Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Recommendation 1879 (2009)[1]

Renewable energies and the environment

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The current energy system, characterised by the excessive consumption of fossil fuels, is increasingly unable to solve the problems of energy supply. The supply structures of conventional sources of energy are increasingly at odds with society's needs for accessible and clean energy.

2. The Parliamentary Assembly would therefore like to see measures for sustainable restructuring of the energy system taken as rapidly as possible and energy generation brought back into line with the requirements of lasting energy security and environmental protection.

3. This restructuring of the energy system should be aimed at making renewable energies rapidly and comprehensively available. The use of solar-, wind- and hydro-power and geothermal energy has no limits in real terms and does not create any consumption costs. In addition, if these energies are used in a sustainable fashion, they do not trigger any damaging environmental effects. The same applies to biomass, provided it is produced in a sustainable way and without competition with food needs. Renewable energies also mean long-term energy security, since they allow for domestic sources to be used. In addition, transnational networks and supply structures are only needed to a small degree.

4. One of the decisive economic and social factors which makes the use of renewable energies vital is the fact that they can be used on a decentralised basis. A large number of small and medium-sized installations will, together, provide the energy needed for a whole society. The decentralised structure of the system, involving many different players, will allow a lively market to develop. A system based on renewable energies therefore offers an opportunity to break down the current monopoly structures on the energy markets.

5. The increasing energy-related crises – the climate crisis, the energy dependency crisis, the poverty crisis, nuclear threats, the water crisis and the health crisis – demonstrate clearly that rapid action is needed if change is to be shaped politically and socially. Any further delay would only mean that the crises over energy and the conflicts over distribution of the remaining resources, with their associated social costs, would continue to escalate until they became impossible to manage.

6. The Assembly believes that measures such as tax exemptions, tax reductions or favourable feed-in tariffs should be taken in order to make renewable energy installations as profitable as possible, without negative impacts on the environment. These measures would also ensure that the construction of renewable energy plants is not subject to − often excessively lengthy − bureaucratic procedures. The construction of such plants should be regarded as a priority.

7. Indeed, such plants make it possible to avoid the social costs of the energy crisis and compensate for the subsidies and privileges that have been granted to conventional energies for decades, which led to their dominant market position. The only alternative to this privileged position for renewables would be full internalisation of the external costs of conventional energies in energy prices. The principles of environmental accounting should be applied to take into account the full cost of environmental damage caused by conventional non-renewable energy systems. In this respect, the Assembly recalls its Recommendation 1653 (2004) on environmental accounting as a sustainable development tool.

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1. *Assembly debate* on 25 June 2009 (25th Sitting) (see Doc. 11918, report of the Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs, rapporteur: Mr Le Grand). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 25 June 2009 (25th Sitting).

8. The Assembly also believes that, to ensure the success of all these measures, consideration must be given to the setting up of an agency with the objective of promoting worldwide the use of renewable energies. This agency could, *inter alia*, provide advice on the implementation of national renewable energy policies and assistance with technology transfer in the field of renewable energies, thus enhancing skills and knowledge on renewable energies. It could also collect all existing, sound scientific information.

9. The Assembly therefore asks the Committee of Ministers to call on Council of Europe member states to:

9.1. take the necessary measures for profitable large-scale use of renewable energies (tax exemptions, tax reductions or favourable feed-in tariffs);

9.2. organise the energy markets of the Council of Europe member states in a non-discriminatory fashion and take the necessary measures to guarantee equal access to distribution networks for all energy suppliers;

9.3. ensure that the conditions applied to energy suppliers when granting access to networks, regardless of their owners, are absolutely neutral;

9.4. grant tax relief or tax exemptions on agrofuels of the second and subsequent generations in order to ensure their competitiveness with fossil fuels in the transition period until broad market penetration has been achieved;

9.5. give clear priorities in territorial planning law to allow the setting aside of locations for the generation of renewable energies, regardless of the kind of energy to be produced;

9.6. seek to ensure that public and private buildings, especially those under construction, are adapted to the use of renewable energies and set up programmes to support the use of renewable energies in existing private buildings;

9.7. use fossil energies as effectively as possible during the transition period;

9.8. modernise conventional power plants in order to allow cogeneration, which would offer the prospect of a 100% gain in energy efficiency;

9.9. support the establishment of the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) with the objective of promoting the use of renewable energies worldwide;

9.10. run large-scale information and advertising campaigns on renewable energies in order to overcome people’s reservations and encourage private investors to invest in these sources of energy;

9.11. promote research in order to develop new renewable energies and improve the efficiency of existing ones;

9.12. offer and arrange appropriate and continuing training for professionals involved in installing and maintaining these new technologies.