

Opinion of the Committee of the Regions on the 'Communication from the Commission, to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and the candidate countries in central and eastern Europe on accession strategies for environment: meeting the challenge of enlargement with the candidate countries in central and eastern Europe'

(1999/C 51/06)

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

having regard to the Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and the candidate countries in central and eastern Europe on accession strategies for environment: meeting the challenge of enlargement with the candidate countries in central and eastern Europe (COM(98) 294 final);

having regard to the Commission's decision of 20 May 1998 to consult it on this subject in accordance with the first paragraph of Article 198c of the Treaty establishing the European Community;

having regard to the decision of its bureau on 15 July 1998 to instruct Commission 4 for Spatial Planning, Urban Issues, Energy and the Environment to draw up the relevant opinion;

having regard to the Commission's Opinions on the applications for accession of 15 July 1997 (Agenda 2000);

having regard to the COR opinion on the effects of enlargement on the Union's policies (CdR 280/97 fin) ⁽¹⁾;

having regard to the COR opinion on the CAP and eastward enlargement (CdR 239/96 fin) ⁽²⁾;

having regard to the COR opinion on the Communication from the Commission on implementing Community environmental law (CdR 437/96 fin) ⁽³⁾;

having regard to the COR opinion on the Proposal for a Council Directive establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy (CdR 171/97 fin) ⁽⁴⁾;

having regard to the COR opinion on environment policy in cities and towns (CdR 393/97 fin) ⁽⁵⁾;

having regard to the report by EDC consultants on compliance costing for approximation of EU environmental legislation in the CEEC;

having regard to the Amsterdam Treaty;

having regard to the 1998 Dobbris report (European Environment Agency) on Europe's environment;

having regard to the draft opinion (CdR 267/98 rev.) adopted by Commission 4 on 2 October 1998 (rapporteur: Mr Penttilä),

unanimously adopted the following opinion at its 26th plenary session on 18 and 19 November 1998 (meeting of 19 November).

1. Introduction

1.1. On 20 May 1998 the European Commission adopted the communication to the Council, the Europe-

an Parliament, the Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and the candidate countries in central and eastern Europe on environmental accession strategies in connection with EU enlargement.

1.2. In the forthcoming enlargement of the Union the environmental dimension will present greater challenges than in any previous accession. There are major environmental problems in the candidate countries and there is a large gap in the level of environmental protection in relation to the situation in the EU. However, this does not mean that environmental problems have been solved

⁽¹⁾ OJ C 64, 27.2.1998, p. 48.

⁽²⁾ OJ C 116, 14.4.1997, p. 39.

⁽³⁾ OJ C 244, 11.8.1997, p. 43.

⁽⁴⁾ OJ C 180, 11.6.1998, p. 38.

⁽⁵⁾ OJ C 180, 11.6.1998, p. 22.

in the present Member States; rather, these countries too must work for a better environment. On the other hand, the candidate countries possess vast tracts of virtually untouched nature which make an important contribution to the biological diversity of the whole of Europe. The challenge in the years ahead is to preserve these assets and at the same time to develop and manage an economically and environmentally sustainable framework.

1.3. The communication notes that, although efforts have been made in all the candidate countries to approximate environmental legislation, much remains to be done before full compliance with the environmental acquis is achieved. The Commission takes the view that this additional work is of a legislative, administrative and financial nature and will place heavy demands on human resources.

1.4. In addition to environmental investment there is a need for reinforcement of environmental institutions and careful strategic planning. Adequate attention must be paid to preventive measures through integration of environmental and sustainable development considerations into policy sectors such as transport, energy and agriculture. A comprehensive financial strategy is required to coordinate action by the various institutions involved.

1.5. The Commission intends to provide the candidate countries with more information, guidance and technical assistance in the implementation of the environmental acquis, for example through networking mechanisms. Implementation of scientific research through joint projects or concerted action is a key objective since it can yield knowledge on sustainable management of natural resources. The enlargement process should be managed in such a way as to bring the whole of the European Union closer towards the objective of genuinely sustainable development.

2. General comments

2.1. The COR considers the communication on enlargement and the environment to be timely and most necessary.

2.2. In the COR's view, environmental issues are among the most important questions in the enlargement negotiations. This should also be reflected in the actual negotiations. Membership is conditional on the transposition of the entire EU environmental acquis into national law in the candidate countries. The candidate countries are required to draw up a detailed legislative programme, together with a programme on its implementation and a financial strategy. It is vital for the implementation and enforcement of the acquis to create and strengthen bodies for environmental administration at local and regional level and to ensure that they can function effectively.

2.3. The candidate countries will need major environmental investment in both technology and administration. Resources will also be needed for upgrading data management and monitoring systems, education and training of staff and acquisition of land. In Agenda 2000 the Commission promises to make support available to the candidate countries to enable them to meet the obligations of membership. It must be ensured that all environmental investments in the applicant countries comply with the criteria of the Community's environmental acquis. Approximation of environmental legislation will require funding from private, national and international sources. Many candidate countries have bilateral arrangements with Member States for financing environmental projects.

2.4. The accession process also offers an opportunity for stepping up cooperation between Europe's regions. Non-governmental organizations, business organizations and firms must be involved in this process. For some time now many candidate countries have been working in active partnership with Member States in the field of environmental administration. There is a need to foster networking and exchange of know-how between local and regional authorities.

2.5. The accession process should be seen as a major opportunity for improving the state of the environment in Europe and the world as a whole. Implementation of the Community's existing environmental acquis cannot be the final goal of environmental policy even in the candidate countries. The aim of EU environmental policy is sustainable development, as defined in the 1997 Amsterdam Treaty. The environmental dimension must be integrated into all industrial sectors, transport, energy production and agriculture. These remarks apply equally to current Member States.

3. Specific comments

3.1. *State of the environment in the candidate countries*

The applicant countries face major environmental problems. On the other hand, they have developed their environmental legislation and improved their purification systems throughout the 1990s. It is particularly worth noting that some pollutants are carried across borders, with potentially major significance for the state of the environment over a wide area.

3.2. *Air*

3.2.1. Sulphur dioxide and particulate emissions were a problem in many industrial areas particularly in the late 1980s. In particular, the burning of brown coal in the Black Triangle formed by East Germany, northern Czechoslovakia and southern Poland caused forest

damage and acidification. Although there has been a clear reduction in emission levels in the 1990s, critical loads are still being exceeded in many areas and acidification continues. Emissions are carried long distances, causing problems in areas which are far away from their pollution sources. Air protection issues are linked to developments in industry, energy production and transport. Decision-making in these areas must take due account of the environment and the long-term interest.

3.2.2. At the beginning of the 1990s about half of the major cities in eastern and central Europe exceeded the air quality limit values set by the WHO. Whilst the situation has improved significantly in recent years, air quality in cities in central and eastern Europe is still poorer than in cities in western Europe. It is estimated that air protection will account for 40 % of the environment-related investment necessary for accession to the EU. Although the most serious air protection problems are encountered in Bulgaria and Romania, there are also considerable problems in Estonia (use of polluting oil shale in energy production), Poland (coal-fired power stations), the Czech Republic (air pollution caused by industry) and Slovakia. Some countries have drawn up action programmes for the most heavily polluted areas but the closure of polluting plants and factories will be difficult.

3.2.3. Several of the candidate countries face financial difficulties in adapting their refineries to present and future EU fuel quality standards. Transport is already beginning to be a major polluter in Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia and Hungary; it is already the main source of pollution in EU Member States. Possible problems caused by transport must be anticipated. Investment in the transport sector will have to focus on modernizing public transport and developing rail networks rather than building motorways.

3.3. *Water*

3.3.1. In many of the candidate countries, such as Lithuania, Poland, Romania and Hungary, water pollution is the most serious environmental problem. Untreated or inadequately treated urban waste water is lowering the quality of river water and continuing to cause the eutrophication of seas such as the Baltic and the North Sea. While phosphorus levels in rivers in western Europe have been falling since the 1980s, they have been rising in central and eastern Europe. A major challenge will be the establishment and implementation of an integrated river basin management approach by the riparian states of international rivers, such as the Danube and Oder.

3.3.2. A Europe-wide problem is the rise in the nitrate levels of water bodies over the past 20 to 40 years. None of the candidate countries appear to have made much

progress in implementing the nitrates directive but the decline in agricultural production due to economic recession has led to reduced use of fertilizers.

3.3.3. It is important for the candidate countries to establish the management infrastructure necessary for limiting diffuse source pollution of water bodies. Improvements are necessary in the current Member States as well. Revised legislation enabling the limitation of diffuse source pollution must be introduced during the integration process in all Member States. The way in which agriculture develops in the future has important implications for water protection and biodiversity. Enlargement should be seen as an opportunity to reorganize agriculture throughout the EU in accordance with the principles of sustainable development.

3.3.4. Bringing waste water management and drinking water supply up to EU standards will account for about a third of the total environmental investment required for accession. The poor quality of drinking water is a problem in, for example, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Romania, Hungary and Estonia. There are concerns that pesticides pose a threat to the quality of drinking water in Lithuania. The quality of ground water is endangered in many EU countries, especially in central and western Europe, partly because of the widespread use of fertilizers. Major investment programmes to improve waste water management and the quality of drinking water are underway or being planned in the Baltic States and other candidate countries.

3.4. *Waste*

3.4.1. The increasing amount of municipal waste is a problem common to the whole of Europe. At present, per capita waste levels in central and eastern European countries are slightly lower than those in EU countries, but levels are likely to increase as standards of living rise. Packaging waste levels, in particular, are higher in Member States than in the candidate countries. Waste treatment is centred largely on landfill sites, with uncontrolled landfill of waste in many candidate countries. Waste incinerators in Bulgaria and Lithuania do not meet EU standards.

3.4.2. Hazardous wastes, ground pollution and the seepage of hazardous substances into the soil and ground water are problems in nearly all of the candidate countries. Poland generates large quantities of industrial waste and the old industrial regions of the Czech Republic are particular environmental blackspots. Bringing waste management installations up to EU standards is likely to account for about 20 % of the total cost of environmental investment. Even the current

Member States will be hard pressed to achieve the key objective of the EU's waste management policy, i.e. a reduction in the quantity of waste. Much remains to be done in the candidate countries, if they are to achieve compliance with the Seveso directive.

3.5. *Nuclear safety and radiation protection*

3.5.1. All the countries have recently adopted a basic law on nuclear safety and radiation protection. Bulgaria (1993) and Lithuania (1994) have undertaken to close down inherently unsafe nuclear reactors, in accordance with the Nuclear Safety Account Agreement with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and these commitments must be respected. Although Slovakia has not entered into any international commitments, it faces a similar challenge with regard to the closure of two reactors. In Estonia there have been shortcomings in the management of radiation protection. Further legislation is needed, and it is important to note that the most of this legislation must be adopted even if there is no nuclear sector in the country concerned.

3.6. *Nature*

3.6.1. The candidate countries possess vast areas of untouched nature which contribute significantly to the bio-diversity of Europe as a whole. All the countries have important natural assets: examples include the Carpathian Mountains and Danube Delta in Romania; an extremely rich biodiversity in Slovenia; extensive protected areas in Bulgaria; marshes, forests, meadows and coastal areas in the Baltic States and Poland. While the Commission report states that to date nature protection has been managed well in all the candidate countries, it is important to note that this situation must be sustained in the future too. As the definition of protected areas varies from one country to another, the real value of these areas only becomes apparent when one considers their purpose, how they are managed and the restrictions they impose. The Committee calls upon the Commission to promote the alignment of the laws of the Member States and the candidate countries regarding this definition.

3.6.2. Protected areas alone will not be enough to maintain biodiversity at current levels in individual states, let alone in Europe as a whole. Preservation of biodiversity must be taken into account as far as possible in all economic activity. To some extent the undeveloped nature of agriculture and forestry has been a factor preserving biodiversity in the candidate countries. The natural assets of many regions are now threatened by the introduction of more intensive methods of farming and forestry, on the one hand, and by e.g. the consequences of road construction, on the other. The EU already finances numerous projects where in the majority of cases there is no assessment of their effects on biodiversity. Funding should always be conditional on extensive environmental impact assessments in which biodiversity is accorded the same importance as other environmental considerations.

3.6.3. In many candidate countries a privatization process is under way which could jeopardize the preservation of conservation sites. Countries should see to it that clear rules are established beforehand on the areas to be protected and compensation. It should also be borne in mind that the present protected areas will not necessarily guarantee implementation of the Habitats and Birds Directives. Many Member States have encountered serious difficulties in implementing Natura 2000 precisely because of uncertainties surrounding compensation. Nature conservation legislation in the candidate countries must be brought up to date and the Habitats and Birds Directives must be incorporated as part of national environmental legislation, as has been done in Lithuania.

3.6.4. With regard to nature protection, there is a need in the candidate countries to strengthen research and administrative structures and to establish data and monitoring systems so that species and habitats of great value are not lost unwittingly. Proper data systems are also lacking in some of the present Member States. In general, European countries have a good knowledge of the species present within their territory, depending of course on the body of species concerned. By contrast, knowledge of natural habitats is less systematic. The Czech Republic stands out among the candidate countries in this respect in that it has compiled a 'red book' on habitats.

3.6.5. The protection of many natural habitats requires management and ongoing monitoring, all of which must be funded on annual basis. The candidate countries have also been able to draw on e.g. LIFE-Nature funding to help build the infrastructure necessary to provide people with access to nature conservation sites.

3.6.6. The candidate countries should focus on strengthening nature protection legislation and ensuring that biodiversity is taken into account in the activities of different policy sectors. Highlighting nature conservation issues as an area where the candidate countries have a particular strength and serve as a model for the rest of Europe opens the way to development of mutual benefit to both existing EU Member States and the candidate countries.

3.7. *Environmental legislation: current situation and development needs*

3.7.1. Although each candidate country has some kind of general environmental law, its contents vary greatly from country to country. All the countries have begun the transposition of the Community environmental acquis into their national legislation. This process is fairly well advanced in some countries e.g. Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Hungary. By contrast, much remains to be done in Bulgaria, Romania, Slovenia and the Czech Republic. The Directive on Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control (IPPC) is an example of a piece of legislation which no candidate country has yet managed to transpose into its own legislation.

3.7.2. The candidate countries are required to draw up a strategy and realistic timetable for the approximation of legislation. The national legislative programmes should take account of environmental priorities, identified on the basis of a detailed assessment of the environmental situation in each country, and legislative and administrative gaps which have to be filled in order to meet the *acquis*. Guidance can be obtained from the EU's 'Guide to the Approximation of the European Union Environmental Legislation'. In addition to framework legislation on the environment, the candidate countries must have the basic procedures necessary for efficient environmental administration. In many cases implementation of legislation requires major investment and new institutional arrangements or the reorganization of existing ones.

3.7.3. The 1995 Commission White Paper on 'Preparation of the Associated Countries of Central and Eastern Europe for Integration into the Internal Market of the Union' contains the environmental legislation which has a direct impact on the functioning of the single market (i.e. product-related environmental legislation). To date, Hungary is the only candidate country to have incorporated all this legislation into national law. Transposition is also well advanced in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and the Czech Republic.

3.7.4. The DISAE facility (Development of Implementation Strategies for Approximation in Environment) and TAIEX (Technical Assistance Information Exchange Office) were established to help the candidate countries transpose the EU *acquis* into national legislation. In addition, investment-related technical assistance for project preparation is available through the LSI (Large Scale Infrastructure) facility of the Phare programme.

3.8. *Environmental administration: development needs and prospects*

3.8.1. According to the Commission opinions, the administrative structure necessary for environmental management needs to be strengthened in all ten candidate countries, although the scale of the task varies from country to country. Strengthening is necessary at all levels of administration. Drafting and implementing environmental legislation, monitoring the state of the environment and fostering sustainable development are also key tasks for environmental administrations in the candidate countries.

3.8.2. The ministries responsible for the environment draft the necessary legislation and provide for all measures to implement this legislation. Enforcement of environmental legislation is often in the hands of local and regional authorities, who are responsible for monitoring, issuing permits and inspection. In many cases, new legislation requires the total reorganization of institutions and additional staff training. In addition, financial resources must be earmarked for the establish-

ment and strengthening of environmental administrative structures in the same way as for more conventional investment. Special attention needs to be paid to the development of local and regional administration in the environmental field in all the candidate countries.

3.8.3. Cooperation and exchanges of experience between the present 15 Member States' local and regional authorities, with their longstanding experience and expertise in environmental administration, and their opposite numbers in the candidate countries, which are building up their knowhow in such matters, makes a valuable contribution to this process.

3.8.4. As local authorities are assuming increased responsibilities in implementing EU environmental legislation, the Commission intends to help towns and cities in the candidate countries to participate in the European Sustainable Cities and Towns Campaign. Thanks to this network towns and cities will be better equipped to develop integrated and least-cost plans for implementing the new legislation. Sustainable development considerations should be incorporated into the legislation and practices of various sectors, such as trade and industry. Similarly, they should be taken into account in sectoral administration. This will require training of workers, information and increased public participation.

3.8.5. With a view to the growing involvement of the local authorities of central and eastern Europe in the European Sustainable Cities and Towns Campaign, the Committee calls upon the Commission to ensure long-term financial support for activities under this campaign and, to this end, proposes that a 'Sustainable Cities and Towns Fund' be set up.

3.8.6. Environmental assistance and institution-building measures will be reinforced through Phare national programmes. The Commission also intends to assist authorities in the candidate countries by publishing further guidance documents. The EU's informal network for the implementation and enforcement of environmental law (IMPEL) was set up in 1992 to promote more effective application of environmental legislation in the Community. The Commission has begun the construction of a parallel network for the candidate countries which will be closely linked to IMPEL and will use the experience gained from IMPEL to address implementation and enforcement issues related to application of the Community environmental *acquis*.

3.8.7. The EU's Research, Technological Development and Demonstration (RTD) Programmes are becoming increasingly important as efforts are made to

include operators from central and eastern European countries in Community programmes. Collaboration through networking of partners in RTD activities in the candidate countries will act as a spur to cross-border and intersectoral cooperation in the environmental field. In addition, the environmental activities foreseen in the Information Society Research programme (of the Fifth Framework Programme) will foster cooperation between national and local authorities, research organizations and industry in the EU and the CEEC. This will be supplemented by the inclusion of the candidate countries in the work of the European Environmental Agency, with a special focus on reports on the state of Europe's environment and implementation of the EU's environmental legislation.

3.9. Meeting the financial challenge

3.9.1. The total cost of the investment required to achieve compliance with the environmental acquis in the ten candidate countries could amount to some ECU 120 billion. The bulk of the investment is likely to be needed for infrastructure in air pollution abatement, water and waste water management and waste management. Substantial resources will also be needed to establish and reinforce environmental administrative structures for efficient implementation, monitoring and enforcement.

3.9.2. Unfortunately, no funds have been earmarked in the Commission report for nature protection in the candidate countries. The Commission should revise the investment plans to take account of nature protection. In Ireland, the costs arising from implementation of the Habitats Directive and its monitoring were estimated at approximately IEP 100 million, which is 10% of the total environmental costs incurred by Ireland in connection with accession, i.e. a very substantial proportion.

3.9.3. Environmental and general economic and competitive improvements can be achieved at the same time only by fully incorporating environmental considerations into sectoral policies and investment decisions. This can be achieved in practice by introducing comprehensive environmental impact appraisal procedures, by strict adherence to the precautionary principle and the polluter pays principle and by carrying out sound scientific assessments for all investment and policy decisions. Merely meeting the legislative requirements for accession is not enough; rather, a forward-looking approach is needed which is responsive to energy efficiency, cleaner technologies, waste minimization, public transport and environmental and natural resource constraints. The candidate countries should examine how the environmental gains resulting from economic recession during the first years of transition can be maintained as their economies grow.

3.9.4. The EU is offering the candidate countries financial assistance (ECU 1,5 billion/year) under the Phare programme for use in their pre-accession preparations. More assistance should be granted under this programme for infrastructure investment necessary to achieve compliance with the environmental acquis, for regional cooperation projects (for example, to establish objectives for implementing key framework directives for water and air and for meeting their obligations under international agreements) and for development projects related to administration. The candidate countries are already able to participate in the LIFE programme and obtain financing from it. With particular reference to the development of environmental administration, the opportunities contained in the pre-accession financial instruments, e.g. the 'Institution Building' component of the Phare programme, should be exploited in a wide-ranging partnership which draws on expertise and experience at a decentralized level.

3.9.5. Investment in water protection is important, but there is a particular need to further develop local waste water treatment technologies rather than just build large treatment plants, although the latter are undoubtedly needed to solve the waste water problems of big cities. Here too the aim should be to apply technology which to an increasing extent is based on the principles of sustainable development; for example, the use of sewage sludge must be planned in such a way that it does not go straight to a landfill site. In the construction sector new systems based on water circulation and the dual water system should be installed in new buildings.

3.9.6. The Commission has allocated financing (approx. ECU 0,5 billion/year) under the pre-EAGGF facility for the development of agriculture and rural areas in the period 2000-2006. Attention should be focused on adapting agriculture in a sustainable way so as to prevent a transition in the candidate countries towards the kind of intensive farming practised in the EU. Agriculture in the candidate countries is still relatively extensive and makes little use of chemicals. Ideally, agriculture should evolve in such a way that the stage of intensive farming and heavy reliance on chemicals can be skipped altogether.

3.9.7. The Instrument for Structural Policies for Pre-accession Assistance (ISPA) provides financing (ECU 1 billion/year) for upgrading transport infrastructure and environmental investment (in the period 2000-2006). The candidate countries are required to promote sustainable transport and energy policies. As far as transport is concerned, this implies the development of environmentally sustainable modes of transport and transport services such as rail, waterborne and public transport and the integration of several modes of transport (intermodality). The EU's development banks (EIB, EBRD) should also provide financing for these purposes. A project has recently been launched within the Phare transport programme which is designed to mitigate the effects of transport-related environmental problems through regional cooperation. Coordination of the

Interreg and Phare programmes will have to be improved in the future.

3.9.8. The COR feels that it is important for local and regional authorities in the candidate countries to be given the opportunity to play an active role in implementing ISPA measures (a) through taking part, or setting in motion, practical projects and (b) in the form of ongoing representation on the committees that are to monitor and evaluate intervention.

3.9.9. The candidate countries are required to draw up a comprehensive financial strategy and detailed operational arrangements. Community funding has a catalytic effect in that it helps to mobilize other resources. It must always be supplemented by national resources and preferably also by financing from other sources, e.g. international financial institutions.

4. Conclusions

4.1. In the COR's view environmental issues are among the most important questions in the enlargement negotiations. The accession process offers an excellent opportunity to improve the environmental situation in Europe. The aim must be to achieve sustainable development by seeking to implement environmental legislation and integrating environmental considerations into all industrial sectors, transport, energy production and agriculture. The transposition of the environmental acquis into national legislation should not therefore be seen as the ultimate objective, but an intermediate stage on the road towards sustainable development in Europe.

4.2. The COR considers it to be of the utmost importance to strengthen environmental administration in the candidate countries and to disseminate know-how on environmental issues and sustainable development.

4.3. The COR would emphasize the overriding importance of monitoring the environmental situation and publicizing the results. It can serve as a basis for raising public awareness of environmental affairs and highlighting the concept of sustainable development throughout society.

4.4. The COR concurs with the Commission's view that special attention needs to be paid to the development of local and regional administration in the environmental field in all the candidate countries. The accession strategies are of great significance at local and regional level. For while environmental legislation is drawn up at national level, enforcement is frequently the responsibility of local and regional authorities, who carry out monitoring, issue permits and perform inspections. In many cases the new legislation will require major reorganization of administrative bodies and staff training. Financial resources must also be earmarked for establishing and reinforcing environmental administrative structures as well as for conventional investment.

4.5. The COR therefore calls for special action to reinforce cooperation and exchanges of experience between the decentralized authorities in the candidate countries and the EU-15 respectively, with a view to boosting administrative capacity in the implementation and deployment of environmental legislation. Further, the COR urges the Commission to ensure that the decentralized authorities in the candidate countries are, early on, assigned an active role at all stages in the framing and implementation of the accession strategies for environment.

4.6. The COR feels that improving air quality is one of the key environmental issues in the candidate countries and that it must be addressed by appropriate action in industry, energy production and the transport sector. Implementation of the IPPC Directive is essential.

4.7. The COR takes the view that bringing waste water and drinking water management up to EU standards will require investment on a very large scale. The COR nevertheless feels that in constructing new installations the candidate countries should try to find sustainable solutions.

4.8. The COR believes that enlargement offers an excellent opportunity to upgrade the quality of surface and ground water throughout Europe. This can be achieved, on the one hand, by tightening legislation, for example by implementing the Nitrates Directive, river basin management plans and legislation on diffuse source pollution, and, on the other hand, by implementing new innovative projects.

4.9. The COR is concerned about the large quantities of waste in Europe. Every effort must be made to ensure that waste levels do not increase in the candidate countries as a result of accession and, moreover, that levels decrease in existing Member States. More active use must be made of economic incentives to resolve this problem. The Committee would also stress the need to ensure that free competition and free movement of goods do not lead to distortions in the area of environmental policy during the candidate countries' process of adaptation.

4.10. The COR feels that radiation and nuclear safety issues are critical. Dangerous plants in the candidate countries must definitely be closed down.

4.11. The COR takes the view that more emphasis must be placed on nature protection and the preservation of biodiversity. Although the candidate countries may now have a fairly good network of protected areas, this does not automatically imply that the situation will remain good in the future. Possible changes in land ownership must be anticipated. Similarly, the preservation of biodiversity must be taken into account in all economic activity to the greatest possible extent. Efforts

must be made to ensure a good level of protection of natural habitats and species in the candidate countries. The protection of many habitats requires management. In addition, there is a need for continuous monitoring. This all requires funding on a regular annual basis. Adequate financing must be earmarked for investment in nature protection (about 10 % on average of the total cost of environmental investment).

4.12. The COR feels that a more detailed analysis should be made of the economic effects of accession and the investment needs it entails by drawing on local knowledge and expertise and basing investment plans on a choice of options which are compatible with sustainable development. Investment plans must take account of options whose employment effects are compatible with sustainable development. In addition, the share of total investment devoted to planning and development must be increased so that projects are not implemented without knowing beforehand whether they are sensible or not. Expenditure on investment should also include allocations for the evaluation and monitoring of the effects of projects. A system must be set up so that mistakes can be avoided and lessons can be learned from past mistakes.

4.13. The COR feels that the starting point for examining the environmental impact of enlargement must be sustainable development. The candidate countries should not seek rigidly to follow in the footsteps of the present Member States in terms of development and management of environmental affairs. Instead, they should explore the possibilities of moving one step ahead of them. In many cases this could be done with the same human and financial resource inputs that would be required to emulate the present Member

States. It should be remembered that EU countries face serious environmental problems, some of which legislation seems to be quite powerless to resolve.

4.14. The candidate countries typically have good public transport systems, which the COR feels should be preserved and developed further. This would help to prevent a massive increase in the number of cars, which unfortunately has already begun to rise sharply in many of the candidate countries. A balanced mix of all modes of transport (rail, waterborne, air and road) will help to establish a durable transport strategy in all the countries which have applied for EU membership.

4.15. The COR feels that the candidate countries should focus attention on the sustainable adaptation of agriculture so that they can avoid the mistakes of intensive farming which have afflicted the EU.

4.16. The COR would underline the need to support the networking of Europe's regions and localities. Collaboration must be developed within and between the various policy sectors.

4.17. In the view of the COR, the environmental accession strategies should be based on an integrated approach. The communication stresses the importance of legislation and financing. There is a particular need to put in place the necessary legislation. In financing, decisions should be guided by the principle of sustainable development.

4.18. The COR feels that education and training have a key role to play in improving the environmental situation in the candidate countries and raising citizens' environmental awareness.

Brussels, 19 November 1998.

*The President
of the Committee of the Regions*

Manfred DAMMEYER
