

# EDITORIAL

*Since national and international environmental law has become more extensive - both at national and international levels - there is an increased demand to review its implementation. Only those unaware of how life works, would claim that a review process could be established easily. Indeed, those knowing the facts, confirm that the problem is a complex one, because the level of compliance can vary greatly even within each State. As there are so many conflicting aspects, an accurate review could only be achieved if the study were to encompass not only the smallest unit at community level, but also extend to all levels where relevant decisions are made, ending up probably with the national government. So it will be interesting to read the "State of Action to Protect the Environment in Europe", concerning the implementation and enforcement of environmental legislation (commissioned by the European Environment Agency), when it is published.*

*Certainly, on a supranational level such as the European Union, a check can be made if its Ordinances and Directives are transferred into national law. But to review the actual implementation in detail is nearly impossible. In any case, the failure of strategies or plans is not the main element; the really important things are the decisions and their impact at the local level.*

*We shall be interested to see how the EU's DG XI, under the new Environment Commissioner Ms. Rhett Bjerregaard, will deal with this subject. We congratulated her on her appointment, and she confirmed that she is ready for an interview with us. She stated recently that her highest environmental priorities will be implementation of the "polluter pays principle" and the development of better monitoring legislation.*

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*After the direction of US environmental policy under the Bush Administration, there was a general expectation of new guidance and initiatives under Bill Clinton. Especially as voters had been led to believe this : Vice-President Gore having been the most vocal senator in this field while in opposition*

*Many, including the media (for example, the Neue Zürcher Zeitung of 5 January), have questioned what the new team has achieved so far. A mid-term review is of particular interest, as during the rest of this term, the Republican dominated Congress will make it much more difficult to legislate in this field.*

*Although the Clinton Administration signed the Biodiversity Convention, the ratification is still open. It is questionable now that the opportunity has been lost, whether the new majority can be persuaded to do so.*

*With regard to the action plan on climate change, we have seen mainly voluntary agreements with industry and there is to be a yearly review, although no spectacular changes as yet. We have not heard if the EPA has decided on new requirements for the automobile industry. It is still open whether they will accept compromise from the industry or follow the demands of the 12 States in the North East, to take over the really rigid standards of California 1990. The discussion on an environmental tax has dried up. Shortly before the presidential election, Carole Browner, the EPA Administrator, announced that the President had increased her budget very substantially. However, following the change in the Congress majority, it is most probable that the EPA will have to live with a reduced budget in 1996.*

*The President's Council on Sustainable Development - high-ranking members from Government, NGOs, and the sciences - is working on a plan concerning Agenda 21. We shall be interested in the outcome, promised in Autumn 1995. The implementation should commence in 1996, at the time when the presidential election campaign will be getting off the ground.*

*Vice-President Gore's success in influencing the environmental aspects of NAFTA has been recognised, but at the same time there are questions as to how he can deal with the dilemma of the concept of sustainable development being directed to a long-term perspective, while political and economic dealing is connected mostly to short-term perspectives.*

*- Wolfgang Breyer -*