



*EU Environmental Policy Briefing**

France Prepares for EU Presidency

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On 1 July France will take up the Presidency of the EU with what promises to be an especially weighty agenda. With a number of important dossiers piled up and important institutional changes in sight, the French Presidency promises to be ‘the heaviest in EU history’¹. If the Lisbon Treaty comes into force in 2009, it is also likely to be one of the last of the six-month rotating EU Presidencies before the job is handed over to a permanent President of the Council and the new foreign policy chief. It is reported that France plans to ‘see it out with a bang’ having set aside a budget of €190 million for the six-month period, compared to the UK which spent around €13 million on its Presidency three years ago². The Presidency website has also now been launched, although much of this is yet to be completed.³

The energy and climate change package which was published by the European Commission in January will be top of the political agenda during the Presidency. The package includes a proposed revision of the EU’s ETS and a new renewable energy Directive. These two dossiers are already provoking heated debate, especially on how to share the burden of commitments between the Member States. It is thought that France is likely to use the Presidency to emphasise its concerns that any measures do not negatively affect the competitiveness of European businesses globally.² Matters of energy security and market liberalisation will also be amongst France’s political priorities.

The energy and climate package alone would be enough to make a heavy workload but the delayed debate on the future of the CAP will also dominate the agenda. A decision on the Commission’s CAP Health Check, which was published on 20 May this year, is planned for the second half of the six months and the French will be keen to use their Presidency to help shape the debate.

Further political priorities for the French are tackling immigration issues at an EU level and furthering cooperation on security and defence. In a speech in November 2007 the French Prime Minister, Francois Fillon, stated that once there is freedom of movement in the Schengen Area, there should also be common rules on granting visas, on the right of asylum and on regularising documents.⁴ Reports that France will

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put forward ambitious proposals on common defence and security have been counterbalanced by other reports which claim that these ambitions will be played down to avoid jeopardising the ratification process of the Lisbon Treaty.²

A number of institutional issues are also likely to occupy the Presidency, mainly in preparing for the Treaty's new provisions which, provided Ireland ratifies the Treaty, will enter into force on 1 January 2009. According to Bernard Kouchner, the French foreign minister, the French Presidency's work will include designating the future permanent President of the Council and the new foreign policy chief, decisions which are expected to be taken by EU Heads of State and Government at a summit in December. France also intends to prepare for the new external action service to be operating on 1 January 2009. There are, however, questions about how and when all these new roles and functions will fall into place. The Treaty should be ratified by the end of 2008 and be in force from 1 January 2009 and so should the permanent EU President and foreign policy chief.

References

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