Andrea Ciaffi (CINSEDO) welcomed the participants and the speakers, introducing the new series of webtalk as part of the Annual Training Programme on European Policies, organised by CINSEDO for the officials from Italian Regions and Autonomous Provinces.

Paolo Fossati (CINSEDO) introduced the webtalk, referring to the current circumstances of the covid-19 lockdown. Less human activity has led to lowering of air pollution especially in the Po Valley. The emergence from the crisis provides an opportunity to rebuild a greener economy and achieve a paradigm-shift. Politically this is manifested by the proposed EU recovery package presented to the European Parliament on 27 May with an increased allocation of the Just Transition Fund.

Jon Parker (European Commission) presented the environmental governance chapters of the 2017 and 2019 Environmental Implementation (EIR) reports, as well as referring in detail to the results of a 2019 study on the same topic (see powerpoint). He mentioned two key findings where Italy could improve – on the implementation of the Environmental Liability Directive & on fragmentation of responsibilities. He highlighted a series of good practices where Italy is doing well, some recognised at European level, and drew attention to opportunities to use the EIR Peer-to-Peer tool for exchanges with other Member States.

Gianni Lampis (Regional Environmental Minister Sardinia & chair of the Environment Committee of the Conference of the Regions and Autonomous Provinces), described the co-ordination role provided by Sardinia to the other regions both under his mandate and in the past (team work). Specifically, he referred to the educational network of schools. He noted that the Italian regions are confronted with different environmental realities and move at different speeds. The regional sustainable strategy for Sardinia is being elaborated involving a vast number of stakeholders, it’s completion delayed by the lock-down. Currently the region is collaborating with the Enrico Mattei Foundation. Gianni Lampis described a cultural dilemma in Italy that the environment is seen as barrier to development, asking the question should Natura 2000 sites be closed off. Natural areas like coastal zones and internal areas have enormous potential for sustainable economic development. Furthermore, there is considerable unfinished environmental business that needs to be dealt with, such as asbestos, polluted soils and mineral extraction.

Remo Tavernari (Environmental attaché, Italian Permanent Representation) described the recent intense work in the Council (discussions on the proposed Climate Law, Circular Economy Package, & Biodiversity Strategy 2030); this necessitates co-ordination at national level amongst various Ministries as well as with the regions. The Biodiversity Strategy also cites scientific studies that pandemics are more likely if there is a continued loss of biodiversity. These specific legislative and non-legislative initiatives are placed within the EU green deal, which is complemented by the Italian Green Deal (unique in the EU), necessary for economic recovery. An example of a recent success is the new EU regulation on the minimum requirements for safe reuse of treated wastewater in agricultural irrigation, where Italy has a centuries old tradition like many Mediterranean countries. Furthermore, the Permanent Representation has almost a daily dialogue with the Commission to deal with ending infringements, including through periodic package meetings involving the regions.

After thanking the organisers, Jon Parker concluded the webtalk citing three key points: i) that the big picture must be kept in mind when addressing environmental issues, citing in particular the European Green Deal and EU Recovery Package; ii) effective and collaborative co-ordination is essential in regionalised countries like Italy to achieve the best environmental outcomes, and iii) there is still a lot of unfinished environmental business in Italy in terms of improving environmental governance as outlined in his presentation, and in cleaning up environmental hotspots.