Towards a thematic strategy on the prevention and recycling of waste

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The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report drafted by Karl- Heinz FLORENZ (EPP-ED, D), welcoming the Commission's communication as an appropriate basis for discussion of future strategy. It asked the Commission to give primary emphasis on concrete measures aimed at waste prevention, so that it achieves the objectives of the Sixth Community Environment Action Programme. Parliament welcomed the fact that the communication broadens the thematic strategy for waste recycling to include the vital areas of waste management, inter alia, waste prevention and clarification of the legal framework. The overall objective of the strategy is to reduce to a minimum the negative environmental impact of waste. This means that, in the thematic strategy, environmental impact should be defined, that recycling is not an end in itself, especially not for hazardous waste, and that the waste hierarchy should be correctly applied for different situations and materials. Since its is the environmental impact that counts, Parliament called for future legislation to give preference to waste disposal over re-use and recycling only where there is a clear evidence that it actually is more environmentally friendly. This could, for instance, be determined through a comparison of emission and energy consumption levels for the various alternative processes throughout their lifecycle. Parliament felt that the objective of the sustainable waste management strategy must be prevention of the generation of waste and sustainable resource management. The Commission must continue to propose the mandatory phasing out of certain hazardous substances in product-related legislation as an effective means of qualitative waste prevention, so as to contribute to an overall reduction of 20% in the generation of hazardous waste by 2010. Parliament went on to discuss the need to speed up the entire Treaty-infringement procedure in the waste sector, in order to put an end to the competitive disadvantages suffered by companies established in Member States which implement legislation within the prescribed period. It also discussed the need for more intensive coordination between the Member States to avoid excessive discrepancies in transposition into national law. It proposed the establishment of a waste steering and advisory committee. Parliament went on to propose that a separate category, 're-use', be distinguished from the waste category 'recovery', between prevention and recycling. In this way, re-use will be defined in its own right and it will be possible to take effective measures to promote re-use. An optimal waste management strategy is a combination of prevention, re-use of products and components, recycling of materials, energy recovery and environmentally friendly disposal. Parliament also stated that it rejected compulsory waste reduction plans, since such plans would have too great an impact on production processes. Voluntary waste reduction plans or programmes at regional, local or sectoral level would, by contrast, be welcome. It called on the Commission to establish tools supplementary to the waste reduction framework, such as: - a cleaner production benchmark for structural funding, - an EU network of technical assistance centres on cleanerproduction that offer their services free of charge, - criteria for waste reduction for inclusion in the industry authorisation process, - a system of accredited re-use and repair centres, - guidelines and criteria for implementing "pay-as-you-throw" schemes, and a working group for sharing knowledge about best practice on "pay-as-you-throw" schemes.