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The Director-General

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Mr Pekka Pesonen
Secretary-General
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Dear Mr Pesonen,

Mr Johannes Laitenberger, Head of Cabinet of President Barroso, has asked me to reply on his behalf with regard to your letter of 12 December 2013 for which he would like to thank you. The response is also covering issues that you raised in your letter to me of 27 November 2013.

Poor air quality is the number one environmental cause of premature death in the EU, prevents many people from living a fully active life due to asthma and respiratory diseases and damages ecosystems through nitrogen pollution and acid rain. There is overwhelming scientific evidence that ammonia is harmful for human health through the formation of secondary particulate matter, and a main contributor to eutrophication and acidification.

The Clean Air Policy Package adopted in December 2013 is a strong and measured response to these challenges. The proposed actions will more than halve the number of premature deaths from air pollution by 2030 compared to 2005, increase protection for the vulnerable groups who need it most, and improve quality of life for all. It will also protect vulnerable ecosystems and boost the clean technology industry – an important growth sector for Europe. Health benefits alone will annually save society over 12 times the pollution abatement costs, and the package will deliver €3 billion in direct benefits due to higher productivity of the workforce, lower healthcare costs, higher crop yields, and less damage to buildings. There will be a positive overall impact on growth and jobs.

The ceilings for 2020 in the new National Emission Ceilings Directive are fully consistent with the ceilings already agreed under the UNECE Gothenburg Protocol. For ammonia, these correspond to an overall decrease of 6% for the EU during the period 2005-2020. According to the most recent national reports, almost half of the Member States have achieved these emission reductions already in 2012, and others are on track to reach them well before 2020.

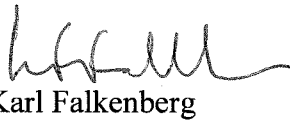
But to make progress towards the EU's long term health and environment objectives in the 7th EU Environment Action Programme, additional emission cuts are necessary that go beyond those for 2020. With regard to ammonia, new 2030 ceilings are proposed that will reduce overall EU emissions by 27% by applying existing best practices at a wider EU-scale.

The impact assessment for the package clearly shows that the 2030 ammonia ceilings are necessary, achievable and cost effective. Experience in some Member States with a strong farming sector (such as Denmark and the Netherlands) demonstrates that application of these best practices does not jeopardise competitiveness. Implementation of the Industrial Emissions Directive will contribute significant reductions in emissions from large pig and poultry installations. The time frame for the new ceilings will give ample time to adapt and invest in new effective technology, and I can confirm that ammonia measures can be supported through the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (provided that the Member States/regions give priority to this in their respective Partnership Agreement). It should also be noted that the final Commission proposal incorporates considerable cost reductions for the agriculture sector (of around 40%) compared with the central case identified in the impact analysis.

With regard to the choice of the base year, there are many good reasons to stick to 2005. A flexible base year would undermine the environmental integrity of the NEC Directive and it would depart from the cost effectiveness approach applied for EU air policy. The impact assessment already takes into account the measures put in place before 2005 when identifying the remaining cost effective measures.

In conclusion, the new air policy package will deliver significant improvements for our health and for the environment, including for the agriculture sector, while stimulating progress towards a green economy and a sustainable agriculture. The package will now be discussed in detail with the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament, and I look forward to continuing a constructive dialogue with you and other stakeholders in the agricultural sector, to agree and implement the policy package as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely,



Karl Falkenberg