Recommendation 977 (1984)[1]

Air pollution and acid rain

Parliamentary Assembly

The Assembly,

1. Recalling its Recommendation 867 (1979), on long-range transboundary air pollution ;

2. Deeply concerned by the effects on the environment and on human health of air pollution, and in particular of the phenomenon known as "acid rain" ;

3. Alarmed by the death of forests, the disappearance of many forms of life in the lakes of northern Europe, the drop in agricultural productivity and the corrosion of monuments and buildings, and the further deterioration of the cultural heritage, especially of paper (archives), leather, textiles and stained glass, brought about to a large extent by acid rain ;

4. Fearing lest the limitation of current knowledge regarding the causes and effects of acid rain be used as a pretext to delay European cooperation in this field ;

5. Convinced that such shortcomings should rather encourage joint European research and the exchange of experience ;

6. Considering that, according to currently available knowledge, the phenomenon of acid rain is closely connected with that of air pollution through emissions of sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxides ;

7. Believing that, in order to combat air pollution, it is necessary to tackle the causes of this scourge, and that immediate action should be taken in this respect to apply known techniques in order to prevent as far as possible the generation of pollutants ;

8. Welcoming the initiatives of various governments, notably of the Federal Republic of Germany, to introduce unleaded petrol, particularly bearing in mind that such a decision satisfies one of the preconditions for a substantial reduction in pollution caused by traffic ;

9. Aware of the fact that the investment needed to reduce air pollution is costly, but that such expenditure would be substantially offset by direct and indirect savings produced by improving the conditions of forests, lakes, farmland and human health ;

10. Recalling that, in the field of air pollution, compliance with the "polluter pays" principle does not exclude public authority assistance to polluting industries ;

11. Welcoming the entry into force on 16 March 1983 of the United Nations Convention on long-range transboundary air pollution, which has already been ratified by twenty-seven European states, while regretting that the Bureau of the convention has not yet succeeded in agreeing on concrete standards for the reduction of emission levels ;

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1. Assembly debate on 31 January and 1 February 1984 (24th, 25th and 26th Sittings) (see Doc. 5158, report of the Committee on Regional Planning and Local Authorities, Doc. 5118. opinion of the Committee on Agriculture. Doc. 5168, opinion of the Committee on Science and Technology, and Doc. 5160. opinion of the Committee on Culture and Education). Text adopted by the Assembly on 1 February 1984 (26th Sitting).

12. Urging the governments of those East European countries which have not already ratified the convention (Poland, Romania, Czechoslovakia) to do so as soon as possible ;

13. Inviting the East European countries to cooperate with the Council of Europe and its member states in devising measures to reduce air pollution, notably those recommended in paragraph 16, sub-paragraph e, of this recommendation ;

14. Believing that the solution to the problem of air pollution, and of acid rain in particular, is to be found at the European level and that the Council of Europe, which had already played a pioneering role in this field in 1968 with its Declaration of Principles on Air Pollution Control, should take urgent action to prevent irreparable damage to the European environment ;

15. Stressing the importance of fully balanced environmental education in order to involve young people in appreciation of the real factors necessary for the survival of their natural and cultural heritage,

16. Recommends that the Committee of Ministers :

a. draw up a European convention, open for signature by non-member states, on limiting air pollution, which would take account of the principles contained in the European Community directives on air pollution control and would be aimed at completing and reinforcing the United Nations Convention on long-range transboundary air pollution ;

b. take measures to reduce drastically the emissions of sulphur dioxide and nitrogen oxides- in particular, the emissions of all motor vehicles with petrol engines registered from 1986 onwards should be reduced by 90% ;

c. study ways of ensuring the best management of the forests and natural environment of Europe with a view to limiting the harmful effects of acid rain ;

d. set up an ad hoc intergovernmental working group of scientific, economic and administrative experts to step up the exchange of information and improve the existing remedial procedures for reducing damage caused by acid pollution ;

e. undertake a programme of joint European research, with a view in particular to drawing up a detailed inventory of damage to forests, lakes and farmland, obtaining better knowledge of the complex processes which cause acid rain, and considering the most effective and least costly ways of reducing air pollution ;

f. correlate such work with what is being done for the conservation of the cultural heritage in order to ensure that the measures taken to limit the effects of air pollution on the natural heritage also contribute to the better preservation of the cultural heritage ;

g. take into account the damage caused to the architectural heritage by environmental or air pollution, in the draft Convention on the Architectural Heritage that is currently under preparation by the Steering Committee on Urban Policies and the Architectural Heritage ;

h. draw up a recommendation to governments of member states to enhance public awareness of the problems of air pollution, with particular reference to the education of young people and the training of experts in related fields ;

i. instruct the Secretary General of the Council of Europe to forward this recommendation to all Eastern European and North African states concerned, as well as interested international organisations (United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, OECD) ;

j. urge the governments of member states :

1. to envisage the possibility of adopting specific measures, alongside those which apply to the whole of their territories, in areas which are highly polluted or require special protection for their environment ;

2. to ensure, through a combination of incentives (such as subsidies, tax advantages and "seals of approval" for industries meeting or improving on norms) and penalties (fines for exceeding norms, for example), that the costs of investments are equitably borne by industry, consumers and the general population ;

3. to encourage, for this purpose, energy conservation, greater use of sulphur-poor oil and increased reliance on energy sources which do not give rise to acid pollution according to each country's preferences and priorities, while taking into account the consequences this might have for employment in certain sectors such as the coal and oil industries ;

4. to unilaterally limit emissions of sulphur and nitrogen oxides, in particular by introducing appropriate control technologies in fossil fuel power stations and ore-smelting works, and by introducing strict controls on the emissions of pollutants from motor car exhausts ;

5. to take fully into account, when establishing their environmental education policies, the principles contained in Recommendation No. R (81) 9 of the Committee of Ministers on this subject.