Environment: soil protection, thematic strategy

2002/2172(COS) - 16/04/2002 - Non-legislative basic document

PURPOSE : to develop a thematic strategy for soil protection. CONTENT : in May 2001, the Commission indicated soil loss and declining fertility as a main threat to sustainable development as it erodes the viability of agricultural land. Against this background, the Community's 6th Environment Action Programme includes a thematic strategy on soil protection with particular attention to preventing erosion, deterioration, contamination and desertification. The purpose of this Communication is to build on this political commitment in order that soil protection be achieved more fully and systematically in coming years by setting out the way towards developing this strategy. However, this Communication is also the first occasion on which the Commission has addressed soil protection for its own sake and therefore it is both broad and descriptive in approach. It addresses inter alia erosion, the decline in soil organic matter and prevention of pollution. It aims in particular to: - describe the multiple functions of soils; - identify its characteristics relevant to policy development; - identify the main threats to soil; - present an overview of relevant Community policy; - present the current situation regarding soil information and monitoring and identify gaps which need to be filled as a basis for soil protection policy; - establish the policy basis and outline the steps towards the presentation of a thematic strategy on soil protection in 2004. The Commission considers that soil protection at this stage can best be achieved through a strategy based on 1) initiatives, now, in environmental policies, 2) integration in other policies, 3) soil monitoring, and 4) the future development of new actions based on monitoring results.