



Meetings of energy and environment ministers on the theme of eco-efficient economy

Åre 23–25 July

During its EU Presidency, Sweden is arranging several informal ministerial meetings with a common theme: an eco-efficient economy. The Ministry of Enterprise, Energy and Communications and the Ministry of the Environment are responsible for the informal meetings of energy and environment ministers in Åre on 23-24 July and 24-25 July 2009 respectively. The subsequent informal meeting of competitiveness ministers in Umeå on 14-16 October 2009 will also cover the same theme.

We are currently experiencing several global crises: the financial and economic crisis, rapid climate change and accelerating loss and destruction of our natural resources and ecosystems. If handled correctly and coherently, the challenges can be turned into an opportunity for the EU.

Sweden is now preparing for various groupings of ministers to discuss how the EU together can create an eco-efficient economy. By providing examples, the Presidency will highlight how committed and proactive environmental efforts can bring competitive benefits. The meetings are to give the ministers a common understanding of the opportunities an eco-efficient economy offers to overcome the economic crisis, contribute to a long-term development strategy for Europe (Lisbon Strategy post 2010) and at the same time strengthen the EU's position ahead of the climate change negotiations.

The world must switch to new forms of building, housing and transport. An early switch makes it possible for the EU to meet climate and energy targets and in addition achieve benefits both for the economy and for increased competitiveness for the business sector. The strong growth already experienced by the environmental technology industry in recent years points to the potential.

Sweden also has experience of long-term climate efforts that have proved successful in combining the switching of energy systems and reduced greenhouse gas emissions with economic growth. The issue is

important in a European perspective because, as the EU Presidency, we will not just be leading the EU at the international climate negotiations. Sweden shall also lead discussions on the next step in the Lisbon Strategy, the EU's overarching strategy for growth, employment and sustainable development, and on the European Sustainable Development Strategy.

The meeting of energy ministers

Energy efficiency is one of the cornerstones of an eco-efficient economy and contributes to all three pillars of energy policy: environmental sustainability, security of supply and competitiveness.

There are a number of legislative proposals on energy efficiency on the EU agenda. Legislative proposals and what form the EU's future work on energy efficiency should take will be discussed by the energy ministers during the informal ministerial meeting in Åre. Energy efficiency can often be achieved through measures that quickly prove cost-effective, which makes the switch to an eco-efficient economy easier.

On the Swedish side we wish to highlight energy efficiency and the fact that cost-effective technology already exists. We also wish to show that energy efficiency is not just concerned with the final use of energy and that it has to be considered at all stages and levels of the energy system.

According to the European Heat Market report, produced within the framework of the Ecoheatcool project, annual heat losses in the EU are estimated at 5 500 TWh, or a third of the total amount of energy supplied in the Union. Some of this heat can be utilised with the help of district heating systems. This heat loss is not reflected if the focus is solely on final use. It is therefore important to include the entire energy system when discussing efficiency in the ways we use the resource of energy. Sweden is aiming for an efficient energy system – not just efficient final use of energy – and it is therefore important to see the opportunities in utilising waste heat, the potential for combined heat and power and other efficient solutions.

The meeting of environment ministers

One of the most important issues in the run-up to Sweden's Presidency of the EU is to facilitate the switch to an eco-efficient economy. The issue of climate change is a priority issue for the Government during the Swedish Presidency as Sweden will be leading the EU during the international climate negotiations in Copenhagen from 7-18 December 2009. But the eco-efficient economy initiative is also linked to other objectives such as preserve the function of ecosystems, addressing the loss of biodiversity and strengthening the EU's economy and competitiveness.

There is an increasing need for new products, services and system solutions that contribute to a response to these global challenges. This creates opportunities for strengthened competitiveness, growth and new jobs for those countries that make an early start.

The EU must utilise the opportunity presented by the economic crisis. Measures to stimulate the economy must not lock us into old technology. The investments now being made must contribute to Europe's overall goal of sustainable development, for example through commitments to renewable energy and efficient energy systems, energy-efficient buildings and spatial planning, sustainable transport, new environmental technology, research, training and innovations. At the same time, we must continue to work on long-term reforms of environmentally harmful subsidies and develop methods and instruments to include environmental costs in the price of products, for example through carbon dioxide tax.

An eco-efficient economy for the future

A future eco-efficient economy would be able to offer more jobs and replace some of the jobs currently being lost. It could also contribute to increased local production, for example of renewable energy, and create greater prosperity in the EU with a better balance of trade and reduced imports of energy and resources. An eco-efficient economy can also be imagined to lead to increased exports, with future markets based on the pricing of carbon dioxide emissions, and to lower vulnerability to rising prices of oil and raw materials. It would also promote greater innovation, which boosts competitiveness.

If the EU switches to an eco-efficient economy before the rest of the world, it will give the Union competitive advantages. These issues will also be discussed during the Informal Competitiveness Council in Umeå on 14-16 October.

The tradition of meetings in the EU

The EU Presidency of the EU has the task of chairing and organising the work of the Council of Ministers. The country holding the Presidency additionally has to deal with contacts with the EU's other institutions and represent the EU at meetings with other countries. The Council of Ministers decides on new EU rules together with the European Parliament and consists of ministers from all the EU's Member States. The ministers meet in various groupings, classified according to subject area. The Council of Ministers takes decisions on new rules on its own or together with the European Parliament. The heads of state and government meet at EU summits.

A number of formal Council of Ministers meetings will be held in Brussels and Luxembourg during the Swedish Presidency in the autumn of 2009. Sweden is also arranging eleven informal Council of Ministers meetings during its Presidency. These meetings will take place at seven different locations in Sweden. At the informal ministerial meetings the ministers have an opportunity to discuss important issues in a more informal setting and at the same time get to know each other better. No decisions are taken at the informal meetings, but this does not rule out the possibility of important breakthroughs being made. The meetings are chaired by the Swedish minister responsible for the area concerned. A number of other meetings will be held in conjunction with the presidency.



General questions concerning the informal meetings of energy and environment ministers in Åre should be addressed to Maria Nilsson, information officer, tel. +46 (0)8-405 16 42, Ministry of Enterprise, Energy and Communications, and to Karolina Hedenmo, information officer, tel. +46 (0)8-405 40 48, Ministry of the Environment. The Swedish Presidency of the EU website: se2009.eu

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