

EUROPEAN UNION



Committee of the Regions



Towards a Genuine 7th Community Environment Action Programme (EAP)

*The role of local and regional authorities in future EU environmental
policy*

*Outcomes of the seminar organised by
Brussels Environment (IBGE) and the Committee of the Regions (CoR)*

The seminar was opened by Mrs Evelyne Huytebroeck, Minister for Environment and Energy of the Brussels Capital Region, and Mr Ilmar Reepalu, Mayor of the city of Malmö and Chair of the Commission for Environment, Climate Change and Energy of the Committee of the Regions. Both highlighted the key role that local and regional authorities play in the elaboration and implementation of EU environmental policy. In that respect, the Outlook Opinion on "The role of local and regional authorities in future environmental policy" that has been requested to the Committee of the Regions by the Spanish EU Presidency will be of great importance and will contribute to the Belgian Presidency Conference on this subject on 25-26 November this year.

In the first session, accent was put on how local and regional authorities (LRA's) can influence the EU environmental policy decision making process. In that respect, focus was put on the role of the Committee of the Regions in the different phases of EU environmental policy (see presentation given by Mrs Baker, CoR member and rapporteur for the CoR Outlook Opinion on the "The role of local and regional authorities in future environmental policy") and on the lobbying tools used by LRA's (see presentation given by Mrs Wasseige, External Relations Direction of Brussels Region).

This session showed that it is indeed important that LRA's participate and influence the legislative process, but focus should also be put on innovative approaches initiated by LRA's own ambitions which then can drive EU and national policy development, too.

The focus of the 2nd session was put more on the importance of LRA's in the implementation phase. Although a screening of EU environmental legislation shows the important number of provisions for LRA's (see presentation by Mrs Barbara Dewulf, Bruxelles Environnement) and case studies e.a. in the Netherlands showed the benefit for good implementation of early coordination with LRA's during the EU pre-legislative and the national transposition phase (see presentation by Mr Martin Unfried of EIPA), this session also showed the need to do more to incorporate local perspectives, needs, and capacities into EU and national policy making and implementation (vertical integration) and the need to do more to facilitate cross-regional (local, regional) learning for sustainability (horizontal integration).

Session 3 focused more specifically on the environmental challenges in urban environment and how to tackle them. An interesting overview of what initiatives should be developed at EU level was developed by Mr Frederiks, senior advisor from the city of Amsterdam and representing Eurocities. The case of the Covenant of Mayors was presented by Frederic Boyer of Energiecities in order to show that such self commitment schemes can be successful in promoting the local dimension in EU policies, but provided that the necessary funding is also made available for the local level. The Brussels experience on promoting sustainable districts, covering a full and integrated range of aspects to be considered in order to be earmarked as sustainable (presentation by Vincent Carton from Bruxelles Environnement), is interesting. It

shows that the environmental challenges in urban environment are not only related to climate change but to a broader and more integrated context of several sustainability criteria. Finally, the presentation given by Mrs Pozo Vera from Ecosphere showed the essential role LRA's have to play in the effective implementation of the Aarhus Convention a but also raised the problem that LRA's often lack the necessary resources to do so..

CONCLUSIONS –

The following actions could be developed at EU level to improve the role of LRA's in EU environmental policy.

1. In order to support and stimulate the development of innovative solutions by LRA's, a platform could be developed at EU level which systematically compiles the numerous, already existing interesting initiatives by LRA's in the field of the environment.
2. In order to amplify the relation between the CoR, the networks of LRA's active in the field of the environment and the European Commission, a biannual Forum could be organised, in order to jointly discuss the upcoming EU environmental agenda as well as to provide a forum for regional representatives and experts to discuss issues related to the implementation of EU environmental policy with the EU institutions.
3. In order to stimulate more the interinstitutional relations, the CoR, the European Parliament and the Council could continue to improve and formalise the exchange of ideas between their Commissions/Committees, their rapporteurs and EU Presidency representatives.
4. The role of LRA's in implementation should be also seen in the context of Better Regulation; EU rules are sometimes too difficult to implement because of their complex conception.
5. The availability of sufficient funding for LRA's is fundamental
6. The existence of integrated approaches like the EU 2020 strategy that included some environmental aspects is a good thing but still a specific environmental strategy is needed. That is why the 7EAP is so important.