

PRESS RELEASE

European Commission staff downsizing bound to hamper environmental protection

[Brussels, March 4th 2013] - Justice & Environment (J&E), an association of public interest environmental law organizations in the EU, is extremely concerned that announced cuts in the European Commission budget will hinder the efficiency of environmental protection.

The European Commission's environment unit is undergoing a major reshuffling, with around 5% of staff likely to be cut. This measure is meant to cope with the reduced budget available for 2014-2020, following the Member States' recent decision to reduce the EU budget.

J&E considers the planned budget cuts unacceptable and questions the credibility of the Commission when talking about better enforcement of environmental laws in its policy papers [1]. In addition, J&E questions the purpose of elaborating new and more sophisticated environmental directives when their effectiveness cannot be guaranteed through the DG Environment institutional setting.

According to J&E, this decision is in contradiction with one of the final decision of the 27th session of the UNEP Governing Council/Global Ministerial Environment Forum, held end of February. The decision strongly supported by DG Environment representatives, stressed that democracy, good governance and the rule of law are essential for sustainable development [2]. And for an effective rule of law for sustainable development, strong institutions are needed.

However, Thomas Alge, Chairman of J&E, critically pointed out: *"The environmental unit will be overburdened with multiple cuts and the infringement staff will be in charge of many extra tasks that have nothing to do with infringements."*

He added: *"How could a reduced staff cope with those major shortcomings with regard to the enforcement of EU law that even the EC acknowledges? This proves the decreasing commitment of the Commission towards environmental protection."*

J&E is calling upon Commissioner Potočník to stand up for DG ENV and re-arrange the priorities in order to enhance the enforcement programme, as proposed in various policy papers, instead of severely cutting units that were already understaffed.

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[1] Such as in the Reference enforcement communication and the 7th Environmental Action Programme

[2] http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-13-136_en.htm

Justice and Environment (J&E) is a European Network of Environmental Law Organizations (www.justiceandenvironment.org). J&E covers 12 countries within and outside the European Union and has 13 members that deal with environmental law solely or as one of their activities. J&E aims for a better legislation and implementation of environmental law on the national and European Union (EU) levels to protect the environment, people and nature. J&E does this by enhancing the enforcement of EU legislation through the use of European law and exchange of information on the national, cross-border and wider European levels.

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