

Clean, Clever and Competitive

Presidency conclusions Informal Environment Council

16-18 July 2004

1. Europe can strengthen its competitiveness by further applying eco-efficient innovations and being the most eco-efficient economy. This will not only avoid the high social and environmental costs of in-action, it will also capitalise on the economic benefits of cost saving, new markets, quality of products and eco-efficiency as a brand. This will give Europe a strong competitive edge. Many examples of this already exist throughout Europe.
2. This message should be an essential part of the well focused and appealing contribution of the Environment Council to the review of the Lisbon process. The strong and reinforced recognition of the Lisbon ambition to become the most eco-efficient economy is already a driver for the innovations that underpin the possibility to achieve the Lisbon goal.
3. Market penetration is the main challenge for existing and future eco-efficient innovations. Both in member states and at EU-level instruments should be further developed to give eco-efficient innovations a fair and competitive market perspective.
4. The EU should create such perspectives by actually implementing a mix of instruments such as public procurement, fiscal incentives and green investment criteria. The internalisation of external costs and the reform of environmentally harmful subsidies are important to establish the right price signals.
5. The pro-activity of business should be strengthened by for example rewarding front-runners and bench marking of eco-efficiency performance.
6. Clear and ambitious long-term targets can drive innovations. Environmental legislation should be founded on fact-based and balanced impact-assessments, consistent, flexible and future oriented and not technology prescriptive. The EU could make EU legislation more supportive of eco-efficient innovations by engaging in an active dialogue on these aspects.
7. Focussed long-term research and development efforts are crucial to further develop new innovations.
8. A joint effort with business is needed to fully grasp the opportunities of eco-efficient innovations. A well informed and proactive dialogue with industry and other stakeholders should be continued. Strong support for SMEs through risk capital provision and capacity building is important to capitalize on their important role in the innovation process. National and local support is needed for this.
9. The Environment Council should create alliances with other Councils to create supportive conditions for eco-efficient innovations given the economic and ecological benefits.