Environment and development: common platform for EU preparation for UN session, June 1997

1996/2229(COS) - 09/12/1996

The Council welcomed the communication from the Commission and considered it to be a good overall basis for defining the EU's position on issues raised at the special session. It supported the Commission's idea of involving the Heads of State in the meeting in order to enhance the public and political image of the session as well as to demonstrate that policy makers were committed to sustainable development. - As far as the objectives of the special session were concerned the Council was of the opinion that this meeting should not seek to re-negotiate Agenda 21 but rather should focus on analysing the successes and failures associated with its implementation. It was won over by the idea of revising the conclusions of the Rio Conference in five years time and stressed that the meeting should essentially highlight the responsibility of all concerned for the well-being of present and future generations. Discussions on safety issues associated with the environment, natural resources and food security should also be placed high on the agenda. The special session should draw up a programme of work for the next cycle of the Commission on Sustainable Development, focussing on the need to change long-term trends in consumption and production and to incorporate the environmental dimension at every level. - As regards the political declaration the Council was of the opinion that this should be short and to the point, focussing on urgent priorities while drawing special attention to the following points: .natural resources and sustainable use: forests should be one of the main items on the agenda at the session, along with the growing shortage of fresh water and the implications of this on food production, soil management, the problem of the oceans, renewable energies, road traffic management and the associated environmental impact, sound management of chemical substances, waste reduction and the management of radioactive waste, etc. It also called for commitment from all donors to increase the level of financial aid to sustainable development (especially with regard to the poorest nations). In this context the EU had committed itself to achieving the targets set by the UN, namely that public aid to development should amount to 0.7% of GDP; .trade and environment: these two policies should be mutually supportive in order to strengthen sustainable development, whether this be under the WTO or within the context of regional and inter-regional free trade agreements. The work of the WTO and other international bodies should be based on a set of clear and predictable rules that would allow recourse to rational trade measures; .international and environmental law: it recalled that Agenda 21 gave the UNEP responsibility for coordinating international and environmental law. The special session should also take account of recommendations made by the UNEP and subscribe to them; - Finally, as regards the role of the Commission on Sustainable Development and its programme of work: the Council took the view that the session should adopt a work programme for the next Commission cycle, one that should more closely reflect the responsibility given to the said Commission in monitoring the progress of sustainable development and its role as a forum for the exchange of ideas and experience. The Commission should restrict itself to dealing with three questions of global interest each year and apply itself to making its decisions more workable.