

# **Euro-Asian Environmental Cooperation – A European Perspective**

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## **1 Introduction**

The protection of the environment is an important driver of European integration. The European Union (EU) aims at achieving the objectives presented in Article 2 of the European Treaty. This article describes a system of objectives that, due to its combination of economic, ecological and social issues, can generally be summarised with the term “sustainable development”.

In addition to Article 2 the principle of environmental policy integration (EPI) is based on Article 6 of the European Treaty, which reads as follows:

“Environmental protection requirements must be integrated into the definition and implementation of the Community policies and activities (...), in particular with a view to promoting sustainable development.”

In accordance with it, environmental protection is not a sectoral policy, but a cross-sectoral imperative. This does not mean that there is no need for environmental ministries, but that interfaces have to be established in other ministries. To this effect, environmental objectives must be integrated into the objectives of other policies (e.g., trade, energy, agriculture, etc.).

In comparison to the central role of environmental policy in the process of European integration, it seems to be more sidelined in Asia. For example, according to Takahashi and Kato (2001) in ASEAN environmental protection – despite having a well established institutional structure – is suffering from rather weak fi-

nancial support. In addition, some critics have suggested that the nature of ASEAN cooperation might be inappropriate for dealing with environmental risks (Hamzah 2000, Tay 2000 quoted in Takahashi 2001). Already in 1997, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) concluded that the root cause of the poor state of the environment in the region was a failure of policy and institutions (ADB 1994). In contrast to the traditional political neglect of environmental issues in Asia is the fact that ecological degradation is becoming more and more a constraint on future economic development (ADB 2001). It seems to be likely that with increasing environmental pressure an understanding of environmental policy might emerge in Asia, which could be similar to the European interpretation: environmental policy is not a result but a prerequisite for successful economic integration.

This likely political convergence due to similar experiences with economic development and political integration could be reason enough for more environmental cooperation between Asia and Europe. In addition, there is a much more pressing need to do so, because Europe and Asia are pursuing the same (industrial) model of wealth and they need the same global resource base for their industrial metabolism.

The European model of wealth is largely based on a high level of resource consumption. The highly industrialised economy is capable of supplying citizens with an increasing amount of high-quality goods and services, almost at any time and at any place. However, this requires much energy (e.g., for transport and heating) and materials (e.g., for food and construction).

Fortunately, Europe can produce a growing value of goods and services with less material and energy input. To some extent, material and energy consumption has been decoupled from economic growth (relative decoupling). This means that even though Europeans do not use less resources in absolute terms (absolute decoupling), the increase is no longer proportional to the growth rates of the economy. With the relatively lower resource input negative impacts on nature and human health have also been decreasing (EEA, 2003, p. 17).

There are a number of success stories of European environmental policy. Compared to the 1970s when most European citizens became aware of environmental problems, the European Union has achieved what Article 2 of the EU Treaty refers to as “a high level of protection and improvement of the quality of the environment”, notably in the areas of water and air quality. The European Union has been a driver of progress by passing ambitious environmental legislation. However, the main thrust of this legislation was reactive, and has mainly aimed at using “end-of-pipe” measures. This has led to substantial investments, for example, in air filter and wastewater treatment installations. According to the European Commission’s estimates (CEC 2000) for two decades (1990-2010) the implementation of seven directives in the area of water and air protection required capital expenditure of around EUR 230 billion, with annual operating costs of around EUR 10 billion. These massive investments have not only improved the quality of the environment, but also created around 300,000 jobs in a highly competitive European eco-industry.