



**COUNCIL OF  
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

**Brussels, 3 March 2009**

**7065/09**

**ENV 159**  
**ECOFIN 165**  
**ECO 26**  
**ENER 76**  
**COMPET 117**  
**RECH 57**  
**AG 22**  
**POLGEN 37**  
**MI 91**  
**IND 21**

**INFORMATION NOTE**

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from : General Secretariat

to : Delegations

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Subject : Contribution of the Council (Environment) to the Spring European Council  
(19 and 20 March 2009)  
– Council conclusions

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Delegations will find annexed the conclusions adopted by the Council (Environment) on  
2 March 2009.

**Contribution of the Council (Environment) to the Spring European Council  
(19 and 20 March 2009)  
- Council conclusions -**

The Council of the European Union,

CONVINCED THAT the economic crisis and the policy measures in response to it provide an opportunity to achieve necessary economic reforms and at the same time speed up reforms towards a safe and sustainable low-carbon and resource-efficient economy, to underpin the growth and job creation potential of related industries and services, especially small and medium-sized enterprises, and to give an additional impetus towards more sustainable development in the EU and globally,

UNDERLINING the importance in the current crisis of, *inter alia*, taking measures to ensure that credit and risk capital are available for the development of eco-technologies, renewable energy sources and recycling activities,

UNDERLINING that structural reforms promoted through the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs should incorporate policy measures towards a safe and sustainable low-carbon and resource-efficient economy as a priority, giving strategic orientation for the Lisbon process after 2010 and supporting complementarity with the EU Sustainable Development Strategy,

STRESSES the following priorities:

**A. European Economic Recovery Plan**

1. Recalling the conclusions of the European Council of 11 and 12 December 2008, WELCOMES the "green" measures suggested under the European Economic Recovery Plan (EERP), and in particular measures aimed at:

- Modernising Europe's infrastructure, which should take full advantage of the potential of "green" investments, such as environmentally friendly transport modes, water and waste management including recycling, renewable energies, as well as additional EIB and EBRD financing to tackle and adapt to climate change both in terms of further reducing carbon emissions and better adapting Europe's infrastructure to climate change;
  - Increasing energy efficiency in buildings, such as through the promotion of green technologies, development of energy-efficient manufacturing systems and materials, market-based instruments for energy efficiency, reprogramming Structural Funds Operational Programmes, and innovative financing models;
  - Facilitating the uptake of "green" products and services, such as through Green Public Procurement, dynamic environmental performance requirements and measures for products and services with a high potential for cost-efficient saving of energy and natural resources, noting the Commission's intention to continue its work and look at the feasibility of new or reinforced fiscal measures at Community level concerning energy-efficient and sustainable products and services;
2. STRESSES the economic and environmental opportunities provided by the "green" measures in the EERP and CALLS for more rapid action in key areas to foster the shift towards a safe and sustainable low-carbon and resource-efficient economy; in this context RECALLS the growing economic and employment opportunities provided in this process by the EU environmental goods and services industry in order to address growing energy and resource constraints and the challenges of climate change and environmental degradation;
3. UNDERLINES the importance of swift implementation of the measures identified in the EERP as agreed by the European Council in December 2008 and CONSIDERS that they should be complemented by other measures that will further combine benefits for growth and jobs with benefits for the environment in a targeted, timely and cost-efficient manner; ASKS the Commission to compile green elements from Member States' crisis response;

## **B. Sustainable Consumption and Production**

4. REITERATES that achieving more sustainable consumption and production is one of the key challenges for the EU, aiming at an absolute decoupling of economic growth from environmental degradation, in order to stay within the carrying capacity of ecosystems in the EU and beyond; STRESSES that sustainable consumption and production and a resource-efficient economy are essential factors for the sustainability and competitiveness of the European economy;
5. REAFFIRMS the conclusions adopted by the Council on 25 September 2008 in relation to the Commission Communication on Public Procurement for a Better Environment and of 4 December 2008 on the Communication on the Sustainable Consumption and Production and Sustainable Industrial Policy Action Plan (SCP and SIP);
6. LOOKS FORWARD TO the rapid adoption and implementation of the elements proposed under the SCP and SIP Action Plan, as appropriate, in order to foster socially, economically and environmentally sustainable consumption and production across Europe; UNDERLINES in this context the importance of synergies between the SCP and the SIP Action Plan and other EU instruments and initiatives;
7. ENCOURAGES the Commission and Member States to take forward work aimed at making full use of the potential of eco-design and of a life-cycle approach in supporting eco-innovation and internalising all costs, by addressing means and instruments to encourage sustainable behaviour by consumers and producers, e.g. through providing them with appropriate information and educational opportunities, extended and more informative environmental labelling, dynamic environmental performance requirements of products and other incentives such as price signals to produce and purchase products with a better environmental performance which should be accessible to all;

8. LOOKS FORWARD to continued work on market-based instruments for environment and related policy purposes, as well as to further analysis of effective ways for the reform of subsidies that have considerable negative effects on the environment, with a view to gradually eliminating them;

**C. Environmental technologies**

9. REAFFIRMS the importance of environmental technologies as one of the fastest growing markets and a means to both reduce pressure on the environment and improve energy and resource efficiency, as well as to strengthen competitiveness and support job creation, and STRESSES the need to integrate eco-innovation into all relevant policies so as to promote it rapidly on a broad scale and to provide impetus for the European Economic Recovery Plan;

10. LOOKS FORWARD TO an early presentation by the Commission of its review of the Environmental Technologies Action Plan, preferably during the first semester 2009, and WELCOMES the associated wide-ranging consultation, and EMPHASISES the importance of targeted actions, such as the transfer of, and access to, environmentally sound technologies, in particular as regards developing countries, and of consideration of environmental technology verification; ENCOURAGES the Commission to examine regulatory frameworks, as well as regulatory barriers and market failures that may hamper the uptake of environmental technologies and further innovation;

## **D. Natural resources, waste and recycling**

11. REAFFIRMS the need for a more sustainable use of natural resources in the EU, in relation also to the impact of this resources use beyond our continent, as highlighted in the Council conclusions of 23 October 2006; ENCOURAGES the Commission to explore measures to further promote the resource efficiency of the economy, in particular measures to promote a reduction in the use of materials, and to encourage their re-use and recycling, including, where appropriate, through the setting of targets, to boost the demand for recycled materials and products, including through the Lead Market Initiative on Recycling, and to encourage the more sustainable use of renewable raw materials;
12. Having regard to the importance of encouraging high quality recycling markets in the EU and maintaining public confidence in these markets, REQUESTS the Commission to continue to monitor recycling markets and, as a matter of urgency, to propose, as appropriate, short-term and long-term policy measures that could, on the basis of an analysis of recycling markets, promote the continued and effective and efficient functioning of recycling markets, reduce unnecessary administrative burden and, once economic conditions improve, achieve sustainable growth and retain employment in the sector; further REQUESTS the Commission with the support of Member States to accelerate work on the end-of-waste criteria, specifying exactly when recyclable materials cease to be waste and thereby helping to reduce unnecessary handling and transportation;
13. RECOGNISES the importance of fully implementing and enforcing waste and recycling legislation, such as the new Framework Directive on waste adopted in November 2008, and UNDERLINES that this is essential in order to reduce negative environmental impacts, to achieve a high rate of reuse and recycling, which is a crucial element of a resource-efficient society, and to develop related industries and services in Europe;

## **E. Biodiversity**

14. TAKES NOTE with great concern of the findings contained in the Commission Communication "A mid-term assessment of implementing the EC Biodiversity Action Plan" which stress that 50% of species and up to 80% of habitat types of European conservation interest have an unfavourable conservation status; while NOTING the Commission's assessment on progress made in certain areas in implementing the Action Plan, in particular in completing the NATURA 2000 network, **STRONGLY UNDERLINES** the urgency of significant additional efforts to reach the EU target of halting the loss of biodiversity by 2010;
  
15. **STRESSES** the intrinsic value of biodiversity and its importance in supporting the provision of vital ecosystem goods and services on which human society, as well as the economy and a healthy environment, depend; **STRESSES** the need to make a better case for the value and economic importance of the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity, as well as its potential to maintain and create jobs, and to analyse the global benefits arising from biological diversity and the costs of insufficient action against its loss; in this context **WELCOMES** the elaboration of the study "The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity (TEEB)" and **LOOKS FORWARD** to its future results; **REITERATES** the importance of raising awareness among stakeholders and the public at large on the overarching value of biodiversity, and of the role of the business community; **CALLS FOR** further promotion of the EU Business and Biodiversity Initiative (B&B) and encouragement for new incentives to develop public-private partnerships and **LOOKS FORWARD** to the establishment of a B&B support platform by the Commission; **SUPPORTS** the ongoing efforts to establish an international mechanism for the provision of objective, authoritative and peer-reviewed scientific knowledge on biodiversity and ecosystem services to policy-making, while promoting synergy with existing processes;

16. WELCOMES the presentation by the Commission of its Communication "Towards an EU strategy on invasive species" and, MINDFUL of the increasing threats and impacts of invasive species on the environment, economic activities and human health, CALLS for speedy progress at EU level in examining possible options with a view to establishing an effective EU strategy on invasive species;
17. DEEPLY CONCERNED about the impacts of climate change on biodiversity, REAFFIRMS the need to properly evaluate and duly take into account concerns regarding conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity in climate change response activities; RECALLS the need for stronger mutual support between biodiversity and climate change policies at all levels; WELCOMES in this respect ongoing activities within the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), in particular with the aim of identifying strategies to integrate biodiversity considerations into efforts to address deforestation and forest degradation;
18. INVITES the Commission to provide an analysis of the status and trends of biodiversity within the EU before the end of 2009 and UNDERLINES the need to establish, by mid-2010 at the latest, a vision and targets beyond 2010 for the conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity within the EU, building on and contributing to deliberations at global level on a vision for biodiversity beyond 2010;

**F. Beyond GDP**

19. RECOGNISES that today's challenges call for indicators that complement GDP in giving a more accurate picture of the inter-linkages between the environmental, economic and social aspects of wealth, welfare and well-being and LOOKS FORWARD to the Commission Communication "Beyond GDP", which should provide a roadmap for further action in this area;

## **G. Better regulation**

20. TAKES NOTE OF the third strategic review of the Better Regulation initiatives and the revised Commission Impact Assessment guidelines and WELCOMES the increased emphasis on identifying environmental impacts, such as the cost of greenhouse gas emissions; RECOGNISES the importance for Better Regulation of the ongoing review of the Common Approach on Impact Assessments and the benefits of greater use of impact assessments in the EU's decision-making process;
  
  21. UNDERLINES that efforts to reduce administrative burden and to simplify legislation at EU and national levels should deliver legislation that not only cuts unnecessary costs for business and others, but achieves better environmental outcomes more efficiently and effectively, for example through enabling streamlining of procedures for implementation and enforcement bodies; REITERATES that further efforts are necessary to simplify and improve legislation where appropriate and to reduce unnecessary administrative burden, while respecting the Community *acquis*, and therefore also CALLS on the Commission and the Member States to increase efforts to consider implementation measures in their impact assessment of new legislation, and to take additional steps to share best practice on implementation and enforcement; ENCOURAGES in this respect actions to further strengthen the implementation and enforcement of EU environmental legislation, e.g. by further promoting the EU network for the Implementation and Enforcement of Environmental Law (IMPEL), and TAKES NOTE of the Commission's communication on implementing European Community Environmental Law.
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