

Commitments made at the hearing of

FRANS TIMMERMANS

Executive Vice President-designate

European Green Deal



The Executive Vice President-designate, Frans Timmermans, appeared before the European Parliament on 08 October 2019 to answer questions put by MEPs from the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI). During the hearing, he made a number of commitments which are highlighted in this document. These commitments refer to his portfolio, as described in the [mission letter](#) sent to him by Ursula von der Leyen, President-elect of the European Commission, including:

- A European Green Deal; and
- Climate action.

Please note that the quotes included in this document only make reference to oral commitments made during the [hearing](#). The [verbatim report](#) of the public hearing is available on the [Commissioners-designate hearings website](#). The Executive Vice President-designate was also sent some written questions in advance of the hearing to which he provided [written answers](#).



European Green Deal

"[...] the European Green Deal must put Europe on the right track to a sustainable future, and ensure that every European is on board and that no one is left behind. Our ambition is to make Europe the world's first climate-neutral continent. We can achieve this by 2050 if we plan well and start straight away."

"It is our task to demonstrate clearly and concretely to our citizens that the Green Deal can help solve problems and improve life for them now, and not just 20 or 30 years down the road."

"National initiatives and local jobs, backed by public and private financing and European support programmes, to share knowledge and capacity. That is, in my view, how a European Green Deal can work directly for the people."

"[...] I think one of the most complicated tasks I'll have to face is to make sure that there is joined-up thinking, there is consistency there [in our policies] [...]. I am under no illusions that I am going to be able to take the 100 days and sort everything out. But to identify where there is a lack of consistency and then move on to come up with steps and legislation that need to be taken to eliminate these inconsistencies, that I think would be a very complicated task and yet one of the most important tasks I face in my portfolio."

"[...] reducing greenhouse gases, reducing the increase in temperature, global warming, attacks on proceeding with biodiversity are things which go together and which are now a matter of urgency."

"We'll certainly work on a hydrogen strategy because I also believe Europe can really lead on this. We would still have an advantage vis-à-vis other parts of the world if we speeded up. I also believe in it because you have no energy loss when you store energy in hydrogen."

2030 Emission Reduction Target

"I will also start work immediately to deliver a higher level of ambition for 2030. As soon as possible, I will put forward legislative proposals that will help us to reduce emissions by at least 50%, or even better, by 55%."

"But I think my position will be stronger if I can back it up with the analysis we are doing right now. [...] Again, however, let me be clear: I would be extremely surprised if the outcome of this were anything other than at least a 55% reduction by 2030."

Lead international negotiations

"We need to work to convince others to step up their ambition as well. I am fully committed to strengthening our international climate diplomacy and implementing the Sustainable Development Goals."

Just Transition Fund

"We need a dedicated Just Transition Fund to support the people and communities most affected, including those in industrial, coal and energy-intensive regions."

"[...] all of us have to have consistent, coherent plans [...] we need to finance things also where [...] there are no market forces which would do that and we need to step in."

"So, that is what we want to put in the Just Transition Fund: a mix of fresh money combined with co-financing nationally, also linking to the different funds we already have – whether it's the Agricultural Fund, the Structural Fund, the Cohesion Fund – and also making sure that there is, through the help of the EIB that has been extremely successful in InvestEU, that there is a huge access to funds to make this transition to the green economy."

"It is absolutely clear that for this transition, especially in those countries still heavily dependent on coal, we will need much, much bigger funds than even what a Just Transition Fund can muster. But it's also absolutely clear to me that there is no future in coal."

Protecting biodiversity

"[...] we will present a robust and ambitious biodiversity strategy for 2030 and [...] the EU must champion the most ambitious commitments possible at the next UN Conference of the Parties on Biodiversity in China in October 2020."

"What I want to do is to engage with the scientific community to make sure that we're able to find some benchmarks against which we can then devise our policies, and we need to do this before we go to Beijing."

"So I want the European Union to be extremely well prepared, through an intensive dialogue with this Parliament, for the next biodiversity conference [...] so that we have concrete proposals on the table to try and convince the rest of the world that we now need to take urgent action on safeguarding our biodiversity."

"We need a strategy for reforestation, and reforestation in a way that does not contradict other goals. [...] So we have to look at this in a sensible way and I think the only way we can do that is to have a Europe-wide strategy to help reforestation."

"[...] consumers need to be better informed. [...] I want to be able to tell them, at some point, this [product] is

deforestation-free. We can't say that today. So we need to work with our international partners to make that happen in the future, because now 80% of deforestation is a consequence of the search for new arable land to create new foodstuffs and sometimes it's the food we import directly. Sometimes it's even the feedstuff we give our animals that are produced in Europe. So we have a lot to do to inform our consumers and we will have to regulate in that sphere as well."

Zero-pollution ambition

"[...] Europe needs to move forward towards a zero-pollution environment to tackle environmental degradation and pollution, address air and water quality, hazardous chemicals, industrial emissions, pesticides, endocrine disruptors and microplastics."

"Clean air in our cities and clean water in our rivers and oceans – that is what we need so that we can lead healthier lives on a planet that can sustain all of humanity, and where the economy grows to the benefit of the many, not the few, with jobs for everyone."

Transport

"[...] transport is one of the most polluting sectors of our economy. We need to tackle this head-on. All over Europe, people depend on their cars for the quality of their daily lives, not seldom even for their livelihoods. I know that, and I don't want a car-free Europe; I want emission-free cars in Europe, and I want people to use clean public transport."

"We need to cut emissions in the aviation and maritime sectors in particular if we are to meet our climate goals. This requires a careful mix of tools. We need to invest, for example, in our railways."

"I want Europe to have the best transport systems in the world."

"[...] the ETS [Emissions Trading System] should be extended to shipping. But we also need a broader policy mix. I want us to have green ports. I want us to be able to force shipping to take the electricity that's offered to them in ports rather than burn the most horrible stuff when they're in cities."

"We need third-generation biofuels. They can be a constructive part of our energy mix because in some areas – take aviation – we will probably need more biofuels. I might be short of imagination but I don't see electric flying happening on a huge scale any time soon."

Circular economy

"We need to take our work on the circular economy to a new level, focusing on sustainable products and waste prevention. We must reduce, reuse and recycle to unlock all its potential for a low-carbon economy. We

will propose a new Circular Economy Action Plan, focusing on sustainable products and resource use, especially in resource-intensive sectors, such as textiles and construction."

Farm to Fork strategy for sustainable food

"[...] I want to underline this – without our farmers we will not attain our sustainability goals and we need to find a Common Agricultural Policy that supports this and that also leads to fair competition for our farmers, also internationally. I think the reforms set in motion by Phil Hogan lead us a long way in that direction and let's check where we can improve this using the Farm to Fork principle."

" [...] what we have to do is to look at the Common Agriculture Policy against that backdrop [of funding intensive farming], how we can guarantee a future for European farmers and produce food which no longer pollutes. [...] that has already been placed into the reforms during the Juncker period, but that's also going to be the front and center in the Farm to Fork policy as well."

"We need to make sure that we put sustainable food on the table. We need to make sure that we put farmers in a position where they can maintain our rural areas and they can have a constructive relationship between the rural areas and the more metropolitan areas in the European Union. We cannot do this without the farmers."

"My intention is to make sure that policy is framed, [...] that animal husbandry can be done in a manner, and is done in a manner, that is more environmentally friendly. I'm prepared to work hard to make sure that animal welfare is given greater attention and there're improvements in animal welfare whether it is in animal husbandry or transporting or slaughtering of animals. Those are measures that [...] the European authorities indeed ought to be taking."

Tax policies to deliver on climate

"My idea would be to say to our international partners that we are making this transition to a climate-neutral continent by 2050. To do that, we will take these measures. These measures will obviously have an impact on our economy. If you take the same measures, or comparable measures but going in the same direction, we will make this voyage together. If you don't do that, then of course we have no choice but to protect our society and our economy, and then we will have to have a carbon border tax."

"I think that it is unescapable that we've got to reduce and phase out subsidies which are still being directed towards fossil fuels. I acknowledge that we need a very practical timetable with milestones, step-by-step, which can be discussed with Member States. But that's one of

the most manifest, one of the most flagrant contradictions that we have to avoid going forward.”

“Our Energy Directive is nowhere near where it needs to be, we need to revisit that. And I want to have the possibility to at least have the possibility to envisage taxation of kerosene, because I don’t see the logic of why that energy source should be exempt from tax.”

Enforcement and implementation

“Well, the rules [of the Ambient Air Quality Directive and similar legislation] are very clear, and I think we should be doing more to enforce the rules in our Member States. [...] This is legislation that is urgently needed, but it is not applied in many Member States. I think the Commission will have to toughen up in terms of starting infringement procedures and it is, I feel, my personal responsibility to make sure that that’s going to happen.”

“[...] we will enforce the emissions legislation with every instrument we have. I think the car industry has outlived its position of being in a comfy position. They need to deliver. They have not delivered in the past, they need to deliver and the Commission will enforce what they need to deliver.”

“[...] [Concerning] what I will enforce in terms of removing contradictions in the policies we have. Already, I believe, we’ve made a step in the right direction in terms of palm oil with the decision taken by the present Commission, but we will have to look at more of these commodities to make sure we remove actions that add to deforestation. We need to create more transparency to know exactly where that is headed, but to do that, we will also need a dialogue with the countries of origin. They of course have their own demands in terms of fair trade and in terms of the relationship with the European Union.”

Climate action

European climate law

“I will propose a climate law within 100 days of taking office to enshrine in legislation the EU’s 2050 climate neutrality objective. This law will set the long-term direction of travel for all our policies.”

“[...] I want to come before Parliament with a draft climate law that goes as far as we can in terms of stipulating exactly not just where we need to be in 2050, but also what we need to do in intermediate steps to get there by 2050.”

“I honestly believe that this climate law will give us the framework which we urgently need to discipline Member States to come up with plans that are concrete enough so that we can sort of look at the stages we will have to go through to get where we need to be in 2050. Some Member States have done some of that work already but many Member States still need to do that. So in that sense, I think it’s the best framework we can have for our common future.”

Implementation of the legislative instruments

“We will review and update our existing climate and energy legislation. It is also clear that we have to consider additional measures to achieve our goals of cleaner transport, less energy-hungry buildings, a more sustainable food system. We cannot afford the luxury of complacency.”

“I think we need to extend the Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) to other sectors such as aviation and the maritime sector but I also believe we have in existing legislation the possibility to look for tougher norms, if that is necessary, emission norms or in other areas. We will also have to review our energy directives and other directives.”

“So, yes, I believe there is room for better regulation. Yes, I believe there’s room for more tailor-made regulation. I also believe that by doing decent impact assessments, by having a Regulatory Scrutiny Board which looks into this, we already have better regulation. I also believe that we need to look at a lot of existing regulation in a lot of areas to see whether it’s fit for purpose.”

European Climate Pact

“The Climate Pact will bring together initiatives and pledges from communities, companies and neighbourhoods, sharing knowledge and data, helping and inspiring each other with best practices and concrete results.”

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