

THE ENVIRONMENT MUST BE FULLY INTEGRATED INTO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT'S WORK

Introduction

The European Parliament has become more influential over the years. Environmental organisations hope that the new Constitution will introduce 'co-decision' into important new areas such as agriculture, cohesion policies and trade. This, however, creates a new responsibility for the Parliament: to ensure that all EU policies integrate environmental requirements, an obligation laid down in Article 6 of the current EC Treaty. For this purpose, the Parliament must introduce an internal mechanism to ensure that all its committees perform this task systematically.

The Parliament should also regularly consult environmental citizens' organisations, which act as watchdogs of the EU's policies and practices. Civil society organisations can provide the Parliament with a clear picture of many people's expectations as well as with innovative ideas and solutions.

THE NEXT EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT SHOULD:

1. Ensure that it has effective control over the integration of environmental requirements into all policies: a special structural organisational arrangement needs to be made at the beginning of the new Parliamentary term.
2. Apply the precautionary principle wherever relevant and necessary and refuse to delay where urgent action is needed. Question arguments about incomplete scientific information and cost-benefit analysis, where the benefits are systematically underestimated because of a lack of concrete information.

Currently, the EP is not well equipped to ensure environmental policy integration. It prepares its opinion through a Committee structure. There are Committees focusing on agriculture, energy, transport, regional policies, etc. Such Committees take the lead in preparing EP positions in such areas. The Environment Committee is often asked to advise the lead Committee, but in practice such advice does not have a great influence on the outcome of the main Committee, and there is no direct discussion between the two. Moreover, there is a trend now to pass over the Environment Committee in environmentally relevant dossiers and go to the Energy/Industry Committee or Legal Affairs Committee instead.

Environmental Policy Integration does not have a mechanism in this way. It is left to the individual MEPs and the political groups to take care of it, or not. The European Parliament urgently needs to establish horizontal mechanisms to promote sustainable development and environmental policy integration. The most logical solution would be watchdog committees composed of the Chairs of the relevant Committees.

At the end of 2003, the Parliament made an 'inter-institutional agreement' with the Commission and the Council. In it the Parliament committed itself to provide 'impact assessments' together with its amendments. It is hard to see how the Parliament could do this in a meaningful manner, as it does not have the scientific capacity nor the time to provide these. Moreover, it thereby contributes to the myth that such impact assessments can tell you the exact costs and benefits of any EU action. It would be unacceptable if the Parliament accepted a reduction of its freedom to act on the basis of this requirement.

QUESTIONS TO THE CANDIDATES:

How will you guarantee that all European Parliament decisions contribute to the protection of the EU's environment, as required by Article 6 of the EC Treaty?

Do you have ideas about how the European Parliament should be restructured in order to ensure the necessary co-ordination necessary for the promotion of environmentally sound sustainable development?

Point 78 of the European Union's Sustainable Development Strategy reads: 'The European Parliament should consider creating a Sustainable Development committee to give a view on the wider implications of sectoral policy proposals. This committee could consist of representatives of other committees, as is the case with the financial control committee'. This has not happened. Would you be in favour of the creation of a special Sustainable Development committee?