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## Position of CEEweb on an effective roadmap towards a resource efficient Europe

Global demands for natural resources for food, clothes, housing and transport of people are increasing. These mounting demands on natural capital are exerting increased pressure on ecosystems, economies and social cohesion in Europe and elsewhere. These pressures are degrading the ecosystem services and lead to the decline of the carrying capacity of the planet, which also undermines human wellbeing.

Therefore CEEweb for Biodiversity welcomes the EU's Flagship Initiative on Resource Efficiency under the Europe 2020 Strategy. However, CEEweb believes that it does not have the real power and the right approach to achieve the goals of the EU on fighting against climate change and limiting the environmental impacts of resource use, increasing security of supply of essential resources, and halting biodiversity loss and the degradation of ecosystem services in the EU by 2020, and restoring them in so far as feasible. There is a serious threat that the Initiative will predominantly serve the economic goal of increasing competitiveness while ignoring the achievement of environmental goals.

The most important shortcoming of the flagship initiative is that it does not take into account the rebound effect, which can cancel out most or all of the savings of resource efficiency increase and thus undermine the stated objectives. The so-called rebound effect can occur at different levels, which requires holistic policy responses. On a consumer level it can be *direct* effect through changing behavior (turning up the heating in a newly insulated house) or *indirect* (spending the money saved on bills on holiday to faraway countries). On a *macro-economic* level though, improved efficiency leads to economic growth and consequently the further increase of resources use.

While the flagship initiative calls for the empowerment of consumers to move to resource-efficient consumption in order to ensure that efficiency gains are not lost, empirical surveys show that this is the level, where rebound effect is least visible. Far greater rebound can result from efficiency improvements in productive sectors of the economy (e.g. industrial and commercial firms) and contribute to resource use increase. Namely efficiency increase and thus cost reduction at manufacturers may provide much greater opportunity to increase

other inputs of production and/or produce more products at a lower price, encouraging an increased consumption on a macro-economic level.

It must be also noted that resource efficiency is already increasing (mostly in industrial countries) spontaneously. While global per capita income has increased sevenfold in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, average resource use per capita merely doubled<sup>1</sup>.

Thus CEEweb calls for an absolute limit on resource use at EU level with accompanying targets and measures. This is also in line with the conclusions of the International Resource Panel emphasising the need for absolute resource use reductions in developed economies and relative decoupling in developing economies (up to a certain point after which they must also shift into an absolute reduction mode). This is especially important in a world where resource scarcity and access to resources increasingly influence the competitiveness of economies. Acting now and realising timely structural changes on EU level will help Europe's economy to prepare for increasing challenges of the future and increase certainty for investment and innovation.

#### Main concerns and recommendations on the EU's Resource Efficiency Flagship Initiative

1. CEEweb welcomes that the Initiative defines resources in a broad sense also including food, soil, water, air, biomass and ecosystems. Ecosystems and their services are overexploited and thus more than 60% of ecosystem services (including the provision of water, fisheries) are degraded globally, which requires a structural change in resource use policies. There should be policy responses dealing with all these types of resources including soil, ecosystems, water, biomass, etc. in a holistic way, including the adoption of the Soil Framework Directive.
2. CEEweb calls for exact targets and responsibilities for delivering structural changes in agricultural, industrial, energy and transport systems, which should include limiting resource use and increasing efficiency at the same time. National level targets and measures should be integrated into the National Reform Programmes and reviewed regularly on EU level.
3. CEEweb sees it important that in addition to building up the knowledge base proper indicators are developed among others on total resource use, while the EU acts now based on the precautionary principle and prepare for worst case scenarios. The EU

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<sup>1</sup> UNEP (2011) Decoupling natural resource use and environmental impacts from economic growth, A Report of the Working Group on Decoupling to the International Resource Panel.

should also include the use of Ecological Footprint in measuring the success in saving resources and returning beyond safe ecological limits, which should be also used for communicating towards the public.

### Background on holistic environmental policy

Decreasing total environmental pressures requires taking a holistic approach and changing the same drivers behind environmental (and many socio-economic) problems. Previous measures have failed to solve the problems mainly because sectoral responses are given to seemingly disconnected issues, and their effects are often contradictory in the end without delivering structural changes in the economy. According to the UNEP's International Resource Panel decisions should consider avoiding burden shifting in time and space<sup>2</sup>. This requires limiting environmental pressures at the same time:

- Limiting the use of natural resources,
- Sustainable use of ecosystems and maintaining their coherent spatial structure,
- Preventing and controlling pollution and alien genotypes to maintain healthy ecosystems.

In order to be able to limit environmental pressures, the underlying socio-economic drivers need to be tackled in a holistic approach. These drivers themselves are interconnected in a complex way:

- Structural drivers (consumption and production patterns, with energy and material intensive products and services, urban structures, infrastructures, etc.)
- Institutional drivers (economic regulatory framework resulting in that natural resources are cheap in comparison to human labour, cheap fuel for transport, EU and state budgets, education system, etc.), which mainly determine the structural drivers,
- Cultural drivers (loss of identity and traditional lifestyle, consumerism, the values of society, sectoral approach, analytical knowledge, etc.), which underlie the institutional drivers<sup>3</sup>.

Within a holistic approach all environmental pressures must be limited in absolute terms through influencing the drivers, which also includes a limit to natural resource use. At the same time the application of end-of-pipe solutions, such as carbon capture and storage technologies only delay the problems, as the root causes (in this case the increasing use of fossil fuels and land use changes) constantly regenerate the problems.

CEEweb for Biodiversity is an umbrella organization of NGOs in the Central and Eastern European region. Our mission is the conservation of biodiversity through the promotion of sustainable development.

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.unep.org/resourcepanel/documents/pdf/PriorityProductsAndMaterials\\_Report\\_Full.pdf](http://www.unep.org/resourcepanel/documents/pdf/PriorityProductsAndMaterials_Report_Full.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Iván Gyulai, Kérdések és válaszok a fenntartható fejlődésről, MTvSz, Friends of the Earth Hungary, 2008