



Brussels, 12 December 2012

## **BACKGROUND<sup>1</sup>**

### ***ENVIRONMENT COUNCIL***

**Brussels, 17 December 2012**

*The Council will start at 10.00 and will be chaired by Cyprus' Minister for Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment, Sofoclis ALETRARIS.*

*The Council will hold a policy debate concerning the proposal for a decision on a general **Union Environment Action Programme (EAP) to 2020 "Living well, within the limits of our planet"**.*

*The Council is also due to adopt conclusions on "**A Blueprint to Safeguard Europe's Water Resources**".*

*Lastly, ministers will hold an exchange of views on "**greening the European Semester**", in the framework of the 2013 Annual Growth Survey.*

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**Press conference:** *At the end of the meeting.*

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<sup>1</sup> This note has been drawn up under the responsibility of the Press office.

## 7th Environment Action Programme

The Council will hold a policy debate on the proposal for a decision on a general Union Environment Action Programme to 2020 "Living well, within the limits of our planet" ([16498/12](#)), recently presented by the Commission as the successor to the 6th Environment Action Programme (EAP) which expired in July 2012. In order to structure the debate, ministers will be invited to focus on two specific questions prepared by the Presidency ([16953/12](#)).

The Council had on several occasions since 2009 called for a 7th Environment Action Programme, but the Commission considered for quite a long time that there was no real need for a dedicated programme in this area, arguing that environmental concerns were already covered by the Europe 2020 Strategy and its flagship initiatives. However, the 6th EAP final assessment ([13683/11](#)) showed that in spite of a number of shortcomings, the overall balance of the programme was quite positive. In the follow-up, in June 2012 the Council adopted a set of conclusions ([11186/12](#)) outlining the programme's framework.

The general aim of the current proposal is to step up the contribution of environment policy to the transition towards a resource-efficient, low-carbon economy in which natural capital is protected and enhanced, and the health and well-being of citizens is safeguarded.

The programme provides a framework for environment policy until 2020, setting nine specific priority objectives for the EU and its member states to attain, recalling that many of these priorities are existing targets under EU environment policy<sup>2</sup>. Better implementation of current environmental legislation is therefore a cross-cutting objective.<sup>3</sup> The programme applies the polluter-pays principle, the precautionary principle, preventive action and the principle of rectification of pollution at source.

As part of the follow-up to the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20 Summit)<sup>4</sup>, the new general action programme should also support international and regional processes aiming to transform the global economy into an inclusive green economy, in the context of sustainable development and poverty reduction.

The new EAP could be an important instrument for addressing the multiple crises facing the EU (not only the environmental crisis, but also the economic and employment crises, etc.).

Negotiations with the European Parliament are expected to start early next year and the incoming Irish Presidency wishes to achieve a first-reading agreement on the proposal during the next six months.

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<sup>2</sup> - "Roadmap to a Resource-Efficient Europe" ([14632/11](#));  
- "Roadmap for moving to a low-carbon economy in 2050" (OJ C 140 of 11.5.2011);  
- EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2020 (OJ C 264 of 8.9.2011).

<sup>3</sup> See also: Council conclusions on improving environmental policy instruments ([5302/11](#)).

<sup>4</sup> See also: Council conclusions on Rio+20: towards achieving sustainable development by greening the economy and improving governance ([15388/11](#)).

## Greening the European Semester

Ministers will hold an exchange of views on the "European Semester" proceedings based on the Commission communication on the Annual Growth Survey 2013 ([16669/12](#)) with a view to preparing the Environment Council contribution to the Spring European Council in March 2013.

In this third "European Semester" of coordination and monitoring of economic policies and structural reforms, the Commission identifies five economic and social priorities where national and EU efforts should be concentrated and two of those priorities touch upon environmental issues:

- pursuing differentiated, growth-friendly fiscal consolidation: the Commission recommends that the tax burden on labour should be substantially reduced in favour, inter alia, of consumption taxes and environmental taxes. Tax exemptions should be reduced or eliminated and environmentally harmful subsidies should be phased out;
- promoting growth and competitiveness for today and tomorrow: in particular, the Commission advocates more ambitious energy efficiency renovation programmes, including but not limited to the requirements of the EU energy efficiency directive, which can bring important savings and job creation in addition to environmental benefits. Improved waste management, water management and recycling also have strong potential to create new jobs, while helping to secure the supply of scarce resources and materials.

In its conclusions, the Commission stresses that structural reforms at national and EU level must strengthen the EU's ability to compete globally, generating growth at home through activities which are sustainable and which equip the EU with the policies and instruments needed to secure a prosperous, inclusive and resource-efficient future.

## Safeguarding Europe's water resources

In response to the recent Commission communication on the subject ([16425/12](#)),<sup>5</sup> the Council is also due to adopt conclusions on "A blueprint to safeguard Europe's water resources" setting out key actions to improve governance by those involved in managing water resources, namely: improving land use, addressing water pollution, increasing water efficiency and resilience.

The conclusions underline the need for better implementation of the current water legislation and increased integration of water policy objectives into other policy areas, such as the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) and the Cohesion Policy. The conclusions also call on the EU and its member states to ensure the sustainability of all activities that impact water, thereby contributing to securing the availability of good-quality water, which will also have positive effects on halting the loss of biodiversity and the degradation of ecosystems.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See also *Commission Communication on the European Innovation Partnership on Water* ([10032/12](#))

<sup>6</sup> See also: *Council conclusions on the protection of water resources and integrated sustainable water management in the European Union and beyond* ([10924/11](#)).

Freshwater constitutes only about 2% of the water on the planet and increasing demands may lead to an estimated 40% global water supply shortage by 2030. The main causes of negative impacts on water status are interlinked: they include climate change, land use, economic activities, such as energy production, industry, agriculture and tourism, as well as urban development and demographic change.

In 2000, the EU Water Framework Directive <sup>7</sup> for the first time comprehensively addressed all the challenges faced by EU waters, making it clear that water management is much more than just water distribution and treatment. It involves land use and management that affect both water quality and quantity. It requires coordination with spatial planning by the member states and incorporation into funding priorities <sup>8</sup>. The Framework Directive established the objective of achieving good status for all EU waters by 2015, but reports indicate that only 53% of them will reach this objective.

### **Any other business**

- Environmental quality standards in the field of water policy (priority substances)
  - Information from the Presidency
- Assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment
  - Information from the Presidency ([17042/12](#))
- Mechanism for monitoring and reporting greenhouse gas emissions
  - Information from the Presidency
- (poss.) Greenhouse gas emissions and removals resulting from activities related to land use, land use change and forestry
  - Information from the Presidency
- Outcome of the Doha Conference on Climate Change (COP18) (Qatar, 26 November - 7 December 2012)
  - Information from the Presidency and the Commission
- (poss.) Reducing CO2 emissions from
  - new light commercial vehicles
  - new passenger cars
  - Information from the Presidency (public deliberation)

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<sup>7</sup> Directive 2000/60/EC (OJ L327, 22.12.2000).

<sup>8</sup> See also Commission Communication on the European Innovation Partnership on Water (10032/12)

- EU ETS
    - Aviation
    - Carbon market report
    - Information from the Commission
  
  - Volumes of greenhouse gas emission allowance to be auctioned in 2013-2020 (Backloading)
    - Information from the Polish delegation
  
  - Work programme of the incoming Presidency
    - Information from the Irish delegation
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