



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

Brussels, 15 October 2012

14811/12

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NOTE

from:	General Secretariat
to:	Delegations
Subject:	The importance of the EU legislation for meeting environmental objectives - example of the air quality = Information from the Belgian delegation

Delegations will find in Annex an information note from the Belgian delegation on the above- mentioned subject, which will be dealt with under "Any other business" at the Council (Environment) meeting on 25 October 2012.

**The importance of the EU legislation for meeting environmental
objectives - example of the air quality**

- Information from the Belgian delegation -

Although air quality in Europe has undeniably improved over the past decades, more than 80 % of EU citizens, according to an EEA report, are still exposed to levels of air pollution that are higher than the limits recommended by the WHO. The objective of the Sixth Environment Action Programme was to attain levels of air quality that do not give rise to significant negative impacts on human health and the environment; we are still some way from achieving these objectives. The necessary actions in order to adapt our production and consumption behaviour in a consistent way are only feasible provided they are supported at European level through harmonisation of measures and by mutual efforts between the various actors.

More particularly, regarding air quality, bearing in mind that it is impossible to unilaterally act upon the causes of air quality degradation and pollutant emission reduction, Belgium has always pleaded for an EU approach to support the efforts of the Member States. In terms of concrete objectives, policies and measures, the Sixth Environment Action Programme and the Thematic Strategy on Air Pollution are ambitious and legitimate. EU-level action not only allows for global coherence of the measures implemented, but also temporal coherence enabling common medium and long-range targets to be defined.

The European Commission plans to make 2013 the ‘Year of Air’, with a review of the Thematic Strategy on Air Pollution and possibly new legislative proposals. Belgium therefore encourages the European Commission to come forward with source legislation for a wide range of sources which is more in line with the current ambitious air quality objectives of the NEC Directive and the air quality directives. Besides the transport sector, emissions standards for small combustion installations, stringent eco-design standards, and an update of directives concerning VOC abatement (e.g. solvent directive) may be considered.

Any delay impacting on our commitments would penalise the actors, who would have to take urgent or non-harmonised measures in order to provide the indispensable high level of environmental and health protection. A continuous effort remains necessary for all sources of air pollution, including the transport sector. It would be prejudicial to both our environment and the technological competitiveness of our European industries if these adaptations, which are now well underway at EU level, were no longer encouraged and supported in the future.
