



# Conference Report

## Executive Summary

### Policy Forum Shaping the Future of EU Environmental Policy From the 7th to the 8th Environment Action Programme – Status, Challenges, and Next Steps

Organised by *Umweltdachverband (UWD)* and *European Environmental Bureau (EEB)*  
in cooperation with Haus der Europäischen Union.

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**Haus der Europäischen Union**

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### Executive Summary

#### **Policy Forum on "Shaping the Future of EU Environmental Policy: From the 7th to the 8th Environment Action Programme"**

On 13th June, the Policy Forum "**Shaping the Future of EU Environmental Policy: From the 7th to the 8th Environment Action Programme**" was organised in Vienna as part of the project "AT 18 - From the Austrian EU Council Presidency to the 8th EU Environmental Action Program". The aim of the project is to build a strong case for an 8th EU Environmental Action Program (8EAP) and to use the upcoming Austrian Council presidency to present a basic proposal for its contents.

The Policy Forum convened a wide range of expert speakers on EU and national environmental policies including high-level representatives from the European Commission and Parliament, the European Environment Agency (EEA), the World Business Council for Sustainable Development (WBCSD), representatives from Austrian politics and administration, NGOs as well as policy experts from other EU member states to discuss the success of the 7EAP and explore priorities for a future 8EAP.

The conference report provides an overview of the various sessions as well as insights and discussions that transpired during the event.

The key messages that have emerged from the Policy Forum can be summarized as follows:

#### **1. Value of Environment Action Programmes**

The value of the 7EAP and the need for an 8EAP was clearly acknowledged. EAPs convey long-term predictability, strengthen the commitment of the European Commission, European Parliament and the Council and create a stable framework for environmental policy making irrespective of the Commission in charge.

#### **2. Long-term vision**

The long term vision to 2050 was generally considered to be helpful as a guiding framework. Questions were raised with regard to the embedded concept of "growth" and the ability to translate and communicate concepts such as "planetary boundaries" and "tipping points" and how to make them more operational.

#### **3. Priority objectives and specific value of 7EAP**

The priority objectives were each considered to be important and still valid, with some objectives coming out stronger than others (see below, points 4-6). Overall the perception seemed to be that the 7EAP had proven its value in terms of having the right title, policy priorities and narrative.

#### **4. Thematic Priority Areas**

There was a general recognition that the three thematic priority areas<sup>1</sup> have to be debated together and that one area cannot be resolved without the other. Many delegates expressed

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<sup>1</sup> (1) Natural Capital (2) Resource-efficient, green and competitive low carbon economy (3) Risks to health and well-being

concern about the limited progress on **biodiversity protection** and that new approaches are necessary to become more effective. The **growth paradigm** was challenged several times, questioning GDP as an indicator and calling for a more sophisticated approach that moves beyond production targets and does justice to criteria such as “well-being” and “living well”. The importance of the **precautionary principle** was stressed by several delegates, especially with regards to biodiversity protection and health. **Policy contradictions** were addressed in all three priority areas and the role of policy coherence was emphasized as an important driver of change throughout the event.

#### 5. Enabling Objectives

All four enabling objectives<sup>2</sup> were deemed important, with a clear emphasis on the objective of **policy coherence**. The inability of making the necessary progress on priority objectives, especially on biodiversity, was also strongly linked to a **lack of finance**. In this regard it was suggested that a new EAP should focus on financial instruments as a key enabling factor that can be developed much more. Also, the need to link the EU Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) to the EAP priorities was stressed several times.

#### 6. Horizontal Objectives<sup>3</sup>

The discussions underlined the international dimension of environmental policy. Global collaboration was seen as essential to address the challenges that we face and the case for multilateralism was deemed to be more important than ever. The SDGs were considered as an important guiding framework also calling for a more holistic/systemic approach to EU policy making. EU leadership was seen as critical but also lacking in areas such as the Paris Agreement. It was also noted that there was lesser export of EU standards to the global level with competition coming from other standard setters, notably China, which was perceived as a threat.

Going beyond the priority objectives of the 7EAP, the following issues came out strongly and could play a role in a subsequent 8EAP:

#### 7. Systemic approach

The interrelationship between environment, health, infrastructure, food security, climate, development, social cohesion and the global economy calls for a systemic approach that joins up and integrates the debate bringing people out of their silos.

A systemic approach could also affect the structure of a future EAP, but this would need further exploration.

#### 8. Create spaces for solutions

To integrate the debate and develop solutions from a systemic perspective, spaces for interdisciplinary exchange have to be developed, reinforcing the idea of innovative ideas for the future. Foresight platforms to explore future risks could play as much a role as programmes

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<sup>2</sup> (4) Better implementation, (5) Better information (3) More and wiser investment (4) Full integration into other policy areas

<sup>3</sup> (8) Make Union’s cities more sustainable (9) Help Union address international environmental and climate challenges more effectively

where innovative projects and ideas can be developed at a much broader scale than it is currently the case. There should be an emphasis on rewarding holistic, multi-sector approaches.

#### **9. Role of business**

The potential role of business in advancing environmental agendas was acknowledged, specific reference was made to the success of the Circular Economy debate and the impact caused by the idea of “stranded assets” in the Climate Change debate. Building on the idea of creating spaces for innovative solutions, businesses should be brought together to look at key systems changes that need to take place in order to overcome current deadlocks.

#### **10. Monitoring & Accountability**

Accountability was stressed as a key factor for success. A future EAP should therefore be clear on who will deliver and who is responsible. This would need objectives, targets with lead indicators, concrete actions, timelines and regular monitoring to assess the progress made.

#### **11. Timescale**

The 2021-2030 timescale was considered important to fit in with the SDGs and the range of 2030 strategies and targets. In order to ensure ownership, it is important that the mid-term assessment and subsequent development of the next Environment Action Programmes is aligned with the Commission’s terms of office. Following from that, an 8EAP would need a mid-term evaluation by 2024-25 to ensure ownership of the incoming Commission for a subsequent EAP.

#### **12. Role of current and future presidencies**

Austria will discuss an 8EAP at the upcoming informal environmental Council in October this year. Based on the evaluation of the 7EAP, Finland will do the conclusions in the council (second half of 2019), Germany can then do the final decision with the European Parliament and the Commission.

### **What’s next?**

In **October 2018, three expert meetings** will be held in Austria to build on the outcomes of the Policy Forum as well as **to develop practical ideas for an 8EAP**. More information on dates, location and content will be made available in due course.

Informed by the Policy Forum and the Expert Workshops, an **Action Plan on “EU Environmental and Austrian Environmental Policies after 2020”** will be developed and presented as an input to reflections on an 8EAP.

We thank all delegates and experts for their active participation in the Vienna Conference.

More information about the project and the Policy Forum can be found under:

<https://www.umweltdachverband.at/themen/europaeische-umweltpolitik/at18/> or contact: Julika Dittrich at [julika.dittrich@umweltdachverband.at](mailto:julika.dittrich@umweltdachverband.at)