among the tangible measures to be taken, it is important to make polluters or those who overuse scarce resources pay through taxes, natural resource charges or tradable permit systems. It is also essential to institute a complete ban on certain activities (such as the production and use of toxic chemicals).

11. Innovation and the spread of clean technologies will be critical factors in greening economies. Investment in environmentally friendly technologies can become a new source of growth in itself and offer the twofold advantage of simultaneously fostering protection of the environment and economic recovery. To encourage innovation, it is necessary to provide incentives for firms to engage in green activities and also to intervene through the funding of basic research. It is, moreover, interesting to note that, when the oil price exceeds US$30 per barrel, technological innovation by businesses begins to focus on renewable energy rather than fossil fuel use.

12. The energy sector must be reoriented towards more environmentally friendly solutions. It is above all important to develop and deploy new renewable energy, energy efficiency and low-carbon technologies.

13. It is self-evident that the principle of precaution must be applied to new technologies which are not yet fully mastered and of which the environmental effects are not yet known for certain. Examples that can be cited include GMOs (already considered in Parliamentary Assembly Resolution 1419 (2005), and moreover the subject of new work under way within the Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs) and above all nanotechnologies, which the same committee will probably address in a future report. Nanotechnologies presently constitute a key area of advanced research in physics, electronics, chemistry and also biology. However, little data is available on the environmental behaviour of nanomaterials and their possible long-term impacts. Nanoparticles diffuse very easily in the atmosphere and can travel great distances before they deposit. They can, for example, be found in surface water, following run-off or leaching from contaminated soil, the deposition of nanoparticles that have travelled through the air or accidental leakage. Currently, no information is available on their degradation capacity. For this reason, nanotechnologies, albeit very promising, should continue to be developed solely on condition that their potential environmental risks are better understood and taken into account.

14. Eliminating the current obstacles to the transition to greener economies is unquestionably of crucial importance, in particular the reform of environmentally harmful subsidies, the elimination of barriers to trade in environmental goods and services and the greater harmonisation of means of action. The OECD's interim report of May 2010 already emphasised the need to reform environmentally harmful fossil fuel subsidies.

15. Reducing greenhouse gas emissions ranks as a priority among the measures to be taken to achieve sustainable development and combat the effects of climate change. In this connection, the committee welcomes the call by Germany, France and the United Kingdom to increase the European Union target for cutting greenhouse gas emissions to 30% of 1990 levels by 2020. Reaching an agreement that commits a large enough number of countries to guarantee sufficient progress in this area can now be seen to be absolutely essential. The committee hopes that the World Summit on Climate Change to be held in Cancún, Mexico, from 29 November to 10 December 2010, will make tangible progress in this direction.

16. The committee also welcomes the OECD Global Forum on Environment, which will take place in Mechelen, Belgium, in October 2010, and hopes that the proceedings will give fresh impetus to the OECD's activities fostering environmental protection and sustainable development.