

# POLLUTION KNOWS NO FRONTIERS



Europe  
on the Move



BeneLux Press

Oil spills . . . ozone depletion . . . dangerous chemicals . . . noxious air. The natural environment which forms the life-support system of our planet has never been at greater risk.

This in itself would be enough to demand a European Community response, but major disasters like Chernobyl have demonstrated once and for all that modern pollution respects no national frontiers. It makes sense to find common solutions to a common problem.

Action at EC level is part of the Community's responsibility to its own citizens and to the wider world – but it also lies at the heart of plans to create a single market by 1992.

Dirtier rivers, smokier air and car-clogged cities must not be the price of a faster-growing Europe with open frontiers. A harmonized European approach, moreover, is essential if different national environmental standards are not to be used as barriers to free trade.

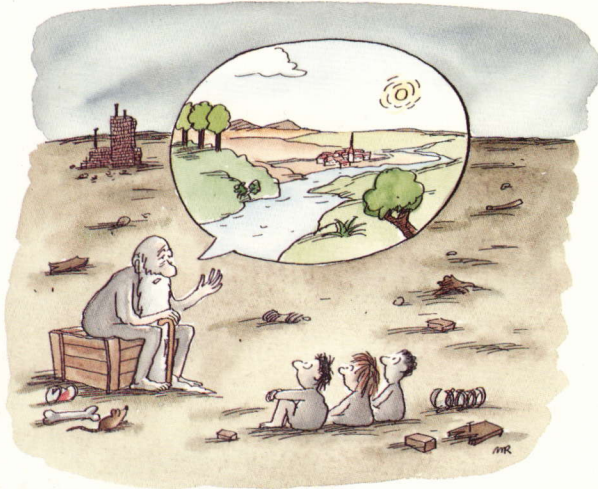
*'Our proposal is about man as part of nature, and not about man dominating nature. What we are trying to do is to find a better balance with the dominating influences of technostructures, while respecting the highest ethics and a suitable culture.'*

Jacques Delors,  
President of  
the European  
Commission

## AIR

The threat from air pollution was illustrated vividly in the early 1980s by the damage to forests caused by acid rain. But with car exhausts in some areas now accounting for 90 % of contamination in the air, the lesson of individual responsibility is increasingly being brought home.

Community policy has sought to set general air quality standards for dangerous substances such as sulphur dioxide, lead and nitrogen dioxide,



Mario Ramos

and product standards for gas, oil and petrol.

Thanks in part to pressure from the EC – notably the European Parliament – all Member States have now introduced lead-free petrol. Legislation has been passed which is expected to cut car exhaust gases such as carbon monoxides and nitrogen oxide by 60–70 % after 1992. And a political commitment has been entered into to stabilize CO<sub>2</sub> emissions at their 1990 levels by the end of the century.

## WATER

Community policy has been concerned to prevent the discharge of dangerous substances, and to set minimum standards for certain types of water.

Member States, for example, are required to comply with the 1980 drinking water directive which lays down values of more than 60 parameters. Separate measures have been introduced for bathing water, surface water, water for freshwater fish, and water for shellfish.

A particular priority of the Community has been the titanium dioxide industry, which has a tendency to dump its waste at sea or in river estuaries. Three directives have been adopted limiting discharges from this source.

Overall, more than 25 directives have come into force since the mid-1970s, adding up to one of the most comprehensive bodies of EC legislation on the environment.

## NOISE

Public opinion surveys confirm that noise is an environmental problem which Community citizens consider to be of the utmost importance.

All measures so far have been concerned with limiting the noise emitted by products, notably cars, aircraft, tractors, plant and machinery, lawnmowers and household appliances.

In the framework of the Community's social action programme, in 1986 a new directive aimed at protecting workers from noise and requiring employers to take action was adopted. In future, the Commission is likely to move beyond its traditional product-based approach to deal with overall noise quality, so that other noises for example would have to be taken into account when a machine is operating.

# CHEMICALS

Many chemicals are hazardous and toxic, highly mobile in the sense that they move quickly and freely once released, and persistent in that small quantities can do considerable damage to the environment and human health. EC rules put the onus on manufacturers and importers to supply information, among other things on the quantity of chemicals being produced, the uses to which they are being put, and ways of rendering the substances harmless. Existing chemicals have been put on a special Community inventory and those that are dangerous are gradually being classified and labelled as such. Attention has been focused on the biotechnology industry – one that holds the promise of great economic benefits in the 21st century but which could pose environmental problems if not carefully controlled. Directives have been adop-



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ted on the contained use of genetically modified micro-organisms.

# NUCLEAR SAFETY

Nuclear energy is seen by the Community as an essential resource for industrial development, and a means of limiting environmentally destructive carbon emissions from oil- and coal-fired power stations.

Nuclear power, though, is not without serious risks and it has always been a priority to ensure that it is produced in conditions of maximum public safety.

EC research into radiation has long been used as the basis for fixing permissible national levels for workers and the general public.

Member States, meanwhile, are legally bound to monitor radiation and report the results to the Commission, notably where new installations are concerned. And in the wake of the Chernobyl disaster maximum contamination levels for foodstuffs were established, and a rapid exchange system for radiological emergencies was introduced.

1

The cause . . .

2

. . . the effect?



*'Economics and ecology are in the same boat: there is no viable economic growth without fully and systematically taking the environment into account.'*

Carlo Ripa di Meana,  
Member of the  
European Commission

## NATURE CONSERVATION AND THE PROTECTION OF NATURAL RESOURCES

The growing pace of industrial and agricultural development increases the risks of serious soil and coastal erosion. The Community has made efforts to fight soil degradation and coastal decline, a particular priority of its current environmental programme.

A five-year action to combat forest fires and acid rain, for example, is currently coming to a close.

Protecting flora and fauna is of clear public concern and more than 600 species of wild bird (and their eggs, nests and habitats) are covered by Community legislation. The Commission, however, intends to go further and by the end of the century aims to establish a comprehensive network of protected natural and semi-natural habitats in the EC.

Other EC actions include the prohibition of whale imports for commercial purposes, successive bans on the import of seal-pup skins, and regulations on the protection and well-being of bred animals.

## WASTE MANAGEMENT AND THE PROMOTION OF CLEAN TECHNOLOGIES

Each year the EC produces 2 billion tonnes of waste, of which around 30 million tonnes can be classified as dangerous.

The Community's strategy has three key strands: waste prevention, waste recycling and safe disposal.

The Commission proposed a 'green' labelling scheme to help consumers identify environmentally-friendly products and packaging.

The Community has adopted special rules for the recycling of waste oils, waste paper, drink containers, used batteries and plastic waste.

National regulations governing the dumping of waste vary significantly – but the Community is determined to harmonize the rules and introduce measures which encourage the disposal of waste as near as possible to the place where it was generated.



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## AN INTEGRATED APPROACH

Measures to protect the environment will never work if they are considered in isolation.

The EC's environmental impact assessment directive – which came into force in mid-1988 – is the weapon which has given force to this important principle. It integrates ecological awareness into the wider planning and decision-making process in all sectors, but notably agriculture, the oil industry, energy, transport, tourism and regional development.

Under the EC's rules, certain categories of project – new crude oil refineries, thermal power stations and motorways, for example – must be subjected to this exercise.

## ENFORCING COMMUNITY LAW

EC legislation is all very well – but its effectiveness depends on the implementation and enforcement of national governments.

The Commission has therefore been devoting considerable time to identifying and rectifying the many deviations and omissions in national law, notably by starting infringement proceedings in the European Court of Justice.

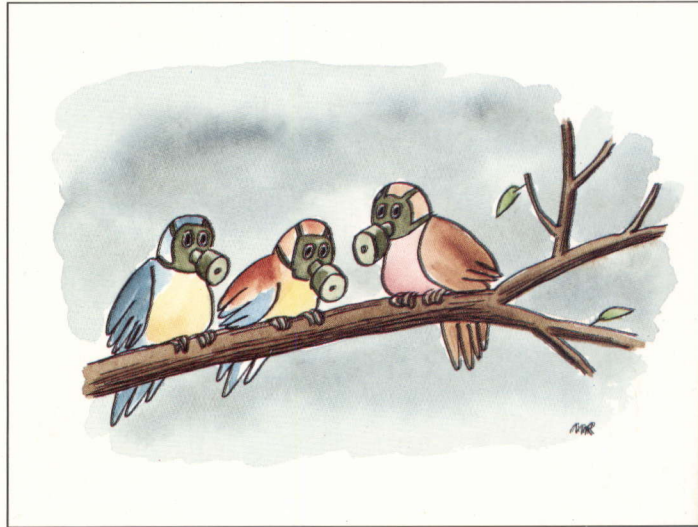
Public pressure also plays an important role in improving Member States' compliance records. The Commission now receives a large number of complaints from non-governmental organizations, local authorities, members of the European Parliament, local groups and private individuals.

In 1984 there were less than 11 submissions of this kind covering all EC directives; by the end of the 1980s the figure was running at about 460 per year.

## EUROPE'S ENVIRONMENT AGENCY

A major new mark of the Community's commitment was registered with the decision to set up a European Environment Agency.

Its task will be to provide objective and comparable data on the state of the environment in Member States, thereby providing a sound scientific basis for newly drafted Commission directives



Mario Romas

and enhanced authority for those trying to enforce existing ones.

Precise functions for the Agency have yet to be defined – but one aim of the Commission is that it will ultimately take over responsibility for running the 'green' label scheme designed to alert consumers to environmentally friendly products.



Eureka Slide

## FROM CURE TO PREVENTION

The Community's first environmental action programme in 1973 – and the second one in 1977 – listed a large number of essentially remedial measures as necessary at European level. But by 1983 the central principle that governs policy formulation today – namely that prevention is better than cure – was beginning to emerge.

Another key idea is the conviction that strict standards of protection are an economic as well as an environmental necessity – that given the 'greening' of consumers in the last few years EC

industry will not be successful until it gears itself up for the challenge of an increasingly polluted society.

It is thus at the core of EC thinking that directives should not be dismissed as red tape and additional costs; strict norms can and should be associated with economic growth and job creation.



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*Man must look after the world or there will be no world to look after.*



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