

AIR QUALITY POLICY IN EUROPE

AMBITIOUS TARGETS AND GREATER FLEXIBILITY

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Dear ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you very much for the Invitation to the CITEAIR Conference here in the beautiful city of Prague in the heart of Europe. It is a great pleasure for me to speak to you as the rapporteur of the Air Quality Directive in the European Parliament.

Air Quality in Europe

Many respiratory diseases are attributable to high levels of air pollution, particularly in densely-populated areas and conurbations in the EU. Air pollution will therefore remain one of the most important public health challenges. The Commission estimates that life expectancy in the European Union has fallen by 9 months on average due to air pollution. Although I prefer to deal more carefully with these figures, it is undisputed that air pollution can be a cause of premature death and reduces the quality of life of millions of people in Europe every day. Apart from the negative effects on health, air pollution also presents a threat to the natural environment and damages ecosystems throughout Europe.

Polluted air takes no account of borders, and so improving the quality of our ambient air remains a major challenge for every city, region and country in Europe. The problem of air pollution can only be solved in the long term and in an ambitious EU legal framework, particularly by stepping up cross-border measures and taking actions at all levels. But whatever ambitious targets and limit values might be decided in Brussels and whatever actions might be taken at the local level, a good air quality status will only be achieved if we concentrate on the source-based measures. Further instruments will be needed in the Community in the future: Clean air in Europe can only be

achieved if the directives which are in force are transposed consistently in all Member States and if new EU legislative proposals concentrate on restricting emissions at the source of the pollution.

While there is still justifiable concern about the state of ambient air in Europe, I would like to take this opportunity to emphasise that air quality in Europe has, over the past decades, been improved as a result of stringent legal action and technical advances and efforts in many sectors.

Air pollution has been one of Europe's main environmental concerns since the late 1970s. And although on the EU level legislative action has been taken rather late - compared to the USA for example - all across Europe, a number of policies that have been made in the past have been proven quite successful.

Environmental measures in many business sectors, such as energy, road transport and industry led to an EU average reduction of fine particles of 43% between 1990 and 2004, according to the figures published by the European Environment Agency. These three sectors contributed 46% (energy), 22% (road transport) and 16% (industry) respectively to the total reduction of emissions. This is a good result as it shows that growth of the industry and transport sectors has not led to an increase but rather to a significant decrease of emissions due to technological modernization.

Countries such as Germany, the United Kingdom and Italy are among the front runners as regards fine particles reductions. Germany alone, for instance, managed to reduce its emissions by about 75% since 1990. Also in many of the new Member States significant improvements have been made and the situation in most cities in Central and Eastern Europe is by far better than just a decade ago.

But let us now have a closer look on the concrete policies in the European Union and compare them with the standards and actions taken in the US. There is a preconception in Europe that the US is always lagging behind

when it comes to environmental protection. While this might be true sometimes, it is clearly not the case when we discuss Air Quality policies.

At the EU level, monitoring and information requirements of PM₁₀ values were first set in a Directive on air quality in 1996. This is quite late compared to the United States, where the Environment Protection Agency first issued standards for particulate matter as early as 1971 and revised the standards twice in 1987 and 1997, when limit values for PM_{2.5} have been set at the federal level.

In the EU a new Directive in 1999 introduced limit values for the first time for the concentration of PM₁₀. Thus, since January 2005 the yearly average of PM₁₀ has been set at 40µg/m³ and at a daily average of 50µg/m³. Overall, the Directive allows exceeding the daily value on 35 days of the year.

Both the EU and the US have been reviewing their air quality legislation recently. Before I focus on the current debate and review of the legislation in the EU, I would like to sum up the latest developments across the Atlantic: After several areas have not met the 1997 PM_{2.5} yearly limit values, in particular in the American North-East and in California, the EPA strengthened the air quality standards for particle pollution in September 2006. The revised standards address two categories of particle pollution: *fine particles* (PM_{2.5}), which are 2.5 micrometers in diameter and smaller; and *inhalable coarse particles* (PM₁₀) which are smaller than 10 micrometers and larger than 2.5 micrometers. The new US standards tighten the 24-hour fine particle standard from 65µg/m³ to 35µg/m³, and retain the current annual fine particle standard at 15µg/m³.

The biggest surprise in the reviewed US standards has been the decision to revoke the annual PM₁₀ limit value, due to a lack of scientific evidence linking health problems to long-term exposure to coarse particle pollution. Nevertheless the EPA has decided to retain the existing daily limit value of 150µg/m³.

The main conclusions that we draw from the approach the US is taking on air pollution are the following: 1. The USA is not to be compared to the EU in terms of population and traffic density. 2. Neither the standards nor the way they measure in the US can be compared with our approach, as we focus on the source and in America they focus on exposure and background concentrations. Nevertheless the experiences they have gained, especially in taking more seriously the reduction of the smaller particles and to focus on the long-term annual values can be very useful for Europe, too.

The position of the EP vs. the Council

Let me now come back to the current discussion about the Air Quality Directive in Europe:

Prior to the June vote in the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety, and again before the vote that took place in Plenary in Strasbourg in September this year, all three of the main groups in the Parliament, the EPP, PSE and the ALDE negotiated a package of compromise amendments. The compromise can be summed up as aiming for, on the one hand, ambitious limit and target values, with, on the other, greater flexibility and consideration of the difficulties that individual Member States face with the transposition of the current directive. Let me briefly sketch out the essential points of the adopted compromise.

I will start with PM_{10} . There is a large degree of consensus in the Parliament about the lack of ambition inherent in allowing the 40 microgram annual average value for PM_{10} to remain unchanged after 2010. This value is already met in most European cities. The Commission had already announced a more stringent annual average value for PM_{10} with effect from 2010, but, as this latest proposal makes no reference to it, the three big groups propose that the limit value for PM_{10} be reduced to 33 micrograms with effect from 2010.

I find it remarkable, in view of the criticism from the Commission and the environmental organisations, that this important point is continually neglected: The Parliament has voted with a big majority for lower PM_{10} annual limit

values. As the annual limit value is more relevant for human health it is clear for me that we have not watered down the Commission's proposal.

The daily limit value for PM₁₀, set at 50 micrograms that may be exceeded at a maximum of 35 days in the year, has been criticised by both local authorities that failed to meet the limit value and by many Members in the European Parliament. It's a fact is that there is no correlation between the current daily and annual limit values in the current Air Quality Directive. Moreover, the figure of 35 days is arbitrary. I do not want to put in doubt the importance of carrying out daily measurements and informing risk groups of increased concentrations of pollutants. Although the short-term risks of PM₁₀ can't be ignored, no scientist has as yet claimed that the daily limit value is more relevant to public health than the annual value. The problems cities have with compliance with the daily limit value are very well known, and we abandon municipalities to "a sort of organised helplessness." It has been demonstrated that compliance with daily limit values is completely unrelated to any clean air measures, but rather largely dependent on chance meteorological phenomena and the geography.

The Environment Committee and the three main groups in the Parliament have put forward a proposal on the daily limit value according to which the cities and municipalities affected would be allowed – under certain conditions – to exceed the 50 µg/m³ on 55 rather than on 35 days. As I have said, the 35 days are arbitrary, and not founded on any scientific insights. The 55 days are arbitrary, too - but they take much better into account the problems the cities and regions are facing and allowing the necessary flexibility.

There may be those who will have their doubts about the correlation between the new daily and annual limit values proposed by the Parliament, but nobody can claim with any seriousness that we are thereby being any less ambitious than the Commission and the Council, that prefer to keep the current standards of 40 µg/m³ as well as the 35 days unchanged.

Let me now turn to PM_{2.5}, the smallest particles, which are, according to all the scientific experts, the source of the greatest hazards to health. The proposed regulation of PM_{2.5} comes somehow late in Europe, but as we have

seen, regulating the PM₁₀ particles the way we do it in Europe, also reduces PM_{2,5}, as they are a part of PM₁₀. That said it makes absolute sense to concentrate on PM_{2,5} in the future. However, the question here is, not if but when we should *regulate* PM_{2,5} as the data obtained in Europe on the smallest particles are uncertain. Most Member States have not yet had sufficient experience with the monitoring and measurements of this standard.

We therefore have agreed both in the Parliament and in the Council to propose a two-stage regulation for PM_{2,5}, with, in the first instance, a target value will be set from 2010 onwards, and, with effect from 2015, a legally binding limit value is foreseen. The difference on this point between the European Parliament and the Council is, that we have opted for the stronger value of 20 micrograms; this too, is more ambitious than what the Council and the Commission are endorsing, a target and limit value of respectively 25 micrograms. An overwhelming majority in the Parliament is convinced that the 25 microgram annual average value as proposed by the Commission is lacking in ambition and that we should therefore opt for a more stringent value.

The Commission also opted in its proposal for a reduction target of 20% for PM_{2,5} without undertaking any further impact assessment. A flat 20% target has been rejected in the Parliament. We are persuaded that a graduated model that takes into account early actions is in any case preferable.

Let me just say something about the much debated Article 20 which aims to institute a time delay to enable the limit values to be reached at a later stage. Just let me point out that it was not the EP but the Commission who had the idea to grant more time to meet the limit values to all those who had taken all the necessary measures but were not yet able to comply. But of course I can understand the Commission's criticisms of the 5+5 rule that the Environment Committee had adopted in June. We have therefore put together a new package called '4+2 years', which represents a move towards the position taken by the Commission and the Council. Both are proposing a five-year period starting in 2005 and a 3 year period from the entering into force respectively.

The position taken by the Parliament in Plenary in September and the Political Agreement reached in the Council in October this year are often depicted as totally different and incompatible. I believe this is not the case. On both the main political points as well as on many technical issues the two institutions are not so far apart as they seem. On PM_{2.5} we have already agreed on the timetable and the two-step approach of having a target value first and a limit value late. On Article 20 we will have to find a compromise between the total of 6 put forward by the Parliament and the 3 years proposed by the Council. The provisions related to PM₁₀ will surely be the meat of the negotiations. The question is "to change or not to change the current limit values". BUT I can assure you that the German Presidency of the Council and the Rapporteur are truly committed to cooperate as closely as possible in order to reach a second reading agreement next year. The negotiations between the three institutions will take some time, but I believe that - if we are all willing to move - we can reach a good agreement before the summer.

Conclusions

Once more I would like to reiterate that a good air quality in Europe can only be achieved only in the long term and only by means of actions targeting the problem at the sources of pollution. If I speak about long-term measures please let me be clear that this is not a call for inaction, it is rather a call for action! We have to start now in reducing the levels of pollution by taking the right measures that will have very positive long term effects, but we should be very much aware that air pollution is not a problem that can be tackled overnight.

If we are to achieve effective and lasting improvement in air quality, it is crucial that we establish limit values that are both ambitious and legally binding but at the same time realistic. But the limit values on their own cannot improve the quality of the air; that can be done only through effective action at all levels and stringent legislation that aims to reduce the emissions at the source! The report on the Euro 5 and Euro 6 emissions standard for passenger cars will be voted in Plenary next week and it looks very promising that we will get a good first reading deal. Euro 5 makes particle filters mandatory for new vehicles from 2009 and Euro 6 will bring down NOx

emissions dramatically for the Diesel cars in the future. Therefore it is of utmost importance that the Commission comes up with further measures as soon as possible. The measures we ask for are on small combustion plants, Euro VI for Heavy Vehicles and Europe-wide limit values for ships' engines. The revision of the NEC directive is also still pending.

To sum it up, we in the Parliament want to get away from short term, temporary actions like closing roads to traffic or paralyzing construction sites in the city centres and focus on the long-term measures. The short-term measures surely grab the attention of the media; they create headlines but are not effective. I strongly believe that the cities and regions concerned should have the right to choose on their own if and what measures they take to reduce pollution locally. That said it is important that effective action is taken at the local level and that the cities feel responsible for their part. The exchange of best practices and experiences at the local level is crucial has to be encouraged.

Thank you very much!