

Mr Josef Pröll
President of the EU Environment Council
Stubenring 1
A-1010 Vienna
Austria

28 February 2006

THE SECRETARY GENERAL

Dear President,

Re: Environment Council meeting on 9 March 2006 – UNICE's views on Sustainable Development, Air Quality and Waste

I am writing to you in view of the next Environment Council meeting on 9 March 2006. UNICE would like to take this opportunity to make some specific recommendations in the three areas mentioned above.

Thematic Strategy on Air Pollution (agenda item 3)

The Thematic Strategy on Air Pollution builds upon important previous air quality initiatives. It sets out the Commission's plans to further clean up air pollution beyond already agreed measures. In particular it sets environmental and health objectives to be achieved by 2020. Although the published Thematic Strategy on Air Pollution is final, UNICE feels it is important that the Council provides clear indications on how Member States wish to see this strategy moved forward.

We would like to express our concern that health and environmental objectives within the Thematic Strategy on Air Pollution and particulate matter reductions in the accompanying Ambient Air Quality Directive proposal are not achievable in practice, given inter alia the difficulty of controlling non-industry sources (e.g. agriculture, domestic wood burning). We are also concerned about the consequences of other sectors not delivering their share of emissions reductions – resulting in rising pressure and costs for the already highly regulated industry sector. We would also urge for greater emphasis on new European research to identify the relationship between air quality and human health in the EU context; to overcome current gaps in knowledge and uncertainties and in order to devise the right measures for genuinely efficient EU air quality policies. UNICE would like to insist on the need to retain compliance flexibility in the Ambient Air Quality Directive, as this recognises the uncertainties over achievability and will allow a focus on the most efficient ways to reduce people's exposure to pollution and will help avoid investing large sums of money simply to target localised high concentrations, regardless of exposure.

Review of the EU Strategy for Sustainable Development (SDS) (agenda item 11)

UNICE notes that the Commission's Communication on the review of the SDS includes a chapter on better policy making. As a contribution for the discussion of this issue, I take pleasure in attaching a UNICE position discussing the issue of environmental policy-making for sustainable development. This position elaborates on the following aspects:

Better policy goals and content:

1. Compatibility with policy in economic areas outside the EU
2. More investment in research and development
3. Realistic objectives and attainable standards
4. A level playing field
5. Workable legislation, putting less emphasis on "command and control"
6. Eliminate inconsistency and avoid duplication of legislation
7. Take advantage of the benefits offered by environmental agreements

Better policy-making process:

8. Impact assessments
9. Involvement of all stakeholders concerned
10. More focus on implementation and follow-up.

Thematic Strategy on the Prevention and Recycling of Waste and the Directive amending the Waste Framework Directive (agenda item 12)

UNICE welcomes the move by the European Commission to initiate a simplification of the current waste legislation. The proposal from the Commission is a step in the right direction. UNICE supports the intention of increasing the amount of waste recovered and recycled in Europe and to make European business more resource-efficient. This would be a win-win situation for business, reducing environmental impact and increasing European business viability. However, UNICE is concerned that there are still areas that remain unclear, such as when waste ceases to be waste and when recycling is completed. The modified Directive should also strongly support new markets for recycled materials. UNICE fears that current proposals for comitology may be slow and fail to meet the challenges of developing technologies for recycling. For the proposed modified Directive to be successful in implementing the ideals of the strategy more work is necessary and UNICE has listed a number of issues to be addressed as well as further recommendations.

UNICE hopes that its concerns will be taken account of in the Council discussions next week. Please find also three documents in annex for more information on our recommendations regarding the Review of the Strategy for Sustainable Development, the Thematic Strategy on Air Pollution and the revision of the EU Waste Framework Directive.

Yours sincerely,



Philippe de Buck