

**EFA briefing**

**February 2013**

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**[Proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on a General Union Environment Action Programme to 2020 "Living well, within the limits of our planet"](#)**

## **Purpose**

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The purpose of this briefing is to introduce the European Commission's proposal for the 7<sup>th</sup> Environment Action Programme (EAP), which will replace the expired-in-2012 [6<sup>th</sup> EAP](#) and will cover the period 2013-2020. This will help to adopt EFA's official position that could be used by EFA and our members in our advocacy activities towards the European institutions and the Member States during the ordinary legislative procedure which is currently in progress.

The European Union (EU) environment policy has always included the protection of public health among its principal objectives<sup>1</sup>, whereas the World Health Organisation ([WHO](#)) estimates that environmental stressors are responsible for 15-20% of all deaths in Europe<sup>2</sup>. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development ([OECD](#)), urban air pollution is set to become the primary environmental cause of mortality by 2050<sup>3</sup>, while air pollution is among the general public's top environmental concerns in the EU<sup>4</sup>. The 7<sup>th</sup> EAP sets the protection of public health among its three thematic objectives recognising the air quality as a key issue to take action on. The proposed programme stresses on reviewing and updating air quality legislation providing the opportunity for EFA and its members to advocate during the following years with the aim of establishing a framework that will protect the patients with allergies, asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and will work as prevention factor for future problems.

## **Background**

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On the 29<sup>th</sup> of November 2012, the European Commission adopted the proposal for the Environmental Action Programme to 2020 "*Living well, within the limits of our planet*". The first EAP was launched in 1973 and after 40 years of successive programmes, this is the 7<sup>th</sup> EAP and replaces the 6<sup>th</sup> EAP after its expiration in July 2012.

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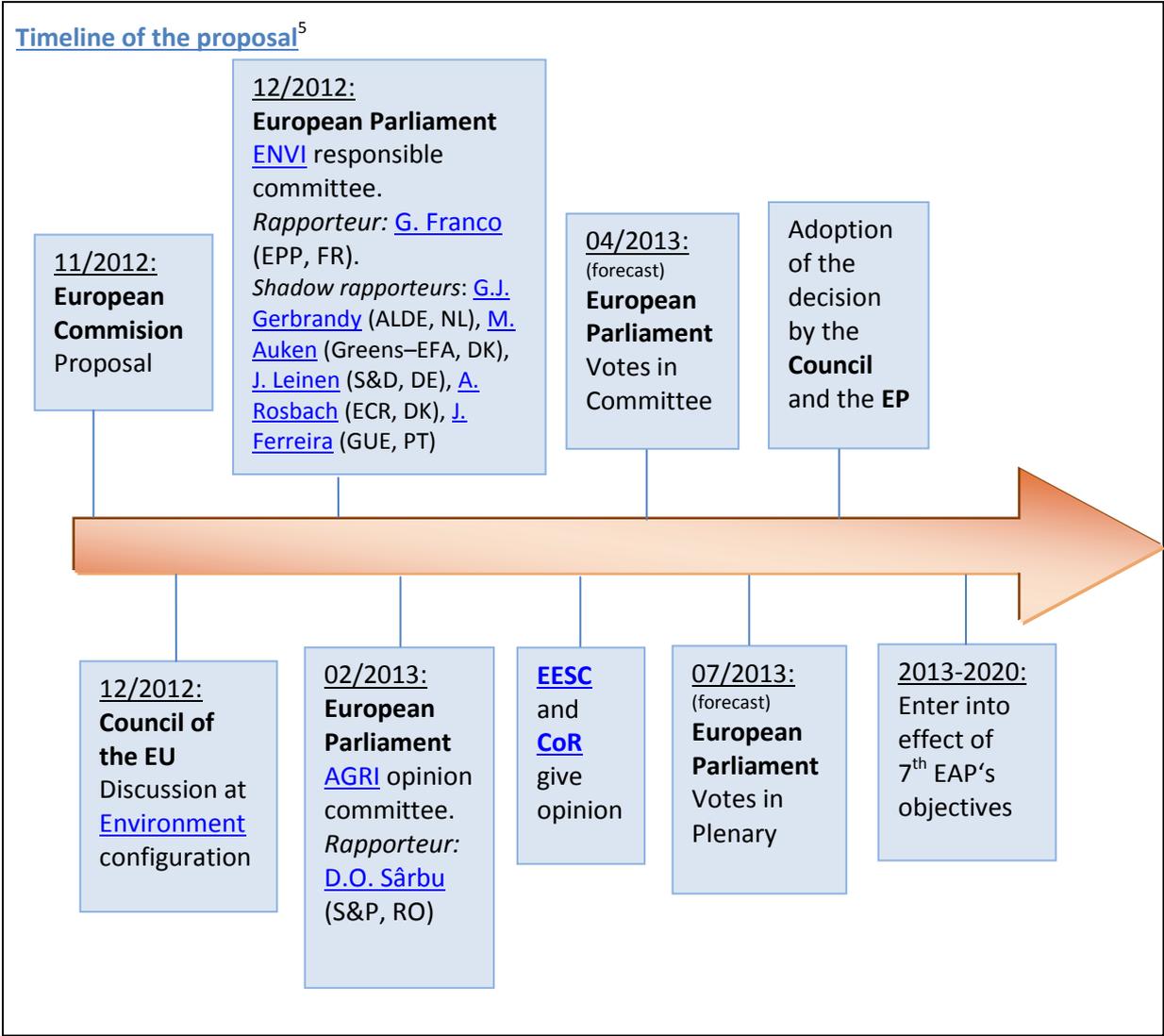
<sup>1</sup> [Article 191](#) (first paragraph) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU)

<sup>2</sup> European Environment Agency, *The European environment — State and outlook 2010*, [SOER 2010](#)

<sup>3</sup> OECD, [Environmental Outlook to 2050](#)

<sup>4</sup> According to [Special Eurobarometer 365 \(2011\)](#), 34% of Europeans consider air pollution among the five environmental issues that they mostly worry about.

For the second time after the 6<sup>th</sup> EAP, the currently proposed programme will be adopted by the Council and the Parliament under the ordinary legislative procedure. That way, the programme is seen by stakeholders as giving it more legitimacy and a wider sense of ownership for subsequent policy proposals is created.



**Legal Basis**

**Article 192** (third paragraph) of the **Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU)**: the priority objectives of the EU environment policy shall be set out in general action programmes (EAPs) that must be adopted by the European Parliament and the Council through the ordinary legislative procedure. The opinion of the Economic and Social Committee (**EESC**) and the Committee of the Regions (**CoR**) is mandatory for the adoption of each EAP.

<sup>5</sup> A more complete overview of the legislative procedure is available at: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/ficheprocedure.do?lang=en&reference=2012/0337\(COD\)](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/ficheprocedure.do?lang=en&reference=2012/0337(COD)). Basically, the Commission proposes; the European Parliament has to identify a responsible committee that will draft the report and several committees that will give an opinion on this proposal; the Council will discuss the issue in its responsible configuration.

The conclusions of the 6<sup>th</sup> EAP revealed that during its 10-year period, several achievements were delivered by providing an overarching framework for environment policy. However, its final assessment identified a series of shortcomings and limitations that should be addressed in the currently proposed 7<sup>th</sup> EAP<sup>6</sup>.

The 7<sup>th</sup> EAP is adjusted according to the [Europe 2020 Strategy](#) that sets the principles for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth until 2020. Indeed, among the key priorities for 2020 is the promotion of a more resource-efficient, greener and more competitive European economy. Beside Europe 2020 Strategy, the 7<sup>th</sup> EAP is built on other long-term policy initiatives, including climate, energy and innovation policies<sup>7</sup>. In addition, EU's commitments to a series of environment targets were taken into consideration while drafting the objectives of 7<sup>th</sup> EAP, including the EU "20-20-20 targets", [ambient air quality policy](#), biodiversity and water protection, waste management and chemicals' adverse effects minimisation<sup>8</sup>.

Last but not least, the EU has been involved in global environment commitments which should be supported by the new EAP. More concretely, during the latest United Nations Earth Summit ("Rio+20")<sup>9</sup>, the EU agreed to strive for an inclusive green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty reduction<sup>10</sup>.

#### Principles:

- Subsidiarity: the proposed actions should be taken at the level of governance (local, regional, national or EU level) which can best deliver the objectives of the EAP – [Article 5](#) (third paragraph) of the [Treaty on European Union \(TEU\)](#).
- Smart regulation: any new legislative proposals or new targets should be based on solid evidence and rigorous impact assessments of previous initiatives<sup>11</sup>.
- EU environment policy principles: the actions of the programme should be based on the principles of environment policy as they are defined in [article 191](#) (second paragraph) of the TFEU:
  - polluter-pays principle
  - precautionary principle and preventive action
  - principle of rectification of pollution at source

#### **General content**

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The 7<sup>th</sup> EAP recognises that despite significant progress in some areas of EU environment policy, Europe continues to face crucial environmental challenges, as well as opportunities to make the environment more resilient to risks and change. Indeed, the new proposed programme builds on the

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<sup>6</sup> EU Commission communication, "*The Sixth Community Environment Action Programme FINAL ASSESSMENT*", [COM/2011/0531 final, 31.08.2011](#)

<sup>7</sup> [EU climate and energy package \(OJ L 140, 2009\)](#), [Roadmap for moving to a low-carbon economy in 2050](#), [EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2020](#), [Roadmap to a resource-efficient Europe](#), [Innovation Union Flagship Initiative](#)

<sup>8</sup> The full list of legislation can be found in recitals 8-17 of the [proposal](#).

<sup>9</sup> The "Rio+20" Summit 2012 was the third United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD), 20 years after the first UNCSD in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 and 10 years after the Earth Summit 2002 in Johannesburg.

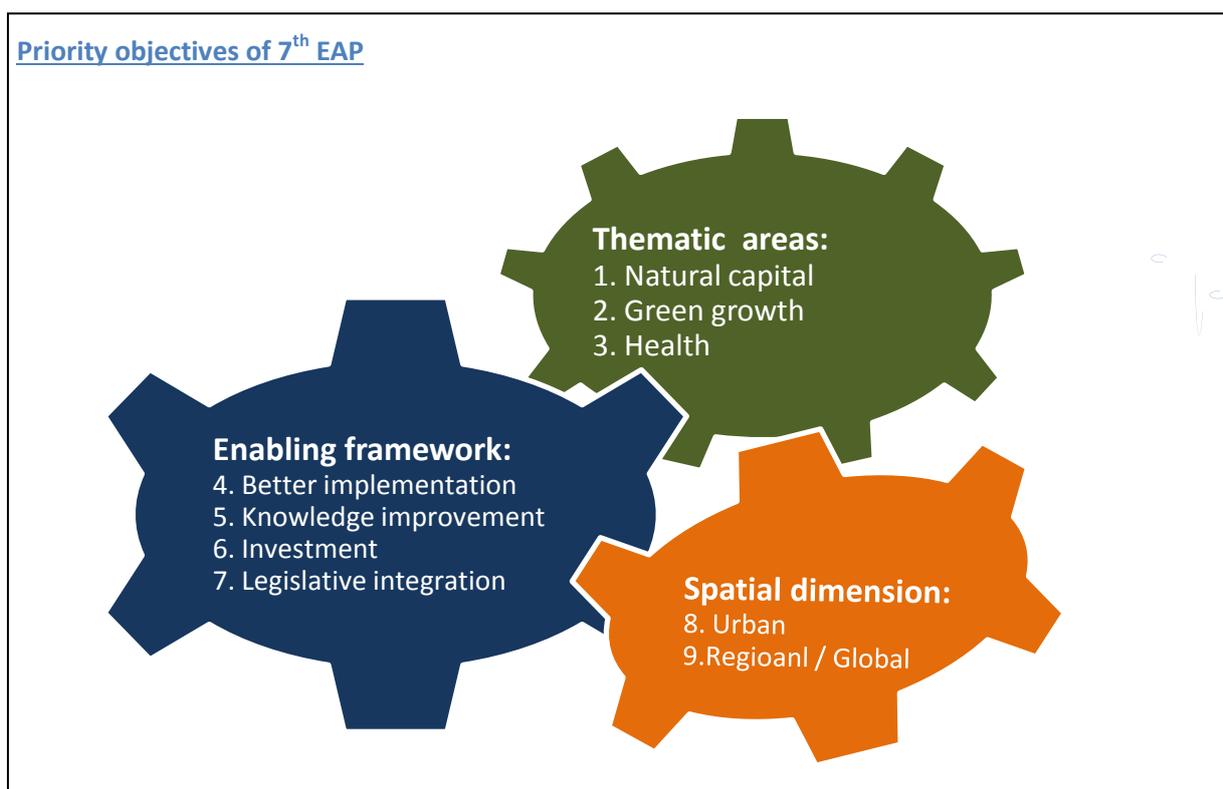
<sup>10</sup> United Nations General Assembly [A/Res/66/288](#), Title III

<sup>11</sup> EU Commission communication, "*Smart Regulation in the European Union*", [COM/2010/543 final, 08.10.2010](#)

significant achievements of 40 years of a broad range of environmental legislation and draws on a number of inefficiencies and shortcomings, as well as recent strategic policy initiatives<sup>12</sup>.

The new EAP is more strategic in nature than the 6<sup>th</sup> EAP by setting out priority objectives to be attained. It is expected to result in stronger action to tackle the main environmental challenges either by launching new measures or by implementing more sufficiently the existing legislation.

The 7<sup>th</sup> EAP sets out 9 priority **objectives** that are distinguished in 3 categories. The first 3 objectives cover 3 thematic areas of actions; the following 4 objectives set the framework that will enable the implementation of those actions; the final 2 objectives define the spatial dimension of the actions that should be both local and global.



#### A. Thematic priority objectives

##### *1. Protect, conserve and enhance the Union's natural capital*

The biggest challenges when it comes to advancing ecological resilience in Europe are the loss of biodiversity, the impacts of pressures on waters (either fresh, transitional, coastal or marine), impacts of air pollution (nitrogen deposition, ozone pollution by emissions from transport, intensive agriculture and power generation), land degradation, nutrient cycle (nitrogen, phosphorus and ammonia releases) and forests vulnerability to climate change and fires.

<sup>12</sup> The [Resource Efficiency Roadmap](#), the [2020 Biodiversity Strategy](#) and the [Low Carbon Economy Roadmap](#) are examples of such recent initiatives.

The 7<sup>th</sup> EAP puts forward concrete actions for each of these challenges either by calling upon the full implementation of existing legislation (such as [EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2020](#), [Blueprint to Safeguard Europe's Water Resources](#)) or by proposing new initiatives (such as a new [EU Forest Strategy](#)).

Regarding the air pollution, the 7<sup>th</sup> EAP calls for strengthening EU's efforts to reach full compliance with European air quality legislation<sup>13</sup> and to define strategic targets and actions beyond 2020.

**EFA comment:** EFA representing people with allergy, asthma and COPD, the quality of the air is a fundamental issue for us. **Air pollution** is especially harmful to people who already suffer from lung diseases: not only because poor air quality may result in increased risks (especially for children) of developing asthma, COPD and respiratory allergies; but also because people with asthma, allergy and COPD are the first to react (initial sensitisation) and the symptoms of their diseases may worsen (exacerbation) in case of poor air quality. Patients with asthma suffer more on or after days with higher pollution levels. These vulnerable people, together with children and the elderly, are more responsive than others to all kinds of pollutants and at an increased risk of experiencing harmful effects from exposure to air pollution. For people with asthma, allergy and COPD the health effects due to air pollution can be devastating and can lead to a reduced quality of life.

Air pollution is responsible for half a million deaths each year in the European Union and it reduces the average life expectancy by more than 8 months per person. Every year, 3.6 million life years are lost due to the bad quality of the air people breathe. Living near polluted roads could be responsible for about 15-30% of all new cases of asthma in children; and of COPD in adults 65 years of age and older. Compliance with stricter air quality standards (for example the WHO annual quality guidelines on fine particles) would increase Europeans' life expectancy and produce 31.5 billion EUR in monetary health benefits every year<sup>14</sup>.

## 2. *Boost resource-efficient, sustainable and low-carbon growth*

In order to ensure that European economy will continue to grow by reducing, at the same time, the environmental impacts, EU's actions should focus on implementing and expanding the climate and energy policy framework; promoting innovative, green technologies together with supporting research and innovation efforts; reviewing product legislation towards better environmental performance; improving water efficiency and; advancing the potential for improving waste management.

More concretely, in order to reach the climate goals, the EU will have to focus on the reduction of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. The target of 20% reduction (compared to 1990) by 2020 must be immediately met while the programme stresses the need that higher target should be agreed for the period beyond 2020 (80-95% by 2050).

**EFA comment:** **climate change** is a crucial topic as several studies show that ultimately the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions is related to the decrease of health costs and the improvement of the

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<sup>13</sup> [Directive 2008/50/EC](#) and [Directive 2004/107/EC](#)

<sup>14</sup> [APHEKON project](#)

quality of life of people in Europe. If the target of reduction of GHG emissions moves from 20% to 30% by 2020, the EU will save up to 7.9 billion EUR annually in terms of avoided health costs<sup>15</sup>.

In addition, global warming is extending the pollen season, and therefore it affects people with respiratory allergies. Hot nights prevent recovery from high daytime temperatures and have further impacts on health, through the effects of sleep deprivation. High humidity impairs sweating, which helps people keep cool and this results in worsening for asthma patients<sup>16</sup>.

### 3. *Effectively address environment-related threats to health and well-being*

The 7<sup>th</sup> EAP gives advanced importance to health concerns related to environmental pollution. Air and water quality, noise pollution, nanomaterials' and chemicals' adverse effects, as well as climate change impacts are listed among the issues that should be triggered.

Beside its full implementation, the proposal calls for a comprehensive review of the EU air quality legislation in order to update targets and ensure synergies with other policy objectives. For example, the promotion of sustainable mobility will result in both emissions and noise reduction in urban areas. Focus should be given on the latest scientific knowledge and on measures to combat air pollution at source

Review and update of the EU noise policy should be ensured in order to reduce the high percentage of the EU's population, 40%, who live in levels of night noise above WHO recommendations. Additional efforts are needed to implement the water quality legislation<sup>17</sup>. Moreover, the new programme endorses the development of an EU strategy for a non-toxic environment in order to ensure the minimisation of significant adverse effects' of chemicals on human health and the environment by 2020, as agreed at Rio+20 Summit as well. Finally, acknowledging the general socioeconomic benefits, including public health, of enhancing ecological and climate resilience, the 7<sup>th</sup> EAP calls for an EU climate adaptation strategy which will integrate climate change adaptation and disaster risk management considerations into other key EU policy initiatives.

**EFA comments:** despite the importance of respiratory diseases, nothing is mentioned when discussing the air and the chemicals' legislation (see above for data on air; chemicals are important for us in a twofold way: they are affecting the quality of the air people breathe in indoor environments and their presence has been proved to be related to asthma incidence and symptoms worsening)<sup>18</sup>.

## B. Enabling framework

In order to achieve the thematic objectives, the 7<sup>th</sup> EAP establishes an enabling framework consisted of 4 sub-objectives: the existing environment legislation should be better implemented while increasing the information to the citizens and their confidence in EU environment law; the collection,

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<sup>15</sup> Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL) and Health Care Without Harm Europe (HCWH), [“Acting now for better health: a 30% reduction target for EU climate policy”](#), 2010

<sup>16</sup> E. M. Fischer, C. Schär, [“Consistent geographical patterns of changes in high-impact European heatwaves”](#), *Nature Geoscience*, 3 May 2010

<sup>17</sup> [Drinking Water Directive](#) and [Bathing Water Directive](#)

<sup>18</sup> R. E. Dodson, M. Nishioka, L. J. Standley, L. J. Perovich, J. G. Brody, R. A. Rudel, [“Endocrine Disruptors and Asthma-Associated Chemicals in Consumer Products”](#), *Environ Health Perspect*, Vol. 120(7), July 2012

management and sharing of any environmental evidence (monitoring, data, indicators, etc.) should be improved by focusing on research in order to address any knowledge gaps and by simplifying, streamlining and modernising the procedures; the necessary investments in support of environment and climate change policy should be secured by facilitating the funding for eco-innovation under the Multiannual Financial Funding (MFF) and other financial instruments and by progressively phasing out environmentally harmful subsidies; EAP's objectives should be integrated with other sectoral policies by introducing environmental and climate-related conditionalities in any policy initiatives.

### C. Spatial dimension

The new EAP emphasises the importance to deal with local, regional and global environmental challenges. For urban areas, where 80% of the EU population is likely to live by 2020, assessment criteria of cities' environmental behaviour should be defined, while facilitating their financing for sustainability measures. For global challenges, the EU should continue with its level of credibility as a global actor in environmental initiatives by fully supporting the implementation of the Rio+20 outcomes. Co-operation with third countries should be enhanced to this direction through the [Neighbourhood Policy](#) and [Development & Cooperation Policy](#).