

New Perspectives for Sustainable Environmental and Waste Policies in Europe

2nd International PRO EUROPE Congress and 1st European Youth Eco-Parliament in Berlin

Berlin, 24 September 2004 – Recycling is an important element in all efforts to make sustainable development a reality. In the face of increasing prices for raw materials and the need to conserve dwindling natural resources the significance of recycling used materials can only become greater in the future. We thus need to strengthen the recycling markets and step up international cooperation. This was the conclusion of the 2nd International PRO-EUROPE Congress that was staged at the Humboldt University in Berlin from 23-24 September 2004, as part of the activities of European Recycling Week 2004.

PRO EUROPE is the umbrella organisation of the 22 European Green Dot schemes and their partners in Great Britain and Canada. The patron of this year's congress was the former president of the Czech Republic, Vaclav Havel, and its motto was *Green Dot 2004 – Recycling Benefits for Future Generations*. It was attended by around 600 international experts from politics, business, science, the media and professional organisations. They convened in Berlin from nearly 35 countries to discuss how we can make sustainable use of our natural resources and conserve them for future generations. Speakers at the conference included Karl-Heinz Florenz, member of the European Parliament and Chairman of the European Parliament Environment Committee; the former French Environment Minister Brice Lalonde; Timo Mäkelä, Director of the Directorate General for the Environment of the EU Commission; and Claudia Fénérol of the Environment Directorate of the OECD.

“The congress was an important signal for the conservation of the environment and natural resources in Europe,” said Dr Fritz Flanderka, Co-Manager of PRO EUROPE. “As business and industry become increasingly globalised it is no longer possible for individual countries to handle the tasks of sustainable development unilaterally. Intensive communication and the exchange of knowledge and expertise are important for networking markets and taking advantage of synergy effects.” The establishment of the Green Dot schemes has already made producer responsibility and the recycling of packaging materials an integral and essential part of the tried-and-tested arsenal of instruments used to protect the environment in Europe. The next step is to push ahead with the economic and ecological development of the overall concept towards a system of “integrated waste management”.

“New alliances have been forged between the state, trade and industry on the foundation of common interests. Companies are now increasingly acting as “corporate citizens” and helping the state with its responsibilities”, said Hans-Peter Repnik, CEO of the Dual System Germany.

“After separating the waste flow into different channels to implement producers’ responsibility, we will, however, have to agree to merge some of those channels in order to handle the waste better,” explained the former French environment minister and “father” of the French packaging legislation Brice Lalonde. “Technology and economy indeed call for materials with close characteristics to be shared, even though their producers or owners do not belong to the same legal category.”

Schoolchildren call for more environmental education

The establishment of a sustainable economy is intimately connected with social development. Environmental education and the inclusion of younger generations in the process are thus absolutely essential. This was made clear by the 1st European Youth Eco-Parliament, which was also initiated by PRO EUROPE. Around 2,700 schoolchildren from ten European countries took their cue from the EU’s 6th Environmental Action Programme and worked together to draw up an International White Book with environmental and ecological demands for European political leaders. During the PRO EUROPE congress around 120 young members of parliament between the ages of 13 and 15 introduced their environmental resolutions and presented their White Book to the Chairman of the Environment Committee of the European Parliament, Karl-Heinz Florenz. One of the schoolchildren’s demands is to make environmental education a required subject from primary school onwards.

“With their exemplary international cooperation these young people have demonstrated that environmental education is one of the pillars of sustainable environmental protection,” said PRO EUROPE Co-Manager Bernard Hérodin. “This confirms the approach of PRO EUROPE and the Green Dot organisations and strengthens our resolve to promote environmental education.”

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