

The EEB Leaders Declaration

We, leaders of national and European environmental civil society organisations, together representing over 30 million people, are deeply concerned about recent geopolitical developments and the risks to cooperation and in and beyond the EU, to democracy and to human security, rights and well-being in Europe and across the globe.

The decisions you take as EU and national leaders are defining Europe's path and the future of its people. They also influence the world we live in and Europe's role in the world. We are writing to share our solutions - for building the EU's resilience, for an EU that is a rule-maker and not a rule-taker, that secures its strategic autonomy and ensures human security – while staying within planetary boundaries, maintaining life-protecting ecosystems, guaranteeing social justice and ensuring long-term sustainability.

We call on you to:

- 1. Strengthen human security by taking a multi-level, holistic approach, recognising that fossil fuels and the climate-pollution-nature crises threaten security and lives.**
- 2. Protect and invest in European democracy by supporting civic space & the rule of law and respect for human rights and justice globally.**
- 3. Maintain and develop regulations that protect health, wellbeing and the environment - people need EU leaders to resist the agenda of fear and construct an agenda of hope and agency.**

This will invest in the EU's long-term resilience, credibility and leadership in a rapidly changing world. Europe has the opportunity to demonstrate that human security, prosperity, democracy and sustainability reinforce one another. Already over 400 organisations have asked for such an **agenda of hope** by signing [The European Pact for the Future](#).

Read our full declaration below,

Signed by



Patrick ten Brink, Secretary General, European Environmental Bureau
On behalf of EEB NGO leaders

(The names of civil society organisations who have signed up to the EEB Leaders Declaration are presented at the end of the full text of the Declaration)

The EEB Leaders Declaration

(Full Declaration Text)

We, leaders of national and European environmental civil society organisations, together representing over 30 million people, are deeply concerned about recent geopolitical developments and the risks to cooperation and in and beyond the EU, to democracy and to human security, rights and well-being in Europe and across the globe.

The decisions you take as EU and national leaders are defining Europe's path and the future of its people. They also influence the world we live in and Europe's role in the world. We are writing to share our solutions - for building the EU's resilience, for an EU that is a rule-maker and not a rule-taker, that secures its strategic autonomy and ensures human security – while staying within planetary boundaries, maintaining life-protecting ecosystems, guaranteeing social justice and ensuring long-term sustainability.

Geopolitical developments & our concerns about security, deregulation and civic space

The triple climate-nature-pollution crisis, combined with widening inequalities, is seriously impacting people's lives, communities, infrastructure, as well as society and the economy as a whole. A growing list of studies are sounding the alarm: [The Planetary Health Check 2025](#) noted that 7 of 9 planetary boundaries have been passed. In October 2025, scientists declared that the [World's First Climate Tipping Point Has Been Crossed](#). [Europe's Environment 2025 report](#) highlighted the clear deterioration of nature, climate, and health. No one can ignore that heat waves are more frequent and powerful. In June alone, the heatwave was estimated to [have killed more than 14 000 people](#). Heatwaves, wildfires, water scarcity, and deadly flooding in other parts of the world remind us of the fundamental need for action. [85% of Europeans](#) say that tackling climate change should be a priority and [94% of citizens in all EU Member States](#) say that protecting the environment is important to them. We cannot negotiate with climate change as heat waves kill people, destroy crops and burn forests. Ecosystem goods and services – from clean water to food provision - are undermined by degraded ecosystems. People suffer when facing illness due to exposure to pollution and toxic chemicals.

The US-led attack on Iran has caused another fossil-fuel crisis. Europe spent around [€400 billion](#) on imported fossil fuels in 2025, a costly dependency. Fossil fuel revenues also strengthen Russia's war coffers against Ukraine. Since the start of the illegal Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, EU payments for Russian fossil fuels amounted to over [€430 billion](#). As stated by the [Green 10](#), the Strait of Hormuz energy crisis should be Europe's last fossil fuel crisis – it has also shown that those who have invested in renewables are more resilient.

Changing World Order and existential risks for the EU. The wars demonstrate a wider reality – that some forces in the [emerging new world order](#) return to power politics, military dominance and neo-imperialism to manage world affairs and to advance their interests. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine continues to threaten European security and seeks to intimidate countries that have chosen a path of democracy, sovereignty and closer integration with the EU. The United States, historically seen as a key partner, has increasingly used military force, economic coercion through tariffs and an uncertain commitment to Europe's security, which has raised concerns about the EU's autonomy. China represents a complex relationship: it is an important economic and diplomatic partner and a key actor in multilateral cooperation, but also a powerful competitor with dominant positions in several supply chains that are critical for Europe's clean and digital transition. In this context, the EU must strengthen its unity, resilience and democratic foundations. Only a stronger and more autonomous Europe following its own path can avoid excessive dependencies, engage confidently with global powers and prevent a future in which individual Member States become increasingly vulnerable to external pressure and influence. The EU must be stronger to avoid splintering into vassal states, at the mercy of big powers.

There has been an erosion of democracy and civic space in many parts of the world. Women's rights and roles, too, are being placed steps back, undoing hard-won historical progress. Elements from an authoritarian playbook are clearly being pursued in Europe both by external forces and from within

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the EU, by certain far-right parties and governments in the EU. European values and the resilience of EU democracy, while both currently far from perfect, are at risk of being further and fundamentally undermined. Targeted disinformation campaigns are seeking to undermine critical civil society organisations fighting for, amongst others, climate and environmental action, humane approaches to migration or the rights of women and LGBTQI+ people; intended to question climate change and push false narratives around the transition at a societal scale and undermine democracy as a whole.

Environmental, climate, and social policies and laws that protect society, workers, and people and their well-being are also at risk. There is intense lobbying in the EU for a deregulation agenda driven by short-term profit interests, a disregard for corporate responsibility and efforts to destabilise Europe. We are concerned that the EU's omnibus approach has missed the opportunity of smart implementation and is driving deregulation, weakening life-saving environmental and social protections. Deregulation and delayed implementation will undermine the rights and well-being of people across Europe and beyond. It will also undermine industry leaders and reward industry laggards, weakening the EU's brand at home and abroad.

We, the undersigned leaders of NGOs from across the EU, call on Europe's leaders to:

1. **Strengthen human security by taking a multi-level, holistic approach, recognising that fossil fuels and the climate-pollution-nature crises threaten human security and lives**
 - **Commit to a fast-track fossil fuel phase-out, with immediate stop of any imports from Russia and planned phasing out of all others.** Do not backtrack on commitments to refuse to buy Russian fossil fuels and hence support their war economy. Do not replace them with [US fossil fuels](#), given their attacks on international cooperation and lock-in of climate impacts. Instead, support the accelerated, nature-compatible shift to renewables, ensuring that environmental safeguards and public participation rights are upheld throughout. Accelerate the rollout of smart grids, invest in the circular economy and electrification, and support a just transition and gender equality on climate mitigation and adaptation. In light of the weaponisation of energy infrastructure, support household and community energy projects based on renewable energies and avoid costly nuclear power.
 - **Use the EU's Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) to drive fossil fuel independence and resilience:** by ringfencing commitments to both climate and nature, maintaining dedicated **LIFE funding**, and embracing the **Do No Significant Harm (DNSH)** principle fully. Complement this with **green public procurement** to create a market pull. Finally, the **MFF should be increased and underpinned by progressive EU own resources**, as the EU budget (1% of the EU's GDP) is too low to enable the EU to be the strong and credible actor on the world stage it arguably needs to be. Create a better-functioning **internal market** and set incentives to tackle the triple climate-nature-pollution crisis, address the root causes of poverty and inequality and support farmers and industry across the region in embracing a rapid transition to clean and sustainable production, rather than defending the status quo, investing in harmful subsidies and stifling innovation.
 - **Embrace a holistic approach to security, recognising that the climate-pollution-nature crisis also threatens human security.** Climate change, nature degradation and biodiversity loss, exposure to pollution and toxic chemicals are not only threats in themselves but threat multipliers as tensions rise. The Nature Restoration Regulation is a good example of flexible lawmaking with important targets that support EU resilience and should be implemented rather than called into question. Avoid the [risks of excessive militarisation](#), bloated budgets and inefficient, unaccountable spending. Military investments must not come at the expense of vital spending on decarbonisation, zero pollution, biodiversity protection, social justice, health care, education, independent media, civil protection, or climate adaptation, all of which are also essential to human security.

2. Protect and invest in EU democracy by supporting civic space & the rule of law and respect for rights and justice globally

- **Strengthen democracy through meaningful engagement of citizens, supporting citizens' rights and strengthening civic space.** The [European Civic Forum \(ECF\) civic space reports 2024](#) and again [2026](#) show that civic freedoms have deteriorated in Europe over the last five years – which is a violation of the fundamental values and identity of Europe. Complement the Commission's EU Civil Society Strategy & Democracy Shield with legally guaranteed civic dialogue, meaningful consultations and explicit funding in the MFF for NGOs to ensure that the voice of the public interest, environmental and climate concerns and women's and minority rights are fairly represented in decision-making. Exert political pressure on Member States to respect and promote civic rights and civic space. Democracy is at risk.
- **Protect environmental defenders** – complement the EU's first anti-SLAPP directive with [the explicit inclusion of environmental defenders](#) within anti-SLAPP protections, as called for by the Special Rapporteur on environmental defenders under the Aarhus Convention. Encourage Member States to transpose and implement the rules to ensure necessary and even protection across the EU. Support the Aarhus Convention framework currently under pressure in several Member States and at EU level, including rights to public participation and access to justice in environmental matters. Support also the work of the Special Rapporteur on Environmental Defenders, whose role is becoming increasingly important as democratic space comes under pressure.
- **Make tracking disinformation and access to information a priority.** Respond to the risk of disinformation by foreign actors such as Russia and actors financed by the US administration, commercial lobbyists, populists and other actors. Launch a strategy to combat disinformation, weed out inappropriate influence by vested interests, and strengthen public accountability. Ensure scientific consensus remains at the centre of any expert groups, discussion groups, civil society exchanges organised by the EU Institutions.
- **Stand firm on the European and International rule of law, human rights and justice and develop a global partnership on multilateralism to address the multiple crises:** At EU level, we are concerned about Member States not respecting and implementing already agreed rules, and the Commission not enforcing them sufficiently. This leads to an erosion of the rule of law and weakening of confidence in and credibility of the EU. [Four in five respondents \(84%\)](#) agree that EU environmental legislation is necessary for protecting the environment in their country. **Internationally**, invest in fair partnerships and global diplomacy with like-minded countries, big and small. Identify the levers being used to weaken the EU and put in place necessary measures: The world needs a strong EU with unwavering support for multilateral governance, international solidarity and cooperation, a respect for the rule of law and continued commitment and action for environmental, climate and social justice. Anything less, and others dictate history, with the EU standing on the wrong side of history.

3. Maintain and develop regulations that protect health, wellbeing and the environment: People need EU leaders to resist the agenda of fear and construct an agenda of hope and agency

- **Policy Ambitions are strategy assets, not burdens: resist the pressures to undermine legislation and targets promoting climate mitigation**, as these reduce dependency on fossil fuels, improve resilience to fossil fuel crises and reduce funding to petro states. Don't undermine CO2 legislation on vehicles, the emissions trading schemes and energy legislation. Invest in solutions that help affected households and businesses in transition, and public institutions – including schools, hospitals and public administrations – engage in the transition.
- **Resist pressure to undermine legislation on nature and pollution.** The Green Deal and wider environmental protections came under attack: while some leaders resisted this pressure and embraced progress, [2025 saw mainly steps backwards](#) and missed opportunities. A majority of people in Europe care about nature and human and animal health, support species-appropriate treatment of animals alongside biodiversity protection, and oppose deregulation of core

legislation on Habitats, Birds, Water and on Nature Restoration. Over the past months, this majority is becoming ever more vocal: the [Take Action - Hands Off Nature](#) campaign has amassed over 550,000 signatures demanding that nature protection laws are not weakened. A Eurobarometer survey showed [the growing concern over PFAS in Europe](#), with 81% of Europeans concerned about health impacts and 84% concerned about environmental effects.

- **Recognise that deregulation now will only reward the laggards and punish the leaders - defend rules that protect health and the environment.** Deregulation or delays in regulatory action will lead to ever-higher economic and human costs of inaction. The costs of non-implementation of EU environmental laws, through air and water pollution, nature degradation and waste, have been estimated at €180 billion per year for the EU (approximately 1% of EU GDP). And, as studies on PFAS show, the clean-up costs are vastly more expensive than preventing it. Acting at source could save [€110 billion](#), and delays drive exponential costs. While the [PFAS market value is around €19/kg, the social costs have been estimated at ~€18,700 per kg](#). Private profits cannot come at such a cost to people and society. Deregulation also undermines predictability and incentives for innovation, both appreciated by industry. Public servants should serve the public's needs, not short-term private profits. Resist ideological calls for deregulation, as the facts underline the need for protections and responsibilities.

In summary, **we ask you to recognise the need to continue and accelerate the transition through progressive environmental and climate policies, complement it with a social deal that ensures people's rights and put measures in place to build a thriving one-planet economy.** Europe has the opportunity to demonstrate that human security, prosperity, democracy, and sustainability reinforce one another. We urge you to seize that opportunity and lead with an agenda of hope, resilience and shared prosperity. Already over 400 organisations have asked for such an agenda of hope by signing The European Pact for the Future.

We hope that your engagement will reflect these pragmatic and practical recommendations from heads of civil society organisations in Europe, who are strong believers in the importance of Europe and the European project.

Signed,

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Signatures as of 28 September 2026.

Additional signatures will be added in the September 2026 launch