

REGIONAL AFFAIRS

EU

Decisions of Environment Council

At their meeting on 12 October 1999 in Luxembourg, the Council debated, among other topics, the following items:

Accidental Marine Pollution

The Council reached a unanimous political agreement on a Decision setting up a Community framework for co-operation in the field of accidental marine pollution for the period 1 January 2000 to 31 December 2006. The common position will be formally agreed after legal-linguistic revision of the text.

The framework is intended to support and supplement existing instruments for the protection of the marine environment, human health and coastlines, and strengthen the conditions for efficient mutual assistance between Member States in this field. Pollution at sea to be targeted includes accidental or deliberate causes, be it from ships, offshore platforms or land based sources as long as not otherwise regulated by other Community instruments.

The framework will bring about increased simplification and coherence between the actions already undertaken since 1978, encompassing in one single act a Community Information System and an Action Programme. This legal basis allows to increase co-operation among Member States, setting out criteria and financing arrangements for the actions to be funded, for which a yearly amount of Euro 1 million is foreseen. The Community Information System will make use of the Internet where a Community Home Page and National Home Pages will provide, respectively, general information and information related to the national intervention resources available and contact points.

Following an amendment of the European Parliament, the text agreed includes the exchange of information on dumped munitions, with a view to facilitating risk identification and preparedness measures, within the scope of the Decision.

CO₂ Emissions from Passenger Cars

In Conclusions reached on the results of the Commission's negotiations with non-European car manufacturers, the Council welcomed, *inter alia*, "the outcome of the negotiations with the Japanese and Korean industries" ... and supported "the Commission's intention to accept the commitments made by JAMA and KAMA on CO₂ emission reduction from new passenger cars on the basis of their commitments of 11 June 1999 and 16 September 1999, respectively."

The Council also confirmed "the necessity to consider further measures that will be required in order to achieve the objectives of the Community strategy; in this context, reiterates its support for a fuel economy label-

ling scheme and invites the Commission to report on the state of work regarding its study of the possibility of establishing a reference framework for fiscal incentives."

Sustainable Development and Environmental Integration

The Ministers adopted a set of Conclusions recalling that Articles 2, 3 and 6 of the Amsterdam Treaty required environmental concerns to be reflected in all EU policy-making.

In the process of integrating environment into other policies, the Council stressed the need to pay special attention to key integration processes within Europe and world-wide, in particular:

- ratification, implementation and further development of the international instruments to address climate change, especially the Kyoto Protocol, and early progress in national and in common and co-ordinated policies and measures, including new measures, particularly in the sectors of transport and energy, in order to meet the Kyoto targets;
- strengthening of positive synergies between trade liberalisation and environmental protection in the new WTO round; recognition of the precautionary principle in WTO rules in order to protect, *inter alia*, human health and the environment as well as preservation of the integrity of multilateral environmental agreements in the international trade negotiations;
- ensuring that the enlargement of the European Union brings benefits for the European environment as a whole through prompt transposition and compliance with the environmental acquis and by ensuring that the projected economic growth in candidate countries be geared towards supporting sustainable development;
- improving the eco-efficiency of production and consumption in order to break the link between economic growth and adverse environmental effects."

Community Strategy on Climate Change

The Council adopted a set of Conclusions, in which it emphasised that climate change represents one of the main global environmental challenges and, while action to curb emissions is now taking place both inside and outside the Community, stresses that much more will need to be done to meet the Kyoto commitments and to go well beyond them in the longer-term.

Acidification and Ozone

The Council President opened a public debate on the proposals for Directives on creating national emission

ceilings for the four main pollutants (SO₂, Nox, VCOs and ammoniac) and tropospheric ozone.

During the debate the Ministers were reminded by Margot Wallström, the Environment Commissioner, of the need for a decision that would genuinely have an impact on air quality in practice. She also pointed out that the Commission's proposals were, after all, based on a strategy that had been worked out and accepted by the Council in 1997. This strategy set specific targets, but the Commissioner admitted that "we are not yet in a position to respect these objectives." Maximum ozone concentration levels had been exceeded on many occasions in several member States during the course of the Summer.

The Commission is now suggesting using intermediary targets to try and encourage tougher action.

Negotiations on the Biosafety Protocol

Ministers were briefed on the status of preparations for resuming international negotiations on the Biosafety Protocol.

The Presidency has expressed its intention to return to this point at the December session in order to prepare for the final round of negotiations in Montreal from 20–28 January 2000. □