

Political Tensions at EU Summit

The Gothenburg European Council met on 15 and 16 June amid riots and political tensions, resulting from the problems of how to ensure the “peaceful” expression of opposition and the deadlock over the Kyoto Protocol. Nevertheless, the Heads of State and Government were not deflected from the objectives set by the Swedish Presidency and the Conclusions of the Meeting were largely welcomed – although positions differed on how to interpret the Council Conclusions, especially those relating to sustainable development and climate change.

The Summit confirmed that the environment should be one of the top EU priorities and it is thus featured on the agenda for all the Spring European Council sessions. However, some delegates deplored that there is still no formal sustainable development strategy. The speaker for the European Environmental Bureau (EEB) said that his organisation plans to work with the Belgian and Spanish presidencies to achieve more meaningful outcomes during the Barcelona Summit in June 2002. The Friends of the Earth noted that the EU member States failed in what they had set out to achieve by not being able to adopt a fully-fledged strategy. They called the Conclusions a “text without any vision, without objectives and without a timetable.”

With regard to enhancing safety at European Council sessions, a working party has been set up under the authority of the Justice and Home Affairs Council, with a view to future sessions being held permanently in Brussels.

Following is a summary of the main decisions adopted by the Summit in the field of the environment:

Sustainable Development

Heads of State and Government endorsed the proposed strategy on sustainable development. Member States were invited to establish national strategies in this context, stressing the importance of ensuring genuine dialogue between all players concerned, encompassing both industry and civil society. The Swedish Premier Göran Persson emphasised that the Commission Communication is a document aimed resolutely towards the future. Commission President Romano Prodi suggested that Gothenburg has transformed the concept of sustainable development into an operational programme.

The Council noted that the Commission, which has begun to draft an action plan to improve EU regulatory policy to be presented to the Laeken Summit in December 2001, will integrate a mechanism aiming to guarantee that all proposed policies include an environmental impact assessment.

The Council confirmed that it endorses the priorities identified by the Commission – *i.e.*, climate change, transport, public health and management of natural resources – and the broad objectives outlined in the Sixth Environmental Action Plan.

Climate Change

Many had expected that governments would adopt a separate declaration on climate change, but in the end they settled on an explicit chapter on combating climate change. In it the EU reaffirms its willingness to pursue the ratification process unilaterally and implement the Kyoto Protocol.



Courtesy: Financial Times

The Council indicated that it would strive to ensure the entry into force of the Protocol with the participation of the greatest number of industrialised countries possible. The Council insisted in its Conclusions on the United States' commitment not to block the Kyoto process at the next negotiating session in Bonn in mid-July. It confirmed the decision to create a European Union and United States high-level working group and concurrently, to send a mission to the EU's principal partners, beginning with Japan, to convince them to pursue the Kyoto process. (MJ)

