



EEA Briefing

Informal Council Meeting of EU Environment Ministers

14 May 2014

This briefing note provides background information for the presentation of Hans Bruyninckx, Executive Director of the European Environment Agency (EEA), under Agenda point: 'Preparing for the next UNFCCC Ministerial Sessions'.

EU will over-achieve its Kyoto emission reduction commitments

The EU is set to over-achieve its objectives under the Kyoto Protocol in terms of reductions of GHG emissions.

In 2012 total EU emissions were 21.7 % below base year levels and are projected to be around 24.5 % below base year levels in 2020. Over the period 2008–2012, average emissions were substantially below the reduction commitments taken under the Kyoto Protocol. Projected emissions also display significant potential over-achievement for the second commitment period 2013–2020.

GDP can increase while reducing GHG emissions

There has been a downward trend in GHG emissions in the EU since 1990. Between 1990 and 2012, the EU economy grew by 45 % (in GDP) while GHG emissions were reduced by 19 %. In 2012, the EU economy was almost half as GHG emission intensive as it was in 1990. GHG emission intensity decreased in all Member States and emissions per GDP converged across Member States.

Economic growth remains an important factor driving GHG levels. However, GDP growth does not always increase GHG emissions: 'green growth' investments, for example, can help reduce emissions as can other key factors, such as energy efficiency and a switch to less carbon-intensive fuels.

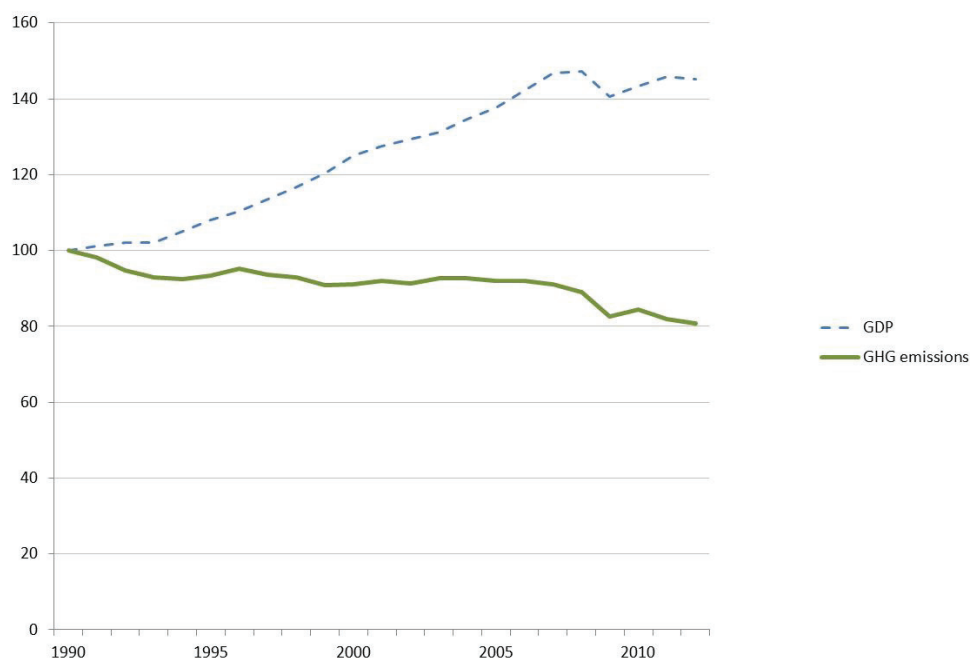


Figure 1: Evolution of GDP (in real terms) and total GHG emissions for EU28. Index (1990=100)

Economic recession - only one factor contributing to emission reductions

During the period 2008–2012, total GHG emissions were reduced by 9.2 %. EEA analyses indicate that economic recession can explain between 30–50 % of the observed emission reductions across the EU. The combined effects of other factors play a more important role. These factors include the lower energy intensity of the economy (improved efficiency and changes in the structure of the economy) as well as lower carbon intensity of the energy mix (an increasing share of renewables).

Figure 2 below shows the results of one EEA analysis which portrays the main aggregated factors behind emission changes in the period 2008–2012. This figure will be explained in greater detail during the EEA presentation at the meeting.

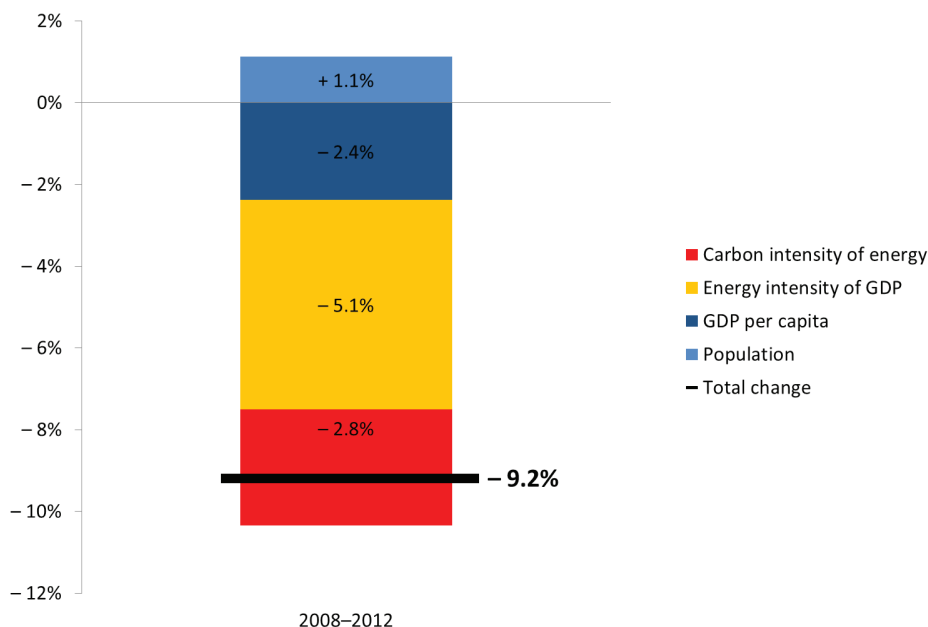


Figure 2: Decomposition of the change in total CO₂ emissions from fossil fuel combustion in the EU28. The bar segments show the changes associated with each factor alone, holding the respective other factors constant.

Member States: climate and energy policies – key to reduction of GHG emissions

There is good progress across Member States towards 2020 targets on GHG emissions, and the use of renewable energy. Progress towards greater energy efficiency is less advanced. No Member State is on track to meet targets across all three policy domains. Equally, no EU Member State under-performs in all three areas.

According to the information reported to the EEA by Member States, a number of EU policies, in particular the climate and energy package, are expected to deliver significant emission savings through implementation at national level.

The Directive promoting renewables and the legislation targeting industrial emissions (in particular the EU ETS) are considered important.

In the sectors not covered by the EU ETS, for which Member States have national annual targets under the Effort Sharing Decision (ESD), energy efficiency measures are expected to play an important role in reducing emissions.

Of course, effective and full implementation of policies and measures is key to the delivery of these emission reductions. Some Member States will rely on the implementation of planned policies that have not yet been adopted to ensure they reach their annual objectives under the ESD.