

Brussels, 26 October 1976

No 38/76



THE ENVIRONMENT THREE YEARS ON:

EUROPE WAKES UP TO ITS SURROUNDINGS

X/601/76

This bulletin is published by the

Commission of the European Communities
Directorate General of Information
Rue de la Loi 200
B-1049 - Brussels - Tel. 735 00 40

Further information is available from the Commission's press and information offices in the countries listed on the back page.

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IN THIS ISSUE:

POLLUTION CONTROL

- I. Assessment of the dangers (p. 4)
- II. Water pollution (p. 4)
- III. Air pollution (p. 7)
- IV. Noise (p. 7)
- V. Waste (p. 7)
- VI. Chemical pollution (p. 8)
- VII. Science and the environment (p. 9)
- VIII. Economics and the environment (p. 9)
- IX. Information agreement (p. 10)

IMPROVEMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT

- I. Protection of the natural environment (p. 11)
- II. Protection of fauna (p. 12)
- III. Natural resources (p. 12)
- IV. European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (p. 13)

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

- I. International organizations (p. 14)
- II. International conventions (p. 14)
- III. Relations with non-member countries (p. 14)

CONCLUSIONS

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THE ENVIRONMENT: THREE YEARS OF COMMUNITY ACTION

The view of Brussels from the top of the Charlemagne building - where the Community's Council of Ministers takes so many decisions - or indeed from the neighbouring Berlaymont complex - where the European Commission does all the ground work - is an object lesson for any visitor interested in the environment: the constant stream of traffic, the distant Forêt de Soignes, a meadow (or is it?) beyond the rooftops and, last but not least, the Atomium, symbol of man's precarious control of technology.

The environment programme for the next five years put forward by the European Commission (see Euroforum No 21/76) is being discussed within the Council of Ministers at present. Euroforum feels that this is the moment to take a look at what the Community has achieved in the three years since it joined in the campaign to combat pollution and improve the environment.

POLLUTION CONTROL

I. Assessment of the dangers

To provide a sound basis for Community action, a great deal of research has been carried out to produce an objective assessment of the dangers that pollution presents to man and his environment. This has tended to concentrate on lead and its compounds, organohalogen and organophosphorus compounds, hydrocarbons with probable carcinogenic effects, sulphur compounds associated with suspended particles, oxides of nitrogen and carbon, photochemical oxidants, asbestos, vanadium, inorganic micropollutants and noise.

II. Water pollution

1. Fresh water

Outstanding progress has been made in the fight against fresh water pollution. Quality objectives have been defined, steps have been taken to control the discharge of dangerous substances and industrial pollution, and discussions on Community participation in international conventions have been held.

A. Quality objectives

1. Texts adopted

The Community's Council of Ministers adopted two directives on a proposal from the European Commission: one on surface water for the abstraction of drinking water (16 June 1975) and the other on bathing water (8 December 1975).

2. Proposals presented

On 31 July 1975 the European Commission sent the Council of Ministers a proposal for a directive on the quality of water for human consumption.

This was followed on 2 August 1976 by another on quality requirements for waters capable of supporting freshwater fish.

Finally, on 30 April 1976 the European Commission presented a proposal for a decision establishing a uniform procedure for the exchange of information on the quality of surface fresh water in the Community. This sets out to organize and promote a flow of information between pollution surveillance and monitoring networks so that the overall situation can be kept under review.

3. Work in progress

The European Commission, with help from a panel of national experts, is currently working on proposals for directives on the quality of water for use in farming, the protection of aquatic life in general, the quality of water for use in industry and measuring methods and sampling frequencies for surface waters for human consumption.

An analytical study of national experiments in this area has been carried out and a working party on water quality has had a preliminary exchange of views on the findings.

B. Dangerous substances

1. Text adopted

On 4 May 1976 the Community's Council of Ministers adopted a directive on pollution caused by certain dangerous substances discharged into the aquatic environment.

This introduces a system of prior authorizations for the discharge of a number of dangerous substances into the aquatic environment. Limit values and quality objectives are to be specified for a number of "black list" substances and programmes are to be devised to reduce pollution caused by certain "grey list" substances.

2. Work in progress

National experts are working with the European Commission on a proposal for a directive on the protection of underground water against pollution caused by the discharge of dangerous substances.

The first steps towards implementing the directive adopted on 4 May 1976 have resulted in the following "black list" substances being singled out for priority treatment: mercury, cadmium, aldrin, dieldrin and endrin.

C. Industrial pollution

1. Texts adopted

The Council of Ministers has not yet adopted either of the proposals for directives on polluting industries put before it by the European Commission.

It did however adopt a resolution on energy and the environment on 3 March 1975.

2. Proposals presented

As we have seen the European Commission has presented two proposals for directives in this area. One, transmitted on 20 January 1975, deals with pollution caused by wood pulp mills; the other, transmitted on 18 July 1975, relates to waste from the titanium dioxide industry.

The European Commission attaches great importance to these proposals. The volume of waste produced by these industries, and the quantity and nature of the pollutants present, seriously affects the quality and self-purification capacity of water.

3. Work in progress

The European Commission is studying pollution caused by the iron and steel industry, the petrochemical industry, the food industry and tanneries.

In response to the Council's resolution on energy and the environment the Commission, with help from national experts, is also investigating the biological effects of water cooling and studying cooling systems in power stations.

D. International Conventions

1. Draft convention on the protection of international watercourses against pollution

Negotiations on this draft have been in progress under the auspices of the Council of Europe since 1967. The Community's Permanent Representatives Committee has agreed in principle to Community participation and approved the texts of articles to be incorporated into the convention to make this possible.

2. Convention for the protection of the Rhine against chemical pollution

On 20 September 1976 the European Commission presented the Council of Ministers with a draft decision on the conclusion by the Community of a convention for the protection of the Rhine against chemical pollution and an additional agreement to the Berne Convention which would allow the Community to participate in the work of the International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine against Pollution. The European Commission has been attending meetings of the International Commission as an observer since 1973.

2. Sea water

1. Texts adopted

We have already discussed the directive on pollution caused by certain dangerous substances discharged into the aquatic environment adopted by the Community's Council of Ministers on 4 May 1976. All we need say here is that it applies to sea water too.

On 3 March 1975 the Council of Ministers agreed that the Community as such should participate in the Paris Convention on the prevention of marine pollution from land-based sources. The Convention was signed by all countries bordering the North-East Atlantic, and by the Community, on 23 June 1975.

The Council of Ministers also authorized the Community to sign the "Barcelona Convention" on the protection of the Mediterranean against pollution and a protocol on the prevention of the pollution of the Mediterranean by dumping from ships and aircraft. Signing took place on 13 September 1976.

2. Proposals presented

On 12 January 1976 the European Commission transmitted a proposal for a directive on the dumping of wastes at sea to the Community's Council of Ministers.

3. Work in progress

The European Commission intends to present a proposal to the Council of Ministers in the near future for a directive on quality requirements for waters in areas where shellfish are cultivated.

The European Commission is also participating in the work of various agencies responsible for administering international conventions:

- (a) In the case of pollution from land-based sources, the European Commission participates, on behalf of the Community, in all the committees and specialized working parties set up under the Paris Convention. In this context it has undertaken a joint study with Belgium to catalogue and analyse surveillance and monitoring systems for substances on the "black list".
- (b) In the case of pollution caused by the deliberate dumping of wastes, the European Commission is an observer at meetings of the Commission responsible for implementing the Oslo Convention.
- (c) In the case of marine pollution resulting from exploitation of the sea bed, the European Commission is participating in the work of a special working party set up under the Paris Convention to devise measures to deal with pollution caused by drilling rigs. It is also involved as an observer in the follow-up to the 1973/75 London Conference on safety and pollution problems associated with exploitation of marine mineral resources in North-Western Europe; one working party is dealing with civil liability for this form of pollution. The European Commission is also taking a keen interest in work being done in this area in connection with the Third UN Conference on the Law of the Sea.

III. Air pollution

1. Texts adopted

In May 1974 the Community's Council of Ministers adopted a directive on air pollution by exhaust gases from motor vehicle engines. This was followed in June 1975 by a decision establishing a common procedure for the exchange of information between surveillance networks monitoring air pollution caused by certain sulphur compounds and dust. In November it adopted a directive on the approximation of national laws on the sulphur content of certain liquid fuels.

2. Proposals presented

In April 1975 the European Commission submitted two proposals for directives, one on biological standards for lead, the other on air quality standards for lead. In December of the same year it presented two more. The first dealt with the emission of pollutants from diesel engines for use in wheeled agricultural or forestry tractors, the second with the use of fuel-oils with the aim of reducing sulphurous emissions. In February 1976 it transmitted proposals for a resolution on the determination of criteria and a directive on health protection standards for sulphur dioxide and suspended particulate matter in urban atmospheres.

3. Work in progress

In addition to its work on the objective assessment of the dangers of pollution, the European Commission - in response to the Council resolution on energy and the environment - is continuing work on the development of measuring methods for nitrogen oxides, the supply of low-pollution fuels and the development of desulphurization and other processes which would reduce pollution by SO₂.

IV. Noise

1. Proposals presented

The European Commission has transmitted a whole series of proposals for directives on permissible noise levels to the Community's Council of Ministers. They cover motor vehicles, pneumatic concrete-breakers and jackhammers, tower cranes, certain types of current generators for welding and for power supply, motorcycles and subsonic aircraft.

The European Commission has also proposed a method for measuring noise emissions from constructional plant and equipment which could serve as a basis for all Community rules in this field.

2. Work in progress

The European Commission is pressing ahead with directives on noise levels for domestic appliances and lawn mowers and the limitation of light aircraft movements.

Studies on noise pollution by power station cooling towers, called for in the Council's resolution on energy and the environment, are in hand.

V. Waste

1. Texts adopted

Three directives have been adopted by the Community's Council of Ministers: one on the disposal of waste oils came into being in June 1975, one on wastes in July 1975 and one

on the disposal of polychlorinated biphenyls and polychlorinated terphenyls in April 1976.

In June 1975 the Council of Ministers adopted a programme on the management and storage of radioactive waste.

2. Proposals presented

In July 1976 the European Commission sent the Council a proposal for a directive on toxic and dangerous waste. This makes provision for a system of prior authorizations for waste disposal and includes measures to promote recycling and processing.

3. Work in progress

A panel of national experts has been set up to examine the gaps in scientific and technical information about primary and secondary raw materials and draw up a multiannual research programme.

The European Commission has carried out numerous studies on waste disposal and recycling. A waste management committee is to meet shortly to discuss the findings of these studies, particularly those on waste paper, discarded vehicles and agricultural wastes.

The European Commission is also planning to organize a meeting between the directors of the "waste exchanges" which have been established in a number of Community countries to discuss experience gained in this field.

Implementation of the programme on the management and storage of radioactive waste is continuing with the help of a special management committee.

VI. Chemical pollution

1. Texts adopted

The Community's Council of Ministers has adopted directives on detergents, on methods of testing the biodegradability of anionic surfactants, and on the marketing and use of certain dangerous substances and preparations.

2. Proposals presented

The European Commission has submitted four proposals for directives to the Council of Ministers. They deal with ceramic articles intended to come into contact with food; the classification, packaging and labelling of paints, varnishes, adhesives and similar products; the classification, packaging and labelling of pesticides; the marketing of EEC-approved plant protection products; and the banning of certain pesticides. A fifth proposal would amend the 1967 directive on the classification, packaging and labelling of dangerous substances to ensure that every new substance is investigated before it is placed on the market to assess its effect on man and the environment. A file giving the results of this study would be compiled by the manufacturer or the firm marketing the substance and copies supplied to the national authorities and the European Commission. The proposal, which also indicates how files are to be processed, is an important step in the campaign against chemical pollution.

3. Work in progress

Following the Seveso disaster, the European Commission is currently considering appropriate action to rule out the possibility of accidents of this kind happening again.

VII. Science and the environment

A. Research

1. Action taken

In February and May 1973 the Council of Ministers approved a number of Community research projects to be carried out at the Joint Research Centre's Ispra establishment. The cost of the programme, which covers the period from 1 January 1973 to 31 December 1976, is put at 15.85 million units of account (1 u.a. = approx. US \$1.1).

In June 1973 it adopted a first environment research programme. This cost 6.3 million u.a. and covered the period from 1 January 1973 to 31 December 1975.

In March 1976 the Council approved a new multiannual research and development programme on the environment covering the period from 1 January 1976 to 31 December 1980. A total of 16 million u.a. and a staff of ten have been allocated to the programme.

2. Action proposed

In May 1976 the European Commission sent the Council of Ministers a proposal for a multiannual research programme (1977-80) to be carried out by the JRC. One project relates to the environment and resources.

3. Work in progress

The European Commission notifies Community countries at regular intervals of research findings under environmental programmes conducted at the JRC's Ispra establishment or contracted to national research organizations.

B. Dissemination of information

1. Action taken

In December 1975 the Council of Ministers approved a common procedure for compiling and updating an inventory of Community sources of information on the environment.

2. Work in progress

The European Commission is working on the inventory, which should be available by the end of the year. Practical arrangements are being made in close collaboration with the Member States and representatives from the International Referral System (IRS) being developed by the United Nations Environment Programme. The European Commission will be forwarding a proposal to the Council of Ministers in the near future to allow of Community participation in the running of the United Nations system.

With the advent of EURONET, the European information network, well-planned information services will be essential. For this reason the European Commission is studying data banks specializing in environmental matters (legislation, analysis of pollution control technology, conference information).

VIII. Economics and the environment

1. Texts adopted

In March 1975 the Council of Ministers adopted a recommendation on cost allocation and action by public authorities on environmental matters.

2. Work in progress

A panel of national experts set up at its suggestion in 1972 is helping the European Commission produce a proposal for a Council recommendation to the Member States on the assessment of pollution control costs in industry. The proposal should be ready for transmission to the Council of Ministers in the near future.

The same panel has begun to discuss a Commission working document on rules to be applied to state aids granted to industry for environmental purposes when the present arrangements expire in 1980.

Some aspects of the "polluter pays" principle have also been discussed, notably the problem of pollution chains and the incorporation of ecological considerations in other policies.

IX. Information agreement

Under the information agreement on the environment, the European Commission is notified on a regular basis of rules and regulations to be adopted by the nine Community countries.

By July 1976 the European Commission had received 147 notifications.

	Planned measures	Measures in force	International agreements	Other	Total
Belgium	1	3	1	-	5
Denmark	1	24	4	-	29
France	26	6	3	6	41
Germany	28	2	2	2	34
Ireland	2	-	-	-	2
Italy	4	-	2	-	6
Luxembourg	1	-	-	-	1
Netherlands	6	17	-	-	23
United Kingdom	6	-	-	-	6
Total	75	52	12	8	147

Of these 44 related to water pollution, 24 to air pollution, 14 to waste, 18 to noise, 12 to international agreements, the remaining 35 being general or miscellaneous provisions.

IMPROVEMENT OF THE ENVIRONMENT

I. Protection of the natural environment

1. Text adopted

In April 1975 the Community's Council of Ministers adopted a directive on mountain and hill farming and farming in certain less-favoured areas.

When it met on 7 November 1974, it asked the European Commission to classify Community territory on the basis of its environmental characteristics as a preliminary to identifying objectives and formulating action.

2. Proposal presented

In February 1974 the European Commission forwarded a proposal to the Council for a directive on the encouragement of afforestation schemes designed to improve agricultural structures.

3. Work in progress

The European Commission is working on the development of a mapping system to present consolidated data on the natural environment as an aid to planning the use of space. It is also preparing proposals on rural areas, urban spaces and coastal areas.

- (a) Work on the classification of Community territory began immediately following the Council's request.

Initially the European Commission is endeavouring to establish what data on environmental characteristics are available nationally and whether any experiments have been conducted along the lines envisaged by the Community project.

- (b) For rural areas, the European Commission has produced an inventory of the known ecological effects of modern production techniques in agriculture as a preliminary to filling in the gaps. The areas investigated include misuse of pesticides, intensive use of certain fertilizers, intensive stock breeding, modern methods of cultivation and the impact of land improvement schemes.

On pesticides, the findings pointed to the advisability of a ban on persistent organochlorine insecticides and organo-mercury fungicides and the introduction of an approval system for the most dangerous pesticides. The European Commission presented proposals to this effect to the Council of Ministers in July and August.

On fertilizers, available information proved to be incomplete and supplementary studies will be necessary.

A number of studies on intensive stock breeding are under way. One is investigating maximum permissible densities per hectare, another involves a comparative study of national legislation while a third is examining health protection requirements for organic wastes returned to the soil.

Two studies on modern methods of cultivation are in hand; the first deals with the ecological impact of land improvement schemes, the second with the consequences in terms of output of restrictions imposed to protect the environment.

The European Commission is also looking into the ecological consequences of cultivated land being abandoned. This includes an inventory and classification by type of cultivated land.

In the field of quality foodstuffs, studies have been produced on the feasibility of developing high-quality agricultural products and devising a production system that would give better tasting fruit. Similar studies are in hand for pigmeat and

poultrymeat.

A preliminary feasibility study on the development of biological and integrated methods of crop protection to replace conventional methods involving the intensive use of pesticides has been completed. This was backed up by a study on an "integrated control" fruit-growing system.

- (c) The findings of the study of environmental problems of city centres will shortly be submitted to a panel of national experts, who will decide on possible Community measures.

The study of national urban development policies should be ready by the end of the year. In the same context the European Commission will shortly present the Council of Ministers with a proposal for a two-year research programme on the development of large conurbations. It is probable that the "concerted action" formula will be adopted, research being conducted and financed by the Member State and coordinated by the Community.

Finally, studies on the development and ecological management of coastal areas and on the protection of open spaces and the countryside are nearing completion.

II. Protection of fauna

Work in progress

Over the last two years the European Commission has investigated a number of problems associated with the protection of migratory birds and some animal species threatened with extinction. Proposals are now being prepared and should reach the Council of Ministers by the end of the year.

The Washington Convention on international trade in endangered species of wild flora and fauna came into force on 1 July 1975. By 1 July 1976 twenty-six countries, including one Community country, had ratified it; the other eight are expected to ratify in the next few months.

Discussions have already been held with national experts to ensure uniform application of the Convention within the Community. In this connection priority is to be given to identification and marking of specimens, import and export permits, introduction of marine species and registration of permits issued.

III. Natural resources

Work in progress

The European Commission has received the final report on the Community's water resources. The report, which will shortly be referred to a panel of national experts, shows that, with the exception of drought years such as 1976, the Community has enough water but that it is unevenly distributed between the different geographical regions.

On 4 November 1974 the Council of Ministers asked the European Commission to identify minimum water requirements and classify Community territory on this basis. This is now being done with the aid of national experts.

A study of mercury, which covers world resources, geochemistry, pollution, production, consumption and future world and Community requirements, is being published.

Studies of total resources of platinumoids, chromium, fluorine, phosphorus, tin, lead and fluorine- and phosphate-bearing ores have been completed.

IV. European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

1. Texts adopted

The Council of Ministers has adopted three regulations; the first set up the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, the second contains financial provisions applying to the Foundation, and the third lays down conditions of employment for the Foundation's staff.

2. Proposals presented

The European Commission has sent the Council of Ministers two proposals for decisions appointing the members of the Committee of Experts attached to the Foundation and laying down rules of procedure for its Administrative Board.

To maintain a proper balance between the two aspects of the Foundation's work - in other words, working conditions and living conditions - the European Commission has already proposed an amendment to the regulation setting up the Foundation to create a second Deputy Director post.

3. Work in progress

The Administrative Board of the Foundation met for the first time in Dublin on 6 and 7 May 1976. The general policy to be adopted by the Foundation and its programme for 1977 were discussed.

It was decided that the Foundation will concentrate on job engineering, with particular reference to the humanization of working conditions; on problems peculiar to certain categories of workers: young school and university leavers, people approaching retirement, immigrants and so on; and on certain subjects common to living and working, notably the problem of time (for instance the relation between working hours and leisure time).

In accordance with the express wish of the Council of Ministers the Foundation's function will be to seek out experiments worth promoting rather than to conduct general studies.

4. Public awareness and education

Work in progress

The European Commission has continued its efforts to get the man-in-the-street actively involved in environmental problems, backing up campaigns mounted by the individual Community countries.

It has also continued to cooperate with non-governmental organizations, notably the European Environment Bureau.

The European Commission will shortly be meeting representatives of primary schools in the nine Community countries to discuss the creation of a network for the exchange of experience acquired in environmental studies for 9 to 14 year-olds. The network will be used to test the first information booklets on specific areas of environmental protection now being prepared with teachers in mind. The European Commission has also helped financially with the organization of summer schools running courses on basic environmental problems.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

I. International organizations

The nine Community countries and the European Commission regularly concert their positions in preparation for meetings held by the international organizations dealing with environmental problems (OECD, Council of Europe, the World Health Organization, UNESCO ...). The European Commission works in close collaboration with the secretariats of these organizations.

II. International conventions

Joint action by the Community and the nine member countries was crowned with success in the area of water pollution. Adoption by the Council of Ministers on 4 May 1976 of a directive concerning pollution caused by certain dangerous substances discharged into the aquatic environment of the Community paved the way for progress on the formulation of a draft convention for the protection of the Rhine against chemical pollution. We have already seen that the European Commission has sent the Council of Ministers a proposal on the conclusion by the Community of the Convention on the protection of the Rhine against chemical pollution and another on an additional agreement to the Berne Convention providing for Community participation in the work of the International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine against Pollution.

We have also mentioned the fact that the European Commission took part in the negotiations which led to the conclusion of a Convention on the Protection of the Mediterranean against pollution and a Protocol on the prevention of pollution of the Mediterranean by dumping from ships and aircraft.

As regards implementation of the Helsinki Agreement, the European Commission helped to formulate a Community position at the final session of the Economic Commission for Europe.

The European Commission was present as an observer at the Conference on Human Settlements organized by the United Nations in Vancouver. It also took part in the preparatory work for the United Nations Conference on Water to be held in Argentina in March 1977.

III. Relations with non-member countries

Relations with non-member countries have developed significantly during the last few months. Technical cooperation arrangements have existed between the European Commission and the US Government since July 1974. Similar arrangements have been made with the Canadian and Swiss Governments and agreed in principle with the Japanese Government. An exchange of letters setting out the form of such cooperation with Japan will take place before the end of the year.

In the context of the Euro-Arab dialogue, the European Commission is chairing a specialized group from the European side on the marine environment and the development of coastal areas. The group hopes to formulate joint projects to be carried out in the Arab countries.

Under the 1973 information agreement on the environment, the European Commission has been notified of agreements reached between certain member and non-member countries.

CONCLUSIONS

Much has been achieved in the field of environment protection at national and Community level in the last three years: 130 bills have been drafted in the Member States and fifty are already in force.

At Community level, the Council of Ministers has approved twenty texts while another twenty are still pending.

Quite apart from their intrinsic political and legal value these texts, by reason of the preparatory work involved, the discussions they have sparked off and the implementing measures which follow them are setting a headline for a Community-wide movement, the importance of which hasn't really hit home as yet.

The fact of working together, in the context of international organizations or conventions, is another important factor in producing a consensus in favour of more attention being paid to the environment when economic development programmes are being implemented. Little by little a "European awareness" of the environment is developing.

There is no doubt that adoption by the Council of Ministers of the 1977-81 action programme will enable the Community to keep up the good work of the last three years for the benefit of present and future generations.

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