



Recommendation 1331 (1997)¹

Establishing international standards for assessing the environmental impact of industrial enterprises

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The direct or indirect pressures placed on the environment by industry make it necessary to introduce regulatory mechanisms that encourage businesses to take an active role in environmental management.
2. Growing public awareness of threats to natural resources make it possible to introduce voluntary standards which, combined with compulsory measures, can help businesses manage their environment, raise the awareness of and train their staff, improve their industrial performance and at the same time contribute to sustainable development.
3. The Assembly welcomes the steps taken by the European Union in this regard, notably the European directive on impact studies and the introduction of voluntary measures which can be applied under the ECO-audit regulations and are designed to enable firms in the industrial sector to participate in a Community Environmental Management and Audit Scheme.
4. It also welcomes the launching by the European Commission of a specific pilot programme to help small and medium-sized firms develop a system which would make them eligible for the Community Environmental Management and Audit Scheme.
5. Furthermore, in the current geopolitical situation, environmental damage in the countries of central and eastern Europe is currently one of the major problems facing the international community and calls for the implementation of specific measures.
6. The current resources and pollution level of the countries of central and eastern Europe, the precarious state of their economies and the decisions that confront them in this transition period require action at all levels in order to achieve a balance between the implementation of measures to contain environmental damage and measures for satisfactory economic development.
7. Moreover, the transition towards a market economy may have extremely serious effects on the environment in the countries of central and eastern Europe, which, if not assisted, could repeat the mistakes made by western countries in the past and whose problems could be aggravated by the fact that in the face of economic and social difficulties, environmental problems often take second place.
8. Furthermore, significant differences between the environmental standards of the central and east European countries and western Europe could give rise to ecological dumping with economic activities such as production or storage of waste being re-located from western to central and eastern Europe.
9. Most of the countries of central and eastern Europe have similar environmental problems and it is therefore vital that the different groups in society address them as a matter of priority. In particular, action should be taken to establish positive, systematic links between economic development and the environment.

1. See [Doc. 7800](#), report of the Committee on the Environment, Regional Planning and Local Authorities, rapporteur: Mr Le Grand. Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 28 May 1997.



10. Following the example of successful initiatives within the European Union, action should be taken to raise the awareness of, inform and involve the relevant groups and to encourage them to take voluntary measures. There should also be compulsory measures resulting from the signature of existing European and international conventions and the enactment of national regulations and laws.
11. The Assembly considers that industrial undertakings in the central and east European countries should be encouraged to adopt environmental management systems which, without matching the level currently required within the European Union, would launch a process in keeping with these countries' future accession to the European Union - membership of which would involve, *inter alia*, the adoption of Community regulations on the environment.
12. It would be useful to draw upon the European Union's experience in this respect, giving priority to raising awareness among firms of the importance of voluntary measures and the justification for a system of collective environmental management through the application of binding instruments such as conventions.
13. Due heed must also be paid to the problem of transfrontier pollution and consequently to the application of the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (Espoo Convention).
14. The harmonisation of legislation is all the more necessary in this respect as differences between individual countries may not only lead to unfair competition (ecological dumping) but also have major repercussions on the operation of economic mechanisms and damage to the environment.
15. The Assembly is, however, aware that harmonisation, which must be rational and economically viable, should be achieved in stages and take account of differences between countries, of economic disparities and different economic and social needs.
16. Moreover, any policy encouraging the harmonisation of standards for auditing the environmental impact of industrial activities requires standardisation of the definitions of sources of pollution and the methods used to measure them, which could be incorporated into a common database.
17. With this in mind, priority should be given to defining the parameters by which to measure the ecological pressure exerted by transport, water use and pollution, energy use, waste production and so on.
18. The Assembly is, moreover, convinced of the role local authorities can play in the complementary actions undertaken at different levels and of the need to give them the institutional and financial means to take action in the field of environmental management.
19. It cannot be overlooked in this respect that the financial and institutional independence of local authorities in the countries of central and eastern Europe varies and this disparity in the exercise of responsibilities is bound to affect the quality of environmental management.
20. Consequently, the Assembly can only reiterate its concern that governments take measures to give local authorities financial autonomy and sufficient powers to ensure appropriate management of their environmental problems.
21. The Assembly considers that the Council of Europe, in line with its generally recognised sphere of activities, can play a key role in the informing, awareness raising and training of various groups, and in harmonising legislation and drafting conventions.
22. In view of the foregoing, the Parliamentary Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers :
 - 22.1. provide, as part of intergovernmental sector activities, awareness-raising, information and training for the economic sectors of countries outside the Community and especially those of central and eastern Europe, in order to encourage the introduction of voluntary measures which, combined with the application of compulsory measures, will help institute a system of environmental management by companies;
 - 22.2. instruct the competent committees of governmental experts to devote some of their activities to the harmonisation of :
 - a. environmental laws and regulations in non-Community countries, with a view to facilitating the future inclusion of these countries in the Community Environmental Management and Audit Scheme and to avoid ecological dumping;
 - b. the fundamental principles governing the assessment of environmental impact in order to achieve optimal application of existing instruments and agreements;

22.3. ask the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe to continue to pay special attention to the achievement of genuine local autonomy that gives local authorities sufficient powers and resources to exercise their environmental responsibilities;

22.4. call on all member state governments :

- a. to ensure that the necessary conditions are created for the optimal application of environmental conventions signed and ratified by them;
- b. to highlight, within European and international organisations and institutions which implement industrial restructuring programmes in the central and east European countries, the need to give priority to projects which support sustainable development;
- c. to encourage industrial firms to adopt voluntary standards for effective environmental management;
- d. to modify the legislation in order to authorise the territorial authorities to apply environmental criteria to their purchasing and tendering procedures so as to encourage local business to adopt more environmentally sensitive working methods;

22.5. invite the governments of the countries of central and eastern Europe :

- a. to adapt existing or enact new environmental legislation which would allow them to sign and ratify conventions to which they are not yet parties;
- b. to take account of environmental management principles in all decisions concerning industrial enterprises by adopting, for example, a framework of standards corresponding to the current national economic situation, but which could evolve to meet European standards;
- c. set up national awareness-raising and training programmes for the relevant groups - the general public, firms, local authorities - so that voluntary commitment can reinforce the results of compulsory measures.