



PRESS RELEASE

Health groups dismayed over lack of clarity on air package

Brussels, 16 December 2014 - First Vice-President Timmermans' announcement today on the future of the clean air quality package in 2015 was disappointingly unclear, according to health, medical and air expert groups from all over Europe.

Speaking to the European Parliament on the EU Commission's work programme today, Timmermans said that a gap had opened up between the position of the Council and the European Parliament on the air package. He said that the Commission would come forward with a modified package, which would not compromise on goals but would include new methods for implementation. He said that the compromise proposals would be brought forward during ongoing negotiations and would take into account the EU's 2030 climate and energy targets agreed by EU leaders at their October summit in Brussels.

"The package has not been withdrawn and we hope this remains so. We expect the negotiations in Parliament and Council to continue for the benefit of citizen's health, because everything else would be an unacceptable delay." says Anne Stauffer, Deputy Director, Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL).

The package, including the important proposal for the National Emissions Ceilings Directive (NEC), has been under serious threat of withdrawal by EU Commission President Juncker and First Vice-President Timmermans because of strong industry pressure in recent weeks.

Ms Stauffer continues: *"We deplore the confusion that has been created as our health should not be subjected to political tactics and the deregulatory agenda. We are calling on Parliament to come out with a strong statement in support of the National Emissions Ceilings Directive (NEC)."*

"Air pollution is a "big issue" for Europe and one that cannot be solved at national level because pollution knows no borders. The NEC Directive is the only instrument to tackle transboundary air pollution and represents a cost-effective law to reduce pollution at the source."

The proposal currently in negotiation in the European Parliament and with Member States follows a comprehensive impact assessment, and a review of the latest science. It is modest given that it aims to reduce premature deaths from exposure to air pollution by 58,000 out of a total toll of 400,000 per year.⁽¹⁾ A recent assessment for the European Parliament has shown that because of synergies with the EU's 2030 climate and energy package, air pollution reduction ambition can be increased at no additional cost. All sectors should share the burden of air pollution since it stems from many sources.

HEAL and its members and partners will continue to work with decision-makers to improve the package. In November, the European Respiratory Society (ERS), representing 10,000 experts in Europe, and the European Federation of Asthma and Allergies Patients Associations (EFA) joined

HEAL in a joint letter to Commissioner President Juncker urging action on air quality. (2) HEAL has also been collaborating closely with the International Association of Mutual Benefit Societies (AIM) to bring attention to this issue. AIM brings together 59 health mutual and health insurance funds representing 230 million people worldwide, including 160 million in Europe. (3)

Background

The Clean Air Policy Package was presented by then Commissioners for Environment, Janez Potočnik, and Health, Tonio Borg, on 18 December 2013 with the aim of cleaning up Europe's air. It includes the proposal for the revised National Emissions Ceilings Directive (NEC) and for medium-scale combustion plants; and is based on a comprehensive cost-benefit analysis and impact assessment of the Commission services. The analysis for the package showed that in 2010 alone, air pollution caused 400,000 premature deaths in the EU-28, with associated health costs of up to €940 billion (or 9% of the EU's GDP). Former environment commissioner Potocnik said at the time it was designed to avoid 58,000 premature deaths each year (1) and that the benefits were likely to be 12 times as high as the costs.(3)

In addition, there is a large body of evidence on the health effects of air pollution, which necessities action at EU level: a recent review by the World Health Organization highlighted that health impacts occur at lower concentration levels and that the range of effects is broader than previously thought, now including not only lung and heart health, but also impacts on children's development. It is also now associated with higher rates of diabetes.

The revised National Emissions Ceilings Directive (NEC) proposal sets emission caps for the six main pollutants PM, SO₂, NO_x, VOCs, ammonia and methane for 2020 and 2030. For 2020, the proposal aims to implement the commitments made under the legally-binding Gothenburg Protocol as part of the Convention on Long-range Transboundary air pollution.

Notes

1. Letter to Juncker, December 2014, Civil Society view regarding pending EU legislation 2014 – response to BusinessEurope <http://www.env-health.org/resources/letters/article/civil-society-view-regarding>

2. Letter to Juncker, HEAL, ERS and EFA http://env-health.org/IMG/pdf/health_letter_to_juncker_on_air_quality.pdf

3. AIM calls on EU to act on air quality, November 2014, <http://www.env-health.org/resources/press-releases/article/aim-calls-on-the-eu-to-act-on-air>

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