

Stimulating technologies for sustainable development: an environmental technologies action plan of the European Union

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PURPOSE : to propose a European Action Plan in order to improve the development and wider use of environmental technologies.

CONTENT : the European Commission presents its Action Plan to improve the development and wider use of environmental technologies. The report states that many new environmental technologies have great potential to improve the environment and, at the same time, boost the competitiveness of companies. Examples of environmental technologies range from recycling systems for waste water in industrial processes, to energy-saving car engines, which allow cars to use less fuel, to soil remediation techniques. However, there are still many barriers, including the complexity of switching from traditional to new technologies, and insufficient access to capital. The Action Plan, based on the results of extensive stakeholder consultations, aims to overcome these barriers through a concerted European effort to help maximise the potential of environmental technologies. It will also help the EU achieve its sustainable development goals in a cost effective way. The Plan should enable the EU to become a recognised leader in environmental technologies. Key actions include the launch of technology platforms with stakeholders in areas such as hydrogen and fuel cells, photovoltaics, and water supply and sanitation; establishing environmental performance targets for products and services; and making the most of funding schemes and public and private procurement policies.

The Plan contains eleven priority actions for the Commission, national and regional governments, industry and other stakeholders to improve the development and uptake of environmental technologies. These include:

- the launch of 3 technology platforms bringing together researchers, industry, financial institutions, decision-makers and other relevant stakeholders, to build a long-term vision on the research needs in this area and future market developments; the technology platforms on hydrogen and fuel cells and on photovoltaics are already planned to start in early 2004. A similar platform on water supply and sanitation technologies will be launched in early 2005;
- developing and agreeing on ambitious environmental performance targets for key products, processes and services. This will encourage their uptake by business and consumers, as has been shown for example by energy-consumption labels on fridges; and
- mobilising financial instruments, both within and outside the EU, to share the risks of investing in environmental technologies, with a focus on climate change, energy and small and medium-size enterprises (SMEs). The European Investment Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, and the funding mechanisms resulting from the Kyoto Protocol (the Clean Development Mechanism and Joint Implementation) should play a role in this action.

The Commission is committed to the implementation of this Action Plan and asks Member States, the European Parliament and the European Council to:

- endorse this Plan and contribute to its rapid implementation;

- request the EIB Group and the EBRD to broaden the range of financing instruments, including venture capital, which can be effectively used to promote environmental technologies; and
- initiate the Open Method of Co-ordination to assist in implementing the specific actions in the Plan.

FINANCIAL STATEMENT :

- Budget lines concerned : 07 01 04 01 : Legislation, awareness-raising and other general actions based on the Community action programmes in the field of the environment - Expenditure on administrative management; 08 03 : Nanotechnologies, intelligent materials, new production processes and devices; 08 06 0101 : Sustainable energy systems; 08 06 0102 : Sustainable surface transport; 08 06 0103 : Global change and eco-systems; 08 08 01 01 : Supporting policies and anticipating scientific and technological needs; 08 08 01 02 : Horizontal research activities involving SMEs; 08 08 01 03 : Specific measures in support of international cooperation; 08 13 01 : Research programme for steel.

- Total allocation for action : EUR 23.676 million until 2008, of which DG ENV constitutes EUR 1.58 million and DG RTD EUR 22.096 million.

- Period of application: indefinite.

- Overall multi-annual estimate of expenditure (in commitments) :

a) Technical and administrative assistance and support expenditure (meetings of experts and studies) : EUR 23.676 million (EUR 5.700 million in 2004, EUR 4.014 million in 2005, EUR .144 million in 2006, EUR 3.674 million in 2007 and EUR 5.144 million in 2008);

b) Financial impact of human resources and other administrative expenditure : EUR 5.783 million over 5 years (EUR 1.1517 million per year). EUR 0.791 million allocated for human resources (7.3 permanent posts) and EUR 0.366 million for other administrative expenditure.

- Total Cost : EUR 29.459 million.