

Thursday 12 December 2013

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Green Infrastructure Policy

European Parliament resolution of 12 December 2013 on Green Infrastructure — Enhancing Europe's Natural Capital (2013/2663(RSP))

(2016/C 468/27)

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the 7th Environmental Action Programme,
 - having regard to the Commission communication entitled 'Green Infrastructure (GI) — Enhancing Europe's Natural Capital' (COM(2013)0249),
 - having regard to the Commission communication entitled 'Europe 2020 — A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth' (COM(2010)2020),
 - having regard to the Roadmap to a Resource-Efficient Europe (COM(2011)0571),
 - having regard to the EU biodiversity strategy to 2020 (COM(2011)0244),
 - having regard to Directive 2009/147/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 November 2009 on the conservation of wild birds ⁽¹⁾,
 - having regard to Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora ⁽²⁾,
 - having regard to the Environment Council conclusions of June 2011 and those of 17 December 2012 (point 14),
 - having regard to its resolution of 20 April 2012 on 'Our life insurance, our natural capital: an EU biodiversity Strategy to 2020' ⁽³⁾, in particular paragraph 50 thereof,
 - having regard to the study entitled 'The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity' (TEEB) ⁽⁴⁾,
 - having regard to the Commission's 2009 White Paper entitled 'Adapting to climate change: Towards a European framework for action' (COM(2009)0147) and its communication entitled 'An EU Strategy on adaptation to climate change' (COM(2013)0216),
 - having regard to the question to the Commission on Green Infrastructure — Enhancing Europe's Natural Capital (O-000094/2013 — B7-0525/2013),
 - having regard to the 'Territorial Agenda of the European Union 2020: Towards an Inclusive, Smart and Sustainable Europe of Diverse Regions',
 - having regard to the Aichi Biodiversity Targets of the 'Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020', adopted by the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) in October 2010,
 - having regard to Rules 115(5) and 110(2) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas declines in biodiversity and in the status of our ecosystems need to be tackled in order to ensure the continued provision of ecosystem services and the protection of natural capital for present and future generations;
- B. whereas green infrastructure helps nature to yield the full potential of the ecosystem services it can provide to society;
- C. whereas the loss of biodiversity needs to be tackled in order to protect natural capital for both present and future generations;

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 20, 26.1.2010, p. 7.

⁽²⁾ OJ L 206, 22.7.1992, p. 7.

⁽³⁾ OJ C 258 E, 7.9.2013, p. 99.

⁽⁴⁾ <http://www.teebweb.org>

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- D. whereas anthropogenic pressure threatens biodiversity and the integrity of ecosystems in the European Union, including through fragmentation and destruction of natural habitats, climate change and intensified use of semi-natural habitats;
- E. whereas biodiversity and the well-being of human society are closely linked;
- F. whereas in order to conserve and strengthen biodiversity in the Union it is important to minimise the level of fragmentation and enhance ecological connectivity;
- G. whereas Aichi Biodiversity Target 11 is that 'by 2020, at least 17 per cent of terrestrial and inland water, and 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services, are conserved through effectively and equitably managed, ecologically representative and well connected systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, and integrated into the wider landscapes and seascapes';
- H. whereas green infrastructure and agriculture are closely linked, in terms of agricultural productivity and the protection of agricultural heritage, and due to the spatial and land-use planning impacts of agricultural activities;
- I. whereas experience shows that green infrastructure projects offer a great opportunity to integrate nature into society, including urban environments that are home to an increasing proportion of the population, and whereas those people are exposed to the serious effects of the 'urban heat island' phenomenon;
- J. whereas information on how to create, protect, enhance and use green infrastructure efficiently across landscapes should be shared amongst stakeholders and published;
- K. whereas experience shows that the planning and development of infrastructure projects are key phases during which the integration of ecological, economic and societal needs must be ensured, both in urban and rural landscapes;
- L. whereas regional and urban infrastructure programmes and projects which are co-funded by the EU should integrate green infrastructure elements and mitigate impacts on existing ecosystems, in order to enhance the environmental, social and economic benefits of such programmes and projects;
- M. whereas green infrastructure offers a whole range of ecological, economic and social benefits deriving from natural solutions, which are generally less costly and more sustainable and can help to create jobs;
- N. whereas green infrastructure investment normally yields a high return;

General remarks

1. Welcomes the communication on green infrastructure and the Commission's intention to actively pursue the objectives set out therein;
2. Recognises the key importance of green infrastructure in effectively protecting Europe's natural capital, conserving natural habitats and species and maintaining the good ecological status of water bodies;
3. Stresses the contribution which green infrastructure can make to the Union's multiple 2020 objectives, and highlights the urgency of its deployment and its integration into the tools to implement the Multiannual Financial Framework, in order to contribute effectively to the achievement of Union biodiversity targets;
4. Recognises that the deployment of green infrastructure will help the Union reach its international commitments under the Aichi Biodiversity Targets and the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020;

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5. Welcomes the innovative approach of green infrastructure, which offers cost-effectiveness, through multiple benefits and solutions, which can reconcile environmental, social and economic objectives;

Integration into different policy areas

6. Stresses the need to integrate green infrastructure into all the EU's sectorial policies and the corresponding financing arrangements, using the Member States' best practices as examples;

7. Points out that green infrastructure can play a particularly important role in cities, where an increasing proportion of the population is living today and where it can deliver services like clean air, temperature control and mitigation of the local 'heat island effect', recreation areas, flood protection, rainwater retention and flood prevention, maintenance of groundwater levels, restoring or halting the loss of biodiversity, alleviation of extreme weather and its effects, improving the health of citizens, and enhancing the quality of life in general, including by providing accessible and affordable areas for physical activity; stresses the link between green infrastructure and public health and considers that investment in green infrastructure is also an investment in public health;

8. Stresses the contribution of green infrastructure as a vital accompaniment to the Natura 2000 network, enhancing the coherence and resilience of the network, which serves the conservation of key species and habitats of Europe's nature, and helping to maintain the delivery of ecosystem services estimated at several hundred billion euros per year; points, in this connection, to the complementarity between Natura 2000 legislation and the green infrastructure initiative;

9. Urges the Member States to integrate and prioritise green infrastructure in spatial and land-use planning by consulting with, and raising awareness among, stakeholders on the ground and local people through education campaigns, involving all decision-taking levels (local, regional and national), and asks the Commission to support guidance and benchmarking in this area in order to ensure that green infrastructure becomes a standard part of spatial planning and territorial development across the Union; points out that permit procedures for new developments or grey infrastructure need to ensure full assessment of any negative impacts on ecosystems and existing green infrastructure in order to avoid and mitigate such impacts and ensure actual long-term societal benefits;

10. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to use all EU financing instruments, including those under the cohesion policy and the common agricultural policy, especially Ecological Focus Areas, to promote green infrastructure where appropriate in order to ensure the delivery of a wide variety of ecosystem services and the protection of natural processes in rural and urban areas; calls on the Commission to report regularly to Parliament on the use of CAP funds to support green infrastructure; stresses, in this connection, the important role of green infrastructure in the protection of bees and hence for the effective functioning of pollination;

11. Underlines the positive effects of green infrastructure on the mitigation of climate change since it has a positive influence on carbon stocks and greenhouse gas balances, particularly with regard to the conservation of peatland soils, semi-natural and natural woodlands and forests, and other carbon rich ecosystems, thereby contributing to the implementation of the EU's climate policy;

12. Supports efforts to combine spatial planning and the development of green infrastructure in coastal areas, with the aim of safeguarding biodiversity and ensuring the sustainable development of coastal landscape areas;

13. Notes the vital role of green infrastructure in adapting to climate change, as it increases ecological coherence between Natura 2000 sites, facilitates the increase in movements and changes in species distribution between and among Natura 2000 sites, and provides landscape scale adaptation for biodiversity, and thus contributes to the implementation of the EU's nature policies, and also encourages and provides ecosystem-based adaptation to other sectors, including water management and food security;

14. Considers it essential for the Member States — and especially those bordering the sea — to implement green infrastructure around port areas and to develop transport schemes propitious to the greening of those areas;

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15. Draws attention to the fact that a reduction in the risks associated with natural disasters — such as floods or forest fires — is also a positive effect of creating or restoring green infrastructure such as natural flood plains, woodlands, wetlands etc., which can improve disaster resilience and help adapt to climate change, and can significantly decrease related costs to society;
16. Highlights the need to fully include the forestry sector in this policy area, in order to obtain multiple benefits beyond timber and biomass production, provided by sustainable forest management and natural forest conservation, and to restore fragmented or destroyed woodlands;
17. Welcomes the initiative to promote green infrastructure as an instrument that contributes to water filtration, the prevention of erosion and the preservation of the water table, and consequently the correct implementation of the Water Framework Directive, the Floods Directive and relevant water legislation as proposed in the blueprint, as well as to integrated coastal management and marine spatial planning;
18. Highlights the importance of the proper integration of green infrastructure requirements into the implementation of EU structural and cohesion policy instruments, in particular for financing urban green infrastructure, and urges the competent authorities to promote relevant actions;
19. Stresses the need to integrate green infrastructure into operational programmes under EU financing instruments for the 2014–2020 period;
20. Urges the Commission to finalise in a timely manner, i.e. by the end of 2013, the support guidance material announced in the communication in order to advance understanding and promotion of green infrastructure in relevant policy areas and to ensure funding opportunities via operational programmes;
21. Calls on the Member States and regional and local authorities to make good use of existing funding opportunities in order to promote investment in coordinated and coherent green infrastructure projects;

Development of a green infrastructure strategy

22. Stresses the need to enhance private sector involvement in green infrastructure investments and calls on the Commission and the EIB to quickly establish and make operational a financing facility including innovative financing mechanisms to support green infrastructure investments and other natural capital-related projects, while also assessing real and long-term support for ecosystem functions; points out that further financing sources at local, regional and national level will also need to be explored;
23. Is convinced that deployment of green infrastructure needs to be supported by solid data and in-depth knowledge and encourages the Commission, working together with the European Environment Agency, the Member States and other stakeholders to make sure that the Union strengthens its capacity in relation to the mapping and assessment of ecosystems and the associated ecosystem services and that this information and knowledge is properly taken into account, including in the planning and delivery of EU co-funded projects;
24. Urges the Commission to promote research, innovation, capacity building, education, dissemination, awareness-raising and public information projects in this field and to support the exchange of information and best practices; points out that the skills and training of personnel able to deal with this innovative approach and to properly value the benefits provided by ecosystems, especially in the sectors of water supply and purification, waste, construction, disaster management, agriculture, tourism and health facilitate the development of green infrastructure;
25. Takes the view that integration into all policy areas is a basic condition, without which no credible green infrastructure policy can be conducted;
26. Highlights the role that land owners and managers, civil society organisations, citizen/crowd science, citizens' responsibility and public participation can play in planning, implementing, maintaining and monitoring green infrastructure projects at local level, and urges the Member States to facilitate such processes;

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27. Agrees with the development of a strategy consisting of the building up of priority axes for green infrastructure projects in Europe and stresses the need for more cross-border interregional strategies and projects;
28. Supports the TEN-G as announced in the communication and calls on the Commission to deliver on the development of a TEN-G scheme by 2015;
29. Emphasises the potential for innovation with regard to green infrastructure and the key role which SMEs can play in this field; points out that common standards, certification and labelling should act as a support for green infrastructure investments and create the necessary room for first movers;
30. Looks forward to the review of the biodiversity strategy in 2015, the subsequent review of the green infrastructure communication in 2017 to further anchor green infrastructure in relevant planned investments at EU level and the mid-term review of the relevant policy areas (CAP health check, REGIO mid-term review, etc.);

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31. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.
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