Environment and health: integrated strategy, SCALE initiative, first cycle 2004-2010

2003/2222(INI) - 31/03/2004 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

Parliament has adopted an own initiative report on the European environment strategy presented by Marit PAULSEN (ELDR, S). Parliament welcomes the intention to improve understanding of the links between environmental factors and certain diseases, but considers it illusory to believe that the strategy could "fill the knowledge gap on the link between environment and health", let alone "generate the necessary information for establishing the cause-effect link", given the enormous complexity of the links between environment and health. A ministerial Conference on Environment and Health is to be held in Budapest in June 2004, and it is important that the Commission's contribution, namely the Action Plan 2004-2010, should set a good example of addressing the disease burden caused by environmental factors in concrete terms, I. whereas the connections between the EU's own actions. The Parliament stresses the importance of considering the socio-economic impact in the work on environment and health. The Commission is called upon to always keep in mind the gender perspective during the implementation of the European environment and health strategy. Parliament underlines that an immediate priority for the action plan must be a more comprehensive survey and evaluation in the short-term of the levels of evidence already available which explore the links between exposure to environmental factors and disease from the various studies already available, studies collected during the first phase, as well as available toxicological data, with a view to proposing concrete measures to protect human health and the environment as soon as possible. Equally, the Commission is called upon to establish an inventory of known damage to health caused by environmental factors, including the costs of such damage. The House calls for the link between traffic, transport and air pollution, on the one hand, and asthma and respiratory diseases on the other, to be made stronger in the first cycle of the strategy, as asthma and respiratory diseases are closely connected with air pollution, and calls for an equal focus to be placed on the two problem areas. Moreover, Parliament recommends that the action plan should provide for more extensive measures to improve indoor air quality in the residential environment, public places (particularly nursery schools and schools) and work-places. The Parliament considers that protecting the health of the children against environment-related diseases is an essential investment with a view to ensuring adequate human and economic development. It recommends that the action plan include studies to detect hot spots of emissions and exposure that endanger health and that these studies focus on the risks in question in order to find rapid solutions that will prevent adverse effects on health; also recommends that the action plan provide for the drafting of standards, protection measures as well as information on risks associated with the home. It calls for the action plan to devote particular attention to people living close to sources of pollution and to step up the policy of prevention based, in particular, on identifying, quantifying and reducing emissions and on stepping up monitoring of the environment for carcinogens and substances which damage the reproductive and nervous systems.The importance of protecting water resources is highlighted and thus the need to limit industrial and urban emissions of pollutants, both diffuse and from point sources, and emissions from agriculture of fertilisers and phytopharmaceutical products, which will require changes to be made in agricultural policies and practices. It stresses that the action plan must take into account the problems linked to labelling, given that clear and user-friendly labelling is essential if consumers are to be informed and made aware of the impact on the environment of the products in question; believes, furthermore, that the action plan should establish other particular ways and means of ensuring appropriate information for children-consumers. The link between the strategy's integrated monitoring and response system should be stressed and the proposal for a regulation concerning the registration, evaluation, authorisation and restriction of chemicals - REACH, which will provide toxicological and exposure data, needs to be clarified and strengthened in the strategy. Parliament considers that the anticipated biomonitoring should include certain pesticides as well as certain brominated flame retardants and phthalates so as to cover substances that are not yet adequately regulated. It recommends that the action plan include legislative proposals to reduce the dependency on pesticides in the context of the thematic

strategy on the sustainable use of pesticides. Parliament stresses the importance of education about environmental health and calls for the methods and activities to be undertaken for raising awareness to be better defined in the strategy and it considers that the objective should be to inform each individual sufficiently so as to enable him or her to make the appropriate choices in relation to his or her own health. It emphasises the crucial role of public access to information in this context and calls on the Commission to ensure that all evidence about environmental degradation that could harm health, in particular children's health, be made publicly available. It calls for the precautionary principle to be included in the strategy and for the action plan to include a list of environmental contaminants, for which there is a sufficient level of scientific evidence at the effect level (e.g. molecular, cellular, or tissue-related) to show that potentially serious or irreversible health impacts are likely. The Commission is called upon to accelerate the pilot project 'Integrated monitoring of dioxins & PCBs in the Baltic region' and to start to use this integrated information as a basis for developing new policies without delay. Parliament recommends that the Action Plan take into specific consideration the problem of passive smoking, in particular at the work place and in public buildings, and include legislative proposals to restrict smoking to dedicated closed rooms at the work place, as well as conduct an awareness campaign to inform the public of the effects of tobacco pollution on children's health. The issue of putting in place a Community monitoring and response system is underlined and ensuring that it is truly successful and useful will require EU funding. It stresses that the financing of the strategy needs to clarified.