



Environment Council **Luxembourg, 16 October 2023**

Chair: **Teresa Ribera Rodríguez** (Spanish Third Vice-President of the Government and Minister for the Ecological Transition and the Demographic Challenge)

European Commission representatives: Executive Vice-President for the European Green Deal, Interinstitutional Relations and Foresight **Maroš Šefčovič**, Commissioner for Climate Action **Wopke Hoekstra** and Commissioner for the Environment, Oceans and Fisheries **Virginijus Sinkevičius**.

At the Environment Council meeting, EU environment ministers will seek a general approach on:

- a proposal to revise the **urban wastewater treatment directive**
- the revision of the regulation on **CO₂ emission standards for heavy-duty vehicles**

They will also discuss and aim to adopt conclusions on the preparations for the 28th Conference of the Parties (**COP 28**) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which will be held in Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE), from 30 November to 12 December 2023. In this context, the ministers will also seek approval of the submission by the EU of an updated nationally determined contribution (**NDC**) to the UNFCCC.

Under other business, the Commission will:

- inform ministers about the state of play of the submission of updated national energy and climate plans
- present a legislative proposal on the revision of the waste framework directive
- present a regulation on preventing plastic pellet losses to reduce microplastic pollution.
- present its recommendation on improving the rate of return of used and waste mobile phones, tablets and laptops
- brief ministers on the outcome of the Our Baltic conference, held in Palanga, Lithuania, on 29 September 2023

Other AOBs include several information sessions given by the ministers from Slovenia, Poland, Germany, Italy, Portugal, and Greece.

¹ This note has been drawn up under the responsibility of the press office.

Indicative schedule (local time)

Monday, 16 October 2023

08:30: Arrivals and doorsteps

09:30: Start of the meeting

13:30: Ministerial lunch with Mr Espen Barth Eide, Norway's Minister for Climate and the Environment

15:00: Plenary session (resume)

+/- 19:00: Press conference

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[Environment Council meeting page](#)

[Press conferences and public events by video streaming](#)

[Video coverage in broadcast quality \(MPEG4\) and photo gallery](#)

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Urban wastewater treatment

EU environment ministers will seek a general approach on a proposal to revise the urban wastewater treatment directive, one of the key initiatives under the **EU zero-pollution action plan**, put forward in May 2021.

Current rules on urban wastewater collection and treatment

Urban wastewater is a major source of pollution into rivers, lakes and seas if not treated properly. Untreated wastewater may contain excessive amounts of organic matter, nitrogen, phosphorous, harmful chemicals, bacteria and micro-pollutants, which are harmful for human health and the environment.

The EU urban wastewater directive was first introduced in 1991 and requires member states to ensure that domestic urban wastewater is effectively collected, treated and discharged. More specifically it requires member states to set up systems to collect and treat wastewater in all urban areas of more than 2 000 people, to arrange for secondary treatment of all discharges from urban areas of more than 2 000 people, and more advanced treatment for urban areas of more than 10 000 people in areas with sensitive waters. It also requires industry to ask for pre-authorisation of all urban wastewater discharges, discharges from the food-processing industry and industrial discharges into urban wastewater collection systems.

Much achieved but more efforts needed

Since the adoption of the directive, 98% of wastewater in the EU is collected and 92% properly treated. While the quality of rivers, lakes and seas has improved, some challenges remain. For instance, smaller agglomerations, pollution caused by storm water overflows and urban runoff, and detrimental micro-pollutants such as residues from pharmaceuticals and cosmetics are outside the scope of the directive. Furthermore, the directive needs to be aligned with the European Green Deal's ambitious objectives to fight climate change, enhance the circularity of the EU economy and reduce environmental degradation.

A new proposal broadening the scope and ambitions

Against that backdrop, on 26 October 2022 the Commission presented a proposal to revise the directive. The proposal extends the scope to all agglomerations above 1 000 population equivalent (p.e.) and asks member states to set up plans for larger agglomerations to handle urban runoff and storm water overflows.

It sets a binding energy neutrality target for the whole wastewater treatment sector at member state level with interim targets in 2030 and 2035, meaning that by the end of 2040 the sector should be producing the energy it consumes. Urban wastewater treatment plants are encouraged to produce energy from renewable sources for their functioning. The proposal also introduces new monitoring obligations, covering among other things the presence of micro-plastics. An urban wastewater surveillance system is required as well to monitor health parameters and viruses in urban wastewater.

Furthermore, the proposed text sets a date by which member states must ensure that larger facilities carry out tertiary treatment (e.g., the removal of nitrogen and phosphorus) and introduces the obligation to carry out additional treatment to eliminate a broad spectrum of micro-pollutants (quaternary treatment). In line with the 'polluter pays principle', producers of pharmaceuticals and cosmetics leading to urban wastewater pollution by micro-pollutants would need to contribute to the costs of this additional treatment, through an extended producer responsibility (EPR) scheme.

A negotiating mandate to start trilogues

EU environment ministers held a policy debate on the proposal on 16 March 2023, where they shared their views on the appropriate ambition level to address the remaining sources of urban wastewater pollution, and on the inclusion of an extended producer responsibility scheme and energy neutrality targets in the proposal.

Ministers will now seek to reach an agreement on amendments to the Commission proposal.

This general approach will serve as a **negotiating mandate** for the Council presidency in negotiations (trilogues) with the European Parliament. The Council and the Parliament need to find agreement on the final shape of the text, before its formal adoption.

[Proposal to revise the urban wastewater treatment directive \(European Commission\)](#)

[Environment Council, 16 March 2023 \(background information\)](#)

[Zero-pollution action plan \(European Commission, background information\)](#)

CO₂ emission standards for heavy-duty vehicles

EU environment ministers will aim to adopt a general approach on a proposal for CO₂ emission standards for new heavy-duty vehicles. The proposal aims to contribute to the EU's climate ambitions by further reducing CO₂ emissions in the road transport sector and introducing new targets for 2030, 2035 and 2040.

New emission reduction targets

The proposal expands the scope of the regulation so that almost all new heavy-duty vehicles with certified CO₂ emissions, including smaller trucks, city buses and coaches and trailers, will be subject to emission reduction targets. An exemption to the CO₂ reduction targets will apply to small-volume manufacturers, as well as to vehicles used for mining, forestry and agricultural purposes, vehicles for use by the armed forces and fire services

and in civil protection, public order and medical care, and to vocational vehicles such as refuse collection trucks.

Beyond the 2025 target of 15%, the proposal sets new targets:

- 45% emissions reduction from 2030 (increased from 30%)
- 65% emissions reduction from 2035
- 90% emissions reduction from 2040

Based on the proposal, all new city buses must be zero-emission from 2030. Other buses such as coaches will be subject to the abovementioned targets.

Although the proposal is not part of the 'Fit for 55' package, it is closely linked to it in that it contributes to the EU's aim to reduce its net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030, compared to 1990 levels, and to achieve climate neutrality in 2050.

Adopting a general approach to begin trilogues

A policy debate was held at the last Environment Council meeting on 20 June 2023, where EU ministers exchanged views on the proposed target levels, as well as the scope and flexibilities of the proposal.

Ministers will now aim to reach an agreement that can serve as a **negotiating mandate** to start talks with the European Parliament (trilogues). Once a provisional agreement on the final shape of the text is found, the co-legislators will have to endorse and formally adopt it.

[Proposal on strengthening the CO₂ emission performance standards for new heavy-duty vehicles \(European Commission\)](#)

[Environment Council meeting, 20 June 2023 \(background information\)](#)

[Clean and sustainable mobility \(background information\)](#)

Preparations for COP28 climate conference

EU environment ministers will seek to approve **Council conclusions** on the preparations for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) meeting in Dubai, UAE, from 30 November to 12 December 2023 (**COP28**). The Council conclusions will serve as the general mandate for the EU's negotiators at the COP28 climate conference.

Taking place halfway between the 2015 Paris Agreement and the year of 2030, the COP28 climate conference will be an opportunity to take stock of the world's collective progress towards achieving the goals of the Paris climate change agreement. In this context, the first **global stocktake** (GST), taking place in Dubai, will provide a comprehensive overview and assessment of progress since adopting the Paris Agreement. This exercise is scheduled to be repeated every five years.

In particular, the conference will focus on:

- the global stocktake
- climate finance (including financial arrangements for loss and damage)
- the mitigation work programme
- the global goal on adaptation

[COP28 UAE \(website\)](#)

[Climate goals and the EU's external policy \(background information\)](#)

The EU's nationally determined contribution (NDC) to the UNFCCC

Ministers will also discuss and approve the submission by the EU of an updated nationally determined contribution (**NDC**) to the UNFCCC. NDCs are an integral part of the Paris Agreement, which requires each party to communicate their post-2020 climate actions.

NDCs set out the efforts made by each country to reduce national emissions and adapt to the impacts of climate change. The EU submits one NDC on behalf of the EU and its member states.

[Paris Agreement on climate change \(background information\)](#)

Any other business

Under other business, the Commission will:

- inform ministers on the state of play of the submission of updated national energy and climate plans
[National energy and climate plans \(infographic\)](#)
- present a legislative proposal on the revision of the waste framework directive
[Proposal for a targeted revision of the waste framework directive](#)
- present a legislative proposal regulation on preventing plastic pellet losses to reduce microplastic pollution.
- present its recommendation on improving the rate of return of used and waste mobile phones, tablets and laptops
[Commission recommendation on improving the rate of return of used and waste mobile phones, tablets and laptops](#)
- brief ministers on the outcome of the Our Baltic conference, held in Palanga, Lithuania, on 29 September 2023
[Our Baltic conference \(European Commission\)](#)

The Slovenian delegation will inform the ministers about the 23rd Meeting of the Contracting Parties to the Barcelona Convention (COP 23), which will take place in Portorož, Slovenia, from 4 to 8 December 2023.

Ministers will hear from Germany on the World Chemical Conference held in Bonn on 25-29 September.

Greece will inform ministers about the recent floods in Greece and the 2024 Ocean Conference to be held in Greece.

Ministers will hear from Poland on the impact of the revised EU emissions trading system (ETS) and energy prices on EU climate policy.

The Greek, Italian and Portuguese delegations will inform the ministers about the implementation of the ETS and the issues of concern for maritime freight transport.

[Fit for 55: reform of the EU emissions trading system \(infographic\)](#)

Over lunch, ministers will have an informal discussion on the negotiation process towards a global agreement to fight plastic pollution with Espen Barth Eide, Norway's Minister for Climate and the Environment and chair of the High Ambition Coalition to End Plastic Pollution.