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Environment

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President

Neno Dimov

Minister for Environment and Water of the Republic of
Bulgaria

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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**Circular economy**

Environment ministers had the opportunity to exchange views on the package presented by the Commission on 16 January 2018, which aims at delivering on the circular economy action plan. The package consists of the following elements:

- European strategy for plastics in a circular economy ([5477/18](#) + [ADD1](#))
- Monitoring framework for the circular economy ([5478/18](#))
- Implementation of the Circular Economy package: options to address the interface between chemical, product and waste legislation ([5479/18](#))

They based their debate on a note prepared by the Presidency ([6155/18](#)) and took into account the interventions of Commissioners Vella and Arias Cañete, who were present.

Ministers agreed that they welcome the presentation of the new EU plastics strategy. They highlighted the need to move forward with the plastics strategy as it aims to improve how we use and recycle plastics. Plastics have been instrumental in achieving the economic and social standards we have today. However, in recent years marine littering and other undesirable consequences linked to the use of plastics have been of concern to environment ministers. All Ministers welcomed the Commission package and called for the urgent implementation of concrete measures, in particular to increase the recycling of plastics, find solutions to the widespread use of single-use plastic and to find a holistic approach to the value chain of plastic production. Eco-design for plastic products can play a very important role here. In their exchange of views, ministers mentioned several other possible actions to be taken at EU or at national levels:

- campaigns to raise consumer awareness
- increasing the quality of recycled products through setting standards
- green public procurement
- the use of the rules on Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR), similar to the one which was agreed recently in the waste package, together with financial incentives and voluntary commitments by the industry.

Finally, ministers agreed that they are all looking forward to the Commission legislative proposal on single-use plastics.

On the interface between chemical, product and waste legislation, many ministers highlighted the need for availability of information on substances of concern in products. According to several speakers, the same rules should apply to the content of hazardous substances in primary and in secondary raw materials, which underlines the importance of the substitution of such substances as far as possible. A number of speakers also addressed the need for more harmonised end-of-waste rules throughout the EU.

While many Ministers focused in their interventions on the plastics strategy and the interface between chemical, product and waste legislation, as suggested by the Presidency, several speakers also highlighted the importance of another element of the package: the monitoring framework regarding progress towards a circular economy. The proposed indicators were generally welcomed, but some ministers asked to broaden the scope of the indicators to areas other than the waste sector. In this context, they stressed the substantial contribution which the circular economy can make to the fulfilment of the climate commitments under the Paris Agreement.

Finally, Environment Ministers underlined the need to fully involve other Council formations in the discussions and the work on the circular economy throughout different sectors.

The Bulgarian Presidency is planning to have Council conclusions adopted on the above topics in June.

Eco-Innovation

During an informal lunch, Ministers had a discussion on enabling an eco-innovation transition towards a circular economy. In December, the Council adopted conclusions on eco-innovation ([15811/17](#)). Commissioner Vella participated in the discussions.

In this context, the AOB item on the 21st European Forum on Eco-innovation for air quality was also relevant. This event was co-organised by the Bulgarian Presidency and the Commission on 5-6 February 2018 in Sofia ([6519/18](#)).

Greening the European Semester

In the context of the European Semester process, ministers exchanged views based on a Presidency note ([6142/18](#)). They underlined how the environment is part of the solution to the economic and financial recovery and development in Europe. Ministers welcomed the specific environmental references in the 2018 Annual Growth Survey ([14826/17](#)):

"Investment that enhances environmental sustainability has the potential to boost productivity across the economy through enhanced resource efficiency and reduced input costs, whilst reducing external costs and impacts. Support for the transition towards a circular economy will create new jobs in innovative, maintenance and repair services and in designing and making new, more sustainable products. Potential specific areas include public procurement, investments in waste and water infrastructure, construction, critical raw materials, biofuels and biochemicals."

Ministers reaffirmed the positive contribution that environmental policy makes to boosting jobs and growth in Europe, in particular through green economy measures and green public procurement. Enhanced environmental implementation can also play a role in greening the European Semester. In this context, ministers appreciated the role of the new initiatives recently proposed by the Commission, the Environmental Implementation Review and the Compliance and Governance Action Plan, while indicating that overlapping should be avoided and existing mechanisms should be used to their full extent in order to limit the administrative burden of member states.

Ministers also underlined that environmental challenges, the 2030 Agenda on sustainable development and climate change should be reflected in the EU's Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) post-2020.

Specifically, some ministers suggested making sustainability risks and opportunities more transparent to investors in order to promote more environment-friendly private investment. Several ministers mentioned the need to rethink production and consumption models, and called for integrating sustainability firmly in the governance of finances. Other ministers called for a pragmatic approach based on realistic goals, which focuses on allocating the appropriate financial resources to environmental goals.

Ministers concluded that the new MFF can play a key role in supporting Europe's transition to a sustainable, resource efficient, circular and low-carbon economy.

Any other business

- ***21st European Forum on Eco-innovation for air quality***
 - The Presidency and the Commission informed the Council on the outcome of the 21st European Forum on Eco-innovation for air quality, held in Sofia on 5 and 6 February 2018 ([6519/18](#))
- ***Global Pact for the Environment***
 - The Council took note of the information provided by the French delegation with support from the Luxembourg delegation ([6512/18](#))
- ***Amsterdam declarations - eliminate deforestation from supply chains***
 - The Council took note of the information provided by the French, Danish, German, Dutch and UK delegations ([6528/18](#))
- ***Implementation of the Regulation on invasive alien species***
 - The Council took note of the information provided by the Danish, Greek and Lithuanian delegations ([6349/18](#))
- ***Commercial trade in raw ivory***
 - The Council took note of the information provided by the French and United Kingdom delegations ([6563/18](#))
- ***Review of the Regulation on Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals (REACH)***
 - The Commission informed the Council on the review of the Regulation on Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals (REACH) ([6650/18](#))

- ***Regulation on CO2 standards for cars and vans***
 - The Commission informed the Council of its legislative proposal on CO2 standards for cars and vans ([14217/17 REV1](#) + [ADD1](#))
- ***Developments regarding shipping and the International Maritime Organization (IMO)***
 - The Commission informed the Council on developments regarding shipping and the International Maritime Organization ([6580/18](#))
- ***Climate change: UNFCCC COP24***
 - The Council took note of the information provided by the Polish delegation ([6580/18](#))

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

ENVIRONMENT

Helsinki Convention on the protection of the Baltic Sea area

The Council approved on behalf of the European Union a Ministerial Declaration on the Helsinki Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area (HELCOM) with a view to the next Ministerial Meeting of HELCOM in Brussels on 6 March.

The objectives of the Ministerial Declaration, a non-binding instrument, are to reaffirm the commitment to implement the Baltic Sea Action Plan (BSAP) agreed in 2007 and set out the vision to achieve a healthy Baltic Sea by 2021; start the update of the BSAP (the aim is to adopt the updated BSAP at the next Ministerial Meeting in 2021); and provide the Ministers' vision on a series of new issues, not yet or partially tackled in the current BSAP, such as marine litter, underwater noise, nutrient recycling, and regional ocean governance.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Sanctions against the Central African Republic

The Council amended the information related to one person under restrictive measures against the Central African Republic (CAR), transposing into EU law an update made by the United Nations Security Council committee on 16 February 2018.

[Council Decision 2013/798/CFSP concerning restrictive measures against the CAR \(last consolidated version\)](#)

[The Central African Republic and the EU \(EEAS website\)](#)

Sanctions on North Korea - UN transposition

The Council amended the information related to one individual under restrictive measures against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), transposing into EU law an update made by the United Nations Security Council committee on 15 February 2018.

[EU restrictive measures against North Korea \(background information\)](#)

[EU- Democratic People's Republic of Korea \(DPRK\) relations, factsheet](#)

Sanctions for misappropriation of Ukrainian state funds

The Council extended until 6 March 2019 the asset freezes against 13 persons identified as responsible for the misappropriation of Ukrainian state funds or for the abuse of office causing a loss to Ukrainian public funds. The restrictive measures against two persons were not extended. This decision was based on the annual review of the measures. The measures were initially introduced in March 2014 and extended on a yearly basis since then. The legal acts will be published in the Official Journal on 6 March 2018.

[EU restrictive measures in response to the crisis in Ukraine](#)

AGRICULTURE**Regulation on maximum residue levels of pesticides**

The Council adopted a Commission regulation amending annexes II and III to regulation 396/2005 as regards maximum residue levels (MRLs) for chlorpyrifos, chlorpyrifos-methyl and triclopyr in or on certain products. ([5539/18](#)+[ADD 1](#)+[ADD 2](#)).

Regulation 396/2005 establishes the maximum quantities of pesticide residues permitted in products of animal or vegetable origin intended for human or animal consumption. These maximum residue levels (MRLs) include, on the one hand, MRLs which are specific to particular foodstuffs or feed and, on the other, a general limit which applies where no specific MRL has been set. MRL applications are communicated to the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) which issues a scientific opinion on each intended new MRL. Based on EFSA's opinion, the Commission proposes a regulation such as those listed above to establish a new MRL or to amend or remove an existing MRL and amend the annexes to regulation 396/2005 accordingly.

The new Commission regulations implement recent EFSA opinions highlighting the possible risks of the above-mentioned MRLs on consumers and animals.

FISHERIES

Black Sea fisheries and aquaculture: Sofia declaration

The Council authorised the Commission to enter into negotiations with third countries in order to draw up a ministerial declaration, the "Sofia Declaration". The Sofia Declaration would be a non-binding instrument to enhance cooperation on Black Sea fisheries and aquaculture, to be adopted at the high-level conference on Black Sea fisheries and aquaculture scheduled for 6 -7 June 2018.

INTERNAL MARKET

Safety of toys - Lower threshold for chromium VI

The Council did not oppose the adoption by the Commission of a directive lowering the threshold for chromium VI laid down in [directive 2009/48/EC on toy safety](#), in order to ensure adequate protection of children ([5139/18](#)).

Directive 2009/48/EC sets a limit value for chromium VI in scraped-off toy material such as paints on toys, hard and soft polymers, wood, textiles, and others. The limit value will be lowered from the current 0,2 mg/kg to 0,053 mg/kg.

The amending directive is subject to the regulatory procedure with scrutiny. This means that now that the Council has given its consent, the Commission may adopt it unless the European Parliament objects.

RESEARCH

EU-Brazil - Renewal of scientific and technological cooperation agreement

The Council approved the renewal of the EU-Brazil scientific and technological cooperation agreement for an additional period of five years ([11040/17](#)).

The bilateral agreement, which entered into force in 2007, may be renewed by mutual agreement every five years.

[EU-Brazil scientific and technological cooperation agreement](#)

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

Appellations of origin and geographical indications - revised Lisbon agreement

The Council authorised the Commission to open negotiations for a revised Lisbon Agreement on Appellations of Origin and Geographical Indications ([6040/18](#)).

The international system of the Lisbon Agreement is currently being reviewed with a view to improving it to attract a wider membership.

[The Lisbon Agreement](#) is a treaty administered by the World Intellectual Property Organisation.

Currently it has 28 contracting parties, including seven EU member states (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, France, Italy, Hungary, Portugal and Slovakia).
