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on the thematic strategy on air pollution
(2006/2060(INI))

Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety

Rapporteur: Dorette Corbey

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MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on the thematic strategy on air pollution (2006/2060(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament on the Thematic Strategy on air pollution (COM(2005)0446),
- having regard to The Sixth Community Environmental Action Programme (EAP)¹,
- having regard to the Lisbon Strategy (Barcelona European Council Conclusions 15-16 March 2002),
- having regard to the communication from the Commission on the Clean Air for Europe (CAFE) programme: towards a thematic strategy for air quality (COM(2001)0245),
- having regard to the impact assessment on the thematic strategy on air pollution and on the Directive on "Ambient Air Quality and Cleaner Air for Europe" (IA) (SEC(2005)1133),
- having regard to the health aspects of air pollution - results from the WHO project "Systematic Review of Health Aspects of Air Pollution" in Europe²,
- having regard to the policy briefing by the Institute for European Environmental Policy (IEEP)³,
- having regard to Directive 96/62/EC⁴ on and its daughter Directives, as well as to the Commission proposal for a new Directive on ambient air quality and cleaner air for Europe (COM(2005)0447),
- having regard to the IPPC Directive⁵,
- having regard to the European Environment Council conclusions of 9 March 2006,
- having regard to Rule 45 of its Rules of Procedure,
- having regard to the report of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety and the opinion of the Committee on Regional Development (A6-0000/2006),

A. whereas air pollution is a major cause of death and factor for disease in Europe, leading

¹ OJ L 242, 10.9.2002, p. 1.

² (<http://www.euro.who.int/document/E83080.pdf>)

³ http://www.europarl.eu.int/comparl/envi/default_en.htm

⁴ OJ L 296, 21.11.1996, p. 55.

⁵ OJ L 257, 10.10.1996, p. 26.

to a loss of life expectancy of over 8 months per individual on average; whereas children, elderly people, people suffering from respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, and those who live in high exposure areas, like urban areas (cities) and near main roads, face a particular health threat,

- B. whereas fine particles PM_{2.5} and ground level ozone are the air pollutants that cause the most health problems,
- C. whereas 55% of European ecosystems are damaged by air pollution,
- D. whereas air pollution occurs in all Member States and is a cross-border issue, as particulate matter and other pollutants travel many hundreds of kilometres, on account of which a European solution is required,
- E. whereas Article 7 of the 6th EAP states that one of its objectives is to achieve "levels of air quality that do not give rise to significant negative impacts on and risks to human health and the environment",
- F. whereas the Commission has presented in its Impact Assessment (IA) three scenarios (A, B and C) reflecting different levels of ambition as well as a Maximum Technically Feasible Reduction scenario,
- G. whereas the IA shows that the majority of European citizens favour a European policy to improve air quality with an ambition level resembling scenario C, in the Strategy however, the Commission has chosen a lower level of ambition, which can be qualified as A+,
- H. whereas the costs of reducing air pollution levels in all scenarios are lower than the financial benefits; whereas none of the scenarios undermine the EU's overall competitive position and whereas an ambitious scenario leads to job creation,
- I. whereas the cost-benefit analysis as outlined in the IA is reliable and balanced, as confirmed by the IEEP briefing; whereas the estimations of the benefits to be derived through implementation of the strategy are however rather low, since the estimates on health benefits are conservative and environmental benefits have not been included; whereas, on the cost side, the potential of very cost-effective measures in the shipping sector have not been included,
- J. whereas the IA shows that the optimal scenario - where marginal costs equal marginal benefits - is to be found between scenario B and C,
- K. whereas the CAFE working group on PM noted that there are health risks linked to PM_{2.5} at concentrations below 10 µg/m³ and that a limit value should not exceed 20 µg/m³,
- L. whereas – as pointed out by IEEP- the PM_{2.5} value of 25 µg/m³ as proposed by the Commission does not entail more stringent requirements for Member States on PM, but rather relaxes obligations by allowing exemptions,
- M. whereas improvements in air quality benefit society as a whole, while the costs are incurred by specific sectors; whereas, for that reason, it is necessary to find ways of

meeting those costs when application of the "polluter pays" principle leads to unacceptable costs for a specific sector,

- N. whereas internal market provisions sometimes hamper the achievement of environmental targets and limit values in the EU,
- O. whereas many Member States do not meet the limit values under current air quality legislation - most problems occur in the Netherlands, Belgium, Germany, northern Italy, Poland and in large cities; whereas the measures adopted so far that are directed at the sources of pollution are insufficient to achieve the limit values,
- P. whereas a strategy is needed that contains ambitious targets that are translated into ambitious limit values for pollutants, accompanied by measures focusing on the sources of pollution, to enable Member States to meet air quality standards, while giving extra time to Member States that have taken all feasible measures but still face problems in meeting limit values,

Setting the right ambition level to tackle air pollution

1. Welcomes the Commission's thematic strategy on air pollution, which emphasises the fact that air pollution is a serious health and environmental problem;
2. Calls for a strategy with more ambitious reduction targets that corresponds to scenario C for VOC, PM2.5 and NOx since this would lead to greater health benefits and employment benefits, while maintaining a balanced approach between costs and benefits; calls for reductions as outlined in the table below:

	2020 Current Legislation	2020 TSAP ⁶	2020 EP targets and corresponding scenario
SO2	68%	82%	82% (B)
NOx	49%	60%	65% (C)
VOC	45%	51%	55% (C)
NH3	4%	27%	27% (A+)
PM2.5	45%	59%	61% (C)
total costs		7,1 extra	+/- 11 extra

3. Favours the introduction of a PM10 yearly limit value of 30 µg/m³ in 2010 and supports the Commission's proposal to introduce a concentration cap for PM2.5, as the PM2.5 part within PM10 is the most harmful to health; calls for the introduction of a PM2.5 yearly

⁶ Thematic Strategy on Air Pollution.

limit value of 20 µg/m³ in 2010; agrees that it should be possible for Member States that can show that they have taken all feasible measures to be granted more time to reach the limit value;

4. Supports the Commission's proposal to introduce a target exposure reduction of 20% for PM_{2.5} in 2020 compared to the average exposure index of 2010; calls however for a reduction of this percentage for Member States that have already achieved low exposure levels;
5. Calls for the introduction of smog warnings in case of high smog levels and for people to be encouraged not to use open fireplaces and to reduce car usage on those days;

Sector-based measures

6. Calls upon the Commission and Member States to take the necessary measures as soon as possible to cut emissions in the various sectors that contribute to air pollution;
7. Calls upon the Member States to take measures to cut emissions from the shipping sector including the introduction of quayside electricity supply and of economic incentives leading to cleaner engines (for example lower port duties for clean ships); calls upon the Commission to propose coordinated action to ensure a level playing field, to review standards for shipping fuels and to insist on action within the IMO; is convinced that a better balance between the costs of reducing emissions from ships and land-based emissions is needed;
8. Notes that, while agriculture is one of the major sources of air pollution, there are few obligations on that sector to reduce emissions; calls on Member States to fight air pollution related to cattle farming, the use of fertilizers and greenhouse heating equipment, and to use agricultural subsidies to tackle the problem of ammonia; calls for an update on ammonia reduction targets in the context of the CAP review; calls on the Commission to include intensive farming in the IPPC Directive;
9. Calls on the Commission to propose as soon as possible measures to reduce emissions from industrial sources, including a revision of the IPPC Directive, which should reward innovation more effectively and include small-scale combustion installations below 50MWh;
10. Asks the Commission to propose as soon as possible measures to cut emissions from domestic sources, including standards on heating equipment; invites Member States to introduce measures and programmes to reduce emissions from domestic sources, such as fireplaces;
11. Urges the Commission to propose as soon as possible the Euro VI norms for heavy duty vehicles and also indicate what the Euro VII norms are likely to be, in order to enable Member States to achieve air quality targets; calls upon the Commission to immediately formulate ambitious Euro 6 norms for passenger cars; invites Member States to take the necessary measures to phase out older polluting vehicles or – where appropriate – provide incentives for retrofitting;
12. Invites Member States to review local transport systems and find innovative solutions to

minimise the use of cars in inner cities; is convinced that environmental zoning that discourages the more polluting cars from entering inner cities provides a strong incentive to modernise the car fleet; stresses that local governments can provide a strong incentive for innovation by purchasing clean cars (EEV, Euro 6 and VI) for the public and semi-public car fleet;

13. Calls on the Commission to propose measures to tackle air pollution that - in line with Article 95(3) of the EC Treaty – ensure a high level of environmental protection; calls on the Commission to allow exemptions from internal market provisions for Member States that wish to take measures that go further than current EU standards; is convinced that those Member States that implement stricter standards provide an important incentive for innovation;

Better law-making

14. Calls on the Commission and the Council to strike an inter-institutional agreement with the Parliament in which the three institutions express their dedication to the reduction targets and all Community level measures set out in paragraphs 8-13 above; is convinced that such an agreement would contribute to improving accountability and therefore to "better law-making";

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15. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and Commission and the governments and parliaments of the Member States.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

Clean air is vital to human health. The damage caused to health by air pollution is considerable. In Europe 3.6 million life years are lost as a result of air pollution, or in other words 360 000 people die 10 years prematurely. In addition to people dying, polluted air also causes a great deal of suffering through illness or impaired lung function. The health problems do not affect everyone in the same way; children, elderly people, people already suffering from a lung disorder and people living in urban areas or near major roads are the worst affected. The natural environment is also damaged by air pollution. It is estimated that 55% of European ecosystems are affected by polluted air. Acidification of forests, eutrophication and loss of biodiversity are the consequences. The problems are caused primarily by nitrogen oxides, sulphur dioxide, ammonia and also ozone. Buildings are also damaged by air pollution.

Air pollution is a cross-border problem. Pollutants can travel hundreds and even thousands of kilometres. A country like the United Kingdom produces considerable levels of emissions, but is itself relatively little affected by them. Frequent westerly winds mean, however, that other Member States are significantly affected by such emissions. The Netherlands imports large amounts of polluted air from Belgium, Germany and the United Kingdom, but exports three times as much as it imports. Scandinavian countries import relatively large amounts of polluted air.

Existing policy

Thanks in part to EU legislation, air quality has already improved significantly in the past 30 years. Air quality standards have been set, resulting in a sharp fall in emissions of many pollutants. European directives are in force which tackle emissions at source, for example large combustion plants, cars and HGVs. However, compliance with air quality standards has not been an unqualified success, and in particular there are still considerable problems around urban conurbations. An analysis by the European Environment Agency indicates that more than 50% of people living in European cities are exposed to concentrations that exceed daily limit values more than 35 times a year (State and Outlook 2005, p. 268). And there is more bad news: unfortunately even the current rules do not go far enough to solve the problem and to achieve the objective set out in the Sixth Environmental Action Programme (EAP) of attaining '*levels of air quality that do not give rise to significant negative impacts on, and risks to human health and the environment*'. A convincing strategy is therefore needed: a strategy which puts health first and which also provides answers to the problem of the shortcomings in current policy and problems with compliance with legislation.

The thematic strategy

The thematic strategy is based on an extensive Impact Assessment. The starting point for the strategy was three scenarios (A, B and C) and a Maximum Technically Feasible Reduction (MTFR). The following remarks may be made with regard to the Impact Assessment:

*All of the scenarios, including the MTFR, are cost-effective, i.e. the benefits in terms of health gains are greater than the costs.

*All of the scenarios are more or less neutral in terms of their impact on employment and competitiveness. However, it should be noted that in the case of scenario C there would be growth in employment in all sectors, except in the agricultural sector. The considerable number of job losses in the agricultural sector (73 000) would be largely offset by increases in other sectors.

*The costs of implementing the various scenarios are, according to some, under-estimated. In particular, the car industry maintains that it would in fact incur higher costs. On the other hand, the costs of reductions in land-based emissions may fall if the shipping sector also reduces its emissions (not included in the calculation of costs). In addition, the costs may fall further given that the measures that will have to be implemented to comply with the post-Kyoto obligations (which have yet to be laid down) have, of course, not yet been taken into account.

*The estimates of the benefits are on the low side, as only health is taken into account in the calculations and, moreover, the value assigned to a human life is much lower than in calculations used in the US. The benefits to the environment and benefits in terms of reduced damage to agricultural crops (estimated at EUR 0.3 billion a year) and reduced damage to buildings are not taken into account in the calculations. The ratio between costs and benefits is therefore in reality considerably more favourable.

*Marginal costs and marginal benefits are, of course, important. The Impact Assessment calculates the optimal scenario to lie somewhere between B and C, based on what is a low estimate of the health benefits.

*The IEEP has evaluated the Impact Assessment and concluded that the figures and estimates are reliable.

Considerations

The level of ambition opted for by the Commission lies between scenarios A and B. The total costs of this scenario A+ run to EUR 7.1 billion. The benefits amount to EUR 42 billion. The scenario chosen would entail no reduction in employment and would have no negative impact on Europe's competitive position within the world.

Following consultations on the Impact Assessment and after hearing recommendations from health experts, your rapporteur takes the view that the level of ambition opted for should be higher. The thematic strategy on air pollution focuses too narrowly on costs and too little on the health benefits and the opportunities which a more ambitious approach could offer. In the light of the Lisbon strategy and the EU's aspiration to be the most competitive economy in the world, the air quality standards applied should be at least equivalent to those in the US. For concentrations of fine particles (PM_{2.5}) a limit of 15 mg applies in the US, although it should be noted that the standard in the US is based on the results of measurements taken over a three-year period and that measurements are not always focused on the real hot spots.

If a more ambitious scenario is chosen and the EU makes a clear choice in favour of health, there will be many opportunities for creating new jobs, as is shown by the Impact Assessment. Air quality is a problem in all of the world's cities. The technology and innovation being developed in Europe has the potential to be applied in other parts of the world.

The strategy: ambitious, but also taking account of the demands of implementation

Your rapporteur would like to quickly see better results achieved in the fight against air pollution. Scenario C has therefore been chosen for PM_{2.5}, VOCs and NO_x. In the case of ammonia your rapporteur favours scenario A+ and in the case of SO₂ scenario B. Your rapporteur's proposals would cost around EUR 11 billion a year, i.e. more than the EUR 7.1 billion proposed by the Commission. The following arguments may be given in favour of opting for scenario C- :

*Greater health gains than in the case of scenario A+ , as it is PM_{2.5}, VOCs and NO_x which cause the most damage to health;

*Scenario C- is fully cost-effective, but the total costs, at EUR 11 billion a year, are substantially lower than for scenario C (EUR 14.9 billion);

*Favourable in terms of growth in employment and potential for innovation. Scenario C- will lead to more than 40 000 new jobs as job losses in the agricultural sector will be limited and many new jobs will be created in other sectors.

In the case of ammonia, your rapporteur – like the Commission –has opted for scenario A+ and in the case of SO₂ has opted for scenario B, for the following reasons:

*The increase in costs entailed by scenario C is very high in the case of ammonia;

*The reform of agricultural policy has not yet been taken into account and its impact is as yet unclear. Your rapporteur is therefore calling for a review and a more ambitious approach to tackling ammonia when the reform of the CAP begins to take shape;

*The contribution made by ammonia to the formation of secondary fine particles is a small one, and the total costs of tackling primary and secondary fine particles on the basis of level of ambition C and ammonia on the basis of A+ are approximately as high as if scenario C were also to be chosen for ammonia;

*Scenario B is acceptable for SO₂ as scenario C would bring relatively few additional health benefits.

Your rapporteur is aware, of course, that the objectives set here are ambitious and will not be easy to achieve. There are Member States which are already having difficulty in meeting the current objectives. She is therefore advocating a temporary derogation for Member States which are able to show that they have taken all possible measures to attain the limit values set under this thematic strategy but are nonetheless unable to achieve the standards. This will also provide an incentive to early and full compliance with limit values. The fact that suitable measures at European level targeting sources are still awaited is, of course, an obstacle to Member States which have to meet these objectives. The Commission therefore has a responsibility to submit suitable measures targeting sources without delay and the Council and Parliament have a responsibility to adopt such measures without delay. Any delay in doing so would mean delaying providing adequate protection for citizens' health and the environment.

Your rapporteur is also aware that the costs are not shared in the same way by society as the benefits. Essentially, the 'polluter pays' principle must be applied. In most cases producers are able to pass on the higher costs to consumers. In some cases, however, that is more difficult as competitors from outside the EU do not necessarily incur the same costs. Your rapporteur is therefore calling on the Commission to consider possibilities for providing financing in cases where the costs cannot be passed on to consumers and the costs to polluters are unacceptable. In this connection, your rapporteur wishes to point out that the Structural Funds and the EAGGF offer opportunities for providing support. Member States may use these to co-finance measures (for example air cleaning equipment in the livestock sector). In addition, Member States may grant businesses state aid under certain conditions.

Measures

Many measures are needed in various sectors in order to achieve the objectives set in this strategy. The Commission has a role to play in this (including in relation to measures targeting sources in the transport sector, small combustion plants and heating systems), as do the Member States (including in relation to air cleaning equipment in the agricultural sector and shipping) and decentralised authorities (in relation to mobility plans, hot spots, smog alerts).

Finally: better regulation and better regulating

The European Union is rightly working hard to ensure '*better regulation*', given that there is a great deal of room for improvement in law-making. The thematic strategy and the accompanying directive on ambient air quality are examples of '*better regulation*'. Your rapporteur has listened to the views of representatives of national and local authorities, companies and NGOs. What emerged from many of the discussions was a certain irritation with the way in which legislation is enacted within Europe. Above all, the failure of suitable legislation to materialise and uncertainty in the medium-term are complaints that are heard time and again. This uncertainty has not been removed by the listing of possible measures in the strategy. It would assist communication with citizens, companies and lower-level authorities (which are required to implement many of the measures) if it was clear what level of ambition the Commission, the Council and Parliament intend to opt for with regard to air quality and what measures targeting sources can be expected, and when. Your rapporteur therefore advocates an interinstitutional agreement in which responsibilities and commitments are laid down by the Commission, the Council and Parliament. Such an agreement would contribute towards '*better regulating*' and would promote the democratic process.