

Valencia Resolution

*Second Environment Conference
of Regional Ministers and Political Leaders
in the European Union
Valencia 20 - 21 November 1995*

Final Resolution

The present resolution was adopted by the Second Environment Conference of Regional Ministers and Political Leaders in the European Union, which took place in Valencia on the 20th and 21st November, 1995.

This resolution consists of 20 points:

1. Role of the Regions in Environmental Policy
2. Objectives of the environment Policy of the Regions
3. Principle of Subsidiarity
4. Application of Community Law
5. Participation, Communication and Education
6. Market-based Instruments
7. Cross Border and Inter-regional Co-operation
8. Incorporating Environmental Protection Requirements in All Policies
9. Environmental Re-alignment of the Economy
10. Spatial Planning
11. Transport
12. Energy
13. Agriculture
14. Tourism
15. Nature Conservation
16. Forestry
17. Water
18. Waste Management
19. Institutional Matters
20. Next Steps

1 Role of the Regions In Environmental Policy

The Second Environment Conference of Regional Ministers and Political Leaders in the European Union, gathered in Valencia on the 20th and 21st November, 1995,

1.1 Whereas, in accordance with their different legal competencies in the different countries, the regions are greatly involved in the implementation of both European Union and national environmental policy and, in particular, following the principle of subsidiarity, many regions are responsible for creating the financial and administrative framework for policy implementation.

1.2 In view, not only of these administrative competencies and the regions common moral responsibility for the environment and to future generations, but also because of their practical experience.

1.3 Considers the development of environmental policy as one of the essential tasks of the regions.

1.4 Expresses the wish and the need for regions be directly involved in the formulation of, environmental policy within member states and for the European Union, maintaining at the same time their collective influence through the Committee of the Regions of the European Union, the Assembly of European Regions, the Council of Europe and other organisations.

2. Objectives of Environmental Policy of the Regions

The Conference

2.1 Declares that environmental policy must have as its fundamental objective the conservation of the natural vital environment (air, water, earth) and bio-diversity whilst, at the same time, contributing to sustainable economic and social development.

2.2 Is aware that environmental policy is the basis of all political areas and is a multi-faceted task which must be respected by energy, transport, trade and industry, agriculture, tourism and regional land-use planning.

2.3 Considers that there is a need to move towards a modern economy which respects the natural cycles of energy and materials, which employs clean production techniques, which uses less energy and raw materials, and encourages the re-use of goods and recycling of materials.

2.4 Constates that there should be a convergence in economic and environmental policy directions, because moving towards sustainable development will bring job opportunities in sectors such as clean technologies and environmentally-friendly products, which offer major potential for growth in the global marketplace.

2.5 Calls on the competent authorities to implement the precautionary principle through the further development of environmental regulation and to place greater emphasis on market-based instruments to implement the polluter pays principle, and to reverse, as far as possible, the harm done by the free use of the environment. However, the Conference declares that the establishment of market-based instruments for environmental protection should not be made by undoing the progress already made through regulation.

2.6 Considers that the citizens of all regions of the European Union have the right to the same high environmental standards but also constates that achieving these will be more expensive in some regions than in others. Islands, peripheral regions, and declining industrial areas will have higher costs. Therefore the Conference calls on the institutions of the European Union to develop technical and financial instruments in order to offer assistance to these regions. These instruments should be put to use depending on each particular case, and after an environmental impact assessment has been carried out.

3. Principle of Subsidiarity

The Conference

3.1 Considers subsidiarity as a fundamental, guiding principle for the decision-making process in the European Union. The principle, and associated ideas of greater public participation, can assist in environmental protection where the regions are fully included in the implementation of the principle. It must apply to the relationship

between the member states and the regions, as well as to the relationship between the Community and the member states.

3.2 Declares that the principle of subsidiarity must not be used to introduce different standards within Europe and therefore put at risk the progress which has been achieved by the harmonisation within the European Union on environmental issues.

3.3 Constates that there is a need to create further environmental legislation at the Community level in order to both protect the environment throughout Europe and, given the close relationship between environmental policy and competition, support the fair working of the internal market.

3.4 Considers that basic minimum environmental standards for the effects of products on the environment, emission values for plants and processes, and the objectives of environmental quality standards must be established on a Community-wide basis. However, all standards should be made and up-dated taking into account the best scientific evidence, as well as the best available technology and techniques.

3.5 Considers that member states and regions with high levels of environmental protection should not be required to lower their standards.

3.6 Reminds that environmental standards may be abused in order to delay the free circulation of goods. Unnecessarily high environmental standards could be introduced in order to prevent imports; unusually low environmental standards, however, could be used in order to reduce production costs and create unfair competition in the internal market. The harmonisation of environmental standards at Community level should avoid this abuse of environmental legislation.

3.7 Calls on the European Community institutions to simplify environmental regulations and to consolidate them with the aims of the internal harmonisation of Community law, in order to improve enforcement and to improve the quality of the reporting of performance on these standards.

4. Application of Community Law

The Conference

4.1 In view of the need for a high quality environment throughout the European Union, calls on all those responsible for transposing Community legislation into national and regional law, and for executing this law, to ensure that the conditions are created for the optimum application of Community environmental law. Being the competent authorities for the implementation of this law, we promise a maximum of transparency.

4.2 Constates the need for a correct enforcement of Community law throughout the European Union and also considers that this enforcement of Community law is best undertaken on a regional level and by regional authorities.

4.3 Considers that, to assist the publicly visible application of environmental law, environmental data will need to be published on a regional level and progress reports on enforcement formulated. These reports should be forwarded to the European Commission either directly or via member states.

4.4 Encourages the European Commission to control the enforcement of Community environmental law, ensuring adequate systems of national and regional monitoring and

enforcement. In exceptional cases, there is a role for joint action between Community-level and national or regional authorities, for example by joint site inspections. The European Commission needs to make provision for this.

4.5 Declares that the consolidation and development of Community law must take greater account of the experience of the regions in implementing it, and must involve greater participation of the regions. One of the facts shown by this experience is that, due to the variations in languages across Europe, the correctness of terminology plays a very important role.

4.6 Expresses the wish that deadlines for the implementation and enforcement of Community law be more realistic. Sometimes this will require more time for arrangements to be made but always needs to be with the aim of more strictly adhering to deadlines once they are set.

5. Participation, Communication and Education

The Conference

5.1 Considers of the utmost importance that open structures and procedures be put into practice, to enable democratic participation in the development of environmental policy at all levels. Achieving a high quality environment throughout the European Union will require much more participation by all actors. This will encourage the public to have greater trust in all organisations involved in environmental protection.

5.2 Encourages all authorities to move towards common methods of monitoring environmental policy and reporting on environmental quality. The information from these should be widely and openly shared and used to inform the public about results, progress and failure.

5.3 Regrets that, even though good efforts have been made in many regions to promote environmental awareness, the necessary changes in behaviour are not yet significant enough. Although an increase in environmental sensitivity can be noticed, the Conference recommends that all organisations work harder to bring about greater environmental awareness, through schools and other educative and informative programmes. The regions will make an effort to increase resources for projects which are managed by environmental non governmental organisations.

6. Market-based Instruments

The Conference

6.1 Considers that, in addition to the legislative instruments, market-based instruments must increasingly come to the fore as a second pillar of European Union environmental policy. On the one hand they give financial incentives for taking action which takes account of environmental needs, whilst on the other hand they present the potential for reducing the costs of monitoring.

6.2 Recognises that the system of taxes and charges needs to be realigned to make them support environmental protection. Taxes on the unsustainable use of resources must be increased. This will generate public income which can compensate for the reduction in labour taxes and therefore contribute to an increase in employment. As a first step, the existing taxes and charges should be examined in terms of their environmental impact, with the aim of abolishing tax advantages which contradict

environmental policy. A Community level system of environmental charges must be considered.

6.3 Expresses the wish that public administration, especially regional government, supports only those projects that move towards sustainable development.

6.4 Expresses the wish that market based instruments contribute, in any case, to the development of an internalisation of environmental cost and to the implementation of correction systems which are necessary in the different sectors of productive activities, especially in the areas of industry, energy, transport, agriculture and tourism.

7. Cross Border and Inter-regional cooperation

The Conference

7.1 Recognises the importance of co-operation between regions, within and beyond the European Union. It encourages the exchange of experience and helps to find solutions for cross-border pollution.

7.2 Considers that inter-regional action is required in procedures such as licensing and environmental impact assessments for proposed installations near national borders. This action would be made easier and more consistent by the establishment of a legal framework for the whole Community. Account must be taken of the language diversity in Europe, which very frequently creates problems along national borders.

7.3 Asks the European institutions to give priority in programmes of assistance to border regions to those regions of countries which wish to join the European Union, and the regions of the southern Mediterranean.

7.4 Welcomes the initiatives of the European Commission to promote cross-border measures by providing supplementary financial instruments. However, the Conference suggests that greater emphasis should be placed on local conditions and that technical procedures should be simplified. This could be assisted by giving border regions greater competence in the selection of projects.

8. Incorporating Environmental Protection Requirements in all Policies

The Conference

8.1 Understands that, in order to move towards the target of sustainable development, further environmental protection needs to be a part of all policies in the regions.

8.2 Considers that the incorporation of environmental protection requires two actions: first, the inclusion of environmental activities within all assistance programmes and second, an open environmental appraisal of all plans and programmes of public authorities. This appraisal should include the views of the public.

8.3 Expresses the wish that binding procedures be established at the Community level so that every proposal by the Commission, especially within the structural and cohesion funds, contains a statement on potential environmental effects.

9. Environmental Re-alignment of the Economy

The Conference

9.1 Considers that trade and industry must make their contribution towards solving environmental problems. The regions have an important responsibility in assisting this ecological re-alignment of the economy.

9.2 Encourages the-participation by companies of the industrial sector in the Community eco-management and audit scheme, the introduction of environmental ('green') accounting, and the life-cycle analysis of products. These approaches should be adopted by other sectors as well. Regions with experience in this area can help those with less experience to implement such systems.

9.3 Calls on the competent authorities to develop further legislation which sets out the responsibility. of companies for the environmental impact of their production and products, demonstrating to companies the advantages for economic activity carried out within sustainable development. The aims should include using fewer resources, especially non-renewable ones, and the promotion of products with a minimum environmental impact.

9.4 Expresses the wish that the philosophy of an integrated approach applicable generally to all media ('Integrated Pollution Control') continues to be developed in Community law.

9.5 Encourages regional authorities to commit themselves to promoting the development of environmental technologies, especially clean technologies, and their implementation in industry, including small and medium-sized enterprises.

10. Spatial Planning

The Conference

10.1 Considers that spatial is needed for the protection and improvement of environmental conditions, including the protection of resources.

10.2 Considers that the regions and other actors should exercise their competencies with the aim of a sustainable development.

11. Transport

The Conference

11.1 Believes that there is a need for traffic reduction and a shift to more environmentally-friendly forms of transport. Public transport systems should be improved and integrated. Walking and cycling should be encouraged. Action to support this should take place at all levels, including at Community level, by member states and by regions.

11.2 Considers that there is a need for the promotion of the use of sustainable transport technology and that Community-wide measures are needed for stricter exhaust and noise emission regulations, statutory standards for fuel consumption, and to achieve a marked increase in the minimum tax rates for petrol and diesel. Also Community-wide measures are required to establish real costs within the area of road transport.

11.3 In view of the sharp increase in the volume of goods traffic on the roads, encourages the European Commission to promote the use of navigation routes and to

take initiatives in order to modernise and develop the European international railway infrastructure and the associated trans-shipment systems for goods; as well as establishing a goods transport system common to Europe, including activities corresponding to coastal navigation.

11.4 Encourages the European Commission and the member states to motivate, using normative measures, the necessary change from road transport to railway.

12. Energy

The Conference

12.1 Is aware that rational energy use is an important criterion for progress towards sustainable development and essential to environmental assessment and life-cycle analysis of products.

12.2 Believes that to make more sparing use of non-renewable sources of energy, to increase the efficiency of converting from primary energy to applied energy, and to increase the use of renewable energy sources are to be considered prime objectives of environmental policy. The associated reduction in exhaust emissions will help to improve air quality and protect the climate. This requires Community-wide efforts with the aim of a constant reduction of air pollution by all industrial installations.

13. Agriculture

The Conference

13.1 Understands that priorities within the Common Agricultural Policy must be changed to further promote environmental protection. The starting point should be to link market-based subsidies to ecological criteria, in order to initiate a sustainable development.

13.2 Considers that the Common Agricultural Policy must encourage all farmers to adopt higher environmental standards and should support sustainable, traditional practices.

13.3 Believes that the support of environmentally-friendly agricultural production processes and marketing is an important approach in this respect. At the same time, this helps to conserve the rural countryside, local traditions and biodiversity.

14. Tourism

The Conference

14.1 Believes that, although in the past environmental protection and tourism have not always had the same short-term goals, they both have the same long-term interest in the maintenance of landscape beauty and nature conservation. To achieve this, there is a need for a set of indicators and monitoring to assess the ability of tourist areas to tolerate the effects of tourist use and enable protective measures to be taken.

14.2 Calls on all regions to ensure, through their spatial planning and economic promotion, that tourism in their areas moves towards the goal of sustainable development.

15. Nature Conservation

The Conference

15.1 Regards nature conservation as a fundamental priority. All agencies and authorities responsible for maintaining natural habitats and bio-diversity need to implement and enforce speedily the relevant Community legislation, as well as creating ecological infrastructures. Other organisations also have an important part to play, in the support of nature conservation everywhere.

15.2 Is aware that many important special areas for nature conservation are on national and regional borders. A cross-border system of conservation areas should be set up, the conservation objectives and measures of which should be coordinated.

15.3 Constates that the conservation of natural habitats and biodiversity should not be limited to a determined surface area. Economic and agricultural, activities in protected areas must be established in accordance with the demands for a sustainable performance.

16. Forestry

The Conference

16.1 Believes that woodland is a n important renewable resource, habitat for wildlife, place for recreation and source of employment and income. However, our large forests and smaller woodland are under many threats, including unsustainable exploitation. Specially worrying in some regions is the cycle forest fire-soil erosion, which can lead to desertification. Other regions suffer from a lack of land management and demand for wood products, which leave forests unattended. Therefore, there is an urgent need for regional forest strategies which address the different requirements of the regions in order to maintain and extend this important resource.

17. Water

The Conference

17.1 Recognises that inter-regional cooperation must be increased to ensure adequate water supplies for all users, clean rivers, lakes and coasts, as well as to promote the integrated exploitation of surface water and underground water resources. In areas with poor water supply, it is necessary to deal with socio-economic aspects of water management and to rectify desertification, to promote reforestation, a reduction in the overexploitation of ground water and the treatment of surface water. Besides, criteria of solidarity must be introduced between regions with abundant or poor water supplies.

17.2 Considers that, where rivers cross national borders, standards must be developed by the European Commission for the environmental quality of whole river catchments, which take into account the relationship between upstream and downstream areas and the fair use of shared resources and the requirements of a preventative protection against floods. The guiding principles should be the conservation and recovery of fertile water meadows and areas with a tendency to flooding, as well as to prevent the acceleration of water flow and erosion. Standards should also be developed for estuaries and coastal water.

17.3 Believes that, as a fundamental resource and part of the economy, water must have a price which reflects its ecological importance. Income should also be utilised for an efficient conservation of water resources.

17.4 Considers that the effectiveness of water usage must be increased. Multiple use and recycling are important and proven as methods of reducing consumption and water pollution. There needs to be a greater application of sustainable techniques of waste water treatment, to promote public health and environmental protection. In this context concrete actions must be developed for the management of an integrated water cycle. Exploitation for human consumption must be a priority.

17.5 Considers that the sea and marine life constitute a fundamental element of the eco-system. The regions of the European Union which have access to the sea will develop coherent and co-ordinated actions for the protection of the maritime medium and the reduction of pollution, as well as the reduction and prevention of ecological catastrophes of maritime transport caused by transporting hydrocarbons.

18. Waste Management

The Conference

18.1 Encourages all organisations to commit themselves to avoiding waste through reduction, re-use and recycling. The long-term aim of waste management should be to become a part of an economy based on natural cycles.

18.2 Believes that co-operation between regions is required to achieve these objectives and this should be reflected in waste management planning.

19. Institutional Matters

The Conference

19.1 Calls on the Committee of the Regions to make environmental policy a focal point of its work, to reflect its importance in the regions. All opinions should be tested for their long-term impact on the environment.

19.2 Is convinced that aspects of environmental protection play a role in all of the technical committees of the Committee of the Regions. Political leaders of the regions must therefore put regional experts at the disposal of their representatives on the Committee of the Regions to ensure that they are given comprehensive advice on the environmental aspects of their work.

20. Next Steps

The Conference

20.1 Considers that there is a need for an Environmental Charter for the Regions of the European Union which sets out the commitments of the regions on the issues covered by this resolution.

20.2 Agrees to hold each year a meeting of senior officials from the regions in order to evaluate progress on this charter and environmental progress in the European Union. This meeting will be organised in 1996 by the region of Rhône-Alpes. The question of

the institutionalisation of the Conference and collaboration with the Assembly of European Regions will also be studied.

20.3 Agrees that the Environment Conference of Regional Ministers and Political Leaders in the European Union will be held every two years. The 1997 conference will be organised by the region of Göteborg och Bohus län.

20.4 Asks the region of Valencia to be co-ordinator until the meeting in Rhône-Alpes, which was mentioned in point 20.2.

20.5 Asks the President of the Conference, the Councillor of Agriculture and the Environment, to send the Resolution, in the official languages of the member states of the European Union, to the institutions of the Community and the regions of the European Union.