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European Union

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OUTCOME OF PROCEEDINGS

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	The 8th Environment Action Programme - Turning the Trends Together - Council conclusions

Delegations will find in the Annex the Council conclusions on the abovementioned "The 8th Environment Action Programme - Turning the Trends Together", as adopted by the Council at its 3716th meeting held on 4 October 2019.

The 8th Environment Action Programme - Turning the Trends Together

- Council conclusions -

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

RECALLING that for more than 40 years, Environment Action Programmes (EAPs), prepared together with all relevant stakeholders, have provided the EU with environment and climate policy frameworks that have contributed to achieving environmental goals and integrating the environment in other EU policy areas;

RECALLING that, pursuant to the provisions of Article 192(3) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), the EU shall adopt EAPs in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure to provide strategic guidance and to ensure predictable and coordinated action for Europe's environment and climate change policy;

RECALLING the Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on a General Union Environment Action Programme to 2020 'Living well, within the limits of our planet'¹ (the 7th EAP), which sets out a vision for 2050 with a narrative of environment and climate change policy as a driver for green growth, a healthy planet and improving human wellbeing;

RECALLING the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the Commission's Reflection Paper 'Towards a sustainable Europe by 2030';

¹ OJ L 354 of 28.12. 2013, p. 171.

RECALLING the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Paris Agreement of December 2015, the Commission’s Communication ‘A clean planet for all’, which presents a strategic long-term vision for a prosperous, modern, competitive and climate-neutral EU economy by 2050, and the IPCC special report ‘Global Warming of 1.5°C’;

RECALLING the findings of the IPBES 2019 Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, which warns that nature is declining globally at rates unprecedented in human history, and that the rate of species extinctions is accelerating, with grave impact on the goods and services provided by nature and for people around the world;

RECALLING the Global Environment Outlook 6, the Global Chemicals Outlook II, the Global Resources Outlook 2019 and the European Environment Agency’s annual environmental indicator reports;

RECALLING the New Strategic Agenda for 2019-2024 adopted by the European Council on 20 June 2019, which insists on the urgent need to build a climate-neutral, green, fair and social Europe;

RECALLING the Commission President elect’s intention to present a European Green Deal;

RECALLING the European Parliament Resolution on the implementation of the 7th EAP and the Opinion of the Committee of the Regions ‘Towards the 8th EAP’;

RECALLING the Council conclusions on:

- Towards an ever more sustainable Union by 2030²;
- Towards a Sustainable Chemicals Policy Strategy of the Union³;
- **More Circularity – Transition to a sustainable society⁴**;

² 8286/19

³ 10713/19

⁴ **12791/19**

1. STRESSES that well-functioning ecosystems and the services they provide are the foundation of a fair, healthy and prosperous society and UNDERLINES the urgent need to act as several planetary boundaries have been crossed and as climate change, pollution, the loss of biodiversity and the accelerating demands on natural resources are jeopardising current and future generations' wellbeing and prospects; INSISTS that not acting now is causing high costs to the environment, human health, wellbeing and the economy; RECALLS that the Union is committed to a high level of protection of the environment and of human health, to the improvement of the quality of the environment, and to combating climate change;

Evaluation of the 7th Environment Action Programme

2. WELCOMES the Commission report on the evaluation of the 7th EAP;
3. ACKNOWLEDGES the main findings of the Commission's report, according to which the 2050 vision and the three thematic priorities⁵ are still valid; however, IS HIGHLY CONCERNED that major challenges remain in the fields of environment and climate change policy;
4. NOTES that the evaluation finds that some progress has been made towards achieving the goals set by the 7th EAP, and that least progress has been made on actions related to natural capital, environment and health, implementation and integration of environmental concerns into other policies;

⁵ To protect, conserve and enhance the Union's natural capital; to turn the Union into a resource-efficient, green, and competitive low-carbon economy; and to safeguard the Union's citizens from environment-related pressures and risks to health and wellbeing.

5. SHARES the evaluation's finding that the 7th EAP provides substantial added value in the field of environment and climate change policy; in that context, UNDERLINES that the 7th EAP lays down a solid strategy, creates strong and coherent links with national strategies, contributes to more predictable, faster and better-coordinated actions in the field of environment and climate change policy, and enables the EU to speak with one voice in international environment negotiations;
6. RECALLS that the 7th EAP runs until 31 December 2020; CALLS on the Commission and the Member States to intensify their efforts to complete actions under the priority objectives, in particular concerning the areas of natural capital, biodiversity and ecosystem services, health, air pollution, quality of water, hazardous chemicals and investment; URGES the Commission to present without any further delay a Union strategy for a non-toxic environment, in close collaboration with the Member States and the Union institutions, in line with the 7th EAP and the Council conclusions entitled 'Towards a Sustainable Chemicals Policy Strategy of the Union', that will fully address endocrine disruptors, combination effects of chemicals and nanomaterials issues;

8th Environment Action Programme

7. CALLS upon the Commission to present at the latest by early 2020 an ambitious and focused proposal for the 8th EAP for the period 2021-2030 in order to avoid a gap between the 7th EAP and the 8th EAP, as required by Article 4 of the 7th EAP Decision; and STRESSES that the 8th EAP should build on the findings of the evaluation report of the 7th EAP, as well as the latest available science and knowledge, including the European environment – State and outlook 2020 report (SOER 2020), taking into account the diversity of situations in the various regions of the Union and Article 191(3) TFEU;

8. CALLS on the Commission, in this regard, to re-establish or identify common priority objectives for strategic actions under the 8th EAP, keeping the 2050 vision from the 7th EAP while also maintaining a clear focus on delivering concrete results as soon as possible and at the latest by 2030, so that the 8th EAP is the environmental pillar for implementation of the Agenda 2030 in the EU; in this regard, UNDERLINES the urgent need to accelerate the implementation of the Agenda 2030, both globally and internally, as an overarching priority of the EU, for the benefit of its citizens and to uphold its credibility within Europe and globally;
9. INVITES the Commission to include in the 8th EAP a well-defined monitoring mechanism to ensure ownership of and delivery on commitments and clear, result-based indicators to measure progress; this monitoring mechanism should build upon existing reporting and data collection mechanisms (such as the Environmental Implementation Review (EIR), the European Semester, the SOER, the SDGs and others), while avoiding duplication and additional administrative burden for Member States and other reporting bodies; furthermore, the 8th EAP should include a mid-term review in 2024 to allow for stocktaking and addressing emerging environmental concerns;
10. CONSIDERS that the 8th EAP should be relevant for all stakeholders and should better integrate the different levels of governance, all relevant actors and new partnerships, as well as development in international agreements; UNDERLINES that the 8th EAP must address environmental governance, including issues such as transparency, information, public participation and access to justice; STRESSES the need to improve implementation, enforcement of Union legislation, information, communication with and awareness raising of the public; NOTES the need to facilitate exchange of know-how and best practices and support authorities in their efforts to implement and enforce environmental legislation;

11. UNDERLINES the systemic nature of Europe’s climate and environmental challenges and the need to work on policy packages with a broader sustainability perspective, integrating the three dimensions of sustainable development, fully seizing opportunities for co-benefits and synergies between different environmental policies – including those addressing climate, nature and biodiversity, air quality and a healthy living environment, water resources, and the circular economy – and mainstreaming the environmental dimension, as set out in the Commission’s SDG Reflection Paper, with a special focus on trade, agriculture and food, forestry, fisheries, energy, mining, industry, civil protection, buildings, infrastructure, digital and transport and mobility policies; STRESSES the need to prioritise actions for the green transition that is just and is better integrating environment and climate aspects into the design of the EU’s social, economic and financial policies;
12. STRESSES the importance of strengthening the financing of environmental policies and sustainable financing for the green transition; UNDERLINES the importance of responsible companies integrating environmental objectives in their business plans; HIGHLIGHTS, in this regard, the need to mobilise private and public investments for the green transition, the need to internalise external environment and social costs in market prices, and the need to phase out environmentally harmful subsidies; FURTHER HIGHLIGHTS the crucial role of Horizon Europe to stimulate innovation and disruptive technologies for the green transition; SUPPORTS the continuing implementation of the Action Plan on Financing Sustainable Growth, in particular the framework to facilitate sustainable investment;

13. UNDERLINES the importance of protecting our citizens' health, with a particular focus on improving air quality, water quality and preventing or minimising exposure to all substances of concern, especially to substances of very high concern (SVHC), that are put on the market or are released into the environment across Europe;
14. HIGHLIGHTS the need to accelerate the transition towards a resource-efficient, circular, non-toxic, safe and climate-neutral economy with safe and sustainable production and consumption patterns, and to ensure that the design of the EU's competitiveness, industrial, trade and digital policies also contributes to this objective; UNDERLINES, in this regard, the importance of moving towards non-toxic circular material cycles by improving product eco-design and maximising the use of sustainable, renewable and secondary raw materials that are safe for human health and the environment; and CALLS UPON the Commission to come up with a new Circular Economy Action Plan and a long-term strategic framework, including a common vision, for a circular economy;
15. CALLS UPON the Commission to ensure coherence of the 8th EAP with the Paris Agreement goal to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 °C and the future EU long-term strategy on a climate-neutral economy;
16. UNDERLINES the need to take urgent additional action to protect and restore terrestrial, fresh water and marine biodiversity and ecosystem services, to promote nature-based solutions and to continue to promote sustainable management of soil; and CALLS UPON the Commission to respond to the challenges underlined in the IPBES 2019 Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, including the five main drivers of biodiversity loss;

17. UNDERLINES the need to include in the 8th EAP ambitious, realistic and measurable biodiversity targets, to ensure adequate and consistent funding for biodiversity, to continue to work on a set of indicators in order to be able to evaluate the results adequately, and to contribute to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; RECOGNISES the need for full integration and mainstreaming of biodiversity into sectoral policies, inter alia by sectoral action plans addressing the drivers of biodiversity loss; CALLS upon the Commission to revise the EU's Biodiversity Strategy taking into account the results of the CBD COP in 2020;
18. UNDERLINES the advantages of promoting EU values and EU environmental standards globally, not only in order to defend the international rules-based order, but also to be a first mover in the green and inclusive economic transition, helping the EU to frame global standards and benefit from a strong competitive advantage; HIGHLIGHTS the need to safeguard European standards and to ensure that trade policy becomes more coherent with the EU sustainable development values, including the fight against climate change and loss of biodiversity;
19. HIGHLIGHTS the potential of digitalisation and new technologies, such as satellite data, remote sensing and artificial intelligence; ENCOURAGES the Commission to address the opportunities and possible risks and challenges of the digital transformation in a systematic way; EMPHASISES the need to improve the gathering, analysis and use of data and to harness the potential of aggregated data to deliver results, increase the knowledge base, foster eco-innovation, and turn the green transition into an opportunity through new business models, processes, products and services; ENCOURAGES the Commission and the Member States to improve access to and use of environmental data and information systems and to promote best practices;

20. STRESSES the need to involve civil society, including young people, the private sector and academia, in active dialogue both before the 8th EAP is adopted and throughout its life span; UNDERLINES the key role of cities in the implementation of the EAP and stimulating public participation.
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