Assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment: provisions concerning the quality of the EIA

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The Council held a public policy debate on proposed changes to the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Directive (Directive 2011/92/EU). The outcome of discussions will provide guidance for further work on this proposal.

Ministers focused on three questions prepared by the Presidency:

1. Do Member States agree with the proposal to introduce an obligation for a **joint or coordinated assessment of a project under one competent authority in all cases**, where the obligation to assess its effects on the environment arises from various Union legislative instruments?

2. Do Member States consider that the s**coping of the environmental impact assessment by the competent authority should be mandatory** in all cases as foreseen in Article 5 of the proposal?

3. Do Member States think that the proposal for a system of **accredited experts** entitled to draw up an environmental report is necessary to ensure the quality such reports?

During the debate, general agreement was expressed on the objective to review the Directive in order to simplify the EIA procedures and to improve their quality. However, considerable concerns were raised with regard to the type of measures proposed by the Commission to achieve this aim.

Ministers expressed concerns on the compatibility of the proposed provisions with the different environmental assessment systems in Member States. In particular, Member States pointed out the risk of increased administrative burden and additional costs. Many delegations considered it not to be appropriate to establish a very prescriptive system at EU level. Most delegations were in favour of flexibility left to Member States to cater for specific situations and to adapt to the existing provisions.

The Commission indicated that some change to the current systems was inevitable to improve the EIA processes for the benefit of the users and the environment. It also showed its openness to Member States' concrete suggestions to make progress on the proposal.

The vote in the European Parliament’s Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety is scheduled for July 2013.