



Council of the  
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**NOTE**

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From: Presidency  
To: Permanent Representatives Committee/Council  
Subject: EU environment and climate policy in the new legislative term  
– Exchange of views

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1. With a view to the exchange of views between Ministers on the above-mentioned topic at the meeting of the Council (Environment) on 19 December 2019, delegations will find attached a Presidency background note together with two questions to help structure the discussion.
2. The Permanent Representatives Committee is invited to take note of the Presidency background note and to forward it to the Council for the exchange of views.

**EU environment and climate policy in the new legislative term****Background note for the policy debate  
at the Council (Environment) on 19 December 2019**

The Strategic Agenda for the EU for 2019-2024 establishes the transition to climate neutrality, fighting against biodiversity loss, improving the environment and ensuring the sustainability of the economy as cross-cutting priorities of the work of the EU Member States and institutions. The Strategic Agenda calls on us to urgently step up our action to manage the existential threat of climate change and its effects. The EU can and must lead the way, by engaging in an in-depth transformation of its own economy and society that takes into account the diversity of situations in the various regions of the Union.

The window of opportunity to prevent irreversible damage to the planet and humanity is narrowing quickly. The alarming trends are interrelated and global by nature, and endanger economies, livelihoods, food security and the quality of life of people everywhere. Building the response to the two key challenges of our time – climate change and biodiversity loss – must be the starting point for European policy-making in the next five years. As outlined in the Strategic Agenda, EU policies should be consistent with the Paris Agreement. Furthermore, the EU will promote sustainable development and implement the 2030 Agenda, and it will lead efforts to fight the loss of biodiversity. The response to the challenges we are facing should be driven through a positive agenda. In the next five years all institutions have to work together in order create solutions and opportunities.

The Council has worked to give a positive push to the new Commission and its work programme. In this regard, the **Environment Council** has recently worked on and adopted conclusions on, for example, the circular economy and the 8<sup>th</sup> Environment Action Programme, with work ongoing on conclusions for a global biodiversity framework post-2020. Over the past year, different Council formations have extensively assessed aspects related to the transition to a climate neutral economy in the EU based on the Commission communication ‘A Clean Planet for all – A European strategic long-term vision for a prosperous, modern, competitive and climate neutral economy’.

In her agenda for Europe, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen presents her Political Guidelines for the next European Commission 2019-2024 with six headline ambitions, one of which is a European Green Deal. Europe must lead the way in the transition to a healthy planet. The European Green Deal will be a central instrument of the 2019-2024 legislature.

The European Green Deal includes the vision of Europe becoming the first climate-neutral continent, through policies such as a Climate Law and an increase of the 2030 targets. It also looks to ensure a socially just transition for all and to align financial flows and investments to support the transformation. Under the Green Deal, a Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 is to be presented, laying the ground for Europe's global leadership and preparing the work to curtail biodiversity loss within the next five years. A New Circular Economy Action Plan, focusing on sustainable resource use, especially in resource-intensive and high-impact sectors such as textiles and construction, will be presented. A zero-pollution ambition, laying down a cross-cutting strategy to protect citizens' health from environmental degradation and pollution, addressing air and water quality, hazardous chemicals, industrial emissions, pesticides and endocrine disruptors, will also be put forward.

Drawing on the Council Strategic Agenda's focus on interinstitutional cooperation, and with a view to responding and providing input to the commitments already announced under the European Green Deal, as well as anticipating further actions, the Finnish presidency invites the Environment Council to exchange views on the actions needed and the way forward on EU environment and climate policy in the new legislative term.

### **Questions for Ministers:**

1. What commitments would you prioritise at EU level in 2019-2024, in order to catalyse the necessary transformative change to reverse climate and environmental degradation and ensure the sustainability of our society and economy?
2. How could we best capture the synergies between the European Green Deal and other EU goals, and ensure other EU policies and actions do not counteract the objectives of the European Green Deal?