

Abstracts

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## **Collaborative Approaches in European Environmental Policy: The principle of shared responsibility**

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### **Abstract**

The past 25 years of European environmental policy have resulted in a comprehensive system of regulations and directives. During the last decade the focus has shifted from merely producing technical standards to an emphasis on changing current patterns of development in a more integrative approach. Throughout Europe one can witness a movement that blurs the lines between governments and private actors. The involvement of partners such as companies, NGOs, consumers and governments is seen as crucial. One of the key principles of European environmental policy has become the notion of shared responsibility. It was born out of a notion that none of the partners involved (governments, industry, NGOs, general public) has the capacity on its own to bring about the changes necessary. Collaboration is therefore seen as one of the paths towards sustainability.

The 5th Environmental Action Program 5EAP ("Towards Sustainability") of the European Union sets longer term objectives in a more integrated approach and focuses on a more global level than previous programs. One of the key orientations of the new approach is the strengthening of the dialogue and consultation with concerned parties (shared responsibilities). For environmental policy aiming at industry 5EAP resulted in a policy framework that rests on the following principles:

- Intensifying the dialogue with industry;
- The use of covenants and other forms of self-regulation;
- The improvement of the management and control of production processes by means of strengthening the connection between environmental permits and forms of self-regulation;
- Environmental disclosure.

Implementation by the member states of the principles underlying 5EAP will lead to changes both in terms of policy-making processes (with more participation from non-governmental parties) as in policy-content and -outcomes (the use of other policy-instruments).

The paper presents (1) a description of current European environmental policy, (2) a

critical analysis of the concept of shared responsibility, and (3) empirical data on the changes in national policy arrangements on environmental affairs within the member states of the EU. The paper therefore gives an actual view on developments in environmental policy within Europe.