Recommendation 1186 (1992)[1]

Environment policy in Europe (1990-91)

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Sustainable development can only be achieved by a balance between the production of goods and the protection of natural resources. For too long a period the industrial society has acted as if limitless growth, thanks to limitless resources, were possible.

2. Having realised that economic growth has ecological limits, the industrial society has to reorganise its production methods and lifestyle in order to achieve sustainability and protect our already seriously threatened planet.

3. To change the way of life is a big challenge for our countries and presupposes being aware of the environment and the needs of nature, as well as acting accordingly.

4. Good information given to the young generations about the problem of nature and of the environment is of the utmost importance, especially taking account of the fact that the urban way of life does not contribute to this awareness.

5. Human beings should also have the right to a sound environment. These rights can only be guaranteed by international co-operation.

6. By signing and ratifying international agreements, governments foresee adapting their national legislation to their international commitments, and taking action within a given period of time. These international agreements should also include provisions for monitoring the commitments of Contracting States.

7. In an industrial society such as ours, the consumer should have access to all the necessary information about products, that should be clearly ‘‘labelled" in so far as they fulfil the various conditions necessary for the protection of the environment.

8. On the other hand, in view of the citizen's important participation in environment management, it is important to take account of the action and the opinion of non-governmental organisations.

9. The setting up of production techniques based on environmentally sound methods is not usual because industries prefer to pay the possible cost of their pollution rather than invest in environmentally sound methods which are often expensive. On the other hand, the ‘‘polluter pays" principle is not yet anchored in legislations, often because of the difficulty in identifying ‘‘the polluter".

10. The problem of waste treatment and management is being discussed in many European countries and different strategies are proposed. Only nine member states of the Council of Europe have signed or ratified the Basle Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal and therefore the implemention of this instrument is, for the moment, difficult.

1. Assembly debate on 7 May 1992 (6th and 7th Sittings) (seeDoc. 6599, report of the Committee on the Environment, Regional Planning and Local Authorities, Rapporteur : Mrs Graenitz). Text adopted by the Assembly on 7 May 1992 (7th Sitting).

11. Energy is a very important factor for development because almost every activity needs energy. Knowing that the use of fossil fuels contributes to the greenhouse effect and to possible climate changes, knowing also the potential dangers of nuclear and thermic power, it is important to develop renewable energy production in order to achieve sustainable development.

12. For many years the countries of Central and Eastern Europe have exploited their natural resources without taking any precautions and have based their national economies on an industry that uses polluting production methods thus causing enormous, sometimes irreparable, damage to the environment.

13. Taking these considerations into account the Assembly is convinced that it is essential and urgent for member countries to join forces, at all levels, in order to ensure the best protection for the environment.

14. The Assembly therefore recommends that the Committee of Ministers :

14.1. resume consideration of the proposal made by the Assembly in its Recommendation 1130 (1990) on the formulation of a European charter and a European convention on environmental protection and sustainable development and entrust, to this end, an intergovernmental committee with its preparation ;

14.2. provide, within the framework of this convention, the right of human beings to a sound environment and a mechanism that, based on the model of the European Commission on Human Rights, guarantees this right ;

14.3. provide, within the framework of Vote IX ofthe general budget, specific actions such as training sessions, youth programmes, rehabilitation programmes for rivers like the Danube or the Elbe, co-operative twinnings in order to put the countries of Central and Eastern Europe in a position to repair some of the damage and set up policies respectful of the environment ;

14.4. include in the Council of Europe's intergovernmental work programme projects on ecological awareness. These programmes should take account of differences between member countries ;

14.5. ensure that the participation of the Council of Europe in the preparation and the work of the 2nd Pan-European Conference on the Environment is substantial and corresponds to the role that the Organisation can and must play in the protection of the environment ;

14.6. invite member governments to :

a. introduce into the school curricula lessons on the protection of the environment in the form of theoretical teaching and project work and activities ;

b. implement more systematically the international agreements they have signed and ratified, and set up concrete actions in order to ensure their implementation ;

c. ensure full and transparent information is given to consumers on the goods put on the market or used by industries ;

d. take regularly into account the ecological costs, in the same way as other costs, in order to encourage industries to apply environmentally sound industrial methods ;

e. conceive provisions that act as economic incentives to industry so that economic and ecological interests can converge ;

f. concerning waste, set up at national level and, in accordance with all the partners involved, a policy aimed at reducing waste and making maximum use of recycling ;

g. encourage the development of transport by rail and waterways, which present less danger for the environment than other means of transport.