Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on the Green Paper on Energy Efficiency or Doing More With Less

(2006/C 192/03)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

Having regard to the Green Paper on Energy Efficiency (COM(2005) 265 final);

Having regard to the decision of the European Commission on 7 June 2005 to consult it on this subject, under Article 265(1) of the Treaty establishing the European Community;

Having regard to the decision taken by its President on 16 November 2005 to instruct the Commission for Sustainable Development to draw up an opinion on the subject;


Having regard to its opinion of 15 November 2001 on the Commission’s Green Paper ‘Towards a European strategy for the security of energy supply’ (COM(2000) 769 final) — CdR 38/2001 fin (3);


Having regard to its opinion of 13 December 2000 on the Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on an Action Plan to Improve Energy Efficiency in the European Community (COM(2000) 247 final) — CdR 270/2000 fin (5);

Having regard to its draft opinion (CdR 216/2005 rev. 1) adopted on 1 December 2005 by its Commission for sustainable development (rapporteur: Mr Bernd Vögerle, Vice-President of the Austrian Federation of Local Authorities, (AT/PES));

adopted the following opinion unanimously at its 63rd plenary session of 15 and 16 February 2006 (meeting of 16 February):

1. Views of the Committee of the Regions

The Committee of the Regions

1.1 welcomes the Green Paper of the European Commission and initiatives to raise energy-efficiency in general in the light of the current trend, which points to an increase in Europe-wide energy consumption of up to 10 % in the next fifteen years;

1.2 stresses the outstanding importance of energy efficiency, particularly in the light of the current crisis on the gas market. Europe’s sources of energy supply must be diversified in order to minimise dependency of the kind currently seen in Ukraine or Bulgaria. On the basis of the Green Paper on Energy Efficiency it is possible to reduce overall dependence on crude oil and natural gas and thus to draw up a European action plan;

1.3 welcomes the fact that measures are being considered at all potential levels of implementation (EU, national, regional, local) and calls for compliance with the subsidiarity principle in the process of implementation;

1.4 is aware that energy-efficiency makes a significant contribution to all three relevant energy-policy objectives: security of supply, environmental and climate protection and competitiveness;

1.5 also emphasises the important social dimension of energy-efficiency measures which include the creation and safeguarding of local and regional jobs and which safeguard consumers from non-sustainable energy costs;

(2) OJ C 73, 26.3.2003, p. 41.
(4) OJ C 107, 3.5.2002, p. 76.
1.6 points out that further energy-efficiency rules for the Member States must not be drawn up too hastily. As stated in the Green Paper, many energy-efficiency measures are already in force in the EU or are being drawn up which have not yet had time to have an impact or which still have to be implemented. Examples of these are the buildings directive, the combined heat and power (CHP) directive, the emissions trading directive and the energy end-use efficiency directive;

1.7 draws attention to the fact that in many Member States and regions strategic plans and programmes of measures with very similar objectives or effects to those set out in the Green Paper already exist. Examples are the climate protection strategies (since the ratification of the Kyoto Protocol), National Allocation Plans (under the Directive on Emissions Trading) and the reduction of atmospheric pollutants (under the Directive on national emission ceilings for certain atmospheric pollutants — NEC Directive). Therefore in the medium term the emphasis should be not on new efficiency plans but on the consistent implementation of the existing plans.

As experience of the implementation of these plans shows, in many cases these are measures in respect of which decisions to implement can be taken rapidly but whose effects are visible only in the longer term;

1.8 points to the numerous initiatives on energy-efficiency and renewable energies taken at local and regional level, the results of which are publicly available on numerous websites. Examples of this are the collections of good practice from all over Europe on the websites of ManagEnergy und Energie Cités (6);

1.9 is aware that raising energy-efficiency requires a policy of small steps. These small steps are being taken on a large scale by local and regional authorities which, given their closeness to the grass roots, have an awareness-raising function to perform;

1.10 makes the critical point that EU objectives regarding liberalisation of energy markets (increasing competition in order to reduce prices) and energy-efficiency are difficult to reconcile. Falling prices do not promote energy-efficiency. Moreover, power station renewal is being delayed for lack of suitable investment conditions;

1.11 considers measures to promote demand-side policy in the liberalised energy market to be appropriate. This entails also including the environmental costs in the consumer price and ensuring equal access to the grid. Strategies to raise energy-efficiency can play a key role wherever a counterweight is needed to current supply-side policies.

2. The Committee of the Regions' recommendations

2.1 recommends that, if it is decided to introduce energy-efficiency plans, these be structured as five-year plans with at most two evaluations. Annual plans and annual evaluations do not in practice produce satisfactory results and are therefore not appropriate (question 3);

2.2 particularly emphasises that, when drawing up measures, special attention needs to be paid to past achievements and potential in the individual Member States, and that cost benefit analyses need to be carried out on each individual measure;

2.3 rejects the establishment of absolute efficiency increase targets. Those Member States which have in the past been less economical in the use of energy must not be given a competitive advantage. Member States which have already made savings or which use particularly efficient technologies have less potential for further efficiency increases and would be clearly disadvantaged by the application of absolute targets;

2.4 recommends instead a benchmarking system which, on the basis of an analysis of different climatic conditions and past energy-efficiency achievements, would lay down national energy-efficiency objectives for each Member State. These national objectives could then be incorporated into the definition of European standards and would thus make it possible to take account of national circumstances and previous achievements in a fairer way;

2.5 considers that the emissions trading mechanism should be structured in such a way that power stations would receive, after a reasonable transitional period, only as many certificates under the allocation plan as correspond to the production of the planned amount of power and heat in a gas turbine CHP power station. This would be a clear signal in favour of the objective of raising the energy-efficiency of electricity generation (question 13);

2.6 proposes that thought be given to a similar emissions certificate calculation for industry. Each industrial plant would receive only as many emission certificates as correspond to the planned amount of production in a plant with the highest energy-efficiency standard. This would mean transferring costs in accordance with the polluter pays principle and would bring major energy and CO₂ savings (question 2);

2.7 calls for state aids for measures to introduce environmental innovations and productivity improvements with a view to increased energy-efficiency to be allowed. This aid could be structured as investment aid, with support for innovative, energy-efficient technologies being exempted from the notification requirement. On the other hand, energy-efficiency should

(6) http://www.managenergy.net/gp.html.
be taken into consideration as a general criterion in environmental protection support, as this is implemented to a great extent at local and regional level; particularly advocates block exemption for aid aimed at raising energy-efficiency, or at least sufficiently high thresholds in order to reduce administrative burdens and any delays in implementing projects of this kind (question 5);

2.8 calls for account to be taken of energy-efficiency criteria in public purchasing at all levels (EU, national, regional and local). As this accounts for 16% of EU GDP, greater demand for energy-efficient equipment, vehicles, buildings etc would be a strong incentive for industry to develop such products and bring their cost down. There is a wealth of experience in individual Member States of environmentally conscious public purchasing criteria;

2.9 rejects, however, binding rules on the award of contracts, as many regional and local authorities have very limited budgets. Instead, local authorities with limited budgets should be shown the advantages of the award of energy-efficient contracts, making it easier for them to chose between the lowest and the best bidder principles (question 6);

2.10 welcomes financing programmes for energy-efficiency projects. For the regional and local level, however, this would mean that financial resources and support could be made available only on a voluntary basis, in line with the authority’s budgetary situation (questions 7 and 22);

2.11 calls on the Commission to take account of energy-efficiency criteria in all policy areas falling within the EU remit. Particularly in the areas of the Structural and Cohesion Funds, rural development and support for research, the Commission could make energy-efficiency a compulsory project-selection criterion. This could also be seen as an indirect incentive for the local and regional levels (question 12);

2.12 rejects any extension or tightening of the EU Buildings Directive before the results of implementation of the existing text have been evaluated. Before the directive is extended sufficient time must be allowed for assessment of the existing directive (question 8);

2.13 advocates intensive publicity work at all levels. Campaigns should be of national, regional or local relevance and focus on issues where practical alternative forms of action are actually available to the target group. Cooperation between the European Commission or its representative offices in the Member States and the regional and local levels of government would be desirable (question 12);

2.14 points out the need for information and training which should not be restricted to energy sector professionals, but extended in particular to those working outside the energy field, such as architects, construction companies, property developers, planners and infrastructure managers;

2.15 strongly advocates the accelerated introduction of CHP plants. In addition to committed implementation of the CHP directive, the associated market for heat must also be developed more rapidly than hitherto (question 13);

2.16 supports the overhaul of older, inefficient district heating systems as an important contribution to raising energy-efficiency and calls on the Member States to use Structural and Cohesion Fund resources for this purpose;

2.17 supports the European Parliament’s call to the Commission to propose legislation for an efficient heat and cooling market. For the local level of government the efficient use of heat energy is just as important as appropriate cooling solutions. The use of air conditioning has in recent years led to an enormous rise in electricity consumption in the warm seasons of the year. As, via building regulations, the market for heat and cooling falls within the remit of local government, a special policy of information and advice would appear to be important here too. Local decisions should be influenced so as to take greater account of energy-efficiency. Innovative examples of district heating and cooling are available in the collections of best practices on the Internet referred to above;

2.18 supports the emphasis on and promotion of decentralised production referred to in the Green paper, but points out that the relationship between power station capacity and local consumption needs to be studied closely. Here too CHP should be viewed as a particularly efficient form of production. High energy-efficiency is easiest to achieve when the heat produced is used locally;

2.19 stresses that, with regard to power generation from renewable energy sources too, attention must be paid to energy-efficiency and the most environmentally sound handling of existing resources. When constructing new plants, consumption should first be optimised in all areas and only then should the supply system be adapted to optimised consumption. The following factors should, however, be considered and — depending on national law — examined with the involvement of the competent local and regional authorities: location, type of technologies, plant size, use of capacity;

2.20 rejects a system of white (energy-efficiency) certificates where the provider is required to carry out energy-saving measures for the final consumer. It is feared that the economic
cost of introducing and operating a further trading system would exceed the savings thereby made. Apart from the high administrative cost, fair allocation would be even more difficult than in the case of emissions trading (question 15);

2.21 **calls for** further investment in the development of local public passenger transport and rail infrastructure. Only if reasonable alternatives to individual transport (cars) exist can a reduction in car traffic be expected in the longer term; **welcomes in this context the fact that the European Commission's Proposal for a Regulation on public passenger transport services by rail and by road accepts the principle of local and regional authority autonomy in the provision of this service of general interest, which constitutes recognition of the role of these authorities in providing local public passenger transport services**;

2.22 **calls on** the Commission to encourage industry to shoulder its responsibility and to adopt various measures aimed at reducing final consumer prices for energy-efficient equipment and renewable-energy technologies; **concerns** with the European Parliament that impressive cost reductions have been achieved in individual technologies in recent years, but that additional reductions are needed to make measures to raise energy-efficiency attractive to the public;

2.23 **sees it as the duty** of the EU, given Europe's relatively high environmental standards, to negotiate tariff or non-tariff advantages in the WTO for energy-efficient products.

Brussels, 16 February 2006.

The President
of the Committee of the Regions
Michel DELEBARRE

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**Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on the Communication from the Commission to the Council on European policies concerning youth Addressing the concerns of young people in Europe — implementing the European Youth Pact and promoting active citizenship**

(2006/C 192/04)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

HAVING REGARD TO the Communication from the Commission to the Council on European policies concerning youth: Addressing the concerns of young people in Europe — implementing the European Youth Pact and promoting active citizenship (COM(2005) 206 final);

HAVING REGARD TO the decision of the European Commission of 30 May 2005 to consult it on this subject, under the first paragraph of Article 265 of the Treaty establishing the European Community;

HAVING REGARD TO the decision of its President of 25 July 2005 to instruct its Commission for Culture and Education to draw up an opinion on this subject;

HAVING REGARD TO the European Youth Pact (Presidency conclusions of the Brussels European Council (22 and 23 March 2005) 7619/05 Annex 1);

HAVING REGARD TO its opinion on the Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council — Creating the 'Youth in action' programme for the period 2007-2013 (¹) (CdR 270/2004 fin) (²);

HAVING REGARD TO its global opinion on the follow-up to the White Paper on a New Impetus for European Youth — Proposed common objectives for voluntary activities by young people and Proposed common objectives for

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(²) OJ C 71 of 22.3.2005, p. 34.