

well as setting up of the UN Environment Programme (UNEP). But it was the European Community that picked up, in the late 1970s and during the 1980s, the world leadership in environmental protection policy and legislation.

The European Community as World Environmental Leader

- 3 The immediate period after the Second World War experienced the gradual development of the European Community. Visionary statesmen, like Robert Schuman and Konrad Adenauer, conceived of Europe as a peace project based upon close economic cooperation. In 1951, six countries – Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands – signed a treaty to cooperate in running their coal and steel industries. The countries extended their cooperation to other economic sectors and established in 1957, under the Treaty of Rome, the European Economic Community (EEC).
- 4 However, environmental policy came in rather late and notably, environmental protection was not mentioned in the Treaty of Rome. In 1972, the European Community adopted its first Environment Action Programme based on the idea that the prevention is better than cure, and the “polluter pays” principle. The Community started building its body of environmental legislation with the adoption of several directives, e.g. on waste, bathing water and birds protection. In 1980, the key Environmental Impact Assessment Directive was adopted and after expanding to twelve member states, the Community regained momentum through the Single European Act of 1987 by devoting an entire section to environment policy.
- 5 The 1970s and 1980s witnessed a number of accidents that gave additional push to calls for environmental awareness and action. First, in 1976 an explosion occurred at a chemical plant near Seveso in Italy, whereby a toxic cloud containing dioxin contaminated a densely populated area. Then in 1982 the “Seveso” Directive was issued to prevent major industrial accidents with dangerous substances. Two years later, an accident involving chemicals of much higher gravity took place in Bhopal, India. With 5,000 short-term fatalities, and the number of long-term fatalities estimated as 135,000 (Radkau 2011:501), the Bhopal accident was the largest industrial accident in the world history at the time. In 1978, oil tanker Amoco Cadiz spilled 68 million gallons off the coast of France. One year later, a partial meltdown of the Three Mile Island nuclear plant in the United States put the future of nuclear energy in question. For the nuclear industry, worse was still to come. In 1986, an uncontrolled chain reaction in a reactor in the Chernobyl power plant north of Kiev, Ukraine caused explosions which blew the reactor’s lid off. More than thirty-one workers died instantly and about 135,000 people were evacuated from the surrounding area, leaving long-term fatalities. The Chernobyl accident reactivated anti-nuclear movements not only in Europe, but worldwide, and accelerated the disintegration tendencies in the Soviet Union (Radkau 2011:502). The collapse of communism across central and eastern Europe, symbolized by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, opened the door to German reunification and the extension of European Community.
- 6 The 1990s was the decade of international commitments to sustainable development and of the consolidation of the importance of environmental information. In 1990, the European Environment Agency was established to provide independent, reliable and comparable environmental information for decision-makers and the public. Three years later, the Maastricht Treaty went into force creating the European Union (EU). In 1995, the EU gained three new member states, namely, Austria, Finland and Sweden, that were environmental leaders. More pioneering EU legislation included the Water Framework Directive (2000), and the Directive on “Strategic Environmental Assessment” (2001). However, energy security concerns, globalisation and terrorism often overshadowed environmental policy concerns.
- 7 In thirty-five years, EU’s environmental policy made huge strides. Initially, the development of a vast body of environmental legislation dealt mostly with technical standards. The EU has passed legislation aimed at improving the quality of water, tackling air and noise pollution, assuring the safety of chemicals, setting standards for waste disposal and protecting the EU’s native wildlife and plants. This legislation works when fully implemented and enforced, and without it our environment would look quite different.^[1] Lead would still be being pumped into the air from cars fleet, chlorofluorocarbons would have further depleted the ozone layer, nitrogen oxide emissions from road transport would be ten times higher, and organisms in rivers, lakes and estuaries would still be choked by effluent, including the prospect of bathing in coastal waters polluted by sewage. Additionally, swathes of land would be eaten up by expanding landfills for waste, and waste incinerators would not be operating to strict standards.
- 8 Gradually, the spectrum of policy tools has broadened with the introduction of market-based instruments. Environmental concerns are increasingly being integrated into other policy areas, such as energy, agriculture and transport. In turn, this helps to prevent the problems at their source. The present EU sustainable development

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