Standardising and rationalising reports on implementation of directives on the environment

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Caroline JACKSON (EPP-ED, UK) on standardising and rationalising reports on the implementation of directives on the environment. The report was critical of the shortcomings of the 1991 directive introducing a standardised reporting system on the implementation of environmental directives in the areas of water, air and waste. It said that the Member States were still failing to meet their basic reporting obligations, which meant that the publication of consolidated reports was regularly delayed. Moreover, the 1991 directive did not lay down detailed instructions for the content of reports, and the questionnaires used were time-consuming and ultimately did not give a useful picture of the effect that environmental legislation was actually having on the environment. A further criticism was that the existing Commission websites did not provide systematic information on reporting or easy access to individual reports. The committee concluded that "the overall picture on reporting is very confusing". The report pointed out that the 6th Environment Action Programme called on the Commission to review the existing reporting systems with a view to ensuring more streamlined, high-quality reporting and comparable and relevant environmental data and information. The committee added that the Commission must now decide to take reporting requirements more seriously and be stricter about following up instances of non-reporting. It recommended separating out basic reporting on transposition from more subjective reporting on the effect of EU law on the state of the environment. The basic reporting requirement should, it said, be very simple and focus on such facts as the date of transposition into national law, the mode of transposition, identification of means of enforcement and of penalties for non-compliance, etc. However, the committee also underlined the importance of separate reports containing information relating to environmental data and descriptions of policy measures, policy effects and effectiveness. Other recommendations focused on ensuring greater transparency with regard to the reporting process, for example by establishing an environmental reporting web page listing the reports submitted by the Member States for all environmental directives in force, together with a list of the countries that have complied with the reporting requirement or are in breach of it. Moreover, the web page should be used to publish consolidated reports following the 3-yearly reporting deadline for major directives even where those reports drew attention to the failure of some Member States to provide information, in the hope that such 'naming and shaming' techniques would act as a spur to the countries concerned. The committee also called for more vigorous enforcement procedures, including a system of fines (per day and per item) which would come into effect automatically as soon as the legal deadline had been passed. Lastly, the report stressed the urgent need to overhaul the reporting system before EU enlargement.