



25 September 2019

SDG Watch Europe Open Letter : Urgent Need and Opportunity for New Commission to put Sustainable Development Goals Centre-Stage

Dear Commission President-elect,
Dear Commissioners designate,

Today four years ago on 25 September 2015, the United Nations member states adopted the 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), an urgent call to action to take bold and transformative steps to shift the world onto a sustainable and resilient path.

Four years after this path-breaking agreement, SDG Watch Europe wishes to share with you the serious concern that the EU and its Member States still show very little sense of urgency or ambition about the actual implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the transition to sustainability. While millions have marched the streets around the world last Friday calling for ambitious action to protect our planet and life-support system, the EU does not even have a strategy of how to implement the SDGs yet.

As you take up your new responsibility, the EU has a long way to go to provide a healthy, prosperous life for its people within the planetary boundaries. We are in urgent need of solutions to the climate crisis, the rapid loss of biodiversity and the destruction of precious eco-systems. Next to these key challenges, SDG Watch Europe's recent reports have shown that [the EU is likely to fail on SDG 10 on reducing inequalities](#) within and beyond the EU and that [some the negative external effects of unsustainable European policies can have negative external effects all over the world](#), making it difficult for other countries to achieve the SDGs themselves.

We therefore welcome that your Political Guidelines "A Union That Strives for More" clearly mention our common aspiration to live on a natural and healthy planet in which all human beings can unfold their full potential. They also make a strong point on the need for the EU's leadership role in achieving these aims. We celebrate that several elements in your Political Guidelines hold the promise that this new Commission will be able to deliver on sustainable development. We urge you to take this commitment seriously in

particular in your proposal for a Green Deal including a Just Transition to leave nobody behind. We welcome your promise of putting in place, amongst others, a sustainable food policy along the whole value chain, a new biodiversity strategy and a zero-pollution circular economy. We equally welcome your promise to ensure an economy that works for people including minimum wages for everybody, better measures for work-life balance, policies that work for children and young people, and to combat poverty in the EU. We will hold you accountable on these promises and expect them to be delivered.

However, what we miss – and this can still be changed given the promising elements mentioned above – is the need to fully align your Political Guidelines with the 2030 Agenda and to frame your proposals, including the Green Deal, along the SDGs and wider sustainable development principles.

Your decision that all Commissioners are responsible for the implementation of the SDGs in their respective area and that the College is taking up responsibility of the 2030 Agenda as a whole is a good step towards putting in place the right governance structures. However, shared responsibility must also mean more action on the SDGs in each respective field. We also take into consideration your commitment to turn the European Semester in an instrument that fully integrates and serves the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

While European civil society will provide more detailed input for your Political Guidelines and the Green Deal in the next weeks and months, we would like to reiterate the following essential points:

- The implementation of the 2030 Agenda and the monitoring and reporting on its progress, should not solely be the responsibility of the Member States but a priority for the EU itself. Many policy areas critical to sustainable development, such as agriculture, trade, employment, consumer policy and the EU budget, fall within the (shared) competences of the EU. Adapting European internal and external policies alike towards sustainability and policy coherence is key for the success of the 2030 Agenda. Until today, we lacked the political will and the right governance structures at EU level that would allow for policy coherence for sustainable development.
- We therefore urge you to develop a governance framework that is suitable for realizing the necessary reforms for sustainable development. A fundamentally reformed European Semester as part of a new EU governance cycle to coordinate sustainable development efforts in Europe is essential, in line with subsidiarity. Political efforts must be supported by a sustainability-proofed Multiannual Financial Framework post 2020 , which serves as an effective driver in the transition to sustainability. These reforms must be complemented by other effective mechanisms for Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development to ensure coherence between internal and external EU policies and efficiently advanced by the new institutional structure and political priorities set by your Commission and the newly elected European Parliament.
- We have urged the last Commission for several years to produce an overarching Sustainable Development Strategy and a comprehensive Implementation Plan.

Such a strategy has also been called for by the Multi-stakeholder Platform on the SDGs in October 2018, the European Parliament in June 2017 and the Council in June 2017 and October 2018. We call on you to ensure that this Commission will rapidly put forward an overarching Sustainable Europe 2030 Strategy to guide all European policies and programmes, including all relevant stakeholders.

- We also urgently call on the EU to set up a transparent and participatory monitoring and reporting system for its 2030 Agenda implementation, in both its internal and external policies, that allows for an honest stock-taking concerning all SDGs and targets and addressing their comprehensive, transformative and universal nature.

We renew our promise to support and help to this new Commission in establishing sustainability policies and practices across the EU and its Member States and speeding up the pace of implementation. We are willing to constructively and meaningfully participate in the policy processes, monitoring and implementation. With more than 100 organisations in our cross-sectoral coalition across the EU, we represent a large number of European citizens calling for change in Europe: for a future that is positive and sustainable for all and viable for the planet.

Yours Sincerely,

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