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# MEPs 'compromise' on resource efficiency roadmap

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The European Parliament's environment committee backed a proposed resource efficiency roadmap for Europe on 25 April, marking an important step in EU policymakers' efforts to decouple natural resource use from economic growth. However, in an effort to find a compromise, they left aside proposed ambitious deadlines and measures.

## Background

Resource-efficiency is one of the seven flagship initiatives in the 'Europe 2020' strategy for sustainable growth and jobs, endorsed by EU heads of state and government in 2010.

The concept means decoupling economic growth from natural resource use – including raw materials, commodities, water, air or ecosystems.

The European Commission unveiled its Roadmap to a Resource Efficient Europe in September 2011, recommending the introduction of resource-efficiency indicators and targets across the 27-nation bloc.

The roadmap followed the adoption of a first policy paper in January, which established resource efficiency as the guiding principle behind EU policies in almost all sectors – energy, transport, commodities, industry, agriculture, fisheries, biodiversity and regional development.

Gerben-Jan Gerbrandy, the Dutch Liberal MEP who drafted the report, received support from his colleagues on most points but some of his “innovative” ideas were deleted from the text in an effort to find a compromise.

The non-binding report was adopted by the Parliament's environment committee on 25 April with 48 votes in favour, 3 against and 5 abstentions.

“This is a crucial first step towards reducing Europe's resource use,” said Ariadna Rodrigo, a resource use campaigner at Friends of the Earth Europe. However, delaying deadlines is a “missed opportunity”, she admitted.

The main purpose of the roadmap, Gerbrandy told EurActiv, was to give resource efficiency “a higher sense of urgency”.

“In a few decades we'll need 70% more food production. We'll have 3 billion more people at middle class income with consumption of middle class income. So the problem that we're facing with the scarcity of resources is huge,” Gerbrandy said.

"Competitive global markets and the spectacular rise of emerging economies do not give us that much time," said Gerbrandy, who will lead the Parliament delegation at the UN Rio+20 sustainable development summit in June.

### **'Schengen area for waste' deleted**

In order to jump-start the "urgent" move towards a circular economy, the resolution called for a major overhaul of the "secondary-material market," an expression referring to recycled materials such as plastics, metals or paper.

But the maze of waste regulations currently in force across the 27 EU countries is a major obstacle for trade in recycled goods.

"At the moment there are so many national, regional and even local laws and rules that it's impossible for companies to transport their very valuable waste," Gerbrandy said. "If you want to recycle certain elements, then you need economies of scale."

Gerbrandy wanted to fix this problem by creating a 'Schengen Area for waste' to make it easier, for example, "to get your old lightbulbs to one or two places in Europe and to recycle everything that is in these lightbulbs." Another way to stimulate the markets to trade secondary materials initially proposed by Gerbrandy was by reducing VAT rates for these products by 2013.

But MEPs have rejected this idea of having a Schengen area for waste. The word 'Schengen' was deleted because some political groups in the Parliament were sensitive about it, EurActiv understands.

Also, MEPs asked for VAT reductions to apply only "in areas where there is a market failure or the promotion of innovative collection and sorting technologies".

However, one of the important achievements agreed on by all political groups was to aim for a ban on waste landfilling in Europe. In their compromise text for a resource efficiency roadmap, MEPs asked for the full implementation of existing EU waste legislation and stricter monitoring by the Commission.

### **A step-back on deadlines**

Some of the key deadlines he had asked for in his report cannot be found in the compromise agreement, which packed together proposed amendments from all political groups in Parliament.

For example, Gerbrandy proposed to create task forces to address resource consumption in three key areas – food, housing and mobility. These would have consisted of experts from the Commission, member states, industry and civil society with the aim of devising efficiency action plans.

This approach is already being used routinely by the European Commission when it consults experts on new legislation. But the lack of deadlines has delayed decisions, Gerbrandy remarked. Thus, the Dutch Liberal MEP had asked task forces to work "with clear benchmarks within one year".

This deadline was scrapped in the compromise reached on 25 April.

Similarly, Gerbrandy had proposed developing and using "clear and measurable" indicators for economic activity that take account of climate change, biodiversity and

resource efficiency by the end of 2012. The compromise text waters down this provision, saying indicators should be just agreed on by 2013.

Despite these setbacks, green campaigners put on a brave face and celebrated the adoption of the Gerbrandy report. "Today's vote sends a clear message to the European Commission that the political will to put Europe on a truly resource efficient path is there – further delay in adopting the indicators would be a missed opportunity," Rodrigo, of Friends of the Earth Europe said.

### **Labour or environmental taxes?**

In a subheading called "transforming the economy", Gerbrandy's draft resolution urged member states to shift the taxation burden from labour to natural resources with the objective of reaching an average of more than 10% of public revenue by 2020. The 10% rate was dropped in the compromise text published on 25 April, but the Parliament nevertheless voted a text urging member states to shift taxes.

"If compensated by cuts in labour taxes, there would be no additional taxation burden on companies, the report states, saying the move will "increase competitiveness and create a level playing field", Gerbrandy said.

### **A sense of urgency**

Gerbrandy said he based his report, amongst other sources, on work done by the European Environmental Agency in Denmark.

"The EU is committed to reducing waste generation, but is not succeeding," the EEA recently wrote, in a study that Gerbrandy used as reference.

In 2006 alone, member states produced some 3 billion tonnes of waste — an average of 6 tonnes per person, the EEA notes.

"As resource use in Europe exceeds local availability, Europe's dependence on and competition for resources from elsewhere in the world raises questions about security in the supply of resources for Europe in the long term, and carries a potential for future conflicts," the report continues.

## **Positions**

**Ariadna Rodrigo, resource use campaigner at Friends of the Earth Europe**, said: "This is a very strong signal from the European Parliament that Europe is ready to embrace the significant environmental and economic benefits that resource efficiency brings. Europe can no longer remain passive about its over-consumption of natural resources, nor can it ignore the negative environmental, social and economic impacts of overconsumption."

"This proposal is really encouraging", said **Jan-Erik Johansson, Programme Director for resource efficiency at PlasticsEurope**, an industry group. "We believe that a landfill ban is key to managing waste as a resource. Every year 10 million tonnes of plastics are still buried in landfills in Europe. These plastics could provide a resource for recycling and energy recovery and stimulate the creation of thousands of new jobs."

## Links

### EU official documents

- European Parliament: [A resource-efficient Europe \(compromise text\)](#)
- European Parliament: [Maximise resources to benefit economy and environment](#)
- PreLex: [Roadmap to a Resource Efficient Europe \[FR\] \[DE\]](#)

### European Union

- European Commission: [Resource Efficiency](#)
- European Council: [Economic aspects of the roadmap to a resource-efficient Europe](#)

### NGOs and Think-Tanks

- Friends of the Earth Europe: [Website](#)

### Industry federations and trade unions

- Plastics Europe: [PlasticsEurope hails European Parliament's call for a ban on landfill](#) (26 April 2012)