



THE HUNGARIAN GOVERNMENT AGAINST STRICTER AIR QUALITY LEGISLATION

Following the meeting of the environmental ministers of Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia on 8th May 2014, the Hungarian minister responsible for environment, Sándor Fazekas declared the following¹: *“The reason for prudence in connection with the Clean Air Policy Package is the fact that it would be unfortunate to lose employment and production capacity or if we would get into a disadvantaged position in terms of competitiveness because of the package. [...] It is a possible scenario that if these rules are becoming stricter the industrial and agricultural capacities move to other countries. [...] If the methane emission quotes are limited, only a decreased number of livestock may be kept – compared to the planned amount – and this way farming may get in a disadvantaged position, especially in newer Member States.”*

Following this declaration of the minister, the Clean Air Action Group (CAAG) wrote him a letter, calling to his attention that according to a study² commissioned by the European Commission circa 11,000 persons die each year in Hungary prematurely due to certain substances polluting the air, and these persons on average lose more than 10 years of their life. Furthermore Hungary’s position in this field is one of the most adverse among European countries. The number of premature deaths means only the tip of the iceberg, for the number of persons suffering from respiratory, heart and circulatory diseases and/or cancer due to air pollution account for a sum that is multiple times more than the number of actual deaths.

In the opinion of CAAG no economical interest may justify causing illness for or death of even a single person. Not even one child should suffer from asthma or another disease because of the need for “economical competitiveness”.

CAAG remarked also that the quality of air should be improved not only because of moral reasons. The Fundamental Law of Hungary requires the same.³ According to a ruling of the Supreme Court “in the case of environmental risks economic interests can not be taken into account.”⁴

The strict limitation of air pollution is also a national economic interest. A series of studies have shown that the benefits of reducing air pollution would substantially exceed the costs of decreasing air pollution.⁵ Air pollution causes enormous damages to society for which we all have to pay: such damages include morbidity and mortality (lost work time, lower production capacity, medical expenses, etc.), damages in buildings and other facilities, agricultural losses and deterioration of natural conditions.

¹ The members of the Visegrad Group have signed a joint declaration on environmental cooperation, 8th of May 2014. <http://2010-2014.kormany.hu/hu/vidékfejlesztési-minisztérium/hirek/kornyezetvedelmi-egyuttmukodesrol-irtak-ala-kozos-nyilatkozatot-a-v4-ek>

² Cost-benefit Analysis of Final Policy Scenarios for the EU Clean Air Package. IIASA, March 2014, <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/air/pdf/review/TSAP%20CBA%20corresponding%20to%20IIASA11%20v2.pdf>

³ Article XX (1) – “Every person shall have the right to physical and mental health.”

Article XXI (1) “Hungary shall recognise and enforce the right of every person to a healthy environment.”

⁴ The ruling of the Supreme Court No. Gf.IV.30.879/1998/17. passed on the 13th of May 1999.

⁵ Cost-benefit Analysis of Final Policy Scenarios for the EU Clean Air Package. IIASA, March 2014, <http://ec.europa.eu/environment/air/pdf/review/TSAP%20CBA%20corresponding%20to%20IIASA11%20v2.pdf>



Stricter air quality policies give boost to innovation and for the enhanced spread of innovative solutions thus greatly contributing to the competitiveness of the national economy.⁶

As for the alleged adverse effect on of animal husbandry in Hungary, CAAG believes that lax air quality regulation would have a negative effect on its competitiveness. On one hand Directive 2001/81/EC of the European Parliament and the Council on National Emission Ceilings for certain pollutants (NEC Directive) includes specific options for the reduction of ammonium and methane emissions, and the European Union is ready to provide financial support for these kind of investments. Thus while complying with the stringent limit values by way of fulfilling the required developments, Hungarian agriculture can be modernized and its competitiveness can also be enhanced with the help of EU funds. On the other hand it would be greatly disadvantageous for the reputation of Hungarian agricultural products if the competitors seated in Western Europe – many of whom have implemented the pollution reduction investments – would inform the consumers of Western Europe, who are sensitive about environmental protection, that Hungarian farmers intend to gain competitive advantage by endangering the environment. The fact that it is not impossible to increase animal husbandry significantly while reducing pollutant emission is shown by Denmark’s example where the pork livestock is four times larger than in Hungary, and yet the ammonium emission from this source is practically the same in both countries.

On the basis of the above CAAG requested that the Hungarian government take a stand for the following points during the negotiations regarding the EU Clean Air Package:

1. **Accepting a stricter NEC**, so that it would comply with the principles set out in the Sixth and Seventh Environment Action Programme of the European Community: *“the Union has agreed to achieve levels of air quality that do not give rise to significant negative impacts on and risks to human health and the environment”*.
2. **In the case of medium-sized combustion plants, accepting much more stringent air pollution limits than those proposed by the European Commission.**

Unfortunately, the Hungarian government did not take into account CAAG’s admonition, and during the meeting of the EU’s Environmental Council on 12th June, the Hungarian representative urged (together with those of the other countries mentioned above) postponing stricter EU air quality legislation.

⁶ See also:

Possibilities of the national innovation policy in the implementation of an environmentally friendly development policy. Budapest, 2010. <http://www.levego.hu/sites/default/files/6-innovacio-gsz2010.pdf>



Clean Air is a project by nine European environmental organisations that fight for clean air in European cities. Despite the existing legislative framework and the citizens’ right to clean air, continuing violations of air pollution limits remain a problem in many cities. Air pollution threatens health, environment and climate. It’s time to take action!

www.cleanair-europe.org

twitter: @VCD_eV



Soot Free for the Climate is a campaign that raises awareness of the severe climate impact of Diesel soot (Black Carbon) and pushes politicians and administrations for efficient measures to reduce these emissions. It was launched five years ago and now includes an alliance of 13 environmental and consumer organisations in ten European countries.

www.russfrei-fuers-klima.de/international

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