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Report

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

on the proposal from the Commission of the European Communities to the Council (Doc. 405/74) for a decision establishing a common procedure for the reciprocal exchange of information between the surveillance and monitoring networks based on data relating to atmospheric pollution by sulphur compounds and suspended particulates

Rapporteur : Mrs E. ORTH

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12.3

English Edition

By letter of 4 December 1974 the President of the Council of the European Communities requested the European Parliament, pursuant to Article 235 of the EEC Treaty, to deliver an opinion on the proposal from the Commission of the European Communities to the Council for a decision establishing a common procedure for the reciprocal exchange of information between the surveillance and monitoring networks based on data relating to atmospheric pollution by sulphur compounds and suspended particulates.

The President of the European Parliament referred this proposal to the Committee on Public Health and the Environment.

On 8 January 1975, the Committee on Public Health and the Environment appointed Mrs Orth rapporteur.

It considered this proposal at its meetings of 8 January and 24 February 1975.

At its meeting of 24 February 1975 the committee unanimously adopted the motion for a resolution and the explanatory statement.

Present: Mr Della Briotta, chairman; Mr Jahn, vice-chairman; Mr Jakobsen, vice-chairman; Mrs Orth, rapporteur; Mr Albertsen, Mr Antoniozzi, Lord Bessborough, Mr Brégégère, Mr Didier, Mrs Fenner, Mr van der Gun, Mr Herbert, Mr Lagorce, Mr Liogier (deputizing for Mr Gibbons), Mr Martens, Mr Willi Müller, Mr Noè, Mr Premoli, Mr Springorum, Mr Terrenoire (deputizing for Mr Petersen), Mr Walkhoff and Mr Yeats (deputizing for Mr Lenihan).

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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

embodying the opinion of the European Parliament on the proposal from the Commission of the European Communities to the Council for a decision establishing a common procedure for the reciprocal exchange of information between the surveillance and monitoring networks based on data relating to atmospheric pollution by sulphur compounds and suspended particulates

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the proposal from the Commission of the European Communities to the Council¹,
 - having been consulted by the Council pursuant to Article 235 of the EEC Treaty (Doc. 405/74),
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Public Health and the Environment (Doc. 515/74),
1. Welcomes the Commission's proposal for a Council decision as a useful initiative and in keeping with the action programme on the environment which announced the introduction of a procedure for the exchange of data relating to air pollution;
 2. Recommends that the Commission take steps to extend cooperation in this field to all countries of Europe;
 3. Calls on the governments of the Member States to strengthen their co-operation with other states in this field;
 4. Considers the proposal unsatisfactory in that it merely provides for the collection of measurement results, and not for the standardization of measuring methods, and therefore calls for its scope to be widened to commit Member States to introduce standardization over a network of monitoring stations of sufficient density to produce significant results;

¹ O.J. No. C 11, 16 January 1975, p.1

5. Hopes that the collection of measurement results will be extended as soon as possible to atmospheric pollution agents, other than sulphur compounds and suspended particulates;
6. Urges the Commission to ensure that the data obtained from measurements taken from aircraft, balloons, ships and marine monitoring stations are also collected;
7. Recommends that the Commission should press for the exchange of information to be extended to cover additional data, for example average measurements on a half-hourly basis and the maximum and minimum levels recorded by the monitoring stations;
8. Takes the view that special efforts should be made to promote international cooperation in recording the movement of sulphur compounds and suspended particulates over long distances;
9. Recommends that data be collected from the Member States on the incidence of disease, and compared with the results of the atmospheric pollution measurements;
10. Recommends the installation of automatic measuring equipment (recording instruments - subsidized if necessary by Community funds);
11. Urges the Commission, in conjunction with this, to arrange for local meteorological readings to be taken at the atmospheric pollution measuring stations;
12. Hopes that the Commission will take steps to develop 'atmospheric pollution climatology';
13. Considers it important to promote cooperation within the Community on atmospheric pollution warning systems;
14. Calls on the Commission to take the necessary steps to implement the above suggestions;
15. Requests the parliamentary committee responsible to follow this matter closely and ascertain to what extent the Commission complies with the European Parliament's suggestions, and expects to be kept informed of the situation;
16. Instructs its President to forward this resolution and the report of its committee to the Council and Commission of the European Communities.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENTI. Introduction

1. The Committee on Public Health and the Environment takes this opportunity to express its satisfaction that the Commission has submitted a proposal on the exchange of information between surveillance and monitoring networks on atmospheric pollution in the Community. The proposal is in keeping with the objectives announced in the Commission's environmental action programme¹.
2. The committee approves the basic terms of the proposal, which will serve principally to make up for the long-standing failure to cooperate on a Community basis in monitoring and combating atmospheric pollution. Reliable measurements covering a wide geographical area are an essential requirement if regional, national and international or Community emission and air quality standards are to be established and compliance with these standards ensured.
3. However, the committee feels compelled to suggest what, in its view, are pertinent changes to the Commission's proposal, and to offer a few observations relevant to the European Parliament's debate on this subject.

¹See OJ No. C 112, 20 December 1973, p. 15

II. General remarks

(a) International cooperation

4. The Committee on Public Health and the Environment is aware of the extensive and wide-ranging work that has been and is still being done in certain international organizations, particularly the OECD, the WHO and the Council of Europe, and assumes that the Commission is in close contact with these organizations and will, as a matter of course, make any future measurement results in this field available as part of the process of international cooperation.

It is important that under the procedures and methods suggested in the Commission's proposal, the results obtained will be compared with those from other countries, particularly the neighbouring Eastern European States, in which the level of atmospheric pollution by sulphur compounds is reported to be extremely high. It would also be useful for the European Community to offer to pass on its own data to these neighbouring States. Atmospheric pollution, like some water pollution, knows no frontiers and the effects of sulphur compounds carried over long distances cannot be evaluated unless surveys can be extended beyond the Community's borders. This obviously applies also to Sweden and Norway, the other Scandinavian countries and the non-Member States in Western Europe that are members of the OECD, in which, as mentioned above, a certain amount of cooperation is already under way¹. The governments of the Member States are also called on to strengthen their cooperation in this field, in particular with the Eastern States.

(b) Standardization of measuring methods

5. Your committee would also like to point out that the European Parliament, in a series of resolutions and reports, has recommended that atmospheric pollution should be monitored on a Community basis without delay. It should be mentioned that in the report by Mr NOE' on behalf of the Committee on Public Health and the Environment, adopted by Parliament in December 1974 (Doc. 320/74), one of the objectives laid down is the introduction of common methods for the continuous monitoring of atmospheric pollution. The present Commission proposal submitted to Parliament for its opinion does not comply with Parliament's recommendation. The proposal calls only for an exchange of measurement results and not for the standardization of measuring methods.

¹ Compare the cooperation in the Global Environmental Monitoring System (GEMS), mentioned in Mr Jahn's report on the Conference on the Environment in Nairobi (Doc. 361/74)

6. In connection with the methods of measuring atmospheric pollution mentioned in paragraph 5 of the explanatory memorandum, your committee wishes to point out that the OECD in particular has stated that the development and application of common methods of measurement and analysis is of paramount importance, since an unnecessarily large number of errors could arise in comparing different data and this may cause delays in passing on information which could be avoided. Your committee therefore reiterates its appeal to the Commission to submit proposals for the harmonization of measuring methods without delay, since, as indicated above, the application of common methods has numerous advantages, as the Commission appreciates. It is important in this connection for standardization to apply to a network of monitoring stations of sufficient density to produce significant results.

(c) Other forms of atmospheric pollution

7. The exchange of information is to cover only two kinds of atmospheric pollution, which are undoubtedly of crucial importance and deserve priority - namely atmospheric pollution by sulphur dioxide and suspended particulates. From the point of view of systems and methods this is only to be expected since it is only for these two forms of pollution that the Member States have the necessary network of monitoring stations and other installations to measure atmospheric pollution on a comprehensive scale. This does not however rule out the possibility of steps being taken to measure other harmful substances commonly found in the atmosphere such as nitrogen compounds, hydrocarbons, fluorides etc., where data are available. In some of the larger Member States there are extensive monitoring networks, at least for nitrogen compounds. Your committee hopes, therefore, that the Commission will encourage the collection of such data on as wide a scale as possible and take steps to ensure that measurements are taken in the Member States where this is not already done.

(d) Monitoring from the air and from the sea

8. The Committee on Public Health and the Environment is aware of the importance of monitoring from aircraft and balloons and therefore finds it surprising that this method is not mentioned in the Commission's proposal. Sulphur compounds are known to be carried for long distances in certain weather conditions, often at a height of between 700 and 2,000 metres; monitoring from aircraft and balloons is therefore of great importance in ascertaining the origin, distribution and concentration of atmospheric pollution, and this in turn is crucial to any decision on appropriate counter-measures. For example, the construction of higher chimneys means that large-scale local pollution is to some extent avoided, but at the same time pollutants, especially sulphur emitted from power stations, industrial installations and similar large and stationary combustion plants, can be carried over long distances.

9. It might also be useful to set up special marine stations for monitoring atmospheric pollution, particularly in the North Sea, or to collect data from ships, as this would be a source of valuable information on the transport of harmful substances over long distances from neighbouring countries. Similar arrangements should be made in the Baltic Sea. Probably a combination of aircraft, balloon or ship monitoring or monitoring by marine stations would be the most appropriate. The Commission's proposal does not, however, take these possibilities into account at all.

(e) Measurement problems

10. According to your committee's information, the absence of the suspended particulates produced in the combustion of low sulphur content hydrocarbons such as natural gas can lead to a paradoxical situation in which a switch to lower sulphur content fuels can produce a measurable increase in the sulphur content of the atmosphere. This is apparently due to the fact that the suspended particulates are alkaline and help to neutralize the sulphur. Points such as this should be taken into consideration when comparing atmospheric pollution data. It is therefore extremely important to keep the methods used under constant review and to gather information on the various factors that may affect results from the different monitoring stations.

In this connection it should be pointed out that from the health point of view the combination of suspended particulates and sulphur compounds is to be regarded as the most harmful. Only if combined measurements are taken can combined standards be established, e.g. for the simultaneous occurrence of SO₂ and suspended particulates in the air. Combined standards are the best solution in drawing up guidelines for appropriate measures to combat harmful atmospheric pollution resulting from the combustion of fossil fuels.

(f) Monitoring frequency

11. The Commission's proposal calls only for the collection of average daily levels of atmospheric pollution. Your committee takes the view that it would also be advisable to collect other data, for example maximum and minimum levels and levels for shorter periods e.g. half an hour. Although this is perhaps not essential in establishing specific standards for atmospheric quality, it might be useful on the scientific point and other grounds, to collect all available data. Also it would be quite feasible to lay down combined Community standards for monthly, daily and half-hourly averages. Those countries which already have guidelines for acceptable immission levels, for example West Germany ('Technische Anleitung zur Reinhaltung der Luft') partly use specific yearly, monthly or daily averages as permissible maxima, and partly specific peaks which must not be reached

for more than 1% of the time in a twelve month cycle (suspended dust particles). Germany, Sweden, the USA and other countries also have, or are planning maximum levels for shorter periods (e.g. the maximum permissible average for 30 minutes must not be reached more than 15 times a month).

12. It appears from the Commission's proposal that the object is merely to establish common immission standards in the items of daily or monthly average levels. Your committee appreciates that it would be difficult to use shorter periods because the necessary data are not available at present. It might however be possible to lay down maximum permissible levels for shorter periods on a national basis and at the same time comply with Community standards for longer periods. Your committee takes the view, however, that efforts should also be made to work out a common Community policy with regard to the application of maximum immission levels over short periods, although the establishment of common rules for longer periods is already a step forward.

(g) Pollutants carried through the atmosphere over long distances

13. It will, however, be extremely difficult to ensure compliance with these standards if there is a further increase in the spread of pollutants through the atmosphere as a result of increased energy consumption and inadequate standards for emissions from various pollution sources. It may be impossible for a country to keep within the permissible limits for long periods, and especially for shorter periods, if a large proportion of the atmospheric pollution from sulphur and suspended particulates comes from sources outside their national boundaries. This may mean that more stringent standards will have to be laid down locally than in the areas from which the pollution partly originates. Appropriate emission standards will have to be laid down in the Community so that the individual Member States are also able to comply with the common atmospheric quality standards.

14. As regards the problem of pollutants carried for long distances from countries outside the Community, it will be difficult to comply with specific immission standards if the circumstances are unfavourable.

It is therefore particularly important to cooperate with countries outside the Community in mapping out the routes along which these pollutants travel. In this field, as already mentioned, the OECD is making a valuable contribution (e.g. under the OECD programme, initial monitoring with a view to charting the path taken by pollutants has already been completed. But this is not enough. Clearly cooperation with the Eastern Bloc countries is called for in this matter, if it does not already exist in the international organizations.

(h) Epidemiological surveys

15. The Commission's proposal stressed the importance of epidemiological surveys in the Community. It would, therefore, be useful for Member States to cooperate in collecting data on various diseases in the Community to obtain a fuller picture of the harmful effects of atmospheric pollution. Certain forms of atmospheric pollution are known to be carcinogenic and also to cause other serious diseases such as bronchitis (for example in London and Oslo, at times when the amount of sulphur and suspended matter in the air was particularly high, a higher death rate was recorded). Research is being carried out in certain urban areas of Denmark at the present time on the link between the incidence of disease (in particular lung cancer) and atmospheric pollution, for example in Fredericia, Denmark where an exceptionally large number of cases of cancer have occurred. Your committee therefore urges the Commission to obtain comparative data on this subject from the whole Community as soon as possible.

(i) Automatic and continuous monitoring equipment

16. Your committee's proposal that the use of monitoring apparatus which registers the development of pollution continuously and automatically should be encouraged is of a technical nature. This equipment, which incorporates automatic recorders, gives the most accurate possible picture of the progress of atmospheric pollution. It is extremely costly and is used by certain power stations, being fitted on to vehicles for use in various locations. During surveys, average levels are usually obtained for a specific period by taking measurements for a short period (generally daily) and then calculating the average for a longer period. These cumulative average measurements give better results than measurements over longer periods. In this connection your committee welcomes the Commission's decision to submit a proposal for the measurement of pollution levels on a daily basis. This gives a varied picture, although it is not as effective as the use of automatic monitoring equipment which records the progress of the pollution (see above : short-period findings and the possibility of establishing maximum limits for immission levels, for example on an hourly basis).

(k) Air pollution climatology

17. Your committee feels that the Commission could have stressed the importance of local meteorological measurements in conjunction with the atmospheric pollution measurements, as this is useful in making an accurate assessment of the measurement results. It would also be desirable for the Community to promote the study of atmospheric pollution climatology, in other words research to establish a link

between recorded atmospheric pollution and meteorological observation data. Statistics of this kind could be used, for example, to assess the economic effects of measures to combat atmospheric pollution (including the temporary suspension of the use of pollutant fuels in factories) introduced in specific areas after a warning that critical levels had been exceeded. The detailed study of atmospheric pollution climatology could also play an important part in town planning or the siting of industrial plants. It should be mentioned, in this connection, that local monitoring in Denmark has revealed a definite link between the increasing use of long-range heating systems and atmospheric pollution from sulphur compounds and suspended particulates (see on this point the recommendation in Mr NOE's report on the use of waste heat for long-range heating).

This kind of pollution was appreciably less serious in a large city (Odense) which is markedly different from similar cities in ~~the~~ use of long-range heating. This information is given in a report on atmospheric pollution measurements, mainly with OECD equipment, carried out in Denmark between 1965 and 1967.

(1) Cooperation on warning systems

18. It would also be useful for the Community to collect and pass on information on atmospheric pollution warning systems in the Member States. The American Weather Bureau produces daily estimates of various meteorological parameters which are useful in pinpointing potential atmospheric pollution. If these exceed a specific critical threshold level, a warning is given that there is a high level of pollution in one or more geographical areas, whether or not the area concerned contains large cities and industrial zones. If steps were taken to centralize the warning systems in the Community through cooperation in exchanging measurement data on atmospheric pollution and meteorological observation data, the systems could be used more effectively, since the critical levels often cover areas extending over several Member States. The Weather Bureau's forecasts therefore occasionally cover areas of about 200,000 square kilometers.

III. Conclusions

19. It will be seen from the above that the Committee on Public Health and the Environment has confined itself to a few observations on this proposal, which is essentially of a technical nature and can be used as a means of establishing Community standards for the emission of substances causing atmospheric pollution and their presence in the atmosphere (air quality or immission standards). Your committee felt that it would be useful to put forward specific proposals to encourage greater efforts in this field but apart from this concedes, as it points out in the motion for a resolution, that the proposal is at least a useful starting point.

