

Recommendation 1823 (2008)¹

Global warming and ecological disasters

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Europe will not be spared the changes in climate caused by global warming. For the past three decades climate change has had a growing impact on many biological and physical systems on a planetary scale. Climate change affects the fundamental elements of life – access to water, food production, health, and the environment – for people all over the world.
2. Such effects are already significant and measurable in Europe, and particularly so in the Arctic. The entire natural environment and all socio-economic spheres on the continent of Europe are, and will continue to be, affected. As the relationship between climate change and its effect on ecosystems is not linear, even slight variations in temperature are causing serious repercussions.
3. At present, the Arctic is the region which gives the greatest cause for concern, with temperatures rising twice as fast there as the global average, many of the consequences of which have a serious impact on other parts of the planet.
4. In Europe, the Mediterranean basin is likely to be one of the parts of the world most affected by global warming, thus present issues and tendencies as regards sharing water between agriculture, tourist facilities and urban areas will be exacerbated.
5. The most optimistic estimations of the 4th Assessment Report of Working Group I of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) forecast rises in temperature of between 1.8°C and 4.0°C if an effective global policy for mitigating climate change is not introduced quickly.
6. Europe, like the remainder of the planet, will therefore most probably be subject to higher temperatures and extreme weather conditions, such as heatwaves, storms, droughts, glacier melt, irregular rainfall, floods, rising sea-levels and other human and environmental disaster situations.
7. Freshwater resources will also be directly affected in terms of both quantity and quality as a result of extreme occurrences like drought and flood: fluctuations in river flow, much lower minimum water levels, high concentrations of pollutants and toxic substances in water, reduced replenishment of groundwater reserves, increased nitrate pollution, water stress, etc.
8. Moreover, because climate change will influence migration of populations threatened by ecological disasters and make access to drinking water even more difficult in some regions, there is a risk that tensions in international relations will increase and that climate change becomes a frequent cause of conflict and even war.
9. The Parliamentary Assembly therefore reaffirms its unswerving commitment to sustainable development and, in particular, its support for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, aimed at stabilising atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases, and for the Kyoto Protocol. It refers in particular to its most recent documents on the subject, [Resolution 1406 \(2004\)](#) on global warming: beyond Kyoto, and [Resolution 1552 \(2007\)](#) on capture of carbon dioxide as a means of fighting climate change.

1. Assembly debate on 22 January 2008 (4th Sitting) (see [Doc. 11476](#), report of the Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs, rapporteur: Mr Meale). Text adopted by the Assembly on 22 January 2008 (4th Sitting).



10. In particular, the Assembly supports the IPCC's work on evaluation of the vulnerability of natural and human systems and their ability to adapt to climate change and its possible consequences, and welcomes the Nobel Peace Prize award to Al Gore and the IPCC for their efforts to increase knowledge about global warming.

11. The Assembly welcomes the conclusions of the United Nations Climate Change Conference held in Bali (3-14 December 2007), which include an agreement in principle on a 2050 target of halving emissions, an agreement to negotiate a binding deal in 2009, an agreement to provide assistance to developing countries for both mitigation and adaptation and an agreement by China to pursue actions that are "measurable, reportable and verifiable" with the aim of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. It believes that the adoption of the Bali road map, which charts the course for a new negotiating process to be concluded by 2009 and which will ultimately lead to a post-2012 international agreement on climate change, is a major step towards the fight against climate change.

12. The Assembly also draws attention to the Stern review on the economic impact of global warming which, using the results from formal economic models, estimates that, unless we act rapidly, the overall costs and risks of climate change will be equivalent to losing at least 5% of global GDP each year. If a wider range of risks and impacts is taken into account, the estimated damage rises to 20% of GDP or more.

13. The Assembly is aware that climate change could have very serious consequences for growth and development and that the cost of stabilising the climate would be considerable. However, it stresses that failure to take immediate action would be dangerous and result in much higher costs.

14. The Assembly considers that the international community must assume its responsibility for providing present and future generations with a viable, healthy and sustainable environment and urges Council of Europe member and observer states to take comprehensive and effective action on climate change and introduce the measures needed to cut emissions without necessarily capping either rich or poor countries' aspirations for growth.

15. The Assembly therefore welcomes the recent ratification of the Kyoto Protocol by Australia and regrets that the United States remains the only major developed nation that has refused to ratify the protocol.

16. It also welcomes the most ambitious policies for reducing greenhouse gas emissions and the measures already taken by numerous countries and regions, such as the European Union (EU). It particularly underlines the role played by the EU, especially the decision taken by the heads of state and government of the EU on 9 March 2007 to commit themselves to a post-Kyoto objective of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 20% by 2020 (30% if other industrialised countries, in particular the United States, introduce similar measures), bringing the percentage of renewable energies in the whole range of energy sources used in EU member states to 20% by 2020.

17. The Assembly is aware that, even with a sharp increase in the use of renewable energies and other less carbon-intensive energy sources, over half of the world's energy supply in 2050 might still be made up of fossil fuels. The Assembly believes that renewable energies will help to eradicate poverty and the energy dependency of developing countries, a great many of which have an abundance of renewable energy.

18. It believes that the loss of natural forest around the world is also a threat to biodiversity and does more to increase the greenhouse effect each year than the transport sector. In addition, agriculture represents 9% of greenhouse gas emissions and is the main source of methane and nitrogen protoxide emissions. It therefore sees curbing deforestation as a highly cost-effective way of cutting emissions and turning agricultural land back into forest, which would then offer a considerable potential for absorbing atmospheric carbon dioxide (CO₂).

19. It is convinced that firm, resolute decisions on future orientations in both developed and emerging economies can achieve the required reduction and stabilisation of emissions without restricting development.

20. The Assembly, aware that a global response must be based on a shared understanding of the long-term objectives and an agreement on the frameworks for action, urges those industrialised countries which produce most of the greenhouse gas emissions to help developing countries that are most affected by the natural disasters caused by global warming, by sharing their technologies and know-how and developing international technological co-operation.

21. In this context, the Assembly urges Council of Europe member states and observer countries to co-ordinate their action at both European and world level, in particular by co-operating with the relevant United Nations bodies and other competent European and international organisations and institutions.

22. With regard to adaptation to climate change, the Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers urge Council of Europe member states and observer countries to:

22.1. take account of climate change in their spatial-planning, water-management, land-use and agricultural policies (particularly with regard to forestry and the organisation of harvests) so as to counter flood and drought risks;

22.2. involve all political, economic and social players and develop local, regional and national capability, in both public and private sectors, with regard to dealing with emergencies and natural disasters;

22.3. use international funding to improve regional information on the consequences of climate change and to support research into new drought- and flood-resistant crop varieties;

22.4. take account of climate change when making development policy choices and drawing up official development aid programmes;

22.5. develop research programmes and flood- and drought-monitoring and warning networks on the basis of a common European approach and integrated river basin management for the prevention and management of weather extremes.

23. With regard to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, the Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers urge Council of Europe member states and observer countries to:

23.1. make precise commitments to cut greenhouse gases by setting a binding target of reducing CO₂ emissions by between 20% and 30% by 2020 and stabilising atmospheric concentrations of CO₂ at the lowest possible level so as to contain temperature increases as far as possible;

23.2. establish a carbon price through taxation, emissions trading and/or legislation;

23.3. take the necessary steps to achieve greater energy efficiency by establishing conditions conducive to alteration of demand and adoption of clean technologies for electricity, heating and air-conditioning, in house building and renovation, in land transport (organisation of urban transport, promotion of rail freight networks, development of hybrid vehicles, etc.), in air and sea transport and in industrial processes;

23.4. assess the contribution of a range of innovative, clean energy sources, including nuclear energy, to the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions;

23.5. take comprehensive measures to promote the capture and storage of carbon on a large scale and develop natural mechanisms for absorbing and stocking CO₂ so as to restrict the use of fossil fuels and the damage they cause to the atmosphere;

23.6. take measures to cut non-energy emissions, such as those resulting from deforestation and agricultural and industrial processes, in particular by developing large-scale international pilot programmes to cut methane and nitrogen protoxide emissions while increasing the absorption of CO₂;

23.7. promote emission-trading quotas aiming at cost-effective reductions in emissions and allowing industrialising countries to further their economic development;

23.8. encourage innovation and less carbon-intensive technologies and enact the necessary legislation to encourage use of renewable energies at all levels by such measures as development of research, incentives to industrial innovation, making the technology available to the consumer and tax incentives for energy producers and consumers;

23.9. persuasively inform and educate the public as to what can be done to help tackle global warming and for that purpose, with the participation of major national media and of industries which produce energy-intensive consumer goods, organise awareness-raising campaigns on the state of the planet, the extent of the global warming problem and the socially responsible behaviour required of all members of society, consumers and producers alike, at their respective levels.

24. The Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers instruct:

24.1. the EUR-OPA Major Hazards Agreement to develop without further delay joint action plans to meet the major challenges posed by climate change, with the emphasis on prevention, education and development of early warning systems and post-disaster assistance;

24.2. the European Conference of Ministers responsible for Regional Planning to draw up and promote a common policy so that all spatial planning, development and management instruments take climate change into account and provide for closer vertical and horizontal consultation between the bodies concerned.