

ENVIRONMENTAL ACTION PROGRAMMES IN THE EUROPEAN UNION - EVOLUTION AND SPECIFIC

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Abstract

European environmental policy has developed substantially, from a group of measures (rather technical) in the creation of sustainable development strategies argued on the fact that economic, social inclusion and environmental protection are interdependent. European environmental policy reflects the outcome of the decision set by the European treaties and is implemented through the Community institutions acting on the principle of subsidiarity, supporting in their actions on a broad collaboration with national governments and other actors involved in the implementation of environmental policy and ensuring combating the negative effects of various actions on the environment.

Environmental policy appears as a form of guidance and organization of complex environmental, called to establish the strategies, methods and means used in activities carried out both nationally and internationally to prevent and combat pollution and to improve the living conditions.” [1]

EU environmental policy has emerged as a separate field of community concern in 1972, boosted by a United Nations conference on the environment held in Stockholm in the same year. [2]

The importance that environmental policy has acquired is because it has become, since 1997, the EU horizontal policy, environmental issues being considered mandatory to other Community policies.

The profile of EU environmental policy was strengthened by the Treaty of Amsterdam and changes to its preamble and Article 2 (ex Article B) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU have led to empowerment of the principle of sustainable development, so that it became one of the EU priority. In Article 6 of the European Community Treaty clearly stipulates the need to integrate environmental protection field in all EU sectoral policies. Thus, these changes to the reference document on European Union shall be given an important place to sustainable development concept, moving it from an article on an important position at the beginning of the treaty, enshrining sustainable development as being the existing Community leitmotiv.

EU applies an active policy regarding environmental protection but, in accordance with the subsidiarity principle, the EU will approach environmental issues specific to each Member State only when it can treat them more effectively than national or regional governments. [3]

Underlying objectives of EU environmental policy is clearly stated in Article 174 of the EC Treaty, namely:

- preserve, protect and improve the environment;
- protect human health;
- rational use of natural resources;
- promoting measures at international level to address regional environmental issues.

Fixing these common goals does not prejudice the role of Member States. Environmental problems falls within the the split skills, and the Member States retain their competence in the development, implementation and financing the environmental policy; community actions are complementary with the role, on the one hand, to ensure harmonization and coordination within the EU and national policies and, secondly, to support the enhancement of Member States policies. [4]

To ensure compliance with the principles of environmental protection, European institutional actors have developed 7 Environmental Action Programmes that reflect an interdependence of policy approaches and action plans, in a concept that evolved from treating environmental issues sectorial to the interdependence approach to the model of sustainable development. Environmental Action Programmes are instruments that have guided the progress of Community environmental policy since the early '70s, and European Community law to act in the field of environmental protection is set out in the Treaty on European Union, Article 192 (3).

First Environmental Action Programme (EAP 1) has been adopted by the European Council in 1972 and covers the period 1973-1976. It reflects a sectoral approach and set out the principles of Community environmental policy that were found also in subsequent programs, including pollution prevention principle underpinning of the fourth program developed 15 years later.

Through this program has already been established the argument that economic development prosperity and environmental protection are interdependent and its implementation was supported louder idea that environmental protection is an essential task of the European community.

The objectives stipulated in PAM 1 were related to: [5] :

- prevention and limitation of damage to the environment;
- preservation of ecological balance;
- rational use of natural resources.

The program also included a number of key elements that have established in the 90s the European Sustainable Development strategy:

- Ensuring prevention, since the design phase in terms of new projects, taking into account the environment variable first;
- Application of the "polluter-pays" principle;
- Reducing the amount of natural resource exploitation and empowering the society in terms of environmental protection (need of education and the development of "environmental awareness");
- Cooperation between Member States and European institutions in view to harmonizing national and Community policies. We believe that this compatibility is impetuously necessary to make sure for the implementation of viable long-term strategies which are equitable to all Member States of the European Community.

Second Environmental Action Program (EAP2), developed for the period 1977-1981, was essentially a continuation of the first EAP in terms of abording and objectives, specifying a limited range of issues to be dealt with. Regarding practical approach, the first two Environmental Action Programmes (1973-1981) pleaded for water and air quality assurance.

Evaluation of practical success of this first period of implementation of environmental policy is generally relatively critical. Initial enthusiasm has decreased considerably during the periods of economic downturn (1975 - 1978, 1981 -1983), but, nevertheless, a number of Framework directives, particularly in water and waste field, were adopted in this period.

The Third Environmental Action Programme (EAP 3), approved for the period 1982-1986, reflected a significant change in addressing environmental policy, being more closely related to the internal market than its predecessors. A new feature brought by this program has been linked to the shaping of generalized environmental strategies and activities emphasizing environmental damage prevention instead of controlling them. By the third EAP it has been highlighted the potential risks and benefits of environmental policies for internal market and the problematic relationship between environmental policy and the internal market become a key factor for the programs and actions of the European community.

Also, EAP 3 outlined the need to harmonize emission standards to avoid the possibility of distortions in terms of industrial competitiveness and economic benefits provided by implementing environmental policies, in particular the positive effects on the labor market sector.

An important aspect of the historical evolution of environmental policies implemented at EU level was the adoption, in 1986, the Single European Act (ratified in 1997), document that ensured the legal integration of environmental policy in the EC Treaty (Treaty of Rome, 1957).

The Single European Act was added to the Treaty of Rome through Title VII "Environmental Policy" which drawn certain objectives to be achieved, such as conservation, protection and improvement of the environment, health protection and rational use of natural resources. Also, the Single European Act lays down that environmental policy should be integrated into other Community policies and Member States must adopt more sustainable measures for environment.

The option to assume clear responsibilities at Community level and a horizontal approach to environmental issues became, however, much clearer by the Fourth Environmental Action Programme (1987-1992) who came towards applying the provisions of the Articles single.

The year 1987 is regarded as a turning point in European environmental policy, because, on this year, the environment was implemented in a own chapter in the Treaty of Rome. However, in terms of practical approach, it appears that, although environmental policy has acquired a new status, there is more continuity than evident change, the principles and other essential aspects of environmental policy have been laid down in the Treaty already existing in earlier policy documents.

The Fourth Environmental Action Programme marks a further change in the approach of the environmental policy. Shortcomings of previous EAP (eg, quality policy, emissions orientation) were recognized and for the first time the environment was not perceived as an additive, but rather as an integrated activity in the whole production process.

This vision was due to the desire to reduce energy consumption or decrease material inputs and closing production cycles so that waste streams can be minimized.

Therefore, by PAM4 were set up "sectoral approach" by analyzing the environmental impact of strategic economic sectors. In fact, hrough this program have been set for the first time the incentive-based instruments such as taxes, subsidies or tradable emission permits.

The fundamental contribution of the the program for the Community environmental policy developments and the evolution of the European model of integration was the argument that environmental protection does not conflict with economic objectives, but rather can be a tool to improve the economic performance and competitiveness, an essential precondition for growth and development. [6]

This was an initial commitment for the strategic reorientation of environmental policies in the European Union, which took place gradually between 1989 and 1994. The central philosophy of the EAP 4 (integrated, sector analysis, new tools stimulation) were further developed in the coming years.

Thus, as a result of this program, environmental policy is no longer perceived as an additive policy but rather as an integral part of economic decision-making. The concept of "sustainable development" has increasingly become a normative reference for environmental policy in the EU since 1990. There were promoted environmental mainstreaming in all Community policies and systematic search of "strategies without regret (no regret strategies)" [7]. In other words, were identified win - win situations (mutually beneficial) wehere the objectives, both ecological and economic, could harmonize and bring benefits on both ways.

A number of external factors have contributed to advancing the development of new approaches to environmental policy. Among the most important factors we can include the emergence of new global agreements, preparations for UNCED conference in 1992, a broad support for economic instruments and the emergence of a new wave of ecological culture in Europe .

Environmental Action Programme 5 (1993-2000), called "Towards Sustainability", was prepared in parallel with the Rio Conference (1992) and the launch of Agenda 21, and represented the first commitment of the Community towards assuming the model of sustainable development. Environment is one of the three pillars of sustainable development and is particularly important for the poor, who are more vulnerable to pollution and ecological disasters, [8] and the cooperation between economical growth and social inclusion with respecting environmental protection beeing the argument for considering environment as a crucial pilar of sustainable development.

The most interesting and innovative EAP 5 elements may include [9]:

- the main objective of sustainable development as defined in the Brundtland Report ;
- reference to the sectoral approach , integrating the environmental dimension in the most polluting sectors (transport , energy, agriculture , etc.) ;
- emphasizing the need to use new tools , especially the market -based instruments such as tax incentives or voluntary instruments , to corroborate their own interests of producers and consumers in environmental decision-making ;
- oriented approach to dialogue and collaboration , especially if we take into account the crucial role of non -state actors and local / regional authorities to represent the general interest of the environment. This may contribute to the development of innovative concepts , public awareness , and to ensure the implementation of EU directives .
- targets medium and long term reduction of pollutants , and design tools to achieve these goals

Therefore, the Fifth Environmental Action Programme had all the necessary elements of a policy-oriented structural environmental changes. Priorities in the Fifth Environmental Action has been granted to the application of two principles:

- transition from traditional action ex post (with emphasis on command and control instruments) to ex-ante action based on prevention and precaution, with the empowerment of all actors whose actions may have an impact on the environment;

- integration of environmental considerations into sectoral policies, in a long-term strategic approach promoting interdependence between environmental protection, economic and social objectives.

An important contribution of the program was also in ensuring coherence of the instruments used in environmental policy: legislative (imposing environmental standards, integration of environmental policies into sectoral policies and territorial planning), economic (encouraging the production and use of products and technologies does not affect the environment, internalisation of environmental costs), horizontal (dissemination of information about the negative effects that can print uncontrolled activities on the environment, education, research), financial (community support programs, taxes, fees).

Through EPA 5 were established the following categories of market-based instruments: [10]

a) *taxes*, grouped into two categories: on emission (discharge of pollutants, noise) and on product; by the use of these tools is intended that through taxation to ensure a change in behavior of economic agents and the responsibility of their application lies with the Member States and represent revenues for national budgets.

b) *facilities and tax deductions* that aims to encourage sustainable production systems and eco-products;

c) *direct and indirect public subsidies*. These instruments have been put in place to ensure their compatibility with the 'polluter pays' principle and the functioning of the internal market. The practical application of these tools can be demonstrated by increasing tax incentives, regarded as a category of public aid to stimulate economic environment to promote "clean" investment;

d) *environmental auditing*, which has been designed for stimulating economic agents to develop an internal management system to analyze and provide increased performance in environmental protection and natural resource use. The system is based on voluntary and is designed to provide proactive visibility firms towards environmental accountability.

The Sixth Environmental Action Program (EPA6) called "Our Choice, Our Future", approved in July 2002 and extended to 2012, does not share his predecessor's ambitions. The starting point of the 6th EAP was the idea that so-called persistent environmental problems, such as climate change, threats of biodiversity or excessive consumption of resources, requires a broader approach beyond environmental legislation.

In addition, the need to strengthen existing legislation at the time was increasing, particularly in view of european enlargement. Basically 6th EAP sets out a framework of principles and general objectives, which could be regarded as so-called thematic strategy on key issues, such as pesticides, resources, recycling, soil, urban, marine and fresh air.

Key coordinates that constituted conceptual and practical framework of PAM6 were:

- ensuring a high degree of applicability of environmental law in the European Community;

- full integration of environmental principles and policy objectives into other policies promoted at European and corroboration with other Community policies;

- ensuring an active dialogue with the whole of society, in that it must ensure transparency in informing consumers and producers regarding the effects of environmental policy promoted voluntary encourage producers to reduce damage to the environment due to the effects of the activities performed by passing the a penalty of their background and environmental performance boost by providing facilities and grants;

- encouraging citizen contribution in the design and implementation of incentive measures for environmental protection by facilitating access to information;

PAM6 application is considered, overall, a success, even if European results regarding the reduce of pollution, prevent climate change or improving biodiversity are still modest [11].

The Sixth Environment Action Programme (PAM6) was completed in July 2012 and the European Commission proposed a new environment action program of the European Union "A good life within our planet," and that will guide European environmental policy until 2020. The proposal aims to increase the ecological resilience of the EU economy and the transformation of european economy into a green, sustainable and inclusive growth.

Despite the progress in some areas, Europe continues to face important environmental challenges, but also opportunities to make the environment more resilient to risks and change. Protecting natural capital by encouraging efficient use of resources and accelerate the transition to low-carbon economy are key features of the Seventh Environment Action Programme. The results should contribute to foster sustainable growth and creating new jobs and to transform the European space in a better and healthier place to live.

EU efforts to adapt its fundamental documents to the new realities of twenty-first century, given the globalization of the economy, population growth, climate change, the need for sustainable energy sources and new security threats, have resulted in recent years in the Treaty of Lisbon and The EU 2020 Strategy [12].

The adoption of the Europe 2020 strategy considered to be a comprehensive strategy that incorporates all EU policies in order to create a smart, sustainable and socially inclusive, was an important starting point in developing the 7th EAP, especially regarding the circumstances in which it was drafted, this being influenced by the existence of an uncertainty economical and political environment in wich many EU countries were making efforts to tackle economic - financial crisis.

In this regard, EU environmental policy proposes three main contributions that that reinforce each other [13]:

1. a sufficient level of resistance to pressure and change of the natural capital of Europe;
2. ensuring that the economy is very efficient in terms of resource usage and has low carbon dioxide emissions;
3. ensuring that the health and welfare of EU citizens are still found at high levels.

The actions and measures within PAM7 and the relationship with the specific objectives it claims are presented in the following table:

Table no. 1

The specific objectives and actions of the 7th EAP

Specific objectives	Actions related, mainly, to one specific objective	Complementary measures that address to all three specific objectives (allowed framework)
Ensuring a sufficient level of resilience to pressure and change of the natural capital of Europe	-full implementation of the EU Biodiversity Strategy until 2020	Improving the implementation of specific objectives 7th EAP - Allow environmental inspections and monitoring more efficient - Ensuring access to justice - Supporting enhanced mechanisms for mediation and resolution of complaints nationally - Establishment of national information systems to actively disseminate information sufficient to demonstrate that EU environmental legislation is implemented effectively - Analyze the practical role that it could play
	- developing a more strategic approach in protecting and improving forests and the services they provide	
	- strengthening the integration of land use decision-making process, including any targets on the ground and land	
	- adoption of new measures and actions to eliminate the	

	<p>discharge of urban and industrial wastewater, fertilizer use and air emissions responsible for eutrophication</p> <p>- full implementation to the Water Framework Directive, including further action to reduce the impact on fresh water, including that of nitrogen and phosphorus</p> <p>- full implementation of the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, including marine waste reduction, possibly including targets</p>	<p>partnership agreements to improve the implementation of specific environmental legislation Improve scientific knowledge in environmental policy</p> <p>- Improving the evidence base for environmental policy , including its availability by simplifying , streamlining and modernizing the collection, management and sharing of information and environmental data</p> <p>- Developing a systematic approach to anticipate , assess and manage emerging risks caused by environmental factors</p> <p>- Reduce existing knowledge gaps</p>
<p>Ensure that the economy is very effective in the use of resources and has reduced CO2 emissions</p>	<p>- full implementation of the package of EU energy and climate change by 2020</p> <p>-full implementation of Community legislation on waste and use of waste as a resource in particular by ensuring the application of the waste hierarchy and the effective use of economic instruments including complete elimination of disposal to landfill and energy recovery limit</p> <p>- addressing the internal market barriers facing organic recycling activities in the EU</p> <p>- reducing the overall environmental impact of production and consumption, focusing in particular on food, housing and mobility sectors, including possibly targets</p>	<p>Ensure that there are appropriate incentives for investment</p> <p>- Ensuring that environmental and climate change objectives are supported by an adequate level of funding : adequate reflection of priorities for environment and climate partnership contracts , ensuring that at least 20 % of EU budget for 2014-2020 is related to climate and increase the use of available EU funding for environmental activities at least 25 % below actual/2010 , develop and implement a system for reporting and environmental expenditure tracking</p> <p>- Phasing out environmentally harmful subsidies , the use of increasingly more market-based instruments , including taxation</p> <p>- Promoting and enhancing private sector funding for environmental and climate-related expenditure, in particular by facilitating access to innovative financial instruments</p> <p>- Intensifying efforts to establish comprehensive measures related to how sustainable is our progress (beyond GDP), including natural capital accounting</p> <p>- Integration of environmental considerations and resource use in the European Semester</p>
<p>Ensuring that EU citizens continue to benefit from high levels of environmental protection</p>	<p>-updating the EU noise policy and its alignment with the latest scientific knowledge to identify effective measures in terms of cost to reduce noise at source</p> <p>- intensify efforts to implement the Drinking Water Directive, in particular for small suppliers and new of the new directive on bathing water quality in order to achieve compliance levels of 95% by 2020</p> <p>-develop a strategy for addressing toxic environment combined effects of chemicals and safety concerns related substances are endocrine disruptors and developing a comprehensive approach to minimize exposure to hazardous</p>	<p>Enhancing urban sustainability</p> <p>- Supporting the implementation of the minimum criteria sustainability of a majority of cities in the EU. Ensuring the effectiveness of international</p> <p>- Focusing EU cooperation with strategic partners on the promotion of good practice in domestic environmental policy and legislation , as well as convergence in multilateral environmental negotiations</p> <p>- Ratification of key multilateral environmental agreements or new present before 2020 and ensure effective participation of the EU in other international processes</p> <p>- Initiation and implementation of actions to protect forests worldwide</p> <p>- Focusing on cooperation with countries subject ENP on progressive approach with major EU environmental policies</p> <p>- Proactively engaging in an international work</p>

substances. effectively addressing safety concerns related to nanomaterials in a coherent	plan on enhancing mitigation ambition and identifying and supporting concrete implementation of effective options in terms of costs for a range of mitigation actions that can close the gap to 2020 ambitions - Full integration of substantial outcome UNCSD 2012 in our actions at regional, international, European and global levels.
-finding and implementing agreed EU strategy for adaptation to climate change, including the integration of climate change adaptation initiatives and major EU policy areas	
-further reduce water stress in EU	

Source: Commission Staff Working Document, Impact Assessment Summary Accompanying the Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on a general EU Environmental Action 2020 "A good life within our planet", page 7 -8

The implementation of the Seventh Environment Action Programme will force the European Union to ensure the following objectives [14]:

- (a) the protection , preservation and enhancement of the natural capital ;
- (b) the transition to a green economy and EU competitive low- carbon and efficient in terms of resource use ;
- (c) protection of Union citizens environmental pressures and risks to the health and welfare;
- (d) increasing the maximum benefits of EU environmental legislation ;
- (e) improving the knowledge base for environmental policy ;
- (f) ensuring the mobilization of financial resources to finance investments in environmental policy and climate and the prices right ;
- (g) ensuring the integration of environmental issues into all Community policies and their consistency ;
- (h) urban sustainability within the European Union ;
- (i) increase the effectiveness of EU environmental policy in confronting the challenges of the various social and economic activities on the environment, both regionally and globally.

Even if you were highlighted a number of positive aspects is aimed to be achieved by 2020, Environmental Action Programme "good life within the limits of our planet" was criticized by the European Economic and Social Committee. He pointed out that: [15]

➤ proposal for the Seventh EAP is characterized by a lack of concreteness rather than clarity, the Committee considering that it is necessary a description of the boundaries of our planet and a clear presentation of the implications of the principles, objectives and environment policy regulations have on the social and economic activity in Europe. The EESC believes that "Seventh EAP is rather a report on the environmental situation than a real strategic policy document or a political and operational action program."

➤ in the seventh EAP is described very vaguely the need of changes in economic activities and on the social structures for for achieving environmental policy objectives, despite the fact that these changes have been highlighted since the presentation of the flagship initiative "Resource efficient Europe in terms of resource use", the Commission stressed that environmental protection should be possible "only if, in addition to technological advances and changing patterns of production and consumption systems bring significant changes in energy, industrial, agricultural and transport ".

Conclusions and proposals

The role of a seventh EAP should be to a more clear and concise description of the instruments (technical, legal, etc.) to be implemented to ensure the transition from classical environmental policy focusing on technical means to remedy the negative effects on sustainable development, especially given the fact that Europe 2020 will expire at the same time with EAP7.

The successful application of this last program raises, in my opinion, the necessity to determine the correct relationship between economic growth and environmental degradation, this being important to establish the policies to be implemented. Thus, a positive relationship require even strict limits on economic growth to maintain a sustainable scale of economic activity compatible with environmental requirements. In other words, the main goals of the 7th EAP should be included the decoupling (absolute) growth on environmental impacts, and the intention to agree, until 2020, the ambitious targets on resource efficiency and reliable indicators that will guide public and private decision makers in the transition to an efficient economy in terms of resources.

Also, the design of incentives for investment in environmental and climate policy and integrating environmental costs into the pricing process are essential to ensure transition to an efficient economy in terms of rational use of resources and low carbon emissions .

Finally, environmental protection involves taking an active role by civil society so that citizens exercise a active control through measures like the liberalization of access to environmental information, participation of civil society in decision-making on environmental legislation and access to justice.

The transition to an development model that is conciliatory with the environment requires changes in policy prices, improving regulatory instruments, changing patterns of production and consumption, etc.. Creating incentives for reorienting practices that are damaging the environment is possible by reforming general and sectoral policy, and not just environmental policies.

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