



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



12908/04 (Presse 283)

PRESS RELEASE

2610th Council Meeting

Environment

Luxembourg, 14 October 2004

President

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P R E S S

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12908/04 (Presse 283)

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Main Results of the Council

The Council reached political agreement on a draft Directive on the management of waste from extractive industries. It also reached political agreement on a draft Regulation on certain fluorinated greenhouse gases and a draft Directive on emissions from air conditioning systems in motor vehicles.

The Council further adopted a Decision approving the Stockholm Convention on persistent organic pollutants.

It also adopted a Recommendation on the implementation of Member States' employment policies.

Finally, it adopted a Regulation on materials and articles intended to come in contact with food.

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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.
- The documents whose references are given in the text are available on the Council's Internet site <http://ue.eu.int>.
- 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 abovementioned Council Internet site or may be obtained from the Press Office.

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PARTICIPANTS

The Governments of the Member States and the European Commission were represented as follows:

Belgium:

Mr Bruno TOBBACK
Ms Evelyne HUYTEBROECK

Minister for the Environment and Minister for Pensions
Minister of the Brussels Capital Regional Government,
with responsibility for the Environment

Czech Republic:

Mr Libor AMBROZEK

Minister for the Environment

Denmark:

Ms Connie HEDEGAARD

Minister for the Environment

Germany:

Mr Jürgen TRITTIN

Federal Minister for the Environment, Nature
Conservation and Reactor Safety

Estonia:

Mr Olavi TAMMEMÄE

Deputy Minister for the Environment

Greece:

Mr Stavros KALOGIANNIS

State Secretary for the Environment, Regional Planning
and Public Works

Spain:

Ms Cristina NARBONA RUIZ

Minister for the Environment

France:

Mr Serge LEPELTIER

Minister for Ecology and Sustainable Development

Ireland:

Mr Dick ROCHE

Minister for the Environment, Heritage and Local
Government

Italy:

Mr Alessandro PIGNATTI

Deputy Permanent Representative

Cyprus:

Mr Efthymios EFTHYMIU

Minister for Agriculture, Natural Resources and
Environment

Latvia:

Mr Raimonds VEJONIS

Minister for the Environment

Lithuania:

Mr Arūnas KUNDROTAS

Minister for the Environment

Luxembourg:

Mr Lucien LUX

Minister for the Environment, Minister for Transport

Hungary:

Mr Miklós PERSÁNYI

Minister for the Environment and Water Management

Malta:

Mr George PULLICINO

Minister for Rural Affairs and the Environment

Netherlands:

Mr Pieter VAN GEEL

State Secretary for Housing, Planning and the
Environment

Ms Melanie SCHULTZ van HAEGEN-MAAS GEESTERANUS

State Secretary for Transport, Public Works and Water
Management

Austria:

Mr Josef PRÖLL

Federal Minister for Agriculture, Forestry, the
Environment and Water Management**Poland:**

Mr Krzysztof SZAMALEK

State Secretary, Ministry of the Environment

Portugal:

Mr Jorge MOREIRA DA SILVA

State Secretary attached to the Minister for the
Environment and Regional Planning**Slovenia:**

Mr Janez KOPAČ

Minister for the Environment, Town and Country Planning
and Energy**Slovakia:**

Mr László MIKLÓS

Minister for the Environment

Finland:

Mr Jan-Erik ENESTAM

Minister for the Environment

Sweden:

Ms Lena SOMMESTAD

Minister for the Environment

United Kingdom:

Ms Margaret BECKETT

Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural
Affairs

.....

Commission

Ms Margot WALLSTRÖM

Member

ITEMS DEBATED**FLOOD RISK MANAGEMENT*** - *Council conclusions*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

ACKNOWLEDGES

- that Europe suffered a large number of floods over the last years which caused loss of lives, injuries and damage to properties and infrastructure,
- the fact that floods have the potential to undermine the drive of the European Union towards sustainable development and cause damage on health, economies and environment,
- that flood risk management is a part of integrated river basin management, should be guided by a holistic approach and should take account of related policy fields as well as efforts already taken,
- that human activity contributes to the increase in the likelihood and adverse impacts of (extreme) flood events and that climate change will cause an increase of floods as well,
- that while it is impossible to prevent flooding totally, it is feasible to reduce the risk to human life, economic assets and the environment,
- that different types of floods need different kind of measures to reduce the likelihood and impact and that preventive, long term and integrated approaches through spatial planning on the different levels (national, regional and local) will also provide in a better use of land, river basins and coastal areas,
- that flood risk management has financial consequences and that appropriate European funding from existing instruments can play a role;

TAKING INTO ACCOUNT

- that the principle of subsidiarity and the existing capabilities of Member States entail the need to leave considerable flexibility to the local, regional and river basin level, in particular on organisation and responsibility of authorities, flood management plans and risk maps, the level of protection and the measures and the timetables to achieve set objectives;

WELCOMES and NOTES WITH APPRECIATION

- the assessment made by the European Commission concerning the importance of flood protection which takes into account the actions ongoing, or planned, at EU, transnational, national and regional level,
- the Commission Communication "Flood Risk Management", including the essential features of the concerted EU Action Programme;

AGREES

- that the Member States and the Commission, within their respective fields of competence, should take concerted action in order to improve the level of protection against floods and to reduce the potential risk for EU citizens, property, assets and the environment in Europe, taking into account projected impacts of climate change in the medium to long term,
- to increase the awareness by the public and competent authorities of flood risk,
- to improve the cooperation between the Member States, Third Countries where appropriate, and the European Commission on flood prevention, protection and mitigation, making maximal use of existing instruments, structures and agreements, such as the Community mechanism for civil protection,
- to further develop (European) research and the exchange of knowledge and experience on all aspects regarding flood risk management for all types of floods, including, inter alia, flood forecasting and warning systems, using existing networks,
- that an effective way to get an integrated and concerted approach is through developing and implementing a European Action Programme on integrated flood prevention, protection and mitigation,
- that based on the Communication, the Member States and the European Commission, in the context of the regular meetings of the EU Water Directors in cooperation with other stakeholders and relevant parties should prepare the content of such an European Action Programme,

- that Member States should develop and implement flood risk management plans and flood risk maps for river basins and coastal areas, in transboundary basins in cooperation with other Member States and Third Countries concerned, except for river basins and coastal areas considered by Member States not to suffer from negative impacts from floods or where, with appropriate planning and/or action under way, such action would not be necessary,
- that development of river basin management plans under the Water Framework Directive and of flood risk management plans are elements of integrated river basin management; the two processes should therefore use the mutual potential for synergies,
- that in developing the flood risk management plans and flood risk maps the guidelines mentioned in the Communication and its Annex should be taken into account;

INVITES

- the Commission to submit an appropriate proposal for a European Action Programme on flood risk management taking into account these conclusions and the work of the Informal meeting of the EU Water Directors, preferably before mid 2005."

WASTE FROM EXTRACTIVE INDUSTRIES

The Council reached political agreement on a draft European Parliament and Council Directive on the management of waste from extractive industries (Commission proposal *10143/03*).

The Hungarian and Austrian delegations abstained.

The draft Directive is aimed at preventing accidents and consequent damage to the environment and human health arising from the treatment and disposal of mining waste, by setting minimum requirements intended to improve mining waste management.

Waste from extractive industries represents 29% of the waste generated each year in the EU, with an annual volume of more than 400 million tonnes. The management of this waste involves risks. Several Member States have already suffered major mining accidents, for example, those at Aberfan, Aznalcóllar and Baia Mare.

With a view to the above objective, the following are the main elements of the draft Directive:

- conditions for operating permits,
- general obligations concerning waste management,
- the obligation to characterise waste before disposing of it or treating it,
- measures to ensure the safety of waste management facilities,
- a requirement to draw up closure plans,
- an obligation to provide for an appropriate level of financial security.

Waste from the extractive industries is currently subject to the general provisions of the Waste Framework Directive (75/442/EEC) and the Landfill Directive (1999/31/EC) and, even after the adoption of the draft Directive, those Directives will continue to apply to any aspects not specifically covered by the new provisions.

The European Parliament having delivered its first reading opinion on 31 March, the text now agreed, after finalisation in all Community languages, will take the form of a common position and be submitted to the European Parliament for its second reading.

FLUORINATED GREENHOUSE GASES

The Council reached political agreement, by qualified majority, on:

- a draft European Parliament and Council Regulation on certain fluorinated greenhouse gases;
- a draft European Parliament and Council Directive on emissions from air conditioning systems in motor vehicles, amending Directive 70/156/EEC (*13630/04*).

The Danish and Austrian delegations voted against; the Belgian, Portuguese and Swedish delegations abstained.

The draft texts submitted to the Council result from a single Commission proposal for a Regulation. However, to reduce the use of fluorinated gases in air conditioning systems in motor vehicles, a separate proposal was put on the table, based on the existing EU vehicle type-approval system (Directive 70/156/EEC).

The draft legal acts are intended to be significant elements of the first phase of the European Climate Change Programme, which was established in June 2000, by introducing cost-effective measures aimed at reducing emissions of the fluorinated greenhouse gases (FGG) which could enable the European Community to meet its Kyoto Protocol targets, while preventing distortion of the internal market.

To that end, the draft Regulation, based on Articles 95 and 175 of the Treaty, addresses the containment, use, recovery and destruction of the FGG listed in Annex A to the Kyoto Protocol. It further regulates the labelling and disposal of products and equipment containing these gases; the reporting of information on those gases; the use of sulphur hexafluoride; the placing on the market of products and equipment containing, or whose functioning relies upon, FGG; and the training and certification of personnel involved in activities provided for by the draft Regulation.

The draft Directive applies specifically to FGG emissions from air conditioning systems fitted to vehicles. It establishes a gradual system of elimination of air conditioning equipment with a global warming potential higher than 150.

The European Parliament having delivered its first reading opinion on 31 March, the text now agreed will take the form of a common position after its finalisation in all Community languages and be submitted to the European Parliament for its second reading.

CLIMATE CHANGE - Council conclusions

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"The Council of the European Union

1. NOTES with deep concern the rate of climate change that is observed worldwide and that Europe's climate is changing with larger impacts than previously expected, as is shown in the European Environment Agency (EEA) report "Impacts of Europe's changing climate" of August 2004: Europe's temperature has risen faster in the last 100 years than the global average (0,95°C in Europe compared with 0,7°C globally); 8 out of 9 glaciers show a significant retreat; extreme weather events, such as droughts, heat waves and floods, have increased; UNDERLINES the need to accelerate actions to tackle climate change, bearing in mind in particular the EEA's conclusion that even with significant emission reductions over the coming decades the climate system will continue to change, and that worldwide societies have to prepare for and adapt to the consequences of some inevitable climate change; REAFFIRMS the EU's continued commitment to assisting developing countries to adapt to adverse effects of climate change, and UNDERLINES the need to limit climate change effects in order to support international and national efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals;
2. REAFFIRMS that, with a view to meeting the ultimate objective of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change ("the Convention") to prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system, overall global annual mean surface temperature increase should not exceed 2°C above pre-industrial levels in order to limit high risks, including irreversible impacts of climate change; RECOGNISES that 2°C would already imply significant impacts on ecosystems and water resources; EMPHASISES that the maximum global temperature increase of 2°C over pre-industrial levels should be considered as an overall long-term objective to guide global efforts to reduce climate change risks in accordance with the precautionary approach; RECOGNISES that long term decision-making by the business community requires a long term global policy perspective to inform investment and drive technology development and diffusion, including with regard to cost-effective measures;
3. ACKNOWLEDGES that recent scientific knowledge indicates that the global temperature increase and associated impacts resulting from greenhouse gas emissions could be significantly larger than previously expected; RECOGNISES that this strongly underlines the necessity of an urgent global response and in that regard, LOOKS FORWARD to the consideration at the 2005 Spring European Council of medium and longer term emission reduction strategies, including targets, as a contribution to global efforts, in the context of the ultimate objective of the Convention;

4. REAFFIRMS the commitment of the enlarged European Community and its Member States to delivering on their respective Convention and Kyoto Protocol commitments; UNDERLINES the importance of the ratification process of the Protocol and that its entry into force is urgent; NOTES that implementation of the Protocol can have economic benefits and encourage investment, especially in improved energy efficiency, *inter alia* through Joint Implementation, and that to make the most of those opportunities, important implementation processes need to be started as a matter of urgency; therefore URGES countries that have not yet ratified the Protocol to do so; in this context, WELCOMES the decision of the Government of the Russian Federation to submit the proposal to ratify the Protocol to the Duma;
5. RECONFIRMS the European Community and the Member States' resolve to continue combating climate change under the Convention and its Kyoto Protocol and to continue to strengthen the global approach, taking into account common but differentiated responsibilities, and respective capabilities; EMPHASISES that the EU is pressing ahead with climate change policies and measures to deliver results; LOOKS FORWARD to demonstrating progress in 2005 and to exchange views with other Parties on results of mitigation policies while recognising that it will take time before all benefits of policies are reflected in the emission trends, and in that regard STRESSES the importance of the revised mechanism for monitoring Community greenhouse gas emissions and for implementing the Kyoto Protocol providing an excellent tool for monitoring and evaluating EU progress towards meeting its greenhouse gas emissions reduction commitments;
6. WELCOMES the progress made in the implementation of the EU emissions trading scheme and its registry system and LOOKS FORWARD to a timely start of trading between over 10.000 installations covering approximately 50% of EU CO₂ emissions, that will contribute to a flexible and cost-effective implementation of the Kyoto Protocol commitments; EMPHASISES the adoption of the Directive linking the EU emissions trading scheme to the Kyoto Protocol's project mechanisms which will allow EU companies more flexibility, will reduce their costs, and will support sustainable development around the world; LOOKS FORWARD to considering establishing links between emissions trading schemes with other Parties; in this context, WELCOMES the request of Norway to link its scheme to the EU emissions trading scheme as of 2005;

7. REITERATES that work towards a low carbon emitting economy is needed; RECALLS the political declaration of the International Conference for Renewable Energies held in Germany last June, that renewable energies, combined with enhanced energy efficiency, can *inter alia* significantly contribute to sustainable development, to providing access to energy, especially for the poor, and to mitigating greenhouse gas emissions; UNDERLINES that the Johannesburg Renewable Energy Coalition should be a continuing forum of like-minded, collaborating countries aiming at the substantial increase of the overall share of renewable energy and could provide input to the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) in 2006/2007; in this context WELCOMES the launching of the Global Renewable Energy Policies and Measures Database and the progress made through the Patient Capital Initiative for creating a Global Renewable Energy Fund of Funds to deliver affordable risk capital to renewable energy entrepreneurs in developing countries and economies in transition; LOOKS FORWARD to the World Conference on Energy for Development in the Netherlands in December 2004 that will focus on energy policies for sustainable development in developing countries; NOTES in that context that *inter alia* Energy for Sustainable Development, Industrial Development, Air Pollution and Climate Change figure on the agenda of the CSD in 2006/2007;
8. RECALLS the need for urgent action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions related to the use of the international bunker fuels, taking into account the agreement in the Sixth Environment Action Programme that the European Community has approved, from which specific action to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from aviation and marine transportation should have been identified within ICAO by 2002 and within IMO by 2003; REITERATES its invitation to the Commission of December 2001, October 2002 and December 2003 to consider in a timely fashion such action and to make proposals in 2005; without precluding any market-based options, LOOKS FORWARD to the study by the Commission on addressing the climate change impacts of aviation through the EU emissions trading scheme;
9. RECALLING the commitment in the "Bonn Political Declaration" on climate change funding for developing countries, REAFFIRMS its determination to deliver USD 369 million annually by 2005 and REITERATES that the relevant Member States will report on their respective contributions in their national communications as of 2006;
10. EMPHASISES the need to start within the context of the UN climate change process the consideration of the post 2012 framework promptly and in this regard REITERATES that mitigation of climate change is a cornerstone of present and future climate change policies and that, since climate change is now inevitable, adaptation to climate change is another key element of such policies;
11. CONGRATULATES all Parties to the Convention on the progress made in 10 years implementation of the Convention; LOOKS FORWARD to engaging in panel discussions at the high level segment of the tenth session of the Conference of Parties in Buenos Aires in December 2004 to exchange views on accomplishments and future challenges."

ECO-EFFICIENT INNOVATIONS WITHIN THE LISBON PROCESS - *Council conclusions*

The Council adopted the following conclusions on *CLEAN, CLEVER, COMPETITIVE: The opportunities of eco-efficient innovations within the Lisbon process*:

"The Council of the European Union

RECALLING the EU's strategic goal established in Lisbon of building the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, characterised by economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion, and its aim of becoming a highly eco-efficient economy that respects the carrying capacity of the environment, AGREES that a major challenge is to reinforce and exploit the positive synergies between environment protection and competitiveness to ensure that the Lisbon Strategy contributes to the EU goals on sustainable development, as outlined in Spring European Council conclusions on the Sustainable Development Strategy;

UNDERLINES that eco-efficient innovations make a positive contribution to the competitiveness of Europe. Not only do they help business lower costs, through improved energy and resource efficiency, they also create new lead markets. Fully grasping these opportunities gives Europe a strong competitive edge and contributes to employment and economic growth.

STRESSES that a joint effort with business is needed to fully grasp the opportunities of eco-efficient innovations. In partnership with business and other stakeholders the identification and establishment of conditions supportive of eco-efficient innovations should be actively pursued.

STRESSES the urgent need, building in particular on a swift implementation of the Environmental Technologies Action Plan (ETAP), to give eco-efficient innovations a fair and competitive market perspective and to provide for the internalisation of external costs through an effective mix of instruments including:

- performance based green public procurement
- fiscal incentives
- reform of subsidies that have considerable negative effects on the environment and are inconsistent with sustainable development, and
- risk sharing facilities, especially for SMEs.

UNDERLINES that, in order to facilitate the development and market introduction of eco-efficient innovations, future policy, including legislation and long-term targets, should be forward looking, result-oriented and predictable. All relevant legislation should be assessed in a balanced manner to that end.

INVITES the Commission and other Council formations, in preparing their inputs to the 2005 Spring European Council, to integrate the positive contributions of eco-efficient innovations to the Lisbon goal and take the necessary practical actions to seize these benefits."

The conclusions will serve as input to the Spring 2005 European Council, which should focus on the progress achieved on the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy and of the Union's Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS), this year coinciding with the mid-term review of the Lisbon Strategy as well as with the review of the SDS.

SUSTAINABLE ROAD TRANSPORT

The Council held a debate on sustainable road transport, on the basis of a Presidency discussion paper (13052/04).

The following items were discussed by the delegations:

- Reduction percentage and timetable of the NO_x emission standard for diesel passenger cars and vans. Importance of the following elements: urgency of the problems for health and the environment; availability of technologies for NO_x-emission reduction and how to encourage technological development (technology forcing or technology following); costs and economic consequences;
- Timing of submission of proposals by the Commission for tighter noise standards for tyres and vehicles; and role for the Environment Council in the process of preparation and determination of the standards for noise;
- EU strategy for more energy-efficient cars after 2008/9 in terms of objectives and instruments. Should legislation be investigated at this stage in case new voluntary commitments will not be feasible?

The discussions in the Council were meant to assess which options were desirable and feasible in the short term, in view of supporting the activities of the Commission and speeding up the decision-making at a later stage.

Sustainable road transport is a priority issue in the context of the Sustainable Development Strategy (SDS) and, so far, traffic flows are increasing. Policy options should contribute to solving urgent problems concerning health and the quality of the urban environment and to achieving the Kyoto goals. There is a synergy with the Thematic Strategy for Environment and Health and the planned Thematic Strategy for the Urban Environment. The options should, furthermore, contribute to achieving EU environment objectives on, in particular, air quality, noise and climate change.

FINANCING OF NATURA 2000*

The Council held a debate on the financing of Natura 2000, on the basis of a Presidency discussion paper (12999/04) concerning the Commission Communication on the same topic (11590/04).

Delegations discussed the following issues:

- Whether the Commission's "integration option" can enhance the availability of Community co-financing for Natura 2000 projects;
- Concerns about potential gaps in funding;
- How funding for Natura 2000 can be ensured, taking account of the current and future co-financing possibilities and priorities of the different financial instruments and the provisions of Article 8 of the Habitats Directive.

The debate was an opportunity for the Council to exchange views concerning the proposals set out by the Commission in its Communication and, in particular, to seek further clarifications on the "integration option".

The Commission proposes to integrate Natura 2000 into the Community's wider land management policies and, therefore, that Community co-financing for Natura 2000 projects should primarily be available through the Community's existing financial instruments. It has further adopted proposed Regulations on the rural development and structural funds that would enhance the availability of funding for Natura 2000 projects under those instruments.

URBAN ENVIRONMENT - Council conclusions

The Council adopted the following conclusions in relation with the Commission Communication "Towards a thematic strategy on the urban environment", which was presented in February 2004 (6462/04):

"THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

1. RECALLS that Decision No 1600/2002/EC laying down the Sixth Community Environment Action Programme, particularly its recital 27 and Articles 2(2), 4 and 7(2)(h), refers to the need for concerted efforts to ensure a better and healthier environment and to contribute to a high level of quality of life and social well being for citizens by encouraging sustainable urban development and establishes a thematic strategy on the urban environment as a priority action;
2. WELCOMES the Commission Communication "Towards a thematic strategy on the urban environment"; SUPPORTS its analysis of environmental problems and conditions in urban areas in Europe as a basis for the forthcoming thematic strategy; ALSO SUPPORTS the four priority themes - management, transport, construction and urban design - all of which have clear links to economic and social issues and are relevant for the sustainable development of urban areas; STRESSES the need to address also strategic environmental issues to reduce cities' impact on the wider environment;
3. CONSIDERS that actions under the thematic strategy on the urban environment should, among other things, contribute to the reduction of air and noise pollution; and UNDERLINES the importance of a continued focus at Community level on source-related measures, in particular for transport;
4. AGREES that further development of the suggested actions and measures for the thematic strategy on the urban environment should have regard to:
 - the principle of subsidiarity, balancing the range of possible actions and measures to be undertaken at the Community, national, regional and local levels,
 - the diversity (geographical, cultural, historical, etc.) of European urban areas, and existing (administrative) structures in Member States,

- lessons to be learned from cities with existing plans, environmental management systems and sustainable development strategies that have proven to work, with the aim of raising the standard of sustainability of European cities,
- existing requirements under Community legislation and at Member State level for plans, monitoring and reporting in the field of the urban environment, to ensure coherence,
- voluntary actions and measures that could be undertaken to achieve a healthier environment and a better quality of life for citizens in European urban areas,
- linkages with other relevant European policies and, in particular, the other thematic strategies,
- balance between the three pillars of sustainable development, while focussing on the environmental pillar in the thematic strategy on the urban environment,
- impacts of cities on their hinterland;

5. INVITES the Commission:

- to review the justification for the suggested obligations for an environmental management plan, an environmental management system and a sustainable urban transport plan, in the light of the principle of subsidiarity and current legislation and procedures at both Community and national levels,
- further to consider the proposed application of those possible obligations to capital cities and cities with over 100 000 inhabitants, with a view inter alia to the need for a conurbational approach and to overcome the administrative obstacles where appropriate,
- to examine the "open method of coordination" in order to assess its feasibility for implementation of the thematic strategy on the urban environment."

KIEV + 1

The Council held an exchange of views on the Conference of Environment Ministers from the countries of Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) and their Partners, which will take place in Tbilisi (Georgia) on 21-22 October 2004 (Kiev + 1) and how the EU can continue to support this process in the future.

The discussion at Council focused on the additional efforts still needed from both the Community and the Member States to help EECCA countries to implement, in the region, the EECCA Strategy adopted in May 2003 at the Kiev Conference (e.g. optimising funding, making full use of existing expertise, better coordinating the various activities in the region).

OTHER BUSINESS

The Council was further briefed on the following items:

- Aarhus package (13206/04).
- 7th Conference of Parties to the Basel Convention (25 to 29 October 2004) (13203/04).
- Workshop on "The environmental dimension of impact assessment", Berlin, 17 and 18 June 2004 (13205/04).
- 16th Meeting of the Parties to the Montreal Protocol (22-26 November 2004, Prague, Czech Republic) (13408/04).

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

ENVIRONMENT

Elimination of polluting substances - Stockholm Convention*

The Council adopted a Decision approving the Stockholm Convention on persistent organic pollutants (12649/04).

The Convention provides a framework for elimination of the production, use, import and export of 12 main polluting substances, their safe handling and disposal and elimination or reduction of unintentional releases. In addition, the Convention lays down rules for adding new chemicals to the list.

EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Libya - Lifting of sanctions and arms embargo

Following its decision on 11 October, the Council adopted a Common Position and a Regulation lifting the restrictive measures and the arms embargo against Libya as a result of the Libyan Government's compliance with UN Security Council Resolutions 748(1992) and 883(1993), accepting responsibility for actions of Libyan officials, payment of appropriate compensation and renunciation of terrorism (12734/04, 12764/04).

As far as the restrictive measures are concerned, the decision implements UN Security Council Resolution 1506, adopted in September 2003. The arms embargo was imposed by the EU in 1986. The decisions are part of an EU policy of engagement towards Libya (see General Affairs and External Relations Council conclusions of 11 October, 12770/04, press 276, p-8).

EMPLOYMENT POLICY

Implementation of Member States' employment policies

The Council adopted a Recommendation on the implementation of Member States' employment policies, replacing the Council Recommendation of 22 July 2003 (10081/04).

The Recommendation sets out, as an immediate priority for action by the Member States and the social partners in 2004, the key policy messages of the report of the Employment Task Force, chaired by Mr Wim Kok: increasing adaptability of workers and enterprises; attracting more people to enter and remain in the labour market: making work a real option for all; investing more effectively in human capital and lifelong learning; ensuring effective implementation of reforms through better governance.

It further establishes specific recommendations and priorities for each Member State.

HEALTH AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS

Safe use of food contact materials and articles*

The Council adopted a Regulation on materials and articles intended to come into contact with food, aiming to secure a high level of protection of human health and the interests of consumers (3676/04).

The Regulation requires adequate labelling or information in order to support the safe and correct use of materials and articles in compliance with food legislation and prohibits substances that are used to mask an incipient spoilage of food or to produce colour changes to food that could mislead the consumer.

The decision was taken together with the European Parliament under the codecision procedure.
