Climate change: energy dimension, preparation of the Kyoto Conference, December 1997

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OBJECTIVE: This communication on the energy dimension of climate change is intended to accelerate the negotiations at the UN Conference which is due to open in Kyoto in December 1997; it stresses the energy implications with a view to the preparation of another communication of general import which will examine all aspects of CO2 emissions and climate change. SUBSTANCE: The Council's conclusions of 3 March 1997 on climate change showed the Community's determination to act: agreement was reached that the Community will propose that the OECD member states and the transition states should commit themselves to a 15% reduction in their emissions of the main greenhouse gases (CO2 , CH4 and N2O) by 2010 (as compared to the reference year of 1990). Should the Union carry on at the existing rate, CO2 emissions will be approximately 8% higher in 2010 than in 1990 - a divergence of twenty points from the negotiating position the Council has set itself. To bridge the gap, ambitious policies and measures are required, especially for energy. The objectives of this communication are to draw attention to the challenge facing the political decision-makers, to identify areas for political intervention and to examine the actions required, with a view to achieving the goal of reducing emissions in a cost-effective manner. With a view to launching the debate and adopting political decisions, the Commission suggests a number of possible approaches: - improved energy efficiency and energy saving (it is essential to establish how to go beyond the energy-saving achievements of recent years); - greater cooperation with economic operators and new actions in the field of environmental agreements; - acceleration of the penetration of renewable energy sources: the Commission suggests, as a possible ambitious but realistic objective, doubling the share of these energy sources (from 6% to 12%) by 2010; - better energy management at island, local and regional level; - promoting combined heat and electricity production initiatives; - development of the electricity generation sector, as being crucial for overall CO2 emission trends (the sector is responsible for nearly one-third of all CO2 emissions, but it is possible to limit emissions despite rising demand); - in the context of technological innovation, efficient and sustainable energy services should be developed via the use of different energy technologies; - limitation of other greenhouse gas emissions (coalmines are an important source of methane emissions, and the production and distribution of natural gas inevitably entail gas leakages); - as regards fiscal instruments and financial resources, measures such as 'green loans' (as in the Netherlands), 'green electricity' (as in Germany) or biofuels pilot projects (as in France) should be examined and made use of. The Commission stresses that the reorientation of energy policy will call for the mobilization of new financial resources, and that the Member States should be aware of this extra burden.