Consequences of the RMI and the EU report on critical metals

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Abstract

The European commission, in autumn 2008, published the report the raw materials initiative - meeting our critical needs for growth and jobs in Europe (RMI). This report highlighted the EU dependence on raw materials for growth and competitiveness of European industry. The report defined 3 pillars:
(1) To ensure access to raw materials from international markets under the same conditions as other industrial competitors.
(2) To set the right framework conditions within the EU in order to foster sustainable supply of raw materials from European sources.
(3) To boost overall resource efficiency and promote recycling to reduce the EU’s consumption of primary raw materials and decrease the relative import dependence.

As a consequence of the RMI, two ad hoc groups of the Raw Materials Supply Group were tasked to advise the European Commission on critical raw materials and sustainable supply in EU. Reports from both groups were published during summer 2010. In the report on critical raw materials a list of 14 raw materials were listed as critical based on: 1) their significant economic importance for key sectors, 2) high supply risks, and 3) lack of substitutes. The report on sustainable supply concluded that efforts are required to improve the EU’s knowledge base of mineral deposits through better networking and making optimal use of the satellite-based information system GMES and especially highlighted the importance of understanding the subsurface geology of Europe in 3D. In October 2010 the communication on Europe 2020: Flagship Initiative Innovation Union was published by the Commission, which in order to enhance EU competitiveness, with focus on innovation, suggests seven areas where European Innovation Partnerships should be established. One of these areas is defined as Ensuring a secure supply chain and achieve efficient and sustainable management and use of non-energy raw materials along the entire value chain.
Collectively this means that Europe for the first time, at least since the early 1980’s, again has defined a platform for how to sustainably use its own non-energy raw materials, how a better framework for utilizing new Pan-European in situ resources can be achieved by improved RDI, legislation and cross-border cooperation using best practice.

This paper will address the possibilities and challenges this new political awareness can have in a globalized economy and the question how Europe can contribute to a sustainable development by fostering a sustainable supply of raw materials from European sources.

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