Environment: agreements at Community level and simplification of the regulatory environment

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PURPOSE : to encourage environmental agreements at Community level, while safeguarding the Commission's right of initiative and the right of control of the European Parliament and the Council. CONTENT : the European Commission wishes to encourage the preparation of voluntary environmental actions as well as environmental agreements at Community level, over a wide range of sectors, going beyond those where the Commission has announced its intention to propose legislation. In line with the 'Action Plan on the Simplification and Improvement of the Regulatory Environment' adopted by the Commission in June 2002, the Communication proposes that environmental agreements at Community level can be acknowledged in the framework of self-regulation or coregulation. - as regards self-regulation, an agreement can be acknowledged by an exchange of letters or by a Commission Recommendation. In order to ensure that the agreement effectively contributes to the attainment of the environmental objective, proper monitoring and reporting mechanisms are crucial. The Recommendation could therefore be complemented by a Decision of the European Parliament and the Council establishing an appropriate monitoring system. Such a model has already been applied in the past when the Commission decided to acknowledge the commitments of the European, Korean and Japanese carmakers on the reduction of CO2 emissions from passenger cars. - concerning co-regulation, environmental agreements are integrated in a more binding and formal manner into a legislative act. The co-legislators (Council and European Parliament) establish the essential aspects notably the environmental objective to achieve at a given deadline as well as monitoring requirements whereas the economic operators themselves commit to implementing the detailed modalities under an environmental agreement. The Commission intends to recognise and make use of environmental agreements at Community level on a selective case-by-case basis. Since the instrument will not necessarily be the most appropriate in all circumstances, it is helpful to identify a limited number of policy areas in which environmental agreements could offer an added value or in which parties have already expressed an intention to present agreements. All in all, leaving aside purely spontaneous decisions initiated by stakeholders in areas in which the Commission has neither proposed legislation nor expressed an intention to do so, not more than four to six environmental agreement are likely to be considered during the remaining term of office of this Commission : - An early candidate would be the PVC Strategy. - Similarly, environmental agreements might be considered as part of the follow-up to the Green Paper on Integrated Product Policy. The precise identification of the possible scope of environmental agreements in this field will of course depend on the outcome of the ongoing discussion of the Green Paper. - Other policy areas to be considered for the effective application of the instrument are in the fields of waste management as well as climate change. The existing agreements on CO2 reductions from passenger cars might be complemented by similar environmental agreements for light commercial vehicles (LVC). In addition, the Communication "Towards an integratedEuropean railway area" proposes voluntary commitments concerning the retrofitting of in-use rolling stock to meet the environmental requirements applied to new rolling stock as a possible policy measure. Lastly, the Commission will continue to explore possibilities to develop other additional modalities that might complement the two models outlined above.