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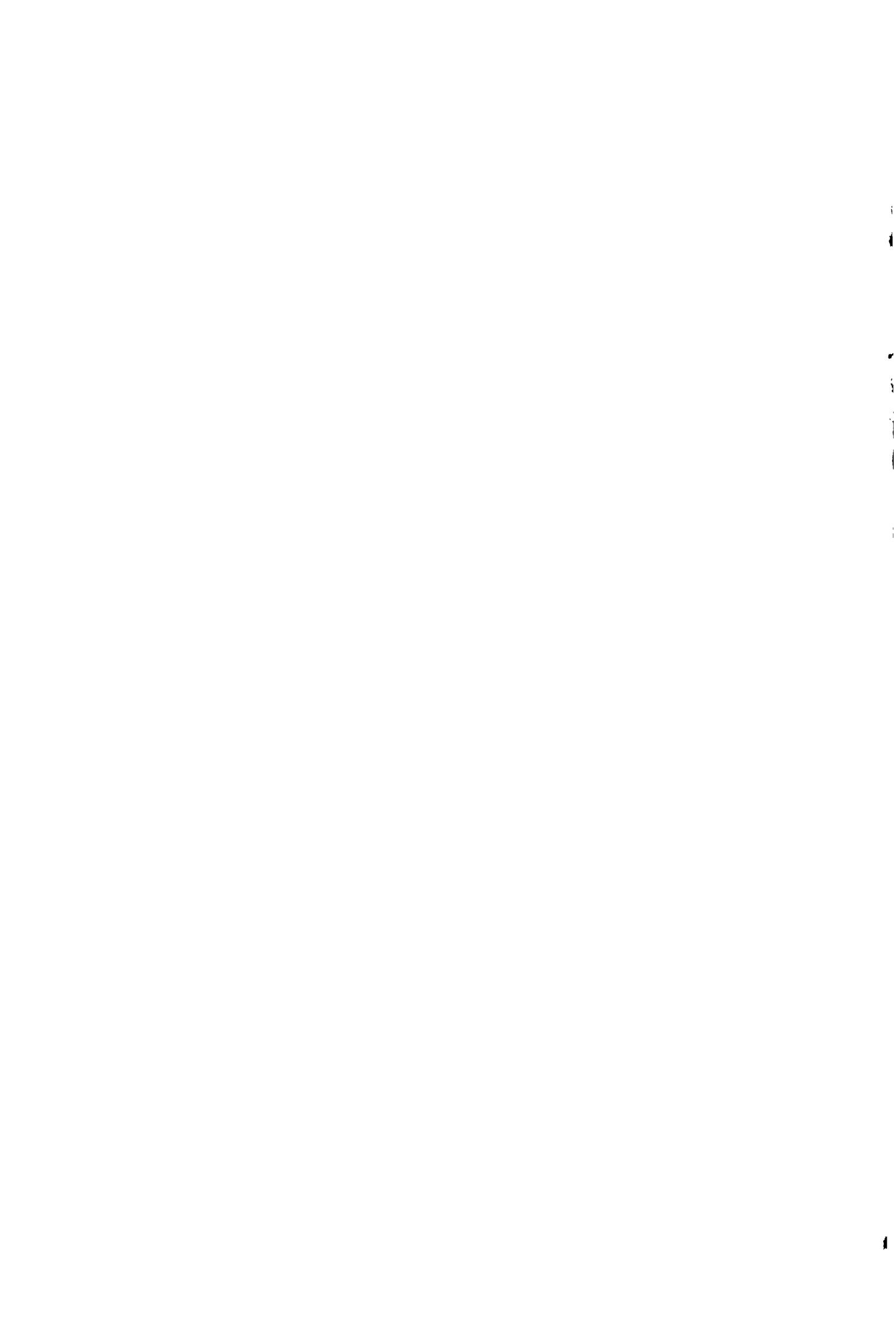
Report

drawn up on behalf of the Committee on Public Health and the Environment

on petition No. 3/74 by Mr Barel on the protection of the Mediterranean

Rapporteur : Mr. Augusto PREMOLI

PE 38.994/fin.



By letter of 19 May 1974, the President of the European Parliament, pursuant to Rule 48(3) of the Rules of Procedure, forwarded to the Committee on Public Health and the Environment the petition by Mr Barel, entered in the general register as No. 3/74, on the protection of the Mediterranean.

At its meeting of 9 and 10 May 1974, the Committee on Public Health and the Environment appointed Mr PREMOLI rapporteur.

It considered the petition at its meeting of 1 and 2 July 1974.

At its meeting of 1 October 1974, the committee considered the petition further and, pursuant to Rule 48(4) of the Rules of Procedure, decided to present a report to Parliament.

At its meeting of 26 November 1974, the Committee considered the draft report and unanimously adopted the motion for a resolution and the explanatory statement.

The following were present: Mr Jakobsen, acting chairman, Mr Premoli, rapporteur; Mr Antoniozzi, Mr Cointat, Mrs Fenner, Mr Martens, Mr Willi Müller, Mr Noè, Mr Rivierez (deputizing for Mr Nolan) and Mr Walkhoff.

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A

The Committee on Public Health and the Environment hereby submits to the European Parliament the following motion for a resolution, together with explanatory statement:

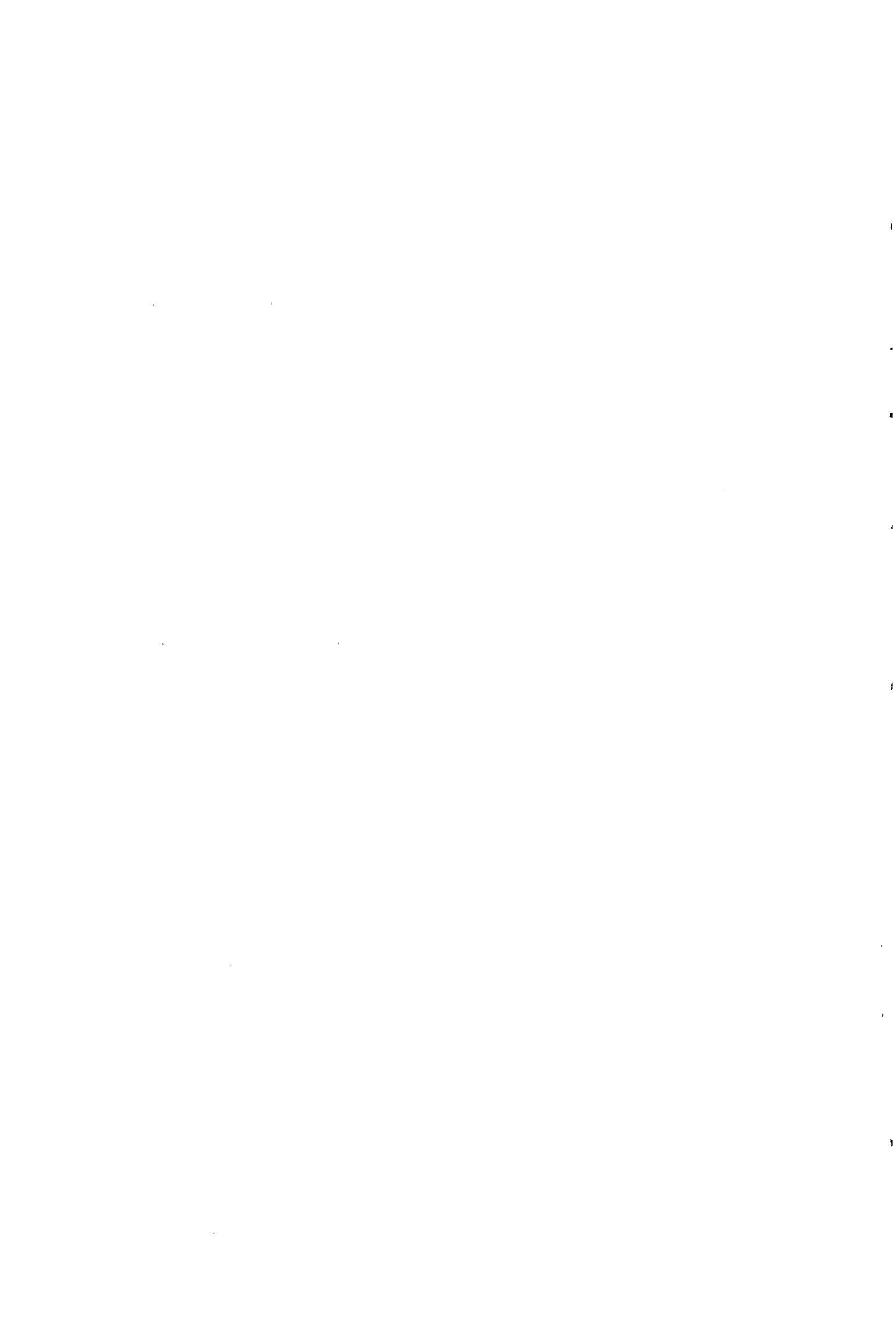
MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

on petition No. 3/74 by Mr Barel on the protection of the Mediterranean

The European Parliament,

- having regard to petition No. 3/74¹,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Public Health and the Environment (Doc. 386/74),
 - noting that the petition falls within the scope of the Community's activities,
1. Draws the attention of the Community institutions to the danger which the high level of pollution in the Mediterranean presents to the flora and fauna as well as to the peoples living along its shores;
 2. Stresses the European Parliament's appeal (Doc. 197/74) to the competent Community bodies to introduce a convention to combat marine pollution in the Mediterranean from land-based sources through harmonization of the legislations of the States concerned and the setting up of an information bank;
 3. Hopes that the Council of the Communities will shortly approve the draft directive on the limitation of discharges into the sea of titanium dioxide waste and of all other similarly polluting substances;
 4. Believes that the establishment of any really binding rules on discharges into the Mediterranean must be accompanied by measures ensuring that the competitive balance between firms is safeguarded;
 5. Gives due credit to the efforts being made by certain industries to purify polluting substances;
 6. Instructs its President to forward the text of petition No. 3/74 to the Commission of the European Communities, and this resolution and the explanatory statement to the Commission and Council of the European Communities.

¹ Bulletin of the European Parliament No. 10/74



EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

1. The cries of warning about the Mediterranean are growing in frequency and are increasingly justified: the Mare Nostrum, which is virtually land-locked, is now in danger of becoming a dead sea, swallowing up not only the marine flora and fauna but a whole civilization whose merits need no stressing. The rate of change of the water is almost zero: a bottle entering the sea by the Straits of Gibraltar would take approximately ninety years to pass out through them again.
2. The European Parliament, in approving at its September part-session a report on the Paris Convention aimed at fighting pollution in the north-east Atlantic, also requested the Community to take a similar initiative for the Mediterranean, since its more restricted area and the lack of tides of any significance make the situation there highly critical.
3. In point of fact, the Mediterranean is one of the areas protected against the risk of pollution from shipping under the London Convention of 2 November 1973, concluded under the aegis of the Intergovernmental Maritime Consultative Organization (IMCO). Further, under the international convention on the prevention of pollution at sea from the discharge of waste, signed in London in December 1972, it is also protected against pollution by dumping on the high seas.

However, in both cases, the main problem is ensuring that these conventions are duly observed and implementing the checks necessary to this end.

However, the Mediterranean is not as yet protected against marine pollution from land-based sources, nor from pollution arising from the exploitation of the seabed. Various initiatives have been taken in recent years, both by international organizations (FAO, WHO, etc.) and through bilateral agreements (Italo-Yugoslav agreement, Franco-Italian project not yet concluded, etc.). It has not, however, been possible to put any of these proposals into practice, either because of their too-general nature, or because of the varying and sometimes divergent interests of the countries concerned.

In view of the greater difficulties confronting an overall agreement aimed at protecting the Mediterranean against pollution, it is worth considering whether the solution to the problem could not be facilitated by concentrating efforts on a given type of pollution. Of course, such initial action on one cause of pollution should not prejudice any other action to increase public awareness of the problem which a

body with the political and moral authority of the European Parliament could undertake or at least encourage.

4. As the Barel petition suggests, an urgent appeal should be made at the same time to the peoples - and not least the industrialists - in the countries bordering this sea to put an end to the serious encroachments on the environment of which, in the last analysis, they themselves are the main victims. The Scarlino scandal about which Corsican fishermen are complaining is certainly the most serious of these encroachments, but unfortunately not the only one: suffice it to mention what has been happening at Marghera for years, undermining an important part of Europe's cultural heritage, Venice. And if appeals have no effect, it will be necessary to turn to action, to condemnation and, in the last resort, to boycotting (following the example of the American Ralph Nader).
5. Given the relative level of development of the peoples bordering the Mediterranean - as is known the fortunes of this region of the world began to decline with the discovery of the Americas - the cleaning up of the Mediterranean should not be carried out at the expense of employment, and so a fair balance must be found between industrial requirements and the protection of marine life.

Consequently, the nations directly interested in this protection must demonstrate a spirit of cooperation, putting at the disposal of the countries bordering on the Mediterranean the most recent inventions and discoveries in the fight against pollution, going as far as to set up a special fund to finance the necessary rehabilitation activities.

6. Special attention should be devoted to harmonizing the legislations of the various Mediterranean states and to encouraging regional agreements between countries having particularly closely connected interests and requirements (for example Spain and France, Corsica and Sardinia).

Parallel with this, research programmes should be coordinated and ecological know-how encouraged. As was proposed at the inter-parliamentary conference of the countries bordering the Mediterranean - held in Rome from 29 March to 3 April 1974 - it would be appropriate to set up an international scientific research centre to centralize data and coordinate research; the UN and European Communities should not underestimate this proposal either.

Further efforts should be made to enlist the mass media and to educate public opinion: environmental studies should be given an important role in school syllabuses, even for the youngest children.

Finally, a coordinated policy on waste disposal is necessary and the installation of waste water purification plants to deal with effluents from industries or urban agglomerations. If need be, the admittedly large expenditure involved could be financed from the abovementioned fund.

The petition levels special criticism at the directors of Montedison, a company which discharges harmful substances from its Scarlino factories and is thus poisoning the north-western part of the Mediterranean: though it claims to be preserving the employment of the industry's work force, it is, in effect, threatening the employment of everyone who earns a living from tourism or fishing - particularly in Corsica. The protests of the Corsican fishermen would seem to be well-founded, judging by the sentence imposed by the Leghorn magistrate who in April sent the chairman of Montedison and four other directors to prison for three months and twenty days.

7. The directors of Montedison are accused, in particular, of causing by their discharges the destruction of plankton, the disruption of deep waters, the accumulation of chromium and, lastly, the disappearance of fish - catches in this sea were down by 47 metric tons in 1972/1973, and moreover a species typical of the Ligurian Sea, the Bluefish, has disappeared altogether.

According to certain public, though unofficial sources, 80% of the fish which were to be found twenty years ago in the Mediterranean have disappeared or migrated to less-polluted seas.

The Mediterranean is therefore in danger of failing to fulfil one of its traditional roles, that of feeding the peoples bordering it; and this is extremely important since it is in fact the sea that is being depended upon to meet the growing food requirements of a world which, by the year 2000, will have a population of approximately eight thousand million.

8. Quite apart from the tons of fish which are believed to have abandoned these polluted waters, it is intolerable that a sea which represents the principal biological resource for millions and millions of inhabitants and holidaymakers should be dyed red. It is intolerable that each day 3,000 metric tons of red mud, that is to say toxic substances constituted by the residues of titanium dioxide (a substance used to colour varnishes, enamels and plastic), are poured into the Ligurian Sea while equal quantities of white mud are discharged into the Adriatic, making a total of one million metric tons a year.

The Mediterranean cannot be subjected to assault from both east and west, not even in the noble cause of employment.

It must be said, however, that Scarlino and Montedison are only typical examples: official French sources state that six million metric tons of alkaline residue are poured into the sea annually in the Marseilles region, and that the Rhône discharges 50 million metric tons of polluted water into the Mediterranean.

9. We are therefore pleased to learn that the Commission is about to draw up a directive restricting the discharge of titanium dioxide waste. We feel, however, that other polluting substances, such as carbon dioxide, should also be subject to similar controls. If this identity of treatment were not put into practice, the conditions of competition in industry would be disturbed since only some firms would be obliged to undertake the very costly purifying operations - unless the Community as such bore the burden of expense for these operations for the protection of the environment.

Our anxiety to preserve the fragile competitive balance between chemical industries in particular leads us to ask that uniform rules be adopted on discharges, irrespective of the sea concerned. In our view it is not possible to deal more severely with firms bordering on the Mediterranean.

10. Equally welcome is the proposal for a decision on the reduction of pollution caused by the discharge of certain dangerous substances into the aquatic environment of the Community.

This step by the Commission is aimed at coordinating the different conventions existing in this important sector, for their number and lack of consistency - their provisions are even contradictory at times - may impair the protection of the aquatic environment, in spite of the good intentions of the drafters. Moreover, the coordination of these conventions with the EEC programme on the environment is a matter of urgency.

We therefore believe that it would be extremely useful for the Commission to publish as soon as possible an inventory of the harmful substances which are regularly discharged into the aquatic environment, together with a supplementary list of dangerous substances. Clearly there should also be an indication of the degree of danger, with the provision of different time-limits for the reduction or elimination of discharges, according to the degree of harmfulness each presents.

11. In addition, some progress is now being made in the fight against pollution of the sea thanks to the constantly increasing number of purifiers and diffusers in operation - although difficult technical problems have still to be resolved, one being the choice between these two instruments.

In view of the smaller costs involved, the diffuser could be of help in tackling the problem in the short term, especially if fitted with sufficiently long pipes, that is to say pipes extending further than a kilometre into the sea.

The diffuser has the advantage of discharging refuse at a certain distance from the coast, and is therefore based on the capacity of the sea to purify itself. Obviously this capacity is not absolute, and for this reason it is necessary to add chemical substances, whose polluting nature is confirmed by the deaths of fish reported in those regions.

Moreover, it should be stressed that within a few decades desalinized sea water will be used for domestic purposes, since fresh water is likely to become inadequate to satisfy growing needs; and for this reason the introduction of chemical substances should be avoided.

Therefore, in the long term, the ideal solution is the use of purifiers which, besides preventing marine pollution, transform sewage into chemical fertilizers; in view of the fertilizer crisis due to the rise in price of energy products, this will afford some respite to the balance of payments of the countries concerned. One technical problem which is sometimes difficult to resolve is that of finding near the sea the large areas necessary to collect and treat sewage in purifying plants.

12. There is another encouraging piece of news from Italy: Montedison, held to be principally responsible for the pollution of the Mediterranean, has undertaken an environmental programme involving a total investment of 250 thousand million lire, 25 thousand million of which will be spent on halving the pollution caused by the Scarlino plant and 50 thousand million on improving the Marghera region, which is poisoning the Venetian basin. Until fairer Community rules are laid down, we feel that it is just that the company should receive some of the allocations provided for in the special law for the preservation of Venice (from 30% to 70% of expenses incurred) even though the company has itself to blame for getting into this situation through defiance of the laws of the environment.

13. At this stage of the report, it is perhaps appropriate to make a brief digression on the nature of pollution: the sea is suspect when it contains between 10 and 20 thousand faecal colobacilli per litre of water; if this limit is exceeded, the beach must definitely be condemned. Further, research has not as yet been able to determine with any great accuracy the self-purifying capacity of water: it should perhaps be stressed that apparently limpid waters, that is to say those with no superficial waste at all, may well prove to be polluted when subjected to bacteriological examination.

Nor should the increasing level of pollution on the beaches be underestimated; this phenomenon is pointed up by the more or less serious infections to which children in particular are subject. Great attention should therefore be paid to cleaning up the beaches and to setting up sanitary installations at seaside resorts.

This measure may perhaps seem inadequate, given the magnitude of the problem. However, by this simple expedient, last year in France, more than a hundred metric tons of refuse were removed from the sea.

14. Pollution from land-based sources, although responsible for 80% of all marine pollution, is clearly not the only form to be considered; there is also the very serious form constituted by dumping on the high seas. Three hundred million metric tons of oil (15% of the total) are dumped annually into the Mediterranean, especially as a result of the cleaning of tanks, and there is a danger that the situation will become still worse when the Suez Canal is reopened.

Mathematical models for studying coastal pollution should be applied at least to test areas or highly polluted stretches of water.

Mention should be made of the French Government's recent decision to introduce effective means - including radar - to track down those responsible for polluting the sea with oil residues discharged when they clean their tanks. With the evidence thus obtained it will be possible to prosecute the offenders.

As is known, this initiative was followed up by the work of the United Nations Conference on the Law of the Sea which closed in Caracas on 29 August. Responsibility for establishing an offence would lie with the coastal country; the courts of the state under whose flag the ship responsible for the dumping was sailing would only have to take note of the offence. If they then took no further steps, the coastal state would be entitled to punish the offender itself. This is a truly historic innovation since, in the past, judgment could only be pronounced in this

field by the courts of the state under whose flag the ship was sailing. If these measures seem excessive, it should be remembered that in the long term freedom of navigation itself would have been put at risk.

Finally, there are serious dangers inherent in prospecting for oil at sea: the greatest care must be taken, and governments must cooperate in drawing up very strict safety measures. Damage to the installations could involve pollution of the sea on an enormous scale, which it would be difficult to combat: some cases, fortunately on a small scale, have already occurred in the United States.

