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Air quality strategy to reduce the spread of coronavirus

Motion for a resolution
tabled by the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development

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This motion has not been discussed in the Assembly and commits only those who have signed it

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Before the coronavirus pandemic, over 750,000 people died prematurely each year across the Council of Europe member States from air pollution, costing society well over €500 billion per year. As the Parliamentary Assembly's Resolution 2286 (2019) points out, this pollution causes lung and heart disease, strokes and dementia, as well as physical and mental ill-health amongst children and unborn babies.

Whilst the public has benefitted from cleaner air during coronavirus lockdowns, clear evidence has emerged from research in the European Union, the United States, China and elsewhere that air pollution increases coronavirus death and infection rates, and that it may also help transport the virus. Therefore, air pollution increases the risk of a faster and more deadly resurgence of coronavirus in countries emerging from lockdown.

The Assembly should hence call on member States to:

– strengthen their air quality strategies in order both to improve public health and to reduce the spread of coronavirus;

– support proposals including but not limited to promoting working practices and public services planning that allow technology to reduce travel; more frequent and environment-friendly public transport and cleaner private transport; more pedestrian space and cycling; restrictions upon wood and coal burning; improvements in indoor air quality; less polluting industries and a reduced use of phytosanitary spraying in agriculture; and the adoption of World Health Organisation air quality targets;

– prioritise and invest in environmental sustainability and public health in domestic economies and in multilateral trade agreements through their national strategies towards reaching various targets under the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.