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NEW ACID RAIN LEGISLATION PROPOSED

The European Commission has published proposals aimed at halving existing levels of air pollution caused by large combustion plants in Europe.

The draft Directive would force plants to cut sulphur dioxide (SO₂) emissions by 60%, suspended particle emissions by 40% and nitrogen oxide (NO_x) emissions by 40% by 1995.

Large combustion plants are currently responsible for an estimated 80% of all SO₂ emissions and 40% of all NO_x emissions. Both chemical compounds are key components in the acid rain that is destroying Europe's forests, farmland and architecture.

Damage from acid rain in Europe is currently estimated at between US\$1.4 and US\$4.2 billion a year, according to the European Commission.

Under the EC plan emission standards would be set from 1985 for all new combustion plants with a thermal rating of over 100MW. Plants in the 50-100MW range would have an additional five years to comply with the regulations.

EC member states would be expected to draw up programmes for the progressive reduction of emissions and new plants would be subject to a system of national licensing.

Backing for the plan has come from the European Parliament. Voting in favour of a report on acid rain compiled by Dutch Socialist MEP Hemmo Muntingh it said that the Commission should undertake a massive anti-acid rain programme that would halve air pollution in Europe over the next five years.

The MEPs also want the Commission to intensify negotiations with the Eastern bloc countries, who may be responsible for between 15% and 20% of the acid rain currently affecting the European Community.

But the Parliament was not quite unanimous in its condemnation of acid rain. Scottish European Democrat MEP Alisdair Hutton claimed that it had actually increased agricultural productivity in his constituency, which suffers from alkaline soil.

"INTEGRATED" DEVELOPMENT PLAN FOR POOREST REGIONS

Aid to underdeveloped regions calls for a systematic approach. What is needed is an overall strategy to minimize overlapping and wasted effort. Preparatory studies on integrated development operations have been supported by EC funding since 1982.

Poor areas often suffer from a number of inter-related handicaps - industrial decline, an exodus of young people, a lack of infrastructure etc. This is why integrated plans comprising a systematic coordination of public and private investment are needed. National development funding must also be coordinated with EC finance from the Regional Development Fund, the European Investment Bank and so on.

Preparatory work plays a key role in the operation. The Community has spent about £1.37/IR£1.75 million on twenty preparatory studies for integrated development operations. Four are located in Italy (Puglia, Campania, Latium and Naples), two in Greece (Epirus-Thessaly and Kozani), one in the mining district of Lens and Arras in France, one near Liège in Belgium, and one near Groningen in the Netherlands. Six others are located in the United Kingdom: in Wales, the Strathclyde region, the Scilly Isles, Merseyside, Humberside and Belfast.

The newest allocation of £328,000/IR£420,000 is now to fund five more studies in France: in the department of Ariège, the North Massif Central, the North Pas-de-Calais, the South of Aveyron, the East of Tarn and the steel area of Northern Lorraine.

Amongst the five, it is the plan for the North Lorraine steel basin that provides the clearest example of what the programmes are up against. The region has traditionally depended on the steel industry and iron ore mines. Both industries have been decimated by the recession. Between 1975 and 1982 the area lost 37,000 jobs and 7.7% of its population.

The main objectives of the plan are to provide solutions to the problems and create the conditions for longterm recovery. After a detailed examination of the economic situation, priorities will be fixed and a final report presented listing projects, details of how to finance them and a timetable for their completion. 75% of the cost of the five studies will be met by the Community and 25% by the French government.

WOMEN IN EUROPE - REPORT PUBLISHED

"Things are going from bad to worse for women - the principal victims of the recession", according to European Social Affairs Commissioner Ivor Richard. Speaking at a European Parliament debate in Strasbourg on "The Situation of Women in Europe", he said that the European Commission intended to keep fighting alongside the European Parliament for equal opportunities for women.

After initial advances the movement towards female emancipation has run out of steam. The recession is slowly eating away at the gains of the past and bygone victories are being jeopardized. The symptoms are alarming: unemployment among women and in particular young women is rising sharply, social outlay is falling, public spending cuts mean fewer jobs and new technologies are posing a direct threat to traditional female job markets. Women are still discriminated against and rarely achieve prominence in business, unions and political parties.

The European Commission has consistently backed the fight for women's equality in Europe. But as Ivor Richard points out, it does not have sufficient powers to impose its views on the member states.

The fact is that national governments have shown little inclination to introduce the principle of equal opportunity into their national legislations. Some have even encouraged women to stay at home, rather than increase the number of unemployed. Two reports have now been published on the EC's 1982-85 programme on the promotion of equal opportunities and application of the Directive on equal treatment in matters of social security. The results of the latter are not impressive.

European governments have made few changes in existing legislation, with the exception of a new law in France and new national committees for the promotion of equal opportunities in most EC countries, with the exception of the Federal Republic of Germany. On the other hand they have decided to introduce a number of positive measures, particularly in the form of special training programmes for women, specialist advisors on equal opportunities in employment offices and information campaigns. But a lot remains to be done, according to Mr Richard.

WOMEN (Contd.)

Praising the work accomplished by the members of the Committee of Enquiry into the situation of women in Europe, Mr Richard said that the Commission and the Parliament were moving in the same direction. Now it was up to the Council of Ministers and national governments to follow suit, he said.

The Committee of Enquiry, led by Italian Communist MEP Maria Lisa Cinciari Rodano, was presenting the result of two years' work, in the form of a 600 page report. It covered 18 specific themes and dealt with a wide variety of aspects of women's lives. Subjects included: health, employment, political representation, the rights of migrant workers and women in the Third World.

The main objectives of the motion for a resolution are listed in 99 points divided up into eight chapters. They include a defence of existing gains in the field of equal job opportunities for women, the creation of new jobs for women and increased political, cultural and social participation. The Committee also wants the new Parliament to introduce a permanent Committee for women's rights.

WOMEN UNDER-REPRESENTED IN UNION HIERARCHY

Women are now unionized to about the same extent as men. But despite changes in recent years, few of them ever become shop stewards or union officials, according to a report just published by the European Trade Union Institute (ETUI).

Throughout the Seventies the number of women as a proportion of the total workforce increased steadily in most EC countries, changing the composition of unions. But the trend slowed at the beginning of the Eighties, partly because of the economic crisis and partly because of government cutbacks in the public sector, traditionally a major source of female employment.

Traditions of union membership vary widely in different EC countries. But it tends to be greater in the northern countries. In the EC Denmark and Ireland have the highest rate of membership. But attitudes are changing fast. Campaigns have been set up in the Netherlands, Denmark, the U.K. and the Federal Republic of Germany aimed at encouraging women to play a more active part in running their unions.

BORDER CLASHES INCREASE PRESSURE TO CUT RED TAPE

When a group of townspeople from Filton in the West of England set out to take a small travelling exhibition depicting their way of life to their "twin" town of Witzhausen in the Federal Republic of Germany, a web of red tape was waiting for them.

Customs officers at Ostend insisted that they should present a £50 Chamber of Commerce ATA carnet to prove that they were not planning to sell the exhibition (which mainly consisted of photos of Filton's aerospace industry) to avid German buyers. Failing that, said the customs officials, they could leave a £5000 deposit ... !

Hours of argument, threat and counter-threat eventually resulted in the exhibit being allowed to pass, "just to get rid of it", according to Filton Euro-MP Richard Cottrell.

The delegation might have been luckier than it knew. British salesman Simon Cohen claims that he was "kicked down the stairs" by a customs officer at a Franco-Belgian border post, during an altercation over a Chamber of Commerce ATA carnet that specified a different border crossing point.

He reported the incident to the Belgian police and asked his MEP to make representations to the Belgian government and the European Commission. "Officials refused to give their names", he said.

Complaints about "regrettable and irritating" border hassles have been arriving at the Commission thick and fast, according to officials in Karl-Heinz Narjes' "Internal Market" Directorate.

Responding to Richard Cottrell's condemnation of "petty and insensitive" border bureaucracy, Narjes says that the Commission has proposed several ways of cutting border red tape. But a number of the proposals are still waiting for approval by the Council of Ministers.

A 1981 Commission proposal designed to replace the ATA carnet procedure with a cheaper and simpler EC alternative is due to be considered by Ministers in February.

FARMERS' INCOMES FALL

Farmers' incomes in Europe fell in real terms by an average 6% last year, compared to an 11% increase in 1982, according to EC Agriculture Commissioner Poul Dalsager.

The decline, which varied in different EC countries, was largely due to the weather. The wet spring, followed by drought conditions from June onwards caused production to drop sharply in several countries.

The only farmers to record increases in income were in Italy and Ireland. The most acute decreases were in the Federal Republic of Germany, Luxembourg and Denmark. Lesser decreases were registered in France, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. Figures for Belgium and Greece remained unchanged.

Crops such as cereals, sugar beet, potatoes and apples were hardest hit by the weather. But deliveries of beef and milk increased by as much as 4%, according to the EC's annual Agriculture Report.

EC SOCIAL FUND SPENDING HITS RECORD HIGH

EC social spending rose by 23.5% to a record £1.08 /IR£1.38 billion last year, with the approval of a fifth and final allocation of £414/IR£528 million in January.

About three quarters of the allocation will go towards training and job creation projects for unemployed young people throughout Europe.

Of the remaining £102/IR£130 million, £41.8/IR£53.4 million will go to projects aimed at helping the disabled, £34.4/IR£44 million to schemes in depressed regions and lesser amounts to projects designed to help women and redundant textile workers to find jobs. £14.8/IR£18.9 million will also go to projects providing training in the use of new technologies.

The bulk of the new allocation will go to the United Kingdom and Italy, who between them will account for about 60% of the total. France will get nearly 15% and Ireland nearly 10%. Greece and the Federal Republic of Germany both get about 6%.

MOT TESTS COULD SPREAD SAYS CONTOGEOORGIS

How many cars in Europe are subject to regular MOT testing? According to EC Transport Commissioner Giorgios Contogeorgis, not enough.

Belgium, Luxembourg, the Federal Republic of Germany and the United Kingdom all insist on regular MOT tests for cars over a certain age, before they are allowed on the road. But no regular controls exist in Denmark, France, Greece, Ireland or the Netherlands. In Italy only cars over ten years old are controlled on a regular basis.

Denmark has tests for second-hand cars over 5 years old, the Netherlands and Greece are to introduce controls in 1985, Italy and Ireland are to extend existing controls and France is expected to follow suit.

In January of this year a European Directive requiring MOT tests for buses, taxis, ambulances and vehicles over 3500 kg came into effect. The Commission has considered the possibility of extending the system to private cars, says M. Contogeorgis.

MINISTERS APPROVE NEW MOTOR INSURANCE DIRECTIVE

EC Finance Ministers have approved a Directive that will provide compensation for victims of accidents caused by uninsured or unidentified drivers in other EC countries.

The legislation follows a 1972 Directive guaranteeing minimum insurance cover for accident victims abroad, that brought an end to "green card" checks at frontier posts within the Community.

The second Motor Insurance Directive establishes minimum requirements that reduce the differences in compensation provided by compulsory insurance in the different member states over the next five years. It makes it obligatory for car owners to insure against property damage, as well as personal injury caused to third parties, and sets minimum levels of cover considerably higher than those currently existing in some EC countries.

The European Commission has welcomed the new legislation as a step towards "fuller and more nearly equivalent protection" for travellers in other EC member states.

NEW EC-US COOPERATION

Nuclear safety, remote sensing, the environment and solar energy are just some of the areas in which Europe cooperates with the United States.

Links are steadily growing and the latest area to be added to the list is mineral technology. A five year agreement between the European Commission and the US Bureau of Mines has been signed by George Vest, the US Ambassador to the EC and Leslie Fielding, the Commission's Director-General for External Relations.

The exchange of information will initially concentrate on the two areas of mining research and minerals and materials research. Cooperation will include an exchange of publications, results and experts, through seminars, symposiums and workshops.

THEY SHOOT HORSES DON'T THEY?

Europeans are eating fewer horses. Between 1972-1982 consumption fell by 25%. In 1982 they ate about 191,000 tonnes.

The Belgians and Luxembourgers still eat the most horse meat per head of population, although consumption did fall from 3.9kg a year in 1977 to 2.9kg in 1982. Next come the Dutch, with 1.6kg a head and, surprisingly, the French with only 1.4kg. The Italians eat 1kg, the Danes 200 grammes and the Germans a mere 100 grammes. The Greeks, the Irish and the British, however, still don't touch the stuff. Yet.

BULLS?

Restrictions on the import of pure-bred bull semen into France have been abolished, following intervention by the European Commission.

The French national union of stock breeding and artificial insemination cooperatives (UNCEIA), which controls almost all the artificial insemination centres in France, introduced the restrictions in 1979.

But according to the Commission, the system, which involved an obligation to centralize imports, a ban on the storage and testing of semen from foreign bulls and agreements on prices, contravened EC competition law.