5.8. The Committee of the Regions believes that, as the key point of contact for ordinary consumers, it is more important to upgrade and network existing consumer protection organisations at national, regional and local level than to set up further Euroguichets.

5.9. The Committee of the Regions welcomes the plan to systematically catalogue, summarise and publish current European, regional and national consumer law. It also proposes including companies’ self-regulatory commitments in a databank of this kind.

5.10. The Committee would ask the European Commission to keep it informed, at appropriate intervals, on the implementation of the action plan and on progress made.


The President
of the Committee of the Regions
Manfred DAMMEYER

Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on ‘Preparing for Implementation of the Kyoto Protocol’

(2000/C 57/13)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,


having regard to the decision taken by the Commission on 28 May 1999, under the first paragraph of Article 265 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, to consult the Committee of the Regions on the matter;

having regard to the decision by the Bureau on 2 June 1999 which directs Commission 4 — Spatial Planning, Urban Issues, Energy and Environment — to draw up the relevant opinion;

having regard to the Kyoto Protocol on reducing greenhouse gas emissions adopted in December 1997 at the 3rd Conference of the Parties of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP3 — 1/10 December 1997);

having regard to the Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on Strengthening environmental integration within Community energy policy, COM(1998) 571 final;

having regard to the opinion of the Committee of the Regions on Climate change and energy, 18 September 1997, CdR 104/97 fin(1);


having regard to the opinion of the Committee of the Regions on the Communication from the Commission on Environment and Employment: building a sustainable Europe, 19 November 1998, CdR 75/98 fin(3);

(3) OJ C 51, 22.2.1999, p. 41.
having regard to the opinion of the Committee of the Regions on the Communication from the Commission on accession strategies for environment, COM(1998) 294 final, 19 November 1998, CdR 267/98 in (1);

having regard to the opinion of the Committee of the Regions on Transport and CO2 — Developing a Community approach, 11 March 1999, CdR 230/98 (2);

having regard to the draft opinion (CdR 295/99 rev. 1) adopted unanimously by Commission 4 on 7 October 1999, for which the rapporteur was Mr Penttilä (FIN, PES),

unanimously adopted the following opinion at its 31st plenary session on 17 and 18 November 1999 (meeting of 18 November).

1. Introduction


1.2. The Commission Communication expresses concern over implementation of the Kyoto Protocol, saying that as many of the signatory countries as possible should ratify the Protocol and steps to implement it should be initiated within the EU.

1.3. The Commission states that in order to reduce emissions, common and coordinated initiatives, policies and measures at both the national and Community level should be reinforced.

1.4. The Commission considers that the primary responsibility for implementing emission reductions lies with the Community’s Member States, whose decision-making procedures for these measures should be speeded up.

1.5. The Commission states that Community level measures can complement national initiatives. It should already be possible by the time of the Helsinki Summit in 1999 to agree on the integration of environmental questions (especially with regard to greenhouse gases) into all the other main policy areas. The Commission is trying to speed up decisions on energy taxation and proposals in the field of energy and transport.

1.6. The Commission is confident that environmental agreements with industry can reduce greenhouse gas emissions and expects expressions of interest from industry associations during 1999.

1.7. The Commission considers that both national and international monitoring and verification systems are important for ascertaining the evolution of emissions and the effectiveness of measures.

1.8. The flexibility mechanisms in the Kyoto Protocol must be elaborated and a broad consultation of all stakeholders should be organised on emissions trading. The basis for this would be provided by a Green Paper.

1.9. The Commission proposes that funding possibilities for emission reduction investments and technology transfer be provided through EIB and EBRD initiatives and possible special credits. In the view of the Commission, linking official development assistance to emission reduction projects requires further examination as well as the active participation of developing countries.

1.10. The Commission communication states that as the EU prepares to enlarge, better conditions can be created for achieving the desired emission reductions in the applicant countries.

1.11. In addition to the initiatives agreed at Kyoto, the main emphasis of the Buenos Aires follow up meeting, the 4th Conference of the Parties (COP4) in 1998, was to examine and elaborate the planned flexibility mechanisms.

1.12. In addition to the signatory countries’ own initiatives, other possible measures for reducing the emissions of developing countries and for preserving carbon sinks include flexibility mechanisms such as Emissions Trading (ET), Joint Implementation (JI) and the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), the implementation rules for which were drawn up and discussed at the meetings for Parties of the UNFCC at the COP5 in Bonn in 1999 and will be decided upon at the COP6 in the Hague in 2000.

2. General considerations

2.1. The Committee of the Regions believes that the Communication on implementation of the Kyoto Protocol is important and that the measures it proposes are urgent.

2.2. The Committee of the Regions considers that the impact of the greenhouse effect on all forms of life and the ability of mankind to survive, particularly in the long term, are generally acknowledged. The continual warming of the global
2.9. The Committee of the Regions believes that the challenge of reducing greenhouse gas emissions is a tough one. Implementation therefore requires new groups of players to be identified. Slowing down climate change and complying with the Kyoto Protocol requires long-term EU-wide, national and local decisions and initiatives which support ecologically, economically and socially sustainable development. Decision making, and the ability to exercise influence, must be brought closer to citizens.

2.10. The reduction of greenhouse gas emissions is a far-reaching, global social issue. It is not restricted to an environmental policy or energy and transport policy based on the principle of sustainable development. Indeed, on the basis of the Amsterdam Treaty, Member States’ agricultural, employment, social and structural fund policies should be integrated into the Community’s energy and environmental policies as well as research and funding programmes.

3. Specific comments

3.1. The Kyoto Protocol specified energy production, industry, transport and agriculture as key priorities. The Commission has decided to add households and the service sector to this list. The service sector also includes many public services (for example child daycare, schooling, social welfare and health care, etc.), which are provided mainly at the local and regional level. The service sector is, however, a very broad concept. It is comprised of activities on different scales and a large number of players. Extreme cases can include hairdressing salons employing 1-2 people, multinational consultancy firms, individual taxi drivers and hotels.

3.2. The local level and local authorities differ considerably with regard to emission levels, sources of emissions, the economic and technical possibilities for reductions, as well as how long it takes for their initiatives to take effect. The range of instruments at the local level is, however, quite wide.

3.3. The municipalities and regions are often responsible for energy production and distribution, spatial and urban planning, transport planning and construction, public transport, waste water purification, and the handling of municipal solid waste.

3.4. In addition, in several Member States regional and local administrations are the authorities responsible for implementing national environmental legislation through local environmental protection measures. For example, local authorities issue the emission permits required by law to different users, they monitor emissions and take part as far as possible in advisory work.
3.5. Environmental problems must be tackled where they occur. Local authorities have the most expertise and are the bodies closest to citizens with the ability to tackle many of the greenhouse gas issues associated with community activities. In addition, the benefits to be gained from measures are often also visible either directly or indirectly at the local level and this helps them to gain public approval.

3.6. The various methods of preventing climate change bring a range of various and recurring benefits for the citizens. For example, improving local air quality in industrial or residential urban areas with heavy traffic has a positive effect on the health, quality of life and well-being of residents.

3.7. Reducing the greenhouse gases which destroy the ozone in the upper atmosphere improves agricultural and forestry productivity and reduces the damaging effects of ultraviolet rays on human health.

3.8. Emission reduction measures help to improve people's livelihoods. These include improving the efficiency of traditional energy production and distribution, doubling the proportion of combined heat and electricity generation, energy efficiency, energy savings and doubling the use of renewable energy sources, as well as giving preference to ecological procurement. Commercial energy production is central as regards the use of renewable energy sources. Many producers already supply energy produced with renewables because of company image among other reasons. As energy markets are liberalised consumers may also demand energy produced in accordance with the principles of sustainable development.

3.9. In this connection, urgency attaches to limitation of the continually rising CO₂ emissions by road traffic, and in particular implementation of the environment agreement with the association of European car manufacturers. New fuel-saving engine technologies have now been developed. However, these require petrol of a higher quality than that specified in the fuel directive 98/79/EC. Sulphur-free fuels will enable car manufacturers to put new and more energy-efficient engines on the market, for instance otto engines with direction petrol injection.

3.10. The development and production of the new environmental and energy technology needed to prevent climate change and the promotion and research of renewable energy sources also create new jobs and improve business competitiveness. The Danish wind power industry is a good example of this.

3.11. In providing services for residents, the local level itself is also a significant energy consumer, as its procurement decisions have an impact on energy use and emissions. Heating buildings, refrigeration, lighting and local technical infrastructure such as street lighting or water and waste management consume a considerable amount of energy. For example, significant reductions have been achieved in the energy consumed by local authority buildings through adjustments and timing changes based on energy surveys. New types of lamps and lighting solutions for road and street lighting save electricity. Reductions have been made in the electricity consumed in pumping clean and waste water by the use of frequency transformers.

3.12. The Committee of the Regions is conscious of the fact that some across-the-board decisions on emission reduction can also have negative structural consequences for the local and regional level and for their vitality. To minimise any damaging economic effects and to ensure the acceptability of measures, both national and EU-wide support arrangements are necessary.

3.13. The international negotiations on supplementary measures established by the flexibility mechanisms of the Kyoto Protocol have in some ways slowed down both national and EU policies and practical initiatives. The EU countries — like the other Annex 1 countries, with a few exceptions — have no experience so far of, for example, emissions trading. Emissions trading requires reliable statistics, monitoring and national experiments.

3.14. The Committee of the Regions considers that use of the Kyoto instruments — emissions trading, joint implementation and clean development mechanism — in the international framework would contribute to cost-efficient climate protection. It is therefore necessary to ensure earliest possible clarification of the rules on international emissions trading. Participation of companies is to be foreseen here. Furthermore, proposals should be formulated for an early crediting system under which climate schemes could be implemented under the clean development mechanism before the 2008-2012 Kyoto budget period.

3.15. The Member States, the European Union and its funding organisations have considerable experience of helping the applicant countries and the other central and east European countries to achieve emission reductions through joint action.

3.16. In addition, EU local and regional authorities have direct links with local authorities in the applicant countries and other nearby regions. Know-how on measuring and monitoring emissions, as well as experience of actual reduction methods, can be transferred to these countries to help them reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
3.17. In many Member States, the local level already has at its disposal the necessary information and instruments for monitoring greenhouse gas emissions, such as statistics and emission calculation programmes which conform with IPCC recommendations. Examples and experiences of good monitoring practices and actual emission reduction methods could be collated and passed on, among other things through best practice competitions both within the EU and in nearby regions.

3.18. CDM projects of particular relevance to developing countries are also suitable for carbon sink consolidation measures, for example through afforestation programmes.

3.19. There are many ways of achieving reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. Useful and necessary methods include regulation (specific emission levels, specific energy use or emissions quotas and permits), price mechanisms (taxes, charges, emission trading), voluntary agreement procedures and related economic support mechanisms, for example for promoting renewable energy sources and combined energy generation.

3.20. The widespread use of energy and environmental taxation in EU countries is one of the main ways of implementing the generally recognized polluter pays principle.

3.21. Implementing emission reduction initiatives in a cost-effective way is generally understood as a principle, but the starting point is problematic. Uncertainty often remains as to whether cost effective refers to the economic viability of individual players themselves or rather to society-wide economic benefits, and over what time period. It is important to include the external costs and savings made when assessing the viability of investment to reduce emissions.

3.22. Evaluating and attributing the costs and societal benefits (savings) resulting from the reduction in all greenhouse gas emissions continues to be difficult. Some of the consequences are not even known, let alone evaluated.

3.23. The EU's fifth research framework programme also focuses considerable attention on climate issues. When the programme is implemented, local and regional considerations need to be taken into account.

3.24. The requirements for returns on emission reduction investments vary from case to case. For example, a long-term return over 10-20 years is acceptable for a basic infrastructure investment such as an energy generation plant. In contrast, investments in energy consumption savings by SMEs or industrial companies only require a short-term return in perhaps 2-4 years. But the same issue is at stake, namely the development — or not — of equal energy capacity and output. The bases of economic assessment for long-term, capital intensive and relatively risk-free project developers are entirely different to those for developers facing a relatively larger financial risk.

3.25. Voluntary agreement procedures concluded between groups of players in conjunction with financial support packages are a useful way of pursuing emission reductions. A promising example is the CO₂ emission reduction programme agreed upon with the European car industry. This procedure may be most useful when there are relatively few and powerful players. Agreement procedures can be either national or EU-wide in scope.

3.26. With regard to energy saving, there is the possibility in some EU countries of agreement procedures between local authorities and central government. There are many examples of the effectiveness of national voluntary agreement arrangements in the field of waste. Perhaps the most widely known are deposit schemes for recyclable and returnable bottles and aluminium cans set up in conjunction with the brewing and soft drinks industry, the collection of car tyres in conjunction with tyre importers and manufacturers, as well as paper, packaging waste and waste glass collection.

3.27. However, influencing the consumption patterns of individuals requires a continuous process of supplying information and reshaping attitudes, for example through publicity, education and advice. More training is needed on various levels. Energy plants, organisations, educational establishments as well as different authorities can provide good advice on energy to target groups. Education in early childhood will also bring benefits in the long-term. This is important for slowing down the global greenhouse phenomenon.

3.28. It is essential to raise general awareness of climate change and to integrate energy and environmental aspects into decision-making at local, national and EU level. The local and regional energy offices supported by the Altener and SAVE II programmes for the promotion of renewable energy sources have proved to be useful information dissemination channels.

3.29. Measuring greenhouse gas emissions and monitoring their development in accordance with the IPCC recommendations is an essential requirement for keeping track of each Member State’s share of the common burden. Emission monitoring can also be carried out on a regional and local basis, as well as on a sectoral basis. Data on the situation concerning emissions and changes to it will enable measures to be tailored according to needs and objectives.

3.30. Climate protection campaigns which have been voluntarily initiated by towns and regions such as the ICLEI Cities for Climate Protection campaign and different kinds of local sustainable development programmes (LA21) in many European countries provide a good opportunity for concrete climate protection measures and the comprehensive integration of sustainable development in decision-making at the local and regional level close to the citizen. Competitions could, for example, be used in order to identify and present good local level practices.
4. Conclusions

4.1. The Committee of the Regions considers that implementation of the Kyoto Protocol and achieving the 8 % emission reduction stipulated by it requires national and EU-wide measures.

4.2. The Committee of the Regions calls on the Helsinki European Council to make positive progress towards concrete reductions in greenhouse gas emissions with regard to integrating the various policies associated with the environment and climate.

4.3. The Committee of the Regions is of the view that because of the enormous challenge posed by emission reduction, the broad-based involvement of many different kinds of local players in national climate strategies is essential.

4.4. The Committee of the Regions considers that the options for local and regional authorities to influence greenhouse gas issues are significant over both the short- and long-term and are converging in many EU countries. The local and regional level should, therefore, be taken into account in national climate strategies and be treated as a relevant set of players in themselves at the EU level.

4.5. The European Union's objectives include doubling the use of renewable energy sources (12 % by the year 2010), doubling the combined generation of heat and electricity, improving energy efficiency and significantly increasing the use of natural gas. In the view of the Committee of the Regions, implementation of these objectives should be accelerated. The COR also believes that the EU should aim to increase the share of vehicles powered by alternative fuels such as hydrogen, bio gas, ethanol fuel and methylester of rapeseed oil.

4.6. The Committee of the Regions supports the Commission proposal for national emission trading experiments to begin well before the deadline in 2008. The Committee nevertheless emphasises the need for each country to put in place its own climate protection measures as a first priority in accordance with the Kyoto Protocol.

4.7. The Committee of the Regions believes that with regard to the flexibility mechanisms in the Kyoto Protocol, a possible integrated policy on development assistance and greenhouse gas emission reduction is important. After all, the humanitarian role of official development assistance should not be disregarded.

4.8. The Committee of the Regions believes that, out of the Kyoto Protocol's flexibility mechanisms which are to be implemented internationally, joint implementation and the clean development mechanism (CDM) supplement the signatory countries' own initiatives and can be naturally integrated into the cooperation on emission reduction and the setting-up of local government to be undertaken with the applicant countries, the transition economies and other countries not included in Annex 1 of the Kyoto Protocol.

4.9. The Committee of the Regions feels that Member States should reach a rapid consensus on a minimum level of energy taxation.

4.10. The Committee of the Regions considers that the structural problems associated with the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions at local and regional level are being compensated for by EU wide and national funding.

4.11. In connection with the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, an integrated cost-benefit analysis and evaluation of the social impact requires greater research funding and training. Local and regional considerations must be taken into account by the fifth RTD framework programme.

4.12. The agreement procedure for reducing greenhouse gas emissions in cooperation with the local and regional level should, in the view of the Committee of the Regions, be promoted. The COR calls on the EU and the Member States to pursue such a dialogue and to support the regions in their efforts to protect the global climate.

4.13. Focused support must continue at the national and EU level for voluntary schemes, campaigns, programmes and competitions which effectively promote the emission reduction objectives.

4.14. In order to reduce the greenhouse gas emissions resulting from transport, financial support must also be provided for developing forms of transport serving local needs, such as rail and public transport, cycling and walking.


The President
of the Committee of the Regions

Manfred DAMMEYER