Convention (1979) on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution: amendment to the 1999 Protocol to abate acidification, eutrophication and ground-level ozone

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PURPOSE: to approve the Amendment to the 1999 Protocol to the 1979 Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution to Abate Acidification, Eutrophication and Ground-level Ozone.

PROPOSED ACT: Council Decision.

ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT: Council may adopt the act only if Parliament has given its consent to the act.

BACKGROUND: the 1979 Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution (the LRTAP Convention) concluded under the auspices of the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) is the main international legal framework for cooperation and measures to limit and gradually reduce and prevent air pollution and its adverse effects upon human health and the environment in the UNECE region.

The LRTAP Convention was signed on behalf of the European Economic Community in 1979 and approved by Council Decision 81/462/EEC of 11 June 1981.

To date, the LRTAP Convention has been extended by eight Protocols, including the 1999 Protocol to Abate Acidification, Eutrophication and Ground-level Ozone. This Protocol promotes a multi-pollutant approach to prevent or minimize exceedances of critical loads of acidification and nutrient nitrogen and critical levels of ozone for human health and vegetation. To that effect, it sets national emission ceilings for each Party to be met by 2010 and thereafter for the following four air pollutants: sulphur (mainly sulphur dioxide, SO2), nitrogen oxides (NOx), ammonia (NH3) and volatile organic compounds other than methane (VOC).

To support the achievement of the national emission ceilings, the Annexes of the Protocol establish emission limit values to control emissions of air pollutants generated at source from relevant categories of stationary and mobile sources.

The accession of the Community to the Protocol was approved on behalf of the Community by Council Decision 2003/507/EC of 13 June 2003. The Protocol, which entered into force

on 17 May 2005, has been transposed into EU law mainly through Directive 2001/80/EC on large combustion plants and Directive 2001/81/EC on national emission ceilings for certain atmospheric pollutants (NEC Directive).

Review of the Protocol: following the review of the Protocol by the Parties, it has been judged necessary to strengthen efforts to meet the environmental and human health-related objectives of achieving critical loads and levels for long term protection of human health and the environment. Two Decisions (EB Decisions 2012/1 and 2012/2) were adopted which amended the text of the Protocol and its Annexes and

added two new annexes (X and XI). Two other Decisions on the implementation of the Protocol provisions (provisional application of adjustments to national emission reduction commitments or to national emission inventories) were also adopted by consensus of the Parties.

It is now necessary to approve the modifications made to the Protocol on behalf of the European Union.

CONTENT: the Council is called upon to accept, on behalf of the European Union, the Amendment to the Protocol to the Convention on Long-Range Transboundary Air Pollution to Abate Acidification, Eutrophication and Ground-Level Ozone.

Main aim of the proposed amendment: the amended Protocol sets out **new national emission reduction commitments to be met by 2020 and beyond** for four air pollutants:

- sulphur (mainly sulphur dioxide, SO2),
- nitrogen oxides (NOx),
- ammonia (NH3),
- volatile organic compounds other than methane (VOC)

as well as for fine particulate matter (PM2,5).

It also promotes :

1. emission reductions for black carbon (a component of particulate matter a short-lived climate pollutant),
2. updates the emission limit values set in the Protocol Annexes,
3. establishes new standards on the content of non-methane volatile organic compounds in products,
4. and completes the reporting obligation of the Parties regarding the emissions of air pollutants as well as the progress made in the fields of technology and research.

Transposition mechanism: the amendments to the Protocol shall be transposed into EU law through several legal instruments. To that purpose, the Commission has proposed a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council to amend the NEC Directive and a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the limitation of emissions of certain pollutants into the air from medium combustion plants. Both those Directives shall apply alongside existing EU emission source control Directives, including Directive 2010/75/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 24 November 2010 on industrial emissions.