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DOCUMENT 1-248/84

Report

drawn up on behalf of the Committee on the Environment,
Public Health and Consumer Protection

on the proposal from the Commission of the European
Communities to the Council (COM(83) 375 final -
Doc. 1-610/83) for a regulation establishing a
Community scheme to provide forests in the Community
with increased protection against fire and acid rain

Rapporteur: Mr A. GHERGO

PE 88.555/fin.
Or Fr

By letter of 14 July 1983, the President of the Council of the European Communities requested the European Parliament to deliver an opinion on the proposal from the Commission of the European Communities to the Council for a regulation establishing a Community scheme to provide forests in the Community with increased protection against fire and acid rain.

On 12 September 1983, the President of the European Parliament referred this proposal for a regulation to the committee on the Environment, Public Health and Consumer Protection as the committee responsible and to the Committee on Agriculture and the Committee on the Budgets for their opinions.

On 22 September 1983, the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Consumer Protection appointed Mr Ghergo rapporteur.

The committee considered the draft report at its meetings of 22 February and 25 April 1984.

At the latter meeting, the committee decided unanimously to recommend to Parliament that it approve the Commission's proposal with the following amendments.

The committee adopted the motion for a resolution as a whole unanimously with one abstention.

The following took part in the vote: Mr COLLINS, chairman; Mr RYAN, vice-chairman; Mr GHERGO, rapporteur; Mr CERAVOLO (deputizing for Mrs LE ROUX), Mr LIGIOS (deputizing for Mrs LENTZ-CORNETTE), Mrs MAIJ-WEGGEN (deputizing for Mr ALBER), Mr MERTENS (deputizing for Mr DEL LUCA), Mr MUNTINGH, Mrs SCHLEICHER, Mr SHERLOCK, Mrs SPAAK and Mrs SQUARCIALUPI.

The opinions of the Committee on Agriculture and the Committee on Budgets are attached.

The report was tabled on 7 May 1984.

The deadline for tabling amendments to this report will be indicated in the draft agenda for the part-session at which it will be debated.

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The Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Consumer Protection hereby submits to the European Parliament the following amendments to the Commission's proposal and motion for a resolution, together with explanatory statement:

Proposal for a Council Regulation (EEC) establishing a Community scheme to provide forests in the Community with increased protection against fire and acid rain

Amendments tabled by the Committee on
the Environment, Public Health and
Consumer Protection

Text proposed by the Commission of
the European Communities

TITLE I: FOREST FIRES

Amendment No. 1

Article 2, 7th indent (new):

- the creation of multidisciplinary 'observation centres' to gather and update any information which might be useful at the various levels of intervention.

Amendment No. 2

Article 4(d) (new):

- (d) defining higher risk zones and accordingly making provision for graduated financial intervention.

TITLE II: ACID DEPOSITIONS

Amendment No. 3

Article 8(a) (new):

The Commission is instructed to
define high risk zones and to
make provision for graduated
financial intervention.

Amendment No. 4

Article 10, third indent (new)

- programmes to promote and
develop the relevant technologies
and the construction of pilot
installations to prevent and
reduce atmospheric pollution.

Amendment No. 5

Article 10, fourth indent (new)

- programmes to promote research
into the cause and effect of
acid rain and other atmospheric
pollutants.

Amendment No. 6

Article 10a (new)

The Member States, assisted by an
adequate and suitably qualified
staff, shall ensure compliance with
the rules for the protection of the
woodland heritage.

MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

closing the procedure for consultation of the European Parliament on the proposal from the Commission of the European Communities to the Council for a regulation establishing a Community scheme to provide forests in the Community with increased protection against fire and acid rain

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the proposal from the Commission to the Council (COM(83) 375 final)¹,
 - having been consulted by the Council pursuant to Articles 43 and 235 of the EEC Treaty (Doc. 1-610/83),
 - having regard to its resolution of 15 April 1983 on the proposal from the Commission of the European Communities to the Council for a regulation on action by the Community relating to the environment (ACE)²,
 - having regard to its resolution of 14 October 1983 on Community forestry policy³,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Consumer Protection and the opinions of the Committee on Agriculture and the Committee on Budgets (Doc. 1-248/84),
 - having regard to the result of the vote on the Commission's proposal,
- A. whereas the protection of forests against fire and acid rain is a matter of particular importance, at national and Community level, both to environmental equilibrium and to the economy in general,
 - B. whereas the extent of the damage to forests caused by fires affects the prevailing ecological balance and has direct repercussions on the forestry activities and employment situation of the Community's woodland regions, which are often less-favoured regions,
 - C. whereas air pollution and, in particular, acid rain have an adverse effect on the natural environment and more especially on the health of the forests, which may die as a result of these phenomena,

¹OJ No. C 107, 13.7.1983

²OJ No. C 128, 16.5.1983

³OJ No. C 307, 14.11.1983

1. Welcomes the Commission's proposal for the establishment of a Community scheme to provide forests in the Community with increased protection against the damage caused by fires and acid rain;
2. Calls on the Commission to increase substantially the share of funds earmarked for research into acid rain and atmospheric pollution;
3. Considers it particularly important to increase funds earmarked for the consequences of atmospheric pollution, since it is necessary to carry out studies into the consequences not only of acid rain but also of other atmospheric pollutants and forms of atmospheric pollution, and it is urgent that research into their cause and effect be stepped up;
4. Recognizes how important the recommended fire prevention and fire-fighting measures could be in improving the effective protection of the Community's forestry potential;
5. Believes, bearing in mind the specific characteristics of the natural environment, that the risks of forest fires are greater in certain regions of the Community and that it would therefore be advisable, within the framework of the Community's scheme, to identify high risk zones and accordingly make provision for graduated financial intervention;
6. Takes the view that the proposed scheme should be backed up by the introduction of uniform measures designed to ensure that woodland areas laid waste by fire are not then put to other uses;
7. Notes that the Commission's proposal concerning acid rain forms part of the Community's efforts to combat atmospheric pollution, welcomes the Commission's intention to step up these efforts and calls for an increase in the appropriation earmarked for this purpose to 15 million ECU, of which 10 million should be used for the financing of demonstration and pilot projects designed to reduce atmospheric pollution and for research into the cause and effect of atmospheric pollutants;
8. Believes that the phenomenon of acid rain is particularly serious in certain regions of the Community and that high risk zones should be identified within the framework of the Community scheme and provision made accordingly for graduated financial intervention;

9. Calls on the Commission to make a survey, under the proposed scheme, of the damage caused to forests in all the Member States and to keep a record of emissions from all industrial furnaces over 50 MW in order to establish the main sources of atmospheric pollution;
10. Draws the Commission's attention to the importance of introducing standard Community procedures for the measurement of atmospheric pollution;
11. Stresses the importance of the research work to be coordinated by the Commission and designed to further the understanding of the causes of atmospheric pollution;
12. Calls on the Member States to ensure compliance with the rules governing the protection of the woodland heritage;
13. Hopes that the Commission's proposal will be implemented at an early date;
14. Approves the proposal for a Council regulation on condition that the Commission incorporates therein the amendments set out in this resolution;
15. Instructs its President to forward to the Council and Commission, as Parliament's opinion, the Commission's proposal as voted by Parliament and the corresponding resolution.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

1. The proposal for a regulation discussed in this report is part of the action taken by the Commission to increase protection of the natural environment by means of special Community measures which Parliament approved when it adopted the Johnson report last April.

The problems underlying this proposal for a regulation establishing a Community scheme to provide forests in the Community with increased protection against fire and acid rain - on which the European Parliament has now been asked to deliver its opinion - are dramatic enough without Parliament having to emphasize the concern already expressed by the Commission.

I shall therefore confine myself to a few essential points and, after highlighting the specific characteristics of the two distinct phenomena dealt with in the proposal, concentrate on some aspects of the subject which need to be more clearly defined.

2. Although it is true that both these phenomena affect a large proportion of the forest area of the Member States, albeit to differing degrees, it cannot be denied that each problem requires a separate solution.
3. The environmental damage caused by fire, a fairly common natural phenomenon, can be assessed in both the short and longer terms.

The destruction of vegetation, and in particular trees, the most important and valuable aspect, automatically leads to changes in the whole ecosystem affected.

But experience has shown that in the long term, the natural tendency towards restoring the 'climate' means that there is a steady reassertion of life in the areas devastated by fire.

It is only the excessively frequent recurrence of this phenomenon in the same area (which statistics now ascribe almost exclusively to human intervention, whether intentional or not) that therefore causes some natural laws to be upset and conditions to arise - not infrequently aggravated by factors intrinsic to the physical environment - that are not conducive to a wealth of diverse forms of life in the area concerned.

4. It should be borne in mind that there is a lack of appropriate sources of information on which politicians and public authorities may draw to form an exact picture of the changes in terms of ecological equilibrium that have occurred or are occurring in the areas of the Community most frequently affected by recurring forest fires. It would, therefore, be useful to set up, as part of the scheme provided for in Title I of the regulation, multidisciplinary observation centres to provide regularly updated information on what action may be taken at different levels.
5. As regards initiatives to be promoted under an effective Community policy to prevent and combat fires, the provisions of Title I should be given more careful consideration so that where, for various reasons (climatic conditions, type of vegetation, morphology of the forest areas, etc.), the phenomenon becomes more serious from the point of view of the maintenance of the ecological balance, Member States may obtain financial aid commensurate with the nature of the high risk involved in a specific area.

It is also essential to promote the principle of the 'legal protection' of forests in the Member States, for instance by strictly forbidding any other use of forest areas destroyed by fire.

6. The correlation between acid depositions and the 'death' of forests, particularly conifer forests, and the disappearance of aquatic life in the Scandinavian lakes has quite different connotations - which in many instances have still to be defined in detail - in the continental areas of the Community and the countries bordering them on the east.
7. To adhere strictly to the purpose of the proposal for a regulation, it should first of all be said that the 'plant death' occurring in many Member States can by no means be compared to other naturally occurring phenomena such as changes in or the disappearance of forests over vast areas of the globe at other times.

This fact, combined with the recent appearance of the phenomenon, has led to the belief that it must be connected with changes made to the ecosystem by modern man.

8. In all probability, therefore, atmospheric pollution, especially (although not exclusively) that caused by industry or energy generating plants, plays a decisive role.

It should also be noted that studies on the subject have not yet finally determined the interaction and synergy of various factors of environmental change to which the death of forests can fairly reliably be connected. It would, therefore, be advisable to increase research into specific aspects such as:

- measurement of the effect of certain harmful substances present in the atmosphere on the gaseous exchange of trees;
 - studying the sub-microscopic changes on the surface of leaves caused by acid depositions and heavy metals;
 - morphological research to give advance warning of the degradation of forests;
 - the effect of non-saturated hydrocarbon emissions from vehicles;
 - the effect of hydrocarbons evaporating from the surface of the sea and carried by the wind into contact with the foliage of plants.
9. The measures proposed in the articles contained in Title II of the regulation thus seem all the more useful as a means of rendering more accurate and regularly updating existing findings.

Although the proposal is mainly technical in nature (and I shall therefore confine myself to making some recommendations), it would be advisable for the scheme provided for in Articles 8 and 9 of the regulation to concentrate on identifying the characteristics of the phenomenon as it occurs in individual areas covered by the surveillance network, particularly with a view to confirming or invalidating the scientific findings of the most recent research.

10. What must be established is whether the trend followed in the 70s to reduce the negative effects of an over-concentration of harmful substances in the atmosphere in specific geographical areas - which are apparently the cause of the present situation - is the consequence of a technical error which is 'excusable' in the light of the knowledge available at the time, or whether failure to make an accurate assessment of the environmental impact caused by the construction of increasingly high smokestacks can in some

way be attributed to the attitude taken by those who maintained in the 70s that it was preferable to follow that path than to try drastically to reduce pollution from the industrial plants that are now the subject of controversy.

11. One thing seems certain, however, and that is the lack of any clear idea of the basic problem in the document submitted to the European Parliament for its opinion: the means of measuring and limiting atmospheric pollution.

The network of monitoring posts provided for in Article 7 will be of little use unless provision is made for limits and intervention mechanisms and, above all, stricter controls to ensure that the rules governing the protection of Community forests are complied with.

In other words, specific provision should be made in the regulation for the creation of a 'forest police' force in each Member State with the primary task of ensuring that the rules governing the protection of forests are observed, just as the creation of a multidisciplinary team of scientists in each Member State is provided for (Article 8).

12. It should not be forgotten that although the Community has taken the line in numerous directives that atmospheric pollution should be contained (mainly through the system of permits for some categories of plants), the Member States have not implemented them at the same rate (and in any case, the directives are exceedingly flexible).

It should also be borne in mind that Community provisions governing the control of atmospheric pollution refer only to a small number of contaminating factors and that the rules have been formulated in a rather narrow perspective (in other words, protection is seen from the point of view of human health and not from the point of view of more effective protection of the whole biosphere whose sensitivity to disrupting agents has been revealed so dramatically to us).

13. The situation is too serious to allow any further carelessness; I shall therefore return to a theme I mentioned earlier, namely that the need to determine more reliably, by means of more accurate research, the real causes of dying forests should not be used as a pretext by those who, even in the Community, are manifestly trying to push through a senseless policy of 'deregulation'.

Where the environmental health of a whole continent is at stake, we must all be vigilant and extremely astute so as not to fall into the trap prepared by those who (as experience has shown) are prompted by considerations of pure immediate profit and cleverly conceal their real intentions behind a smokescreen of 'the laws of economics'.

Lastly, because of the serious repercussions of environmental pollution on the ecological equilibrium and the climate of the whole world, measures to protect forests must be given an extra European dimension which should become an integral part of development policy.

OPINION

(Rule 101 of the Rules of Procedure)
of the Committee on Agriculture
Draftsman: Mr MARTIN

On 3 November 1983, the Committee on Agriculture appointed Mr MARTIN draftsman.

The committee considered the draft opinion at its meeting of 28/29 February 1984 and adopted the conclusions contained therein by 11 votes to nil with 1 abstention.

The following took part in the vote: Mr DELATTE, vice-chairman and acting chairman; Mr PRANCHERE (deputizing for Mr MARTIN, draftsman); Mr DALSA, Mr EYRAUD, Mr GATTO, Mr GOERENS (deputizing for Mrs MARTIN), Mr HELMS, Mr MAHER, Mr STELLA (deputizing for Mr COLLESELLI), Mr SUTRA DE GERMA, Mr TOLMAN and Mr VGENOPOULOS.

INTRODUCTION

1. Forests in the Community, which constitute a major natural and renewable resource and cover an area of 35.2 million hectares (of which 27.6 million are worked on a regular basis), play an important economic role. The development of this forest heritage, the expansion of jobs and forestry activities and the improvement of the trade balance are nowadays prime concerns¹.
2. Forests also perform other major functions in keeping with their economic role. They are essential to the environment and agriculture, inasmuch as they influence the climate and the water system and protect the soil. In addition, they help to attract tourism in many, frequently disadvantaged, regions of the Community and are an important source of energy.
3. Unfortunately, attempts to develop the forests are frequently frustrated or defeated by scourges such as fires and atmospheric pollutants. The resultant losses reduce the productivity of Community forests, which is already insufficient, and aggravate the trade deficit in timber. The damage may entail imbalances harmful to the environment and especially to agriculture bordering the forests, with serious effects on regional economies.
4. Improving the profitability of forests therefore requires not only better management but also protection against these scourges. In the long term, what is at stake is the survival of a major part of the Community's forest heritage.

ACID PRECIPITATIONS

5. Atmospheric pollution, with its acid precipitations (rain and deposits), is causing major damage to terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems and, in particular, is responsible for the large-scale death of forests in several regions of the EEC, especially in the Federal Republic of Germany. According to the results of a study carried out by the Federal Ministry of Agriculture in autumn 1983, 2.5 million hectares are affected in the FRG (34% of the total forest area), of which 1.8 million ha are slightly damaged, 0.6 million ha are moderately damaged and 64,000 ha are dying.

¹European Parliament resolution of 14 October 1983. OJ No. C 307, 14.11.1983, p. 123 - Gatto report

6. Community measures have already been taken to reduce the risks of atmospheric pollution. However, the problems caused, which involve interactions between pollutants, climate and soil, are so complex, and research is at such an early stage, that it is difficult to implement effective preventive and curative action.

7. The European Parliament, which is concerned at the extent of the damage caused and at the growth of atmospheric pollution, has recently called for the implementation of a 'major programme of measures to combat air pollution'¹.

8. The Commission intends to continue the action already taken to combat atmospheric pollution emissions by introducing specific measures relating to forest death.

In its proposal for a regulation, it provides for an annual appropriation of 5 million ECU, with a Community contribution of between 50% and 100% for:

- the setting up of a network of monitoring posts
- the setting up of multi disciplinary teams of scientists
- the coordination of the multi disciplinary scientific work
- the establishment of experimental pilot projects.

9. These measures are a useful first step towards measuring the effects of the damage caused to forests by acid rain and deposits and towards understanding their mechanisms. They must be implemented in regions already affected, as well as in those which are as yet undamaged, in order to prevent the damage from spreading. It would be preferable for these measures to be incorporated into a wider programme to combat atmospheric pollution, in line with the recommendations of the Muntingh report.

FOREST FIRES

10. Each year, large stretches of forest go up in smoke. The fires cause substantial physical and economic damage and result in the loss of many lives. Every year, on average, 120,000 hectares of forest are destroyed in the Community, corresponding to a loss of 100 million ECU. The southern regions are particularly

¹European Parliament resolution of 20 January 1984, PE 88.703. - Muntingh report

hard-hit: in 1983, 140,000 ha were burned in Sardinia, including 45,000 ha of forests (a quarter of the woodland area), 50,000 ha were devastated in the South of France (including 34,000 ha in Corsica) and 75,000 ha in Greece in 1981.

Other regions within the EEC are not spared, either: there were major fires in the FRG in 1976 and 1983.

11. Community measures have already been taken in the Mediterranean areas of the EEC pursuant to Regulation (EEC) No. 269/79¹, as amended by Regulation (EEC) No. 2119/83 of 25 July 1983².

Forest investment work has been carried out: afforestation, improvement of run-down forests, associated work, fire protection measures and construction of forest tracks. This has benefited the forests concerned, as well as agriculture, by slowing the rate of soil erosion and improving the supply of water to the land. Hitherto, however, this work has only been concerned with fire prevention aspects.

12. Experience shows that it has been insufficient to limit the damage caused by fires. All too often, attempts at afforestation and reforestation are jeopardized, or even cancelled out, by the lack or inadequacy of fire-fighting resources.

To provide forests with effective protection against fire, prevention and fire-fighting must be considered together and not separately. The two must go hand in hand, because they are complementary.

13. For this reason, in a desire to improve the protection of forests against fire, the European Parliament has adopted many resolutions³ calling for the common forest fire prevention measures already under way in the Mediterranean regions to be strengthened and supplemented by fire-fighting measures.

¹OJ No. L 38, 14.2.1979

²OJ No. L 205, 29.7.1983

³OJ No. C 292, 8.11.1982, OJ No. C 184, 11.7.1983, OJ No. C 277, 17.10.1983

14. It is to be welcomed that the Commission has taken account of these requests in proposing to the Council a new regulation for which appropriations have already been set aside in the 1984 budget. Five kinds of measures are envisaged under a five-year programme applicable in all the regions of the EEC, at an annual cost of 15 million ECU with a Community contribution of 30%, 50% or 100%:

- strengthening of existing preventive measures (brush clearance, pruning, fire belts, lookout systems),
- implementation of fire-fighting measures: establishment of tactical and operational centres, purchase of fire-fighting equipment and aids (retardants, wetting agents),
- permanent specific measures: personnel training, harmonization of fire-fighting methods,
- occasional specific measures: cooperation between Member States with pooling of fire-fighting equipment,
- coordination measures in terms of studies, research, information and awareness campaigns, etc.

15. Implementation of these measures should provide improved protection of forests against fire. Personnel training has rightly been regarded as a priority, and cooperation between the various regions which regularly suffer fires is encouraged.

16. These measures could be improved, however, in some fields. The purchase of fire-fighting equipment and aids made in the Community could be encouraged by increasing the Community contribution from 30% to 50%. The establishment of inter-regional purchasing groups could be encouraged. These measures will only be really effective if they are implemented in a decentralized way, in touch with realities in the field. Might it not also be useful to provide for a sliding scale of assistance depending on the financial outlay by the Member States and the size of the risks to be covered?

17. These measures must be implemented as quickly as possible in anticipation of the fires in the summer of 1984; in budgetary terms, this can be done now, as 5 million ECU has already been entered in the 1984 budget.

18. Their effectiveness will be increased if they are incorporated into an overall regional planning and economic revival programme for the depopulated regions which is aimed at maintaining and boosting population levels.

CONCLUSIONS

19. The Committee on Agriculture hereby submits to the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Consumer Protection the following conclusions:

1. Notes that the attempts to develop forests are frequently thwarted by fire and atmospheric pollutants; regards it as a priority, therefore, to improve the protection of forests against these scourges;
2. Welcomes the proposals from the Commission, which has to a large extent followed the recommendations of the European Parliament;
3. Hopes that the specific measures envisaged to combat acid rain in forests will be incorporated in a wider programme to combat atmospheric pollution;
4. Considers that to provide effective protection of forests against fire, prevention and fire-fighting measures must go hand in hand, because all too often efforts at prevention are jeopardized by inadequate fire-fighting resources;
5. Is convinced that rapid, large-scale intervention at the outbreak of a fire remains the most effective approach, and considers, therefore, that detection and fire-fighting resources must be strengthened;
6. Approves the measures proposed by the Commission which strengthen and supplement Community action already under way; calls on the Council to implement them as quickly as possible in anticipation of the fires in the summer of 1984;
7. Hopes that the level of the Community contribution will be increased from 30% to 50% for Community fire-fighting equipment and aids, in order to encourage their production in the Community;
8. Hopes that these measures will be implemented in a decentralized way and will serve to encourage activities in the field;

9. Notes the emergency aid of 100,000 ECU granted to Sardinia following the fires in the summer of 1983; calls for this procedure to be extended throughout the Community and for regions affected by fires to receive the emergency Community aid provided for natural disasters;

10. Calls on the Commission to prepare a list of all types of forest damage and, from this, to draw up a European register; calls on it to investigate measures to combat damage other than that caused by fire and acid rain.

OPINION OF THE COMMITTEE ON BUDGETS

Letter from the chairman of the committee to Mr COLLINS, chairman of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Consumer Protection

Brussels, 26 March 1984

Subject: Proposal for a Council regulation (EEC) establishing a Community scheme to provide forests in the Community with increased protection against fire and acid rain (COM(83) 375 final)

Dear Mr Collins,

The Committee on Budgets considered the proposal referred to above at its meeting of 21 March 1984¹.

The committee noted that the Financial Statement did not take account of the inclusion of 5 m ECU in the 1984 Budget. The committee can, however, give a favourable opinion on the proposal, subject to the following points:

- The overall amount of 100 m ECU mentioned in the proposal is an indication of the dimensions which the programme may assume: the precise amount to be allocated annually will be determined in the course of the budgetary procedure. This amount must in present circumstances be established in the light of the imminent exhaustion of the Communities' own resources;
- The committee points out that the Commission may use the funds in the 1984 budget to finance pilot and demonstration projects and convene conferences and working parties, as the budget is sufficient authorization for this purpose.

Yours sincerely,

.sgd) Erwin LANGE

¹ Present: Mr Lange, chairman; Mr Notenboom, vice-chairman; Mr Adornino, Mr Arndt, Mr Balfe, Lord Douro, Mr Helms (deputizing for Mr Lange), Mr Louwes, Mr Newton Dunn and Mrs Scrivener