



Rat der Gemeinden und Regionen Europas
Council of European Municipalities and Regions
Europæiske kommuners og regioners råd
Συμβούλιο των Ευρωπαϊκών Δήμων και Περιφερειών
Consejo de municipios y regiones de Europa
Consiglio dei comuni e delle regioni d'Europa
Raad der Europese gemeenten en regio's
Conselho dos municípios e regiões da Europa

Position paper on EU soil policy

1. CEMR welcomes the increased attention that the Commission is placing on Soil policy, with the preparation of thematic strategy on this issue under the 6th Environmental Action Programme. We believe that the Communication "Towards a Thematic Strategy for Soil Protection" (COM (2002) 179 (2002) 179 FREE final) provides a good basis for the preparation of the strategy.

2. Soil is in every way very much linked to its local context, especially when considered in connection with agriculture and forestry. Local government is in many European countries responsible for regulating and managing actions that have a strong impact on soil, such as water and wastewater treatment, waste management and land use.

3. CEMR believes that careful consideration must be given to the added value of the Community's role in soil policy. We call for a EU soil policy, which takes an "integrated" approach, rather than being "comprehensive" as such. Indeed it is important that the future strategy takes account of the many different fields of EU policy, which have a direct or indirect impact on soil protection, such as agriculture, internal market, waste management and product policies. Local and regional authorities are of course well aware of the interactions between these policy fields and their implication for soil policy at the local and regional level. We thus believe that we are in a good place to contribute to the preparation of this strategy.

4. We believe that the important problem of contaminated sites, which is a common issue throughout Europe, is also central to the question of soil protection. CEMR believes that this problem has not been given appropriate consideration in the Communication. A common European approach regarding finance and responsibilities to clean up contaminated sites is needed. Local authorities are usually not responsible for the occurrence of the problem and do not have the means or capacity to restore these sites to their original state, although this is very much needed from the point of view of citizen's health and well-being.

5. At the European level soil sealing is a problem and there is a need in particular to protect land of prime agricultural value for long-term food production. Erosion, salinisation, flood and landslides can cause a need for restrictions in land use. However, land use remains a local issue. CEMR therefore urges the Commission to take full account of the principle of subsidiarity, when drawing up its strategy.

6. CEMR fully agrees that the EU can play a role in the development of EU-wide soil information and monitoring systems and the adoption of soil related standards. Although local government has a clear role to play within such systems we believe that modern remote sensing and geographical information systems provide an excellent opportunity to receive relevant information about soils and land use at national and EU level.