Coastal zones: integrated management

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OBJECTIVE: to highlight the main characteristics of the coastal zones of Europe, where the environment is steadily deteriorating in many areas, and to set out the reasons for action at Union level to increase the rate of sustainable development in these zones. SUBSTANCE: the Commission communication has come about as a result of the fifth Community programme of policy and action in relation to the environment and sustainable development, which provides for an initiative responding to the Council's request to draw up a comprehensive Community strategy for the integrated management of coastal zones. Three reasons justify the EU's interest in the future of coastal zones: - the existence of problems at European level that cannot be dealt with by each Member State acting in isolation (common natural and cultural heritage, transfer of pollutants, tourism flows, safety at sea); - the effect of the EU's policies and actions on the equilibrium of coastal zones (regional policy, transport, fisheries, the environment, agriculture, energy, industry, tourism); - the need to exchange experience and know-how in a field where success is still rare and where there is a strong public demand for the preservation of coastal zones. A joint effort between the EU and the Member States is therefore vital to increase the rate of sustainable development at all levels by making legislation and existing financial and planning instruments more effective. The Commission is proposing to implement a demonstration programme aimed at highlighting the practical conditions that must be met if sustainable development is to be achieved in the European coastal zones in all their diversity. It will have two main objectives: - to test cooperation models for the integrated management of coastal zones; - to provide the technical results needed to stimulate dialogue between the European institutions and the actors involved (political authorities, administrations, economic, scientific and public representatives). The lessons drawn from the programme and the reactions to it will make it possible to identify potential additional measures to be implemented at European level and at other levels of decision-making: - establishing criteria and mechanisms to incorporate the environment within the framework of the Structural Funds; - drawing up a draft directive on the strategic assessment of the effects on the environment; - drawing up initiatives relating to other types of zones facing similar problems (urban and mountainous areas). Finally, they will form a response to the EU's commitments to Agenda 21 of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development.