

Competition policy and the Green Deal: Contribution

The following are a series of proposals based on the current format of the Green Deal – The aim of which is to enhance climate action through legislation, as well as use policy to strengthen the respective markets they each belong to – in hope that competition can be fostered in a more environmentally sustainable manner, so as to align with the goals of the directorate general, which is to promote and protect effective competition in markets, delivering efficient outcomes to the benefit of consumers, and invest efficiently and to innovate and adopt more energy-efficient technologies.

1. A Greener Diet for a Cleaner Climate

Although not often given much importance (apart from the irregular article here and there floating through the social media ocean), it is an almost undeniable fact that our diets form a major part of our carbon emissions. That is, closer to home than transport (another substantial emitter), is people themselves. If we were to maximise the efficiency with which we consume food, we could not only lower our carbon footprint in a drastic manner, but also save large amounts of resources, and, in what is the more relevant element in terms of this recommendation, it can also have a revolutionary effect on the global economy in future, as well as an immediate positive effect on local markets via the product diversification that would ensue. So how does all of this come together with respect to European Competition Proposals?

While recognising the importance of the recently adopted Biodiversity and Farm to Fork strategies, it might not be useless to point out the fact that, having declared themselves allies of those who want to shift their diets, the strategies lack weight when it comes to ensuring that said change is possible for the everyday citizen.

The Farm to Fork strategy commits to pushing for a harmonised food labelling system and also looks towards informing the consumer about the environmental impact of the product so that individuals can make a decision on what to consume. Where it falls short though, is when it comes to ensuring the availability of environmentally sustainable diets, and controlling their cost. Here, the Commission is promising to address certain issues in select institutions such as schools and hospitals, but does little in face of the elephant in the room – the market.

A proposal could be to draw increased attention from Member States to the Commission's proposal on favourable VAT rates for organic fruits and vegetables, but should not stop there; whole-grain cereals, legumes, nuts and non red meat food items that have the most beneficial or least detrimental effects in their specific market in terms of;

Finite Resources, Pollution, GHG emissions, as well as any other relevant environmental externality.

Another question that cannot be abandoned is that of Hydroponics. General requirement 1.2 in annex II of document A8-0311/2015, highlights a law that will soon be coming into force, prohibiting hydroponic production, therefore excluding it from having organic plant regulations apply to it.

Now, although this move is generally seen as beneficial towards to goal of long term sustainability on the principle of ecology, in that organic agriculture should be based on living ecological systems and cycles, work with them, emulate them and help sustain them (exception being made for the USA, which till now continues to allow hydroponics to reside under its USDA label), one cannot exclude the reality that Hydroponics bears incredible potential.

As such, a proposal could be to include a rigorous research programme within the remit of Clause 3.1 of the Farm to Fork strategy, on the potential benefits of this method – ranging from ability to grow crops out of season, carbon footprint, the drastic reduction in dependency on importation due to said multi-seasonal functionality, the amplified sustainable intensity of crop growth, the lower amounts of resources used, disease and pest resistance as well as space usage efficiency – and whether these undeniable advantages can be solidified via adequate regulation and deployed publicly.

Having done so, land farmers may be protected by having their own crops prioritised in the markets they participate in, with hydroponic production serving a supplementary role, as well as an export potential – but certainly not something to be afraid of in terms of a future method of sustainable food production.

2. Combatting Pollution to Support Biodiversity

Plastic has for quite a while now held the awareness crown when it comes to sea and water pollution in general – rightly so. But what we tend to forget is that there are several other factors that are contributing to the constant poisoning of our waters and deterioration of entire ecosystems. One such phenomenon is Antifouling.

Antifouling is a treatment carried out on a vessel's bottom in order to prevent marine organisms from surviving on it. As such, it is inevitably a toxic biocide through a paint surface applied to the vessel.

This of course can cause both primary and secondary environmental impacts (needless to say, all negative) when the biocides fail to degrade in the water. The problems grow when one analyses the means by which this coat is re-applied once the time comes for its maintenance. Here, lack of consistent regulation and in certain cases an absence of enforcement of said laws – are translating into worryingly substantial amounts of antifouling bodies being released into European waters at any moment.

As such, having recognised successful EU regulations such as 782/2003 and 536/2008, as well as Directive 76/769/EEC, a proposal is to make efforts to push for surveillance and enforcement that is drastically more far-reaching in manner – so that breaches of law and illegal pollution may be halted in as little time as possible, and the biodiversity of our waters further protected.

In addition to this, research is to be supported with the goal of developing not only a more effective barrier for pollutants not to leach into the water, but also for new, potentially environmentally friendly means of protecting the marine vessels whilst not chemically endangering in any way the life below.

3. Incentivising Sustainability in the Private Sector – Ensuring it in Public Institutions

The concept of funding in order to support internships is hardly a new one. Several such programs exist, both internationally and regionally. Most of the time they are created as a means of boosting employment in a select sector, or helping individuals who do not have the capability, most often fiscal, to pursue the career in subject.

The mentioned benefits may and will still manifest themselves in the results of this proposal of course, but an idea could be to create another kind of subsidised employment. The kind being spoken of is dependent on sustainability levels for eligible businesses. In such a system, salaries for a company's interns are subsidised at a pre-determined rate, with such subsidy being awarded on a range of factors, from the size of reduction of carbon footprint, to the value of the business in question, availability of candidates etc.

The European Environmental Agency has proposed financial incentives and taxes be put in place to encourage consumers to buy cars with lower carbon dioxide emissions and other air pollutants such as Nitrogen Oxide and particulate matter. This conversation surrounds electric vehicles which have been speculated to be not as green as one would think due to their manufacturing process. Even if so, electric vehicles are still a better alternative, especially in countries where there are many old cars contributing even more to carbon emissions. However, our aim should not just be in changing our cars, but reducing the number of cars on our roads. Recent initiatives providing free transport for school children have proven widely popular.

A proposal related to this issue need not be complex or difficult to prove successful. Initiatives wherein workplaces in which more than 5 people work on a determinate timetable (Restaurants, Hotels, Offices, STEM jobs, Shops, Supermarkets etc), should start to organise shuttle systems so that private cars aren't used for the work commute at all. Not only has such an initiative and ones similar to it proved widely popular in research, it would also begin to substantially reduce the amount of cars on the roads for commuting purposes – possibly even reduce the very need for a personal car for those whose investment in one is primarily motivated by the need to arrive at their workplace. Not only does this mean that less emissions will be released, but that less vehicles need to be converted to electric quickly, and economies

will start to save very notable amounts of finances previously lost in traffic.

Another area where the goals of the green deal may be better forwarded is that of awarding tenders or contracts. Of course, currently there are already regulations in existence that give importance to environmental impact – but it certainly is not proving to be enough.

When candidates for tenders or contracts are evaluated, a far more significant portion of the pre-published point criteria ought to be focused on the environmental impact, with regards to elements such as but not limited to, visual, sustainability, and carbon footprint.