Issues in Environmental Politics

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European environmental policy: the pioneers  
Mikael Skou Andersen and Duncan Liefferink (eds)

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European environmental policy

The pioneers

edited by  
Mikael Skou Andersen and Duncan Liefferink

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Preface

EU environmental policy was formally founded with the European Council declaration made in Paris in October 1972, and especially in the last decade its environmental policies have developed at an unexpected speed. While the Cechini White Paper from 1985 scheduled about 300 new directives for the creation of the single market, no one policy document foresaw that about 150 legal acts relating to environmental policy would be passed in the period from 1987 to 1994, further extending environmental protection and thus affirming the position of environmental policy as one of the key areas within the EU. One of the reasons for the rapid development of EU environmental policy has been the marked differences among the various member states; between the forerunners with relatively developed domestic environmental policies and the latecomers with little or no national environmental legislation. The differences have had to be levelled out, and in this process the administrative and technical policy experiences of the forerunners seem to have had an upper hand in the harmonisation process.

The title of this book, *European environmental policy: the pioneers*, is not meant as a bold claim regarding the sophistication of environmental policy in a certain part of Europe, nor can the countries covered by this book be regarded as having developed particularly 'sustainable' economies and societies. What we are interested in is their political role in EU environmental policy-making, where they often have pushed for higher environmental standards, on the basis of their domestic policies.

It is our view that we cannot understand the promotion of
strategies and concepts at the EU level without understanding their origin in the domestic context. The basic idea of the book is to provide the reader with a deeper insight into domestic environmental policy-making, to trace the internal conflicts and dynamics that have made these countries develop their notions of environmental policy, and select the issues which are brought to Brussels for ‘Europeanisation’. We think that such insights may provide a useful tool for better understanding and analysing the internal environmental politics of other EU member states, and hence for better understanding the policies they promote at the EU level.

The enlargement of the EU in 1995 with Austria, Finland and Sweden provided the occasion for the focus on the ‘pioneers’ since these three new member states had relatively developed domestic environmental policies and were expected to provide a significant impetus to EU environmental policy-making. Because alliances are rather crucial to policy-making in the EU, where decisions can be taken by qualified majority in the Council of Ministers, we found it logical to explore the domestic environmental policies of the previous environmental pioneers (Germany, the Netherlands and Denmark) as well, to investigate the coherency of a potential ‘green bloc’ in EU environmental decision-making. Norway is also included in the book, because Norway was expected to become a member, and because Norway is linked to the EU policy-making process, both through the European Economic Area arrangement and through its traditional partnership with the other Nordic countries.

The dynamics of the enlargement have been further explored in another book, *The innovation of EU environmental policy* from Scandinavian University Press, as well as in the final report from the project ‘New member states and the impact on EU environmental policy’. The project, from which this book also stems, was funded by the European Commission’s Socio-Economic Environmental Research Programme (contract CT 94-0385), and additional support was obtained from the Nordic Academy for Advanced Studies (NorFa). We would like to express our thanks to both organisations for their generosity.

The individual chapters have been written using a common analytical framework and were first presented at a workshop in April 1995 at Sandbjerg Manor, the conference facility of Aarhus University. As editors of this volume, we would very much like to thank the individual chapter authors for their efforts. We are also grateful for the linguistic assistance of Virginia A. Schildhauer, who translated the chapter on Germany into English, and of Judith Ugelow, who reviewed the remaining chapters, as well as for the skilful secretarial assistance of Anette Riber of the Political Science Department at Aarhus University. We would also like to express our thanks to Rebecca Crum from Manchester University Press for a pleasant and fruitful co-operation and to the series’ editors, in particular Albert Weale, for their supportive attitude to this book.