Environment: integrated pollution prevention and control

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The Commission has presented its communication on the progress on implementing Council Directive 96 /61/EC concerning integrated pollution prevention and control. Compliance with the Integrated Pollution Prevention and Control Directive is one of the key prerequisites for European industry to achieve good environmental performance. The Commission has a clear message to send to Member States and Candidate Countries: a high level of protection of the environment, which is the overriding objective of the Directive, can only be achieved if the authorities in charge of implementation make the efforts necessary for correct implementation and engage in constructive interaction with plant operators and other stakeholders. A large number of Member States need to accelerate progress towards this objective and the majority of the Acceding Countries must continue to significantly enhance their efforts, as agreed in the accession negotiations. In all cases except where an extra transition period has been granted, which may be the case for installations located in Poland, Slovenia, Slovakia or Latvia, the final deadline is October 2007. Under the the Directive, most decisions about binding environmental standards are taken by the Member States and their authorities in line with the principle of subsidiarity. However, if it becomes clear that their efforts to implement the Directive are insufficient, it might be necessary to consider a higher degree of harmonisation to ensure reasonable consistency between permits issued by different authorities, or alternative ways to achieve the Directive's objectives. Should it become clear that the efforts of the authorities are insufficient, it might be necessary to consider a more harmonised approach that ensures a reasonable degree of consistency between permits issued by different authorities, for example by setting minimum Community-wide emission limit values as a rule rather than as an exception. Alternatively, greater use of market-based instruments could be considered. Successful implementation of the Directive would represent a major contribution to a number of actions under development as part of the Sixth Community Environment Action Programme, in particular the thematic strategies on air pollution, the marine environment, soil protection, sustainable resource use and recycling as well as the strategy on climate change. A particular challenge in this respect will be to evaluate the expected impact of the Directive on the environmental issues addressed in these strategies. The Community also needs to constantly strive for an optimal mix of environment policy instruments, check that there is full consistency between them and to explore the possibility of making more use of non-traditional approaches which provide incentives to companies to further improve their environmental performance. In the global arena, the Community needs to continue its efforts to promote a progressive transition to sustainable production patterns within the 10-year framework of programmes agreed at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg. It is particularly important for non-European countries as well to be able to reap the benefits of the European information exchange on best available techniques. With the publication of this Communication, the Commission islaunching a broad consultation on implementation issues and future development of the policy that addresses the environmental impact of large industrial point sources.