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Environment

Luxembourg, 4 October 2019

President

Krista Mikkonen

Minister for the Environment and Climate Change of
Finland

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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

CONCLUSIONS ON CLIMATE CHANGE FOR COP 25

The Council adopted conclusions on EU preparations for COP 25, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) meetings in Santiago de Chile (2-13 December 2019).

Ministers agreed that the EU's priorities for the upcoming negotiations in Santiago include:

- completing the implementation guidelines for the voluntary cooperation mechanism of the Paris Agreement (Article 6);
- completing the second review of the Warsaw International Mechanism for loss and damage;
- completing the review of the Lima work programme on gender;
- advancing technical work on the arrangements under the Enhanced Transparency Framework.

The conclusions outline the EU's position on these objectives, and deliver a strong political message on the urgent need for enhanced global action, the EU's firm commitment to the multilateral process and its level of ambition.

[Council conclusions](#)

[Press release](#)

CLIMATE CHANGE - LONG-TERM STRATEGY

The Council held a policy debate on the strategic long-term vision for a climate-neutral economy, based on the Commission Communication published on 28 November 2018.

In line with the European Council's conclusions of 20 June 2019, the Environment Council focused on advancing work on the conditions, incentives and enabling framework to be put in place so as to ensure a transition to a climate-neutral EU in line with the Paris Agreement. The policy debate also provided an occasion to take stock of the discussions held at ministerial and technical levels at the Council since the end of 2018.

Ministers responded to the following questions posed by Finland's Presidency:

- What are the main conditions, incentives and enabling framework that need to be prepared at EU level and be operational in the short, medium and long term in order to achieve climate neutrality in the EU?
- What EU-level measures and actions, including sectoral ones, should be enhanced to decisively and swiftly contribute to climate neutrality in the EU by 2050?

Most ministers supported the goal of turning the EU into a climate-neutral economy by 2050 and hoped that the European Council would reach agreement on this before the end of the year. Ministers agreed that the transformation towards climate neutrality requires a horizontal, holistic approach and coherence between all relevant policies. They also agreed on the need for a range of EU financing instruments for climate-friendly solutions and stressed the importance of public funding to leverage private investment. Some ministers called for additional financial instruments at EU level while others considered that a variety of instruments already exist and stressed the need to make the best possible use of them. Some called for 'climate-proofing' the EU budget to better target financing to sustainable projects.

Several ministers stressed the need to take into account Member States' specificities and different circumstances.

Ministers also agreed that the transition must take place in an inclusive, just and socially balanced manner. In this context, ministers stressed the importance of education and training to help people find jobs in the green economy. Avoiding the risk of increased energy poverty and supporting the most vulnerable parts of the population were seen as key to public acceptance of the transition. Some ministers referred to the 'just transition fund' under the new 'Green Deal' announced by the European Commission's President-elect.

Several ministers highlighted the need to maintain the competitiveness of European industry and to protect European industry from carbon leakage.

The circular economy, the bioeconomy, digitalisation and research & development were mentioned by several ministers as important in helping to accelerate the transition.

Several ministers underlined the need to protect natural carbon sinks and drew attention to the role that sustainable agriculture and forest management can play in reducing emissions.

The Presidency concluded that the Finnish Prime Minister would inform the European Council on the progress made on the long-term strategy, as part of his report on the implementation of the strategic agenda.

[Presidency note](#)

[European Council conclusions of 20 June 2019](#)

[European Council conclusions of 22 March 2018](#)

[Communication from the Commission: A Clean Planet for all. A European strategic long-term vision for a prosperous, modern, competitive and climate-neutral economy](#)

[In-depth analysis accompanying the Communication from the Commission](#)

[Questions and Answers: Long-term strategy for a Clean Planet for All](#)

CONCLUSIONS ON AN 8TH ENVIRONMENT ACTION PROGRAMME

The Council adopted conclusions which provide political guidance for the EU's environment and climate change policies for the period 2021-2030. The Council called upon the Commission to present at the latest by early 2020 an ambitious and focused proposal for an 8th Environment Action Programme (EAP).

The Council stressed in its conclusions that climate change, pollution, the loss of biodiversity and the accelerating demands on natural resources are jeopardising current and future generations' well-being and prospects. It underlined the need for additional action to protect and restore biodiversity, and for ambitious biodiversity targets in the 8th EAP.

It also urged the Commission to present without further delay a Union strategy for a non-toxic environment that will fully address endocrine disruptors, combination effects of chemicals and nanomaterial issues.

The Commission was also invited to come up with a new circular economy action plan and a long-term strategic framework, including a common vision, for a circular economy.

Luxembourg, supported by Germany and Austria, made a statement to the minutes on the term 'green transition' versus 'safe and sustainable transition' because of concerns about the safety of nuclear energy. They declared that they understood the term 'green transition' to mean a transition to a climate-neutral, resource-efficient, safe and sustainable economy.

[Council conclusions](#)

Statement

[Press release](#)

[7th Environment Action Programme](#)

CONCLUSIONS ON MORE CIRCULARITY - TRANSITION TO A SUSTAINABLE SOCIETY

The Council held a discussion on the circular economy and adopted comprehensive conclusions.

Environment ministers expressed their satisfaction with recently adopted EU legislation which helps tackle marine litter from plastics, improves chemicals management and increases the recycling of materials. Several ministers highlighted that the circular economy plays an important part in driving the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, respect for planetary boundaries as well as the achievement of the UN sustainable development goals.

The Council stressed in its conclusions that further ambitious efforts are needed to stimulate a systemic transition to a sustainable society. It invited the Commission to come up with an ambitious long-term strategic framework, including a common vision for a circular economy, and to adopt a new circular economy action plan with targeted actions.

The Council called for action to promote circularity systemically across the value chain, including from the consumer perspective, in key sectors including textiles, transport and food, as well as construction and demolition. The Council also stressed the need for more measures on batteries and plastics.

In its conclusions, the Council highlighted that eco-design principles have helped to make an increasing number of energy-related products more energy efficient, and tasked the Commission with assessing whether eco-design principles could be applied to new product groups (for example information and communications technology products) and, if appropriate, to put forward a legislative proposal. The Council asked the Commission to broaden the scope of eco-design measures by including criteria on material efficiency such as durability, reparability, recyclability and recycled content.

The conclusions encouraged the use of economic instruments such as environmental taxation, green tax reforms and extended producer responsibility schemes, to promote the circular economy, more sustainable production and consumption patterns, and improved waste management. The Council highlighted that the procurement of products and services can boost circular markets and investments in clean, safe, non-toxic and sustainable cycles.

[Council conclusions](#)

[Press release](#)

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Regulation on type approval of motor vehicles with respect to emissions from light passenger and commercial vehicles (Euro 5 and Euro 6)

The Presidency presented the state of play regarding this current legislative proposal, the so-called Real Driving Emissions Regulation. It sets out conformity factors used to assess the compliance of light passenger and commercial vehicles with NOx emission limits, while performing a real driving emissions test. The Presidency brought this proposal to the attention of ministers to stress its intention to work towards a swift adoption of the proposal. A rapid adoption is important in order to ensure clarity of the standards governing emissions that have an impact on air quality. Manufacturers need to have clarity about the applicable rules as soon as possible.

Information from the Presidency ([12509/19](#), [10347/19](#) + [ADD 1](#))

Transition to a fleet of zero-emission passenger cars – a necessity for a climate-neutral EU by 2050 at the latest

The Danish delegation, supported by the Luxembourg delegation, informed ministers on this topic, arguing that Europe needs to consider phasing out petrol and diesel cars in order to help the EU to reach climate neutrality by 2050 at the latest. It stressed the need to identify suitable incentives, address possible barriers and ensure alignment of single market rules to support the transition to a fleet of zero-emission vehicles. The Danish delegation suggested that possible measures at national and EU level be examined in order to improve the conditions for phasing out petrol and diesel cars, for example stricter CO₂ standards, environmental zones, tax incentives, road pricing and supporting infrastructure. Seventeen delegations contributed to this discussion.

[Information from the Danish delegation, supported by the Luxembourg delegation](#)

Regulation on a taxonomy for sustainable finance

The German, Luxembourg and Austrian delegations provided information on this current legislative proposal. The aim of this regulation is to create an EU-wide classification system, or ‘taxonomy’, which will provide businesses and investors with a common language to define the economic activities that can be considered environmentally sustainable.

Germany, Luxembourg and Austria expressed their concern that the current Council position leaves the door open to investments in nuclear energy being considered as sustainable.

[Information from the German, Luxembourg and Austrian delegations](#)

[Commission proposal 9355/18](#)

[Sustainable finance: Council agrees position on a unified EU classification system \(press release, 25/09/2019\)](#)

Communication on stepping up EU action to protect and restore the world’s forests

The Commission presented its Communication of 23 July 2019 to ministers. Its objective is to propose ways to step up EU action to protect the world’s forests, in particular primary forests, and regenerate forests in a sustainable and responsible way. The world’s forests are in serious danger from deforestation and forest degradation. The disappearance and degradation of forests has received global attention, most recently due to the rainforest fires in the Amazon. The EU is already working with other countries worldwide to help protect forests and will continue to do so. Finland’s Presidency stressed that it aims to adopt Council conclusions by the Agriculture and Fisheries Council before the end of 2019. To keep the Environment Council informed about the initiative, which covers several policy areas, the Presidency had invited the Commission to present this Communication at the Environment Council.

Information from the Commission [11449/1/19 REV 1](#) + [REV1 ADD 2](#) + [REV 1 ADD 3](#)

Report on COP 18 to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) (Geneva, 17-28 August 2019)

The Presidency and the Commission informed ministers on the successful outcome of this recent meeting. The agenda of the meeting included 57 proposals to bring animal and plant species under the scope of the Convention or to change the level of protection of species already listed. There was a large number of proposals to reinforce monitoring, implementation and enforcement of obligations under the Convention, including initiatives to tackle increased illegal wildlife trade on digital platforms. The COP 18 adopted the CITES strategic vision post-2020 which promotes transformative change in wildlife conservation and management.

[Information from the Presidency and the Commission](#)**High-level dialogue meeting of the China-Europe Water Platform (Guimarães, 7-8 November 2019)**

The Portuguese delegation informed ministers on the preparations for this meeting. China and Europe continue to be committed to enhancing cooperation and dialogue, undertaking joint efforts to achieve the water goals within the 2030 Agenda. Recognised as an important cooperation and partnership initiative, the China-Europe Water Platform aims to promote policy dialogue, collaborative research and business cooperation in the field of water. The theme of the 7th high-level conference will be ‘Water and Innovation’, including sub-topics such as the ecological security of rivers and drought management in an era of climate change.

[Information from the Portuguese delegation](#)

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

ENVIRONMENT

Signature of the Rome Declaration on the contribution of the Montreal Protocol to a sustainable cold chain to reduce food losses

The Council authorised the Commission to sign on behalf of the European Union the Rome Declaration on the contribution of the Montreal Protocol to a sustainable cold chain to reduce food losses. The declaration will be adopted by ministers and heads of delegations of the parties to the Montreal Protocol at the 31st meeting of the parties (MOP 31) on 4-8 November 2019 in Rome.

The aim of the Rome Declaration on the contribution of the Montreal Protocol is to reduce food loss by reaffirming the cooperation among contracting parties in the implementation of the Montreal Protocol and by stressing the importance of pursuing national action and international cooperation to promote the development of environmentally friendly refrigerating technologies aimed at food preservation. ([12432/19](#))

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

EU action in support of the UN Verification and Inspection Mechanism in Yemen

The Council renewed the EU's support to the UN Verification and Inspection Mechanism (UNVIM) in Yemen with a contribution of around EUR 4.46 million for one year. The specific objectives of this support are to increase the flow of commercial cargo to Yemen and to enhance UNVIM's ability to deploy in the ports of Hodeidah, Saleef and Ras Issa as set out in the Stockholm Agreement and the relevant UN Security Council resolutions.

[UNVIM in Yemen \(UN website\)](#)

EU terrorist list (Hamas)

The Council decided to appeal against the judgment of the EU General Court in Case T-308/18, Hamas v. Council.

[EU terrorist list](#)

[Judgment of the General Court \(First Chamber\) of 4 September 2019, Hamas v Council of the EU](#)

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS

Appointment of the Vice-Chair of the ECB supervisory board

The Council adopted an implementing decision on the appointment of Yves Mersch as Vice-Chair of the supervisory board of the European Central Bank until 14 December 2020.

Yves Mersch will replace Sabine Lautenschläger who had held the position since February 2014 for an entire term of five years ([12029/19](#)).

TRANSPORT

International rail carriage

The Council adopted a decision on the EU position to be taken in the written procedure to be launched by the Committee of Technical Experts of the Intergovernmental Organisation for International Carriage by Rail (OTIF) for the adoption of modifications to certain technical provisions ([12283/19](#); [11365/19](#)).

TRANSPARENCY

Public access to documents

On 4 October 2019, the Council approved the reply to confirmatory application No 19/c/04/19 (12440/19).