



ETUC resolution on the efficient use of natural resources

Adopted by the ETUC Executive Committee at their meeting on 5-6 December 2012

1. The increasing scarcity of the resources that are currently being exploited poses a major challenge to the EU, which must, without further delay, launch a targeted and socially fair policy to improve the efficiency of their use.
2. As regards the environment, the planet's limitations are becoming more and more apparent by the day, both in terms of ecosystems having to cope with pollution and from the perspective of the depletion of conventional raw materials. From a social point of view, the current level of resource consumption is leading to a sharp increase in the price of commodities, with socially pernicious consequences. Economically, the dependence on these resources and the inefficiency of their use are hampering companies' competitiveness and hitting employment, in particular in sectors that make substantial use of commodities. More generally, the growing signs of the gradual depletion of the natural resources, that are currently being used, calls for us to bring about a paradigm shift based on durability, reuse and recycling, and a radical reorientation of the European model as demanded by the Social Compact for Europe proposed by the ETUC.
3. Aware of the need for this change in direction, the ETUC wants the Roadmap to a Resource Efficient Europe to help develop the EU economy. With this approach, the ETUC intends to be a stakeholder in the processes that will subsequently be launched. The ETUC highlights the need to quickly formulate scientifically robust indicators that take into consideration the social effects of the envisaged measures. It also stresses the importance of a regulatory framework based on quantified and verifiable targets. It reiterates the need for a European roadmap regarding a just transition and a transition to a sustainable economy that is compatible with the protection of our climate.
4. The ETUC regards the transition to an economy that is efficient in its use of natural resources as one of the essential cornerstones of a targeted policy to exit the crisis. According to a study commissioned by the European Commission, every 1% reduction in resource use could be worth €23 billion and could generate 100,000 to 200,000 new jobs¹. Increasing resource efficiency is a crucial plank of a policy to support the competitiveness of European companies by creating jobs and the political authorities must make it a top priority.
5. However, the process of transition of the economic model will only be fully legitimate if it is based on a strong social dimension involving the following aspects:
 - a. Active education, training and skill development strategies – mainly launched at the initiative of the public authorities – that prepare current and future workers for this development.
 - b. The creation of stable, quality jobs with decent working conditions. In

¹¹ http://ec.europa.eu/environment/enveco/studies_modelling/pdf/exec_sum_macroeconomic.pdf

this regard, special attention should be paid to occupational health and safety, and in particular to emerging sectors such as recycling.

- c. A social dialogue that gets workers involved in the transition process. In this regard, the ETUC highlights the existence of many initiatives relating to the 'greening' of the workplace that have been proposed by worker representatives, and calls for an extension of the powers of European works councils to cover environmental issues. Mandatory company reporting on their environmental, social and corporate governance (ESG) performance is crucial to allow transparency and effective worker information and consultation procedures.
- d. Solidarity mechanisms to offset the adverse impact of the transition for certain categories of workers and for socially vulnerable groups.
- e. Social tariffs guaranteeing everyone access to energy and water.

6. Social fairness in this transition is also a factor in taxation policy. The ETUC has long argued for taxation to be used as a means of regulating the price signals needed to promote energy and resource efficiency, which should not be left to market mechanisms alone. That said, the ETUC strongly defends progressive taxation, ensuring the redistribution of wealth. The need to reform taxation to improve resource efficiency should not undermine universal and affordable access to basic goods and services such as water and energy.

7. The ETUC calls on the EU to address the impact of the liberalisation of the gas and energy markets in Europe on vulnerable social groups and their welfare, and to implement measures that curb rising energy poverty. The ETUC reiterates its demand for a strong EU energy policy, including the following characteristics:

- underpinned by public regulation and control,
- promoting the modernisation of Europe's energy grid and infrastructure,
- developing connections between member states,
- negotiating collectively with external energy suppliers, and
- guaranteeing social partner involvement.

8. In accordance with the International Trade Union Confederation resolution adopted in Rio on 13 June 2012, the ETUC calls for natural and energy resources to be regarded as common goods whose preservation and democratic management must be ensured by the public authorities. The ETUC also reiterates that access to resources, energy and water are fundamental rights that the European Union and its Member States must safeguard and guarantee. The ETUC opposes policies pushing for further privatisation and commodification of natural resources, especially water.

9. Public authorities have a key role to play, in particular by setting an example through the systematic use of Green Public Procurement, based on selection criteria reflecting a high level of environmental protection. The ETUC reiterates that the current proposed reform of public procurement envisaged by the European Commission must ensure that social and environmental considerations in public procurement procedures are taken into account. While it is only optional for the public authorities to take account of social and environmental considerations, the reform should promote sustainable development. Although the ETUC welcomes the fact that the lifecycle is set to become a criterion for the

allocation of public contracts, it regrets the fact that the Commission only envisages this for the environment and has not yet defined a common methodology for setting it up. The ETUC advocates the rapid definition of a European methodology and the inclusion of social and employment dimensions in calculating the cost of a lifecycle.

10. Public authorities should also strongly drive both private and public research and development activities, in particular with a view to supporting technological innovation. The ETUC recalls the Europe 2020 objective of at least 3% GDP to be allocated to R&D activities. The consolidation of public funding of research and innovation activities constitutes one of the main aids to this transition, but only on condition that research agendas are targeted towards the common good. Support for research in the private sector should avoid unfair profits and be conditional upon commitments regarding job creation in Europe.
11. The current economic model, which is characterised by the existence of private oligopolies and speculative practices regarding commodities, appears socially unfair and politically illegitimate. The ETUC calls on public authorities to combat these practices and to support alternative economic models to individual ownership, for example leasing and forms of collective ownership of goods.
12. The regulatory framework is crucial for stimulating a shift in resource efficiency. Greater coherence is necessary between European policy initiatives and particularly in European legislation on product policy. The ETUC supports the development of a framework directive bringing together the various sectoral and product rules and standards. The responsibility of producers and distributors should be developed, in particular by expanding the scope of the Ecodesign Directive to cover issues of efficiency in natural resource use. Extending the length of product guarantees and imposing obligations in terms of product disassembly and recyclability are measures that should be introduced into the text of the directive. These legislative developments should be based on an analysis of the life cycle of consumer goods to take into account all resources used, from the extraction of raw materials, through to the destruction or recycling of the product. This is a crucial pillar of a proactive European industrial policy agenda, for which the ETUC has repeatedly called, and is urgently needed to ensure that industrial sectors are restructured to minimise their impact on the environment and made accountable for their resource use.
13. Health and environmental problems of the past linked to extractive activities are yet to be resolved in much of Europe, in particular by ensuring adequate compensation is available to the workers affected. The ETUC calls for:
 - action to ensure a total ban on asbestos in Europe, and support and training for workers involved in asbestos removal and disposal (notably in the construction sector);
 - the creation of a European health surveillance system for workers exposed to harmful substances in the workplace;
 - better EU research coordination on industrial and occupational diseases; and,
 - all new/future planning permission applications to be subject to effective environmental and public health assessments and based on the precautionary principle.

14. The ETUC will play an active role in the European Resource Efficiency Platform and other forums to ensure that these concerns are integrated into European resource efficiency policy.
15. Together with its affiliates, the ETUC will further develop its work on worker-led resource efficiency, notably through future Green Workplaces projects at company, sectoral, regional and national levels, and the broad dissemination of its Green Guide for union activists.