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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Council

Subject: Workshop "Future Environment Action Programme"
- Information from the Austrian Delegation

Delegations will find in the Annex an information note from the Austrian delegation on the above subject, to be dealt with under "Any other business" at the Council (Environment) meeting on 26 June 2019.

"Workshop „Future Environment Action Programme“

(Hainburg, Austria, 11 - 12 June 2019)

- Information from the Austrian delegation -

On 11 and 12 June this year, the Austrian Ministry of Sustainability and Tourism hosted a workshop on the Future Environment Action Programme, as a follow-up to the discussion started at the Informal Environment Council in Graz in October 2018. The overall aim of the workshop was to discuss further steps on the road to a possible future 8th EAP. It was attended by high-level representatives from the European Commission (DG CLIMA and DG ENV), Directors-General for the Environment and colleagues from the EU coordination departments from most Member States.

Presentations were given by the European Commission on the evaluation of the 7th Environment Action Programme (EAP) and by the European Environment Agency on the possible way forward. Following this, remaining and emerging environmental priorities, ways to achieve a ‘green transition’ and the role of the EAP in a changed policy environment were discussed in three break-out sessions. The workshop was held under Chatham House Rules.

The discussions showed there was strong support for an 8th EAP among all Member States present at the meeting. Since the 7th EAP entered into force, the world and especially the environmental policy area has completely changed. Therefore, the notion of a clear 2030 focus and a more strategic vision for environmental policy in a possible future EAP have emerged as central in the discussions. However, should the European Commission decide, in line with the April 2019 conclusions of the General Affairs Council, to come forward with an overarching SDG strategy, the future EAP could supplement this strategy in relation to specific points relevant for environment and climate objectives.

Linking a possible 8th EAP with the EU’s long-term strategy on climate was also discussed, not least because this offers many win-win opportunities beneficial to ecosystems, climate change adaptation and mitigation, and disaster risk reduction.

In line with the recently published European Commission evaluation of the 7th EAP, the priority objectives of the 7th EAP were regarded as still valid. However, the importance of maintaining our natural capital and increasing efforts to protect biodiversity while also keeping the focus on pollution in relation to health issues (e.g. on water and air) were discussed as some of the key areas for future action. The need for an increased focus on synergies was underlined in connection with knowledge sharing, implementation of the existing environmental acquis, monitoring and financing. In terms of process, the need for a smooth transition between the end of the 7th and the beginning of the 8th EAP was highlighted.

Putting in place the right multi-level governance and also a stronger focus on the global dimension of environmental and climate issues could encourage new partnerships, which could in turn stimulate new commitments and actions. In this regard, the role of cities and, more generally, the local level was highlighted.

The value of communicating with and engaging citizens was mentioned in terms of helping to raise awareness and support the policy framework in achieving a successful and just transition. The discussions also showed that a possible future EAP could pave the way beyond sectoral policy towards a coherent systems approach. The need for systemic thinking would include, among other things, the global, economic and social dimensions, striving for cohesion within Member States and across European regions.

A well-designed environment policy was also seen as an opportunity to make Europe the standard-setter for green technologies, creating business opportunities, jobs and sustainable growth while also protecting citizens' health and quality of life. In this regard, the potential of digitalisation, R&D and (eco-)innovation as well as sustainable/green finance as key enablers for a green transition was noted. Digitalisation was not only discussed as an enabler but also as a tool to facilitate possible monitoring frameworks concerning the implementation of environmental policies across the EU, two other central topics of the discussion.

All participants emphasised the importance of the new European Commission's input into the discussions on a possible future 8th EAP and its further guidance in future deliberations.