

A New Impetus for Europe: Urgent Actions and Priorities for the new European Commission

The Green 10, the alliance of ten of the leading environmental organisations in the EU, representing over 20 million Europeans, look forward to working constructively with the new European Commission to make EU environmental policies a central part of the Commission's solution to Europe's problems. During the first year the European Commission should focus on the following

Urgent Actions

1. Put sustainable development at the core of the EU agenda

Sustainable development is a principle enshrined in the EU Treaties (Article 3 TEU) and part of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights: it should thus be taken into account by all institutions and become a guiding principle of all their actions and policies.

The new European Commission should take inspiration from the fact that European countries take 8 of the top 10 spots in the recent [world happiness report](#) and countries with the most ambitious environmental policies top the list. Only policies where the three pillars of sustainable development (economic, environmental and social) are equally acknowledged and supported can contribute to increased wellbeing of our citizens.

Urgent actions for the new Commission: to start promoting sustainable development through a reform of the Europe 2020 Strategy and of the semester process and to re-orient the REFIT Programme away from being a front for deregulation.

2. Rebuild trust in a European project for people

Regaining the trust of Europe's citizens in the European project is a key objective of the new Commission. [Only a third of European citizens still trust the EU](#), yet they [strongly support](#) a positive role of the EU in environmental protection.

Responding to EU citizens' environmental concerns with transparent and good governance is therefore essential to achieve successful European Commission action. Better governance and more transparency can help the EU regain trust with its citizens. More transparency in lobbying and expert groups, better implementation, enforcement and market surveillance, and better access to justice are the pillars of a more open and democratic EU.

Urgent actions for the new Commission: to increase lobby transparency, put forward legal proposals to improve access to justice and environmental inspections, and organise a 'pause and reflect' in negotiations on TTIP

3. Make environmental policy a key tool of job creation

Unemployment in the EU stands at 10%, youth unemployment at a staggering 22%. To address this problem, it is the quality of economic development that matters. The European Union needs a high-quality, job-intensive economic development in emerging, future-oriented sectors.

Green energy is much [more labour-intensive](#) than fossil energy. Money saved by avoided fossil-fuel imports [generates jobs](#) in Europe. Every billion euro of taxes shifted away from labour towards pollution and resource use can generate [over 10,000 new jobs](#). The green sector is one of the few sectors that [kept hiring during the crisis](#).

The European Commission must put sustainable, resource-efficient, clean-energy development truly at the centre of its jobs programme and ensure delivery across all DGs.

Urgent actions for the new Commission: to move swiftly beyond the 'at least' 40% reduction of greenhouse gases and a 27% share of renewables, to stick to President Juncker's commitment to improve energy efficiency through a binding target of at least 30%, to implement these targets in a robust, loophole-free way, and to use all available tools to green Europe's tax system.

4. Regain Competitiveness through innovation

The vast majority of EU rules serve a useful societal purpose and have positive benefit/cost ratios. Environmental regulation causes [less than 1% of red tape](#). The EU simply cannot compete on lower costs and poor environmental standards; the only option is higher quality and innovation.

A forward-looking policy for competitiveness aims at cutting the least competitive and least productive form of EU spending - the €400bn annual fossil energy import bill. By promoting challenging efficiency and emission standards and ensuring that environmental targets are met, the European Commission will unlock the creative forces that will allow European companies to charge ahead with innovative and sustainable products, services, and business models

Urgent action for the new Commission: to ensure a swift implementation of the 7th Environmental Action Programme.

5. Foster investment in green and nature-based solutions

President Juncker has promised a €300bn investment package before the end of 2014. This investment plan can work if directed towards green and nature-based innovative solutions.

Environmental innovation typically means 'invest now, enjoy later'. Solar and wind electricity are almost free once installed. Electric cars are cheap to drive once bought. Research and development for safer chemicals under REACH delivers benefits for decades to come. The investment to establish and connect nature areas safeguards Europe's invaluable natural capital.

If correctly directed, these public policies can also unlock the necessary private-sector investment and align it around ambitious, environmentally sustainable targets, timetables, and standards.

Urgent action for the new Commission: to ensure that the new investment package is primarily directed to green and nature-based solutions

During the 2014-2019 mandate the European Commission should focus on the following

Priorities

1. Create new jobs, shift the tax burden from labour to resource consumption, and eliminate environmentally-harmful subsidies through a new economic strategy based on sustainability principles.

The EU should align its spending and lending with its environmental targets, ensuring that the European Investment Bank lends money to projects that protect the environment and our climate. All these measures will help combat climate change, reduce resource consumption and safeguard biodiversity.

2. Develop legislative proposals on greenhouse gas emission reduction, renewable energy and energy savings policies that ensure the EU is on track to decarbonize by the middle of this century.

To help keep global temperature increases below 2°C, the Commission must ensure it develops a set of policies based on the October 2014 Council conclusions while looking at the longer term needs to phase out the use of fossil fuels and increase the reduction of energy consumption and the use of sustainable renewable energy. Such policies will deliver a healthier environment, a better quality of life, new jobs, greater energy security, and technological innovation.

3. Halt Europe's accelerated loss of biodiversity by 2020.

The strengthening of the EU's biodiversity strategy, the enforcement of flagship conservation issues such as Natura 2000 (Europe's network of protected areas) and the implementation of the reformed fishing and waters laws will help protect our habitats, forests, animals, waters and soils.

4. Put in place comprehensive resource-reduction, product and waste policies.

Europe is using more than its fair share of the world's resources – exacerbating global social inequalities and environmental damage. Policies are needed which tackle this overconsumption and put Europe on a path to eliminating waste, moving towards a circular economy and encouraging quality, resource and energy-efficient products. Food waste is a particular problem and should be cut by at least 50%. The communication on sustainable food consumption is a priority.

5. Adopt measures to reduce the use of pesticides and replace hazardous chemicals.

Many chemicals, including nano-materials, used in the production of goods are a threat to our health and wildlife. For example, pesticides that kill bees are still widely used in Europe, despite the vital role that pollinators play in food production. The European Commission must adopt measures to reduce the use of pesticides and exposure to endocrine disruptors, which are chemicals that disrupt our hormonal systems and increase rates of breast cancer, diabetes and infertility problems.

6. Limit air pollution and bring levels in line with latest health recommendations.

The World Health Organisation recently classified outdoor air pollution as a cancer-causing agent. The European Commission should set ambitious and binding air pollution ceilings for 2020 and 2025. It should also limit air pollution from major sources such as power plants, agriculture, shipping, construction and domestic heating. This would improve the quality of the air we breathe and bring down cancer and respiratory disease rates.

7. End European and global deforestation and forest degradation.

Forest loss is increasing greenhouse gas emissions and threatening wildlife and the livelihoods of millions of people worldwide. European Commission should adopt, by 2015, an action plan to reduce the overall impact of EU consumption on forests, eliminate goods linked to deforestation, and support efforts by developing countries to tackle rainforest destruction.

8. Oppose any new free trade deals, especially agreements with the US and Canada, that jeopardise strong social and environmental standards.

In particular, the European Commission should oppose any deal that includes an investor-state dispute settlement measure or regulatory coherence. This clause would allow private corporations to legally challenge democratically agreed EU, national and local laws, which preserve citizen rights, health and the environment.

9. Put the environment at the heart of the global development goals to end poverty.

Environmental protection should be at the centre of post-2015 global sustainable development goals to help eradicate poverty. The European Commission must ensure the global development agenda is implemented in all relevant EU policies.

10. Guarantee the right to information, participation and justice for European citizens.

Greater transparency in EU decision-making and lobbying activities would strengthen EU legitimacy, help ensure a balanced composition of EU advisory groups and avoid politicians' conflicts of interest. The European Commission must adopt new policies to guarantee these rights and good practices. It must also ensure the public rights to information and participation in decision-making in environmental matters, at both EU and national levels, are respected.