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ENVIRONMENT:

NEW GUIDELINES FOR COMMUNITY ACTION

The European Community's Second Action Programme on the Environment, covering the years 1976 to 1980, must build on progress under first (see I&S No 24/75) but will have to adjust its guidelines to recent economic developments. The European Commission's initial reflections on this second programme reproduced in this issue of "Industry and Society" will serve as a blueprint for Community action in the years ahead.

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The environment policy adopted by the European Community in November 1973 (see I&S No 28/74) set out "to improve the setting, surroundings and conditions of life" of the people of Europe. It sought to put expansion at the service of man by procuring for him an environment which provides the best possible conditions of life, and to reconcile expansion with the increasingly imperative need to preserve the natural environment.

Adoption of these objectives at a time when the economic climate was favourable reflected a determination to ensure that action by the Community and the Member States would, from that point onwards, be influenced by new considerations and values such as the fragile nature of the natural environment, the "finiteness" of natural resources, the shortcomings of a society whose only criteria for development were affluence and technological progress, and the interdependence of national policies on these issues.

Since then, despite the economic difficulties encountered, this determination has scarcely lessened: attacks on the natural environment are still deeply felt, the fate of future generations is still a major cause of concern and better living and working conditions are still a major aspiration.

However, the recent energy crisis has highlighted the vulnerability of the European economy as regards supplies of non-regenerating raw materials and focussed attention on the need to avoid the wastage that goes hand in hand with a consumer society.

For this reason the Commission is convinced that a Community environment policy, designed to improve living conditions, promote economic expansion and social progress and preserve our natural heritage, is needed as much, if not more, today than it was yesterday.

The Commission feels that the environment programme for the next five years should centre around three key areas.

In the first place it should ensure that the action begun under the first programme (see I&S No 24/75) is continued and intensified if necessary.

Secondly, it should put some flesh on the bones of certain guiding principles such as the need to take early preventive action, to fix common long-term objectives, and to coordinate national programmes and policies on the basis of common long-term thinking. Coordination should, in particular, make it easier to identify action to be given priority treatment at Community level.

In the third place, it should focus attention on economic changes some at least of which are attributable to reaction to the very excesses it is trying to combat. The Community should join in the fight against the various types of wastage which accompany expansion and become more closely involved with development policies of third world countries.

1. Action already begun

Although environment policy cannot lose sight of economic realities, it should not be swayed either by fashion or by short-term trends. A number of actions listed in the first programme have still to be undertaken, pursued or applied.

(a) Action to reduce pollution and nuisance must continue in accordance with the three principles defined in the first programme, namely:

- . objective evaluation of pollution hazards;
- . protection of man and the natural environment;
- . reduction of nuisance at source.

Much remains to be done before an objective evaluation of pollution hazards can be obtained. The aim here must still be to gain greater insight into the real short- and long-term effects of the major pollutants on man and his environment and to formulate criteria, i.e. to establish a relationship between the concentration of a pollutant and its effect. Community criteria of this kind have already been proposed for SO<sub>2</sub>, CO and lead. Under the second programme further criteria should be proposed and adopted for the remaining pollutants mentioned in the first programme and for "second category" pollutants on the definitive list recently adopted.

The definition of quality objectives or quality standards as the case may be provides immediate evidence of concern to protect man and the natural environment. Quality objectives have been adopted for surface water used to produce drinking water and in February 1975 the Commission forwarded a proposal for a directive on quality objectives for water for bathing. Similar proposals are being prepared for water for fish and shellfish breeding, irrigation and specific industrial uses.

Work should now continue on the definition of quality objectives for water, air and soil and common methods should be developed to determine the steps to be taken to achieve and maintain present and future quality objectives.

Finally, the state of the various environmental media should be systematically monitored and controlled throughout the Community by the use of harmonized methods of measurement.

Efforts to reduce nuisance at source should be kept up by:

- the adoption of regulations on product specifications, use and disposal;
- the adoption of regulations on the discharge of particularly dangerous pollutants;
- the study of ways and means of solving the problems posed by pollution from specific industries.

(b) As stressed in the first programme, environment policy must not be content to fight pollution but must also make a positive contribution to improving the environment.

Accordingly, action should be taken or continued under the second programme:

- to provide increased information on "the state of the environment" in the various regions of the Community;
- to study the problems posed by the availability of water resources and the depletion of certain non-regenerating natural resources;
- to seek practical solutions to the conflict between the desire to protect and improve the environment and the requirements of economic development in regions where improvement of the quality of life is held back by regional imbalances;
- to ensure that the need to improve and protect the environment is taken into account in land use planning, particularly in the planning of environmentally sensitive areas and transport systems (for example, the possibility of disincentives in densely populated areas might be considered);
- to protect flora and fauna;
- to safeguard the natural environment, notably in the context of the common agricultural policy.

(c) Lastly, on a third front, the fight against pollution and wastage and efforts to improve the environment would overlap.

Apart from research projects which would form a special programme, the aim here would be to promote environmental awareness through education, to disseminate information on the environment and to tighten up certain rules of law (e.g., on the civil liability of polluters, on the harmonization of monitoring methods, etc.). It would include continued action by the Community and the Member States within international organizations and cooperation with non-member countries to "find common solutions to environmental problems", a prominent aspect being implementation of International Conventions to which the Community is a signatory.

2. Shift of emphasis to preventive action and increased harmonization of Community policies

- (a) The principles of the Community's environment programme have inspired a number of Member States to introduce "environmental impact assessment" procedures to ensure that the environmental implications of important investment and planning decisions, or decisions to market specific products, are not overlooked.

The Commission believes that such procedures should be introduced throughout the Community on the basis of common evaluation criteria defined and adopted under the second programme.

- (b) The Commission considers that an effort should be made to formulate and implement a long-term policy in the Community which would ensure that economic development is not at the expense of the natural and social environment and which would at the same time help to redress the economic and social imbalances between the various regions of the Community.

The following measures might be singled out for mention: improved information on and evaluation of the environmental situation in the various regions of the Community; the rehabilitation of certain sensitive areas (notably areas of common interest such as the Rhine and the Mediterranean); the preservation of the present quality of the environment in areas which are relatively uncongested and unpolluted; the production of environmental impact assessments; the harmonized application of quality objectives; the definition of standards for the most dangerous pollutants; and the promotion of new techniques less harmful to the environment.

- (c) Under the information agreement adopted on 5 March 1973 (see I&S No 28/74) the Commission and Member States are informed in advance of national laws, regulations and administrative provisions under preparation and the Commission can now request that particular national initiatives be extended to the entire Community.

Nevertheless, because these texts are necessarily forwarded at irregular intervals, it is impossible to build up a completely accurate picture of policies pursued at national or regional level and hence difficult to coordinate national programmes and harmonize Community policies as required by the first programme.

Coordination would make it easier to establish priorities for Community action, allowing for the economic, social and environmental differences between Member States without however adversely affecting the satisfactory operation of the common market.

The Commission believes that coordination could be improved if at one of the meetings of the Council of Ministers on the environment Ministers were to discuss and compare ideas among themselves and with the Commission on the environment policies pursued at national, Community and international level and if, twice yearly for example, the Commission were to invite senior officials from the relevant government departments to meet on an informal basis to exchange information and ideas.

### 3. Conservation of resources

It will be remembered that the first environment programme - drawn up in October 1973, well before the present energy and raw material crises - attached considerable importance to the proper management of natural resources.

In fact a well-thought-out environment policy dovetails into a general policy for the conservation of natural resources and the reduction of wastage. Damage to the environment is frequently linked to wastage; atmospheric pollution in large urban centres is linked to the widespread use of energy-wasting private transport and poorly-regulated domestic heating systems; the use of products with built-in obsolescence produces refuse which scars the countryside; the intensive use of chemicals in agriculture (pesticides, fertilizers), the consequent consumption of luxury products, and the emphasis on cultivation techniques with a high short-term yield affect the natural environment and soil productivity in the long run; and the abandonment of arable land has ecological implications (erosion, changes in the water system) which must not be overlooked.

Environment policy must prevent waste production by subjecting production methods and product composition to scrutiny. In this way it could call a halt to the squandering of expensive resources which are being depleted with little regard for future generations. More generally it must protect a rare asset, the quality of the environment in which men live and from which they derive their livelihood.

Conversely, the campaign against wastage, and the implied changes in consumption and production habits, could have favourable repercussions on the quality of life, if for example it led to a reduction of overcrowding, pollution, noise nuisance and the spoiling of beauty spots by rubbish or inessential buildings.

The Community's second environment programme must therefore place more stress on measures designed to save natural resources, notably the recovery and recycling of waste, the composition and durability of products and the rational use of energy and raw materials.

4. Environmental aspects of cooperation with developing countries

Any overall view of environmental problems seen in terms of their three major components - overcrowding, shortage of certain resources and deterioration of the environment - means that analysis and solutions cannot be confined to Europe but must extend to non-member countries and developing countries in particular.

The links between development and environment are many and inevitably international. As far as the Member States and the Community are concerned the transnational dimension of environmental problems presents a whole new range of constraints and opportunities. It reduces room for manoeuvre (transfer of pollutants; global effects; negative effects of the environment on competitive positions, etc.) but it does provide an opportunity of stepping beyond the limits imposed by national or Community territory. Current trends towards a new industrial geography should therefore be examined for their impact on the environment and for the type of development implied.

This examination should not be confined to industries which could be redeployed internationally, the geographical extent or the manner of redeployment - which must obviously allow for regional differences in life-style, geography and climate - but should also study the long-term consequences of industrial and agricultural development on the natural and social equilibria.

Given the potential ease with which pollution problems might be passed on to developing countries, the Community should make clear its intention to do all it can in the context of cooperation with these countries to prevent the phenomena of environmental destruction now afflicting the industrialized nations of the world from spreading to the third world. Where these considerations coincided with the priorities of the developing countries themselves, the Lomé Convention could make a positive contribution to the development of vast projects to combat erosion, soil impoverishment and desert formation and to improve living conditions, notably housing.

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These objectives and measures, designed as they are to reconcile the demands of economic progress with the need to protect the environment and avoid wastage and responding as they do to the deep desire of Europeans to improve the quality of life, will undoubtedly make a valuable contribution to the balanced and harmonious development of the European Community.