Air quality: improvement of comparability and transparency at European level (reduction of emissions)

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The committee has adopted the report of Mrs. Anita POLLACK (UK, PES) on the proposal for a Council Direction establishing a reciprocal exchange of information and data from networks and individual stations measuring ambient air pollution within the Member States. The rapporteur tabled 11 amendments, most of them concerning the amendments in the annex. In her report, Mrs. POLLACK writes that there has been growing disquiet about the quality of air in the Member States. The Commission has introduced air quality standards for sulphur dioxide, suspended particulate matter, black smoke, lead, nitrogen dioxide and ozone. The Commission proposes to establish a reciprocal change of data covering 34 pollutants. Of these, 6 are covered by existing air quality directives and a further 8 will be covered by the framework directive on Ambient Air Quality (COM(94/0109)). The other pollutants were chosen on the basis of their risk to human health and the environments. Article 2 of the proposal states that the reciprocal exchange shall cover these pollutants only to the extent that they are currently measured in the Member States. Therefore, no new measurement stations are required and no extra costs envisaged. The data gathered by the Member States will be sent to the Commission on a yearly basis. A committee will be set up to administer this transfer of data, to make amendments to the list of pollutants measured and to adapt the decision to scientific and technical progress. But the rapporteur warns that the information should not be seen as "info for info's sake". It must be used as a tool for pollution control and therefore for bettering the lives of Europe's citizens. In this respect, it is essential that the public gain access tot the results. The data provided to the Commission should be available by computer link on request and the Proposal should explicitly address the need to ensure this access. Besides the technical reports foreseen, a report should be prepared to provide general information to the public. This should include a summary of the collected data, an analysis of the number of times and days relevant EU guidelines were exceeded for each site and an outline of the underlying trends in the EU for air quality. Article 2 of the Proposal states that "the reciprocal exchange shall cover the pollutants listed in annex 1 of the Proposal to the extent that they are measured in the Member States". Here we have a problems, says the rapporteur, because this would mean that if a pollutant is not measured at present in a certain Member State, there is no compulsion for it to be measured in the future. This seems to contradict one of the aims of the proposal, which should extend the scope and improve the quality of data transmitted. Mrs. POLLACK fears that without some form of mandatory measurement of the pollutants listed in annex 1, the Commission's data bank will remain patchy and the information to the public will remain inadequate. Therefore, she proposes a review of the Proposal in 2 years. This would ascertain whether the information requested was being supplied voluntarily, and if not, whether a more mandatory approach was needed.