



Will the Environment Committee continue to steer the EU's green course?

The Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI), one of the most influential committees in the European Parliament, will have to deal with new faces and a new reality. The centre-right and the Greens are the main winners of the European elections, but what does that mean for the EU's environmental policy over the next five years?

Over the years the ENVI has been able to become an ever more influential voice in shaping EU policy ranging from air quality to chemicals to climate change. In addition to strong Treaty provisions, a number of strong personalities have helped the Committee to further its influence.

The new Parliament will be marked by the absence of a number of the best-known MEPs: in particular, the two biggest political groups have lost some of their most prominent environmental spokespersons. At first glance the centre-right EPP is likely to be slightly less green, with the departure of political heavyweights such as former ENVI Chair Caroline Jackson, EPP-ED coordinator John Bowis, EU Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) rapporteur Avril Doyle, and Anders Wijkman. The Socialists have lost prominent personalities such as former coordinator and REACH rapporteur Guido Sacconi, Fuel Quality rapporteur Dorette Corbey, and French members Anne Ferreira and Marie-Noelle Lienemann.

This substantial changeover will be partly offset by the stronger presence of the Green Group and the return of former MEPs such as Kathleen van Brempt (Belgian Socialist) and Marit Paulsen (Swedish Liberal) – provided, of course, that they sit on the Environment Committee. However, with a more right-leaning Parliament it may be difficult for the ENVI Committee and the Parliament as a whole to make significant changes to Commission proposals.

Following the election result we can expect the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (PASD) Group to be looking for a way to profile itself more and more as different from both the centre-right and the Greens. At the same time the 'less green' EPP, together with the new European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) Group, is likely to be more careful in supporting further regulation, weighing up the costs for industry and member states in a time of economic hardship. This could make it difficult to find sufficient majorities in favour of amendments to Commission legislative proposals.

As a result, there may actually be a push from the Greens for more first reading agreements where simple majorities suffice as a way of avoiding second readings, where any parliamentary change needs to be supported by an absolute majority. The first tests of this hypothesis are the legislative

proposals on Integrated Pollution Prevention Control (IPPC), and the recasts of the Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WEEE) and Restriction of Hazardous Substances (RoHS) Directives.

Over the next five years it will become clearer how the ENVI Committee will make use of its increased involvement in scrutinising implementing decisions under the new comitology procedure, such as implementing measures under the EU ETS. The experience of the returning MEPs such as Karl-Heinz Florenz, Dagmar Roth-Behrendt and Chris Davies will be important in this regard.

At the same time the new ENVI Committee may do more with its role of holding the Commission to account by being stricter on the full implementation and the uniform enforcement of EU environmental legislation. Will the new Parliament be more vigilant in ensuring that the Commission and member state governments take their role of implementer, enforcer, and supervisor seriously?

Diederik Peereboom – Director, Burson-Marsteller Brussels