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Environment

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President **Kaspars Gerhards**
Minister for Environmental Protection and Regional
Development of Latvia

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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.
- 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.

ITEMS DEBATED

UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) conference

Ministers discussed the preparations for the UNFCCC conference that will take place in Paris in December 2015 and which aims to adopt an ambitious, legally binding global agreement to be implemented from 2020.

The Council approved the submission on the intended nationally determined contribution (INDC) of the EU and its member states, in accordance with the EU [2030 climate and energy framework](#) adopted by the [European Council of October 2014](#), which sets out a binding, economy-wide reduction target, covering all sectors and all sources of emissions, including agriculture, forestry and other land use.

While most member states felt that the INDC submission should remain closely aligned with the [October European Council conclusions](#), there were divergent views on how to include land-use, land-use change and forestry (LULUCF) in the binding EU target of an at least 40% domestic reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 compared to 1990.

The EU and its member states are the first major economy to communicate their INDC and as such urge all other Parties to communicate their INDCs by the end of March 2015 in order to facilitate the clarity, transparency and understanding of the intended contributions.

Ministers underlined that this early adoption of the INDC will send a strong signal to international partners. It was also widely agreed that presenting an ambitious common EU position in Paris was crucial for the EU's credibility as leader in the fight against climate change

It was broadly agreed that adaptation and climate financing are key issues in the fight against climate change and that different sources of financing must be explored.

Ministers also recalled that the EU has already contributed significantly to the financing of adaptation measures.

Energy Union

Ministers had a first exchange of views on the climate policy aspects of the [Commission communication on the Energy Union](#).

The general aim of the communication is to provide a coherent approach across different policy areas in order to give a coordinated response to the challenges of climate change, energy security and competitiveness. It also seeks to contribute to the attainment of the [EU 2030 climate and energy goals](#) agreed by the European Council in October 2014.

Ministers welcomed the Commission proposal and underlined the importance of striking the right balance between its different goals: affordable energy, safe and secure energy systems, European competitiveness, sustainability and the transition towards a more climate friendly economy.

Ministers pointed out that the agreed 2030 climate and energy policy framework should be the basis for developing the decarbonisation dimension of the Energy Union and underlined the importance of maintaining the momentum at this critical stage in the international climate negotiations.

Ministers agreed on the key role of the emissions trading system (ETS) for achieving the EU's 2030 emission reduction target. In this context, many ministers mentioned the importance of the market stability reserve proposal, which is currently being discussed, as well as the future proposal on the revision of the ETS Directive. Ministers also called for new initiatives for measures in non-ETS sectors, such as transport and buildings.

Increased energy efficiency and use of renewable energy, in particular from indigenous resources, will also contribute to the achievement of the overall emission reduction target, as well as to energy security. Research and innovation are essential for the development of low-carbon technologies.

Member states stressed that any governance structures should be transparent, avoid unnecessary administrative burden and fully respect member states' freedom to determine their energy mix.

Greening the European Semester

Ministers discussed the environment-related aspects of the [2015 Annual Growth Survey \(AGS\)](#), which sets out measures that can be included by member states in their 2015 national reform programmes, namely to make progress towards sustainable development. It states that pressure on resources and environmental concerns are among the main long-term challenges facing the EU.

Ministers clearly reiterated that environment policy, greening the economy and introducing an environmental dimension in the European Semester can contribute in a very significant manner to the broad policy objectives of stimulating growth and creating jobs, as clearly stated in the Council conclusions of October 2014.

A number of ministers expressed their disappointment at the fact that AGS 2015 had failed to acknowledge the social and economic growth opportunities offered by resource efficiency and the circular economy.

Ministers considered that it was necessary to take full advantage of the synergies between environmental policies and policies in other fields through a mix of instruments and initiatives, such as greening the tax systems, promoting research and development and taking into account the special needs of SMEs.

Ministers welcomed the upcoming Commission proposal on a Digital Single Market (DSM) Strategy, which should be articulated with the resource efficiency agenda under the Europe 2020 Strategy and the 7th Environment Action Programme in order to develop green growth and green jobs.

Ministers also supported the list of possible synergies between the circular economy and the Digital Single Market Strategy proposed in the [Presidency](#) background document with special emphasis on access to environmental information, smart cities (including smart transport systems) and waste management.

The Commission informed ministers that it was preparing a new proposal on the circular economy, which would look beyond the narrow focus on waste and which would be broader and more ambitious than the existing proposal.

Post-2015 agenda

Ministers had an exchange of views on the latest developments and prospects for negotiations on the post-2015 development agenda, which should define the [new global partnership for poverty eradication and sustainable development](#), to be adopted at the UN General Assembly summit in September 2015.

Agreement on the agenda will also have important implications for the future negotiations under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.

The Presidency recalled that the conclusions on [a transformative post-2015 agenda](#), adopted by the (General Affairs) Council on December 2014, remain valid as the general EU position for the main negotiating track on the agenda.

Ministers agreed in general that

- Keeping the balance between the economic, environmental and social dimensions of sustainable development, as reflected in the Open Working Group proposal, should be adequately reflected in the different components of the outcome document to be adopted in September.
- Decoupling growth from environmental degradation and reducing the pressure on natural resources by adopting more sustainable consumption and production patterns are paramount elements of a really transformative post-2015 agenda.
- A genuine global partnership with adequate means of implementation, including financing for sustainable development, will be key to shaping an overall compromise deal on the post-2015 agenda and ensuring its effective implementation.
- Environment-related funds have a crucial role to play both in pursuing environmental objectives (preserving and restoring biodiversity or addressing climate change), and in contributing to the achievement of wider sustainable development objectives.
- Coordination and consistency at EU level (both across ministries in capitals and between the capitals and Brussels and New York) will be needed throughout negotiations at the Addis Ababa, New York and Paris conferences.

OTHER ITEMS APPROVED

ENVIRONMENT

Hazardous chemicals

The Council adopted a decision establishing the EU position for the seventh meeting of the Conference of the Parties (COP7) to the Rotterdam Convention, which will be held from 4 to 15 May 2015.

The aim of the meeting is to take a decision on the inclusion of further chemicals in Annex III to the Rotterdam Convention on the Prior Informed Consent Procedure for Certain Hazardous Chemicals and Pesticides in International Trade, making them subject to the prior informed consent procedure.

The Rotterdam Convention entered into force in February 2004. Its commitments were transposed into EU law by regulation 649/2012 concerning the export and import of dangerous chemicals.

CITES Convention

The Council adopted a decision concerning the accession of the European Union to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). The Council also decided to inform the European Parliament of the adoption.

The [CITES Convention](#) is a major international environmental instrument aiming to protect endangered species of fauna and flora through controls on international trade in specimens of those species. To date 178 countries, including all member states, are party to the Convention.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Restrictive measures - Syria

The Council imposed a travel ban and an EU asset freeze on an additional 7 persons and 6 entities providing support to the Syrian regime as well as benefitting from it. For more details, see [press release](#).

Restrictive measures - Libya

The Council modified EU restrictive measures in view of the situation in Libya.

So as to implement UN Security Council resolution 2174 (2014), it amended the criterion for designating persons and entities. This paves the way for imposing asset freezes and travel bans on persons and entities involved in acts threatening the peace, stability or security of Libya, or obstructing the successful completion of its political transition.

The Council also adopted further technical amendments so as to give legal effect to the UN resolution.

JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS

EU-Belarus Mobility Partnership

The Council confirmed the agreement on the text of a draft Joint Declaration establishing a Mobility Partnership EU-Belarus to be submitted to the Belarusian authorities to start negotiations.

Mobility Partnerships are established in those cases where they can bring added value both to the EU and the third country concerned on the management of migration flows.

Belarus is among the third countries with which the EU intends to develop cooperation in the area of migration. Mobility Partnerships have already been established with a majority of countries belonging to the Eastern Partnership (namely Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova).