Chapter 6 EU minerals policy status quo – critical reflections

Chapter 5 refers to some EU and non-EU countries at national level. The following reflects directly on EU level.

While the present European Union had one of its roots in the European Coal and Steel Community of the 1950s, securing the supply of raw materials for the European economy has not been a primary aim of common policy in the past decades. This has been mainly left to the respective national policies. Some countries have pursued protectionist policies to favour their own national enterprises and change them reluctantly.

Political priorities at the European Union level are generally discussed in the context of European Union policy and national policies. For further understanding, a short overview of the (complex) European Union structure will be given. The European Union (EU) is a joint federation of countries, an economic and political union of 27 member states primarily located in Europe. As an international organisation sui generis, the EU operates through a hybrid system of supranationalism and intergovernmentalism. In certain areas it depends on mutual agreement between the member states; in others, supranational bodies are able to make decisions without unanimity. Through a standardised system of laws, which applies to all member states and ensures the freedom of movement for people, goods, services and capital, the EU has formed a single market; it maintains common policies on trade and regional development. The EU furthermore developed a restricted role in foreign policy, in the WTO, G8 summits, and in the UN. Important institutions and bodies of the EU include the European Commission, the Council of the European Union, the European Council, the European Court of Justice and the European Central Bank.

616 The European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), often called the Montan Union was a European trade association and a predecessor of the EC. It rendered all member countries access to coal and steel without paying customs. The founding members of the treaty were Belgium, Federal Republic of Germany, France, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. The ECSC Treaty, which was concluded for a period of 50 years, expired on 23 July 2002. It was not renewed, and its regime was henceforth attributed to the EC Treaty (http://de.wikipedia.org). Interestingly, there were already in the 1940s, various approaches to European minerals policy. See in this respect: Labour Science Institute of the German Labour Front (1942): Thoughts on a European agricultural and raw material policy: first attempt at a foundation. – Berlin, 1942].

G. Tiess, General and International Mineral Policy
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6.1 General

In the last two decades little importance was attached to the European mineral policy or, in other words, it was not in its whole complexity noted by the policy/decision-makers in the last decades.

Hence, the publishing of the Communication “The Raw Materials Initiative – Meeting our critical needs for growth and jobs in Europe” in November 2008 which is based on the preceding consultation process (from January to March 2008), was a welcome improvement. However, it must be stated that, against the background of recent international developments, this happened considerably late.

6.2 Public raw material awareness

At the European Conference on Mineral Planning in 2002 a general deficit in public awareness regarding the importance of raw materials for every individual, the society and national economy was recognized. This