Environment: 6th Community action programme 2001-2010

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The Commission presents its final assessment of the Sixth Community Environment Action Programme (EAP) which was established by Decision No 1600/2002/EC , the first Environment Action Programme to be adopted through the co-decision procedure.

Findings: the overall conclusion of the final assessment is that on balance the 6th EAP was helpful in that it provided **an overarching framework for environment policy**. The large majority of actions set out in the Programme have been or are in the process of being completed. Preparation of the programme gave actors an opportunity for a comprehensive stock-taking and better understanding of EU environment policy as a whole. As it was **adopted by codecision**, stakeholders see it as having more legitimacy than previous programmes. This has helped to create a wider sense of ownership for subsequent policy proposals. Many stakeholders see the 6th EAP as a reference point from which to defend environment policy against competing policy demands, to secure appropriate funding and to provide predictability for business regarding certain future policy developments. The **seven thematic strategies of the 6th EAP** – air, pesticides, waste prevention and recycling, natural resources, soil, marine environment, urban environment – were developed in order to strengthen policy integration and to improve the knowledge base. Although progress varied across the areas covered by the thematic strategies, in some cases their preparation helped to build political will for the adoption of effective targets and timetables, and their subsequent implementation. This encouraged a more holistic approach to environmental policy-making and established a consensus on how best to proceed in view of concerns over competence or insufficiently robust data. Marine, soil, urban and resources strategies are seen by stakeholders as having provided most impetus. Some of these even spawned specific legislative instruments. Those on air, pesticides, and waste prevention and recycling focused to a greater degree on revising existing measures to improve coherence and to address specific gaps.

However, **evidence of the 6th EAP's capacity to leverage the adoption of specific environmental instruments is not compelling**, and the paper discusses the reasons for this.

Design of the Programme: part of the varying progress towards the objectives set out in the 6th EAP can be explained by the design of the Programme, especially in light of the respective levels of ambition in the different thematic areas. For example, the objectives set for climate change were subsequently overtaken by the dynamic policy developments in that field which were not driven by the 6th EAP. In contrast, the 2010 biodiversity target was not achieved, as strong initial commitment from Member States was not matched by adequate means. The paper notes that the general trend of most indicators relevant to biodiversity has been negative, albeit with significant regional variations, e.g. land abandonment, habitat fragmentation resulting from developments in transport infrastructures, urban sprawl, and inappropriate agricultural practices.

Fragmentation: while the intent of the Treaty is that general environment action programmes should focus on priority objectives, the co-decision process resulted in a 6th EAP with a large number of actions, varying both in scope and effect. This, coupled with the absence of a longer-term vision, compromised the Programme's capacity to deliver a clear message, which would have helped to maintain its profile more effectively throughout its lifespan. The thematic strategies were developed at significant costs in terms of time and human resources: the last strategy was adopted as late as 2006. **Inadequate implementation and enforcement of EU environmental legislation has also been a limiting factor.**

Timeframe: the ten-year timeframe of the 6th EAP was not always appropriate. It proved long enough to cover policy formulation, adoption and the early stages of implementation in some areas (e.g. waste). In others (e.g. resources, biodiversity) it proved to be too short because of the need for more information or because of other obstacles.

Financing: lastly, while the 6th EAP influenced the 2007-2013 multi-annual financial framework, the timing of its adoption in 2002 was too late for the period 2000-2007.

The paper goes on to provide a **detailed assessment of the priority areas of the 6th EAP** – nature and biodiversity, environment and health, natural resources and waste, climate change, and international issues – in terms of their contribution, the achievements and shortfalls of environment policy during the period, and lessons learned. In addition to the priority areas, the 6th EAP refers to a range of policy-making approaches and instruments including coherence and integration, finance and implementation and enforcement, which are also assessed by the Commission.

Challenges for the future: the principal pillars of environment policy and legislation, with the exception of soil, are now in place, although their full potential to deliver improvements has yet to materialise due to shortfalls in implementation. During the lifespan of the 6th EAP, the global economic order has been reshaped and as the global population grows, increasing demand for resources is putting more pressure on the environment. The EU has expanded through its enlargements during this period, and so is increasingly dependent on imported resources. Traditional environment policy still has a very important role to play in protecting the environment. But the increasingly interlinked nature of environmental challenges implies a need to be flexible and to adapt. The **underlying key challenge for future environment policy is to evolve from remediation to prevention of degradation, and to help further integrate the environment in all relevant policies.**

Internationally, the EU should also leverage its potential as a marketplace of some 500 million people with strict environmental standards and related skills and products. It can thus promote sustainable green growth beyond its borders, including among the beneficiaries of EU aid, while continuing to strive for better global environmental governance. Integrating environmental and low-carbon considerations into business models in other sectors, and ensuring coherence from policy formulation through to implementation are essential. **Obstacles to proper implementation of existing legislation need to be addressed, in particular governance issues at all levels in Member States.**

The paper discusses the need to do the following:

- achieve similar gains for resource productivity in future decades, as in past decades for labour productivity, to reduce EU dependency on raw materials and natural resources;
- acquire a more extensive knowledge base to understand better the drivers and barriers, to justify the cost of action and inaction, and to develop reliable indicators to measure progress toward a sustainable future for the EU;
- examine the potential to change the behaviour of consumers in order to ease pressures on the environment;
- expand the use of market-based instruments to mobilise more sustainable consumption patterns;
- continue efforts to remove environmentally harmful subsidies;
- better align environment policy planning with the multi-annual financing frameworks, since these set the publicly funded financial envelopes at EU level and determine the needs for co-financing in other policy domains on whose actions environmental outcomes increasingly depend.

Although the 6th EAP is in its final year, the Commission continues to pursue an ambitious environment policy that is now an integral part of the Europe 2020 Strategy. Policy orientations have been adopted on climate, transport and biodiversity. Others are expected later this year on resource efficiency and initiatives in the areas of water, air pollution, waste legislation and sustainable consumption and

production are expected. Against this background, the Commission will consider how a new environment action programme could best provide added value in the rapidly evolving context for environment policy.