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1996 HIGH LEVEL CONSULTATIONS ON THE ENVIRONMENT BETWEEN THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION AND THE GOVERNMENT OF THE UNITED STATES

During the EU-US High Level Consultations on the environment in Brussels 2 October it was agreed to expand the ongoing cooperation through a joint air quality workshop in 1997, a transatlantic environmental conference on chemicals in 1998, and improved efforts on consumer education and a possible workshop on biotechnology issues. In addition, both delegations agreed to hold technical meetings on ecolabelling. Other issues discussed included enforcement of international and domestic environmental regulations, waste issues, persistent organic pollutants, biodiversity, leg-hold traps, protection of the marine environment, and the good progress achieved in environmental cooperation with the New Independent States.

On 2-3 October 1996 the European Commission and the government of the United States conducted their annual High Level Consultations on the environment in Brussels. These consultations were the first to be conducted since the New Transatlantic Agenda, adopted in December 1995. The EU delegation was led by Mr Marius Enthoven, Director General for the Environment, Nuclear Safety and Civil Protection. The US delegation was led by Mr Rafe Pomerance, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Environment and Development, Department of State, and Mr William A. Nitze, Assistant Administrator for International Activities, Environmental Protection Agency.

Under the New Transatlantic Agenda, the EU and the US agreed to intensify their cooperation on a broad range of issues of mutual concern. The strengthening of the bilateral dialogue, both at the multilateral and bilateral level, is a main tenet of the Agenda's environmental chapter. During this year's discussions, the participants covered a very full agenda with particular attention to pressing global environmental issues such as trade and environment, climate change, chemicals, forests, and the forthcoming UN General Assembly Special Session on Sustainable Development.

The delegations noted the importance of increased consultations prior to international negotiations and improved efforts to develop regulatory approaches in concert, as agreed under the New Transatlantic Agenda. Both sides highlighted the usefulness of prior consultations in the context of negotiations on climate change as well as on biodiversity and biosafety. Through the EU-US technical working groups, bilateral regulatory cooperation on air quality issues, biotechnology and chemicals have been advanced. The EU and US agreed to expand this work through a joint air quality workshop in 1997, a transatlantic environmental conference on chemicals in 1998, and improved efforts on consumer education and a possible workshop on biotechnology issues. In addition, both delegations agreed to hold technical meetings on ecolabelling. Other issues discussed included enforcement of international and domestic environmental regulations, waste issues, persistent organic pollutants, biodiversity, leg-hold traps, protection of the marine environment, and the good progress achieved in environmental cooperation with the New Independent States.

The delegations agreed that close cooperation over the coming year is instrumental in achieving positive results in the forthcoming Conference of the Parties of the Montreal Protocol in Costa Rica, the World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference in Singapore, the Conference of the Parties of the Climate Change Convention, as well as in the UN General Assembly Special Session, and in concluding an agreement on Prior Informed Consent. Joint efforts will also be considered to halt the illegal trade in, and ensure adherence to the phase-out schedule of, ozone depleting substances.

After more than two decades of ever-increasing environmental cooperation, the EU and US have built a solid foundation to tackle jointly the global environmental challenges of the 21st century. Toward that goal, the 1996 High Level Consultations on the Environment under the New Transatlantic Agenda have set the standard for cooperation on environmental issues into the next century.
