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CONTRIBUTION

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Working Party on the Environment
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Subject:	Soil Monitoring Law Directive: Follow up to the informal VC of the WPE on 27 July 2023 - comments from a delegation

Following the above WPE meeting and the call for comments (WK 10383/23 INIT), delegations will find attached comments from Hungary.

HUNGARY

Comments on the Soil Monitoring Law Directive

The new directive is under investigation in Hungary. The formulation of our official position requires further consultation. Preliminary speaking, in general we agree with the objectives of the directive to preserve and maintain the health of soils. It is important to emphasize that during the implementation of the directive, the Member States' prior knowledge and previous soil protection methods should be taken into account.

To preserve soil health, we support the development of a unified „monitoring and assessment system. However, in our country the "Soil Conservation Information and Monitoring (SIMS)" is currently in use and we would like to continue using it when implementing the directive. We are currently examining how the EUs LUCAS system aligns with our SIMS system.

The collection and assessment of soil parameters will require financial and human resources, which need to be secured. We consider EU funding to be essential for resource allocation, given the high costs of IT developments.

We agree with the objectives of the draft directive which can provide a good framework for a harmonized soil management at EU level, but when identifying this EU level framework, we should build on the best practices of the Member states and create synergies with the existing well-functioning systems.

Proper definition of soil parameters requires precise research to ensure soil protection without imposing undue burdens on farmers. The harmonization of new soil parameters is necessary to avoid conflicts and develop appropriate policies.

From the point of view of the protection of human health, a priority task in Hungary is the identification, survey and risk assessment of contaminated areas followed by their successful remediation. The comparative analysis and unification of the principles of risk assessment processes, as well as the mutual knowledge of damage remediation experiences, are of particular importance.

Sustainable soil management is crucial to maintain the good condition of our soils. The practical implementation of soil protection should be carried out by land users. To achieve this, farmers need to possess the necessary expertise, which can be acquired through training and expert guidance. Within the framework of the Soil Protection Action Plan, Hungary is in the process of introducing the "Farmer Soil Protection Program," which outlines strategic goals to assist farmers. This could lead to synergies between EU and national plans. It is important to emphasize that incentives for mindset change should be applied, and priority should be given to supportive rather than to punitive regulatory procedures.

We consider the Commission's role in the implementation of the directive crucial in terms of assistance, expert consultation, and coordination. Further increase of administrative burdens should be avoided, new obligations should be proportionate and in line with the offered environmental benefits.

We have achieved significant results in the assessment of polluted areas, but the planned EU-level data collection will require the further development of existing IT systems, which requires further financial and human resources and takes considerable time.

At the same time, we see a good opportunity to assess and remediate the contaminated areas and historical environmental damage as it is proposed by the draft directive. The sharing of experiences and knowledge, joint efforts can give inputs to the further development of practices in member countries and the restoration of damaged areas.
