

COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

COM(85) 86 final
Brussels, 19 March 1985

A EUROPE-WIDE ENVIRONMENT POLICY

(Communication from the Commission to the
European Council, 29 and 30 March 1985)

A EUROPE-WIDE ENVIRONMENT POLICY

1. The environment in which the citizens of the Community, and of many other parts of the world, live and work is deteriorating, in town and countryside alike. This is the more regrettable since the natural resources and facilities exist for making life better and more livable. Protection and improvement of the environment therefore must be a top Community priority.

2. The European Council acknowledged this need when it decided at its last meeting in Dublin to devote part of the next session to the subject of environmental protection.

3. Urgent action is imperative on several fronts.

(i) Air pollution from the burning of fossil fuels is causing the destruction of forests, the pollution of lakes, the erosion of buildings and of our architectural heritage, and, sometimes, hazards to human health.

(ii) Marine pollution is reaching alarming proportions in the Mediterranean and some areas of the North Sea. The absorptive capacity of the sea, where pollution discharged to water, air or land finally ends up, could be swamped if action is not taken soon.

(iii) The handling of dangerous chemicals has given rise to serious and tragic accidents in Europe and elsewhere. Though rare, these can be utterly devastating.

(iv) Modern farming methods sometimes cause grave ecological damage, even though agriculture, which has moulded the European landscape over centuries, still offers the best assurance of preserving landscape features.

(v) The scale of environmental deterioration in some parts of the Third World is such that they may well become permanently unable to support life: desertification, tropical deforestation and the loss of wildlife, and hence genetic diversity, are among the worst problems of all.

4. The seriousness of these problems is such that the Commission has given them prominence in the action programme it recently submitted to the European Parliament, in which it states its intention of laying before the Council a number of proposals concerning legislation, scientific and technical research, the orientation of common and national policies and the use of the financial armoury at the Community's disposal.

5. The Commission would like to see decision-making in this area of policy prompted and influenced by policy guidelines from the European Council. Without going into detail, it asks the European Council to endorse three main guidelines for Community environment policy:

(i) protection of the environment is to be treated as an integral part of economic and social policies both overall (at macro-economic level) and by individual sector (agricultural policy, industrial policy, energy policy ...), the point must be made that an active policy for the protection and improvement of the environment can help economic growth and job creation;

- (ii) Member States must recognize the necessity of coherent actions within the Community framework, since piecemeal and isolated action would risk to be ineffective and even harmful to the cohesion and continuity of its policies;

- (iii) signal the importance the European Council attaches to Community policy for the protection and improvement of the environment by deciding that the year 1987 will be the European Year of the Environment, and by inviting the Commission and Council to make every effort to ensure that the year is marked by major progress in the Community drive for the protection of the environment in Europe and the world.