



European Commission - Speech [Check Against Delivery]



Press statement by Commissioner Sinkevičius, in charge of Environment, Oceans and Fisheries, after the Environment Council

Brussels, 23 October 2020

Good evening everybody.

Today we had a very productive Council, which sends a number of positive messages. Apart from the discussions on climate, which were covered by Executive Vice President Timmermans this morning, the afternoon was dedicated to important environment files.

Let me start from the Biodiversity Strategy.

I am extremely happy that the Environment Ministers could agree on ambitious **conclusions on the Biodiversity Strategy**, which the Commission had proposed in May this year.

Ministers endorsed the Strategy's objectives, welcoming in particular the creation of a network of well-managed protected areas and the target of protecting a minimum of 30% of the EU's land area and 30% of its sea area, with one third of it strictly protected. The conclusions managed to clarify some issues raised by a number of Member States in the course of the last months, and we are grateful to the German Presidency and to Svenja and her team for their efforts and hard work to reach such a balanced and comprehensive result.

These conclusions on the Biodiversity Strategy, together with those on Farm to Fork, adopted by Agriculture Ministers earlier this week, also paves the way for corresponding ambition in related policies, such as the upcoming new EU Forest Strategy, and for mainstreaming biodiversity in the EU Recovery Package and in the next Multi-annual Financial Framework.

The Commission warmly welcomes today's endorsement of the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and the strong support it received. This clear political message will help us to implement the Strategy effectively in the EU, and demonstrates that the EU is ready to play a string role at international stage and to lead by example in the negotiations on a global biodiversity framework under the Convention on Biological Diversity.

This afternoon, I also took the opportunity to inform ministers briefly about a number of other recent Commission initiatives, which we had announced in the European Green Deal.

One of these is the new **Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability**, a first step towards the Zero Pollution Ambition for a toxic-free environment.

The Strategy has two overall objectives. It will boost innovation for safe and sustainable chemicals, and it will increase protection of human health and the environment against hazardous chemicals.

We will achieve these objectives by becoming more preventive, and by simplifying and consolidating our legal framework. We will ensure that the most harmful chemicals are no longer used in consumer products or affecting vulnerable groups, for example children, pregnant women or elderly people. The only exception could be only if use of these chemicals would be proven essential.

But increased protection needs to go hand in hand with innovation of safer alternatives. We need to create a virtuous circle between protection and innovation. We need to boost development of new chemicals and materials that are safe and sustainable by design: from the production to the end of life, including by greening chemical production. This will help to boost competitiveness of EU industry, build up the EU reputation, and make it synonymous with safety.

I also presented to Ministers the recent Commission proposal for an **8th Environmental Action Programme**, which is complementary to the European Green Deal and supports the delivery of the EU's climate and environmental objectives.

Therefore, the focus of this 8th EAP is on implementation at all levels of governance and on

monitoring..

Our proposal aims to strike a “deal” with Member States and the European Parliament and, once adopted in co-decision, will ensure shared ownership with the other institutions, for whom the 8th EAP is legally binding.

The 8th EAP should be the trajectory to deliver on the environment part of the Sustainable Development Goals and thus run to 2030, while being guided by a long term objective for 2050. And it will also support the EU's green recovery through its long-term orientation and environmental priority objectives it shares with the Green Deal.

Lastly, I also presented the Commission proposal for a **Regulation to amend the Aarhus Regulation on Access to Justice in Environmental Matters**. The proposal aims to ensure compliance with the EU's international obligations under the Aarhus Convention, of which we were in breach, and to improve openness and accountability when it comes to environmental protection.

The proposal will significantly improve the possibilities for Environmental NGOs to ask the Commission to review decisions in any policy area, provided there are justified concerns that they undermine environmental laws.

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Press contacts:

[Vivian LOONELA](#) (+32 2 296 67 12)

[Daniela STOYCHEVA](#) (+32 2 295 36 64)

General public inquiries: [Europe Direct](#) by phone [00 800 67 89 10 11](#) or by [email](#)