

The Göteborg Resolution

After the preparatory meeting in Rhone-Alpes, France, on 28-29 November, 1996, the third Environment Conference of Regional Ministers and Political Leaders in the European Union gathered at Göteborg, Sweden, on 18-20 June, 1997.

*This resolution was adopted by the Göteborg Conference.
The resolution consists of a preamble and four parts.*

- 1. Implementation and further development of Community environmental law.**
- 2. Regional Agenda 21.**
- 3. Sustainable Development and Structural Funds**
- 4. Next steps**



English

Preamble

The Göteborg Conference

1. Reaffirms the Final Resolutions of the first and second Environment Conferences of Regional Ministers and Political Leaders in the European Union.
2. Reaffirms the Valencia Charter, now formally endorsed by more than 80 Regions and the Committee of the Regions.
3. Considers that many environmental issues remain urgent. In particular, the issues of climate change and biodiversity, which link all other issues, need to be fully addressed.
4. Recognises that there have been some achievements in progress towards sustainable development, but is concerned that much more needs to be done to adopt new approaches, to implement them and to monitor progress towards sustainable development.
5. Wishes to develop proposals in three particular areas: the implementation and further development of Community environmental law; regional Agenda 21; and sustainable development and the Structural Funds.



Implementation and Further Development of Community Environmental Law

*The Göteborg Conference
concludes that:*

1.1

Although legal and administrative systems differ across Europe, consistent implementation and enforcement of common European law is necessary to move towards sustainable development and to reinforce the protection of the environment.

1.2

Initiatives, such as the Eco-Management and Audit Scheme and the Eco-label Scheme, are welcome where they increase the environmental self-regulation of the economy. Such voluntary schemes also offer the possibility of a simplification of Community environmental law, if adopted throughout Europe.

1.3

Although voluntary agreements are welcome and other tools such as financial incentives are important, the further development of Community environmental law remains necessary for both environmental and economic reasons.

1.4

A lack of achievement in enforcement has been the weakest part of Community environmental law. The Conference welcomes initiatives by the European Commission to promote consistent implementation and enforcement¹.

¹ Especially communication COM (96) 500, on implementing Community environmental law.

1.5

Within a common framework, differences amongst the Regions in terms of environmental circumstances and legal and administrative systems, should be taken into account more fully in proposals for the application and enforcement of existing provisions, and in the creation of new Community environmental law. Therefore, the principle of subsidiarity, as stated in the Treaty, must be fully applied in the whole regulatory chain.

1.6

One of the main objectives of new Community law should be to promote the sustainable development of the economy. Where this requires new building works, this development should take place without a similar rate of increase in the consumption of resources.

1.7

The creation of new procedural environmental law by the Community should focus on transboundary issues between Member States, notwithstanding the possibility of bi- and multi-lateral agreements.

1.8

To help achieve fair competition, common European limit values for emissions based on the best available techniques are needed alongside environmental quality standards, taking account of subsidiarity.

1.9

As legislation which is unambiguous and straightforward to follow is a pre-requisite for its practical application, the European Commission must consolidate Community environmental law to achieve a coherent framework and to simplify the process of implementation.

1.10

The Network for Implementation and Enforcement of Environmental Law (IMPEL) deserves full support from the Regions, whether by direct participation or via a national network.

1.11

The European Commission would benefit from taking up the offer from the Regions of sharing their experience in drafting, applying and enforcing environmental law.

1.12

The Assembly of European Regions is invited to establish a working group to examine the contribution that Regions can make to improving the enforcement of Community environmental law, and that this group should seek to co-operate with the IMPEL network.

1.13

To settle environmental disputes more speedily, at lower cost, and more easily for the citizen and non-governmental organisations, encourages these Member States and Regions, where they do not exist already, to consider appropriate administrative mechanisms, such as mediation procedures, taking into account the experience of other Member States and Regions. If necessary, information about access to justice will need to be improved.

2

Regional Agenda 21

The Göteborg Conference concludes that:

2.1

Five years after the Rio Earth Summit and the publication of Agenda 21 there is still much work to be done to enable us to move towards sustainable development.

2.2

Regions are key actors in sustainable development, and that actions controlled or influenced by us have an impact at the national and global level. Regions must therefore take part in drawing up and implementing international and national sustainable development strategies, and in adopting, implementing and evaluating the Agenda 21 process created in each Member State.

2.3

There are fundamental roles played by information and education for citizens, and communication with and participation by citizens in working towards sustainable development, especially in the framework of the Agenda 21 process.

2.4

There is a need to go beyond simply ensuring that citizens have access to environmental data: Regions must be active in their public information work, understanding and responding to the information needs of citizens and promoting participation. As a first step, each Region should designate a single point of contact for information about regional Agenda 21.

2.5

To command public confidence in Agenda 21 work, Regions and the European Commission must set a better example in the environmental and social impact of their actions, and should actively promote the use of products with a lesser environmental impact.

2.6

Regions should promote a debate on sustainable development, which could be animated by suitable fora, involving all sectors and groupings, including regional and local authorities, non-governmental organisations, management representatives and trade unions, training and research bodies, as well as individual citizens.

2.7

Regions should take initiatives to stimulate and encourage local Agenda 21 work by others, where this is compatible with regional Agenda 21 work.

2.8

Regions should use and extend existing networks to exchange information and experience in the field of sustainable development, and should develop a menu of regional Agenda 21 initiatives for Regions to examine and from which to choose.

2.9

It is important to integrate environmental, social and economic issues, as shown by Agenda 21. The Conference calls on Regions to demonstrate through pilot projects how this can be achieved. The development of socially and environmentally useful employment is an important challenge for all Regions.

2.10

It is important to demonstrate how environmental considerations can be integrated into work in all subject areas. The Conference calls on the European Commission to set a good example by demonstrating the value of environmental appraisal of its plans and programmes, with a view to implementing such a system in the future.

3

Sustainable Development and the Structural Funds

The Göteborg Conference concludes that:

3.1

Our actions must conserve non-renewable resources and optimise the benefits obtained from the efficient use of all resources. This must be achieved whilst meeting economic, social and cultural needs and whilst satisfying needs for health, safety, education, housing, food, and community and spiritual well-being.

3.2

The framework of sustainable development requires economic development to be compatible with environmental protection and social needs, and that this framework should be the basis for all forms of assistance under the Structural Funds.

3.3

Support by the European Commission for integrating environmental issues more fully into the Structural Funds is welcome²⁾. The Conference notes the recent opinion of the Committee of the Regions³⁾, and calls for a debate in the Council of Ministers on the document "Cohesion Policy and the Environment" and measures to implement its conclusions.

3.4

The purpose of the Structural Funds should be to secure a pattern of development which improves the quality of life through the creation of economic activity which meets sustainable development objectives.

²⁾ Communication COM(95)509 on Cohesion Policy and the Environment

³⁾ See COR Opinion 97/C 34/05.

3.5

Ensuring that the Structural Funds address environmental and social disparities, as well as economic disparities, will assist cohesion.

3.6

Current Structural Fund Regulations do not contain sufficient instruments to ensure the effective evaluation and monitoring of sustainability objectives within the implementation of programmes and projects, and that there is inconsistency in current practices of monitoring and evaluation.

3.7

Progress needs to be made urgently to ensure that the operation of the Structural Funds fully implements the European Commission's commitment to sustainable development.

3.8

Regional development plans, programmes and projects should be required to demonstrate how they achieve compatibility with European Union environmental legislation and policy. In this respect, there needs to be strong co-operation and an exchange of knowledge and experience between Regions within the European Union and Regions in the future Member States.

3.9

Emphasis should be placed on ensuring that regional development plans, programmes and projects assisted by the Structural Funds are geared towards meeting the demands of sustainable development and demonstrate how they meet sustainability criteria.

3.10

Regions must be guided by the principles of sustainable development when promoting projects for support by the Structural Funds, and must develop criteria for sustainable development and assess projects against these criteria before and after their implementation. To this end, a regional cross-sectoral unit to assess projects against these criteria is desirable.

3.11

The European Commission, in co-operation with the Member States and Regions, can assist the Regions by issuing clear guidance to ensure consistency and transparency in applying principles of sustainable development to regional development plans, programmes and projects.

3.12

Indicators of sustainable development, including environmentally and socially useful employment, are required as an integral part of planning and monitoring. Such indicators should be developed as part of a systematic and consistent appraisal process which is open to examination by the European Commission, Member States, Regions, and citizens at all stages.

3.13

In accordance with Agenda 21, environmental non-governmental organisations should be part of the process of the preparation and implementation of assistance through Structural Funds, having the same status as economic and social partners.

3.14

The European Commission must also be guided by the principles of sustainable development when considering projects for support by the Structural Funds, and must show how projects have been assessed for their environmental impact by the European Commission or bodies delegated this task by the Commission.

4

Next Steps

The Göteborg Conference

4.1

Asks the President of the Conference, the Governor of Göteborgs och Bohus län, to send the Resolution in Swedish, English, French, German, Italian and Spanish to the institutions of the Community, including the Committee of the Regions, to the Assembly of European Regions, and to the Regions of the European Union.

4.2

Welcomes the offer of the South East Region, Ireland, to host the 1999, fourth Conference.

4.3

Asks the Regions to form a steering group of Regions to organise the future Conferences. The membership of the steering group should be broadly representative of the geographical spread and type of Regions within the European Union.

4.4

Asks the steering group to initiate the various actions referred to in this Resolution.

4.5

Asks the steering group to organise the content of the fourth Conference to ensure that it includes:

- a) a review of progress on the implementation of the Valencia Charter;
- b) a review of the outcomes of the resolutions of the first three Conferences; and
- c) a report on regional Agenda 21, including an evaluation of the first seven years of such work and a presentation of conclusions on regional pilot projects, the integration of the environment into work by various sectors, and information for and the participation of citizens.