



Contribution by the PES Group of the CoR on "Save Our Planet"

According to the latest report of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), "climate change is expected to magnify regional differences in Europe's natural resources and assets"¹. In the meantime, energy choices, the key culprit for the dramatic increase in greenhouse gas emissions globally, are raising a number of serious concerns across the EU and all over the world, ranging from security of supply and optimal energy mix to energy prices and subsequent energy poverty.

Addressing climate change presupposes a political approach based on citizens' rights, but also on concrete obligations. It is evident that the response to a phenomenon as complex as global warming cannot fit into the confines of traditional governance sharing and it therefore requires mutually reinforcing actions at local, regional, national, European and global level, based on a common vision for the attainment of long-term goals, with the active involvement of the civil society. Environment policy should be part and parcel of all other policies, covering from economy, education and agriculture, to health, energy or security. What is more, addressing climate change involves an in-depth discussion of controversial issues such as the use of nuclear energy, GMOs, industrialisation and the common industrial policy.

Confronted with such challenges, we European Socialists and Social Democrats of the Committee of the Regions have put climate change and energy at the top of our political agenda, placing particular emphasis on human development for the good of all. We fully back the recently adopted EU targets of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 20% in the EU, and by 30%, subject to global agreement, with a view to limiting climate change to 2°C above pre-industrial levels. At European level, we also welcome the formal commitment by many local elected representatives in the "Covenant of Mayors" to exceed the targets for emissions reductions set at intergovernmental level. Moreover, we consider a post-2012 Kyoto agreement an absolute prerequisite for any meaningful global response to climate change. In this respect, the success of the UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen (December 2009) under Swedish Presidency of the EU is crucial.

We also particularly welcome the legal basis for energy provided for the first time by the Lisbon Treaty (Article 176 A) and the clear acknowledgement of the role of the Committee of the Regions in the relevant consultation process. Likewise, we are pleased with the explicit references to combating climate change (Article 174) and addressing - in a spirit of solidarity between Member States - severe difficulties in energy supply (Article 100), both an innovation of the Lisbon Treaty.

We urge, however, for a single post-2010 strategy that will replace both the current Lisbon Strategy and the Sustainable Development Strategy, adopting a balanced approach towards not only the social and economic challenges facing the EU, but also the

¹ "Climate Change 2007 Synthesis Report", Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (November 2007)

environmental ones. After all, climate change is likely to have serious repercussions on the EU's growth, also exacerbating social inequalities. We therefore need an instrument that would remedy existing policy fragmentation and implementation shortcomings. The success of the new strategy will depend on the possibility to identify and address challenges at the level closest to the citizens. This is where Socialists and Social Democrats of the Committee of the Regions have a key role to play, and why the new instrument must acknowledge the distinct role of local and regional levels of governance in the process.

Indeed, locally and regionally elected Socialists and Social Democrats can help redress environmental injustices, often suffered by the economically weakest groups of society, and support the far-reaching technological and societal changes required to address climate change. They can significantly contribute towards setting up and managing a "Green Skills Fund", aimed at equipping workers with adequate skills to embrace the transformation required to achieve the EU environmental targets. Addressing climate change involves huge costs, impacting unevenly on states, regions, cities, households and individuals. The local and regional levels of governance are a vital link for ensuring a fairer redistribution of environmental burdens.

Last but not least, they can help citizens, especially the younger ones, bring about changes in their lifestyles by providing environmental education in the broad sense of the term.

Question 1: *In what ways can local and regional authorities contribute towards halting global warming and reducing fossil fuel dependence? How could they better contribute to the development of innovative climate adaptation technologies and to the promotion of new and sustainable energy sources?*

Local and regional authorities have an important role to play in mitigating climate change, in other words, in reducing the magnitude of change. Energy production and saving, as well as infrastructure, transport and overall environmentally sustainable public procurement are areas in which those levels of governance can help to significantly reduce greenhouse gas emissions. It is a fact that numerous initiatives on energy efficiency and renewable energies are taken at local and regional level, and examples of good practice from all over the EU are easily available. In view of the above, we call for political leaders on the ground to be given the power to act in such a way as to influence energy consumption in a tangible and sustainable way, either by setting examples or by regulating where appropriate.

The ability to adapt to the changing climate is also a key issue for local and regional authorities because they are the ones to bear the brunt of increasingly frequent extreme weather conditions causing from heat waves, droughts and wildfires, to inland flash floods, mudslides and rising sea levels. This requires long-term planning, reflected also in the regulation of land use, including halting urban sprawl, and in the construction and maintenance of municipal infrastructure (see also Question 3). Although renewable energies and energy efficiency measures are acknowledged as key issues for climate change, urban sprawl, a major contributor to pollution, is often ignored and should therefore be given appropriate attention.

To be able to mitigate and adapt to climate change, locally and regionally elected Socialists and Social Democrats urge for more significant investments in large-scale R&D programmes on alternative energy sources, implemented at infra-national level. We believe that reducing fossil fuel dependence contributes decisively towards fighting not only climate change but also energy poverty, an alarming phenomenon in our view.

We particularly call for adequate EU funding of Carbon Capture and Storage demonstration projects, which can make a meaningful contribution towards reducing greenhouse gas emissions. We also believe that the private sector commitment to research and development (R&D) of clean energy technology is inadequate and that national energy regulatory authorities should be able to require operators to invest a minimum amount in R&D to support priority projects at European level.

Moreover, the PES Group in the Committee of the Regions calls for the prompt extension of the scope of the European Regional Development Fund (FEDER) in relation to financing energy efficiency measures in order to cover buildings also for residential purpose in the EU-15 countries and not only in the EU-12.

However, we are sceptical about fuel crops, which are increasingly displacing subsistence agriculture, thus endangering biodiversity and reducing food supply.

Finally, we advocate strengthening solidarity mechanisms to secure energy supply between the Member States. Mutual assistance mechanisms exist for oil crises in the form of the International Energy Agency's strategic stocks. Others could be introduced for gas and electricity at European level. Each Member State could for example be required to be able to mobilise emergency resources equivalent to 10% of its peak energy consumption, to be made available for other Member States affected by a supply crisis.

We also call for cross-border links (transmission lines, gas pipelines) to be developed and for security of supply to be stipulated as a task of regulatory authorities in each Member State.

Question 2: What strategies should be set up by the regions, especially the cities, in order to tackle the problems of urban transport?

Although cities and major urban areas have a significant growth potential, they are faced with increasing environmental problems, threatening to eventually hinder this growth. To remedy this situation, they need to improve accessibility and address the significant problems of transportation and derived congestion, as well as transport-related environmental issues.

Socialists and Social Democrats in the Committee of the Regions believe that it is crucial to decouple growth from negative climate change impacts in dense urban areas by providing alternative modes of transport, with a view to achieving decarbonisation of road transport by 2050. We must rethink urban mobility in terms of "co-modality" between all public and private modes of transport, and work to bring about a shift towards environmentally friendly modes of transport.

Although the division of powers between local, regional and national authorities varies across EU Member States, we believe that local and regional authorities play a fundamental role in the planning and implementation of urban transport policy. This is why we call on regions and cities to develop comprehensive long-term mobility plans that address the issue of congestion and mitigate climate change.

Full accessibility to and affordability of the proposed modes of urban transport must of course remain a key priority.

Question 3: What role for the regional and local authorities in managing natural resources such as water and soil?

Local and regional authorities are and have always been key actors in water and soil management. Effectively and efficiently matching water supply and demand while keeping at bay water and soil contamination, deforestation and loss of natural habitat require a fine balancing act between environmental, social and economic needs. What is more, local and regional authorities are often responsible for decisions concerning land use and spatial planning. The issue involves a number of key policies (apart from environment) ranging from public health and consumer policy, agriculture and the internal market to regional and cohesion policy, energy, transport or enterprise policy.

At the same time, it is the sub-national levels of governance that are called to address phenomena related to climate change such as increased water scarcity, soil erosion or flooding.

We are arguing for the full involvement of local and regional authorities in the elaboration of preventive measures in terms of water and soil degradation, in the identification of areas already affected or at risk of such degradation and in the implementation of relevant remedial measures.

We also support the creation of a European Drought and Desertification Observatory to monitor water scarcity and forecast droughts in the context of climate change.

Last but not least, we reiterate the key role of local and regional authorities in the implementation of the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive.

Question 4: In terms of waste policy, how can local and regional authorities ensure an efficient management by limiting the impact on the environment and by setting up ecologically integrated waste prevention schemes, in order to prevent repetition of the problems encountered over the years in the EU and to bridge current technology gaps?

Reaching the overarching objective of sustainability in waste management is a challenge local and regional authorities are confronted with on a daily basis. A clear hierarchy of waste management options in EU policy does exist, listing in descending order of preference prevention, reuse, recovery (recycling and composting, recovery of energy such as incineration) and finally the least favoured option of final disposal (landfilling). Problems occur with the failure to prevent or reuse waste.

To enable local and regional authorities to successfully implement the acquis communautaire on waste policy, we urge for a clear definition of tasks amongst the different levels of government and for comprehensive information on the various options available.

We call for the full implication of the sub-national levels in the formulation of a coherent national waste management strategy, setting strategic goals and targets, and including detailed and practical regional and local plans.

Separate collection and sorting systems and adequate treatment and disposal facilities require adequate funding and considerable administrative capacity building (information and technical expertise). We are aware that local and regional authorities, mainly responsible for planning, enforcement and control, and technical implementation often are not able to fulfil their tasks adequately because of a lack of administrative and/or financial capacity.

We also underline the importance of information, consultation and participation of all stakeholders, including industry, trade, environmental groups and particularly households. Educational campaigns and public hearings can raise public awareness, interest, and support for those options that contribute to more sustainable waste management.

Question 5: What measures could be taken at local and regional level to address *energy poverty*, a problem with serious social repercussions as it is affecting an ever-growing number of Europeans?

Local and regional authorities are best placed to identify individuals or groups at risk of energy poverty and to implement measures that ensure social cohesion and solidarity. This pre-supposes that special energy-related social clauses do exist, which is not the case in all Member States.

The PES Group in the Committee of the Regions urges for the elaboration and implementation of such support measures at EU level through the Open Method of Coordination, as part of the EU's social inclusion strategy. Tackling energy poverty should figure amongst the key challenges identified by the EU in the field of social inclusion (child poverty, inclusive labour markets, decent housing, various forms of discrimination, financial exclusion and over-indebtedness) and should be reflected in the relevant National Action Plans, possibly under the "Decent Housing" objective.

We insist that the involvement of local and regional authorities in the policy-making process in the field of energy poverty is a condition sine qua non.

In this context, we call for the Charter on the Rights of Energy Consumers, which the European Commission proposed in July 2007, to have binding effect in order to guarantee a certain number of essential rights for consumers, e.g. continuity of energy supply, socially acceptable prices, a ceiling on wholesale prices in emergencies or the possibility of consumer representation with the national regulatory authorities.

Question 6: What awareness raising strategies can regional and local authorities develop in order to influence citizens' individual energy choices through a "sustainable energy culture"?

In their often dual capacity as energy producers and consumers, local and regional authorities can be role models in the application of a sustainable energy culture. Existence of energy efficient public buildings, availability of alternative means of transport and renewable energy sources, carefully planned land use, coupled with sustainable use of natural resources encourage citizens to reconsider lifestyle choices and opt for more environment-friendly energy options. Environmental education in the school curricula and awareness raising campaigns are also useful tools in promoting a sustainable energy culture.
