



Council of the
European Union

047536/EU XXVII.GP
Eingelangt am 20/01/21

EN

6577/20

(OR. en)

PRESSE 13
PR CO 13

OUTCOME OF THE COUNCIL MEETING

3754th Council meeting

Environment

Brussels, 5 March 2020

President

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¹ • 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

European Green Deal

The Environment Council had an exchange of views on the European Green Deal. The European Green Deal is a key instrument, addressing all sectors of the economy, for taking work forward on the EU's transition to climate neutrality by 2050. It was first presented to the Environment Council on 19 December 2019.

The discussion was also an opportunity for ministers to respond to the messages of Greta Thunberg, who had addressed ministers at the beginning of the meeting, and to react to the European Commission's presentation of the European Climate Law proposal.

Ministers had a long exchange of views on the various issues at stake. This discussion highlighted member states' positions on the priorities and initiatives proposed in the European Green Deal. Ministers addressed mainly the climate aspects of the European Green Deal in the context of the Climate Law proposal, the 2030 climate target and financing of the transition (Just Transition Mechanism and Fund), and their wishes for the Circular Economy Action Plan (to be presented mid-March).

[Recording of the debate](#)

Presidency note ([6122/20](#) + [6122/20 COR 1](#))

Commission communication on the European Green Deal ([15051/19](#) + [ADD 1](#))

[European Council conclusions of 12 December 2019](#)

[Strategic agenda adopted by the European Council on 20 June 2019](#)

Submission of the EU's long-term climate strategy to the UN

Environment ministers discussed the long-term low greenhouse gas emission strategy of the European Union and its member states and adopted the EU's submission to the UNFCCC in time for COP26, the 2020 UN Climate Change Conference (9-19 November 2020, Glasgow, UK).

The strategy enables the EU to fulfil one of its commitments under the Paris Agreement. Under Article 4, paragraph 19, of the Paris Agreement, "all Parties should strive to formulate and communicate long-term low greenhouse gas emission development strategies, mindful of Article 2 taking into account their common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, in the light of different national circumstances." The Conference of the Parties, in its decision 1/CP.21, paragraph 35, invited Parties to communicate, by 2020, to the secretariat mid-century, long-term low greenhouse gas emission development strategies in accordance with Article 4, paragraph 19, of the Paris Agreement.

The submission was adopted by consensus and will be sent to the UNFCCC as requested by the European Council. On 12 December 2019, in its conclusions on climate change, the European Council endorsed the objective of achieving a climate-neutral EU by 2050 and invited the Commission to prepare a proposal for the EU's long-term low greenhouse gas emission development strategy as early as possible in 2020 with a view to its adoption by the Council and its submission to the UNFCCC.

Submission to the UNFCCC on behalf of the European Union and its member states ([6612/20](#) + [6612/20 COR 1](#))

[Climate change: Council adopts EU long-term strategy for submission to the UNFCCC \(press release, 5 March 2020\)](#)

[European Council conclusions of 12 December 2019](#)

[Climate change: what the EU is doing](#)

[Taking the lead on climate change \(multimedia story\)](#)

[COP26 website](#)

Conclusions on air quality

The Council had a discussion on the improvement of air quality. It adopted conclusions which take stock of the progress made so far in improving air quality and provide political guidance for future work, including in the context of actions related to air quality announced in the Commission's communication on the European Green Deal.

The Council concluded that the EU's existing clean air policy had contributed significantly to improving air quality, but more needed to be done to reduce the negative impact of air pollution on health and the environment.

Conclusions on the improvement of air quality

[Air quality: Council adopts conclusions \(press release, 5 March 2020\)](#)

Recording of the debate

Fitness check of the ambient air quality directives ([14712/19](#) + [ADD 1](#))

Evaluation of water legislation

The Council had an exchange of views on the evaluation of EU water legislation. This was based on a fitness check, i.e. a comprehensive policy evaluation of four directives on integrated water management: the water framework directive, the environmental quality standards directive, the groundwater directive and the floods directive. It was also closely linked to the evaluation of the urban waste water treatment directive.

Ministers stressed that improvements could be made as regards the implementation of water legislation.

Recording of the debate

Presidency note [5977/20](#) + [5977/20 COR 1](#)

Commission documents ([15101/19](#) + [ADD 1](#), [15135/19](#) + [ADD 1](#) + [ADD 2](#))

Greening the European Semester

The Council had an exchange of views on greening the European Semester. The discussion focused on how the reinforced sustainability dimension of the European Semester can contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals while maintaining its focus on macroeconomic policies.

The presidency concluded that it would include the key messages from the debate in a summary report to the March **European Council**. This report would cover all European-Semester-related debates which had taken place in the various Council formations.

[European Semester](#)

[Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy 2020](#)

[European Council meeting \(26 and 27 March 2020\)](#)

[Report 'The European environment – state and outlook' by the European Environment Agency \(EEA\)](#)

Any other business

– *Fridays for future*

At the beginning of the Council meeting, climate activist Greta Thunberg addressed ministers, underlining the urgency of swift action, as the remaining global carbon budget to keep temperature rise within 1.5 °C would be exhausted within the next eight years.

During the subsequent exchange of views on the European Green Deal, many ministers praised Greta for her work and thanked the presidency for inviting her to the Council.

Recording

Information from the presidency and Greta Thunberg

– *European Climate Law*

The Commission presented its proposal for a European Climate Law to ministers.

Information from the Commission

– *Just Transition Mechanism*

The Commission presented its proposal for a Just Transition Mechanism, including a Just Transition Fund, to ministers.

Information from the Commission [5256/20](#) + [5256/20 ADD 1](#)

– *Communication on the Sustainable Europe Investment Plan and the European Green Deal Investment Plan*

The Commission presented this proposal to ministers.

Information from the Commission

– ***Implementation of full auctioning for the aviation sector under EU ETS***

The Polish delegation informed the Council about its reflections on ending free allowances for airlines (no danger of carbon leakage and more revenues for mitigating measures) and called for an in-depth analysis. Several ministers commented on the matter. The Commission welcomed the initiative as a timely one and recalled that a gradual reduction of free allowances for airlines was envisaged as part of the revision of the ETS directive, currently planned for June 2021.

[Information from the Polish delegation](#)

– ***High-Level Symposium on Water***

The Portuguese delegation informed ministers about the preparations for the High-Level Symposium on Water - Bridging SDG 6 and SDG 14 (Lisbon, 2 June 2020), which will take place in the margins of the 2020 UN Ocean Conference.

[Information from the Portuguese delegation](#)

– ***By-catch of common dolphins, harbour porpoises and other protected species***

The European Commission informed delegations about the by-catch of common dolphins, harbour porpoises and other protected species in fishing gear. It underlined the fact that accidental capture and entanglement in fishing gear kills at least 300 000 cetaceans every year in European and international waters. The Commission told ministers that it was considering what actions were needed and could be taken in order to drastically reduce these numbers.

[Information from the Commission](#)

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

ENVIRONMENT

Drinking water

The Council reached a political agreement on the drinking water directive ([6060/1/20 REV 1](#) + [6060/20 ADD 1 REV 1](#)). Political agreement means that the full set of texts resulting from the negotiations with the European Parliament have been endorsed at political level. They now undergo legal-linguistic revision before formal adoption by the Council at first reading. This is followed by final approval by the European Parliament at second reading.

[Press release on the approval of the provisional agreement \(5 February 2020\)](#)

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Misappropriation of Ukrainian state funds: Council extends asset freezes

The Council today decided to prolong until 6 March 2021 the existing asset freezes in relation to 10 individuals identified as being responsible for misappropriation of Ukrainian state funds or for abuse of office causing a loss to Ukrainian public funds. The restrictive measures against two individuals were not extended.

Council decision on restrictive measures against five individuals in Libya - UN transposition

The Council adopted decisions amending Implementing Decision (CFSP) 2015/1333 and Implementing Regulation (EU) 2016/44, updating the listing of five individuals subject to restrictive measures in Libya.

The Council decisions come as the EU transposes updated restrictive measures established by the United Nations Security Council Committee on 25 February 2020 in view of the situation in Libya.

JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS

EU-Iran dialogue on drugs

The Council approved the launch of a new EU-Iran dialogue on drugs.

One of the objectives of the EU Drugs Strategy 2013-2020 is to further strengthen dialogue and cooperation between the EU and third countries and international organisations on drug issues in a comprehensive and balanced manner.

Schengen evaluation - United Kingdom

The Council adopted an implementing decision setting out a recommendation on addressing the serious deficiencies identified in the 2017 evaluation of the United Kingdom on the application of the Schengen acquis in the field of the Schengen Information System ([6554/20](#)).

TRANSPORT

EU-Western Balkans Transport Community – position on secretariat appointments

With a view to establishing an EU position for a forthcoming meeting of the EU-Western Balkans Transport Community Treaty's Regional Steering Committee, the Council approved the candidates proposed by the Commission for senior management positions within the Permanent Secretariat of the Transport Community: Mr Matej Zakonjšek for the position of director, and Ms Ljuba Siljanoska for the position of deputy director ([6083/20](#)).

AGRICULTURE

Commission regulation correcting the Swedish-language version of regulation (EU) No 68/2013 on the catalogue of feed materials

The Council decided not to oppose the adoption of Commission regulation correcting the Swedish-language version of regulation (EU) No 68/2013 on the catalogue of feed materials.

The regulation corrects errors in entries 1.10.1, 3.7.1 to 3.7.5, 5.38.1, 6.8.1 and 7.1.5 of the table set out in part C of the annex to the Swedish-language version of Commission Regulation (EU) No 68/2013 as regards the names of the feed materials listed in those entries ([6072/20](#), [5611/20](#)).

FISHERIES

Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreement between the EU and the Republic of The Gambia

The Council adopted a decision on the conclusion of the Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreement between the European Union and the Republic of The Gambia and of the protocol on the implementation of that partnership agreement.

This decision will enter into force on the date of its adoption ([6166/20](#) + [ADD 1](#), 8974/20).
