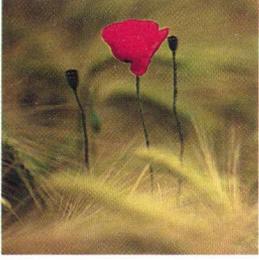


PROTECTING OUR ENVIRONMENT



Europe
on the move



Westerling

Future generations have the same right as we have to clean air, clear water and green forests. This right is under threat. The danger to the environment posed by the uncontrolled exploitation of the earth's natural resources is now universally recognized. This is why the European Community and governments around the world have accepted the principle of sustainable development. The aim is to match our future production and consumption patterns to what our planet and its environment can sustain in the long term. The phenomenon of global warming, the depletion of the earth's protective ozone layer and the wanton destruction of tropical forests are just three instances where the limits of sustainability have been exceeded. The Community has adopted a programme which is proactive rather than reactive. After two decades of mainly corrective action, which was not always successful, the Community now focuses on partnership and shared responsibility to prevent and, where possible, to reverse environmental degradation. It is seeking, from a coalition of government, industry and consumers, a commitment to conserve resources, recycle used products, dispose of waste safely and develop environmentally-friendly energy sources. In this way, we can continue economic and social development without compromising the needs of our children's children.

THE CHALLENGE

Social progress and economic well-being in Europe and elsewhere depend on activities which deplete the earth's resources and which can cause pollution. The products we need and the vital services we use — from transportation to health-care systems — take resources from the earth and create waste and pollution as by-products. Historically, the earth's remarkable regenerative capacity has been able to cope with the environmental impact of human activity. But this capacity is now stretched beyond its limit. The two need to be brought back into balance.

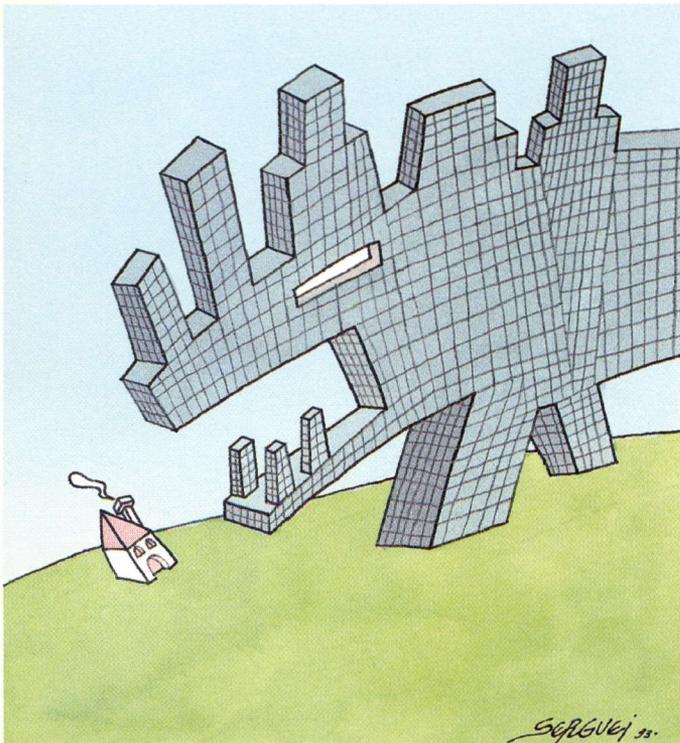
Our environment is threatened in many, often interrelated, ways. Pollution knows no frontiers. Problems are global as well as local. There can be no piecemeal responses; the Community's overall strategy has to reflect this reality.

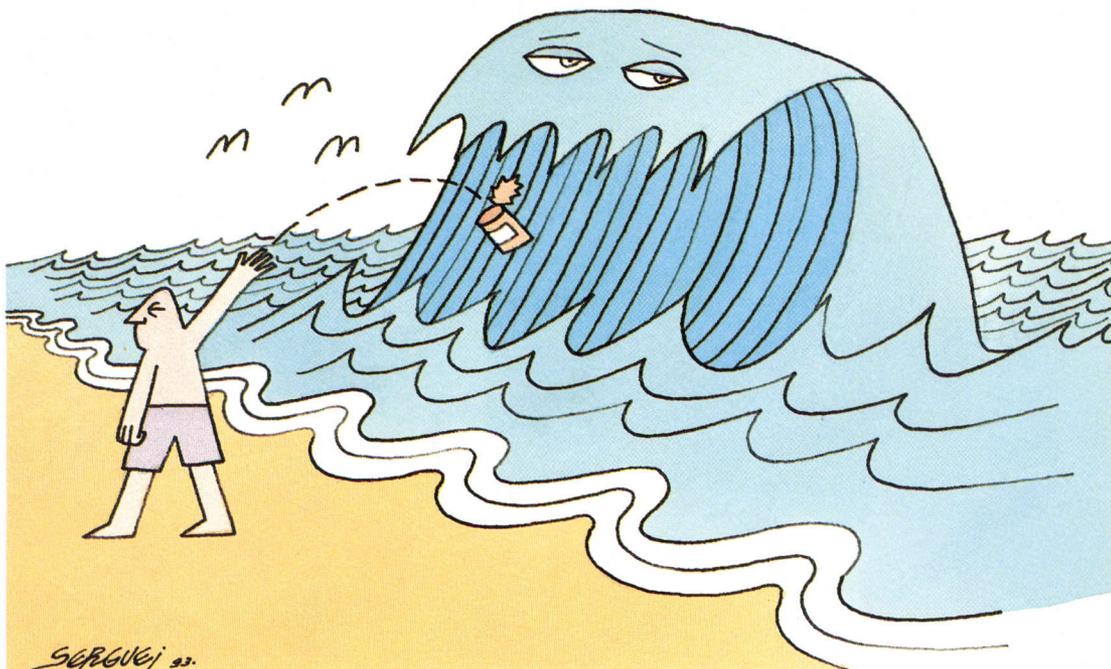
Global warming, and the ensuing climatic changes that could transform temperate zones of the earth into arid deserts and flood low-lying regions as ice-caps melt, is only one prospect of economic degradation that faces mankind. It is caused by the release of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, principally carbon dioxide (CO₂) from the burning of fossil fuels.

Another consequence may be a sharp rise in skin cancers as the protective ozone layer in the upper atmosphere is depleted by man-made chemicals. Acid rain, the destruction of tropical forests and the extinction of many species of animal and plant life are also part of this scenario.

Globally, our consumer society produces billions of tonnes of waste in the form of by-products from industry, old and used items, packaging materials and agricultural inputs. In the European Community alone, more than 21 million tonnes of toxic waste have to be treated each year.

Our rivers and coastal waters are unable to cope with the huge quantities of semi-treated or untreated municipal waste poured into them. Landfill and incineration, traditional waste-disposal techniques, have serious limitations.





THE COMMUNITY'S RESPONSE

The Community and its Member States have adopted more than 200 directives over the past 20 years aimed at improving the quality of air and water, improving waste disposal, monitoring industrial risk and protecting nature. Key legislation has been directed towards such goals as limiting sulphur emissions that cause acid rain, controlling the shipment and disposal of hazardous waste or setting standards for bathing water at beaches throughout the Community. The approach was corrective rather than preventive.

The Community made a significant change in policy in December 1992 with the adoption of an action programme entitled 'Towards sustainability'. Rather than being merely focused on environmental protection, the programme addresses the form of our future growth management. The idea is that we cannot freely use, or

abuse, the earth's environment. Like the factors of production, the environment has a value and a price which must be recognized.

'Towards sustainability' embodies the central theme of the 1992 'Earth Summit', the United Nations Conference on the Environment and Development (UNCED) as set out in the Agenda 21 document. Both set aims for achieving sustainable patterns of economic and social growth.

The EC programme will enable it to define the main thrust of policy for the environment and economic development in key fields, such as industry, energy, transport, agriculture and tourism, for the remainder of the decade and beyond. In this way, the Community can be an example and a source of assistance to other countries and regions of the world.

The Community strategy is based on partnership — between government, industry and consumers — and on shared responsibilities among the main actors. The Community will set minimum requirements. Individual EC countries are free to fix national standards which are higher than those set at Community level.

In concrete terms, the programme stresses a more rational use of resources — producing less in the first place and using what we produce more efficiently. Reuse and recycling are also vital if finite resources are to be conserved.

Energy efficiency is particularly important in order to reduce CO₂ emissions. Emphasis is on developing renewable or non-polluting energy

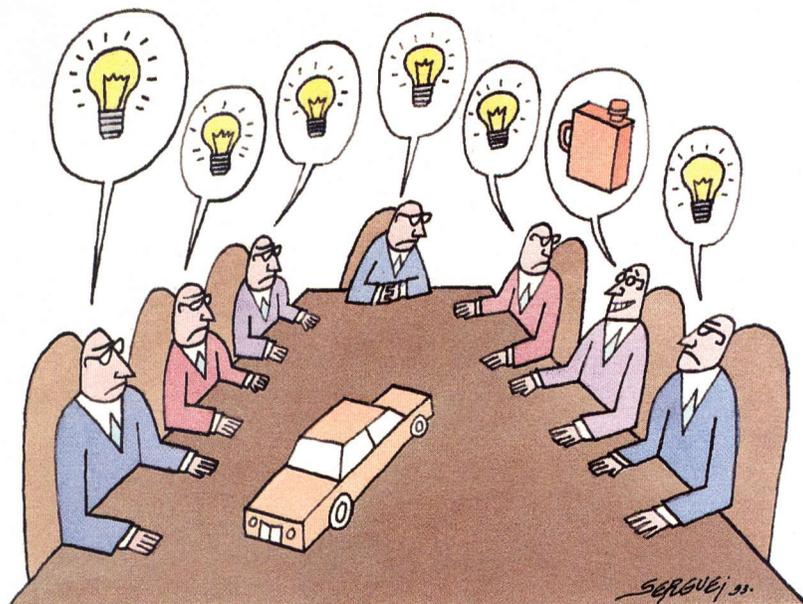
sources and on recovering waste energy from industrial processes for use in heat or energy generation.

Waste management is based on the principles of the prevention of waste, recovery (via recycling or reuse) of as many waste products as possible and ensuring that the waste which remains is disposed of securely and efficiently.

In future, all EC policymaking will have an environmental dimension. Draft laws on agricultural or transport policy, as in other sectors, will each be assessed for their environmental impact before being submitted for adoption to member governments.

The programme also includes the principle of fiscal or economic incentives in favour of environmentally-friendly goods and services, better public information and education, support for R&D and specific financial aid mechanisms.





PAYING FOR A SOUND ENVIRONMENT

Greece and Ireland. The Cohesion Fund set up under the Maastricht Treaty on European Union will provide them with cash for environmental projects as a matter of priority.

The EC action programme recognizes the cost of the environment as an economic resource in several ways.

It confirms the principle that, wherever possible, the polluter pays for the environmental degradation he causes. But it also stresses that 'green' economics can also be sound economics.

Manufacturing firms investing in clean state-of-the-art technology are also investing in future economic and social development, which can increase their own competitiveness.

The Community also recognizes the special need of financial support for its poorest members, Spain, Portugal,



These countries have been particularly concerned that, without such support, adherence to EC environmental commitments could affect their rate of economic growth and their ability to catch up with their more advanced Community partners.

The most innovative aspect of the EC programme is its proposed carbon/energy tax aimed at reducing CO₂ output and increasing energy efficiency. The tax would be charged at the rate of USD 10 per barrel of oil or its energy equivalent. It would be introduced gradually, starting at USD 3 in the first year and rising by USD 1 each year for the following seven.

The carbon/energy tax would not be additional to other taxes. These would be reduced by same amount as the sum raised by the new tax. The tax would be 50% based on the carbon content of emissions and 50% according to energy content. Renewable or non-polluting energy sources — solar, wind and tidal — would be exempt from the tax.



Environmental threats

Air. Air quality, or to be precise, the concentration and combined effects of pollutants, continues to give cause for concern in most towns and cities due to the increase in emissions from motor vehicles. Some progress has been made in reducing emissions of sulphur dioxide, suspended particles, lead and CFCs at Community level but serious problems persist and are increasing with regard to carbon dioxide, oxides of nitrogen, atmospheric ozone and methane.

Water. Over the last 20 years, the state of the Community's water resources has not improved. Since 1970 there has been a 35% increase in the withdrawal rate not only in the Mediterranean region but throughout the Community. Far more examples exist of deterioration in quality than of improvements with the problem not limited to major pollution, such as inadequately treated or untreated sewage discharges, but including 'non-point' sources, most notably from agricultural chemicals.

Soil. Despite the existence of environmentally-friendly farming methods using fewer fertilizers and pesticides, fertilizer use has increased by 60% in the last two decades. Up to the end of the century, both physical and chemical degradation of soil will continue, not only through the input of chemicals but also from diffuse sources of air pollution. Poor land management is resulting in soil erosion of even the best farmland, especially in the south of the Community.

Waste. The Community currently produces in excess of 100 million tonnes of municipal waste every year. The majority of this ends up as landfill, thereby increasing the risk of groundwater and soil contamination. Separating of waste, recycling and composting schemes are all vital and necessary but they do not address the fundamental problem of packaging. In developing regions there is the added problem of the sharp increase in industrial waste.

TAKING THE LEAD

The Community is the world's biggest trading power. It has created the largest integrated market and its people have reached a significant level of economic well-being. The Community is therefore better placed than many countries and regions to put its own house in order and to give a lead to others.

This dual responsibility was recognized by EC Heads of State or Government at the meeting of the European Council in Dublin in June 1990 when they declared:

'The environment is dependent on our collective actions; tomorrow's environment depends on how we act today... The Community must use more effectively its position of moral, economic and political authority to advance international efforts to solve global problems and to promote sustainable development.'

'Towards sustainability': formerly 'Protecting the Environment'

Sustainable development: 'A development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.'

The Brundtland Report, 'Our common future', 1987

'We seek to set our course by the star of age-old values, not short-term expediencies, to waste less in the present and provide more for the future, to leave a legacy which keeps faith with those who left the earth to us.'

President Clinton, Earth Day Ceremony Speech, April 1993

'Our challenge is to elevate strategic plans above the exigencies of "short-termism"; to effect economies in which the value of the air we breathe and the water we drink is reflected in the policies we create, the legislation we draft and the price of goods we purchase.'

Yannis Paleokrassas, Member of the European Commission, May 1993

The Community's responsibility has grown over the years as the awareness of environmental problems and their trans-border dimension has increased. First the 1986 Single European Act and then the 1992 Maastricht Treaty entrusted the Community with additional authority. It made sense for the Community, as it dismantled commercial and political frontiers, to do more towards creating and implementing an EC policy for the environment.

The Community has accepted commitments to stabilize emissions of carbon dioxide at their 1990 level by the year 2000. The proposed carbon/energy tax is the key instrument for attaining this goal.

The Community has also agreed to phase out chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs), which are used in spray canisters and which deplete the ozone layer, by 1996, ahead of the target date set by the Montreal Protocol. Exhaust emissions from automobiles are strictly controlled and all new cars must be fitted with catalytic converters.

Turning words into action

by Yannis Paleokrassas, Member of the Commission

THE NEED FOR GLOBAL ACTION

Environmental problems are posed differently in different parts of the world. In the Community and other industrially advanced countries, the essential aim is to change consumption patterns. In Central and Eastern Europe, years of neglect and underinvestment in pollution control (including the safety of nuclear reactors) have left a heritage of environmental degradation which is now a primary target for action. In the developing countries, population pressure and poverty have allowed unsustainable development patterns to emerge.

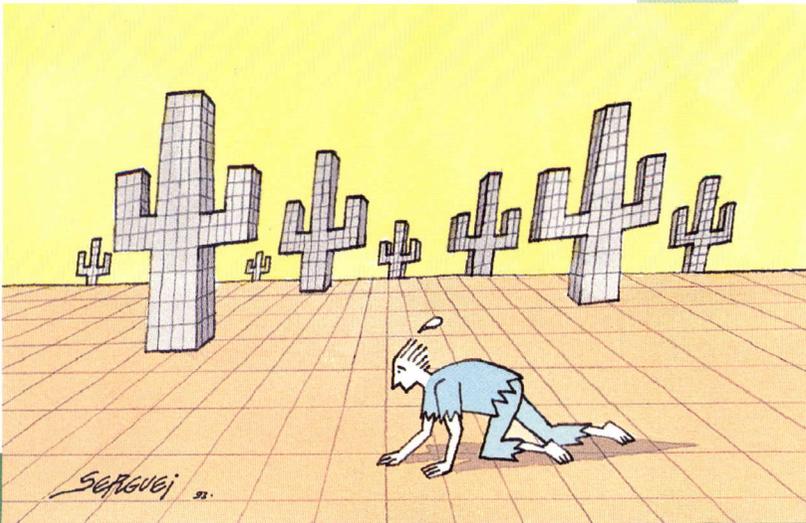
The internal and external dimensions of the Community's environment policy are inextricably linked. It has to act both in a European and a global context. The Community has to play a leading role in the United Nations and other international bodies concerned with environment and development.

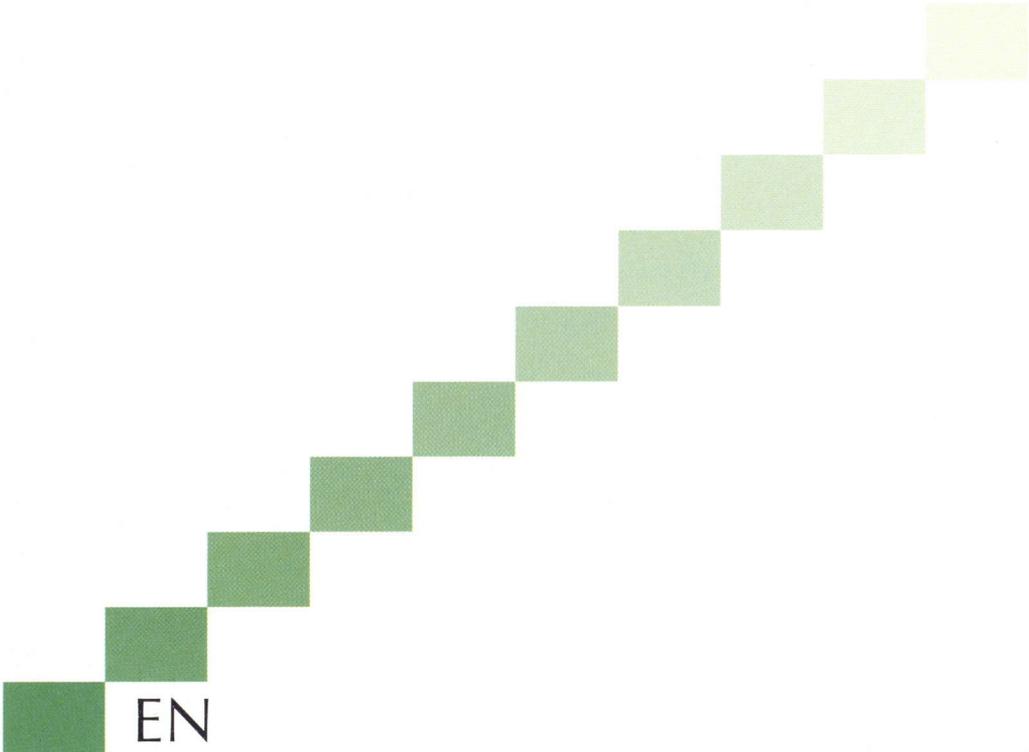
'With the same vigour it has shown in many areas, such as eliminating ozone-depleting substances, the European Community must now face the uphill struggle of converting environmental slogans into substantive policies. We must value the resources we use. Failure to pay the price yesterday has pushed up the costs we face today.'

The state of the environment continues to deteriorate, demanding of us radical responses and a fundamental shift in political will. The environment is not a marginal consideration on the periphery of economic reality — it intimately affects the health, quality of life and future of every European citizen. There is no shortage of scientific data on the ills being suffered by the environment. The challenge rests with us all; whether as policymakers or planners, banks or businesses, enterprises or private individuals. Public and private sectors must cooperate.

Integrating the environment into the heartland of our economic policy is as important as any of the Community's policy commitments. Future generations will lament the slow speed with which we moved taxation away from "labour" and onto "natural resources", thereby holding hostage attempts to introduce a sustainable development path. Any development which is unsustainable will prove to have been no development at all.'

There is now a perceptible feeling throughout the Community and further afield that many of the great environmental battles will be won or lost during the current decade. By the next century, it could be too late.





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