



## Towards Sustainable Consumption and Production Patterns

### Introduction

To "improve the quality of life for everyone within the Earth's carrying capacity" is the core interest of Agenda 21 and of all who care for sustainability. Given the insight that only limited resources are available to fulfil this goal, it is necessary to develop economies which are less consumptive via different and more effective production and consumption patterns. **To reach this goal is not only a question of scientific or technical improvement; it is first and foremost a question of which values drive societal progress and of political will to make the necessary changes.** This means developing a wider vision of welfare, within a truly global context, where sufficiency and the satisfaction of **needs**, rather than production and consumption as a mechanism for economic growth, is the aim. Sustainability requires acknowledging the need for, and accepting the responsibility of prioritizing respect and care for the greater community of life. This would need to take account of 'equal rights' for 'environmental space' and development possibilities for developing countries. It also means that decision-makers need to move from commitments to action.

### On the EU Action Plan

Although the EU has moved forward in some respects, changing unsustainable patterns of consumption and production requires a comprehensive, coherent and consistent approach as highlighted by NGO representatives at the 2004 Ostend EU Stakeholder meeting on Sustainable Consumption and Production. The need for such an approach is now even more relevant and needs to be highlighted again in the context of the proposed EU Action Plan on Sustainable Consumption and Production and Sustainable Industrial Policy.

The key elements underpinning such a broad-based approach are:

- **Ecological fiscal reform** ('getting the prices right') containing (i) removal of all perverse subsidies; (ii) use of eco-taxes to internalise external costs; (iii) price mechanisms to support policy integration; (iv) selective use of positive incentives; (v) development of new measures of progress accounting more fully for environmental impacts within the current system of accounts.
- **Clean and eco-effective production** supported by (i) green investment; (ii) eco-innovation; (iii) eco – design; (iv) appropriate products standards and labelling programmes; (v) increasing market access for environmental goods and services; (vi) environmentally sound public procurement rules and practices.
- **Education for sustainable consumption and production** via (i) integrating knowledge of relevant consumption behaviour into curricula from pre-school to universities and in the concepts of life-long learning; (ii) providing data for reliable information; (iii) report on indicators to shape consumption behaviour that can make a difference.
- **Corporate responsibility and accountability** as a legally binding framework including (i) by creating full transparency about the sustainability performance of business; (ii) dialogue between enterprises and the communities in which they operate; (iii) financial institutions to incorporate sustainable development considerations into their decision - making processes; workplace.
- **Information and public participation for sustainable consumption and production** including (i) a broader right to know; (ii) involvement of stakeholders into decision making or at least consultative structures; (iii) support and financing of participation structures; (iv) develop and provide effective transparent and verifiable consumer information tools relating to sustainable consumption and production.

Although we welcome the measures on energy as outlined in the Action Plan we think this is far too narrow a scope. What is lacking is a strong and clear vision that also takes account of the social dimensions. Moreover we believe that there is a need to focus on a wider range of products and services in terms of use of natural resources and waste

production. Specific attention has to be given to the areas of consumption/production with the highest environmental relevance: **housing, food** and **mobility**. There is a general recognition and consensus that these areas should have priority as they have the greatest impact on the environment. This was underlined by the outcomes of the 2007 Time for Action – towards sustainable consumption and production in Europe conference in Ljubljana. In our view these areas are not considered adequately in the Action Plan.

In this respect, the EU should ensure to:

1. set clear quantitative reduction/sustainability targets;
2. identify meaningful instruments how to reach them;
3. specify the implementation steps;
4. establish benchmarks and 'alarm bells' to allow a meaningful monitoring procedure including regular reporting to the public.

Most importantly, EU policy on SCP has to be as concrete as possible. This should all take place within the framework of moving from a quantitative towards a qualitative economic model whereby sustainability in terms of production as well as consumption is the key.

The efforts to establish coherence with existing EU policy are appreciated. This should reach out to include the technical directives as well as social strategies, curricula and others.

As called for in Agenda 21 and reiterated in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, the industrialised countries of the global North - and thus the EU at the regional level - have to show leadership in changing unsustainable consumption and production patterns.

### **On the European Region**

We urge to take into account that SCP efforts have to be endorsed in all European countries. There should be no double standards in countries outside the EU because this could diminish the whole idea of sustainability in the European region. SCP policy development and implementation are to be promoted, facilitated and supported in all countries in Europe with a view to harmonise policy and legislation.

Thus ANPED calls on the European Commission, the National Governments of the Member States as well as Governments all over Europe to identify the gaps in existing policies, and elaborate policies for all sectors, while taking into account the external dimensions of these policies. To ensure that all policy levels get active on developing Sustainable Consumption and Production, member states and other European countries should be strongly encouraged to either develop national action plans, as recommended in several international expert meetings already (e.g. Second and Third International Expert Meeting of the Marrakech Process), or to incorporate specific SCP action in their National Sustainable Development Strategies.

In view of ensuring forceful coordination and coherence among sector ministries, a clear and broad horizontal mandate in national and EU structures should be designated to one minister / Commissioner. We recommend that a European Expert Group on Sustainable Consumption and Production is to be established, with national government representatives and relevant stakeholders. Participants should ensure regular (country) peer review of the development and implementation of Sustainable Consumption and Production policies and be mandated to work on concrete strategy building on regional level and serve as focal points in the national contexts.

We would like to close with a more practical demand. The "SCP" discussion is still very distant from the average citizen and even from those organizations that have been actively engaged for decades in promoting sustainable consumption and lifestyles at the grassroots level. To help overcome this we would regard it as helpful if more support would be made available for initiatives to link the "SCP" discussion to the 'daily life' of the EU citizens by providing information in a 'easy to communicate' way to help bring about more engagement and to facilitate the step from engagement to practical action.

ANPED and its national member organizations throughout the UNECE region are prepared to cooperate as partners in concrete national and international projects towards sustainable consumption and production.