



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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"Only one air"

Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

Closing remarks at Green Week 2013
Brussels, 7 June 2013

Ladies and gentlemen,

Everything comes to an end. So, welcome to this final session of Green Week.

I am pleased to speak after the Commissioner responsible for Health. And I am happy that my friend Siim Kallas, responsible for Transport, has also joined us. This is how we are working together in the Commission - across borders and across sectors.

Over this week we have debated almost all aspects of air pollution. We have heard from researchers, experts, policy makers, city representatives, regions, NGOs, industry and from all of you who have shared your experience, expertise, opinions and provided new insights. Thank you for this.

We have addressed the health impacts and the underlying scientific evidence, the different sources of emissions, the costs and benefits to society, effective and innovative abatement methods for pollutants, and how to better inform the public at large to encourage them to get involved.

Some of the sessions have also addressed the important issues raised by my fellow Commissioners at this closing session – improving indoor air pollution, and reducing emissions from the transport sector.

The debates have provided us with an **invaluable source of information and a greater understanding of the challenges**, which we are already feeding into the final phases of the on-going air policy review and its impact assessment. So, thank you also for all your concrete contributions.

It will take a while to digest them all. What are my first impressions? **What have I learned from this Green Week?**

I **won't try to summarize all the interesting ideas emerging from this year's Green Week** but I will **make a few personal observations** that I find particularly appealing, and that I think are especially relevant for the air policy review.

First of all, **leading health experts** have confirmed the strong scientific evidence for negative health effects from air pollution. And they have shown that action works if there is will: policy measures to reduce air emissions can make a significant difference to health effects in the short and the longer term. They also called for more action at EU level to reduce emissions at source, and for stricter air quality standards for harmful pollutants. We should listen!

Climate change experts have underlined the need to address air pollution and climate change in parallel, giving priority to black carbon and methane emissions.

We have learned that **public awareness** is of key importance for the implementation of existing air policy, as well as for the success of any future air pollution strategy.

- Now, a lot is already happening here – such as clever smart-phone air pollution apps, websites showing emissions in real time, innovative air pollution alert systems in cities like the air pollution balloon in Paris, and TV weather forecasts with complementary air pollution reports. Citizen science has huge potential in this area – and if we can replicate the successes of the UK on an EU-wide scale, our researchers will reap enormous benefits. We heard last night how scaling up the UK's Open Air Laboratories programme could realistically involve five million European citizens in research. That would create a genuinely impressive database!

- Our own social media presence has been bigger than ever before: we have seen a lively debate on Twitter with more than 1,500 contributions from over 50 countries, including USA, Mexico, Latin American countries and from Asia, and live-tweeting throughout Green Week. The #EUGreenWeek hashtag has reached the wider green community.
- Many participants have underlined the need for more action to raise public awareness about air quality. Air pollution scientific experts have been asked to speak up and participate more actively in public debates. We are not yet using the full potential of social media in this area. We also heard calls for a simple EU standard for air pollution – a “smog indicator” that would further raise awareness about this important issue.

We heard **news - good and bad**. We heard some rather sad experiences from other parts of the world - in Beijing, large sections of industry were forced to close down during the 2008 Olympic Games, to improve air quality. And in the 1990s in Mexico City, we heard, birds were dying in the streets due to poor air quality, with only 8 days of good air quality per year. But Mexico shows - as its former mayor, Marta Delgado, testified during the session devoted to sustainable cities - that these situations can be turned around.

Green Week works best when it is a **genuine forum of exchange between different groups**. I was pleased to hear directly from representatives from industry. I was struck by the message that progressive EU environmental legislation is needed to stimulate cutting-edge research and innovation. To give you **two examples**:

- The clean technology industry demanded stricter EU emission limit values for vehicles, as well as retrofitting requirements, improved emission test cycles, and promotion of SULEVs (Super Low Emission Vehicles). It also stressed that the EU should not stop at Euro 6. We need to keep pace with the latest developments elsewhere, and particularly in the US.
- And the fertiliser industry has called for more incentives to promote low ammonia-emitting fertilisers and higher nutrient use efficiency for agriculture.

This confirms my conviction that ambitious air policy means greater benefits for European competitiveness.

And I was very pleased to see that **European standards** are becoming the reference for a large part of the world. This is certainly not because they are weak!

There have been several calls for more EU action on **methane and ozone**.

And, it has been made clear that the single biggest contribution to the quality of indoor air is the quality of the outdoor air.

One message that has been hammered home this year is "**only one air**". We all share the air we breathe, and we need to share global solutions. Europeans have a special responsibility here. EU air quality policy, above all in the transport sector, is used as a reference model for air pollution strategies in many other parts of the world. As well as a responsibility, this also represents a huge opportunity, and we need to make sure that European leadership will give the right direction.

We have also learned, in some of the sessions and at the exhibitions, that **advanced technology for further emission reductions is already available**, for most if not all economic sectors. This is also true for agriculture, where we hope to see much more progress in the future.

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

These are **only a few of many interesting ideas and comments** that we have heard during this intensive week. I will ask my team to make sure that the key points are picked up and considered further in the context of the air policy review and its on-going impact assessment.

Let me **finish with a reminder**. In a few months, I intend to present a comprehensive **air policy package**, with a revised and strengthened air policy strategy with the following **key components**:

1. Implement and ensure full compliance with existing air quality legislation up to 2020 at the very latest;
2. Set out a long term "Zero Impact" vision, and concrete intermediate air quality objectives for the period beyond 2020,
3. Identify concrete measures to support the achievements of these objectives, and
4. Ensure that European businesses can tap the full potential of the rapidly expanding market for pollution abatement technology and services.

These are **sobering times to be a European** - I cannot remember living through so intense a period of questioning of the European model. The place of European legislation itself is sometimes being called into question. But we are all clear about one thing: Environmental problems know no borders, and we will all be sharing the same air for some time to come.

So in these times of European soul-searching, it is **important that our legislation is fit for purpose**. We constantly review EU standards, and right now we are looking hard at ways to modernise them, in order to improve both our health and the environment. Our review will cover the national ceilings for the main air pollutants, and include targeted source emission initiatives, for medium-scale combustion and perhaps agriculture, for example.

But air quality is about much more than just legislation, it's also about the economy and how it impacts on the environment and on our health. And this brings me to **next year's theme of Green Week**.

Let me explain:

Most air pollution is caused by economic activities. If you use resources in a more efficient way, you can also reduce air pollution. If you recycle scrap steel, for example, you also reduce air pollution of the sector by 87% - and this is about cleaner air.

It's all interlinked. Nature knows this well. And it can teach us precious lessons. If we look at the way nature works: it produces, uses and reuses. It works in a circular manner. Nothing is ever wasted. This is what a green economy is about. And I want Green Economy to be the theme of next year's Green Week. Actually, we will dedicate all of 2014 to the green economy; to making our economy a circular one that lives in harmony with nature.

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Ladies and gentlemen,

If this year is about **respiration** - breathing cleaner air - next year will be about **aspiration**. It will be about creating the conditions to meet the aspirations of us all, but also of those additional 2 billion citizens that will join us on the planet by 2050, and those additional 3 million middle class consumers that will join us in the next two decades.

The green economy places the **efficient use of resources at the centre of its growth strategy**. The objective is to decouple gross domestic product from resource use and from environmental impact. In simpler terms it means respecting the environment and its limits, taking into account the impact economic activities have on the resources used, but also the impact they have on the environment.

This approach is already an important part of the EU economic growth strategy. We need to work together to ensure that it is translated into concrete actions. To create an economic model that will allow us to be proud of the heritage we leave to future generations.

And I want to start by **cleaning up part of the mess we have made**. It would be great if we could organise in May 2014 a European clean-up day with wide participation of citizens. A European day in which many of us get their boots and gloves on and clean up Europe.

But we will have plenty of opportunities to discuss further about the green economy, that's why I will stop here.

Let me finish by thanking you again for sharing experiences, providing new insights, and suggesting constructive ways to address the remaining challenges. It is only in true partnerships, actions which use the power of data, science, civil society, awareness raising, innovation, bottom up activities of cities and regions, responsible top down policy setting, international cooperation ... that we can be really successful in providing clean air. We need to join forces and, as it was rightly pointed out yesterday by Cor Lamers from the Netherlands: "Cooperation can only be as strong as its weakest link".

Thank you all for making this week so successful. For helping and hoping with us, and me, working in the Commission. I also hope that you find the new Green Week location, The Egg, as inspiring as I do. We finally got the answer to the question "what comes first, the chicken or the egg?" Many healthy open air chickens hatched out of our new egg.

Finally my wholehearted thanks go to the team from DG ENV, to everybody involved in the organization of this Green Week. I could not imagine a better way to conclude my closing speech than asking you to join me in a warm round of applause to thank them for their giant work, their professionalism and enthusiasm!

Thank you and have a safe trip back home!