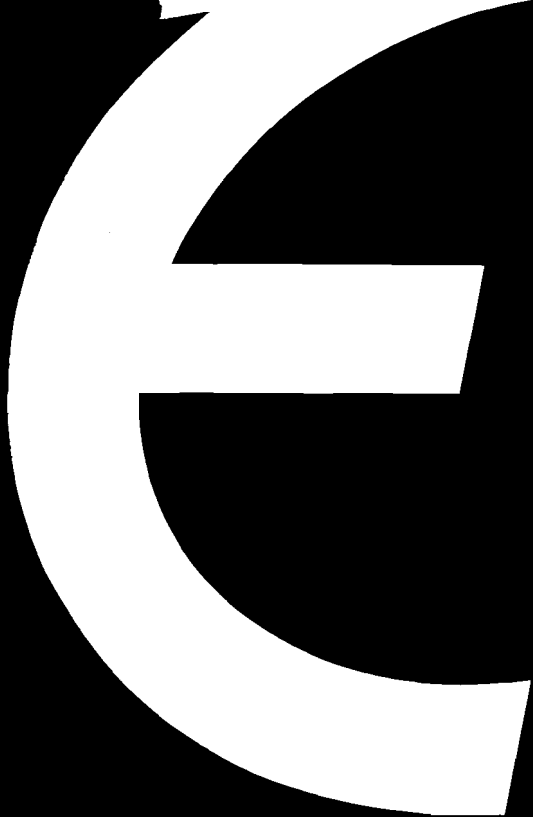


# The European Community and environmental protection



## European File

For too long economic growth was based on the belief that natural resources were free and inexhaustible. The need for ecological balance was scorned. Over-intensive and badly planned developments - whether urban, industrial or agricultural - wasted scarce resources and generated pollution and nuisances which threatened to damage our health and spoil our environment. But public awareness of the dangers has finally been aroused. The damage caused by oil slicks and acid rain has brought home the desperate need to preserve the environment. At the same time, the economic crisis has shown the absurdity of thoughtless waste of resources and raw materials. <sup>1</sup>

### **Why a Community policy?**

The need for a Community environment policy was proclaimed by the Heads of State or Government at their Paris Summit in October 1972. A first action programme, drawn up by the European Commission, was adopted in 1973, followed by a second in 1977. A third programme, to cover the period 1983-86, was approved in February 1983. The priority measures accepted by the Council of Ministers include the development of an environmental awareness in other Community policies; the carrying out of impact studies, before any decision is taken which might affect the environment; the prevention or reduction of atmospheric, water or soil pollution and nuisances; action against noise nuisances; the management of waste and dangerous chemical substances and processes; the promotion of clean technologies; the development of cross-frontier anti-pollution cooperation; the consideration of the special problems of the Mediterranean region and other sensitive areas of Community-wide importance; and cooperation with the Third World.

But why deal with the environment at European level?

- Firstly, because the European Treaties commit Member States to work together to develop their economies in harmony and to promote balanced and steady growth. In the modern world, this mission cannot be accomplished without a rational use of resources and without protecting the environment. Natural resources are both the foundation and limitation of economic and social development. They are the well-springs for the quality of life, without which economic advance is futile.
- Secondly, because the natural environment does not recognize frontiers. Industrial waste and polluted air-streams travel across Europe. Many lakes and water courses cross national boundaries. It would be pointless for one country to protect migratory birds, if they are massacred in the next country. The Community is not trying to assert central control over actions better organized at national or local level. But the Community is well placed to solve problems for which national action is too limited and action on a world scale is

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<sup>1</sup> This file updates and replaces our No 14/83.

frequently difficult to enforce. Joint action by the Community States can also strengthen their position at a wider international level. Moreover, exchanges between national experts and administrators, and joint or coordinated research encourage speedy progress, save money, and often obtain the quickest and best results.

- Divergent national environment policies could create anomalies which would impede the common market for goods and services. The establishment of differing standards prevents the free movement of goods. Varying financial burdens on business distort competition. A Europe-wide policy, on the other hand, helps to create a large market and to equip firms to deal with international competition.
  
- Environmental policy has a fundamental importance, independent of the vagaries of the economic climate. It aims to safeguard the potential for future development by preventing the despoilation of natural resources. But, at a time of recession, such a policy acquires a new importance. It can help the Community to accomplish a number of its major objectives: the reduction of unemployment by creating jobs and stimulating industries producing the latest equipment or using modern processes (it is estimated that 300 000 jobs were created in the Federal Republic of Germany in this way between 1975 and 1979); the sharpening of the competitive edge of the European economy by promoting new technologies and reducing direct and indirect costs caused by nuisance and waste; the elimination of obstacles to the use of energy sources other than oil; and the encouragement of the development of lesser-favoured regions, especially the Mediterranean region, affected by the enlargement of the Community.

### **Towards an overall prevention strategy**

The European environmental policy has three major objectives: to protect human health; to ensure the continued existence, in sufficient quantity and quality, of all resources on which life depends: water, air, open spaces, climate, raw materials, the urban environment and our natural heritage; finally, to preserve and, where possible, restore the natural environment and the habitats needed by both fauna and flora. The interdependence of these different resources means that the Community has to adopt a global strategy. Increasingly, this strategy must be one of prevention. The fight against pollution and the despoilation of scarce resources is less costly, more effective and more conducive to healthy economic development if environmental considerations are taken into account from the beginning of the planning and decision-making process. The need to incorporate environmental considerations in the planning and execution of all economic activities, whether agricultural, industrial or in the fields of energy, transport and tourism, is one of the most crucial of the new approaches to environmental protection. The Community must therefore encourage:

- The promotion of scientific research which will prepare the ground for the necessary action. Work already undertaken in Community laboratories and, jointly, in those of Member States, has included the study of air and water pollution and the treatment and use of wastes, the analysis of organic micro-pollutants, the detection of atmospheric pollutants and the study of their effect on humans, as well as research into chemicals, heavy metals and noise. Other work has been carried out on the protection of soils and agricultural resources and the management of towns and country parks. The Community's Joint Research Centre is studying the ecological impact of conventional power stations and certain chemical products. It is also working on agricultural resources and the teledetection of pollutants. Recent research subjects have included climatology and improved ways of forecasting the weather; the recycling of wastes and 'clean' technologies; the protection and management of the natural environment; the improvement of information services (especially data banks on chemical products); and general research into the interaction between people and their environment. In 1984, the Community budget gave about 18 million ECU<sup>1</sup> for research of this kind.
  
- The improvement of information, training and awareness of environmental problems. The European Commission publishes reports on the state of the environment, research findings, reports by documentation centres and experts and gives warnings of incidents of pollution which could affect surface waters or the atmosphere. It is launching a work programme, of an experimental nature, involving the collection and coordination of information on the state of the environment and natural resources within the Community. Areas which will be given priority treatment are habitats of key importance in nature preservation, acidic deposits and the environment of the Mediterranean. This project is expected to yield results of direct significance for the application of Community environment policy. It will also help to coordinate national and international data-collection and ensure that they produce coherent results at Community level. In addition, the Community organizes conferences for special interest groups (especially in industry). Close relations have been established with the non-governmental organizations which belong to the European Environment Bureau. Finally, an educational pilot programme, originally confined to primary schools, was extended to secondary schools in 1983. The programme will spread and test new methods of education of environmental problems. The Commission is studying the possibility of launching similar experiments in universities and professional training courses.
  
- The promotion of procedures which will ensure that environmental considerations are taken into account before decisions, likely to affect the environment, are taken. European directives on dangerous substances already lay down rules for authorization and examination before the substances are marketed. In addition, the Community is about to extend the scope of impact studies in such

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<sup>1</sup> One ECU (European currency unit) = about £ 0.62, Ir. £ 0.72 or US \$ 0.69 (at exchange rates current on 8 February 1985).

a way that planning permission for large industrial or infrastructural developments will in future be subject in all States to a prior study of its likely effect on the environment. <sup>1</sup> The Commission hopes to extend this process gradually to other public and private activities, such as changes in land use, programmes of economic and regional development and the introduction of new products, laws or technologies.

- The monitoring of the correct application of decisions already taken and the strengthening of the cohesiveness of Community and national environment policies. In addition to its research activities, the Community has implemented a number of legal steps in this direction. About 100 decisions have been made. They oblige Member States to draw up regulations in conformity with Community policy. The Commission keeps a close watch on the implementation of these rules and their adaptation in the light of technical advances or the emergence of new problems.
- The provision of financial resources. To reduce pollution and to prevent distortion of competition, the Community decided in 1975 that the polluter must pay the costs of preventing or removing the nuisance he has caused. But the European Commission has allowed, as a temporary measure under strict conditions, public aid for the suppression of pollution in an attempt to relieve the financial burden on industry at a time of recession. The Commission also hopes to see an increase in the funds already given by the Community over many years for the improvement of the environment from its agricultural and regional funds and, especially, through loans from the European Investment Bank.<sup>2</sup> Community ministers have already agreed to devote, between 1984 and 1986, 13 million ECU to demonstration projects on technologies which will pollute less and consume fewer raw materials as well as new technologies and methods for measuring the quality of the environment. The Community will also finance pilot projects intended to safeguard habitats of Europe-wide importance which shelter threatened species of birds.

European environmental policy has two major themes: the fight against pollution and nuisances and, increasingly, the improvement of our management of land, the environment and natural resources. It also has a significant international dimension.

### **The fight against pollution and nuisances**

- Cleaner water:** a number of European directives deal with the protection of surface and underground, fresh and salt water. Quality standards have been set

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<sup>1</sup> This impact is already taken into account in financing decisions taken by the European Investment Bank and other Community financial instruments.

<sup>2</sup> A variety of infrastructure projects have been financed, involving, notably, the treatment of waste, the cleansing of water and the improvement of city sites and coastal areas. The European Regional Development Fund has granted a total of 154 million ECU for projects of this kind since 1975 and the EIB has given loans totalling 1.5 billion ECU since 1958 (not counting investments linked to projects financed for other reasons).

for bathing water, drinking water, freshwater fisheries and water for the farming of molluscs and crustaceans. The discharge of dangerous substances, listed as 'black' or 'grey' according to their toxicity, must receive prior authorization and quantities and quality standards must be strictly controlled. Limits on dumping and quality guidelines for the aquatic environment have been fixed for mercury, cadmium and lindane. Other directives call for the control and gradual reduction of dumping of titanium dioxide which creates the 'red sludge' which destroys marine life. In addition, the Community has two procedures for exchange of information. One concerns the pollution of fresh water. The other aims to control and reduce pollution caused by oil spills. Further action is needed to protect water from pollution, especially in sensitive areas covered by international conventions to which the Community belongs: the Rhine, the North Atlantic, the North Sea and the Mediterranean.

- Pure air:** European directives limit atmospheric pollution by motor vehicles, the level of sulphur in heating oil and the lead content of petrol. Other directives set out quality objectives and pollution limits for sulphur dioxide and suspended particles. In the latter case, national monitoring services are linked by an information exchange procedure. In addition, the Community has ratified an international convention on long-distance cross-frontier pollution. Further action is needed to control the 'acid rain' which threatens human health, forests and our architectural heritage. With this in mind, the Council recently adopted a directive concerning the control of atmospheric pollution from industrial plants. In addition, the Council established quality limits for the presence of nitrogen dioxide in the atmosphere. Other priority objectives include the general introduction of lead free petrol, a substantial reduction in noxious emissions from motor vehicles and limits on pollution caused by large furnaces, such as those at power stations.
- Less noise:** European directives lay down methods for measuring noise and fix maximum levels for noise made by cars, lorries, motorcycles, tractors, sub-sonic aircraft, helicopters, lawnmowers, pneumatic drills and other building site machinery. Possible future subjects for research and action include the link between noise reduction and energy saving, the effect of machinery vibration on old buildings and the definition of physical indicators which would allow the evaluation of the level of sound in any one place.
- Better control of chemical products:** in 1982 the Community published the European Core Inventory, listing 34 000 chemical substances already on the market. It has launched a common procedure for the notification, evaluation and control of new chemical substances before they are marketed. Arrangements have been made for the classification and labelling of dangerous substances. A range of directives fix standards of biodegradability for detergents, and classification, packaging and labelling standards for pesticides, solvents and paints. The Community has also taken action to curb the use of dangerous substances: PCB, certain phytopharmaceutical preparations, the fluorocarbons used in aerosols which can damage the ozone layer around the Earth which

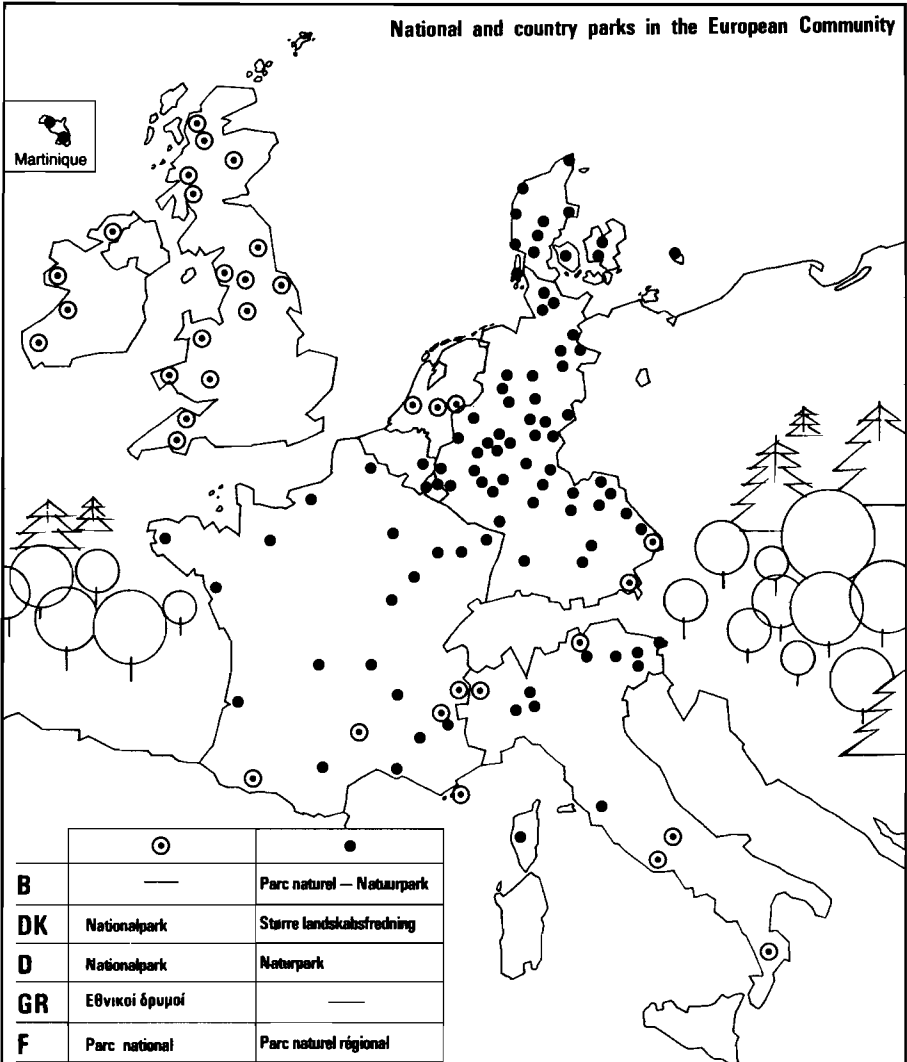
protects us from ultraviolet radiation. Other measures, drawn up after the Flixborough and Seveso accidents, aim to forestall the risk of accident associated with certain industrial activities and to limit their effect by laying down safety standards and contingency plans. The Community intends to intensify its efforts in this field by ensuring that the industry uses the best construction methods and safety techniques.

Alongside these specific measures, the Community is improving environmental coordination in order to prevent the transfer of pollution through piecemeal solutions. A notable initiative has been the creation of a list of the most threatened sites and ancient monuments as a first step towards a joint effort to halt the erosion of Europe's cultural heritage by pollution of various kinds.

### **The protection and management of land, the environment and natural resources**

- Rational management of land: land is one of the most limited and sought-after natural resources in the Community. The way it is used very largely determines the quality of the environment. Over 80% of the Community consists of agricultural land and forests. Protective action taken by the Community has included controlling the use of effluents from intensive animal rearing, the protection of plant species, studying the ecological impact of large drainage and irrigation schemes and limiting the use of pesticides, including an outright ban on a number of products. The Commission has published a number of reports on forestry policy, which must aim to strike a balance between the rational use of land and the traditional uses of forests. The problems of coastal areas, mountainous regions and nature reserves have been given special attention. At the same time, the Community has taken special measures under its agricultural policy to help the Mediterranean area, including grants for reafforestation and the improvement of soils. Similar help has been given to mountainous regions, where the preservation of a certain number of farms is vital to the protection of the environment. These efforts must be redoubled in order to protect the most threatened areas or preserve sites of particular ecological or natural importance. An action programme is soon likely to be launched to protect forests against fire and acid rain.
- The rational management of water resources: the future availability of water supplies is beginning to become a matter of concern in some areas. The Community is preparing reports on the total supplies available and underground water resources.
- The conservation of fauna and flora: the rich, genetic variety of nature is threatened by the growing scarcity and even the extinction of certain species. The Community has banned the importation of products from whales and other cetaceans, as well as from baby seals. It has adopted a directive protecting the habitats of 74 species of birds, limiting the hunting and sale of

# National and country parks in the European Community



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<b>B</b>	—	Parc naturel — Naturpark
<b>DK</b>	Nationalpark	Større landskabsfredning
<b>D</b>	Nationalpark	Naturpark
<b>GR</b>	Εθνικοί δρυμοί	—
<b>F</b>	Parc national	Parc naturel régional
<b>IRL</b>	National park	—
<b>I</b>	Parco nazionale	Parco regionale e provinciale
<b>L</b>	—	Parc naturel
<b>NL</b>	National park	—
<b>UK</b>	National park	—



Source: 'Protected areas in the European Community', Study published by the European Commission, 1988.



other species and forbidding capture on a large scale. More has to be done. A Europe-wide network of habitats must be identified and protected to guarantee the survival of the most threatened species. The increased financial resources agreed for the Community should allow a contribution to this work.

- The management of waste and the promotion of clean technologies: more than five million tonnes of solid waste are generated in the Community each day. This waste is a source of pollution, can be toxic and contains a variety of raw materials which have to be imported at considerable cost. The Commission will soon publish a report outlining global Community policy in this area. European procedures and standards have already been established for reducing and recycling waste, especially used oil and toxic or dangerous substances. The transportation of the latter from one member country to another is the subject of a recently adopted Community directive, setting out safety measures and a prior notification procedure which should prevent any repetition of the controversy which surrounded the shipment of barrels of dioxin from Seveso in 1983. Research programmes have also been launched to find ways of reducing the quantity of non-recoverable waste, promoting the recycling of urban and industrial waste and using the latter for agricultural or energy-generating purposes. Specific recommendations have been made on the reuse of old paper and cardboard, of which the Community is a large net importer. Since prevention is better than cure, the Commission is also drawing up an inventory and encouraging the spread of the best 'clean' technologies, which cause little or no pollution, generate less waste and consume less energy and raw materials. The Community has financed demonstration projects for new processes in this field.

### **Action at international level**

- Environmental problems go far beyond the frontiers of the Community, which is a signatory to a number of international conventions on the protection of fauna, flora, the atmosphere and fresh and sea water. The Community coordinates the position of its Member States in various international bodies. It exchanges information with countries throughout the world and has undertaken joint research programmes with a number of non-Community countries in Europe. These efforts must be intensified, especially in the conservation of scarce resources and in tackling the problems of the Mediterranean and the North Sea.
- Special mention must also be made of the Third World where environmental protection is increasingly seen as an essential pre-condition of lasting economic development. The Community and the European Investment Bank monitor the likely impact on the environment of the projects which they sponsor through grants or loans to Third World countries. In addition, the Community is intensifying its financial and technical aid to the struggles against desertification, the conservation of tropical forests, for better management of water

supplies and for the establishment of forms of agriculture and energy supply consistent with protection of the environment.



Community environment policy has achieved significant results over a comparatively short period of time. It is the intention of the European Commission to extend the policy, on the basis of research, analysis and detailed consultations, whenever Community action appears capable of filling a vacuum at national or international level. Commission proposals carefully weigh the economic and social considerations. In so far as it is possible, the precise cost and benefit of all planned actions are carefully worked out in advance. The different economic and ecological situations of the Member States are taken into account to avoid the creation of disproportionate burdens in the implementation of Community policy.

That being understood, the recession should be seen as an occasion for strengthening, not limiting, action to protect the environment. These efforts must be all-embracing and, increasingly in the area of prevention rather than cure. To achieve these aims the Community needs not only the support of its citizens but also their active involvement. Environmental policy must be seen as a public programme, which aims to foster a better balanced and more harmonious economic development and to involve ordinary people in its implementation. In short, its intention is to achieve a genuine improvement in the quality of life ■

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#### Commission of the European Communities

Information offices (countries fully or partially English speaking\*)

**Ireland** 39 Molesworth Street, Dublin 2 – Tel. 71 22 44

**United Kingdom** 8 Storey's Gate, London SW1P 3AT – Tel. 222 81 22  
– 4 Cathedral Road, Cardiff CF1 9SG – Tel. 371631  
– 7 Alva Street, Edinburgh EH2 4PH – Tel. 225 2058  
– Windsor House, 9/15 Bedford Street,  
Belfast BT2 7EG – Tel. 40708

**Australia** Capitol Centre, Franklin Street, PO Box 609,  
Manuka 2603, Canberra ACT - Tel. (062) 95 50 00

**Canada** Inn of the Provinces-Office Tower, Suite 1110, 350 Sparks Street,  
Ottawa Ont. K1R 7S8 – Tel. (613) 238 64 64

**USA** 2100 M Street, NW, Suite 707,  
Washington DC 20037 - USA – Tel. (202) 862-9500  
– 245 East 47th Street, 1 Dag Hammarskjöld Plaza,  
New York, NY 10017 - USA – Tel. (212) 371-3804

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\* Offices also exist in other countries including all Member States.

