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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Permanent Representatives Committee/Council

Subject: Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development:
Implications for the EU environmental policy
- Exchange of views

1. The UN Sustainable Development Summit (New York, 25-27 September 2015) adopted the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development ("Transforming our world"), including a single set of global Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that replaced the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as from 1 January 2016.

The adoption of the 2030 Agenda represents the culmination of a long process of dialogue and negotiations, involving both government representatives and non-state actors, that was launched at the Rio+20 Summit in June 2012.

The 2030 Agenda responds comprehensively to global challenges by addressing poverty eradication and the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development in a holistic manner. Its 17 SDGs and the 169 associated targets cover key areas such as poverty, inequality, food security, health, sustainable consumption and production, growth, employment, infrastructure, sustainable management of natural resources, oceans, climate change and gender equality.

2. On 26 October 2015, the Council (Environment) held a first exchange of views on the 2030 Agenda and its environmental perspectives, on the basis of a Presidency background paper including few questions ¹.
3. On 22 November 2016, the Commission adopted its Communication on "Next steps for a sustainable European future: European action for sustainability" ², which was presented to the Council (Environment) on 19 December 2016.
4. The Council (General Affairs) is expected to adopt conclusions regarding the 2030 Agenda implementation at EU level at its meeting on 20 June 2017.
5. In this context, the Presidency considers it timely for Environment Ministers to further reflect on how to implement effectively the Agenda 2030 at EU level, as well as on the impact of the 2030 Agenda on the EU environmental policy and legislation. In order to guide and structure the exchange of views on this subject at the Council (Environment) on 28 February 2017, the Presidency has prepared a background paper and three questions, set out in the Annex to this Note.
6. The Committee of Permanent Representatives is invited to take note of the Presidency's background paper and questions (in Annex) and forward them to Council for the above mentioned exchange of views on 28 February 2017.

¹ Doc. 12809/15.

² Docs 14774/16 - COM(2016) 739 final + ADD 1.

Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Implications for the EU environmental policy

- Exchange of views -

1. The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by the 70th session of the UN General Assembly in September 2015, represents an ambitious new blueprint to respond to global trends and challenges in a universal and transformative manner. The core of the 2030 Agenda are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their 169 associated targets, which should be achieved by 2030.

Along with the outcome of other key international summits and conferences held in 2015 (in particular Financing for Development in Addis Ababa, the Climate COP 21 in Paris and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction), the international community has an ambitious new frame for all countries to work together on shared challenges. For the first time, the SDGs are universally applicable to all countries and the EU is committed to be a frontrunner in implementing them.

2. The Commission Communication on "Next steps for a sustainable European future: European action for sustainability"

The above Communication, adopted on 22 November 2016, is the Commission's reaction to the 2030 Agenda and explains how the Commission's 10 political priorities contribute to implement it and how the EU will meet the SDGs in the future.

The process of implementation of the 2030 Agenda at EU level should include two work streams: the first one is to mainstream the SDGs in the European policy framework and current Commission priorities; the second one is to launch a reflection on further developing the EU's longer term vision and the focus of sectoral policies after 2020.

The Commission is expected to provide regular reporting of the EU's progress towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda as of 2017.

When the Commission presented its Communication to the Council (Environment) on 19 December 2016, the preliminary reactions from a number of Ministers showed that while the Communication provides a good mapping of existing policy initiatives and instruments and shows how the Commission's priorities relate to the SDGs, it lacks an analytical perspective and does not provide a full gap assessment in terms of existing EU policies and legislation in all relevant sectors.

The Communication was subsequently presented to the Council (General Affairs) on 7 February 2017. Among other things, Ministers indicated that, in order to ensure the effective implementation of the 2030 Agenda, a high level of ambition, increased consistency and policy coherence and breaking down the silos among policy sectors should be required from the EU and the Member States. The Council (General Affairs) is expected to adopt Conclusions on the 2030 Agenda implementation at its meeting on 20 June 2017.

3. The 2030 Agenda implementation challenges

In light of recent discussions and consultations, the Presidency has identified a number of challenges as regards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda:

General implementation challenges

- Means of implementation, in particular international public financing
- Lack of synergies between the finance for development process and the financing for sustainable development
- Effective monitoring and accountability, since much of the data and indicators related to a number of SDGs are not available or not comparable, and many of them will not be available on time

- Policy coherence for sustainable development, which requires keeping a comprehensive approach while at the same time implementing the 2030 Agenda in all relevant policy sectors, both at internal and external levels
- Effective involvement of all relevant stakeholders, in particular the civil society and the private sector, in the implementation and monitoring process.

Global implementation challenges from an environmental perspective

- Mainstreaming the environment into the whole 2030 Agenda and the SDGs and keeping the balance among the 3 dimensions of sustainable development also during the implementation period up to 2030
- Keeping the environmental dimension of the sustainable development process high on the HLPF agenda, including through regular and relevant UNEA inputs
- The weak environmental dimension of the Addis Ababa Agenda Action, especially when compared to the 2030 Agenda that it is supposed to support, and the uncertainty about the availability of the necessary means of implementation up to 2030.

Implementation challenges for the EU, including in the area of environment

- Making the implementation of the 2030 Agenda a priority for the EU and its Member States, including at the European Council level
- Mainstreaming the 2030 Agenda into all policy areas and promoting ownership of the 2030 Agenda by policy sectors other than Environment and Development Cooperation, including by other Council formations
- Awareness raising among all Council formations of the need to integrate, in a balanced way the environmental dimension of sustainable development in their ongoing and future activities when implementing the 2030 Agenda in their respective policy areas
- Assessing and identifying possible gaps in all policy areas in order to holistically assess what needs to be done in terms of EU policy, legislation and means of implementation from now to 2030. This includes the possible review of existing EU strategies, policies and instruments that have a shorter implementation period, such as the 7th EAP or the Europe 2020 Strategy

- Raising awareness and creating ownership of the 2030 Agenda by all relevant EU stakeholders, in particular the civil society and the private sector, and involving them effectively in the implementation process.

4. Framework and objectives of the exchange of views at the Environment Council meeting on 28 February 2017

The 2030 Agenda implementation process is complex and requires the involvement of many different actors. The Presidency is therefore aware that the analysis of the Commission Communication and the internal coordination are time-consuming processes that are still ongoing in most Member States.

On the other hand, Environment Ministers and the Council (Environment) have been deeply involved and in the lead of the sustainable development process for many years up to the Rio+20 Summit in 2012, and have been closely involved in the Rio+20 follow-up process leading to the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Through this background paper the Presidency invites Ministers to express their views as regards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda from an environmental perspective, and what could be done to address the different implementation challenges at Member State, EU and global levels. The objective should be to discuss whether the existing EU environmental policy and instruments are fit for the purpose of achieving the relevant SDGs and targets and what can be done to align these policy instruments.

In this perspective, Ministers are invited to consider the following three questions as a basis to structure the debate:

- 1. The 2030 Agenda requires that all SDGs are implemented in a balanced manner and that action in one area does not undermine efforts in other policy areas. How can we effectively achieve this horizontal coherence in practice, while ensuring the necessary progress in the implementation of sectoral policy areas?*

2. *What should be the next steps to be taken and the priority areas to be addressed in the process of implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the EU environmental policy?*

3. *How can we attract and effectively engage and involve citizens and the private sector into the 2030 Agenda implementation process, thus contributing to the general objective of bringing the EU back to its citizens? What role could the Multi-Stakeholders Platform that is referred to in the Commission Communication play in this regard?*

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