



Recommendation 1233 (1994)¹

European environmental policy (1992-93)

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Earth Summit, organised by the United Nations in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992, was the most important summit meeting ever held on environmental problems.
2. It marked a definite watershed in governments' awareness of the dangers inherent in the damage which humanity and human development are continually inflicting on the environment.
3. It was certainly the first meeting at which governments agreed on a number of political undertakings aimed at setting up a whole series of concerted initiatives to tackle our most immediate environmental problems.
4. Taking as its starting point the concept of sustainable development put forward in the Brundtland report, the summit further recognised that protection of the environment and sustainable development must be indissolubly linked, thus committing the participants to taking into account the imperatives dictated by the protection of resources and genuine North-South solidarity when implementing sectoral policies.
5. While the negotiations, the commitments and the agreement reached in Rio on action to achieve sustainable development were all global in scope, the projects, strategies and activities needed to realise the aims set out will clearly have to be launched on various levels - local, regional, interregional, national, transfrontier, international, etc.
6. Although the Earth Summit succeeded in winning general support for action to preserve our planet, it has to be said that, nearly two years later, the results fall somewhat short of expectations.
7. It is true that certain non-binding agreements and a host of declarations of principle were recognised, from the outset, as being wholly inadequate to deal with a situation that was increasingly seen as extremely serious. Nevertheless, the Agenda 21 embodies precise objectives and action plans, defined and adopted by most of the participants.
8. But it is also true that the recession has hit nearly all the industrialised countries, and does nothing to assist implementation of the "Rio process", which has been forced into the background by other pressing issues, such as unemployment, warfare and political instability.
9. At the same time, having regard both to the new structures set up within the United Nations to pursue the Earth Summit's objectives as effectively as possible, and to the practical undertakings given by various organisations and countries, one can still hope that, once recovery begins and funds can be mobilised again, work will recommence and bring better results far more rapidly.
10. As far as environment policy at pan-European level is concerned, the Assembly is especially worried about the state of the environment in certain of its member states, and particularly in the countries of central and eastern Europe.

1. Assembly debate on 28 January 1994 (8th Sitting) (see [Doc. 6991](#), report of the Committee on the Environment, Regional Planning and Local Authorities, Rapporteur: Mr Granstedt). Text adopted by the Assembly on 28 January 1994 (8th Sitting).



11. Indeed, the specific nature of the environmental crisis inflicted on these countries by years of centralised economic planning, with industrialisation as its only aim, has created a truly disastrous situation in many regions, calling for action on a massive scale.

12. In this connection, the Assembly welcomes the efforts made by European and international organisations to help the "transition" countries master this crisis, and their contribution to the collective effort triggered by the "Rio process".

13. The first two pan-European conferences of ministers for the environment, the second of which was held recently in Lucerne, focused to a large extent on this specific aspect of Europe's environmental situation.

14. Furthermore, in view of the great number of initiatives taken in the environment field, the Assembly is convinced of the importance of pan-European interparliamentary co-operation in this area, and of the value of conferences such as those organised by itself, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the Nordic Council and the international parliamentary association, GLOBE.

15. It is indeed important to ensure that parliaments play a full and active role in setting up a legal framework and in implementing co-operation policies in the environment field.

16. Moreover, the Assembly wishes to underline the importance it attaches to an ongoing dialogue with all the parties concerned: local authorities, non-governmental organisations, associations, young people, etc.

17. With specific reference to young people, it stresses that priority must be given to environmental awareness-building and education programmes which will help to forge a society that is conscious of its responsibilities and capable of managing the planet's resources sensibly.

18. As for the particular situation of the countries of central and eastern Europe, the Assembly is aware that the acceptance and development of environment policies at all levels are directly linked with the democratisation process in those countries and with the setting up of institutions and instruments for the genuine exercise of democracy.

19. At the same time, the Assembly does not forget that its member states in western Europe must make considerable efforts to improve the environmental situation both at national and European levels, that urgent measures are clearly required to achieve this and that political undertakings must be backed-up by practical action in areas such as air and water pollution, and transport and energy policy.

20. Consequently, bearing in mind both the Council of Europe's specificity and the role it is expected to play among other European and international organisations, the Parliamentary Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers:

- 20.1. focus the Council of Europe's intergovernmental activity in the environment sector primarily on:
 - a. drawing up and implementing legal instruments and establishing machinery for their optimal application;
 - b. full Council of Europe participation in the pan-European ministerial environment conferences, the next of which is to be held in Bulgaria in 1994;
 - c. developing specific programmes of information, education and legal advice for the countries of central and eastern Europe;
 - d. developing transfrontier co-operation and co-operation between local authorities in this field, associating the Standing Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (CLRAE) and the relevant intergovernmental committees with these efforts;
- 20.2. call on the governments of member countries:
 - a. to develop their actions in this field with rigour and integrity respecting the commitments they have undertaken;
 - b. to introduce stricter limits on air and water pollution, so that ecologically sustainable levels may be attained in the next twenty years;
 - c. to enforce the principle of cost liability at source by levying, for example, taxes on energy, CO₂, the use of non-renewable energy sources, etc.;
 - d. to encourage research and development programmes aimed at exploring new technologies in environment-linked areas, notably to combat the greenhouse effect and the climate changes caused by the latter;

- e. to devise economic measures to encourage the use of new environment-friendly technologies;
 - f. to introduce waste management policies based on the three principles: avoid - recycle - eliminate;
 - g. to develop railway transport and shipping as well as less polluting engines in order to lessen the environmental hazards of present road and air transport;
 - h. to give emphasis in the field of energy policy to conservation and the use of renewable, environment-friendly energy sources;
 - i. to encourage the development and implementation of ecologically sustainable methods of agriculture and forestry and to preserve biodiversity and especially endangered habitats;
 - j. to give particular attention to the pollution problems in the polar regions, and, bearing in mind the responsibility of the European states for this pollution notably in the Arctic region, to take measures to reduce the negative ecological impact of the latter;
 - k. to engage manufacturers' responsibility for the whole life cycle of their products and ensure consumers are adequately informed of the ecological conditions of the production process, mainly by means of labelling and controls exercised by consumer councils;
 - l. to give particular attention to the solution of pollution problems in big cities;
 - m. to give priority to implementing and respecting the undertakings given at European and world level in agreements, action plans or conventions;
 - n. to give special attention to the application and further development of the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Wildlife (Bern Convention), which provides, for the time being, an effective instrument for implementation, at pan-European level, of the undertakings given in Rio concerning biodiversity;
 - o. to sign and ratify without delay other key legislative instruments, such as the Basel Convention on the control of transboundary movements of hazardous waste or the Council of Europe Convention on Civil Liability for damage resulting from activities dangerous to the environment;
 - p. to make a special effort to improve, or make effective, their application of the many conventions which they have already signed and ratified - particularly in the marine pollution sector - and which offer potentially effective means of safeguarding the environment;
 - q. to retain in their national budgets the appropriations for investment in environmental protection and in non-polluting technological research;
- 20.3. encourage and initiate Council of Europe participation in all forms of pan-European co-operative ventures in this area.