Air pollution: strategy for reducing methane emissions

1996/2254(COS) - 18/03/1998

A call for the establishment of a European Climate Agency was made by the Committee. The agency should coordinate public and private climate protection measures, the committee said in a motion for a resolution on a Commission communication proposing a strategy for reducing methane emissions into the atmosphere. The motion was contained in a report drafted under the consultation procedure by Mr Pedro MARSET CAMPOS (GUE/NGL, E). Methane (CH4) traps heat and inhibits its release into space, thus contributing to the global greenhouse effect. Of the factors which contribute to global warming, methane is second only to carbon dioxide (C02). Thirty per cent of methane comes from natural sources (eg wetlands), the rest resulting from human activity, particularly livestock rearing, the landfill of waste and burning fossil fuels. Other anthropogenic sources include rice cultivation, brush fires and coalmining. The aim of the Commission strategy is to reduce methane emissions in the EU to 30% of their 1990 levels by the year 2005 and to 41% by 2010. In its motion, the committee called on the Commission to submit a package of legislative, economic and social recommendations with a view to achieving a substantial reduction in methane emissions through practical proposals within a definite timescale. In particular, it wanted methane recovered, for use as a source of energy, from coal-mining, landfill and animal waste. Animal diets should be improved and livestock effluent needed to be managed. Education and the media should be used to increase public awareness of the need to reduce emissions: people must change their behaviour eg as regards waste disposal. European firms which helped cut methane emissions in third countries should enjoy tax concessions. The committee also wanted EU funds used to repair old pipelines leaking methane in the former Soviet Union.