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The need for independent and credible environmental assessments

Motion for a resolution

tabled by Mr Cezar Florin PREDA and other members of the Assembly

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

Nuclear energy, explosions and disasters, smoking, dental amalgams, asbestos, aspartame, mobile phones, relay antennas, etc are all subjects which raise controversial environmental and health issues and on which the scientific community is often divided.

But are scientists genuinely divided? This question has to be asked because the impartiality of an expert or an expert committee, and hence the outcome of their expert assessments, may be influenced by the fact that the experts belong to interest groups or by the source of funding of their work.

For example, an analysis of 59 scientific publications over a period of 10 years, focusing on the effects of mobile phones on health, produced the following results: in the case of studies funded exclusively by industry, none reported any negative effects, 58% found neutral effects and 42% no effects. In the case of jointly funded (public/industry) studies, the corresponding figures were 18% (negative effects), 77% (neutral effects) and 5% (no effect). In the case of public or NGO-funded studies, the corresponding figures were 36% (negative effects), 46% (neutral effects) and 18% (no effect).

The same applies to smoking: it took a long time for the scientific community to agree on the potential risks. It is now known that scientists were paid for twenty years by the big tobacco companies to conceal the health risks associated with smoking.

Another example is that of the artificial sweetener aspartame, to which 155 studies have been devoted: discrepancies have been found between different studies and expert opinions depending on the source of funding.

The same finding has been made in connection with assessments of the causes of disasters, such as oil spills or industrial accidents. The scientific community is still divided today over the causes of the explosion at the AZF plant in Toulouse in 2001. Some experts support the chemical accident theory, while others assert the opposite.

The Assembly therefore wishes to:

- establish model rules and a code of ethics to be observed in expert assessments, whether scientific or post-disaster;
- ensure that independent experts are called upon for all expert assessments on issues involving possible environmental effects;



- ensure that all expert assessments of this kind are followed by a second expert assessment conducted in a fully transparent manner.

Signed (see overleaf)

Signed¹:

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1. EDG: European Democrat Group
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