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As Greece takes over the Presidency of the EU, we are amidst critical debates for the future of Europe's environment and climate policy. The Greek government will notably have the last chance to conclude vital political agreements before the current European Commission and Parliament reach the end of the term. BirdLife Europe and its Greek Partner, the [Hellenic Ornithological Society](#) (HOS; BirdLife in Greece) are working together to make sure the EU government is provided with the support and knowledge necessary to ensure a successful term.

The Greek presidency will need to take over where Lithuania left off, which leaves them with a couple more files than previously expected; the dossier of [Indirect Land Use Change](#) (ILUC) related to [biofuels](#), and the [European Maritime Fisheries Fund](#) (EMFF).

During its term, Lithuania managed to heavily water down the ILUC text in order to give in to the more conservative forces in the Council. This was without avail, since not only progressive but also conservative Member States, such as Poland and Hungary, voted against the final text. It will now be an extra challenge for the Greek presidency to close this file in a context not only of the climate and energy package, but also of the future talks on the post 2020 climate ambitions of the EU.

In the case of the EMFF, the Lithuanian presidency refused to increase the payment for data collection, something that is extremely important in ensuring a sustainable fisheries sector, [leading to a stand-still in the negotiations](#). The Greek presidency must now ensure that it continues to uphold the agreements of the [Common Fisheries Policy reform](#) by moving EMFF payments away from increased fishing capacity and more in support of the marine environment.

During the course of the next six months, BirdLife Europe hopes the Greek presidency will put environmental challenges at the forefront of policy discussions and maintain the EU's role as a model for environmental governance.

To achieve this, we need to first see strong political leadership on the development of the Climate and Energy Package for 2030, [where the Commission has just tabled a proposal that lacks in ambition and puts global climate action at risk](#). This piece of flagship legislation must bring in binding targets as soon as possible to guide investments towards a secure and affordable energy system. A deal must also be brokered on the Indirect Land Use Change of Biofuels. The [recent collapse of Council negotiations over biofuels](#) runs the risk of leaving Europe with a broken system of subsidies that harms the climate and biodiversity, disrupts food markets and does nothing to promote innovative clean energy solutions.

Secondly, EU regulation addressing the damages caused by [invasive alien species \(IAS\)](#) must move forward. Invasive alien species are devastating Europe's natural environment and costing Member States at least 12 billion euros a year. The [current IAS proposal](#) that was published last autumn needs to be finalized and swiftly implemented before the European Elections cause delay. Europe's biodiversity and natural environment can recover from this issue but only through prevention, control and co-ordination that must be provided by the Greek presidency.

Finally, there will need to be a strong conservational commitment to the marine environment and migratory species. Robust environmental measures must be insured in the [Maritime Spatial Planning and Integrated Coastal Management \(MSP-ICM\) Directive](#). This will be crucial in guaranteeing that the much needed infrastructure and energy investments for the marine environment are rolled out sustainably and with a long-term perspective. A clear position will also need to be prepared for the next [Convention on Migratory Species](#) to ensure protection for migratory birds and biodiversity.

BirdLife Europe and the Hellenic Ornithological Society will be offering all their expertise and support to the Greek Presidency in the challenging work ahead and look forward to the environmental progress envisioned for 2014.

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