

WEEK IN BRUSSELS

Week ending Friday 2 September

European unemployment holds at 9.5%

Figures published by Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union, show that the European Union unemployment rate for July remained unchanged from June, on 9.5%, with an estimated 22.71 million unemployed. Within the eurozone, the unemployment rate also remained unchanged, at the slightly higher figure of 10%, resulting in 15.76 million people unemployed. The highest increase in the unemployment rate was registered in Greece (11.0% to 15.0% between the first quarters of 2010 and 2011), whilst globally unemployment in the USA was 9.1%, and 4.6% in Japan. (Source: Eurostat)

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=STAT/11/124&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>

Increased demand for biomass could drive land grabs

A recent report from the International Institute for Environment and Development, has raised concerns that the rising global demand for cleaner energy from biomass could drive more land acquisition in poorer nations where food security and land rights are weak. The report states that biomass energy currently makes up for 77% of world renewable energy, and that trees and woody plants account for 87% of that biomass. As governments attempt to move away from fossil fuel-based power, they are increasingly looking at biomass, as new technologies now allow it to be converted competitively into liquid fuels and electricity. The report calls for more public scrutiny of global biomass expansion plans, stating that unchecked, the growing pressure on land access could undermine livelihoods and food security in some of the world's poorest countries. With demand for wood set to outstrip supply by up to 600% in some countries, and high tree growth rates in tropical countries, some developed countries may look at non-traditional suppliers in the south to plug the biomass gap.

Lorenzo Cotula, co-author of the report, stated: "All eyes are turned to food and biofuels, but tree plantations for biomass energy may soon become an important driver in the global land rush". The EU's Renewable Energy Directive has set a binding goal to source 20% of the bloc's energy from renewable sources by 2020, which includes a target to provide 10% of transport energy from renewable sources, including biofuels. (Source: EurActiv)

<http://www.euractiv.com/en/climate-environment/rising-biomass-demand-drive-land-grabs-report-news-507203>

EU plans to review REACH regulations

Five years after its adoption, the European Commission is preparing to review REACH (Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemical substances) regulation, which for the first time required chemical manufacturers to justify that their products are safe for consumers. The regulations have been criticised in some quarters for targeting the wrong substances. The REACH regulation was initially designed to protect consumers from exposure to hazardous chemicals, but the bureaucracy it created ended up encompassing metals such as cobalt, which rarely comes into contact with consumers. The Commission review will be based on a report drawing on lessons learned from the implementation of REACH, "with special attention to the costs and administrative burden and other impacts on innovation". (Source: EurActiv)

<http://www.euractiv.com/en/climate-environment/eu-prepares-open-reach-worms-news-507129>

Week ahead

European Commission

No relevant activity.

Council of Ministers

No relevant activity.

European Parliament (Committees Brussels)

TRAN – 8 September

Roadmap to a Single European Transport Area
Consideration of draft report