Beat: Politics

Europe still faces a range of persistent and growing environmental challenges

Require fundamental changes

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USPA NEWS - Europe's environment and climate policies have delivered substantial benefits, improving the environment and quality of life, while driving innovation, job creation and growth. Despite these gains, Europe still faces a range of persistent and growing environmental challenges.

Europe require fundamental changes in the systems of production and consumption that are the root cause of environmental problems. These are some of the key messages from the European Environment Agency's five-yearly assessment 'The European environment “‘ state and outlook 2015' (SOER 2015), published today. SOER 2015 is an integrated assessment of Europe's environment. It also includes assessments and data at global, regional and country levels, as well as cross-country comparisons.

Today, Europeans enjoy cleaner air and water, less waste is sent to landfill and more resources are recycled. However, Europe remains a long way from achieving the objective of 'living well within the limits of the planet' by 2050, as set out in the 7th Environment Action Programme. Although we use natural resources more efficiently than previously, we are still degrading the resource base that we rely on in Europe and across the world. Problems such as biodiversity loss and climate change remain major threats.

Hans Bruyninckx, EEA Executive Director, said that "our analysis shows that European policies have successfully tackled many environmental challenges over the years. But it also shows that we continue to harm the natural systems that sustain our prosperity. While living within planetary limits is an immense challenge, there are huge benefits in responding to it. Fully using Europe's capacity to innovate could make us truly sustainable and put us at the frontier of science and technology, creating new industries and a healthier society".

SOER 2015 highlights the need for more ambitious policies to achieve Europe's 2050 vision. It also stresses the need for new approaches that respond to the systemic nature of many environmental problems. For example, external pressures, including global megatrends, can counteract specific policies and local environmental management efforts. In addition, many environmental challenges are closely linked to systems of production and consumption that support numerous jobs and livelihoods and changes to these systems create diverse costs and benefits. Moreover, efficiency improvements are often negated by increased consumption.

The report concludes that although full implementation of existing policies will be essential, neither the environmental policies currently in place, nor economic and technology-driven efficiency gains, will be sufficient to achieve Europe's 2050 vision. Addressing the complex challenges facing Europe will require more ambitious policies, alongside better knowledge and smarter investments, aimed at fundamentally transforming key systems such as food, energy, housing, transport, finance, health and education.

It will necessitate strategies and approaches aimed at mitigating pressures and avoiding potential harm, restoring ecosystems, correcting socio-economic inequities, and adapting to global trends such as climate change and resource depletion. According Dr Bruyninckx said, "we have 35 years to ensure that we live on a sustainable planet by 2050. This may seem like a distant future, but to achieve our goal, we need to act now. We need our actions and investments to be even more ambitious and more coherent. Many of the decisions we make today will determine how we are going to live in 2050".

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