

Frans Timmermans
Vice President of the European Commission
European Commission
B-1049 Brussels, Belgium

CC: College of Commissioners

Subject: Open letter on possible withdrawal of air and waste proposals and absence of sustainability

Brussel, 11 December 2014

Dear Vice President Timmermans,

We are deeply concerned that environmental protection and sustainability is not only going to be absent in the Commission's Workplan for 2015 but that you are even planning to withdraw two recently proposed pieces of legislation that would bring major benefits for citizens' health, the environment as well as for Europe's economy – the air package and circular economy package.

It is alarming that, despite all the public reassurances of President Juncker and yourself, including during and following the hearing in front of the European Parliament, in your first weeks in office you seem to have immediately singled out key proposals for environment and health protection as your prime target.

No less worrying is the fact that the two proposals you have singled out actually bring significant benefits to the economy and employment, two priorities of President Juncker.

One can only understand that as an ideological approach to "better regulation" that is completely negating the well known benefits to European citizens, our economy and our environment that environmental policies bring. By withdrawing the air quality proposal the European Commission would miss the opportunity to prevent as many as 58,000 premature deaths per year that result from air pollution, when the current toll is 400,000 premature deaths per year. You would also miss a huge economic benefit to the European economy as the air quality directive would deliver health benefits of €40-140 billion in avoided external costs and provide about €3 billion in direct benefits due to higher productivity of the workforce, lower healthcare costs, higher crop yields and less damage to buildings.

Withdrawing the circular economy package would also go against the number one priority of the European Commission. Europe would fail to create as many as 180,000 new jobs through turning waste into a resource while making business more competitive and reducing demand for and dependency from costly scarce resources from outside the continent.

You would send an extremely negative political message to European citizens that the EU under the Juncker Commission is no longer there to improve the health and quality of life of its citizens and protect the environment, but rather to protect the short-sighted interests of obsolete business that

are unwilling to develop new and cleaner business models and explore new sources of employment and economic activities.

If the intention of withdrawing these legislative proposals is to respond to public concern about the EU interfering too much in the life of its citizens, we submit that the choice of these particular instruments is spectacularly misguided, as many EU citizens want the EU to do more on health and environmental protection, not less¹. This will have the effect of alienating precisely those citizens who have been among the EU's strongest supporters. Neither is this choice borne out by facts, as EU environmental legislation is responsible for less than 1% of administrative burden.

We therefore urge you to, as an absolute minimum consider the below following 4 priorities to be included before taking your final decision on the Commission Work Programme for 2015:

- Include sustainability as one of the priority areas in this and future Commission Work Programmes;
- Implement the outstanding parts of the 7th Environmental Action Programme by bringing forward the expected proposals in 2015 on deforestation/forest degradation, sustainable food, endocrine disrupting chemicals, a strategy for a non-toxic environment, access to justice and environmental inspections;
- Maintain existing proposals on air quality and waste which are currently being negotiated between the EU institutions;
- Set the evaluation of the Birds/Habitats Directives (BHD) clearly in the context of the 2020 Biodiversity Strategy targets; and promote full implementation of the BHD in all Member States;

For your reference, we re-attach the letter we sent you two months ago in which we outlined ideas to fill in your mandate in accordance to principles of sustainability, which at the time was not yet foreseen to be part of your portfolio and stress again our hope to engage in constructive dialogue on this issue.

Yours sincerely,



Angelo Caserta, Regional Director, BirdLife Europe

¹ 1 According to one recent survey, 95% of Europeans say that protecting the environment is "important to them personally", over half say it is "very important", and 56% of Europeans say they are most concerned about air pollution (up from 36% in 2011).

On behalf of the Green 10 EU Directors

Wendel Trio, Director – Climate Action Network (CAN) Europe

Petr Hlobil, Director – CEE Bankwatch Network

Jeremy Wates, Secretary-General – European Environmental Bureau

Magda Stoczkiewicz, Director – Friends of the Earth Europe

Jorgo Riss, Director – Greenpeace European Unit

Genon K. Jensen, Executive Director – Health & Environment Alliance

Christian Baumgartner, Director, Naturefriends International

Jos Dings, Director – The European Federation for Transport and Environment (T&E)

Tony Long, Director – WWF European Policy Office



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