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PRESIDENCY SUMMARY

Enabling an Eco-efficient Economy - Joint session for environment and energy ministers

Åre 24 July 2009

At the joint session for EU environment and energy ministers during the informal ministerial meeting in Åre on the 24 July, discussions were held on the subject of “Enabling an Eco-efficient Economy”. The Swedish Presidency summarizes the constructive discussion as follows:

- The challenges of the present economic down-turn and climate change could, if met simultaneously, offer substantial business opportunities, new markets and new jobs, creating a forceful engine for sustainable growth and competitiveness. To achieve this, a transition to an Eco-efficient Economy in Europe is needed. This means creating more wealth while using less natural resources and causing less negative impact on the environment.
- Reaching an international agreement on climate change in Copenhagen in December 2009 is an important step to create the necessary long-term market conditions to accelerate the transition and for business to capitalize on eco-efficient products and services.
- An international price on carbon will be a key incentive to achieve an Eco-efficient Economy. Developing a global carbon trading system is an important contribution. National taxes can also play a role.
- To fulfill the potential for jobs and growth, adequate policies in areas such as competitiveness, environment, energy, innovation, and transport need to be implemented. An integrated and cross-sectoral policy approach is essential to exploit synergies between different policy measures. It is therefore important to meet across the boundaries of ministries, institutions and council configurations.
- To achieve an eco-efficient economy a broad transition of the industry and economy as a whole is needed. Among the sectors with considerable potential for sustainable growth and jobs are: renewable energy, energy efficient technologies, environmental technology, ICT, spatial planning, sustainable transport, tourism and agriculture.
- The future EU strategy on growth and employment – the successor to the Lisbon strategy post-2010 – should have the transition to an Eco-efficient Economy at its core. Green industries and resource efficient technologies and processes will be cornerstones for EU growth and job-creation in the years to come. The post-Lisbon 2010 strategy should emphasize this potential and include measures to further develop the market conditions that facilitate a transition to an Eco-efficient Economy. The strategy should also have a clear focus on research, innovation, development and the deployment of new products and services contributing to an Eco-efficient Economy.
- Firm action is needed by all stakeholders; not least the public sector has an important role to play. Energy efficiency, alternative power and transport infrastructure and green public procurement are examples of actions that will lay the foundation for a global sustainable growth.

- In the short run, priority should be given to the implementation of “low hanging fruit” i.a. existing technology that reap financial and environmental pay-offs. Institutional barriers, lack of financing and information are examples of obstacles that need to be overcome in order to make this happen. Energy efficiency is the obvious example with great potential for job-creation, carbon emissions reduction and increasing energy security. This was also underlined during yesterday’s discussions among energy ministers.
- The importance of international co-operation was stressed, with a consistent and credible set of policies and measures to support the transition to an Eco-efficient Economy, with a special focus on reducing green house gases. In particular, the responsibility of the EU policy towards developing technology transfer and partnerships actions.
- The time to start the shift to an Eco-efficient Economy is now as the transition will become more expensive if we wait. The EU risks missing out on its first mover advantage on international markets, if other major economies capitalize on this transition.

The discussions at the informal environment and energy ministers joint session gives important input to the formal contribution from the Competitiveness and Environment Councils leading up to the European Council discussion on future EU competitiveness and growth.

To further emphasize this priority, several meetings will be held during the Swedish presidency, among others:

- The informal meeting of the Environmental Council (24 July, Åre, Sweden)
- The High level conference “European Cities and Global Climate Change” (14–15 September, Stockholm, Sweden)
- Ministerial working dinner for the Transport Ministers (21 September, Stockholm, Sweden)
- The informal meeting of the Competitiveness Council (14–16 October, Umeå, Sweden)
- Presidency conference “Eco-efficient Economy – Towards Innovative and Sustainable Competitiveness” (2–3 November, Linköping, Sweden)

