



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

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ENV	397
AGRI	170
DEVGEN	106
ELARG	233
FORETS	23
FSTR	12
RECH	121
REGIO	22
TRANS	200

INFORMATION NOTE

from : General Secretariat

to : Delegations

No. prev. doc. : 9992/02 ENV 322 AGRI 134 DEVGEN 88 ELARG 215 FORETS 18 FSTR 9
RECH 107 REGIO 19 TRANS 178

No. Cion prop. : 8344/02 ENV 238 AGRI 92 DEVGEN 44 ELARG 142 FORETS 11 FSTR 4
RECH 75 REGIO 14 TRANS 122 – COM (2002) 179 final

Subject : Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament,
the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions:
"Towards a thematic strategy for **soil protection**"
– Council conclusions on integrated soil protection

Delegations will find in the Annex the conclusions on integrated soil protection as adopted by
Council on 25 June 2002.

**COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS ON
INTEGRATED SOIL PROTECTION**

THE COUNCIL:

1. RECOGNISES the vital role the soil plays as one of the three natural elements essential for life, as the physical support for a great number of human activities and its important functions including its huge richness of biodiversity and genetic variability, its capacity to store, buffer and filter water and other substances as well as its key role for biomass, food and raw materials production; NOTES that soil may not only be affected by climate change but it is also a storehouse for organic matter and that it has an important role in combating climate change; furthermore it has also important cultural and aesthetic values to be properly preserved;
2. STRESSES that soil is essentially a non-renewable natural resource subject to potentially rapid degradation processes such as erosion, decline of soil organic matter, contamination, decline in soil biodiversity, salinisation, soil sealing and compaction, as well as floods and landslides. These threats can have various consequences, including desertification, acidification and contamination of deeper soil layers, which can seriously threaten the ability of the soil to provide the necessary functions for life; RECOGNISES that the type and extent of land degradation processes differ within the Community; CONSIDERS that human activities in certain areas are essential to maintain the good status of soils, but that they may also start and seriously accelerate degradation processes;
3. CONSIDERS that, to safeguard its capacity to simultaneously perform its vital functions, the sustainable use of soils or soil protecting measures as appropriate need to be assured thus placing soil alongside water and air as a natural resource to be protected;

4. WELCOMES the Communication of the Commission to the Council and to the European Parliament "Towards a Thematic Strategy for Soil Protection". CONSIDERS that it provides a comprehensive overview of the elements and factors related to soil threats, as well as of Community existing policies relevant for soil protection, and establishes the basis for the identification of the future Community actions for its protection. In this respect, attention should be paid to the complexity and to the diversity of soil protection as well as to measures already taken by and within Member States;
5. UNDERLINES that, in order to deal with the huge variability of soils, soil protection policy requires full consideration of regional and local particularities and that, due to its non renewable nature, it is of particular importance to apply the precautionary principle, that preventive action should be taken, that environmental damage should, as a priority, be rectified at source and that the polluter should pay; CONSIDERS also that environmental liability mechanisms contribute to prevent and tackle soil degradation processes and for the remediation of local pollution;
6. STRESSES that increasing threats to soil may often lead to increasing threats to water. Erosion and Soil contamination can affect not only water quality, but the loss of organic matter and compaction can also diminish the soils capacity to retain water, and sealing can disturb the water balance of nearby soils, with additional consequences including increased flood risk and altering groundwater regime;
7. RECOGNISES that, although the information on identified threats is not complete, there is sufficient scientific evidence to conclude that soil degradation processes continue to take place in many areas of the European Union and the Candidate Countries;
8. UNDERLINES the need for appropriate Community action to protect soil and provide for its sustainable use, as already established in the Sixth Community Environmental Action Programme; It should take already existing Community policies and measures and subsidiarity appropriately into account; CONSIDERS that the proper functioning of the single market may require also a common approach to soil policy, insofar as its protection and remediation at all relevant levels may also affect competitiveness;

9. REQUESTS the Commission to bring forward as soon as possible, before July 2004, the Thematic Strategy for Soil Protection, based on an integrated approach and with a comprehensive and long-term perspective with a view to maintain the vital functions of the soil, which should include where appropriate relevant qualitative and quantitative targets and timetables, against which the measures foreseen can be measured and evaluated, and general principles for assessing and managing the threats, as well as identify actions for its implementation, including appropriate sustainable use and soil protection measures. This community framework should be based on available scientific knowledge, best technologies and on a broad consultation with all the concerned stakeholders. It should also consider the possible long distance degradation effects of some human actions including inappropriate soil management, in particular through water and air pollution;
10. RECALLS that several major Community policies, including Agriculture, Transport, Research and Regional policies affect soil and that they may significantly contribute to its protection; in this respect STRESSES the need to improve the integration of soil protection objectives in relevant policies including an appropriate consideration in the future development of the Common Agriculture Policy; SUPPORTS the Commission's intention to promptly start the work outlined in the Communication in relation to environmental legislation and integration in other policies and to report back to the Council during 2004 on the progress made and on future plans for action;
11. STRESSES the key role of environmental policy in addressing most threats to soil;
12. STRESSES that ongoing environmental legislation initiatives on compost, mining waste and sewage sludge, as well as air quality, will make an important contribution to soil protection and REQUESTS the Commission to present the appropriate proposals as soon as possible; BELIEVES that, in addition, the appropriate development and implementation of legislation in relation inter alia to water, air, and biodiversity as well as other relevant environment policy initiatives, such as on chemicals and pesticides, will bring significant benefits for soil;

13. RECOGNISES that, in the absence of comparable policy relevant data, and in line with the knowledge based approach, there is a need to set up a Community framework, including legislation, to develop a soil monitoring system based in so far as possible on already existing systems and capable, where appropriate, of being integrated into more comprehensive multi-layered monitoring and reporting systems. UNDERLINES the long-term need for policy relevant, accurate, compatible and comparable data and indicators, permitting, including through its common interpretation, the detection of changes and trends in the threats to soil and on which future policies can be built and SUPPORTS the Commission intention to bring forward proposals during 2004 based on full stakeholder involvement;
14. CONSIDERS that future actions should be focused on sustainable use of soils or soil protecting measures as appropriate and on the benefits that may bring to water, air, biodiversity, land, human health and to combat climate change;
15. SUPPORTS the Commission view that erosion, decline of organic matter and soil contamination are considered priority soil threats especially where these processes may become irreversible and WELCOMES the intention of the Commission to present a communication on these matters in 2004; SUPPORTS the Commission's intention to hold a major conference for this purpose;
16. CONSIDERS that tackling the issue of soil sealing is also a priority and UNDERLINES the need to take up soil protection and the sustainable use of soil in land management; LOOKS FORWARD to this being addressed, together with other soil protection related issues, in the future Commission Communication on the subject to be presented in 2003. RECALLS that the importance of certain soils is such that they need to be protected for their intrinsic value;
17. EMPHASISES the link between soil contamination and risks to human and animal health and to ecosystems and INVITES the Commission to come forward with recommendations for further actions as appropriate in this respect during 2004, including, inter alia, consideration of risks to soil functions and their potential impact on human health;

18. RECOGNISES the importance of the wider international dimension of soil protection, as expressed in a number of Community commitments to relevant international conventions and conferences; RECOGNISES that Member States and Candidate Countries have developed various actions and policies on soil protection, some of which are part of the National Action Programmes in the context of the Convention to Combat Desertification, and STRESSES the value of soil protection and of its sustainable use and management for poverty alleviation worldwide.
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