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Thematic strategy on air pollution

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 (6th 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 (IA) relating to the Thematic Strategy on Air Pollution and the Directive on "Ambient Air Quality and Cleaner Air for Europe" (SEC(2005)1133),
- having regard to the report on Health Aspects of Air Pollution - Results from the WHO project "Systematic Review of Health Aspects of Air Pollution in Europe"²,
- having regard to the policy briefing by the Institute for European Environmental Policy (IEEP)³,
- having regard to the Commission proposal for a new Directive on ambient air quality and cleaner air for Europe (COM(2005)0447),
- having regard to the large body of existing EU legislation controlling air quality and emissions to air, including: the Air Quality Framework Directive⁴ and its Daughter Directives, the National Emission Ceilings Directive⁵, the Large Combustion Plant Directive⁶, Directives controlling vehicle emissions and fuel quality, the Solvents Emissions Directive⁷ and the Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control (IPPC) Directive⁸;
- having regard to the European Environment Council conclusions of 9 March 2006,

¹ OJ L 242, 10.9.2002, p. 1.

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

³ http://www.europarl.europa.eu/comparl/envi/pdf/externalexpertise/ieep_6leg/air_pollution.pdf

⁴ Directive 96/62/EC (OJ L 296, 21.11.1996, p. 55).

⁵ Directive 2001/81/EC (OJ L 309, 27.11.2001, p. 22).

⁶ Directive 2001/80/EC (OJ L 309, 27.11.2001, p. 1).

⁷ Directive 1999/13/EC (OJ L 85, 29.3.1999, p. 1).

⁸ Directive 96/61/EC (OJ L 257, 10.10.1996, p. 26).

- 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 (A6-0235/2006),
- A. whereas air pollution is a major cause of death and factor for disease in Europe, leading to a loss of life expectancy of over eight 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 the general objective of the Thematic Strategy on Air Pollution is to draw up a long-term integrated strategic policy for combating air pollution in order to achieve the objectives of the 6th EAP relating to the protection of human health and the environment,
 - C. whereas in recent decades considerable progress has already been made in reducing emissions into the air of the pollutants most inimical to health,
 - D. whereas fine particles PM_{2.5} and ground level ozone are the air pollutants that cause the most health problems,
 - E. whereas 55% of European ecosystems are damaged by air pollution,
 - F. 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 and stronger cross-border measures are required; whereas that fact does not absolve certain Member States from their particular responsibilities to comply with the limit values for air quality,
 - G. whereas air pollution can be effectively combated only by means of a coordinated package of measures which combines measures at European, national and local level and which is primarily geared to combating emissions of pollutants at source,
 - H. 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",
 - I. whereas among the key measures listed in Article 7 of the 6th EAP are the development of a thematic strategy on air pollution and the review and updating of air quality standards and national emission ceilings, with a view to achieving the long-term objective of not exceeding critical loads and levels; whereas air pollution is a complex problem which can only be solved by means of a systematic approach which takes account of interactions,
 - J. whereas effective implementation of existing legislation is key to delivering improvements in air quality in 2020, and whereas some existing legislation is still in the process of being implemented,
 - K. whereas ambitious air quality objectives can be attained only if the existing legislation is consistently implemented in all Member States and if new legislative proposals can concentrate on limiting emissions by polluters,
 - L. 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,

- M. 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+,
- N. 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,
- O. whereas the Commission's IA is thorough and takes both Better Regulation and the Sustainable Development Strategy into account; yet there is a serious lack of systems approach in the proposed Strategy and the related Air Quality Directive, since, for instance, no further CO₂ emission reductions are anticipated, which no doubt leads to an overestimation of costs and underestimation of benefits for the Strategy since continued emission reductions after 2012 will, as one of many effects, contribute to an improvement of air quality,
- P. whereas the IA shows that the optimal scenario - where marginal costs equal marginal benefits - is to be found between scenarios B and C, regardless of the fact that monetarisation of damage to ecosystems, crop materials as well as some adverse health effects are not included in the cost figures,
- Q. whereas the CAFE working group on PM (particulate matter) 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,
- R. 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,
- S. 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,
- T. whereas all sectors must contribute to improvements in air quality, with particular emphasis on those sectors which hitherto have made only an inadequate contribution to keeping the air clean,
- U. whereas internal market provisions stimulate the achievement of environmental targets and limit values in the EU, as long as targets are equally implemented in the various Member States,
- V. 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,

- W. whereas failures to comply with limit values are not always due to a lack of measures taken by the Member State but are sometimes also caused by a lack of adequate Community measures,
- X. whereas a strategy is needed that contains ambitious targets that are translated into ambitious air quality legislation, accompanied by measures focusing on the sources of pollution, to enable Member States to meet air quality standards, while giving more time to Member States that have taken all appropriate measures but still face problems in meeting limit values,
- Y. whereas in order to ensure the attainment of health and environmental objectives, the National Emission Ceilings Directive should be complemented by a mix of emission reduction measures at local, national, Community and international levels,

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. Notes with concern that the Strategy does not show how the objectives of the 6th EAP can be attained; therefore calls on the Commission to aim for a significantly higher level of ambition to reduce air pollution for 2020 in order to attain those objectives;
3. Is aware of the fact that the ambition level A+ for NH3 in paragraph 2 of the strategy is relatively ambitious for the agricultural sector, but asks the Commission to take fully into account the acidification problems caused by NH3 in the review of the CAP, and therefore to pursue ambition level C;
4. Notes with regret that the Strategy does not include any legal requirement to reduce particulate emissions, as recommended by the European Environment Agency, but simply confines itself to suggesting indicative targets;
5. Calls for a strategy with more ambitious reduction targets that correspond to scenario C for VOC (volatile organic compounds), 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 ¹	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+)

¹ Thematic Strategy on Air Pollution.

PM2.5	45%	59%	61% (C)
Total costs (per year)		EUR 7 100 million extra	+/- EUR 11 000 million extra

6. Calls on the Commission to update the input data used for the integrated assessment model to take account of structural measures, to take full account of the potential for reducing emissions from international shipping, to include all relevant existing legislation in the so-called baseline scenario and to use an energy scenario that is in line with ambitious EU climate policy before using the model for preparing the revision of the National Emission Ceilings Directive; believes that updating the input data used for the analysis along those lines, together with the inclusion of additional non-technical structural measures for reducing emissions, would substantially bring down the estimated cost of achieving given interim targets and would result in significantly higher emission reduction potential;
7. Favours the introduction of a PM10 yearly limit value of 33 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ in 2010 and supports the Commission's proposal to introduce a concentration reduction of PM2.5, as the PM2.5 part within PM10 is the most harmful to health; calls for the introduction of a PM2.5 target value of 20 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ in 2010, turning into a limit value in 2015, and, in accordance with the WHO recommendation, a long-term target value for PM2.5 of 10 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$; 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 and target values;
8. Advocates greater uniformity of the methods of measurement and calculation used by different Member States for fine particulate concentrations; considers, inter alia, that the correction factors should be applied properly;
9. Is convinced that the proposed pollution reductions can only be achieved if the EU strengthens its emission legislation and calls for the adoption of ambitious limit values that are binding to a larger extent;
10. Supports the Commission's proposal to introduce a target exposure reduction of 20% for PM2.5 in 2020 compared to the average exposure index of 2010; calls however for differentiated reduction targets, which take account of the different initial levels of the Member States and the measures taken previously, with particular reference to the greater reduction potential of Member States where the initial exposure level is high;
11. 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;
12. Is convinced that the proposed reductions can only be achieved if the EU strengthens its emissions legislation; points out that air pollution can only be tackled if ambitious limit values are linked to an ambitious emission policy;

Sector-based measures

13. 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, in which connection particular priority should be assigned to those sectors which have not previously been regulated and where further emission reductions can be achieved at lower cost;

14. Calls on the Commission to make a proposal for revision of the National Emission Ceilings Directive as soon as possible and for making it commensurate with the level of ambition advocated by Parliament;
15. Calls upon the Commission and the Member States to urgently take measures to cut emissions from the shipping sector and calls for the Commission to come forward with proposals
 - to establish NO_x emission standards for ships using EU ports;
 - to designate the Mediterranean Sea and the North-East Atlantic as Sulphur Emission Control areas (SECAs) under the MARPOL Convention;
 - to lower the maximum allowed sulphur content in marine fuels used in SECAs and by passenger vessels from 1.5% to 0.5%;
 - to introduce financial instruments such as taxes or charges on SO₂ and NO_x emissions from ships;
 - to encourage the introduction of differentiated port and fairway charges favouring vessels with low emissions of SO₂ and NO_x;
 - to encourage the use of shore-side electricity by ships when in ports;
 - for an EU directive on the quality of marine fuels;

further calls upon the Commission to propose coordinated action to ensure a level playing field 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;

16. Notes that, while agriculture is one of the major sources of air pollution caused by ammonia, there are few obligations on that sector to reduce emissions; welcomes the introduction of the principle of 'conditionality' of agricultural aid following the latest reform of the CAP, which should make for a notable reduction in emissions of substances damaging to the environment; calls on Member States to fight air pollution related to cattle farming, especially intensive 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 and also calls on the Commission and Member States to foster measures which promote the development of organic farming and integrated agriculture as part of rural development policy;
17. Notes the high contribution from agricultural activities to emissions of ammonia; agrees with the Commission on the need to reduce these emissions; calls on the Commission to urgently come forward with specific proposals aimed at reducing emissions of ammonia

from agriculture; and calls on the Commission to link CAP subsidies to stringent requirements for action to combat ammonia emissions from farming;

18. Notes that as a general feature the costs of NH₃ emission reductions seem to be overestimated, for example the draft CAP reform projections of the European Environment Agency foresee lower livestock numbers than the CAFE baseline projections, which if more accurate would also mean lower than projected costs for achieving ammonia emissions reductions;
19. Calls on the Commission to evaluate the cross effects of relevant environmental Directives, such as the Nitrates Directive, the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive and the Water Framework Directive; points in this light especially to the stimulus to use mineral fertilisers (which have been identified as a major source of ammonia emission within the agricultural sector), instead of animal fertilisers, that results from the Nitrates Directive;
20. 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;
21. 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;
22. Urges the Commission to propose in 2006 the future Euro 6 standards for passenger cars with a further reduction of the NO_x standard for diesel passenger cars and vans from 2011, and also to indicate the direction of Euro VII for heavy duty vehicles; urges the Commission to introduce the Euro VI norms for heavy duty vehicles at the latest in 2012 with standards comparable to the standards in the United States; these enable Member States to achieve the air quality targets; invites Member States to take the necessary measures to phase out older polluting vehicles, exempting historic vintage vehicles, or – where appropriate – provide incentives for retrofitting; calls on the Commission, Member States and the transport sector to engage in a fundamental debate concerning sustainable mobility in the 21st century;
23. Invites national, regional and local authorities to review local transport systems and find innovative solutions to minimise the use of cars in inner cities; is convinced that congestion charges result in economic and environmental benefits, and 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 semipublic car fleet and by taking action to support employees that use more sustainable transport modes;
24. Notes the absence of linkage between the development and use of alternative energy sources and a reduction in air pollution as well as the lack of emphasis on the need to extend public transport and exploit alternative energy sources on the basis of strategic planning;

25. 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

26. 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 air quality targets as laid down in this Strategy and to a correspondingly ambitious revision of the National Emission Ceilings Directive; the agreement needs to incorporate a detailed list of EU measures to be taken to ensure that the emission targets of the Strategy are met in a timely way, including the ones set out in paragraphs 13-24 above; the list should be coherent with other Community policies, including the climate action plan; is convinced that such an agreement would contribute to improving accountability and therefore to "better law-making";
27. Calls on the Commission to review in 2012 the progress made in attaining the objectives of the Strategy and to assess the potential in different sectors for further cost-effective reductions;

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