Environment: integrated product policy, life-cycle and sustainable development

2003/2221(INI) - 21/04/2004 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted a resolution based on the own-initiative report drafted by Anders WIJKMAN (EPP-ED, S) welcoming the IPP communication but regretting that it provides only limited guidance on how to move society in the direction of truly sustainable systems of product development and design. It called on the Commission to present a framework directive for IPP based on a set of clearly defined principles and objectives. The objective is not to present detailed requirements for product design but to establish framework conditions aimed at facilitating business practices which should be built on systems thinking, giving priority to resource efficiency and should be structured progressively along biological lines. Parliament suggested that the main principles guiding the IPP framework have to be based on: - a systems-based approach, where life-cycle thinking is at the core and primary attention is given to product design, - an enhanced understanding of how natural systems work and of how structuring business along biological lines can both improve the environment and establish the bottom line, - ensuring that products whose useful life is over should ideally not become useless waste but be separated and reconditioned to become inputs for new production cycles, - an enhanced understanding of how consumption patterns are formed and how they can be changed to contribute to sustainable development, - optimisation of the product design process, by the selection of low-impact materials, - giving preference to bio-based materials; moreover, hazardous substances, including many heavy metals, should not be allowed systematically to increase in concentration in the biosphere; furthermore, chemicals should be used in a non-dissipatory way; safety of chemicals should be assessed through a science-based hazard and /or risk-approach. Priority should be given, however, to the substitution principle, meaning that hazardous substances including many heavy metals should preferably be replaced by more benign ones or safeguarded through tightly controlled closed-loop recycling, - optimisation of production techniques, by giving preference to the clustering of production by encouraging reuse and recycling of materials, in particular by developing techniques for the separation and reconditioning of used products and materials to become input for new production cycles, - reduction of impact during use, - making full use of the potential offered by ICT to promote miniaturisation and dematerialisation, enhancing energy and material efficiency and reducing transport demand by turning products into sustainable services, - maximum involvement of stakeholders. The short-term objectives for the IPP framework should be focused on reductions in emissions of greenhouse, acidifying gases and air pollutants, reductions in energy intensity, reductions in the use of hazardous substances, reductions in the intensity of virgin material resource use, water use and waste production and increase in renewable material use. Without the creation of such a framework, the necessary signals and incentives are not put across to designers and decision makers. Parliament called on the Commission to give priority to the following actions: - develop the necessary legal and economic framework conditions, objectives and incentives to make IPP a reality, - identifying key R&D areas and pilot projects, - developing and implementing effective information tools at consumer level (product registers, eco-labels and/or comparable tools); presenting a strategy on how different information instruments can be developed and co-ordinated in order to improve the information flow in the whole product chain, - developing education and awareness-raising programmes in society at large, giving special attention to certain target groups, - integrating IPP and life-cycle thinking in all major EU policy areas, - drawing up a plan for co-ordinating IPP with other on-going processes such as relevant thematic strategies, the follow-up to Johannesburg, Chemical Strategies, Climate action plan etc. Finally, Parliament insisted that, to promote the consumption of environmentally friendly products, the Commission should encourage Member States to consider various incentives, such as reduced taxes and rebates.