



International Society of Doctors for the Environment - I S D E

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Arezzo, 16th June 2015

Ref.: Environment and health in Europe as human rights

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ISDE, the *International Society of Doctors for the Environment*, is submitting to the EU Parliament its contribution in order to orient each legislation act, policy and planning to ensure top priority to the basic issues of Environment and Health.

ISDE has initiated this plea for an action plan on the occasion of the 2014 EU elections. Doctors and researchers in ISDE felt it was their role and moral duty to point out the most appropriate and safe choices to safeguard the environment and the health of citizens, of current and future generations, and to protect the biosphere.

If the European policies have to be centred on the coupled concepts of Environment and Health, then the current model of development has to be reconsidered as does the whole economic system.

The dynamic and intimate entanglement linking Environment with the Health of populations must be pivotal in the scientific and cultural debate, and should inform and orient all cultural, political and economic choices.

Basic principles

The basic principles which should inspire European policies so to attain the above goals are:

- Necessity of Best Health.
- The precautionary principle.
- The priority of primary prevention.

Necessity of Best Health

The right to Health¹ is established by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and by several European Constitutions, which place it amongst the fundamental and inalienable rights of every human being. ISDE proposes to the European Parliament that it operate to remove every hindrance to the full implementation of this inviolable right. This right must be guaranteed not only to all the citizens of Europe but also to those who happen to live, even temporarily, in the Member States of the Union, without any discrimination; the protection of the physical and psycho-social well-being of every individual is a necessary pre-condition and guarantee for the well-being and health of the entire community.

ISDE also proposes to the European Parliament to ensure that the right to health is guaranteed in every part of the world and in particular in the poorest Countries, through policies of partnership and cooperation. In particular, ISDE proposes that the European Parliament: 1) be the advocate of compelling measures for engaging pharmaceutical industries to provide access to lifesaving drugs and their patents at affordable prices and 2) remind EU Member States to devote more funds for research on the diagnosis and care of the so-called "neglected diseases", the endemic diseases that afflict the most marginalized and forgotten communities in the world (over a billion people).

Precautionary Principle

The precautionary principle, which became part of the founding Treaty of the European Union (Maastricht, 1994) states: "... *When there is a risk of serious and irreparable harm, the lack of full scientific certainty shall*

¹ The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* states a "right to a standard of living adequate for the health and

well-being of himself and of his family", apart from the right to medical care
(in: <http://www.un.org/en/events/humanrightsday/udhr60/declaration.shtml>)



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not be a pretext to postpone the adoption of effective measures, not even a zero cost, for the prevention of environmental degradation."

ISDE proposes to the European Parliament to choose and undertake every legislative action in the light of the Precautionary Principle, which establishes the priority of human Health and the preservation of the Environment over and above any evaluation of political, economic, and industrial kind.

Priority of primary prevention

Primary prevention is defined as the whole range of choices at environmental, social and political levels to foster physical and psychosocial well-being in the population and prevent the outbreak of diseases in the communities.

ISDE proposes that the European Parliament give priority to the policies of primary prevention always and in each case; to ensure correct and complete information about the health risks arising from environmental degradation connected to the planning of infrastructure, major works and bio-medical practices.

ISDE proposes that to ensure the full and final implementation of the terms from the *Stockholm Convention* of May 13, 2001 for the elimination of so-called persistent organic pollutants (POPs: *Persistent Organic Pollutants*) the European legislation R. E. A. C. H. (*Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals*) be made more rigorous and extended to all newly introduced synthetic chemicals: that every new product be submitted to adequate tests - due by the producer - for evidence of harmlessness and verified by independent bodies.

ISDE proposes that priority and adequate support be given to independent biomedical research, by diverting to it part of the military budget; that the planning of infrastructure and major works be dumped whenever alternative projects exist that do not entail risks to the environment and the population; that the citizens themselves be involved in every decision-making process and that this right be not restricted in any way or tainted by the laws of individual States of the Union; that all choice be assessed on the basis of the Precautionary Principle.

Application domains

The areas in which these principles will apply are the following:

- *Energy*
- *Management of waste*
- *Water*
- *Air*
- *Mobility*
- *Urban planning and construction*
- *Work environment and industrial risk*
- *Agricultural practices*
- *Electromagnetic fields*

Energy

The international scientific community agrees with the need for a rapid conversion of the current model of development based to a large extent on the consumption of fossil fuels and non-renewable resources.

Thus, ISDE proposes: (a) A rapid strengthening of the policies for energy saving and for research and dissemination of renewable energies (solar, solar thermal, and mini-wind power); (b) concrete programs for a progressive but rapid emancipation from fossil and fissile energy sources, in particular from coal and nuclear energy, which represents an unacceptable mortgage on the lives of future generations; (c) the dissemination in the EU territory of small power stations; (d) to hamper the construction of large power poles; e) to close or



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to reduce power for those already existing, as they are heavily polluting to the environment and harmful to the health of the populations.

ISDE also proposes that the European Parliament strive for the elimination of all forms of incentives for energy sources not truly renewable and classified as "assimilated".

In fact, the current regulatory framework favouring the energy from biomass is greatly distorting, in so far as it pushes the market toward a rush to build plants of larger size, which are totally unsustainable from an environmental standpoint and hazardous to health. The same considerations apply to the biogas plants.

Waste management

In some European countries, illegal dumps and the illegal disposal of waste, often managed by criminal groups, have created situations of serious and documented environmental damage and damage to the health of communities. An example is the known area of the Campania region (Italy), nicknamed as the "land of fires". It is therefore proposed that the European Parliament devote particular attention to all the procedures and the funds allocated to the reclamation work of these areas.

The tools are already identified in the European norms: reduction in the production of waste, "door to door" collection and recycling, reuse, repair, and accountability of public and of private institutions. This will allow you to avoid the post-use incineration of materials and progressively reduce the land-filling of waste.

Water

The quality of water, such as that of air, is a fundamental determinant of the health of people and of the entire biosphere. Water is and must remain a Common Good. To this aim, ISDE proposes that the European institutions monitor so that in all EU countries specific policies be adopted:

- for saving water;
- for the protection and restoration of ecosystems and reservoirs used to the supply of drinking water;
- for the improvement of the aqueducts and the distribution networks, even by imposing the removal of sections made in the past with lead pipes and cement – asbestos;
- to inhibit the exceptions, that have been allowed in the recent past to deliver as drinkable, waters with high levels of toxic and carcinogenic substances.

Such substances, as for example arsenic, vanadium, fluorine, and selenium, may contribute to the so-called "cocktail effect": the summation and interaction effects amongst various toxic and carcinogenic substances present in the waters, albeit each in quantities below the currently allowed limits.

Air

The ISDE proposes to extend and enhance throughout the European territory the air quality monitoring networks, and update them with the best available technologies, in particular in areas and districts where significant sources of pollution are present. These are industrial areas, the large centres of energy production, the cities with high road traffic, and the airport areas.

Moreover, initiatives to restrict with taxation the use of fossil fuels should be made more effective, as these account for the main source of pollutant emissions and greenhouse gases for almost two centuries.

Mobility

For ISDE doctors a progressive and substantial reduction of road traffic must be achieved as well as a limitation of the urban areas intended for private transport, both in large and small cities, which could thus



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retrieve their charm, beauty and healthier living conditions; the transport of goods by road is to be discouraged; air traffic is to be submitted to monitoring policies and regulations to curtail it.

On the other hand, the ISDE proposes to give priority to the rail links between European capitals and to improve local and national railway networks, albeit it should always be implemented with respect of territories' peculiar features and of the rights of concerned communities.

Urban planning and building activities

ISDE advocates a strong European commitment to the adoption of laws and norms aiming at stopping the waste of land and protecting environment and landscape in the individual Countries. Another needed policy choice is the adoption of regulations for fostering bio-eco-sustainable buildings in every Country; this is necessary for the impact that the building activity has on the waste of resources (water, raw materials, energy), the pollution of soil, air and water, and on the production of waste.

Work environment and industrial risks

The fight against every form of exploitation and discrimination is a priority, with particular regard to migrants, women and children. For ISDE there is also a need for a greater commitment for the elimination of harmful factors present in work-sites and for the removal of the causes of accidents, in a special way in the construction industry.

Agricultural practices

ISDE proposes incentives for organic farming (which should become compulsory next to water systems that provide drinking water to the population) and for integrated pest control. GMOS have to be stopped, pending strong scientific evidences which demonstrate their safety and their real need.

Electromagnetic fields

ISDE stresses the need to enact effective norms and measures to progressively reduce – next to schools, sports centres and densely inhabited areas - the exposure (of children and teens in particular) to this type of non-ionizing energy and that the rules concerning so-called "wireless areas" be carefully re-examined. The European Parliament should also strive to obtain that all European Countries draw up guidelines for the planning the location of plants which emit non-ionising radiation taking into account the IARC classification and adopting the precautionary principle.

Please receive my best regards,

Roberto Romizi, MD
ISDE President