



EEB's message to the new European Commission

REINFORCE THE EU'S SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

The European Environmental Bureau, a federation of over 140 environmental citizens' organisations, with some 20 million members and supporters in all Member States of the EU, calls for the new European Commission to commit itself to the reinforcement and implementation of the **Sustainable Development Strategy**, published by the European Commission under President Romano Prodi in May 2001.

The EEB expects the new European Commission to put sustainable development at the heart of its strategic objectives from the start, and integrate the Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS) of 2001 in these objectives, reinforced where necessary.

This is an essential step for a Commission that wants to lead the EU in the spirit of the new Constitution, truly serving its citizens, with responsibility to the earth and its peoples, and with a courageous and creative vision on economic modernisation. In particular the further implementation of the Lisbon Strategy should be brought in line with the SDS.

In this message, the EEB indicates its expectations and demands for the new European Commission.

We wish to highlight three important aspects:

1. Address public concerns
2. Promote sustainably sound innovation and knowledge building
3. Make markets really work for sustainable development

1. Address public concerns

At a time when the legitimacy of the EU is of growing concern, the new Commission would contribute to narrowing the gap between itself and European citizens if it showed greater commitment to public concerns, such as social cohesion, public health and quality of the environment.

To this end, commitment to clear and ambitious objectives followed by effective measures and regular, transparent reporting on actions taken and the results, is key. In the first place this means an unambiguous confirmation that this new Commission will do its utmost to:

- implement the Kyoto Protocol in a genuine manner, and work towards post-Kyoto agreements which set clear further reduction targets, leading to the achievement of the long-term global reduction target of 70% (compared with 1990), as laid down in the EU's 6th Environmental Action Programme.
- achieve the official EU objective to halt the decline of Europe's biodiversity in 2010, and global biodiversity in 2015. And, in particular, implement effective fisheries and agriculture policies to contribute to these objectives.
- Take concrete steps towards sustainable transport, in particular by breaking the trend of continuous growth of air and road transport movements and by shifting to the cleanest transport modes, as well as towards environmentally sound urban planning.
- take the protection of public health and biodiversity seriously by fighting for the necessary legislation, based on the precautionary principle, starting with determination for a successful introduction of a (reinforced) REACH (chemicals) policy.
- commit itself to the full and ambitious implementation of the 6th Environmental Action Programme and systematic integration of environmental objectives in all EU policies, as required by Article 6 of the EC Treaty.

Given the increasing global demand for resources by a growing world population and growing economies, dematerialisation of our economy is increasingly important, for geo-political and economic advantages, as well as from social and environmental gains.

The EEB has, together with social organisations and trade unions, made proposals for large investment programmes in sustainable housing and transport. Such programmes could make a visible, understandable and concrete contribution to the social, economic and environmental goals of the European Union which people value. While much needs to be done at national level, the European Commission can show leadership and assistance.

2. Innovation and knowledge, building ownership and alliances

In order to equip European governments and business better to develop and widely apply innovations for sustainable development, the Commission needs to step up its efforts considerably. Instead of the traditional focus on trade-offs between the three dimensions of sustainability, we need intelligent combinations of economic innovation, knowledge building and social and environmental innovation.

The Environmental Technology Action Plan (ETAP) issued by the outgoing Commission is a first step, but it is not visionary enough in bringing together the three dimensions. It lacks ambition, commitment and urgency.

The EEB insists on choosing proactive businesses and NGOs as the key partners in promoting innovation, instead of the federations of business and industry where conservative forces and the lowest common denominator tend to dominate.

Environmental legislation will remain necessary, but, cleverly designed, it can make a large contribution to economic and environmental innovation. We also need proactive businesses to support this type of legislation, instead of laggards who will merely aim at weakening legislation.

The starting-up of concrete, ambitious innovation programmes in domains such as housing and transport, as mentioned before, can release the necessary integrated approach, enthusiasm, resources, creativity and ownership that are needed to take the next step in sustainable development policy.

3. Make markets really work for sustainable development

For many years, the EU institutions support and promote the concept of steering market prices so that they make it attractive to apply new, more sustainable, technologies, products and services for business, consumers and government bodies. In practice, implementation has been very slow. As a result, clever innovations have been put on the shelf because the initial costs for wider application are seen as too high or because out-dated technologies are still cheaper to buy or to keep.

The new European Commission should make a convincing change and speed up the process leading to the removal of environmentally harmful subsidies; introduce taxation and charging to discourage harmful practices; provide price incentives, subsidies and make EU-wide binding commitments to public procurement to stimulate innovations and their uptake.

Another important aspect is the creation of markets by setting high performance standards for products, processes or services. As we read on the official EU website: *'European Union environment policy is based on the belief that high environmental standards stimulate innovation and business opportunities.'*

We hope to see more good practice based on this principle initiated by the Commission, using rational arguments against simplistic calls from traditional industry lobbies for less environmental legislation.

Finally, the EEB emphasises that it is ready to closely co-operate with the European Commission on the road to implement sustainable development, mobilising our large network and our coalitions with NGOs in many sectors, trade unions, companies, government bodies and institutions inside and outside the European Union.

Brussels, 20 September, 2004