Environment and employment: building a sustainable Europe

1997/2287(COS) - 18/11/1997 - Non-legislative basic document

OBJECTIVE: to define a strategy through which environment and employment policies can be made mutually beneficial. SUBSTANCE: the communication is based on three key observations: 1) that the Union is characterised by 'underuse' of its labour resources (with an average unemployment rate of over 10%) and an 'overuse' of natural resources; 2) that the industrialised world is responsible for a significant part of global environmental problems: the main problems arise in a number of specific sectors of the economy (industry, transport, energy, agriculture) and in the pattern of consumption; 3) the way we presently produce goods and services is still based on investment and price relations of the past when environmental concerns were much less important. The Commission therefore considers that the Member States must speed up the transition to new and clean technologies seeking to replace polluting technologies. They must also reconsider ways for financing the provision of public goods. The most favourable time for making this shift is when old capital is to be replaced with new investment integrating high environment standards. The benefits would be twofold: - investment would create jobs and business opportunities; - new technologies would lead to a better environment. If well designed this new environmental policy could become a strong driving force for investment and employment. The Commission therefore proposes a series of initiatives which could help the Member States to link their employment and environment policies. The actions proposed concentrate on the following five areas: - benchmarking of employment and environmental achievements of economic sectors so as to encourage public authorities in their reorientation towards cleaner methods of production and consumption; - assessing and promoting the development of clean technologies and identifying their effects in employment terms; - stepping up, in the context of enlargement, efforts to link employment and sustainable development through Community initiatives and funding (through urban renovation and rural development); - continuing the gradual restructuring of tax systems by reducing non-wage labour costs and by incorporating environmental and resource costs (in particular energy) in the price of goods and services; - promoting environmental education and training so as to support the implementation of new environmentally friendly technologies and working practices.