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NOTE

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Permanent Representatives Committee/Council
Subject:	Global environmental policies - Exchange of views

1. To guide the exchange of views on the abovementioned topic at the meeting of the Council (Environment) on 27 March 2025, the Presidency has prepared the attached note and questions for Ministers.
2. The Permanent Representatives Committee is invited to take note of the Presidency note and questions and forward them to the Council for the exchange of views.

Global environmental policies

- Exchange of views -

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) is the leading global authority on the environment. Since its establishment in 1972, it has provided leadership, science and solutions to a wide palette of environmental issues and has catalysed the efforts and cooperation of all its 193 Member States for the sake of our planet. UNEP's mandate covers all elements of the natural environment, including climate, air, water and the oceans, soils, forests and biodiversity, chemicals and waste, as well as a broad spectrum of cross-cutting issues, including science, environmental law and governance, the green economy, resource efficiency, natural disasters and the contributions of women and youth to environmental protection. To improve the state of the global environment it works with national governments, civil society, the private sector and international organisations involved in environmental protection.

Despite all the efforts undertaken by a broad spectrum of actors engaged in environmental protection, pressure on the global environment is constantly rising. Unsustainable patterns of production and consumption mean that we are gradually crossing all planetary boundaries, turning a triple planetary crisis into a polycrisis, where water quality and availability, soil health and productivity, an excess concentration of chemicals and poor management of critical resources become new frontiers in a battle for a healthy planet for all.

Changing geopolitical landscapes, security concerns, disinformation and polarisation lead to a shift in priorities for governments and citizens, from long-term prosperity based on a clean environment to short-term crisis management. Disagreements on the causes and priorities of, and solutions to, environmental crises erode trust in our ability to solve them through multilateral dialogue. Implementation delays allow the crises to grow and their costs to increase, leading to a growing financial gap between needs and available resources.

The ongoing negotiations on a new international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment, clearly illustrate all the abovementioned concerns linked to multilateral solutions to complex global environmental problems. Although the decision to develop this instrument was taken in 2022 and the work was expected to be concluded by the end of 2024, over five meetings of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC), the parties were unable to find a compromise solution to an obvious global problem that urgently needs to be addressed. The main points of disagreement concern the stage in the lifecycle of plastics at which we need to act, and how to finance both future activities and the legacy of plastic pollution in the environment. To tackle those problems effectively, we need to act as early as possible in the value chain of plastics, before they become waste that pollutes the environment.

2025 is an important year for UNEP, with the upcoming United Nations Environmental Assembly meeting in December 2025 in Nairobi, at which UNEP's mid-term strategy and programme of work for 2026-2029 are expected to be adopted. Negotiations on the new international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment, will resume with the 5th session of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee in Geneva in August 2025. The broad participation and deep engagement of the EU and its Member States at both ministerial and expert levels are of utmost importance for a successful conclusion of both meetings. Ministerial participation is indispensable to break the deadlocks on the politically sensitive issues of primary plastic production, chemicals of concern and financing. We need to take full advantage of our expertise and political ties to steer those meetings and effectively tackle the evolving multidimensional environmental crisis.

Questions to ministers:

1. How can the European Union and its Member States support effective environmental cooperation aimed at implementing multilateral environmental agreements and contributing to sustainable development for current and future generations?
 2. How can the European Union and its Member States, as well as other high ambition states, contribute to a successful outcome of the negotiations on a new international legally binding instrument on plastic pollution, including in the marine environment, in the run-up to the INC-5.2 in August 2025 in Geneva?
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