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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Delegations

Subject: Fourth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-4)
(Nairobi, 11-15 March 2019)
- Information from the Presidency and the Commission

Delegations will find in the Annex an information note from the Presidency and the Commission on the abovementioned subject, which will be discussed under ‘Any other business’ at the Environment Council meeting on 26 June 2019.

**Fourth Meeting of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-4)
(Nairobi, 11–15 March 2019)****- Information from the Presidency and the Commission -**

The fourth session of the United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA-4) took place 11-15 March 2019 in Nairobi, Kenya, under the theme of “Innovative solutions for environmental challenges and sustainable consumption and production.” Preceding UNEA, Resolutions and the Ministerial Declaration were discussed at the Open-ended Committee of Permanent Representatives (OECPR), formally convened from 4 to 8 March, with informal negotiations prolonged over the weekend and beyond on many of the draft resolutions and decisions, with a view to their gavelling at the UNEA Committee of the Whole and Plenary.

UNEA-4 registered a record number of participants and delegations (5 000 delegates from 179 countries, five Heads of State and Government, 157 Ministers and deputy Ministers, 426 invited guests and speakers), twice as much as UNEA-3 and five times those to UNEA-1. The EU and its Member States were very well represented with some 180 delegates overall. The Assembly included plenary sessions, leadership dialogues and a multi-stakeholder dialogue, and a number of side events took place concurrently, two of them organised by the EU (Sustainable finance and the Circular economy and Ministerial breakfast on Natural resource management).

Parallel to UNEA and convened by Presidents Macron (France) and Kenyatta (Kenya), the third One Planet Summit took place on 14 March with a prominent focus on Africa. Many African leaders attended the High-level Segment. Other events that took place in conjunction with UNEA-4 included: the 24th plenary meeting of the International Resource Panel (IRP); the Global Major Groups and Stakeholders Forum; the Science, Policy and Business Forum; the Sustainable Innovation Expo; and the Cities Summit.

From the point of view of the EU and its Member States, UNEA-4 can be considered a success. Overall, UNEA came out reinforced as the main and unchallenged global governing body for the environment. The leadership of the EU and its Member States, speaking with one voice throughout the negotiations, was widely acknowledged.

The Assembly adopted a Ministerial Declaration, 23 Resolutions and three Decisions, addressing shared and emerging global environmental issues, as well as UNEP's Programme of Work and budget for the 2020-21 biennium. The Assembly elected the Norwegian Minister for Climate and Environment Ola Elvestuen as its President for its fifth session, while two EU vice-presidents (France and Estonia) will sit at UNEA-5 Bureau. While the setting up of the OECPR meetings vs. UNEA will be subject to review, the dates of the OECPR-5 and UNEA-5 have been decided to take place on 15-19 February and 22-26 February 2021 respectively. UNEP will also prepare the commemoration of its 50th anniversary (Stockholm+50).

The multiple outcomes agreed, while incremental in nature, reflect an increasing environmental awareness by the world leaders of the ever-growing array of environmental challenges that need to be tackled at global scale.

The various outcomes addressed, among others, the following themes: innovative solutions for environmental challenges and sustainable consumption and production, environmental governance, resource efficiency, chemicals and waste, biodiversity and ecosystems and UNEP's programme of work and budget, and other administrative and budgetary issues. The Ministerial Declaration contains a strong recognition of the circular economy as a tool to arrive at sustainable consumption and production patterns and the commitment to significantly reduce single use plastics by 2030. The USA, who had expressed reservations on this point and threatened to reopen the text until the last minute, in the end did not oppose, but tabled a unilateral statement dissociating itself from any commitment in this regard. Other positive elements are the Resolutions on "Innovative Pathways to Sustainable Consumption and Production" which internationally recognises the main features of the EU policy, as well as the Chemicals and waste (EU) and Gender Resolutions (tabled by Costa Rica). Resolutions on marine litter (Norway, Sri Lanka, Japan) and Single use plastics (India) were adopted with clear messages. Of particular interest to the EU and its Member States for being its main contributors was the adoption of UNEP's Programme of Work and Budget for 2020-2021. In this context, the EU and its Member States expressed concerns about the gap between the agreed budget and actual contributions, and the lack of balance between core funds and earmarked funds. The EU welcomed the effort to promote transparency around donor contributions and to increase the range of contributors to UNEP. UNEA-4 also welcomed the Global Resource Outlook by the IRP, the Pollution implementation Plan, a mandate from UNEA-3, and the Sixth Global Environment Outlook (GEO-6 report).

The EU stressed its strong support to the latter, with a view to influence the upcoming High Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development and the Global Sustainable Development Report, due to be presented at the High-level meeting in September 2019. The GEO-6 concludes that in order to pursue the implementation process of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals, it is required to create tangible strategic changes in consumption and production systems, technological and institutional innovation and well-designed policies.

Only three proposed resolutions did not get enough support to be finally adopted by UNEA: a draft resolution on Geoengineering (Switzerland), a draft resolution on Blue economy (Kenya) and an EU-sponsored draft resolution on Deforestation from agriculture commodity supply chains. This was a disappointment, but despite EU's efforts and engagement, it proved impossible to convince some of the most concerned member states to address this burning global challenge at this Assembly.

The visibility and the level and number of participants of UNEA have substantially grown over time; hence, it is important that, in order to improve the effectiveness of its functioning and impact, the EU and its Member States play an active role in the review process of the governing bodies of UNEP and their meetings, as mandated by the UNEA-5 Decision.

The EU and its Member States remain committed to the multilateral cooperation and the 2030 Agenda and will continue engaging in future sessions of UNEA to make sure that the threats to our environment are fully addressed.