

Third opinion on a strategy for the prevention of climate change beyond 2012: Belgian policy in the European framework

Summary

- [a] The Minister for the Environment requested an opinion of the FCSD in June 2004 on what would be possible and a desirable course of action in the wake of the Kyoto Protocol, as from 2012. The FCSD responded to this request in three distinct phases:
- In November 2004: What is the scope of the climate problem and how can the burden of reducing greenhouse gas emissions be shared after 2012?
 - In July 2005: What options are available at global level to maintain planetary emissions of greenhouse gases at a level sustainable for the stability of the climate?
 - And with this opinion: What might be the main points of a Belgian climate policy in the European and international framework for the period beyond 2012?

What future reductions for Belgium?

- [b] One of the Minister's central questions concerned the level of greenhouse gas emissions that would be possible and desirable for Belgium in 2017 and 2050. The FCSD recognises the usefulness and motivating nature of a policy framework and clear objectives, notably for investments.
- [c] After this question had been raised by the Minister, the European Commission determined the key elements of its strategy for 2012 and beyond, notably in the framework of future international negotiations, of which the Montreal COP/MOP will be the first important landmark. Accordingly, the European Council of March 2005 determined brackets for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions for the industrialised nations for the years 2020 and 2050, with conditions. These levels constitute references for the effort to be made by Belgium. They will have to be weighted –upward or downward- in terms of its specific characteristics. At the present time, it is difficult for the FCSD to give precise reduction brackets for 2017 and 2050.
- [d] Average CO₂ emissions and per capita energy consumption rates in Belgium are higher than those of all its neighbours and higher than the European average. Various elements contribute to the situation in Belgium: the current level of consumption and energy intensity, the characteristics of its industrial structure and electricity generating plants, its (very poor) performances in terms of building insulation and spatial planning, the density of its road system, its complex institutional structures, its technological level, and so on.

A post-2012 strategy for Belgium

- [e] The climate issue is still too often perceived in Belgium solely as a potential source of costs and constraints, whereas the target of a carbon-poor economy should also lead to numerous opportunities for enterprises, the economy and employment. Without a clear policy framework, Belgium risks missing out on these opportunities, which could prove to be the most costly and most harmful strategy for the three pillars of sustainable development. In addition, most policy makers do not always recognise the need to adopt long-term strategies, in spite of the fact that many of them have acknowledged the urgency of the problems, as shown by the results of the recent survey on the societal basis of sustainable development, commissioned by the FCSD¹.

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See results of the third survey commissioned by the FCSD in 2005 on the societal basis of sustainable development (available on the FCSD site: <http://www.cfdd.be>)

- [f] The population and players in society are nevertheless becoming increasingly aware of the problems created by climate change, the excessive dependence of our societies on fossil fuels and more generally our ways of consuming and producing. Combating climate change and developing an energy policy that corresponds to sustainable development must form part of a plan for society, shared by all, in order to create a new societal consensus and to leave future generations a heritage that enables them to meet their needs. Such a plan will require very significant investments and a real readiness for concrete changes of behaviour by all actors.
- [g] For all these reasons, the FCSD calls for the energy and climate policies to at last become priorities for Belgium and recommends the development of a climate and energy strategy for the medium (2020-2030) and long term (2050 and beyond). In that connection, the FCSD regrets the absence of different plans that could lay the cornerstones of such a strategy, such as the national climate plan or the national mobility plan, which were nonetheless announced some time ago.
- [h] In this context, Belgium must use all means to reduce its energy dependency, improve energy efficiency for all actors and lower its overall energy intensity, especially in the sectors of transport and housing. A climate policy cannot have the effect of encouraging the relocation of energy-intensive industrial activities. Belgium should also draw up agreements with the neighbouring countries to build synergy in energy issues (concerning, inter alia, the complementarity of investments and security of supply). In so doing, it must strengthen its competitive advantages and create employment (quality and quantity).
- [i] As the foundation for this strategy, the FCSD analyses in this opinion the main energy-consuming sectors and proposes several practical measures for each:
- transport (section 4.9.),
 - buildings (section 4.10.),
 - industry (section 4.11.),
 - heat and electricity generation (section 4.12.).
- The most appropriate instruments for each sector must be taken into consideration, namely regulations, economic and tax instruments, social instruments (consultation, education and information campaigns), voluntary agreements, research policy, development and demonstration.
- [j] Maximum consistency will be needed in the implementation of these instruments by the different levels of power.
- [k] The choice of an instrument must take due account of its effectiveness and relevance and be based on an analysis of costs, benefits and impacts (particularly the impact on employment and the competitiveness of enterprises). The FCSD calls in any event for achievement of the economically cost-effective and socially acceptable² potential improvements to energy efficiency that have been identified in all sectors.
- [l] The public powers will have to set the example by reviewing their procurement policy and reducing their energy consumption in public buildings, where considerable potential exists.
- [m] The FCSD calls for greater attention to be devoted to the issue of climate change in Belgian development cooperation policy, in terms of both building the capacities of the developing countries and implementing concrete projects with the partner countries. The FCSD requests that the human and financial resources needed to build capacity be made available, so as to develop a multilateral framework for adaptation to climate change.
- [n] The FCSD calls on Belgium to stress in international organisations the necessity of involving all countries and all sectors in the processes that will begin after 2012, while strengthening the necessary societal foundations.

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See in this connection section 2.3 and graph 1 of the Second Opinion on a Global Strategy for the Prevention of Climate Change beyond 2012, of 8 July 2005