

## Assessment of the 6<sup>th</sup> Environment Action Programme – contribution of the Czech Republic

The 6<sup>th</sup> Environment Action Programme (6<sup>th</sup> EAP), which was agreed in 2002, establishes priority objectives in the field of environmental protection to be achieved by the EU before 2012. The four priority areas are **climate change, nature and biodiversity, environment and health**, and **natural resources and waste**. In addition to the main objectives seven thematic strategies were developed under the 6<sup>th</sup> EAP: soil, marine, air, pesticides, urban environment, natural resources and waste recycling.

The 6<sup>th</sup> EAP contributed to promoting environmental policies across the process of policy-making and strategic debate primarily by providing policymakers with one coherent document, which had been agreed under the co-decision procedure and therefore provides a strong mandate for integrating environmental objectives into other areas and strategies. However, the major challenge of the 6<sup>th</sup> EAP remains effective implementation of its objectives, adoption of legislation and concrete measures that would ensure meeting the goals in the four priority areas as well as in the thematic strategies.

### Main specific problems of the Czech Republic in the field of environment:

- **Air quality** remains a major problem in the Czech Republic. It concerns mainly industrial regions with intensive road traffic and small settlements, where fossil fuels used for heating for households have a significant impact on air quality. Polluting substances of the air have undesirable effects on human health as well as vegetation and eco-systems.
- **Urban development** is an essential factor in land use. The expansion of urban areas, known as urban sprawl, is characteristic of the current development around large cities in the Czech Republic. This trend carries negative impacts to the environment such as soil sealing, intensifying transport and subsequent increase in air pollution, loss of biodiversity and ecosystems. The degree of landscape fragmentation has increased, due to urban sprawl as well as to the construction of road network.
- Ensuring **water quality** and its sufficient quantity is important not only for human consumption but also in the context of landscape protection, biodiversity protection and ecosystem services. Especially in connection with climate change and anticipated occurrence of more frequent and longer periods of droughts, it is crucial to improve water management, especially by reducing of water withdrawals by households as well as by the economic sectors, proper implementation of municipal and industrial waste water treatment legislation and controlling water pollution from agriculture. Shortages in underground water supply could present a challenge in future.
- **Soil** protection continues to be challenge due to a persisting problem of erosion, loss of soil to urban development and intensive agricultural activity. A large proportion of agricultural land is threatened by water erosion.
- High-energy and emission **intensity** in the transportation and industry sectors remains continuous problem.

The Czech Republic would welcome the aforementioned topics to be analyzed and integrated into the preparations of the 7<sup>th</sup> EAP while respecting the subsidiarity principle.

### Further development

Recent development brought new challenges in the area of environment to which the European Union has to adopt a position in its environmental policy. Environment is only partially covered in the Europe 2020 Strategy; therefore a separate, comprehensive and coherent instrument for environmental protection is needed. The Czech Republic believes that a long-term detailed strategic framework is necessary and the 6<sup>th</sup> EAP should be followed by 7<sup>th</sup> EAP or comparable strategic programme setting out priorities and objectives until 2020 as well as concrete commitments for the member states.

It is important that the European Commission carries out a complex assessment of the 6<sup>th</sup> EAP and its achieved objectives. The State of the Environment Report 2010 provides a useful basis for conducting the over-all assessment of the 6<sup>th</sup> EAP. The assessment should be presented as soon as possible with the proposal for the 7<sup>th</sup> EAP following ideally at the beginning of 2012 to allow the debate on EU's future environmental strategy to start at the earliest opportunity and be integrated into other cross-cutting strategic documents which are now being negotiated.

The Czech Republic is cautious when it comes to introducing new tools and therefore supports the concept of greening already existing EU funds instead. Environmental objectives should be also accordingly reflected in the future Cohesion Policy, the Common Agricultural Policy reform and the Europe 2020 Strategy implementation. The 7<sup>th</sup> EAP may serve as a term of reference for setting environmental criteria for EU funding - yet the link must be fairly strong.

As possible priorities for the 7<sup>th</sup> EAP the Czech Republic would envisage **urban environment** as a prominent source of pollution and resource inefficiencies, **adaptation to climate change** in the context of specific sectors such as water management, forestry, agriculture, biodiversity etc. and **resource efficiency** (innovative waste management, boosting competitiveness). It is important to pursue synergies among environmental, economic and social policies by promoting resource efficiency, eco-innovation and enhancement of green economy. In order to make the 7<sup>th</sup> EAP more outcome orientated the Czech Republic could support setting reasonable targets for the period until 2020. Improving environmental monitoring and data sharing is important in order to assess, value and manage the ecosystem services more precisely. Determining a clear set of indicators is a condition for receiving effective monitoring and assessment.

The 7<sup>th</sup> EAP should be focused on implementation, enforcement and streamlining of existing EU legislation. The 7<sup>th</sup> EAP should be a vehicle for meaningful and cost-effective sectoral integration of environmental concerns thus enabling effective environmental protection and contributing to higher competitiveness and growth.