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THE EUROPEAN UNION**



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## **PRESS RELEASE**

3297th Council meeting

### **Environment**

Brussels, 3 March 2014

President

**Ioannis Maniatis**

Minister for the Environment, Energy and Climate Change

# **P R E S S**

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Rue de la Loi 175 B – 1048 BRUSSELS Tel.: +32 (0)2 281 9776 / 6319 Fax: +32 (0)2 281 8026  
[press.office@consilium.europa.eu](mailto:press.office@consilium.europa.eu) <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/press>

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## **Main results of the Council**

*The Council held a public policy debate on a Commission communication for a **2030 framework for climate and energy policy**. Ministers agreed that the debate on the Commission's proposal for a 2030 framework was necessary as investors, businesses and citizens want clarity and predictability with regard to future climate and energy policies. In addition, ministers underlined the need to prepare for the international negotiations on a new, global agreement on climate change.*

*Furthermore, the Council held a public exchange of views on the draft regulation amending directive 2001/18/EC as regards the possibility for member states to restrict or prohibit the cultivation, in all or part of their territory, of **genetically modified organisms (GMOs)** that have been authorised at EU level. The exchange of views confirmed the member states' willingness to re-open discussions on this legislative proposal on the basis of the presidency compromise text.*

*Finally, ministers held a debate on the **Annual Growth Survey 2014**, which forms part of all relevant Council deliberations in preparation for the Spring European Council on 20 and 21 March. Ministers focused the debate on how to improve the uptake of green economy priorities in national reform programmes and in the overall semester cycle.*

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- 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.

## **PARTICIPANTS**

### **Belgium:**

Mr Joke SCHAUVLIEGE

Flemish Minister for the Environment, Nature and Culture

### **Bulgaria:**

Mr Atanas KOSTADINOV

Deputy Minister for the Environment and Water

### **Czech Republic:**

Mr Richard BRABEC

Minister for the Environment

### **Denmark:**

Ms Kirsten BROSBØL

Minister for the Environment

Mr Rasmus HELVEG PETERSEN

Minister for Climate, Energy and Building

### **Germany:**

Ms Barbara HENDRICKS

Federal Minister for Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety

### **Estonia:**

Mr Clyde KULL

Deputy Permanent Representative

### **Ireland:**

Mr Phil HOGAN

Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government

### **Greece:**

Mr Ioannis MANIATIS

Minister for the Environment, Energy and Climate Change

### **Spain:**

Mr Miguel ARIAS CAÑETE

Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Environment

### **France:**

Mr Philippe MARTIN

Minister for Ecology, Sustainable Development and Energy

### **Croatia**

Mr Mihael ZMAJLOVIĆ

Minister for the Protection of the Environment and Nature

### **Italy:**

Mr Gianluca GALLETTI

State Secretary for Education, Universities and Research

### **Cyprus:**

Mr Nicos KOUYIALIS

Minister for Agriculture, Natural Resources and Environment

### **Latvia:**

Mr Einārs CILINSKIS

Minister of Environmental Protection and Regional Development

### **Lithuania:**

Mr Valentinas MAZURONIS

Minister for the Environment

### **Luxembourg:**

Ms Carole DIESCHBOURG

Minister for the Environment

### **Hungary:**

Mr Endre KARDEVÁN

State Secretary for Food Chain Supervision and Agricultural Administration, Ministry of Rural Development

Mr Pál KOVÁCS

State Secretary for Climate Change and Energy, Ministry of National Development

### **Malta:**

Mr Leo BRINCAT

Minister for Sustainable Development, the Environment and Climate Change

### **Netherlands:**

Ms Wilma MANSVELD

Minister for Infrastructure and the Environment

### **Austria:**

Mr Andrä RUPPRECHTER

Federal Minister for Agriculture, Forestry, the Environment and Water Management

**Poland:**

Mr Maciej GRABOWSKI  
Mr Marcin Korolec

Minister for the Environment  
State Secretary, Ministry of the Environment

**Portugal:**

Mr Jorge MOREIRA DA SILVA

Minister for the Environment, Spatial Planning and Energy

**Romania:**

Mr Mihail FĂCĂ

State Secretary, Ministry of the Environment and Climate Change

**Slovenia:**

Ms Andreja JERINA

State Secretary for the Environment, Ministry of Agriculture and the Environment

**Slovakia:**

Mr Peter ŽIGA

Minister for the Environment

**Finland:**

Mr Ville NIINISTÖ

Minister for the Environment

**Sweden:**

Ms Lena EK

Ministry for the Environment

**United Kingdom:**

Mr Edward DAVEY  
Mr Owen PATERSON

Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change  
Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Mr Paul WHEELHOUSE

Minister for Environment and Climate Change (Scottish Government)

Mr Alun DAVIES

Minister for Natural Resources and Food (Welsh Government)

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**Commission:**

Ms Connie HEDEGAARD  
Mr Janez POTOČNIK  
Mr Tonio BORG

Member  
Member  
Member

## **ITEMS DEBATED**

### **2030 framework for climate and energy**

The Council held a public policy debate on a Commission communication for a 2030 framework for climate and energy policy.

Ministers agreed that the debate on the Commission's proposal for a 2030 framework was necessary as investors, businesses and citizens want clarity and predictability with regard to future climate and energy policies. In addition, ministers underlined the need to prepare for the international negotiations on a new, global agreement on climate change.

Member states agreed with the aim of the future framework, namely to achieve a balance between three key components: environmental sustainability, competitiveness and security of energy supply. This requires an integrated approach and consistency between policies, and also relates to the need to keep energy prices down and guarantee the EU's competitiveness.

Regarding the overall approach of the proposed framework, there seems to be a shared view that greenhouse gas reduction is the centrepiece of the framework. Many delegations welcomed the approach of giving member states more flexibility to decide on the most cost-effective measures to achieve the overall target. However, questions remain as to how this flexibility would work in practice, in particular in the context of renewables and the new governance framework.

Ministers expressed divergent views on the level of ambition, the number and nature of targets, and the timing of decisions on future targets. Some delegations would prefer stronger or a larger number of targets while others consider that the proposed level of ambition is already very high; where some would like to see swift agreement on the overall framework, others consider that more time is needed to reflect on its elements, not least in the light of international developments.

The emissions trading scheme was generally seen as a key instrument in reducing emissions; however, further discussions on its future operation as well as on the contribution of sectors outside the emissions trading scheme will be necessary.

Many delegations underlined the importance of effort sharing in upcoming discussions and of taking into account the different circumstances of each member state.

The presidency will report on the outcome of the ministerial discussion to the President of the European Council with a view to the European Council meeting of 20-21 March 2014.

The Commission communication ([5644/1/14 REV 1](#)), presented on 22 January, suggests a framework for future EU energy and climate policies and is intended to launch a process to reach a shared understanding of how to take these policies forward in the future.

The main elements of the proposed framework include:

- a greenhouse gas emissions reduction target of 40% below 1990 levels, to be achieved only through domestic measures (without the use of international credits);
- a renewable energy target of at least 27% of energy consumption, with flexibility for member states to set national objectives;
- energy efficiency as a key component of the 2030 framework: a review of the energy efficiency directive will be concluded later in 2014.

The Commission also outlines a new governance system based on national plans for competitive, secure and sustainable energy to be drawn up by member states. In addition, it proposes a set of indicators intended to assess progress over time and to provide a factual basis for a potential policy response.

## **Cultivation of genetically modified organisms**

The Council held a public exchange of views on the draft regulation amending directive 2001/18/EC as regards the possibility for member states to restrict or prohibit the cultivation, in all or part of their territory, of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) that have been authorised at EU level.

The exchange of views confirmed the member states' willingness to re-open discussions on this legislative proposal on the basis of the presidency compromise text. The Hellenic presidency will convene a first working party meeting to examine the proposal on 13 March 2014. The presidency aims to reach a political agreement and prepare the adoption of this important legislation by the end of 2014.

The Commission presented the GMO cultivation proposal in July 2010 ([12371/10](#) + [ADD1](#)) with the aim of providing for a legal basis to allow member states to restrict or prohibit the cultivation of GMOs in their territory on grounds other than health and environmental considerations, which had already been addressed during the EU authorisation process for GMOs. The proposal has already been examined during several presidencies. The Environment Council of 9 March 2012 was not able to reach a political agreement as a blocking minority of delegations still had concerns regarding some issues (*see press release [7478/12](#), page 11*).

## **Greening the European Semester**

Ministers held an exchange of views on the Annual Growth Survey 2014, which forms part of all relevant Council deliberations on the European Semester in preparation for the Spring European Council on 20 and 21 March.

The March European Council will assess overall progress made in implementing the 2013 country-specific recommendations and provide guidance to member states on their 2014 Stability and Convergence Programmes and National Reform Programmes for the implementation of the priorities set out in the Commission's Annual Growth Survey.

Ministers focused the debate on how to improve the uptake of green economy priorities in national reform programmes and in the overall semester cycle ([6349/14](#)).

Ministers agreed that the Environment ministers have a role to play in the preparation of the national reform programmes to ensure that the growth and job creation potential deriving from low carbon and resource efficient actions is fully taken into account. The setting of national strategies and targets is a helpful tool in this context.

Ministers also underlined that at European level, the potential of sustainable growth and the green economy should be addressed more specifically and clearly in the Annual Growth Survey to strengthen their role among policies enhancing job creation and fostering innovation.

The Annual Growth Survey 2014 ([15803/13](#)) was presented in November 2013. It takes stock of the economic and social situation in Europe and sets out broad policy priorities for the EU as a whole for the coming year. The Annual Growth Survey launches a new European Semester of economic policy coordination, ensuring that the EU and its member states coordinate their economic policies and their efforts to promote growth and jobs. In this fourth European Semester of economic policy coordination, the Commission identifies five economic and social priorities:

- pursuing differentiated, growth-friendly fiscal consolidation;
- restoring normal lending to the economy;
- promoting growth and competitiveness;
- tackling unemployment and the social consequences of the crisis; and
- modernising public administrations.

## **Other business**

### ***– State of play of the Kyoto Protocol's second commitment period ratification***

The Commission briefed the Council on the state of play of the Kyoto Protocol's second commitment period ratification ([7019/14](#)). Ratification of the Doha Agreement by the EU and its member states is necessary to help to ensure its formal entry into force as an international agreement. In November 2013, the Commission made proposals for a legislative package to allow this ratification and its technical implementation. According to the Commission, a timely ratification in early 2015 would enhance the credibility of the EU and its member states in the UN climate negotiations.

### ***– A clean air programme for Europe***

The Commission briefed the Council on its package presented in December 2013. The package includes an update of existing legislation and imposes further limits on harmful emissions from industry, traffic, energy plants and agriculture, with a view to reducing their impact on human health and the environment.

The package consists of the following documents: a communication entitled "A new clean air programme for Europe", outlining measures to ensure that existing targets are met in the short term, and new air quality objectives for the period up to 2030 ([18155/13](#)); a revised national emission ceilings directive with stricter national emission ceilings for the six main pollutants ([18167/13](#)); a draft directive to reduce pollution from medium-sized combustion installations ([18170/13](#)); and a proposal for a Council decision on the acceptance of the Amendment to the 1999 Protocol to the 1979 Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution to Abate Acidification, Eutrophication and Ground-level Ozone ([18165/13](#)).

The presidency intends to hold a policy debate on these proposals at the Environment Council in June.

For more information see the Commission [website](#).

– ***The EU approach against wildlife trafficking***

The Commission briefed the Council on its communication on the EU approach against wildlife trafficking presented on 7 February 2014 ([6351/14](#)).

The communication highlights the urgency of addressing the global problem of wildlife trafficking in a more effective and comprehensive manner. It assesses existing EU measures to support the fight against wildlife trafficking both globally and within the EU. The Commission has also launched a stakeholder consultation on the future EU approach to wildlife trafficking.

For more information see the Commission [website](#).

– ***Exploration and production of hydrocarbons using high-volume hydraulic fracturing***

The Commission briefed the Council on its recommendation, accompanied by a communication on the exploration and production of hydrocarbons (such as shale gas) using high-volume hydraulic fracturing in the EU. Both documents are part of the Commission initiative on a 2030 framework for climate and energy policy ([5700/14](#), [5706/14](#)).

The communication outlines the potential new opportunities and challenges stemming from shale gas extraction in Europe. The recommendation lays down minimum principles for the exploration and production of hydrocarbons by means of high-volume hydraulic fracturing. Its objective is to enable the safe and secure development of these resources, and to foster a level playing field for the industry in all EU member states that choose to develop them.

The Commission will assess the situation in 18 months.

– ***Best available techniques reference document for large combustion plants***

The Czech delegation supported by other delegations, raised some concerns on certain aspects of the current Commission review of the best available techniques reference document for large combustion plants. This review is based on the requirements of directive 2010/75/EU on industrial emissions and may have an impact on EU policies on the economy, energy security and the environment ([6531/14](#)).

**OTHER ITEMS APPROVED**

**APPOINTMENTS**

**Court of Auditors**

On 27 February, the Council, by written procedure, appointed Mr Oskar HERICS (Austria) as member of the Court of Auditors for the period from 1 March 2014 to 29 February 2020 ([6242/14](#)).

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