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OUTCOME OF THE COUNCIL MEETING

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Environment

Brussels, 4 March 2016

President **Sharon Dijksma**
Minister for the Environment of the Netherlands

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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.

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ITEMS DEBATED

Climate change: follow-up to the Paris Agreement

Ministers had a policy debate on the results of the UN climate change conference held in December 2015 (COP21) and the Paris Agreement. They particularly discussed the implications of the agreement for EU policies, in particular in view of the EU's 2030 climate and energy framework.

The Paris Agreement is seen as a landmark instrument in climate action. There is a common understanding that its signature on 22 April 2016 in New York will be an important political signal of common determination for the work ahead.

Many ministers highlighted the need to maintain the momentum from Paris and to focus now on implementation of all elements of the agreement, both at international level and domestically, in particular in relation to the intended nationally determined contributions (INDCs).

The Commission communication assessing the implications of the Paris Agreement was broadly welcomed as valuable input for the upcoming work, although some ministers advocated higher ambition.

Several delegations argued the 'at least 40%' emissions reduction target (set out in both the EU 2030 climate and energy framework and in the EU's INDC) represents a fair and ambitious contribution to a below 2°C scenario.

Some ministers underlined that the EU must be prepared to take part in the periodic reviews of global ambition and progress made and to participate fully in the 2018 facilitative dialogue agreed in Paris and the subsequent global reviews under the Paris Agreement.

Ministers put emphasis on ongoing and upcoming legislative work, namely regarding the revision of the EU emissions trading system (ETS) and emission reductions in non-trading sectors, renewable energy and energy efficiency.

There was a broad commitment to keep climate issues high on the international agenda. Several ministers also referred to the importance of the aviation and shipping sectors, and therefore asked for a determined push in negotiations at the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) and the International Maritime Organisation (IMO).

The presidency will summarise the debate in a letter to the President of the European Council.

Endocrine disruptors: Council statement

The Council adopted the following statement:

"Case T-521/14 Sweden v Commission

Council statement

Judgement of the General Court of 16 December 2015

The Council notes that in its judgment of 16 December 2015 in the abovementioned case, the General Court concluded that, by failing to adopt delegated acts as regards the specification of the scientific criteria for the determination of endocrine-disrupting properties, the Commission has failed to fulfil its obligations under Regulation No 528/2012 on biocidal products.

The Council recalls that, in accordance with Article 266 TFEU, the Commission is now required to take the necessary measures to comply with the judgment of the General Court. The Council therefore calls on the Commission to respect its legal obligations, as required by the Treaty and the judgment of the General Court."

Circular economy

The Council held a debate on the EU action plan for the circular economy, part of a package which also includes four legislative proposals on waste. Ministers focused on the action plan and on the priority actions from an environmental point of view.

In general, ministers welcomed the Commission proposal and particularly the fact that the action plan aims at tackling all phases in the lifecycle of a product, in order not to focus only on waste, but to effectively "close the loop".

Ministers also highlighted the importance of investing in innovation and praised action and financial support planned to that end. They pointed out the synergies with other policy areas, such as water, and mentioned the role of green public procurement.

There was broad support for a well-functioning secondary raw materials market ensuring a level playing field. Many delegations also considered it a priority to take measures to improve eco-design of products to increase their durability, reparability and re-usability.

Some stressed that the promotion of sustainable consumption and raising awareness also play a role. The reduction of waste, and in particular food waste, and of marine litter were also mentioned, as well as the need to phase-out microplastics.

Ministers also mentioned the proposed waste targets in the revised legislative proposals. A few of them expressed doubts about the proposed time frames, while others welcomed the acknowledgement of member states' specificities.

Ministers also asked for the transition to a circular economy to be monitored, without excessive administrative burden, and for the Council to be informed of progress on a regular basis. Exchanges on experiences and good practices among member states were considered useful, and cooperation with all stakeholders was deemed essential.

European Semester

Ministers had an exchange of views on the European Semester and on the contribution of environment and climate policies to growth and jobs. In particular, they addressed the longer-term vision, beyond the Europe 2020 strategy.

Ministers agreed on the cross-cutting nature of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (which includes the sustainable development goals) as well as of the transition towards a low carbon and circular economy.

They stressed the importance of ensuring successful integration of these goals into EU and national macroeconomic policies. Accordingly, they called for a new and comprehensive strategy covering all dimensions (economic, social, environmental) beyond the 2020 time frame.

In general, ministers saw great potential in the European Semester as a monitoring mechanism and as a tool for environmental integration. In this regard, they stated that the development of a set of comprehensive indicators was required to track progress at national level, although there were different views on how the monitoring should be done and to what extent the European Semester should be used to that end.

Any other business

– Energy transition – Promoting environmentally friendly forms of energy in the EU

The Council took note of the information provided by the Austrian delegation on the promotion of a long-term system change towards safe, environmentally friendly and sustainable energy production, leading to a future EU protocol.

[Information note from the Austrian delegation](#)

– Implementation of the 7th Environment Action Programme

At the request of the Belgian delegation, the Commission briefed the ministers on the implementation of the 7th Environment Action Programme. The Council took note of the information provided.

[Note from the Belgian delegation](#)

– Minamata package on mercury

The Commission presented to the Council the Minamata package on mercury, which includes a proposal for a regulation and a proposal for a Council decision. The Council took note of the information provided.

– Real driving emissions (RDE)

At the request of the French delegation, the Commission informed the ministers of the state of play regarding the real driving emission tests. The Council took note of the information. Several delegations supported the swift implementation of the RDE tests.

[Note from the French delegation](#)

– *EU action plan against wildlife trafficking*

The Council took note of the information provided by the Commission on the EU action plan against wildlife trafficking. Several delegations welcomed the initiative. The presidency confirmed its intention to propose conclusions to be adopted by the Council in June 2016.

– *Innovation deals*

The Council took note of the information provided by the Commission regarding innovation deals, which are relevant in the context of the transition towards a circular economy.

[Information note from the Commission](#)

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

ENVIRONMENT

Minamata Convention on Mercury

The Council approved the position to be taken by the EU and its member states at the 7th session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on Mercury, with a view to supporting the provisional adoption of the guidance referred to in article 8(8) and (9) of the Minamata Convention on Mercury.

The 7th session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee on Mercury will take place from 10 to 15 March 2016 in Jordan. The Minamata Convention on Mercury, which was negotiated under the auspices of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), was adopted at a Conference of the Plenipotentiaries in Kumamoto, Japan, in October 2013.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ukraine sanctions

The Council extended by one year asset freezes against 16 people identified as responsible for the misappropriation of Ukrainian state funds or for the abuse of office causing a loss to Ukrainian public funds.

See [press release](#) for details.

Lebanon – Croatia accession

The Council [adopted a decision](#) on the signing and provisional application of a protocol to the Euro-Mediterranean Agreement establishing an association with Lebanon in order to take account of Croatia's accession to the EU.

INDUSTRY

Motor vehicles – Technical prescriptions for type-approval

The Council adopted a [decision](#) supporting certain amendments to the agreement of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) concerning the adoption of uniform technical prescriptions for wheeled vehicles, equipment and parts used on wheeled vehicles.

The decision includes support for a new UN regulation which seeks to harmonise safety provisions for the type-approval of quiet road transport vehicles with regard to their reduced audibility.

The Council also decided not to oppose the adoption by the Commission [of amendments to regulation 661/2009](#) on type-approval requirements for the general safety of motor vehicles.

The amendments will [update Annex IV](#) to regulation 661/2009 to reflect the application at EU level of new requirements as regards certain UNECE regulations.

[UNECE](#) develops harmonised requirements intended to remove technical barriers to the trade in motor vehicles between the contracting parties of the agreement. The EU is a contracting party to the agreement and votes on behalf of the member states.

TRANSPORT

Satellite navigation: cooperation agreement with Norway

The Council adopted a decision on the conclusion of the cooperation agreement on satellite navigation between the EU and its member states and Norway.

TRADE POLICY

Export subsidies – Jordan

The Council adopted a decision supporting Jordan's request to the WTO for a waiver relating to the extension, until 31 December 2018, of a transitional period for the elimination of its export subsidy programme ([5619/16](#) + [5620/16](#)).