

Business and civil society urge European Commission to implement smarter, not less

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Together with over 180 other civil society organisations, WWF is calling on the incoming European Commission to focus on smart implementation of climate and environmental laws, warning that the current push for "simplification" risks weakening Europe's ability to tackle the climate and nature crises. This call



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comes as businesses across Europe also express concerns over the potential consequences of delaying or rolling back on Green Deal initiatives.

"The European Commission has a crucial choice ahead of itself: we must implement smarter, not less," says **Ester Asin, Director of WWF European Policy Office.**

"Europe can achieve its climate and nature goals, but only if we make sure existing laws are implemented efficiently and effectively. Simplifying regulations carelessly risks throwing away decades of progress."

"Simplification" of EU legislation is crystallising as a key objective of the new Commission [1], and all Commissioners have been assigned arbitrary targets of reducing burdens on businesses in their mission letters, in order to boost competitiveness. However, in practice, if done unchecked or arbitrarily, this risks unfairly penalising those businesses that have already invested to meet environmental standards, while creating uncertainty for companies trying to plan for the future. It also undermines the climate and nature objectives of the European Green Deal.

These concerns were raised today by more than 60 companies (https://drive.google.com/file/d/1edW_GpxZHIAt6D_sLfu-3PX265u64wj/view) and 180 civil society organisations (https://drive.google.com/file/d/1X7sFtRA79-Fxxb7KCC_kcbOFNG-kVEKf/view). In their public statements, they urge the European Commission to avoid backtracking on any of the EU's environmental and climate laws to protect both Europe's economy

and the planet.

The potential price of failing on the EU environmental targets is high. Climate impacts have already set Europe back by €260 billion over the past decade (https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/CLI_IAD_LOSS/default/table?lang=en&category=cli.cli_iad). Weakening environmental laws now will only increase those costs, leading to more floods, droughts, pollution, and health crises. In contrast, effective implementation of existing laws could save Europe at least €60 billion annually. (<https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/2c05c9e6-59aa-11e9-a8ed-01aa75ed71a1>) in health and environmental costs.

“The Commission's recent proposal to delay the application of the EU Deforestation Regulation is a clear sign of this new narrative taking hold in European politics. But it's a mirage: we can't have a strong economy without a strong Green Deal,” says **Tycho Vandermaesen, Policy & Strategy Director at WWF European Policy Office**. “The EU needs a dedicated implementation programme for the Green Deal to give the necessary support to businesses and stakeholders to comply, without compromising environmental standards.”

A dedicated implementation programme would involve a more systematic and better use of digital tools to reduce paperwork and enhance accountability, clear guidance to help businesses and regulators understand their responsibilities, and the improvement of EU and national public administration efficiency. [2]

Both CSO and business statements demand a clear response from President von der Leyen as the Commissioners' confirmation hearings begin. Commissioners must resist the allure of “simplification” in their commitments, while the President must unequivocally pledge against any further rollback of

environmental standards and clarify her commitment to fully implementing the Green Deal.

Notes to the editor

[1] Recent signs of EU leaders backtracking on their commitment to the European Green Deal—often framed as moves toward simplification and boosting competitiveness—include:

- The April 2024 ‘emergency’ reform of the EU’s agricultural policy, following farmers protests, which led to the removal of standards on good agricultural and environmental conditions ([source \(https://eeb.org/fast-and-loose-historic-move-as-eu-rushes-to-remove-environmental-safeguards-in-the-cap-despite-renewed-calls-from-scientists-to-accelerate-climate-action/\)](https://eeb.org/fast-and-loose-historic-move-as-eu-rushes-to-remove-environmental-safeguards-in-the-cap-despite-renewed-calls-from-scientists-to-accelerate-climate-action/)).
- The proposal by the European Commission of October 2024 to delay by twelve months the application of the EU deforestation-free products regulation ([source \(https://www.wwf.eu/wwf_news/media_centre/?15410891/225-global-groups-say-Hands-off-the-EU-deforestation-regulation\)](https://www.wwf.eu/wwf_news/media_centre/?15410891/225-global-groups-say-Hands-off-the-EU-deforestation-regulation)).
- The announcement by the incoming Agriculture Commissioner, Christophe Hansen, in his prepared remarks for his upcoming confirmation hearing on November 4, that the European Commission is dropping the upcoming legislative proposal for sustainable food systems ([source \(https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2024/10/25/is-incoming-eu-agri-food-commissioner-all-farm-and-no-fork\)](https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2024/10/25/is-incoming-eu-agri-food-commissioner-all-farm-and-no-fork)).
- The independent report by Mario Draghi on the ‘Europe’s competitiveness’ from September 2024, which contains worrying deregulation elements that are pitting climate and environmental goals against one another, for example granting temporary exemptions to environmental legislation until climate neutrality is reached ([source \(https://caneurope.org/draghis-report-missing-crucial-elements-the-green-and-just-transition-is-](https://caneurope.org/draghis-report-missing-crucial-elements-the-green-and-just-transition-is-)

europes-best-bet-for-lasting-competitiveness/)).

- Ongoing calls to postpone the EU's commitment to push back the EU's zero-emission target for cars and vans by 2035 (source (<https://www.ft.com/content/9b8e685c-622c-467c-ace6-b9dfc203f819>)), despite widespread support from companies not to re-open the 2035 car CO2 law (source (<https://industryfor2035.org/>)).

[2] WWF's Briefing: Smart Implementation of the European Green Deal

(https://wwfeu.awsassets.panda.org/downloads/briefing-note-on-smart-implementation_1.pdf) proposes to focus on six areas:

1. **Digital innovation**, for example to improve data management for monitoring, decision-making and enforcing biodiversity-related laws.
2. **Guidance and engagement with stakeholders**, including through a dedicated service solely focused on implementing laws related to the Green Deal.
3. **Improvement of public administration efficiency** at national, regional and local levels.
4. **Reduction of administrative burdens for beneficiaries of EU funds** without weakening control, oversight and targets.
5. **Staffing and capacity building of competent authorities** to strengthen the operational and technical capacities of the relevant national authorities.
6. **Stepping up inspections and enforcement** as inspections are crucial for identifying poor implementation and enabling environmental protection.



A business perspective: Strong environmental standards foster long-term competitiveness

We, the undersigned companies, stand firmly behind the European Green Deal and its continuation. As leaders in sustainable sourcing and production, we know that EU standards on nature, biodiversity and climate are not the problem but a vital part of the solution.

The current climate, nature and pollution crises are taking a serious financial toll on businesses: Between 1980 and 2022, weather- and climate-related extremes caused economic losses of assets estimated at EUR 650 billion in the EU Member States, of which EUR 59.4 billion in 2021 and EUR 52.3 billion in 2022 alone. And more than 75% of bank loans to companies in the eurozone are granted to companies with a high dependency on at least one ecosystem service.

EU-wide laws provide immense added value for businesses, by offering a unified framework across the 27 Member States — as opposed to 27 national laws. Over the last five years, the Green Deal has delivered meaningful progress. It has successfully improved environmental protection but has also advanced a green transition for the economy, enhanced transparency and created a regulatory framework that can result in new opportunities, a global competitive advantage, more resilient business sectors, and a level playing field.

Examples of that are seen in the EU's efforts to tackle deforestation through the EU Deforestation Regulation, as well as to protect and restore nature via the Birds and Habitats Directives and Nature Restoration Law. Additionally, new laws on corporate sustainability reporting and due diligence promote greater climate ambition and transparency on environmental action, and create a level playing field by also applying to foreign companies active in the EU. Implementing these laws requires time, resources and effort by businesses, as well as trust that investments undertaken to get ready for the application of these laws are not in vain.

Deregulation, whether through lowering environmental or social standards, reneging on international commitments, or reducing the EU's climate ambition, threatens the stable and predictable legal framework that we depend on.

We urge the European Commission to support businesses in successfully implementing existing and upcoming environmental standards — by prioritising smart implementation:

- Modernising the EU and national administrations through digitalisation and capacity building, to ensure they can effectively support and guide businesses in implementing EU legislation.
- Boosting green investment and promoting access to related finance for business based on clear and simple conditions.
- Consistently implementing and enforcing legislation across the EU to ensure a level playing field, while rewarding frontrunners. This includes fostering better cooperation and coordination between EU Member States.
- Increasing access to clean, cheap renewable energy for businesses.

- Ensuring that for products placed on the EU market from third countries the same rigorous criteria apply as for those produced in the EU.
- Avoiding blanket exemptions of sectors or company sizes which can create unfair competition, harm consumer trust and further complicate supply chains. Given the proportionality principle, EU legislation often already provides longer timeframes and lighter processes for SMEs.
- Addressing the rise and impact of extreme weather events, such as droughts and floods, through nature-based solutions for climate adaptation and ambitious climate action, in order to minimise the increasing damage caused to EU businesses.

We call on the European Union to stay committed to protecting and restoring nature and biodiversity, and combating climate change, to foster a transparent business environment and a level playing field for businesses in the EU.

This statement was facilitated by WWF EU.



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