

## II

*(Preparatory Acts)*

## ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE

**Opinion on the proposal for a Council Decision concerning the conclusion of the Framework Convention on Climate Change<sup>(1)</sup>**

(93/C 201/01)

On 8 January 1993 the Council decided to consult the Economic and Social Committee, under Article 130 S of the Treaty establishing the European Economic Community, on the abovementioned proposal.

The Section for Protection of the Environment, Public Health and Consumer Affairs, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its Opinion on 4 May 1993. The Rapporteur was Mr Silva.

At its 306th Plenary Session (meeting of 26 May 1993), the Economic and Social Committee unanimously adopted the following Opinion.

**1. Introduction**

1.1. There is now growing international consensus about the nature and origin of certain global phenomena which threaten ecological balance and lie behind climate changes and the depletion of the ozone layer.

1.2. There is also growing support for the view that the present system of growth and its concomitants, including:

- non-sustainable economic growth;
- production structures that rely heavily on fossil fuels;
- world demographic growth and the consequent rise in food, energy and other requirements;
- poverty and unregulated urbanization, mainly in the developing nations;
- ecologically harmful consumer practices;

are upsetting the ecological balance at regional, national and world level, and draining natural resources.

1.3. For several years now, awareness of the threats clouding our future—and more especially, climate

change, depletion of the ozone layer and deforestation—has led the States of the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, and the developing nations to attempt to reach a consensus on internationally acceptable measures.

1.4. The UN framework convention on climate change is concrete evidence of this realization of the ecological dangers that are damaging the earth's basic ecosystems and threatening its future.

1.5. The convention would also seem indicative of a concerted readiness on the part of the international community to rethink humankind's relations with its planet.

1.6. This positive (albeit belated) shift in outlook presupposes a new pattern of sustainable development in which environmental protection and the management of natural resources occupy a key part.

<sup>(1)</sup> OJ No C 44, 16. 2. 1993, p. 1.

## 2. The role of the EC

2.1. The EC has assumed a major role in the definition of a global strategy to stabilize greenhouse gas emissions, hence helping to tackle this serious environmental problem.

2.2. The Dublin European Council of June 1990 stressed that the EC and its Member States bear a special responsibility for promoting international action to combat global environmental problems.

2.3. The EC and its Member States took part in the negotiation of the framework convention on climate change, and signed it in Rio following the Environment Council mandate of 26 May 1992.

2.4. In Annex III to the present draft Decision, the Community reaffirms its commitment to stabilize CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by the year 2000 at their 1990 level in the Community as a whole.

2.4.1. Although the Committee is aware of certain difficulties in implementing the Decision, it is confident that the planned emissions level will be fully attained if all the necessary measures are taken as swiftly as possible.

2.5. When dealing with international conventions it is necessary to avoid the adoption of non-essential measures since these could have an adverse impact on the European business economy, and this could in turn also have social implications.

## 3. Ratification of the convention

### 3.1. *The ESC favours ratification and implementation of the convention*

3.1.1. Having carefully examined the draft Decision and its Annexes, the Committee strongly supports the proposal to ensure prompt ratification and effective implementation of the convention by the Community and its Member States.

3.1.2. The Committee fully endorses the general approach and key objective of 'stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic inter-

ference with the climate system ... within a time-frame sufficient to allow ecosystems to adapt naturally to climate change, to ensure that food production is not threatened and to enable economic development to proceed in a sustainable manner.'

3.1.3. The Committee feels it useful to explain its stance in detail, and to draw attention to certain implementing and information-related problems that now arise, in order to help ensure that the convention is implemented as effectively as possible.

## 4. General considerations and recommendations

### 4.1. *Differentiated responsibilities*

4.1.1. The Committee strongly supports the important commitment of the contracting parties to work towards the achievement of the ultimate objective 'on the basis of equity and in accordance with their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities.' The developed nations are thus to 'take the lead', giving full consideration to 'the specific needs and special circumstances of developing country Parties, especially those that are particularly vulnerable ... (or) would have to bear a disproportionate or abnormal burden.'

### 4.2. *Basic principles*

4.2.1. Of vital importance is the commitment to be guided by two basic principles:

- where there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty is not to be used as a reason for postponing such measures;
- the measures adopted, including unilateral ones, should not constitute a means of arbitrary or unjustifiable discrimination or a disguised restriction on international trade.

### 4.3. *Programmes and other main measures*

4.3.1. The various forms of intervention contained in the general strategy are in keeping with the undertakings made and with the differing requirements and circumstances: national inventories of greenhouse gas emissions; national and regional programmes; cooper-

ation arrangements (technology transfer, control and reduction of emissions in all relevant sectors: energy, transport, construction, agriculture, forestry and waste management); sinks and reservoirs of all greenhouse gases, including biomass, forests and oceans as well as other terrestrial, coastal and marine ecosystems; integrated plans for various zones, and more particularly for African areas hit by drought and desertification or floods; social, economic and environmental policies; scientific research; improving public awareness; communication to the Conference of the Parties.

4.3.2. The Committee particularly appreciates the implementing procedures and instruments. These are streamlined and clear-cut, leaving sufficient room for initiative and for the necessary agreements: Conference of the Parties (the supreme body); secretariat; subsidiary body for scientific and technological advice; subsidiary body for implementation; financial mechanism; system for the communication of information; system for the settlement of disputes; amending mechanism.

## 5. Comments and recommendations on implementation

### 5.1. Ratification deadlines

5.1.1. Since the different situations faced by the parties are likely to prevent some of them from ratifying the convention promptly, it is desirable for the EC and Member States to ratify it as soon as possible, bearing in mind that such developed nations as Canada and the United States have already done so.

### 5.2. Implementing arrangements (*Annex II to the Report*)

5.2.1. The Committee calls on the parties to implement the interim arrangements swiftly and properly, particularly as regards making voluntary contributions to the costs of the interim measures and ensuring full and effective participation of developing nations.

### 5.3. Preparation of the next conference

5.3.1. The Committee calls on the organizers of the next conference to make maximum use of the lessons learnt at Rio, so as to ensure that the number of participants is neither too low or too high. To facilitate global debate and understanding, it is desirable that no justified request for participation be turned down; but nor should there be a disproportionate increase in the number of participants. This is made particularly important by the fact that, as at Rio, parallel initiatives and meetings are likely, and these could draw on the contributions of other parties active in the same sphere.

### 5.4. The EC's contribution to methodology

5.4.1. The Committee calls on the EC to extend the contribution it has already made in the area of methodology, for example establishment of the mechanism for monitoring emissions, together with other measures already adopted or in the pipeline.

5.4.2. As regards the methodology being set up by the OECD, which should be ready by the end of this year, the Committee urges the Community to help by offering its own comparable data and comments, bearing in mind that as the methodology for CO<sub>2</sub> has already been perfected, attention should now focus on other gases and elements.

Done at Brussels, 26 May 1993.

*The Chairman*  
*of the Economic and Social Committee*  
Susanne TIEMANN