

Ambient air quality and cleaner air for Europe

2005/0183(COD) - 29/06/2007 - Commission communication on Council's position

The European Parliament gave its opinion at first reading on 26 September 2006. The Commission accepted totally, in part or in principle 29 of the 59 amendments proposed by the European Parliament in the first reading. 16 out of 29 are already at least in part reflected in the common position.

The Commission accepted all amendments which would lead to further streamlining, greater clarity or improved the information given to the public. On the other hand, the Commission rejected, in particular, amendments which would reduce the level of protection of public health either below the level of the existing legislation or, as regards the exposure reduction objective for fine particulate matter PM 2.5, below the level of ambition set in the Thematic Strategy on Air Pollution. The Commission also rejected amendments which it considers introduce requirements that could not be achieved in the specified timeframe, or limit the scope for action of the national, regional and local authorities to pursue effective implementation of the directive.

The major impediments to achieving 1st reading agreement have been different views on the exact degree of flexibility, on the need to modify the existing particulate matter PM 10 standards and the stringency and legal nature of the new fine particulate matter PM 2.5 standard.

In the common position the Member States confirmed the Commission's initial position to keep the existing standards unchanged while allowing some more flexibility with regard to achieving compliance with the particulate matter PM 10 limit values, and slightly modified the new PM 2.5 standards.

The Commission can support the common position, as the balance of the Commission proposal between the strong public health concern, which calls for strong and continuous action to improve air quality in certain areas and the introduction of ambitious legally binding PM 2.5 standards, and the flexibility introduced to facilitate implementation, has nevertheless been maintained. The common position also maintains the clear commitment to review in 5 years the standards related to the fine particulate matter with a view to make the exposure reduction target legally binding.

The common position includes additional provisions such as a requirement for the Commission to prepare guidance on the determination of contributions from the natural sources and winter sanding. The Commission welcomes these additions as they will facilitate more harmonized approach to the implementation of the directive across the European Union.

The Commission would have preferred that some specific provisions of the proposal, in particular those related to the minimum air quality monitoring requirements, would have been maintained. However it recognizes that the common position represents an important improvement compared to the arrangements under the existing directives and therefore supports it.