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Environment

Luxembourg, 15 June 2015

President **Kaspars Gerhards**
Minister for Environmental Protection and Regional
Development of Latvia

P R E S S

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- Where declarations, conclusions or resolutions have been formally adopted by the Council, this is indicated in the heading for the item concerned and the text is placed between quotation marks.
- Documents for which references are given in the text are available on the Council's Internet site (<http://www.consilium.europa.eu>).
- Acts adopted with statements for the Council minutes which may be released to the public are indicated by an asterisk; these statements are available on the Council's Internet site or may be obtained from the Press Office.

ITEMS DEBATED

National emissions of certain pollutants (NEC Directive)

Ministers held a policy debate on the proposed directive for the reduction of national emissions of certain atmospheric pollutants, which is part of the "Clean Air Programme for Europe"

[Commission proposal for a directive on the reduction of national emissions of certain atmospheric pollutants](#)

Air pollution is the most significant environmental cause of death in the EU, leading to 400 000 premature deaths each year. The Commission's proposal establishes emission reduction targets so as to reduce the number of premature deaths at least by half by 2030. Ministers highlighted the importance of this objective but called for realistic and feasible targets, some demanding a lowering of the envisaged national ceilings for certain pollutants.

Several ministers advocated for more flexibility for the long-term targets, to take into account the uncertainty of future developments, such as the economic situation or technical progress. Other ministers, however, underlined the need to preserve binding targets and warned that too much flexibility could put at risk the level of ambition of the directive.

Member states expressed concerns about how some sectors may be affected by the directive, especially agriculture, and they pointed out the need to take this into account when determining the emission limits.

Some ministers welcomed the proposal to leave methane out of the scope of this directive, as stated in the current Presidency compromise text. This responded to concerns about possible overlaps with commitments related to greenhouse gas emission reduction targets.

[Latvian presidency compromise text on the proposed review of NEC directive](#)

The outcome of the debate will feed into the preparation of the Council's position with a view to future negotiations with the European Parliament. The European Parliament ENVI Committee is expected to vote on its report on 15-16 July and a vote in plenary could take place as early as September 2015.

Road to Paris

The Council discussed the preparations for the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change conference to be held in Paris in December 2015 (COP 21), also in the light of the outcome of recent international meetings on climate change, in Geneva and in Bonn.

The aim of the Paris Conference is to adopt a legally-binding agreement (Paris agreement) to be implemented from 2020, preferably in the form of a new protocol that will be applicable to all and will ensure that the global temperature increase stays below 2°C relative to pre-industrial levels.

The main outcomes from the debate were the following:

- the need to speed up the pace of negotiations, strengthen climate diplomacy at the highest level and streamline the final text before Paris
- climate change should be a strategic priority at international summits, including at G7 and G20 levels and also in development cooperation
- the future Paris agreement should be legally binding and ensure the broadest possible participation
- it must uphold and reinforce the principles and objectives of the UNFCCC Convention, in particular the 2C objective
- climate finance should promote investments in low-emission, climate-resilient programmes and policies and will be crucial for an agreement, particularly regarding mitigation and adaptation issues,
- a transparency and accountability framework should be provided in order to ensure that each Party is implementing its commitments and is on track to meet its target
- a dynamic mechanism should be set out to review every five years the level of ambition of the agreement
- technology development and transfer, capacity building and transparency of actions should be increased

The Council's debate will contribute to the development of Council conclusions which are expected to be adopted at the **Environment Council** on 18 September 2015, setting out the EU's position for the Climate Change conference in Paris.

Any other business

– Market stability reserve

The Council took note of information provided by the Presidency on the state of play concerning the adoption of the decision to establish a market stability reserve for the EU greenhouse gas emission trading scheme (ETS).

On 26 May 2015 the Parliament's ENVI committee approved the Council's overall compromise text. The plenary vote is scheduled to take place in early July, following the legal/linguistic finalisation of the text which is currently underway.

The Council will then formally adopt the decision at one of its forthcoming meetings, probably in mid-September. Poland announced that it will present a statement at that time.

[Press release on the agreement on the market stability reserve, 13/05/2015](#)

– Recent international meetings

The Commission and the Presidency reported to the ministers on several recent international environmental conferences.

Regarding the Triple Conference of the Parties to the Basel (COP 12) Rotterdam (COP 7) and Stockholm (COP 7) Conventions (Geneva, 4-15 May 2015), the Presidency considered that the Council can generally be satisfied with the results achieved and that several key decisions were adopted.

[Information on the triple conference of the Parties to the Basel \(COP 12\) Rotterdam \(COP 7\) and Stockholm \(COP 7\) Conventions](#)

The presidency also stated that the outcome of the COP12 to the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (Punta del Este, Uruguay, 1-9 June 2015) is fully in line with the negotiating position of the Council.

[Information on the COP12 to the Ramsar Convention](#)

– Investment plan

The Commission informed ministers of the funding possibilities that will become available for environmental projects once the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI) is operational. The aim is to raise awareness of these funding possibilities amongst stakeholders and find ways to promote the submission of environmental projects eligible for EFSI funding.

[EFSI as an opportunity for environmental and climate related projects](#)

– *The Lisbon Charter*

Ministers heard from the Portuguese delegation about the Lisbon Charter, a guide for public policy and regulation of drinking water supply, sanitation and wastewater management services.

[Information from the Portuguese delegation on the Lisbon Charter](#)

– *Work programme of the incoming presidency*

The Luxembourg delegation presented its work programme in the area of environment for the coming months.

[Luxembourg presidency website](#)

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

CUSTOMS UNION

Improved antifraud measures

The Council adopted, by qualified majority, its position in first reading on a [regulation](#) aimed at improving the functioning of the antifraud system in the customs field. It also approved a [statement of the Council's reasons](#).

The Austrian and German delegations voted against and the Spanish delegation abstained.

The regulation seeks to further promote mutual assistance between member states and the Commission to ensure the correct application of laws on customs and agricultural matters.

It will simplify and speed up procedures to better protect the financial interests of the EU against customs fraud and other breaches of customs and agriculture legislation.

The European Parliament is expected to confirm the Council's position in a second-reading vote at an upcoming plenary session.

The Council's first-reading position follows a political agreement reached by the Council on 11 May 2015, which formally endorsed the Council-Parliament provisional agreement of [19 December 2014](#).

EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AREA

Switzerland - Codification of regulation on safeguard measures

The Council approved a [codified version](#) of a regulation on the safeguard measures provided for in the EU-Switzerland free trade agreement for the purpose of simplification and clarity.

The new regulation supersedes the various acts incorporated in regulation [2841/72](#) on the safeguard measures provided for in the EU-Switzerland agreement, whilst preserving the substance of the content.

TRANSPARENCY

Public access to documents

On 15 June 2015, the Council approved:

- the reply to confirmatory application No 08/c/01/15 ([8774/15](#)).
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