

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

1999



2004

Session document

FINAL
A5-0354/2003

10 October 2003

REPORT

on the Commission communication ‘Towards a Thematic Strategy for Soil Protection’
(COM(2002) 179 – C5-0328/2002 – 2002/2172(COS))

Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Consumer Policy

Rapporteur: Cristina Gutiérrez Cortines

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PROCEDURAL PAGE

By letter of 16 April 2002, the Commission forwarded to Parliament a communication 'Towards a Thematic Strategy for Soil Protection' (COM(2002) 179 – 2002/2172(COS)).

At the sitting of 2 September 2002 the President of Parliament announced that he had referred the communication to the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Consumer Policy as the committee responsible and the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development and the Committee on Regional Policy, Transport and Tourism for their opinions (C5-0328/2002).

The Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Consumer Policy appointed Cristina Gutiérrez Cortines rapporteur at its meeting of 9 September 2002.

The committee considered the Commission communication and the draft report at its meetings of 8 September 2003 and 7 October 2003.

At the latter meeting it adopted the motion for a resolution by 48 votes to 2, with 0 abstention.

The following were present for the vote: Caroline F. Jackson, chairman; Mauro Nobilia, Alexander de Roo and Guido Sacconi, vice-chairmen, Cristina Gutiérrez Cortines, rapporteur, María Antonia Avilés Perea (for John Bowis pursuant to Rule 153(2)), María del Pilar Ayuso González, Juan José Bayona de Perogordo (for Martin Callanan pursuant to Rule 153(2)), Maria Luiza Bergaz Conesa, Jean-Louis Bernié, Hans Blokland, Carmen Cerdeira Morterero (for David Robert Bowe pursuant to Rule 153(2)), Dorette Corbey, Chris Davies, Proinsias De Rossa (for Torben Lund), Avril Doyle, Anne Ferreira, Karl-Heinz Florenz, Cristina García-Orcoyen Tormo, Georges Garot (for Béatrice Patrie pursuant to Rule 153(2)), Françoise Grossetête, María Esther Herranz García (for Raffaele Costa pursuant to Rule 153(2)), Eija-Riitta Anneli Korhola, Bernd Lange, Paul A.A.J.G. Lannoye (for Hiltrud Breyer), Giorgio Lisi, Jules Maaten, Minerva Melpomeni Malliori, Patricia McKenna, Emilia Franziska Müller, Rosemarie Müller, Riitta Myller, Juan Andrés Naranjo Escobar (for Christa Klauf pursuant to Rule 153(2)), Ria G.H.C. Oomen-Ruijten, Marit Paulsen, Joaquim Pissarreta (for Peter Liese pursuant to Rule 153(2)), José Javier Pomés Ruiz (for Marialiese Flemming pursuant to Rule 153(2)), Encarnación Redondo Jiménez (for Giuseppe Nisticò), Frédérique Ries, Yvonne Sandberg-Fries, Karin Scheele, Ursula Schleicher (for Robert Goodwill), Jonas Sjöstedt, María Sornosa Martínez, Bart Staes (for Inger Schörling), Catherine Stihler, Nicole Thomas-Mauro, Antonios Trakatellis, Peder Wachtmeister and Phillip Whitehead.

The opinions of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development and the Committee on Regional Policy, Transport and Tourism are attached.

The report was tabled on 10 October 2003.

MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

**on the Commission communication ‘Towards a Thematic Strategy for Soil Protection’
(COM(2002) 179 – C5-0328/2002 – 2002/2172(COS))**

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Commission communication (COM(2002) 179 – C5-0328/2002¹),
 - having regard to Decision No 1600/2002/EC² of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 July 2002 laying down the Sixth Community Environment Action Programme,
 - having regard to the provisions laid down in the Habitats (92/43/EEC), Birds (79/409/EEC) and Environmental Impact Assessment (85/377/EEC) Directives and the Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC) as regards the protection of ecosystems and their direct link with soil protection,
 - having regard to Rule 47.2 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Consumer Policy and the opinions of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development and the Committee on Regional Policy, Transport and Tourism (A5-0354/2003),
- A. whereas soil is a key component of the earth’s environment, is the interface between the hydrosphere, atmosphere and organisms inhabiting it, regulates natural material and energy cycles and is extremely sensitive to the effects of climate change and to human and historical activities, with the result that its structure and characteristics are the product of an age-old process, making it a non-renewable resource,
- B. whereas soil provides the basis for human settlements, their economic activities and infrastructures, and there is consequently an urgent need to regulate its uses and assess and mitigate the impact of external actions,
- C. whereas, nevertheless, certain farming and forestry activities (conservation of terraces, controlled grazing in certain areas, the creation of crop mosaics) have been key factors in conserving soil as a resource and, consequently, abandoning these practices has given rise to significant problems of soil loss,
- D. whereas the methodology of this thematic strategy must consider the cause-effect relationship, human or climatic impacts, the main causes of soil degradation and loss, contamination, acid rain, desertification and salinisation, sealing and compaction, floods and landslides, so as to propose a series of interlinking measures geared to promoting effective soil management,

¹ Not yet published in OJ.

² OJ L 242, 10.9.2002, p. 1-15.

- E. whereas excessively concentrated urbanisation and infrastructure construction, which do not always respect the environment, have boosted the consumption of natural soil, generated large compact areas which weaken citizens' relationship with the natural surroundings, fragmented land, changed water courses and increased the risks of floods, and recognising that this process is becoming particularly unsustainable in many European coastal areas,
- F. whereas a reduction in the use of pesticides as well as a phase-out of the use of certain dangerous substances in pesticides is necessary to minimise the problems relating to the quality of agricultural soils,
- G. whereas the priorities for soil policy must include the decline in biodiversity, the processes of physical and chemical degradation triggered by erosion, desertification, pollution and the decline in organic matter,
- H. whereas there is a wide diversity of soil problems among and within the Member States and candidate countries, and soil pollution is much less of a cross-border problem than air or water pollution; whereas the added value of European action lies principally in the exchange of information, know-how and best practice,
- I. whereas soil protection is a precondition for achieving, inter alia, the objectives of the Water Framework Directive as regards preventing diffuse pollution, the Habitats Directive as regards soil biodiversity and the Kyoto Protocol as regards the capacity of the soil and subsoil to retain CO₂,
- J. whereas it is necessary to consider the causes of the process of soil degradation taking account of the specific features of each European region and, in particular, the problems linked to Mediterranean soils seriously affected by phenomena such as forest fires or desertification,
1. Calls on the Commission to present, by July 2004, the thematic strategy for soil protection which should be based on the strengthening of current policies and, through an integrated approach, should define problems, qualitative and quantitative objectives and the means by which they can be achieved, timetables and general principles for evaluation and monitoring geared to the following:
 - putting an end to the accumulation in soil of substances which pose an environmental and health hazard;
 - reversing the alarming trend towards erosion, compaction and sealing, the removal and contamination of soil;
 - protecting soil in its role in storing CO₂, securing water resources and preserving biodiversity;
 - protecting soil for the sustainable production of food and renewable resources;
 2. Urges the Commission to draw up by 2007, in cooperation with the Member States and the competent regional authorities, a **scientific soil catalogue** which should include the nature of the soil, its biography, health and vulnerability, degradation and erosion

processes and contaminated areas, recognising the existence of high-value soils (in terms of agriculture, geology, ecology, history or the countryside) and the need to draw up recommendations for their conservation and sustainable use; stresses the importance of harmonising analytical methods to obtain comparable soil data; the accessibility of existing information must also be improved, given that this is an important prerequisite for the necessary exchange of information and experience between Member States;

3. Calls on the Commission to draw up guidelines, addressed to the Member States and the competent regional authorities, for preventing, monitoring and controlling soil pollution;
4. Supports the Commission in collating and perfecting the existing databases and completing the **maps** in order to obtain a georeferenced system; approves, likewise, the creation of a digital Geographic Information System which would gather the currently fragmented information at appropriate levels and which would be accessible to the public;
5. Calls on the Commission, in line with the SOVEUR report¹ by FAO, to carry out an audit to provide a methodical assessment and mapping of European soil, taking into account the need for a specific approach based on three main principles: precaution, anticipation and prevention; these principles, in the spirit of the FAO World Soil Charter, should be designed to prevent soil erosion and desertification;
6. Proposes to the Commission, once the catalogues and diagnoses have been completed, that European soils be zonified, taking account of geographic, climatic and typological heterogeneity, including uses and risks and its proposals for feasible monitoring at the appropriate levels;
7. Calls on the Commission to study the possibility of adopting a system of specific soil indicators which will make it possible to trace the development of the state of soil in line with the steps taken, starting with an initial diagnosis; points out, in this connection, that there are already systems proposed by the European Environment Agency and the OECD (pressure-state-response system) which could be adopted in the thematic strategy;
8. Considers it necessary for **soil protection to be better integrated** into Community policies in particular, soil protection should be taken into account in the context of the common agricultural policy, on (regional) infrastructure projects co-financed by the European Union both in connection with the Trans-European Networks, and when granting support from the Structural and Cohesion Funds and pre-accession aid;
9. Calls on the Commission to make cross compliance compulsory for all payments under the Common Agricultural Policy, ensuring that all relevant aspects of soil protection are covered in the definition of 'good agricultural and environmental condition', including mandatory soil management plans, providing free impartial data and advice to all farmers, in both arable and pastoral systems;

¹ Van Lynden, G.W., 2000. Soil degradation in Central and Eastern Europe: The assessment of the status of human-induced soil degradation. FAO-ISRIC, Rome

10. Supports the Commission's initiative to draw up a legislative proposal, the nature of which should be determined in the thematic strategies, on the creation of a system for monitoring soil and possible impacts;
11. Calls on the Commission to review existing legislation with a view to the improved integration of soil protection and, through supplementary proposals, to ensure that greater account is taken of soil protection in the Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control Directive and the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive;
12. Calls on the Commission to take account, in the legislative initiatives which will ensue from its thematic strategy, of the role played by agriculture in revitalising soil and the importance of maintaining farming activity, above all in regions facing the greatest risk of depopulation; suitable soil uses in agriculture, grassland or woodland are basic factors in soil preservation;
13. Considers it necessary to establish a **formal definition of models of agriculture** and types of crops which coexist in the EU (sustainable organic farming with minimum tillage, dry farming, farming on irrigated land, pastureland, farming without land, and mountain or dry pastures) and their different effects on soil, so that environmental measures are diversified in line with the characteristics of farming and its benefits for the soil;
14. Calls on the Commission to provide an incentive, through the CAP's environmental flanking programmes, for practices geared towards soil conservation and to promote, through suitable EAGGF support, the crops and uses which are most appropriate to the soil characteristics and the economic and social context; stresses, in this connection, the role which legumes might play in preserving vegetal cover and the wealth of fauna in certain regions, since the capacity of these crops to hold nitrogen makes it possible to use fewer fertilisers;
15. Calls on the Commission to prepare a **localised diagnosis of the impact of CAP reform on soil health**, which should include rural depopulation (and its socio-economic and environmental consequences), the centralisation of aid and market liberalisation, and calls, likewise, for the environmental measures under the CAP to include measures relating to the protection and conservation of soil and water resources, including specific measures with financial support;
16. Considers it necessary, even though there are saline soils of high intrinsic value, to create the mechanisms required to control salinisation processes and evaluate new irrigation schemes which may have an adverse impact on rivers or groundwater flows; recommends, likewise, drawing up guides to good farming practice, strengthening the capacities and responsibility of regional and local administrations;
17. Urges the Commission to revise the Sewage Sludge Directive (1986/278/EEC of 12 June 1986) and draw up a directive on compost; stresses the need to intensify research in this field so as to boost its potential for the recovery of soil lacking in organic matter and bring together waste management and soil protection and enrichment;
18. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to ensure that sacred sites, riverbanks, old-growth forests, wetlands and salt marshes are excluded from possible urbanisation,

compaction or exploitation, in both the thematic strategy on the urban environment and the regional planning instruments; considers that sites with contaminated soil can be used for certain purposes permitted by planning law subject to pollution-specific requirements relating to remediation or protection;

19. Calls on the Commission to draw up guidelines for the recovery of contaminated soil in urban and fringe areas including (1) an appropriate definition of soil typologies allowing their possible uses to be characterised, (2) the setting of sufficient periods of time for their recovery, (3) research into the use of simpler and more efficient systems and experimental biological treatment techniques and (4) soil history;
20. Asks that, in carrying out impact assessments on underground and surface infrastructure and urban construction projects, Member States should consider the effects on natural surface or underground water flows, including measures to conserve permeable soil, and that account should also be taken of the impact of the fragmentation of natural water flows, sites and habitats when plans are drawn up; calls, likewise, for the Environmental Impact and Strategic Environmental Assessment Directives to be applied when implementing the urban and regional thematic strategy;
21. Highlights the need to integrate soil protection objectives in spatial planning strategies and to commit itself to the further development of the European Spatial Development Perspective; calls on the Commission, in the communication that it is due to submit in 2003 on 'Planning and Environment – the territorial dimension', to study ways of preventing the soil sealing which occurs when new areas are assigned for urban development and infrastructure; calls for rules to be introduced bringing land use into line with soil characteristics, taking account of social values, and putting an end to the indiscriminate sealing of land;
22. Takes the view that the topography, structure and natural form of the land must be respected in housing development processes in the interests of sustainable development; considers it necessary, further, to restrict soil sealing and the distortion of natural rock and land formations, and considers it necessary to exercise greater control over the disappearance of soil and prevent the environmental and visual impact of large-scale excavations to extract aggregate;
23. Notes, in connection with transport, that road infrastructure in particular, and to a lesser extent rail infrastructure, can constitute a threat to the soil through covering and impacting (by pressure from heavy vehicles) and the bisection of eco-systems; stresses in this connection the importance of water transport, as set out inter alia in the White Paper on Transport, and the need, for projects in the framework of the Trans-European Networks, to carry out environmental impact assessments pursuant to Directive 2001/42/EC; calls on the Commission to encourage the use of innovative sustainable technologies and products in road-building, such as Very Open-graded Asphalt Concrete;
24. Considers it necessary to gain greater understanding of the functions performed by species which live in the soil, the nutrient cycle and the water cycle; believes it is crucial to apply the precautionary principle and to make sure that the 6th Environmental Action Programme and EU environmental legislation such as the Habitats, Birds and Water Framework Directives are fully respected; further believes that Community policies

should be revised, where necessary, to better protect the natural balance by preventing decline in biodiversity;

25. Urges the Commission to design a system for providing a reliable and up-to-date estimate of the costs and economic implications of soil degradation as an integral part of the thematic strategy for soil protection;
26. Considers that the desertification process affecting various regions in the Union and its socio-economic repercussions and impact on the natural environment have not been adequately reflected or met with sufficient awareness in certain Community bodies; urges the Commission to submit a communication on desertification immediately; calls on the Commission, consequently, to include in it a Community action programme containing a precise description of the zonification of regions affected or likely to be affected by the desertification process, together with a detailed analysis of the causes and socio-economic effects on the regions and their consequences for the human environment, the natural environment and the water cycle, and to identify appropriate Community actions to help to limit the negative effects of that process;
27. Agrees with the Commission's description of erosion as an 'EU-wide problem' and calls on the Commission to initiate a Community-level action programme taking appropriate account of coastal erosion, which threatens not only residential areas but also infrastructure and cultural sites;
28. Calls on the Commission to study the implications of climate change for erosion and the desertification process and develop proposals for the Member States with a view to mitigating its effects;
29. Calls on the Commission to maintain and promote new aid for the prevention of forest fires, a key factor in soil erosion which is a particularly serious phenomenon in the Mediterranean countries; considers that, in addition to aid for fire prevention, more funding needs to be allocated to maintain the traditional soil management practices which have proved so beneficial for their conservation;
30. Stresses the importance of sustainable forest management for soil protection and calls on the Member States to take measures to prohibit urban development on forest land damaged by fire and to ensure that its recovery is based on suitable species which will not have adverse effects on the environmental and water balance in the region;
31. Recommends that soil research be reviewed, so as to encourage research into the relationship between agriculture and soil, crops with a water deficit and other measures against desertification, as well as research into the effects of artificial fertilisers and plant protection products on soil biodiversity, with priority being given to interdisciplinary research; considers it necessary to include research on urbanisation processes and the impact of soil sealing;
32. Insists that any planning and soil conservation strategy should include objectives relating to environmental education geared to those sectors and agents who, through their incorrect practices, contribute to soil degradation (farmers, the food industry, farms producing slurry, the wood extraction sector, etc.);

33. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the Parliaments of the Member States and accession countries.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

Soil is a fundamental integral part of the earth's environment and as such, the quality of life enjoyed by European citizens largely depends on its state of conservation. Soil also has a feature which distinguishes it from the two remaining major compartments of the earth's environment (air and water): resilience. This means that degradation processes in response to pressures are not noticed immediately but only after a certain amount of time has elapsed. That is why environmental protection measures initially focused on air and water protection, where the signs of degradation became apparent at an earlier stage.

Soil is exposed to many risks, owing either to natural degradation or the effects of human activities or the climate. In many cases, such negative processes take on a Community dimension, and we are faced with phenomena such as climate change which reach beyond the borders of EU territory. It must also be borne in mind that soil supports vegetation and the production system and must be seen in all its facets - topography, the structure of the soil, the countryside and its value as a landscape which should be preserved - in the same way as the natural areas, coasts and rivers which form part of an integrated system of land use.

The Community institutions are therefore fully justified in considering it desirable to launch a specific integrated action to protect this environment, whilst acknowledging the existence of national or sectoral legislation providing partial protection for the soil. This was the view taken by Parliament when it gave the Commission a mandate to develop a thematic strategy for soil protection in the context of the sixth environmental action programme.

I. A thematic strategy for soil protection

The sixth environmental action programme presented by the Commission in 2001 established the objective of protecting soils against erosion and pollution and proposed introducing a thematic strategy. This means that we are dealing with a new type of non-legislative document which seeks to determine the broad lines of the approach to soil policy. It is thus an open document which requires a holistic approach covering all the variables that affect soil and the interaction between them from a scientific point of view, taking account of the system's complexity. It also calls for a detailed in-depth analysis of the problems and the identification of cause/effect relationships, and points to the needs in terms of research and know-how.

The Commission document was drawn up following wide consultation involving scientists, experts and the sectors affected. It represents a number of significant innovations, recognising the gaps in knowledge and the research which would need to be undertaken or completed in order to lend greater scientific consistency to the development of thematic strategies and future directives. It also draws attention to the various policies pursued in different countries and the diversity of the problems affecting soil in the various parts of the EU.

Nevertheless, the proposal fails to develop a number of the basic premises which will make it possible to improve the scientific quality of future documents, in line with what is required of a thematic strategy. For example, we believe that a basic principle in relation to assessment of biodiversity is to recognise that possible harmonisation cannot be applied across Europe, since in some respects the differences in climate, latitude, altitude or geographical conditions

require a diversified and distinct approach.

A basic principle of this report is the belief that sustainable development must combine general policies with precautionary measures and local solutions geared to the problem to be resolved, which involves a Europe-wide combination of similar information systems objective scientific formulae geared to harmonisation and, at the same time, adaptability to the specific features of soil, taking account of climatic, topographical and typological aspects, social problems and conditions of use. Accordingly, the Commission is asked to zonify the European soil map taking account of a series of variables, thus making it possible to design a range of different measures tailored to the site and soil requirements. Such zonification is already carried out under the Habitats and Natura 2000 Directive. It must evidently be defined on the basis of improved knowledge and a definition of the problems and risks, and it must be multi-faceted.

1. Active policies and solutions

In its communication the Commission undertakes to put forward a series of environmental proposals which will undoubtedly help to improve soil conservation. We particularly welcome the future directives on mining waste, polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons (PAH) and compost, the amendment of the directive on sewage sludge and the communication on the territorial dimension of environment policy. It appears especially important to update knowledge on the use of compost, since methods of manuring and regenerating the soil and organic matter need to be revised on the basis of new solutions which will take the place of nitrates and other chemicals.

2. Integration into other policies

The close link between soil and the other major compartments (water and air) is reflected in specific environmental legislation, which is targeted at those compartments but in turn makes a general contribution to soil protection.

Community legislation on water, nitrates, national emissions ceilings, waste management, chemicals, plant health products, biocidal products and habitats, to list just some examples, has a decisive influence on the protection of soil in terms of its various functions.

'Good farming practice' constitutes a core element of the new rural development policy: the granting of compensatory allowances in less-favoured areas is conditional on respect for good farming practice, and agri-environmental measures provide compensation for undertakings going beyond this baseline.

There are a number of agri-environmental measures that contribute to soil protection: organic farming, integrated crop management, no-tillage or conservation practices, grassland strips, winter covers, use of compost and the maintenance of terraces.

Regional policy and transport policy also have a decisive influence on soil management and use.

It should nevertheless be pointed out that it is important for the EU to continue financing soil-related research activities under the fifth and sixth research framework programmes. The

Commission communication is comprehensive and provides a good starting point for specific and integrated soil protection. However, as mentioned above, references to the lack of knowledge, data, forecasts and economic estimates are a constant thread throughout the document.

3. Soil monitoring

Most European soil monitoring services were set up around fifty years ago in response to the need to ensure food self-sufficiency. Soil maps based on these data are extremely variable in Europe. Differences in nomenclature, techniques, scale and data transfer methods used in the Member States make it urgently necessary to harmonise sampling procedures and methods of data analysis.

The specifications of a Community soil information and monitoring system will be the subject of an appropriate legislative proposal. The monitoring system will need to be based on existing information systems, data bases and scientific know-how and form a knowledge base providing data for future actions and ensuring that they are coherent.

4. Future preparation of new measures based on the results obtained from soil monitoring

The Commission communication includes a clear timetable for the presentation of subsequent proposals and reports. The Commission has undertaken to submit a proposal on soil monitoring in June 2004, as well as a communication providing a more detailed analysis of erosion, the decline in organic matter and soil contamination and including recommendations for future measures and actions.

The Commission has likewise undertaken to continue its work on a series of measures which will have an extremely positive impact on soil management and protection in the context of agricultural, transport, regional and research policy.

II. Assessment

The Commission communication 'Towards a thematic strategy for soil protection' lists the main problems affecting soil and outlines the main directions which action should take. As the Commission recognises in its text, the data are not conclusive, research still remains to be carried out and the forecasts/projections are not sufficient to provide a picture of the extent of all and each of the problems addressed in the communication.

It is vital to bear in mind the concept of soil. Soil is the interface between the four elements of the ancient world (and perhaps the ancients had more common sense than we do): water, earth, air and sun. The combination of these four elements lends soil a uniqueness and importance which has not been reflected at political level. Moreover, soil conservation does not rest on more or less sectoral proposals; it is vital to apply an integrated approach based on sustainable development.

Balanced town planning which prevents excessive sealing is clearly important. Urbanisation which respects water courses and the structure and topography of the land, and the 'oxygenation' of land through green areas, are key elements of sustainable regional planning.

Attention should be drawn to the importance of sustainable farming activities as a factor in soil distribution, the visual impact of all forms of soil degradation (particularly in relation to mines and aggregate extraction), the maintenance of water table levels as an element of interaction between the soil and subsoil and the need to amend the directive on sewage sludge and draw up a new directive on composting.

Finally, we must not forget desertification, the terminal stage to which all processes of soil degradation lead. We must not disregard the relationship that exists between desertification, poverty, food security, the decline in biodiversity and climate change. The areas worst hit by desertification are central and south-eastern Spain, central and southern Italy, southern France and Portugal and extensive areas of Greece, whilst other parts of Europe are now also starting to show serious symptoms. Future reviews of the common agricultural policy should consider irrigation management schemes which will help to fight soil erosion.

19 March 2003

OPINION OF THE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

for the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Consumer Policy

on the Commission communication 'Towards a Thematic Strategy for Soil Protection' (COM(2002) 179 – C5-2002/0328 – 2002/2172 (COS))

Draftsman: Danielle Auroi

PROCEDURE

The Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development appointed Danielle Auroi draftsman at its meeting of 11 September 2002.

The committee considered the draft opinion at its meetings of 27 November 2002, 17 February and 19 March 2003.

At the last meeting it adopted the following conclusions unanimously.

The following were present for the vote: Joseph Daul (chairman), Friedrich-Wilhelm Graefe zu Baringdorf, Albert Jan Maat and María Rodríguez Ramos (vice-chairmen), Danielle Auroi (draftsman), Gordon J. Adam, Carlos Bautista Ojeda, Sergio Berlato, Arlindo Cunha, Christel Fiebiger, Francesco Fiori, Christos Folias, Jean-Claude Fruteau, Georges Garot, Lutz Goepel, Willi Görlach, María Esther Herranz García (for Encarnación Redondo Jiménez), Elisabeth Jeggle, Salvador Jové Peres, Heinz Kindermann, Dimitrios Koulourianos, Wolfgang Kreissl-Dörfler (for António Campos), Astrid Lulling (for Agnes Schierhuber), Véronique Mathieu, Hans-Peter Mayer (for Michl Ebner), Xaver Mayer, Karl Erik Olsson, Neil Parish, Mikko Pesälä, Christa Prets (for María Izquierdo Rojo), Dominique F.C. Souchet and Eurig Wyn (for Giorgio Celli).

CONCLUSIONS

The Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development calls on the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Consumer Policy, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following points in its motion for a resolution:

1. Calls on the Commission to take account, in the legislative initiatives which will ensue from its thematic strategy, of the role played by agriculture in revitalising soil and the importance of maintaining farming activity, above all in regions facing the greatest risk of depopulation; suitable soil uses in agriculture, grassland or woodland are basic factors in soil preservation.
2. Calls on the Commission, in line with the SOVEUR report, to carry out an audit to provide a methodical assessment and mapping of European soil, taking into account the need for a specific approach based on three main principles: precaution, anticipation and prevention; these principles, in the spirit of the FAO World Soil Charter, should be designed to prevent soil erosion and desertification.
3. Calls on the Commission to carry out a classification of European agricultural land with the aim of adapting good farming practices to the nature and topography of farmland, whilst at the same time taking account of socio-economic conditions in regions dependent on farming.
4. Calls for a report on the state of the soil in the enlarged EU and an inventory of all positive or negative influences on the state of soil.
5. Calls on the Commission to ensure that the proposal for a Community soil monitoring system is geared to further extending rather than restricting the Member States' responsibility for comprehensive soil protection in line with the manifold regional and local conditions and demands; at the same time, however, the system should serve to create the preconditions for the Europe-wide comparability of selected basic data which are indispensable for the implementation of a Community soil protection strategy.
6. Calls for a shift in farming methods and good farming practices (an end to ploughing up and down the slope, rehabilitation of crop growing in small plots, replanting of hedgerows, ditches, copses), adapted to the soil characteristics in each region and the socio-economic circumstances of communities dependent on farming, by restricting the use of heavy mechanised equipment.
7. Calls on the Commission to provide an incentive, through the CAP's environmental flanking programmes, for practices geared towards soil conservation and to promote, through suitable EAGGF support, the crops and uses which are most appropriate to the soil characteristics and the economic and social context; stresses, in this connection, the role which legumes might play in preserving vegetal cover and the wealth of fauna in certain regions, since the capacity of these crops to hold nitrogen makes it possible

to use fewer fertilisers.

8. Calls, as proposed by the Commission, for soil-friendly practices to be covered by the ecoconditionality rule on assistance, to encourage crop rotation and the growing of legumes and protein crops, including on set-aside land; particular care should be taken with permanent pasture, which has a vital role in regenerating the biodiversity of the soil and should not be converted into arable land.
9. Calls for rules to be introduced bringing land use into line with soil characteristics, taking account of social values, and putting an end to the indiscriminate sealing of land.
10. Points out that obligatory non-rotational set-aside, as proposed by the Commission in its proposals for the mid-term review of the CAP, may interfere with environmental objectives in the field of soil protection.
11. Calls for the introduction of good practices for the non-agricultural rural population, in particular with a view to the production of compost: creation of a cooperative collection system under the responsibility of a farmer, with a financial incentive; support for the creation of structures for pilot projects introducing good practices (aimed, for example, at avoiding an excessive concentration of nitrates in the soil).
12. Calls for the programmes under the European Structural Funds to be evaluated in respect of their impact on soil protection and for the future inclusion of standards, which should be as specific as possible, for direct and indirect soil protection measures such as landscape conservation and planning, preventing erosion, minimising the sealing of land, flood protection, etc.
13. Calls on the Commission to produce a timetable for the adoption of a Community legislative measure on soil and its protection, starting with the restructuring of current relevant EU legislation into one legislative framework in the field of soil protection.
14. Calls for measures to promote and encourage the creation of soil information networks.
15. Considers that it is necessary to look ahead to enlargement as the candidate countries have not had any opportunity until very recently to consider the question of an appropriate soil management and protection policy.
16. Points out that certain aspects of the legislative proposals for the reform of the common agricultural policy contradict the objective of soil conservation which is the subject of the thematic strategy presented by the Commission; more specifically, the introduction of aid which is totally decoupled from production could lead to farming being abandoned in the most marginal regions, which would worsen erosion and desertification.
17. Opposes the introduction of permanent fallow land put forward by the Commission in its proposals for CAP reform owing to the great difficulties which might arise as regards verifying that farmers keep such fallow land in good agronomic condition.

18. Calls on the Commission to carry out a suitable cost-benefit assessment of the planned actions.

OPINION OF THE COMMITTEE ON REGIONAL POLICY, TRANSPORT AND TOURISM

for the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Consumer Policy

on the Commission communication to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions : "Towards a Thematic Strategy for Soil Protection"

(COM(2002) 179 – C5-0328/2002 – 2002/2172 (COS))

Draftsman: Rijk van Dam

PROCEDURE

The Committee on Regional Policy, Transport and Tourism appointed Rijk van Dam draftsman at its meeting of 10 September 2002.

It considered the draft opinion at its meetings of 5 November 2002 and 3 December 2002.

At the last meeting it adopted the following conclusions unanimously.

The following were present for the vote: Luciano Caveri, chairman; Gilles Savary, vice-chairman; Rijk van Dam, draftsman and vice chairman; Emmanouil Bakopoulos, Rolf Berend, Philip Charles Bradbourn, Felipe Camisón Asensio, Nicholas Clegg (for Isidoro Sánchez García), Luigi Cocilovo, Jan Dhaene, Den Dover (for James Nicholson), Garrelt Duin, Jacqueline Foster, Catherine Guy-Quint (for Wilhelm Ernst Piecyk), Konstantinos Hatzidakis, Ewa Hedkvist Petersen, Roger Helmer (for Ingo Schmitt), Juan de Dios Izquierdo Collado, Georg Jarzembowski, Dieter-Lebrecht Koch, Giorgio Lisi, Sérgio Marques, Emmanouil Mastorakis, Rosa Miguélez Ramos, Bill Miller (for Danielle Darras), Giovanni Pittella (for Giovanni Claudio Fava), Samuli Pohjamo, Reinhard Rack, Brian Simpson, Renate Sommer, Dirk Sterckx, Ulrich Stockmann, Margie Sudre, Ari Vatanen, Dominique Vlasto (for Dana Rosemary Scallon), Brigitte Wenzel-Perillo (for Carlos Ripoll y Martínez de Bedoya).

CONCLUSIONS

The Committee on Regional Policy, Transport and Tourism calls on the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Consumer Policy, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following points in its motion for a resolution:

1. Stresses that the principle of sustainable development lies at the heart of Community policies, shares the concern expressed in the communication about the threats to the soil – in particular desertification, erosion and pollution of (industrial) sites, and notes that this is a problem of growing importance in the run-up to the enlargement of the Union; considers, therefore, that the Commission should apply the precautionary and ‘polluter pays’ principles in all its policies;
2. Notes that soil degradation processes are frequently triggered or aggravated by human agency;
3. Highlights the wide diversity of soil problems among and within the Member States and candidate countries, and notes that soil pollution is much less of a cross-border problem than air or water pollution; considers, therefore, that the added value of European action lies principally in the exchange of information, know-how and best practice;
4. Calls on the Commission to take account of existing initiatives at national, European and pan-European level, to which new European initiatives in this field should be complementary;
5. Stresses the importance of harmonising analytical methods to obtain comparable soil data; the accessibility of existing information must also be improved, given that this is an important prerequisite for the necessary exchange of information and experience between Member States;
6. Notes, in connection with transport, that road infrastructure in particular, and to a lesser extent rail infrastructure, can constitute a threat to the soil through covering and impacting (by pressure from heavy vehicles) and the bisection of eco-systems; stresses in this connection the importance of water transport, as set out inter alia in the White Paper on Transport, and the need, for projects in the framework of the Trans-European Networks, to carry out environmental impact assessments pursuant to Directive 2001/42/EC; calls on the Commission to encourage the use of innovative sustainable technologies and products in road-building, such as Very Open-graded Asphalt Concrete;
7. Calls on the Commission, in the communication that it is due to submit in 2003 on ‘Planning and Environment – the territorial dimension’, to study ways of preventing the soil sealing which occurs when new areas are assigned for urban development and infrastructure;
8. Supports the incorporation of soil protection as a component of Community policy, particularly as regards the imposition of soil protection conditions on (regional) infrastructure projects co-financed by the European Union both in connection with the Trans-European Networks and with the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund;

