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HOTSPOT

April 2015

The Energy Union Package

On 25th February 2015, the European Commission published “A Framework Strategy for a Resilient Energy Union with a Forward-Looking Climate Change Policy”, a communication combined with a specific one on climate “On the road to Paris” and another one concerning the 10% electricity interconnecting target.

BACKGROUND

The main preoccupation of the European Commission is that:

- The European Union is the biggest energy importer in the world, importing 53% of its energy at a cost of around 400 billion euros a year.
- There still is no real European internal energy market.
- Renewable energy is not fully integrated into the electricity system.

GOAL

The goal is to give EU consumers – households and businesses – access to a “secure, sustainable, competitive and affordable energy”.

The Energy Union should bring an economy:

- “that is no longer driven by fossil fuels and where energy security is based on solidarity and trust;
- where energy flows freely, without any barriers, in a truly integrated EU-wide energy system;
- where strong, competitive companies develop innovative products and technologies;
- where citizens play a stronger role in the energy system, using technology to reduce their bills, and vulnerable consumers are not left behind.”

[...]

HIGHLIGHTS OF THIS ISSUE:

Lightweight plastic carrier bags

Informal meeting of Environment and Energy Ministers

European Parliament own-initiative report on circular economy

Eurostat report on municipal waste

Committee of the Regions: support for resource efficiency and circular economy

The European environment: State and outlook 2015



FIVE DIMENSIONS

Five mutually-reinforcing and closely interrelated dimensions are proposed:

- Energy security;
- Fully Integrated European energy market;
- Energy efficiency;
- Decarbonised economy;
- Research, Innovation and Competitiveness.

In the area of energy efficiency, the European Commission aims at contributing to the moderation of energy demand and stresses the sectors which hold a significant energy efficiency potential, in particular the transport and building sector.

The climate policy (at least 40% domestic reduction in greenhouse gas emissions compared to 1990) is formulated as an integral part of the Energy Union. This policy is based on an EU-wide carbon market (the EU Emissions Trading System), national greenhouse gas reduction targets for the sectors outside the Emissions Trading System and “an energy policy to make the European Union the number one in renewable energy”.

FIFTEEN ACTION POINTS

The European Energy Strategy Proposal can be summarised in fifteen points:

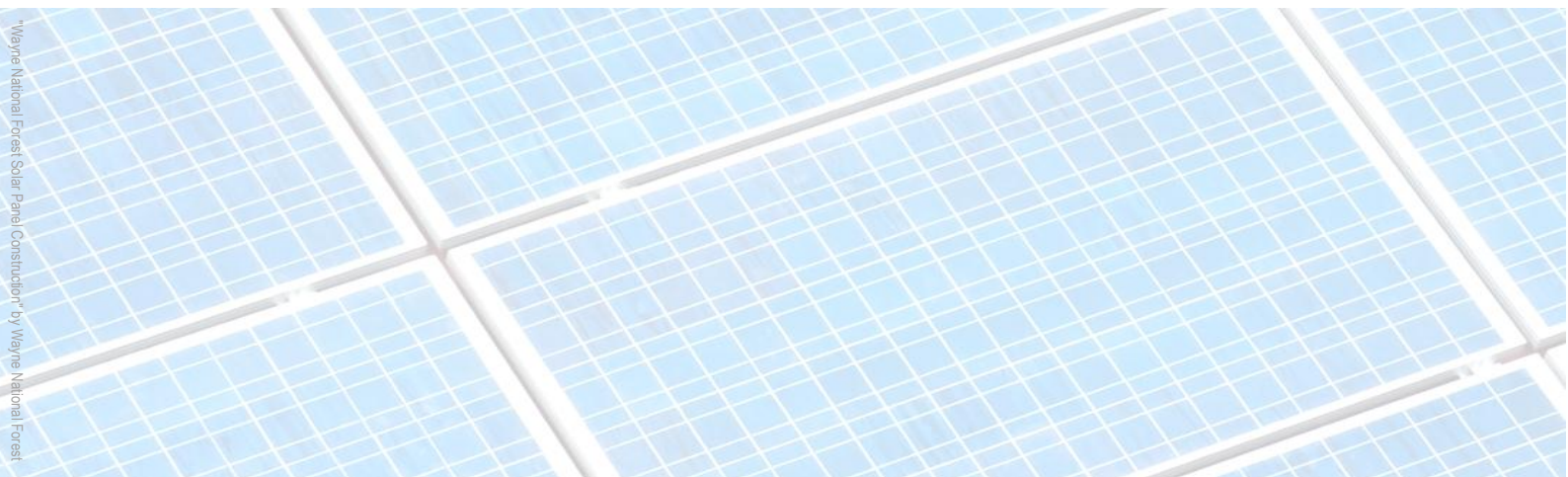
1. Full implementation and strict enforcement of existing energy and related legislation.
2. Diversification of the EU supply of gas.
3. Transparent intergovernmental agreements.
4. New infrastructure integrating renewables and security of supply.
5. Seamless internal energy market (a new European electricity market design in 2015).
6. More developed regulatory framework for the Internal Energy Market.
7. Regional approaches to market integration.
8. Greater transparency on energy costs and prices as well as on the level of public support.
9. Revision of all relevant energy efficiency legislation and of the use of European funds for renovation.
10. Retrofitting existing buildings (the “Smart Financing for Smart Buildings” initiative).
11. Energy efficiency and decarbonisation in the transport sector.
12. Implementation of the EU climate and energy framework for 2030 and contribution to the international climate negotiations.
13. New Renewable Energy Package in 2016-2017 including a new policy for sustainable biomass and biofuels.
14. Energy and climate-related R&I strategy to maintain European technological leadership and expand export opportunities.
15. Use of all external policy instruments to ensure that the EU speaks with one voice on energy and climate.



WHAT TO MAKE OF THIS?

Energy has always been in the centre of the EU's attention. After CECA and EURATOM came to life, one could indeed have hoped that a true European Community of Renewable Energy would be the next step. However, we still have a long way to go in order to finally take that step, even if the integration of renewable energy in the European single market is one of the key orientations of the new strategy. The European Commission plans to bring forward its new Renewable Energy Package to 2016-17 to support Europe's post-2020 goal of a minimum 27% share for renewables by the end of the next decade, and to guarantee that the 2030 climate and energy targets are met cost-effectively.

In fact, two points are particularly stressed: the diversification and security of energy supply. However, concrete proposals on how to prompt the evolution of energy efficiency and innovation are still to be put forward.



"Wayne National Forest Solar Panel Construction" by Wayne National Forest

It is striking that the European Commission would put forward a “general guidelines in energy strategy package” at the same time as they withdraw the “circular economy package” proposed in July 2014.

What is more, in the new communication the Commission states that, in the future, synergies will be created “between energy efficiency policies, resource efficiency policies and the circular Economy”, and goes on to add that “this will include exploiting the potential of ‘waste to energy’”.

In this way, a communication on energy from waste is announced for 2016, with no guarantee that a balance will be struck concerning the implementation of the first steps of the waste hierarchy (prevention, preparing for reuse and recycling).

ACR+ has never opposed energy recovery from waste but we have always stressed its role only *after* important measures have been taken in the area of recycling, as well as reuse and waste reduction at source.

Both from the point of view of CO₂ emissions and the scarcity of raw materials, it is now more than ever crucial to apply the multi-R approach.

All in all, it goes without saying that the current policy orientations of the European Commission should, at the very least, be closely followed!





COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

Main results of the Environment meeting on 6th March 2015

On 6th March 2015, the Environment Council took place, chaired by the Latvian minister for Environmental Protection and Regional Development, Kaspars Gerhards.

The ministers discussed, amongst others, the preparations for the UN Climate Change conference; the climate change issues of the Energy Union; the environment related aspects of the Annual Growth Survey, with a view to the mid-term review of Europe 2020 strategy as well as the latest developments and prospects concerning the negotiations on the post-2015 agenda. They also exchanged views with the European Environment Agency on the findings of its recent report “The European environment – state and outlook 2015”.

Concerning the Annual Growth Survey, the ministers focused on how the Europe 2020 strategy could best contribute to the move towards a resource efficient, circular and low carbon economy.

They reiterated that growth and creation of jobs can be in a significant manner boosted by the introduction of an environmental dimension in the European Semester and greening the economy. Ministers considered that it was necessary to take full advantage of the synergies between environmental policies and policies in other fields through a mix of instruments and initiatives.

Thus, they supported the list of possible synergies between the circular economy and the Digital Single Market Strategy proposed by the [Presidency background document](#) with special emphasis on access to environmental information, smart cities (including smart transport systems) and waste management.



Lightweight plastic carrier bags

On 4th March 2015 the Council of the EU communicated [its position regarding the Directive to reduce the consumption of lightweight plastic carrier bags](#).

A first communication was published on 18th February 2015, to which the European Commission replied by publishing [a statement](#) expressing some disagreement with this final compromise. Consequently, the Council issued [a statement](#) observing that “the text agreed by the co-legislators is fully in line with the aims of the Commission proposal” and that “a Commission impact assessment is not binding on either the Council or the Parliament, who, under the ordinary legislative procedure, are entitled to make amendments to a Commission proposal”.

On 2nd March 2015 the Council [voted](#) and adopted the [first reading](#) of the text with an absolute majority, leading to the final communication which was sent for comments to the European Parliament.

The aim of the proposed legislation is to require Member States to reduce their consumption of lightweight plastic carrier bags. With this proposal EU countries would be required to choose between two approaches to reduce the use of lightweight plastic bags:

1. Bring down the number of lightweight plastic bags used by each person to 90 bags per person every year by the end of 2019; and to no more than 40 bags per person by 2025;
2. Put an end to plastic bags being given away for free when buying goods by the end of 2018

Under the new rules, it would be up to the European Commission to set specifications on labelling and look into ways to limit the use of oxo-biodegradable bags.

Read the [procedure file](#) online.



Informal meeting of Environment and Energy Ministers

On 14-16th April, the European Union Environment Ministers met during a three-day informal meeting in Riga, under the Latvian Presidency of the Council of the EU. The Ministers focused on biodiversity preservation – defined as one of the priority issues in the field of environment by the Latvian presidency – and the international climate change negotiations.

The first part of the morning session was devoted to the evaluation of the progress made towards objectives set in the EU Biodiversity Strategy – to halt biodiversity loss by 2020 and promote the preservation, use and enhancement of natural capital. At the second session the Ministers exchanged examples of best practice at national level for limiting the loss of biodiversity. They discussed about challenges and opportunities for integrating biodiversity in key policy areas (such as agriculture, forestry and regional planning) and their tools of implementation. Ministers stressed the importance of integrating biodiversity preservation in other policies.

At the end of the day, a session devoted to the international climate change negotiations took place. It aimed to take stock of the progress made towards reaching a new global agreement on post-2020 climate change mitigation at the Paris Climate Change Conference in December 2015.

The meeting of ministers continued on 15th April 2015 with a joint session of the Environment and Energy Ministers. They debated on how to best accommodate biodiversity preservation with the increased use of renewable energy sources in order to reduce the EU's energy dependency and to mitigate climate change.

Ministers exchanged views on two topics: sharing the national experience regarding the planning and implementing of renewable energy and biodiversity policies and on the benefits of technological neutrality principle in both policies. Preserving biodiversity and increasing the resilience of ecosystems should go hand in hand with increasing the competitiveness of the economy and increasing energy security in Europe and mitigating climate change.



Dutch presidency of the Council of the European Union 2016 and circular economy

The Netherlands is gearing up to make the circular economy a centrepiece of its presidency of the Council of the European Union during the first half of 2016. As part of the preparations, a project to make the Netherlands a “circular hotspot” started in September 2014.

The project has its roots in a 2013 “Green Deal” between the Dutch government and project partners Circle Economy, MVO Nederland and the Amsterdam Economic Board. Green Deals are Dutch government-backed partnership agreements to help with the implementation of sustainability programmes. The circular hotspot Green Deal aimed to start a number of projects to demonstrate the opportunities and create a network that would have an overall influence on Dutch policy to encourage the take-up of circular economy principles.

The Green Deal triggered a specific programme, the **Realisation of Acceleration of a Circular Economy (RACE)**, which is overseen by Circle Economy and is backed by Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte.

Further initiatives will follow ahead of the Dutch presidency of the Council of the EU. By the time it starts, according to RACE, the Netherlands should be recognised as a “global frontrunner for circular economy, by creating tangible examples and making circular economy a mainstream paradigm.”



Packaging and packaging waste to reduce the consumption of lightweight plastic carrier bags

Adoption of draft recommendation for second reading

Following the publication of the EU Council’s position on the Directive to reduce the consumption of lightweight plastic carrier bags, the EU Parliament is currently reviewing the draft recommendation for second reading.

The text is scheduled to be debated in plenary session on 28th April 2015, after being approved by the ENVI Committee.

The [draft recommendation for second reading](#) of Danish Green MEP Margrete Auken on packaging and packaging waste to reduce the consumption of lightweight plastic carrier bags was approved with 55 votes to 2 and 6 abstentions, during the ENVI Committee meeting of 31st March 2015. As no amendments have been proposed to the draft recommendation, the full Parliament is free to confirm the text at the 27th-30th April 2015 plenary session without a vote.



Green growth and Business Opportunities for SMEs

During its meeting on 23rd March 2015 the ITRE Committee considered the amendments that have been tabled to the draft report of MEP Philippe De Backer on "[Green growth opportunities for SMEs](#)".

[The 183 amendments](#) mainly put emphasis on the support for green economy and circular economy. Moreover, amendments stress the importance of improving resource efficiency, the need for simple and accessible sources of information, the need to facilitate start-ups and spin-offs through collaboration with research institutes, universities and vocational training establishments.

The draft report was submitted to vote in the ITRE committee on 14th April 2015 and will be presented in Plenary on 18th May 2015.

More information on [the procedure file](#)



*Arboretum Zürich 2014-08-09 17:55-47" by © Roland Fischer, Zürich

EU factsheets by European Parliament Think tank

The [European Parliamentary Research Service](#) (also called EP Think tank) has published two new fact sheets on the European Union:

- [Resource efficiency and waste](#)
- [Sustainable consumption and production](#)

The EP Think tank offers research and analytical support to Members of the European Parliament, their staff, and parliamentary committees.

Interparliamentary Committee Meeting

"From COP 21 Paris to 2050: A roadmap towards and innovative low-carbon, resource-efficient Europe"

Members of national Parliaments were invited to an interparliamentary committee meeting "From COP 21 Paris to 2050: a roadmap towards and innovative low-carbon, resource-efficient Europe" on 30th March 2015.

The meeting was divided into two sessions:

- Session 1 focused on the "Paris alliance" towards the international climate change conference that will take place in Paris in December 2015 ("COP 21") - challenges, stakes and the role of European environmental diplomacy
- Session 2 tried to look beyond the Paris conference and discussed the challenges towards an innovative low-carbon and resource-efficient Europe

[Click here to see the draft agenda](#)



Resource efficiency: moving towards a circular economy

Following the withdrawn of the circular economy package by the European Commission, the ENVI Committee has already started to draw up an own-initiative report on circular economy.

This report is relating to the basis of the "circular economy package", consisting of the chapeau communication "Towards a circular economy: A zero waste programme for Europe", of a number of other documents presented by the Commission in 2014, and of the communication on sustainable buildings.

The [draft report](#) of ENVI committee by MEP Pietikäinen Sirpa has been published on 24th March 2015 and it was considered by the ENVI Committee on 14th April 2015.

MEP Benedek Javor is the draft person of ITRE's opinion to ENVI. Amendments to [his draft opinion](#) to ENVI on "Towards a circular economy: a zero waste programme for Europe" could be sent until 26th March 2015 and the draft opinion will be submitted to vote in the ITRE Committee on 7th May 2015.

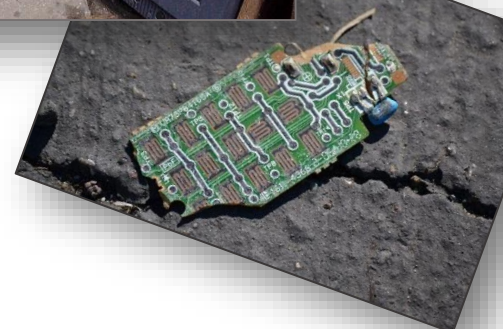
MEP Benedek Javor believes that, in order to tackle global challenges and the EU's resource dependency, it is essential that energy and resource efficiency form the basis of European industrial renewal so that the EU can maintain its competitiveness in the future, recreate manufacturing capacity and generate jobs for highly skilled workers. Industrial design is also an important element to avoid spoiling resources.



Recovery of Rare Earths from Electronic wastes: An opportunity for High-Tech SMEs

Study for the ITRE committee

The study "[Recovery of Rare Earths from Electronic wastes: An opportunity for High-Tech SMEs](#)" has been published in February 2015. It reviews the current level of technology development for the recovery of rare earths from electronic waste and examines the elements that affect its development at the industrial scale and the opportunities arising for high tech SMEs. It also reviews the existing policy framework and provides a set of recommendations for improved implementation of existing actions and new policy measures.





"From niche to norm" report

The Directorate-General for Research and Innovation of the European Commission published a new report: "From niche to norm". It compiles suggestions by a group of experts on a 'systemic approach to eco-innovation to achieve a low-carbon, circular economy'.

The report argues that "without change, the EU will inevitably become less competitive, less attractive and less economically viable. Making changes now and into the future to a more circular, resource efficient economic model is not without risk. However, as the developing world continues along linear growth path, the EU and its Member States have the opportunity to reinvent their economies and make them globally competitive. And systemic eco-innovation is at the heart of the paradigm shift which is needed."

The report can be downloaded [online](#)

Eurostat report on municipal waste

Eurostat published its [new report on municipal waste generation and treatment in the European Union](#). In 2013, the amount of municipal **waste generated per person amounted to 481 kg**, down by 8.7% compared with its peak of 527 kg per person in 2002. Since 2007, the generation of municipal waste per person has **constantly decreased in the EU** to below its mid-1990s level.

Of the 481 kg of municipal waste generated per person in the EU in 2013, **470 kg were treated**. This treatment followed **different methods**: 31% was landfilled, 28% recycled, 26% incinerated and 15% composted. The share of municipal waste recycled or composted in the EU has steadily increased over the time period: from 18% in 1995 to 43% in 2013.



"Mixed municipal waste" by Alex Marshall

The amount of municipal waste generated **varies significantly across the EU Member States**. With the **lowest waste generated per person in Romania and the highest in Denmark**. Similarly, the **treatment methods differ** between Member States. For example almost two-thirds of municipal waste was recycled or composted in Germany in 2013 while Estonia, Denmark and Sweden incinerated at least half of their municipal waste. And Romania, Malta, Croatia, Latvia and Greece landfilled more than 80%. It has to be noted that different coverage of municipal waste explains part of the differences between Member States.



COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

New President and Vice-President

On 12th February 2015, the Committee of the Regions (CoR) began a new five-year term. Markku Markkula (European People's Party), member of Espoo City Council in Finland, was elected new President and Karl-Heinz Lambertz (Party of European Socialists), President of the Parliament of the German-speaking Community of Belgium, as First Vice-President.



Support for the Agenda for growth and jobs

Concerning the European Commission work programme for 2015, the CoR has expressed its full support. The CoR warned, however, that the new roadmap did not put enough focus on cohesion policy, rural development and the environment.



Support for resource efficiency and circular economy

In an opinion drawn up by Satu Tietari, chair of Säkylä Municipal Council, on "[Green action plan for SMEs and Green Employment Initiative](#)", the CoR underlines the pivotal role played by the public sector, including local and regional authorities, in the necessary transition to a green, low-carbon and resource-efficient economy. The opinion was adopted on 12th February 2015 at the CoR's plenary session.

In relation to the "circular economy package withdrawal", the CoR argues that it would be far more sensible to build on the original proposals than "start again from scratch".

Mariana Gâju (PES), the Mayor of Cumpăna who led this specific opinion, said: "we all agree that delivering a "circular economy" is good for the economy, good for the environment and good for our citizens so let's build on what we have".

The CoR's opinion sets out its own targets which, the rapporteur concluded, should now form the basis of the legislation if a new package is to be published by the Commission:

- ban landfilling of recyclable and biodegradable waste by 1st January 2025 and make the target of a maximum of 5% landfilling of residual waste by 2030 binding;
- ensure a single definition of municipal waste and establish a single method for calculating recycling targets in the EU;
- greater environmental responsibility from businesses by introducing recommendations to ensure marketing products come from recycled sources;
- bio-waste recycling target to be introduced in the revised Waste Framework Directive;
- include a new resource productivity target of at least an increase of 30% by 2030, in the mid-term review of the EU's growth strategy - Europe 2020.



16th April 2015: 111th CoR Plenary session

On 16th April 2015 the members of the CoR met at the 111th Plenary session. Amongst others they examined and adopted an opinion on Resource efficiency opportunities in the building sector.

Reacting to European Commission proposals, the CoR raised concern that "the role of local and regional authorities had been worryingly overlooked" despite their responsibility for local housing development and resource efficiency. Led by Csaba Borboly, President of Harghita County Council in Romania, the CoRs' opinion further calls for greater EU investment in overcoming the challenges in developing sustainable buildings and expanding local green infrastructure.

The development of EU-wide core indicators to measure and boost resource efficiency in the building sector is the corner stone of the current Commission proposals. The Committee recognises the economic, social and environmental potential of setting out European guidelines in order to green the building industry, better manage resources and create new jobs. However, with wide regional disparities and growing pressures on local government funding, the Committee calls on the EU to develop a compensation mechanism to help less developed regions to meet the challenges involved in creating sustainable buildings and expanding green infrastructure in those regions most affected by changes in land use. Rural regions and small and medium-sized towns should be backed with proper investment and research into new technologies through EU funding pots such as Horizon 2020.



Good Food Good Farming Campaign

On 10th-11th February 2015, the EESC hosted the Good Food – Good Farming conference, co-organised by the Agricultural and Rural Convention 2020 (ARC2020), Friends of the Earth Europe and IFOAM EU.

The topics of this event included:

1. Assessing the implementation of the reformed CAP 2014-2020, prospects of agricultural sustainability and of rural renaissance.
2. Identifying milestones to support transition of food and agriculture systems based on agro-ecological approaches.





EUROPEAN ENVIRONMENT AGENCY

The European environment: State and outlook 2015

Synthesis report

The European Environment Agency has published on 3rd March 2015 its five-yearly flagship report “The European environment – state and outlook 2015” (SOER 2015).

This synthesis report informs future European environmental policy in general and its implementation between 2015 and 2020 in particular. It includes a reflection on the European environment in a global context, as well as chapters summarizing the state of, trends in, and prospects for the environment in Europe.

The report highlights the substantial benefit delivered by the EU environment and climate policies: improving the environment and quality of life while driving innovation, job creation and growth.

Concerning waste, the report states that guided by diverse policies, European countries have improved waste management. Manufacturing and service sector waste declined by about a quarter in 2004–2012, while municipal waste generation fell by 2%. Along with increased recycling, these trends helped reduce landfilling. Nevertheless, progress to EU waste targets is mixed. Achieving the EU's long-term objective of establishing a circular economy will require far-reaching technological, behavioural and organisational change. The environmental policies currently in place and economic and technology-driven efficiency gains will not be sufficient to achieve Europe's 2050 vision.



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MILESTONES

☑ **THE EUROPEAN ENVIRONMENT STATE AND OUTLOOK 2015**

Several events organised in different countries

See online what is organised in your country



☑ **12th-14th May 2015: EUROPE CLIMATE CHANGE ADAPTATION (ECCA) Conference, Copenhagen (DK)**

The conference will offer a unique platform for researchers, policy makers, and businesses to share new research results, novel policy developments, and practical implementation experiences regarding climate change impacts and adaptation, as well as highlight opportunities for business

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☑ **EU Parliament: ENVI meeting**

The next ENVI Committee meetings will be held on 27th April 2015 (19.00 - 21.30) in Strasbourg, 6th and 7th May 2015 in Brussels.

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☑ **EU Parliament: ITRE meeting**

The next ITRE Committee meetings will be held on 6th and 7th May 2015 in Brussels. On 7th May the ITRE Committee will vote on the draft opinion "Towards a circular economy: A zero waste programme for Europe".

☑ **18th-20th May 2015: NATURE AND URBAN WELLBEING – Nature-Based Solutions to Societal Challenges, Ghent (BE)**

Their interdisciplinary conference will address key scientific and applied questions, discuss underpinning information, provide new perspectives and develop partnerships. It will:

- Provide a forum for dialogue across fields of research, policy and practice engaged in nature and urban wellbeing
- Evaluate conditions and options for upscaling Nature-Based Solutions
- Build on previous work, knowledge and experience to develop innovations in Nature-Based Solutions.

Registrations until 30th April 2015

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☑ **ERASMUS+ CALL open till 30th April!**

"Strategic partnership in the field of education" (max. 150.000 euros/year for training).

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*The ACR+ Team hopes you have enjoyed reading the second issue of our online EU newsletter. We strive to constantly improve our Member Services and would very much appreciate your comments. Do not hesitate to let us know what we can do to **make the EU Digest more interesting for you** and your organisation!
Contact us at info@acrplus.org. We will be very happy to hear from you!*