

EDITORIAL

The Commission of the European Communities has just published a pre-print of its report on 10 years of Community Environmental Policy, covering activities from the First Action Programme up to the present.

In the past there has been quite a high degree of political support and commitment from both the European Parliament and the Economic and Social Committee and from the Council of Ministers. This has resulted in the adoption of a total of 90 legislative texts of major importance in this field — and was partly a reaction to increased public opinion over the years for effective environmental protection. As a result, there have been a number of achievements, even if the deadlines in most of the cases have not been met. The active members in the European Parliament are not wrong when they insist on the continuing need for urgent action.

The report sees itself as being both a retrospect and a prospect — the link between the two being the Community's Third Environmental Action Programme adopted in February 1983, which, although less ambitious than the two preceding ones, commits itself to the "progressive and preventing integration of environmental requirements into the planning and execution of all actions within these and other economic sectors that can have significant effects on the environment". We would be very happy if this should turn out to be the case.

The report admits that there are two main problems which have to be solved and which have thwarted progress from the beginning: firstly, the slow moving nature of the decision-making processes in the Community institutions, especially in the Council of Ministers, and secondly, the fact that the scale and scope of the problems are out of all proportion to the means provided to implement them. The first assertion is certainly correct but it is questionable if the latter statement really reflects the truth.

The Community's Third Action Programme mirrors the Council Resolution adopted at the same time. It introduces a new element, as up to that point environmental policy had tended to put the emphasis on pollution control, but now this policy is seen to be a key element in developments of all kinds in other fields, i.e., "environmental policy is a rational policy... which is at the heart of the Community's overall socio-economic policies". When one considers the inter-action between environment and the economy and environment and employment, it is easy to see that here is where the problems are.

The European Heads of Government, at their summit meeting in Stuttgart in June 1983, proclaimed "the urgent necessity of accelerating and reinforcing action, at national, Community and international level aimed at combatting the pollution of the environment". However, at that stage no one realized that these aims would break down a short time later in November, at the meeting of the Community's Environment Ministers when they failed to reach agreement on anything of substance.

At their recent meeting on 16th December, only very slight progress was achieved, the welcome exception being the adoption of the Second Quicksilver Directive. Under the directive, the Member States also have to draw-up a programme for the prevention and removal of quicksilver pollution, for nonindustrial installations, e.g., hospitals.

With regard to the discussion of the so-called "Seveso" directive, only a hardening of existing positions could be recorded. The Federal Republic of Germany, with the support of Denmark, emphasized that the regulation proposed by Commissioner Narjes was unsatisfactory, as instead of demanding a strict approval procedure, Brussels only requires an obligation to notify. Such a solution argued the Germans, does not guarantee that a scandal similar to the Seveso one is excluded for the future. □

19th December 1983