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## RATIONAL LAND USE : ITS ROLE IN COMMUNITY ENVIRONMENT POLICY

(Communication from the Commission to the Council)

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Rational land use : Its role in Community environment policy

A. Introduction

The paper assessing Community environment policy\* submitted for the Council's consideration highlights the importance of rational land management, and emphasizes the need for balanced distribution of human activities and land allocation which is compatible with the capacity of the environment. Rational land use is an important part of such a policy.

This Memo identifies certain specific problems concerning rational land use which make stronger action necessary, in the context of the common environment policy, in regard to the safeguarding and conservation of land.

Hitherto, policies for the safeguarding and conservation of land have been guided mainly by sectoral (in particular agricultural) considerations. This has not always made it possible to have an overall view of the problems in their totality as necessitated in the case of soil changes by the complex interactions between human activities and the environment.

Some proposals in this direction have already been issued in the context of Community environment policy. The Italian Memorandum of 1974 (supplemented in 1975) concerning the implementation of the European Communities' Environment Action Programme emphasized the prevention of soil erosion by maintaining appropriate types of farming. The German Memorandum of 1975 drew attention to the problems arising from the pollution of agricultural land by undesirable substances, fertilizers and organic waste spread on the land.

The Commission has carried out a lot of work on these aspects. It considers that the scope of its investigations should now be enlarged, and has identified a number of aspects concerning which, in its view, action at Community level would be appropriate :

- natural hazards
- misuse of land
- protected areas.

B. Prospects

I. Problems of rational land use in areas subject to natural hazards

The basic problem of these areas arises from the fact that their structure and physical balance are threatened by the effects of the natural phenomena to which they are exposed (erosion, flooding, landslides, erosion and drift of coastal deposits, etc.) particularly in extreme cases. This situation is often aggravated by the expansion of human activities, resulting in an increase in the number of people and property at risk and modifying the environment, generally placing it in a situation which is no longer in balance with the physical forces at play.

Problems to be solved

The safety of population centres and of property within areas exposed to natural hazards has been and remains the fundamental concern where these areas are concerned. Short-term constraints imposed by the pressures indicated above have often resulted in insufficient thought being given to development in the context of natural hazards. The need for a more comprehensive approach taking greater account of natural phenomena has now made itself felt, as has the need for management methods suitable for these areas, with a view to steering and containing their development.

The Commission thinks that a set of actions coordinated at Community level relating to areas subject to natural hazards could make a decisive contribution towards solving the problems in these areas in the Community, which will probably be even more acute after enlargement. Taking into account the natural hazards and the environmental protection considerations, such action would have three aims :

- 1) To expand operational knowledge of natural phenomena, their activation conditions, their inter-reactions, action zones

This first line of action should make it possible to determine the areas at risk, according to the significance of the hazards, and should make it possible to select priority areas.

With this aim in view, the Commission should intensify its research work, initiate new applied research work, and step up the work concerning the inventory of areas subject to natural hazards begun in the context of the ecological mapping project.

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2) To develop an appropriate management framework for areas exposed to natural hazards

The purpose of this line of action would be to establish guiding principles and to develop management and planning methods for the various types of area exposed to natural hazards. Where planning is concerned, the development of a methodology for programming and coordinating preventive and remedial action in relation to nuisance caused by natural phenomena should be given special attention, as should an assessment of the technical resources (structures, safeguarding and protection of land) and the defining of relevant criteria for deploying these resources.

Two problems should be the subject of special examination in this connection :

- a) the management of areas the situation of which as a result of development is seriously at odds with the principles concerning the management of areas exposed to natural hazards;
- b) the redevelopment and management of areas which have recently been hit by large natural disasters.

These are new areas for action as far as the Commission is concerned. It intends to make a contribution towards the work required in order to formulate these principles. It will examine the desirability of making proposals to the Council concerning the general application of these principles in the Member States and in Community policy.

3) To expand Community action in priority sectors or priority geographical areas

- a) Two types of general measures could be envisaged :

- to make the allocation of Community funds to regions exposed to natural hazards subject to the principles of sound management in these areas;
- to make it a condition of qualifying for these funds that work be carried out to prevent natural hazards and protect the land.

- b) Several types of special measures could be developed :

- sectoral measures, e.g. the Mediterranean forestry regulation\* to improve protection against erosion. Other measures of this kind (agricultural structural measures and infrastructure measures) could be taken in the context of specific plans for preventive and remedial action against natural hazards;

\* EEC Regulation 269/79, OJ L 38 14.2.79

- measures relating to particular geographical areas exposed to natural risks. These measures would be programmes relating to development and the prevention of natural hazards in line with the principles of environmentally sound management.

Special programmes for reorientation and the prevention of natural hazards could be established for areas in which the situation with regard to natural hazards is significantly at odds with the principles of environmentally sound management.

Special development and redevelopment programmes could be established for areas hit by large natural disasters.

- promotion of information and training, not only for planners but, in general, for all land users.

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The coordinated use of existing Community financial instruments will be required in order to implement these measures, but they are likely to be inadequate without independent funds for environmental protection measures.

It will be noted that these measures, in particular those referred to under (3), are likely to have a significant effect as regards job creation, particularly since the areas in question are mostly less-developed regions.

## II. Areas where the problems are due to the misuse of land

### 1) Soil pollution

One category of problems concerns areas in which land and the maintenance of its suitability are threatened by various types of pollution.

One threat concerns how the soil is affected by products which are not sufficiently environmentally safe and which can pollute if repeatedly used for various specific activities (certain products used in agriculture or for the maintenance of lines of communication).

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Another threat arises from the conditions under which certain products, including waste, are stored under the ground or above the ground where sealing conditions are inadequate. The re-use on agricultural land of certain types of organic waste also causes problems because of the undesirable substances which they contain (heavy metals). This concerns primarily sewage sludge but also livestock effluent.

The physical properties of soils can also deteriorate, sometimes to a considerable extent, in the case of certain types of soil, as a result of engineering plant and work carried out for the laying of pipes and energy transmission lines.

In addition, pollution may be transmitted to a great extent. This concerns certain air pollutants retained by vegetation and soil but also water pollutants. In this respect, attention should be paid to the quality of certain types of irrigation water, flood water in certain areas subject to flooding and certain types of runoff water (lines of communication subjected to treatment against snow and frost).

Some of these problems are already being examined within the Commission, e.g. the conditions under which livestock effluent and sewage sludge are used. This work should be stepped up in order to prepare, where appropriate, proposals governing the conditions under which certain products are used. This work should also be expanded to include the various problems mentioned, in the context of action specifically geared to the prevention of soil pollution. The first stage should be to make a more detailed assessment, following on from what has been outlined, in order to forestall the effects of several types of soil pollution occurring in the same area or a particular type of pollution affecting large areas of land.

2) Derelict areas (agricultural, industrial, urban)

- a) Abandoned farmland in the Community covers a considerable area. A study carried out by the Commission has estimated the size of this area as over 4 million hectares. The way in which such areas evolve from the point of view of the environment is closely connected with the local conditions. Where it has been possible to record the trends in these conditions they have proved to be varied, since sometimes they are favourable but at other times they are unfavourable particularly, in the areas exposed to natural hazards.

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This question, which is an important one because of the substantial total surface area affected in the various Member States, should give rise to two types of action at Community level : (a) action to assemble as much information as possible on the areas of land concerned, the classification of these areas from the point of view of the environment and the corresponding evolving trends, and (b) action along the same lines as that proposed for areas subject to natural hazards.

- b) Areas abandoned by declining industry as a result of the considerable amount of conversion that has taken place give rise to several problems : their influence on other areas of land as a result of the reorientation of activities, problems to do with waste, changes in the structure of the subsoil (extractive industries) and problems resulting from the temporary storage of waste.

The Commission already carries out large reconversion operations (e.g. ERDF, under Article 56 of ECSC Treaty etc.). In this context it will attach greater importance to procedures for restoring or redeveloping these areas of land in a way which is environmentally sound.

A second line of action would be to draw up a list of the areas in which such problems occur.

- c) Derelict areas in the centre of old towns are also problem areas which have a significant influence on land use since the decline of these areas pushes urban development to the outskirts of towns, causing an increasing loss of land hitherto used for other purposes.

These problems also may be important enough to appear to warrant support at Community level. The scope for assistance under existing financial instruments should be examined and, insofar as necessary, extended.

3) Built-up areas and infrastructure : Their influence on the land

The influence of areas which are built up or used by infrastructure, by reducing the quality of the land over large areas, affects the use of the land in question for other purposes. The problem in question arises not only because of the percentage of area covered but also as a result of the carving-up of the land which dismembers structures compatible with effective activity and a stable function.

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Without special action, situations of this kind not only result in a loss of agricultural land or natural areas but also reduce the regeneration capacity as a result of uses which exert greater pressure on the environment.

The public authorities which have attempted to remedy such situations and prevent them from developing have placed the emphasis on more extensive planning of development and infrastructure and on efforts to arrive at a more balanced distribution, e.g. as a result of the maintenance of open spaces.

The Commission could draw on the experience acquired at international level, in particular in the OECD context, and possibly add to this experience. It could also have recourse to specific instruments of Community action in order to define an intervention framework and, as a first step, promote a package of pilot operations in the areas where these problems are most acute (metropolitan areas).

It is evident that it should be possible to base Community measures to promote better land use on comparable information for the whole of the Community concerning the current state and value of land as a resource which is increasingly scarce in Europe. With this in view it is highly desirable to speed up work in progress on this subject at Community level.

C. Protected areas

Protected areas are of vital importance in the context of the conservation of natural resources. Protected areas fulfil multiple functions, sometimes simultaneously, ranging from the strict protection of certain biotopes essential to the conservation of fauna and flora, the protection of open spaces on the outskirts of urban areas for recreation purposes, to the protection of certain forests in order to preserve land and water.

The Commission has carried out an initial study of the various types of protected areas in the Member States in order to establish a common classification to provide a basis for comparison for Community action relating to protected areas (see ENV/202/80).

In regard to areas which are important for bird conservation work has been carried out in the context of the Directive on the Conservation of Wild Birds and the Council Resolution concerning Special Protection Areas. \*\*

\* 79/409/EEC.

\*\* Resolution of 2 April 1979.



The purpose of this work is to establish a coherent network of protected areas satisfying requirements regarding the protection of species and certain biotopes.

On the basis of information to be provided by the Member States, the Commission will prepare an inventory and propose the creation of protected areas capable of fitting into a wider network, where appropriate.

It is becoming increasingly obvious that the extinction of many species cannot be avoided in the long run unless more effort is made to preserve habitats. Future work should therefore focus on this aspect in particular in order to guarantee the protection of biotopes of Community importance on a permanent basis.

In order to attain this objective it will be necessary to pass legislation, inform the public and the circles concerned and deploy adequate financial resources at Community and other levels.

D. Particular considerations relating to coastal and mountain areas

There is an urgent need for action to safeguard and conserve land in two areas in particular : coastal areas and mountain areas.

Many and varied activities which are often difficult to reconcile are laying claim to an extremely limited amount of space in the coastal fringe and in the valley regions in mountain areas.

The coast is an important focal point for trade, it is affected by energy policy, mining policy and industrial policy, and it is a production area and a place for tourism.

With appropriate development, the mountains must guarantee the welfare of the local population, accommodate an increasing number of tourists from all areas of Europe and often also fulfil a transit function.

In addition, the natural ecosystems and coastal and mountain landscapes, which are already by their very nature very sensitive to external influences, have become increasingly rare because of the rapid development of these areas since the 50s.

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In addition, natural hazards (in particular coastal erosion, land movements, and flooding) are a permanent major constraint on the coast and in the mountains.

All the problems concerning land use are therefore particularly acute in these two types of areas; this makes rational management there more difficult than elsewhere.

The Council might therefore think it appropriate to focus efforts at Community level on a number of priority measures to be carried out in these problem areas. Because of the complexity of the inter-relationships between the many and varied factors which determine the way in which these areas evolve, these measures should, of course, fit into overall frameworks for action envisaged for the continuation of the Community measures already under way concerning coastal areas and mountain areas (see ENV/202/80).