Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Resolution 1667 (2009)[1]

Growing food and fuel

Parliamentary Assembly

1. In the context of diminishing sources of fossil fuels and the alarming consequences of climate change, the production of agrofuels appeared to be a miracle solution.

2. However, their increasing use, while helping to cut energy dependence and fossil fuel consumption, has begun to create problems of another kind. It is a fact that the allocation of land, formerly used to produce foodstuffs, to the cultivation of crops for agrofuels has not only had damaging consequences for food production but has also raised doubts as to whether they really help to preserve the environment.

3. Moreover, studies have shown that agrofuels quite often produce more greenhouse gas emissions than the fossil fuels they are replacing, if we take all the factors in their production chain into account.

4. Deforestation and changes in land use trigger the release of large quantities of previously stored CO_2. In addition, there are the gas emissions resulting from the production, transformation and transportation of agrofuels, as well as from the deployment of technologies using oil derivatives and other greenhouse gas-emitting components.

5. Some studies suggest that the climate would be more effectively protected by conserving or restoring forests and grasslands rather than developing crops for agrofuel production. Reforestation would make it possible to capture between two and nine times more CO_2 over a period of thirty years than would be saved in terms of emissions through the use of agrofuels over that period.

6. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-ordination and Development (OECD), agrofuels would help to reduce CO_2 emissions by only 3% at best, at a cost of €360 per tonne of CO_2 saved.

7. The development of agrofuels is therefore highly controversial from an energy balance perspective. In fact, more oil is sometimes needed to manufacture agrofuels.

8. In terms of foodstuffs, it is estimated that the quantity of cereal needed to fill a lorry's tank with agrofuel could feed one person for a whole year. According to Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimates, 10% of the overall price increase in the food sector is due to agrofuels, while the International Monetary Fund (IMF) puts forward a figure of 30%. The World Bank puts this percentage at around 75%.

9. A study by Stanford University has shown that agrofuels also have harmful effects on health. The use of ethanol could well cause a considerably greater public health problem than the present pathologies linked to hydrocarbon pollution. Ethanol combustion engines increase the amounts of ozone toxicity in the air, particularly in cities already affected by pollution.

10. A supplementary danger linked to the development of agrofuels is the introduction of invasive alien plant species, which, if spread outside the cultivation fields, become a main cause of biodiversity loss.

1. *Assembly debate* on 30 April 2009 (17th Sitting) (see Doc. 11790, report of the Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs, rapporteur: Mr Evans; and Doc. 11824, opinion of the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development, rapporteur: Mrs Barnett). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 30 April 2009 (17th Sitting).

11. The Parliamentary Assembly was surprised that the European Commission had chosen to give its strong backing to the development of agrofuels despite the alarm bells rung by scientists, farmers and environmental activists. It was all the more surprised that the European Commission stressed that agrofuels had only a negligible influence on rising foodstuff prices and had set a target of 10% for agrofuels by the year 2020.

12. The Assembly welcomes the fact that the European Commission reconsidered its position in July 2008, emphasising that its targets did not in fact include any specific obligation as to the use of agrofuels, but related to renewable energy sources in general.

13. The Assembly believes it is desirable for Council of Europe member and non-member states, as well as the European Commission and the other international organisations concerned, to commit themselves without delay to an effort to find a compromise solution between the world's fuel needs (especially in wealthy countries) and foodstuff needs (especially in poor countries).

14. For these reasons the Assembly invites the governments of Council of Europe member states and observer countries and all the international organisations concerned to consider agrofuels as one of the key elements in their policies for renewable energies and, while doing this:

14.1. take better account, in the framing of their energy and agriculture policies, of the damaging effects on the environment, agriculture and food if the development of agrofuels is taken too far, notably in the light of the resolution on the proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the promotion of the use of energy from renewable resources as approved by the European Parliament on 17 December 2008;

14.2. learn from both the positive and negative aspects of past experiences, since even a successful model cannot be identically replicated without taking local realities into account;

14.3. phase out over a period of time all financial incentives granted to the producers of agrofuels and step up free trade in both agrofuels and the raw materials used to manufacture them;

14.4. ensure that any agrofuels imported are produced in full respect of the sustainability criteria and the relevant International Labour Organization conventions;

14.5. ensure that invasive alien plant species, if used for agrofuel production, do not spread outside the cultivation fields, mainly by reducing the chance of seed dispersal;

14.6. encourage more strongly investment in research and development in the area of second and next generation agrofuels, whilst clearly classifying agrofuel generations by their performance in terms of resource use, environmental impact and greenhouse gas emissions;

14.7. support research into algae-based agrofuels;

14.8. encourage the construction of bio-refineries capable of manufacturing a whole range of products, not limited to agrofuels;

14.9. study in greater depth all the possibilities on offer from alternative energy sources, in order to generate electricity more cheaply;

14.10. emphasise the development of policies aimed at reducing energy demand and greenhouse gas emissions, *inter alia,* by encouraging the development of vehicles which are both less polluting and more energy efficient, particularly in the light of the European Parliament and Council's Directive 2006/32/EC on energy end-use efficiency and energy services, which should be further strengthened;

14.11. encourage the recovery of the many hidden inventions that lie dormant in the European and national patent offices, the current financial crisis presenting an opportunity to provide inventors and developers with start-up capital, thus stimulating an innovative economy and creating new jobs.