



Strategic EU Affairs – European Parliament adopts resolution on Europe 2020 Strategy

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Summary: On 16 June the European Parliament adopted a resolution on the proposed Europe 2020 Strategy, the successor to the 2000 Lisbon Strategy, which aimed to turn the EU into ‘the world's most dynamic knowledge-based economy by 2010’. In its resolution the Parliament considers the environmental aspects of the proposed strategy as generally too weak. It therefore calls for the adoption of binding targets not included in the Commission proposal such as a 20 per cent reduction target for energy consumption, a resource efficiency improvement target and measurable targets geared towards halting the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services and restoring them by 2020. Although the European Parliament calls for resource efficiency to be a priority throughout the strategy, it only calls for a resource efficiency target and fails to call for a target on limiting resource use.

Background

On 3 March, the European Commission unveiled its much anticipated proposal for a successor to the Lisbon Strategy, adopted in 2000 and re-launched in 2005, which largely failed to turn the EU into ‘the world's most dynamic knowledge-based economy by 2010’ (see IEEP Analysis Briefing: 5 March 2010). The proposal for the new strategy aims to turn the EU into a smart (based on knowledge and innovation), sustainable (promoting resource efficient, greener and more competitive growth); and inclusive (high employment, delivering economic, social and territorial cohesion) economy. Therefore a series of headline targets to be met by 2020 are proposed. The most relevant targets for the environment field are:

- 3 per cent of the EU’s GDP to be spent on research and development (R&D); and
- 20-20-20 climate and energy targets to be met (including an increase to 30 per cent emission reduction ‘if conditions are right’).

Seven ‘flagship initiatives’ to stimulate action in each area are set out, among others an ‘Innovation Union’, a ‘Resource efficient Europe’ and an ‘Industrial Policy for the globalisation era’.

The March European Council was initially due to discuss the strategy's overall approach, but a final decision was postponed. EU leaders finally adopted the Europe 2020 Strategy ‘for jobs and smart, sustainable and inclusive growth’ at their summit on 17 June.

European Parliament resolution of 16 June

Following debates with the Commission and the Council, the European Parliament, on the day before this summit, adopted a resolution on the Europe 2020 Strategy by 562 votes to 57 with 24 abstentions.¹ At the general level, Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) expressed their disappointment about the main elements of the new strategy as agreed by the European Council on 26 March. They nevertheless urged the European Council to endorse the key elements of the Europe 2020 Strategy at its meeting on 17 June, though insisting that the summit should not adopt final decisions on the key instruments, targets and indicators of the strategy without properly consulting the European Parliament.

As for the environmental aspects of the proposed strategy, the MEPs consider these as generally too weak. Among other things, MEPs are disappointed about the lack of ambition regarding the European Council's headline targets on greenhouse gas emissions, renewables and energy efficiency. The Parliament therefore called for the adoption of the following binding targets: reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 30 per cent by 2020 and substantially reducing emissions further in the long run provided that other countries are also ready to commit themselves to taking adequate action; a 20 per cent reduction target for energy consumption by 2020; a resource efficiency improvement target; and, measurable targets geared towards halting the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services and restoring them where possible by 2020.

In the field of innovation, the European Parliament resolution calls on the Commission to increase the total financial envelope earmarked for research and innovation in the EU budget and to improve conditions for innovation, for instance by introducing a single EU patent.

In the area of resource efficiency, the European Parliament considers that the strategy should be geared towards meeting the EU's long-term goals of cutting greenhouse gas emissions by 80 per cent by 2050. The resolution furthermore states that resource efficiency should be a priority throughout the strategy and that the consequences of ever-increasing oil-prices and the limited supply of precious metals vital to electronics (such as batteries for electric cars) should receive particular attention.

In the field of energy, the European Parliament deplores the lack of ambition to develop a truly common European energy policy. In its view, the strategy overemphasises the objective of 'a functioning internal market' at the detriment of the other two objectives 'sustainable development' and 'security of supply'.

As regards industrial policy, the resolution calls for 'a transformation of European industry through a European sustainable industrial policy geared towards the creation of sustainable jobs and the amelioration of resource efficiency and resource use'.¹ The European Parliament furthermore repeats its request to secure adequate financing to support low-carbon energy technologies, suggesting to spend at least €2 billion per year from the EU budget, in addition to existing funding under the Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) and under the Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme (CIP).

European Parliament workshop on environmental challenges for the Europe 2020 Strategy

On 16 June the European Parliament's Environment Committee organised a workshop with the aim of providing MEPs with a comprehensive overview of the environmental aspects of and challenges for the Europe 2020 Strategy and to prepare the

Committee's contribution to the European Parliament's resolution on the strategy. In his speech to the workshop, the head of the European Environmental Bureau (EEB) presented some clear views on the strategy from an environmental point of view.

The EEB suggested among other things to strengthen the strategy by including ambitious and binding energy and resource use reduction targets and by explicitly linking the strategy to the EU's new biodiversity and ecosystem target for 2020 and explicitly recognising that biodiversity and ecosystems are the ultimate resource base of our economies. In fact the EEB is in favour of a 40 per cent emission reduction target and is also supportive of cutting energy use by 20 per cent by 2020. Therefore it calls on the European Parliament to insist on setting an immediate and unconditional greenhouse gas emission reduction target of 30 per cent by 2020 and open the debate on moving to 40 per cent. As to resource efficiency, the EEB calls for halving the EU's ecological footprint by 2030.

The EEB calls for a strengthening of the environmental dimension of the strategy, but questions whether the environmental dimension will survive as there are doubts about whether the flagship initiative on resource efficiency ('Resource efficient Europe') will be put into practice in the short term. The environment Commissioner seems to have plans to develop a roadmap for resource efficiency to be published in the course of 2011, whereas the implementation of the other flagship initiatives have been incorporated in the 2010 work programme of the Commission. Therefore there is a risk that resource efficiency and resource use considerations will not be integrated sufficiently in the other flagship initiatives.

European Council of 17 June

The EU Heads of State and Government adopted the Europe 2020 Strategy at their summit on 17 June² (See IEEP Analysis Briefing: 25 June 2010). In concrete terms, they reached a political agreement on five headline targets for employment, innovation, climate change, education and poverty. As far as innovation is concerned, the target is to improve the conditions for R&D, and in particular to increase combined public and private R&D investment to 3 per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In fact, the latter is a renewed commitment. As far as climate change is concerned, the targets set in 2008 are reaffirmed: reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 20 per cent compared to 1990 levels, increasing the share of renewables to 20 per cent, and moving towards a 20 per cent increase in energy efficiency. However, the EU is still willing to commit to a 30 per cent emission reduction on the condition that other developed countries commit themselves to comparable emission reductions and that developing countries contribute adequately according to their responsibilities and capabilities. However, no targets in the field of resource efficiency and biodiversity and ecosystem services, as called for by the European Parliament in its 16 June resolution, were agreed upon. The same holds for the 20 per cent reduction target for energy consumption for 2020.

Future developments

EU leaders are still to adopt further details of the strategy. In the Autumn Member States are to submit stability and convergence programmes, as well as national reform programmes. Implementation, however, will probably remain the weak point of the new strategy, as EU leaders were once again unable to agree sufficiently on strong governance and enforcement mechanisms. Although the new strategy provides for tighter monitoring of national reform programmes, implementation still relies largely on the political will of the national governments.

References

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Kristof Geeraerts

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