



OPEN LETTER: The Sibiu Summit: a civil society vision of an environmentally sustainable future for Europe

Brussels, 19 April 2019

Dear Heads of State and Government,

Over many decades, the European Union has served to protect the people of Europe from the calamities of war; it has secured peace and relative prosperity; it has chosen the path of cooperation, cohesion, and solidarity based on the rule of law. At the Sibiu Summit on 9 May 2019, along with other European leaders you will have the opportunity to shape the next steps in that journey; to look at the lessons from the past and choose a path for the future.

As the largest federation of environmental citizens' organisations in Europe, bringing together 150 member organisations from more than 30 countries representing a constituency of more than 30 million citizens, we are writing to share our vision of a future for Europe that we believe is worth fighting for at Sibiu and during the European elections.

Historically Europe has both had a major responsibility for creating the environmental problems we now face and been a leader in the ecological transition in many fields – tackling acid rain, ensuring clean drinking water for our citizens, establishing the world's largest network of protected areas, supporting a renewables revolution, pushing climate change up the global agenda, and leading on chemical regulation.

However, while much has been achieved, much remains to be done. Ambition continues to fall short of what science and ethics require. European progress has been undermined by a range of factors and faces multiple challenges. Our response to global competition and crises has been defensive rather than visionary in many fields. We have made some impressive commitments but not always implemented them well.

We now face urgent and existential challenges – climate change and biodiversity loss that undermine the very foundations of civilisation as we know it; chemicals that contaminate our bodies and our planet; plastic and pollution that fill our air and oceans.

Without a convincing change, our citizens will lose trust in governments, our children will lose their future.

We need an EU that protects our environment and our citizens' health and rights. We need a commitment to this in Sibiu so that during the European elections, citizens can see the EU's positive role, be inspired to believe in the European project and have hope for the future.

According to Eurobarometer polling, 9 out of 10 EU citizens say that protecting the environment is important for them personally and 67% would like the EU to do more. There is a case for both strong national and EU roles.

We therefore ask that you embrace and fight for our vision of Europe, one where:

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Europe's largest network of
environmental citizens' organisations

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- We commit to the systematic implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and make this an overarching framework for the EU;
- We do everything we can to tackle climate change to limit warming to within 1.5 degrees and achieve net zero emissions well before 2050, preferably by 2040. We need a credible long-term strategy and immediate actions;
- The calamitous collapse of bees and other pollinators and the wider pattern of biodiversity loss are given the highest level of political attention;
- In particular, agriculture's impacts are urgently addressed, with a new Common Agricultural Policy that focuses on healthy food and farming that respects the need to protect biodiversity, soil and water;
- A rapid substitution strategy is put in place to minimise the risk of hazardous chemicals – through REACH implementation, a non-toxic environment strategy and progress on eliminating endocrine disrupting substances;
- Citizens' rights to clean air and water and access to nature are respected;
- The EU budget is used as a means to encourage a just transition – with no space given for locking in Paris-incompatible fossil fuel use or unsustainable agricultural practices;
- The democratic accountability of the EU institutions is strengthened through removing obstacles to access to justice and bringing the EU back into compliance with the Aarhus Convention without delay;
- Civil society has a secure space to make its essential contribution to a fully functioning democratic Europe.

Finally, a policy focus on economic growth itself has unfortunately not improved social equality or wellbeing sufficiently over the last two decades, leading to social tensions and disillusionment. We need to reset the EU's compass, focusing on the wellbeing of our citizens. With each new European Parliament and Commission there is an opportunity for a new architecture, and sustainable development needs to be at its heart. We are pleased to annex the Green 10 Manifesto where some of the above ideas are elaborated.

Dear President Tusk, we are fully convinced that the European Union needs a just, urgent and ambitious transition towards sustainable development that respects the carrying capacity of our planet. This requires your leadership to push for a Europe we want, a Europe we need – a Europe that listens to the children marching in our streets, and that embraces the irrefutable logic and reality of a just transition to sustainability. There is no planet B, and we need strong European leadership to ensure that we still have viable planet A.

Yours sincerely,



Jeremy Wates
Secretary General



Cc: Mr Jean-Claude Juncker, President of the European Commission
Mr Frans Timmermans, First Vice-President of the European Commission
Mr Jyrki Katainen, Vice-President of the European Commission
Mr Karmenu Vella, Commissioner for Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries
Mr Miguel Arias Cañete, Commissioner for Climate Action & Energy
Mr Phil Hogan, Commissioner for Agriculture & Rural Development

Encs:

[The Green 10 Manifesto for the European Election](#)

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