

ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITIES OF BUSINESS INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

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The really acute problem of atmospheric pollution from the industrial and chemical activity of the last ten or twenty years is not considered to be a new problem. It results from the uncontrollable and irrational use and abuse of nature's potential, dating from the first days of human presence on the planet.

The era of the Industrial Revolution, combined with a dramatic human population increase, signals the period when we are, supposedly, facing an improvement in the standard of living for the acquisition of which many sacrifices had to be made. The gradual but uncontrollable aggravation and destruction of natural and animal resources in favour of more cement structures, in favour also of the development and domination of the internal combustion engine which brings new prospects to the general financial and social growth of all countries.

During this period, different arguments against the Industrial Revolution and its unprecedented propagation and predomination evolved. These arguments, however, whilst trying to raise consciousness regarding industrial development, were found to be "against the current" resulting in a violent suppression of most of the protesters.

Thus, financial centres and decision-makers imposed their views to state governments, however, various youth organisations found ways of communicating and questioning these developments. In this way, the international community achieved a strong movement concerning environmental conservation and the protection of plants and animals against mutation and contamination. At the same time, industrialisation began demonstrating the "paradise" we were intending to create. Photochemical clouds, changes in the atmosphere, ozone depletion and different other effects have resulted in new diseases for the human body with short- and long-term consequences.

At the beginning of the 1980s, most of the governments of the industrialised countries started imposing strict laws on industries, and technology evolved by systematically seeking ways to reduce the pollution in the atmosphere, ground and sea. Unfortunately, the legislation and the binding terms that were decided upon were not accompanied by fiscal incentives. This obviously resulted in reactions and disagreements from entrepreneurs regarding the competitiveness of their products which would greatly influence state economies. These pressures brought the expected results, mainly because there was no political will for the enforcement of environmental protection legislation.

As a consequence, humanity was once again asked to pay the political price, the outweighing issue for all politicians. On the one hand, governments promised to implement stringent measures for environmental protection and, on the other, they tried to satisfy and abate pressures from big financial interests. World conferences take place for the protection of the ozone layer and the prohibition of aerosol sprays and, at the same time, in the very countries that endorse the prohibition of such sprays, every day hundreds of industries producing these harmful products are in operation.

The problem has assumed uncontrollable dimensions, and the situation may soon become irreversible, especially regarding sea pollution from toxic and chemical waste. We are obliged to recognise that world organisations for the protection of the sea, in co-operation with local governmental authorities, have taken effective measures for the punishment of polluters and have formulated safety specifications for navigation and for harmful waste disposal in rivers, lakes and lagoons. Eventually, such measures become insufficient, because pollution in one geographical area spreads through the water around the world.

For the same reason, every effort for recovery is insufficient, because it cannot totally eliminate the harmful consequences of the pollutants and, after all, it cannot restore the physical environment. In this case, the vital aspect is prevention and not the cure, because in every day practice it is obvious that a permanent cure is not possible and nothing at all can substitute nature.

The question that we have to consider is whether we can have sufficient prevention, when in many countries of the world, due to low development, there is a lack of environmental sensitivity, because daily survival remains the main issue. In Tunisia and Egypt, in countries in Eastern and Central Asia, in some Balkan countries like Albania and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, in many nations of the former USSR, like Turkmenistan, Kajakstan, Kirgisia, Moldova etc, there are major indications and, in some cases, proof that the land is used as a "waste dump" for industrial, nuclear and toxic waste, which is very harmful to public health.

For the so-called industrial and financially developed countries, potential problems and risks from the uncontrolled operation of industrial facilities are not negligible. Humanity has faced many environmental catastrophes and may need hundreds or even thousands of years to recover. The Chernobyl accident, the Exxon-Valdez oil spill in the North Sea, the sinking of the cargo ship Erika carrying toxic and nuclear waste, the destruction of the oil-wells in Kuwait, not to mention air pollution from the use of nuclear weapons during the Gulf War or from the bombings in

Yugoslavia, where, according to scientists, the consequences will become noticeable in the next five years.

These facts are well known to almost everyone, so, at this point, I would like to discuss the measures and decisions concerning environmental protection, which were developed within the framework of the financial co-operation among Black Sea countries (BSEC), where Greece participates as a full member. The member states of this co-operation have taken many important initiatives, which are very notable, considering the difficult financial situation that most of these countries face and, also, the lack of basic infrastructure and awareness of matters of environmental protection and security.

One of BSEC's primary concerns is the prevention and remediation of pollution in the Black Sea, in order to preserve the beauty of the Black Sea for future generations. Therefore, BSEC has put together a working group assigned with the task to monitor and carry out environmental programmes for the Black Sea and the surrounding area, which can only be protected through international co-operation among neighbouring countries and countries of the Danube basin. Very soon, a joint BSEC-UNIDO project for the promotion of cleaner production in the Black Sea region will be put into operation.

It is also important to note that during the conference of Environmental Ministers of the six Black Sea countries – Bulgaria, Georgia, Romania, Russia, Turkey and Ukraine – that convened in Istanbul in October 1996, a Strategic Action Plan for the Black Sea was ratified. This action plan concerns sustainable regional environmental management and is complementary to the Bucharest Convention and the Odessa Declaration. The Black Sea area is also considered an important tourist destination, thanks to its sunny weather, historical sites and warm hospitality.

BSEC's principles and action plans are endorsed by business councils promoting Hellenic-Turkish co-operation in both Greece and Turkey. It is important to note that an agreement between Greece and Turkey regarding environmental protection in the Aegean Sea is one of the nine bilateral agreements signed by both countries within the framework of the improvement of Hellenic-Turkish relations. The agreement is based on the principles of the Rio Declaration and Agenda 21 and provides for the governments and authorities of both countries to co-operate in environmental protection. It also provides for scientific, technical and legislative co-operation for the more efficient protection of natural resources, and encourages co-operation among governmental and non-governmental organisations in fields such as energy production, the prevention of desertification, marine pollution abatement, environmentally-sound solid waste management, etc. The agreement was unanimously approved by international environmental organisations and other associations and is considered an important effort of the governments of both countries.

In conclusion, I would like to focus on the following points. We cannot allow further squandering of natural resources. Governments and people must realise that the problem of atmospheric, ground and water pollution affects us all. A lot of money must be spent in order to remediate and, most importantly, to prevent environmental accidents and damage. I hereby endorse the proposal for a "green tax" put forward by the German government and call upon all governments to do the same.

The human population explosion cannot and should not be strictly regulated, because this regulation would not have any meaningful results nor would it secure human dignity and freedom. On the other hand, however, it must become clear that the cost of protecting the environment should not be considered solely the responsibility of a certain social sector – such as the business sector – but should be equally distributed among social groups, according to their capacity to bear the financial burden.

It is essential to understand that without a clean and protected environment, no human endeavour or action will be able to have long-term potential. There is no place on this planet that can constitute a safe haven for anyone in the event of serious environmental degradation. Pollution and environmental abuse will sooner or later affect the doers. Nature will take revenge.

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