EC/Switzerland agreement: participation in the European Environmental Agency and the European environment information and observation network

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PURPOSE : The signature and conclusion of an Agreement between the European Community and Switzerland for Swiss participation in the European Environment Agency and the European Environment Information and Observation Network (EIONET).

PROPOSED ACT : Council Decision.

CONTENT : Article 19 of the EU Regulation establishing the European Environment Agency allows for third country membership of the Agency. Switzerland is one of the major European countries, which has no membership arrangement with the Agency in spite of the useful information and knowledge it has concerning the Alps. In 1999 Switzerland made a formal application to join the Agency. The negotiation process for membership was concluded in June 2004 and the European Commission is now presenting two Council Decisions, which would put into effect Swiss membership of both the EEA and EIONET.

Prior to commencing the negotiations the Council requested the Commission to achieve two objectives. Firstly, that arrangements for Swiss participation as an observer without voting rights are in conformity with the Treaty of the Union and secondly that the financial contribution from Switzerland to the Agency represents the full costs of its participation. For the calculation of this annual figure, the objective was that the Agency's annual subvention should be divided by the number of Member States. The draft Agreement being presented grants the country conditions for participation, similar to those governing the participation of the current non-EU Member States of the Agency such as Liechtenstein, Iceland and Norway. Moreover, Switzerland's financial contribution reflects the wishes of the Council. Under the terms of the Agreement, Switzerland will have to establish an infrastructure for providing uniform environmental data relating to its territory. It will have the right to participate in the Management Board of the Agency without the right to vote. A Joint Committee has been set up allowing for technical adaptations, including the incorporation into Annex I of the Agreement allowing for future Community legislation relating to the EEA. For its part, the Agency will treat Switzerland as a Member State, through equal treatment in terms of provisions of environmental data and information and analysis, staffing provisions, contracts to third parties and appointments of and participation in Topic Centres.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS: Switzerland will contribute financially to the EEA to cover the full cost involved in its participation. This full cost, and thus Switzerland's contribution, is calculated as the annual Community subvention, divided by the number of EU Member States. For the Community there are no negative financial implications.