

European Communities

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Working Documents

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DOCUMENT 1-1073/81

Report

drawn up on behalf of the Committee on the
Environment, Public Health and Consumer Protection

on the proposal from the Commission of the European
Communities to the Council (Doc. 1-448/81) for a
decision establishing a reciprocal exchange of
information and data from networks and individual
stations measuring air pollution within the
Member States

Rapporteur: Mr M. MERTENS

By letter of 17.8.1981 the President of the Council of the European Communities requested the European Parliament to deliver an opinion on the proposal from the Commission of the European Communities to the Council for a Council decision establishing a reciprocal exchange of information and data from networks and individual stations measuring air pollution within the Member States.

On 26.8.1981 the President of the European Parliament referred the proposal to the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Consumer Protection as the committee responsible and to the Committee on Budgets for its opinion.

On 22.9.1981 the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Consumer Protection appointed Mr MERTENS rapporteur.

It considered the proposal at its meetings of 26.1.1982 and 23.2.1982 and at the latter meeting unanimously adopted the proposal and the motion for a resolution.

The following participated in the vote:

Mr Collins, chairman; Mrs Weber, vice-chairman; Mr Mertens (deputizing for Mrs Schleicher), rapporteur; Mr Alber, Mr Bombard, Mr Ceravolo (deputizing for Mr Spinelli), Mr Combe, Mr Forth, Mr Ghergo, Mrs Lentz-Cornette, Mr Muntingh, Mr Protopapadakis (deputizing for Mr Clinton), Mr Provan (deputizing for Miss Hooper), Mr Rogers (deputizing for Mrs Seibel-Emmerling), Mr Sherlock and Mrs Van Hemeldonck.

The opinion of the Committee on Budgets will be published separately.

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The Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Consumer Protection hereby submits to the European Parliament the following motion for a resolution, together with explanatory statement:

MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

embodying the opinion of the European Parliament on the proposal from the Commission of the European Communities to the Council for a decision establishing a reciprocal exchange of information and data from networks and individual stations measuring air pollution within the Member States.

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the proposal from the Commission of the European Communities to the Council, (COM(81) 361 final)¹,
- having been consulted by the Council (Doc. 1-448/81),
- having regard to the Council Decision of 24.6.1975² establishing a common procedure for the exchange of information relating to atmospheric pollution by sulphur compounds and suspended particulates, and to its opinion of 14.3.1975 on that Council decision³,
- having regard to the report of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Consumer Protection, (Doc. 1-1073/81),

1. Welcomes the proposal for a decision establishing a programme for the exchange of information on further pollutants (lead and other heavy metal particulates, nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide and ozone) because these harmful substances are particularly dangerous elements in transfrontier air pollution;
2. Regards this programme as intrinsically necessary and calls upon the Council to make the funds required for its implementation available over the coming years;
3. Regards the achievement of comparability of data as a matter of special urgency and therefore calls again for increased efforts in this direction;

¹OJ C 211, 20.8.1981, p.3

²OJ L 194, 25.7.1975, p. 32 et seq.

³OJ C 76, 7.4.1975, p. 40 et seq.

4. Regrets that, in its explanatory memorandum to this proposal for a decision the Commission has failed to report on experience already acquired in the exchange of measurement data on sulphur compounds;
5. Deplores this failure especially since the problems caused by sulphur dioxide emissions are tending to increase;
6. Refers in this connection particularly to the alarming reports on the effects of 'acid rain', for which sulphur dioxide emissions are partly responsible;
7. Urges the Commission to use this exchange of information to examine the phenomenon of 'acid rain' in greater detail;
8. Calls upon the Commission also to consider whether hydrogen chlorides, which, along with sulphur compounds and nitrogen oxides, have been linked to the occurrence of acid rain, could also be covered, as a further source of pollution, by the exchange of information on the basis of this proposal for a decision;
9. Requests the Commission, when implementing the programme, to take account of the following points included in the European Parliament's resolution of 14 March 1975¹:
 - a. Extension to cover further data, for example the maximum and minimum levels recorded by the monitoring stations;
 - b. collection of data on the incidence of disease, for example bronchial complaints, diseases of the heart and circulation, in the areas where measurements are taken, for comparison with the results of the atmospheric pollution measurements;
 - c. the development of 'atmospheric pollution climatology' and the establishment of an atmospheric pollution warning system;
10. Approves, with these comments, the proposal for a decision.

¹ OJ No. C. 76. 7.4.75, p. 40 et seq.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENTI. BACKGROUND TO THE PROPOSAL FOR A DECISION

1. The two environmental action programmes of the European Communities, of 1973 and 1977, provide for the establishment of a procedure for the exchange of data and information between air pollution monitoring stations. On 24 June 1975 the Council adopted a decision establishing a common procedure for the exchange of information between the surveillance and monitoring networks based on data relating to atmospheric pollution by sulphur compounds and suspended particulates¹. This first decision establishing a monitoring programme came into force in 1976, to run three years only. The programme therefore officially terminated in 1979, but has been tacitly renewed.

2. As its title makes clear, of the first-priority pollutants (as defined in the 1973 action programme) this decision covered only certain sulphur compounds and suspended particulates. The reason given was that at the time these were the only pollutants subject to systematic and intensive monitoring in the Member States.

3. Since then, interest in other first-priority air pollutants has increased together with their importance, as the Commission points out in its explanatory memorandum for this new Council decision. In its opinion on the 1975 Council Decision², Parliament also called on the Commission to take action to ensure that the collection of data was extended as soon as possible to other pollutants. Council and Parliament are agreed on that and on the need for the measurement procedures and data collected to be comparable.

II. CONTENT OF THE PROPOSAL FOR A DECISION

4. The following pollutants are to be included in the exchange of information and data:

- (a) lead and other heavy metal particulates
- (b) nitrogen oxides
- (c) carbon monoxide
- (d) ozone

The Commission explains why other first-priority pollutants, hydrocarbons and asbestos, are not included in this proposal.

¹OJ L 194, 25.7.1975, p. 32 et seq.

²See para. 5 of the European Parliament's resolution (OJ No. C 76, 7.4.1975 p. 40 et seq.).

5. Like its predecessor, this second Council decision specifies a choice of measuring stations in the individual Member States and the form in which data are transferred. Monitoring stations already taking part in the exchange of data on certain sulphur compounds and suspended particulates will also be included in this new exchange. However, additional stations will have to be selected as not all stations are equipped to collect data on the new pollutants.

6. In the Commission's words 'one of the important aspects of this new proposal is the commitment by the Commission to intercomparison programmes... which are the most important step towards harmonization and comparability' of measurement data. On the basis of these intercomparison programmes the Commission will draw up reports and, together with a group of experts, examine and use them to prepare technical guidelines on suitable inter-comparison programmes and the contents thereof.

III ASSESSMENT OF THE PROPOSAL FOR A DECISION AND COMMENTS ON THE MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

7. Increasing air pollution has now become one of the most serious environmental pollution problems. The Commission therefore deserves praise for having begun monitoring atmospheric pollution by sulphur compounds and suspended particulate matter by means of the exchange of information and data as long ago as 1975.

It is therefore all the more regrettable that the Commission has so far failed to report to Parliament on the data and knowledge acquired.

8. The committee supports the inclusion of further pollutants in this data-exchange system. Any further measures depend heavily on reliable data.

Parliament calls on the Commission to report on the results in due course.

9. One difficulty with the existing and planned exchange of data is the comparability of results. An exchange of data is useful only if the data are comparable. As long ago as 1975 the Council instructed the Commission to submit proposals as soon as possible for the harmonization of these procedures. The Commission's present proposals are certainly an important step in this direction; however, the committee believes that it would be desirable if agreement could be reached on a small number of procedures in the longer term, especially if the only problem is one of finance.

10. The committee hopes that the Commission will be given the funds to carry out this programme. There is no point in the Council instructing the Commission to act, Parliament supporting the Commission, if difficulties then arise over the availability of finance.

11. The known problems caused by sulphur dioxide and by suspended particulate matter are not the only cause for concern. The phenomenon of 'acid rain' is increasing in importance. A number of pollutants are blamed for the chemical reactions which undoubtedly cause it: in particular sulphur dioxide, nitrogen oxides and hydrogen chloride. The exact chain of events linking emission, the formation of acid rain and its disruptive effect on the environment has yet to be determined.

12. Acid rain is clearly responsible for the disturbance of the ecological balance of lakes, especially in Scandinavia and Canada, after the thaw. On the other hand, changes in the PH value of atmospheric precipitation have not been definitely proved. Nevertheless, the growing incidence of tree diseases and other plant ailments has been linked to acid rain.

13. Sulphur dioxide values have been measured for a number of years, and under the present proposal nitrogen oxide will also be covered by the system. Hydrogen chlorides occur primarily as a result of PVC and rubbish incineration in unsupervised dumps. This releases hydrogen chloride (HCl), which dissolves in rain to form hydrochloric acid. This very dilute hydrochloric acid is then precipitated in rain.

14. Hydrogen chloride should therefore be included, as a matter of the utmost urgency, in this proposal for the exchange of information and data from networks and individual stations measuring air pollution.

