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The activities of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2010-2011

Contribution[1]
Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs
Rapporteur: Mr Dimitrios PAPADIMOULIS, Greece, Group of the Unified European Left

1. Introduction

1. The Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs congratulates the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) on its 50th anniversary and welcomes the new strategies developed by this organisation for building stable long-term growth in the world.

2. The committee fully supports the report prepared by the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development and congratulates the rapporteur, Ms Birutė Vėsaitė, on her excellent work. In particular, the committee welcomes the emphasis in the report on environmentally sustainable and socially balanced growth and the "Green Growth Strategy" launched by the OECD in May 2011.

3. The committee also wishes to highlight and support the achievements of the OECD in other areas related to its work, such as agriculture, water governance, regional innovation and nanotechnologies.

2. Explanatory memorandum by Mr Papadimoulis, rapporteur for opinion

4. The rapporteur has rightly underlined, in part IV of the report, new initiatives by the OECD that will enable more environmentally sustainable and socially balanced growth.

2.1. Green Growth

5. The Green Growth Strategy was delivered at the Ministerial Council Meeting in May 2011 and launched a long-term process of mainstreaming the OECD's green growth analytical work to enrich guidance on a number of country, sector and specific issues. This Strategy will help member states to expand economic growth and encourage job creation through sustainable use of natural resources, efficiencies in energy use and the valuation of ecosystem services.

6. The Green Growth Strategy is an excellent tool for achieving sustainable development. It should create the necessary conditions for developing new technologies and attracting more investment to new sources of economic growth, which will be ecologically friendly. The Strategy provides both political recommendations to make economic growth "greener", and a set of indicators to monitor progress towards green growth.

7. The OECD's document "Towards green growth: A summary for policy makers" (May 2011), which synthesises the key elements and messages of main green growth reports, is a very good aid for politicians on how to streamline the principles of green growth in national policies. The committee encourages all members of the Assembly to familiarise themselves with this important publication.

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1. Reference to committee: Standing mandate. Reporting committee: Committee on Economic Affairs and Development. See Doc. 12683. Contribution approved by the committee on 4 October 2011.

8. The development of a Green Growth Strategy will require investment in infrastructure networks, especially in areas such as energy, water, transport and communication. It could improve economic growth and bring social and health benefits. The committee strongly supports the priorities given by the OECD to the sector-specific studies on the implications of green growth for such areas as food and agriculture, the energy sector, water and biodiversity.

9. A high degree of co-ordination at local, ministerial, governmental and international levels is vital for the identification of necessary policies for the implementation of green growth. A very important aspect of the green growth agenda would be to find ways of measuring progress, which is vital for analysing policies and developing political recommendations.

10. The committee considers that the Council of Europe should also join the new global knowledge platform for fostering green growth, which aims to bring together proponents of sustainable development to promote and implement green growth policies by exchanging knowledge, information and experience. The rapporteur is convinced that respect for human rights should be at the centre of the development of these indicators.

2.2. Agriculture and fisheries

11. The OECD publication, "A Green Growth Strategy for Food and Agriculture", pointed out that farming and fisheries are particularly vulnerable to climate change and will need to adapt to shifting temperature and rainfall patterns, rising sea levels and extreme weather conditions. Farming policy is facing major challenges with the rise of the world's population by a third by 2050. Governments should take measures to increase productivity in a sustainable way, using resources more efficiently and phasing out environmentally harmful subsidies. It is also important to establish well-defined property rights on marine resources, land and forests.

12. These conclusions are reinforced in the OECD-FAO Agricultural Outlook 2011-2020, issued in June 2011. To prevent food shortages in developing countries, actions are needed to increase investments and productivity in agriculture and to place more emphasis on improving productivity growth and ensuring sustainable resource management.

13. In this context, the OECD highlights the need for further work on the role of agricultural policies in developing countries, including the management of risk and uncertainty, the need for ensuring environmental and resource sustainability, infrastructural needs, and ways of targeting policies to benefit poor populations.

2.3. Water

14. Extensive work has been done by the OECD in the framework of the Horizontal Programme on Water to improve water management. The OECD focuses its efforts on policy and institutional responses, pricing, financing, infrastructure and sustainable management of water resources. In 2010, it released three major publications on water: "Pricing Water Resources and Water and Sanitation Services", "Sustainable Management of Water Resources in Agriculture" and "Innovative Financing Mechanisms for the Water Sector". These publications give guidelines for governments on innovative mechanisms of water management. The OECD also considers the important link between water and climate change adaptation, including the role of agriculture. In 2011, the work of the OECD in this area is focussing on the development of guidelines for sustainable water governance mechanisms and aims to provide for an institutional mapping of roles and responsibilities in water policymaking at national, regional and local levels.

15. The committee also welcomes the partnership established with the OECD in the framework of the preparation of the 6th World Water Forum (Marseilles, March 2012), in particular active participation by the OECD representatives in the Preparatory Conference of the Parliamentary Process at the 6th World Water Forum, which was held in the Council of Europe in Strasbourg, on 10 June 2011 and encourages both organisations to continue co-operation in this field.

2.4. Nanotechnologies

16. The OECD is playing a co-ordinating role in international efforts on the development and use of nanotechnology. It has established two working parties to look at specific aspects of nanotechnologies. The Working Party on Manufactured Nanomaterials (WPMN), established in September 2006, is tasked to explore the implications for the safety of human health and the environment of the use of nanomaterials. Its work will lead towards internationally agreed standards for testing nanomaterials and methods for addressing risk assessment.

17. The OECD's Working Party on Nanotechnology (WPN), was established in March 2007 to advise on emerging policy issues regarding science, technology and innovation related to the responsible development of nanotechnologies. The WPN aims to develop a better shared understanding of the potential challenges and opportunities of nanotechnologies to support their responsible development.

18. The OECD and the US Environmental Protection Agency are undertaking work in developing standard protocols for toxicology testing of nanoparticles. This work should be built on, along with the guidelines for particle toxicology that already exist.

19. The committee will acknowledge the work done by the OECD on nanotechnologies in a future report on "Nanotechnologies, a new danger to the environment", which is under preparation by a member of the committee, Mr Valeriy Sudarenkov.

2.5. Regional, rural and urban development

20. The financial crisis posed new challenges to regions and to regional development policies. It has strongly affected rural areas and regions in Europe, where more people lost jobs than in cities and their well-being decreased significantly. To help governments to take advantage of the economic potential of all regions, the OECD issued "Regions at a Glance", a publication which provides regionally and nationally comparative statistics on factors which affect the economy and people's quality of life. The committee welcomes the complementary nature of the work and exchanges between the OECD Network and the Council of Europe intergovernmental work on local and regional democracy.

21. The activities of the OECD LEED Trento Centre for Local Development contribute greatly to capacity building for local development. More than 7 000 policymakers and practitioners have benefited from different seminars, workshops and conferences organised by this centre using peer-to-peer learning methods. The broad research community is involved in studies undertaken by the Trento Centre to promote knowledge of and comparison for local development and employment policies and strategies.

22. Finally, in the framework of Green Growth Strategy, the OECD has launched a programme on Green Cities to assess how urban green growth and sustainability policies can contribute to improving the economic performance and environmental quality of metropolitan areas. This programme will include the elaboration of case studies of cities and indicators of economic performance and environmental quality, and will produce a comparative report that identifies best practices to help make cities dynamic engines of green growth in local and national economies.

3. Conclusions

23. Acknowledging the long-lasting and mutually beneficial working relationship established between the Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs and the OECD, the committee wishes the Assembly to continue supporting the initiatives of the OECD in areas related to the committee's work, paying special attention to the new Green Growth Strategy and contributing to its promotion at the parliamentary level in the Council of Europe member states.

24. The committee also invites the OECD to continue co-operation in the preparations for the 6th World Water Forum and encourages the organisation to take part in the transversal conference on climate change and human rights which will be organised in the Council of Europe in autumn 2012 on the initiative of the committee.

25. This conference will aim to advance the parliamentary proposal to draft an additional protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5) concerning the right to a healthy and viable environment (Assembly Recommendation 1885 (2009)), as part of a global process to advance this issue within the United Nations system by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Human Rights Council. In more general terms, it will help to set a global change towards a low carbon society and eco-friendly lifestyles, by drawing attention to necessary changes in societal values and raising awareness about the protection of the environment, protection of human health; social cohesion, welfare and equity; educational needs, especially of young generations; cultural and natural heritage.

26. The enlarged Assembly welcomes the long lasting co-operation between the Council of Europe and the OECD including most recently in researching and addressing the challenges posed by the financial crisis to local and regional governments as well as to development policies.

27. The Parliamentary Assembly notes with satisfaction that the OECD Secretary General, Mr Angel Gurría, is invited to take an active part in the 17th session of the Council of Europe Conference of European Ministers for Local and Regional Governments, which will be organised in Kiev, Ukraine, on 3 and 4 November 2011. This conference will aim to present the financial and economic developments as well as policy responses by member states to the impact of the economic crisis on local government, in light of the Utrecht Declaration and guidelines adopted by the Ministerial Conference in 2009. It will address the urgent need for robust improvements in governance and in the management of public expenditure, for increasing efficiency across the whole of the public sector and for greater collaboration between all stakeholders, in compliance with the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122). The ministers will highlight the importance of sound local finance systems in the context of the economic downturn, adopting and committing themselves to an updated set of guidelines for their national policies, complementing the two recommendations of the Committee of Ministers in the field of local finance, namely Recommendations Rec(2004)1[2] and Rec(2005)1.[3]

4. Contribution to the draft resolution proposed by the committee

28. The enlarged Assembly welcomes the co-operation between its Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs and the OECD in the preparation of the 6th World Water Forum and looks forward to the OECD's participation in the transversal conference on climate change and human rights, which will be organised in the Council of Europe in autumn 2012.

29. The enlarged Assembly welcomes the long lasting co-operation between the Council of Europe and the OECD including in research and on addressing the challenges posed by the financial crisis to local and regional governments. It notes with satisfaction that the OECD Secretary General, Mr Angel Gurría, is invited to take an active part in the 17th session of the Council of Europe Conference of European Ministers for Local and Regional Governments, which will be organised in Kiev, Ukraine, on 3 and 4 November 2011.

2. Recommendation Rec(2004)1 on financial and budgetary management at local and regional levels.
3. Recommendation Rec(2005)1 on the financial resources of local and regional authorities.