1. Introduction: composition and objectives of delegation

The main objective of the delegation was to learn more about the state of play of implementation of EU Environmental, Health and Food Safety legislation in Cyprus.

The delegation consisted of nine members. It was chaired by Mr Johannes Blokland (Netherlands, IND-DEM). The delegation also included Mrs Pilar Ayuso (Spain, EPP-ED), Mr Martin Callanan (United Kingdom, EPP-ED), Prof. Antonios Trakatellis (Greece, EPP-ED), Mrs Edite Estrela (Portugal, PSE), Mr David Martin (United Kingdom, PSE), Mr Marios Matsakis (Cyprus, ALDE), Mrs Kartika Liotard (Netherlands, GUE-NGL), Mr Adamos Adamou (Cyprus, GUE-NGL). The delegation was accompanied by Guy Deregnaucourt and Rita Habermann (Environment Committee secretariat) as well as by Mr Walter van Luik (IND-DEM group staff) and Mrs Lisa Ekstrand (GUE/NGL group staff).

2. Preparatory Meeting: identified problems

Before departure the delegation was briefed by the European Commission (Mr Stephanos Ampatzis, DG Environment) about the situation in Cyprus with regard to the implementation of environmental legislation.

It was concluded, looking at the infringement cases (11 only for Cyprus), that compared to other Member States Cyprus can be seen as a good example for proper implementation of European environmental legislation. The main problems being, as often the case with small Member States, the lack of reporting. At the moment, there is only one pending procedure for lack of transposition: it concerns the "marine fuels" directive.

Even if Cyprus performs very well, and reacts promptly when a problem arises, this does not mean that everything is perfect. Problems remain to be solved in the area of waste treatment, illegal dumping sites, waste water treatment plants and the completion of the Natura 2000 network.
The delegation also received two written briefing notes: one from DG SANCO and one from the European Environmental Agency.

3. Programme: meetings and visits

Meeting with Mr Photis Photiou, Minister of Agriculture, Natural Resources and the Environment.

The Minister recognises that the environment services of his Ministry were small. The main problems are linked to the implementation of the Habitats Directive and Natura 2000. Cyprus is in the process of completing the designated areas (they started with 24 areas and 40 areas are now designated). Efforts are ongoing in order to finalise the management plans of those areas.

Huge efforts are made in the waste sector. A concrete plan of action for the treatment of solid and dangerous waste will be ready in a few weeks. Regarding waste water treatment, the situation also improves gradually. The authorities are very concerned with the possible lack of water in the coming years and concrete actions are taken in order to promote renewable energy. The objective is to have 6% of the consumption from renewable sources in the near future and 20% by 2020.

Answering to questions the Minister explained that 14% of the territory will be included in Natura 2000 and that problems came from the citizens who thought that their interests were at stake with the designation of Natura 2000 areas. Cyprus has very few solutions able to respond to the water problem. Desalinisation is one of them (even if it poses some environmental problems).

The problem of the Akamas peninsula was also discussed, and Mr Photiou told the delegation that the government planning for the area is completed. Development projects will be conducted with the perspective of preserving the area and, if necessary, the government is prepared to buy land to maintain the environmental character of the peninsula.

The Minister insisted on the satisfactory level of control in the food safety sector and reassures the delegation of the political will to remedy to the identified shortcomings. He quoted that inspection of FVO have always been satisfactory and that identified problems have been corrected.

Meeting with Mr Charis Charalambous, Minister of Health.

Answering to a question the Minister reaffirms that he was opposed to the budget reduction of the public health programme and stresses the importance of prevention, treatment of contagious diseases. He also pointed out the campaign launched in favour of better nutrition habits and against smoking.

Cyprus seems to be well prepared to face influenza pandemic and bird flue. The country meets the EU requirements and has established contact with the pharmaceutical industry for reception of vaccines in case of emergency. An observation network is also operational.

A pilot programme was launched, in cooperation with NGOs, to fight against breast cancer. The programme includes early detection and each woman receives an individual invitation for examination.
Cyprus is also prepared to implement actions against new diseases; the country is part of an early warning response system.

The impact of the Antennas in the Akrotiri British base on the populations' health has been studied and the findings show that there were increased symptoms of depression in the area.

**Joint meeting with the Parliamentary Committee on the Environment and the Parliamentary Committee on Health Affairs.**

The delegation was welcomed by Mrs Kyriatidou, Vice-President of the Committee on the Environment and by Mr Hadjinicolas, Vice-President of the Committee on Health Affairs.

On **food safety** issues the fragmented approach was deplored and reference was made to the proposal to establish an independent authority which still is at an initial state. It is now time for the Food Safety Council, established in 2004, to become an independent agency with decision power. On more specific issues, like scrapie, it was said that Cyprus did apply a very strict programme and is now in a situation to reintroduce resistant species.

The need for greater cooperation and joint management was stresses in the **environment policy** as well. Water management (and desalinisation) was recognised as being the second most important issue in the country (after the national issue). The need for a long term approach was stressed, taking into account the effect of climate change and the development of touristic infrastructures.

Members of the Cyprus parliament requested the support of their European colleagues in their fight to see Cyprus declared "GMO free", to obtain the demolition of the Antennas of Akrotiri British Base and to insure implementation of Natura 2000 in the occupied territory as well.

The objective to guarantee a high level of **health** for the population was mentioned and patient's right is considered as of one of the main priorities. In this area also, occupation creates specific problems as a great number of illegal immigrants enter the country through the occupied territory.

As the European acquis only applies to the Republic of Cyprus, the fears of having problems arising from the occupied part of Cyprus were expressed.

Finally it was acknowledged that, despite the limited amount of resources in a small Member State, Cyprus was making huge efforts trying to enforce in the best possible way the European legislation.

**Meeting with the Commissioner for the Environment**

The Commissioner for the Environment, Mr Charalambos Theopemptou, explained to the delegation the role and power of his institution. It is a new independent institution operating since a few months only. Mr Theopemptou is still on his own but should receive staff support in the coming months.
Any major decision in Cyprus is supposed to be monitored and the Commissioner has the power to examine major government projects and provide advice to the government. The Commissioner has no executive power but is free to determine its own agenda.

Meeting with the Federation of Environmental and Ecological Organizations of Cyprus

The delegation met the Federation of Environmental and Ecological Organizations of Cyprus, who represent 16 different NGOs.

During the discussion, the split of competences between different ministries was identified as one of the major problems for a more consistent implementation of the EU legislation. The destruction of the environment in the part of the Island occupied by Turkey was also pointed out. The specific problem of land occupation, in relation with the designation of the Natura 2000 sites, was taken as an example; in the occupied territories, but also in the rest of the country; where a better control on "where to build" and "what to build" was requested on the NGO side.

Concerns were raised about the management of energy and water resources, and NGOs have expressed their wish to see a strategic plan for renewable energy emerging in the country. One of the representatives, considering that in a small country like Cyprus, coexistence was not possible; expressed the wish to see the EP adopting a resolution protecting the right of Member States to declare their territory GMO free zones.

On food issues, it was recognized that Cyprus fulfills the acquis but the fact that there was not a single authority dealing with food was seen as a problem.

The fact that responsibility for Environment was included in the Ministry of Agriculture was seen as problematic and it was requested that the new "Commissioner for the Environment" (see above) was given the staff and the means to act.

Meeting with the Cyprus Chamber of Commerce and Industry

In his introduction, Mr. Mavrommatis, Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, insists on the fact that it was more difficult to handle environmental legislation for a small country like Cyprus.

The discussion mainly focused on waste recycling, which is still low in Cyprus. Even if the legislation is in place, it was said that time will be needed for a substantial increase; one of the main difficulties being to find places to build the necessary infrastructure. There is also a need for a cultural change in Cyprus towards this problem. Representatives of the industry asked for understanding and assistance.

Answering a question on emission trading system, solar and wind energy were presented as the best options to achieve a decrease in emissions on the island.

Visits

The delegation decided to focus the visits on The Antennas in the Akrotiri British Base, The Sewerage Board of Larnaca and was invited for the inauguration of the EU house in Nicosia.
The Commissioner for the Environment accompanied the delegation during the visits.

At the **Antennas in the Akrotiri British Base** the delegation encountered the mayor of the locality who explained the problems caused by the Antennas for the local population (destruction of a nice wetlands area, Biodiversity problems caused by the Antennas and health effect on the population). The leader of the Delegation, Mr Johannes Blokland, also received a memorandum from the Green party.

During the visit one of the members of the Delegation (Mr Marios Matsakis) was arrested by the Authorities of the military base, which is not part of the territory of the Republic of Cyprus and where EU legislation is only applicable to the extent provided in Protocol No 3 to the Act of Accession. Mr. Matsakis was maintained in custody for a few days, because he refused to agree to being bailed. Mr. Matsakis then started a hunger strike and was transferred to a hospital situated on the territory of the Republic of Cyprus from where he was subsequently released.

Members of the ENVI Committee condemn the way in which the arrest of Mr. Matsakis was carried out, i.e. by boarding the bus of an official EP delegation and hand-cuffing an MEP in front of his colleagues. They do not want such a situation to be repeated in future.

The **Larnaca Sewerage and Drainage Board** provides full biological treatment followed by tertiary treatment for a population of 46,340. The final effluents are pumped into a distribution network provided under a separate contract for irrigation of agricultural land. The surplus sludge produced by the system is thickened in a gravity thickener and transferred to two aerobic digestion tanks where further stabilisation of the sludge takes place by additional aeration. The thickened digested sludge is transferred to a series of sludge drying beds for natural drying and the dry cake is removed manually for use as landfall or fertiliser.

Our delegation was invited to attend the inauguration of the **EU House in Nicosia**. The EU House will house the offices of the Commission and the European Parliament. The President of the Republic of Cyprus, Tassos Papadopoulos, inaugurated the EU House, describing it as a place for acquaintance and familiarization of the European citizen of Cyprus with the Community institutions, the activities and the policies of the EU. Several speeches were held, such as by EU Commissioner Kyprianou, the Questor Mr Nicholson and recorded speeches by EP-President Pöttering and EU Commissioner Wallström. After the inauguration Mr. Blokland, the delegation leader, spoke with the Cypriot President Tassos Papadopoulos, the Cypriot Minister of Foreign Affairs Yiorgos Lillikas, the Dutch and German Ambassadors and the Mayor of Nicosia. Mr Blokland was informed that a waste water treatment plant due to be constructed around Nicosia, and subsidized by the European Union was in danger.

**4. Conclusions**

The visits made by the delegation, as well as the discussions that were held, have shown that there appears to be a strong will to improve the environmental, health and food safety situation in the country. If a lot of things still need to be done, the general feeling is that the progresses are substantial and the delegation was pleased to see the good will of the authorities.