

Commitments made at the hearing of

WOPKE HOEKSTRA

Commissioner-designate on Climate Action



The Commissioner-designate, Wopke Hoekstra, appeared before the European Parliament on 2 October 2023 to answer questions put by MEPs from the Committees on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI), Foreign Affairs (AFET), Development (DEVE) and Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE). 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 of the European Commission, including on 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 [dedicated website](#) for the changes in the European Commission in 2023. The Commissioner-designate was also sent some written questions in advance of the hearing to which he provided [written answers](#). He also replied to some [additional written follow-up questions](#) after the hearing.



European Green Deal

Overall aims

“As Commissioner, I would aim for continuity, for ambition, and for outreach. I want to ensure you that continuity is in place on the entire Green Deal. In my own portfolio, I aim to swiftly conclude all pending negotiations.”

“Climate policy is closely linked to the other pillars of the Green Deal. This applies to biodiversity, the Nature Restoration Law, the Soil Monitoring Law and the forthcoming Framework for Forest Monitoring. To achieve our climate goals, we need to complete the Green Deal.”

“I want to prepare the foundations of a Green Deal 2.0, on climate, biodiversity, circularity, and pollution, and help increase ambitions across the board.”

Energy

“I will champion the EU’s push to triple global renewable energy capacity, double energy efficiency, and phase out unabated fossil fuels.”

“The Treaty is clear about this [nuclear energy]. It is up to the Member States to decide and you see that the topic is dealt with in very different ways in many different countries, sometimes entirely regardless of political colour. There are countries where the left and right strongly agree that they need to continue with nuclear energy, and there are countries where the exact opposite is true. [...] Like scientists, I think that we cannot afford to exclude knowledge and nuclear energy at this point in time. But it is up to the Member States.”

Transport

“Let’s start with the most absurdity in my view: the lack of taxation on aviation fuel. When I drive a car to the service station, 50 % to 60 % of what I pay at the pump is tax. However, if a jet is refuelled, there are no taxes at all. Zero. Which European thinks it would make sense not to act in accordance with the polluter pays principle in the case of kerosene? [...] I am fully committed to promoting support for a global aviation tax in Europe and around the world.”

Fossil fuel subsidies

“We also need to finally end fossil fuel subsidies. In my view, they are anachronistic and counterproductive for our energy transition. And I want to work closely with Commissioner Gentiloni to advance the Energy Taxation Directive in the Council.”

“What I would want to commit to is that we make sure we phase these out and make sure they’re no longer part of the next MFF [Multiannual Financial Framework]. And I will provide you with an analysis as to what extent they

actually exist today, knowing that, given that we have the ‘do no significant harm’ principle, that might actually be rather limited compared to Member States. So I’m optimistic about it, but I’ll provide you with the information and I will do everything I can to make sure the next MFF is fossil subsidies-free.”

Farm to fork

“We need to work closely with our farmers. They should be supported in producing sustainably and are entitled to a decent livelihood. This is why we need to offer our farmers a revised business model. To this end, I will deliberately seek dialogue with the food industry and the banks.”

Climate Action

The 2040 target

“In the first quarter of next year, we will present our Communication on the 2040 target. I can offer you my clear commitment: I will act fully in line with the [Scientific Advisory] Board’s advice. I will use all instruments available to aim to enable the EU to reach the minimum recommended target of 90% net reductions.”

“We will need a 2035 target, if only because we’re asking that from the whole wide world, including ourselves, and we need to prepare it as a next step after the global stocktaking, which is actually taking place in Dubai. So, absolutely, and I think it makes most sense if we manage to set this very ambitious, at least 90% target for 2040 to then make it linear.”

Euro 7 standards for vehicles

“The most important thing for my portfolio is to be absolutely adamant about the 2035 target, because in the end that is what drives not only the climate part of the equation, but in the end, if you go to electric cars and electric vehicles, then you would have also gotten rid of the particles discussion altogether.”

“If you look into e-fuels, they should be much more geared actually to aviation and to maritime rather than to chase this – according to scientists – let me say, very, very, very narrow alley to create any change. I will stand in full for the 2035 targets. No doubt about that.”

Adaptation

“A very important point that was not as prominent in the hearing so far[...] is adaptation. The results are indeed absolutely devastating. We’ve seen it in Slovenia, we’ve seen it in Spain, we have seen it in Greece, and that was only this year. Two years ago we saw it in Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany – flooding. It is absolutely horrific what happens to our people and to our nature.

The price is tremendous. We're now approximately at 50 billion a year. This will go up by 2030 to 1% of our total GDP. That is exactly the amount we're currently spending as the European Union on everything together. So if we do not change this, we do have a very, very significant problem also from a financial perspective. So adaptation with allocating money, I think, for example, through the EIB [European Investment Bank], talking with insurers and seeing how we close the insurance gap should be on the top of our list."

"We need to step up the help that we provide all across the Union and we need to make sure we provide them [European regions] with funding. I was mentioning the EIB. Why? Because actually if you look at the EIB, which is a fantastic institution, the minimum investment hurdle for them is EUR 25 million. For adaptation and an average city that is actually too high a benchmark. So what I would want to do is have a discussion with them how we can make this more tailor-made for regions on adaptation."

COP28 (28th Conference of the Parties)

Overall aims

"The public expectations for COP28 are high, and rightly so. And time is running out. We must get the world on track for 1.5 degrees. I still see avenues to success in Dubai, and I will work non-stop to make it happen."

"A simple part of the answer is significantly stepping up our engagements and also seeing COP28 as an intermediate step, but certainly not as the end result."

Loss and damage

"I will talk to all partners to build a global loss and damage coalition. I want to explore an international kerosene tax, a maritime levy, a fossil fuels tax, and even a share of ETS [Emissions Trading System] proceeds – no stone should be left unturned."

"COP28 should be about operationalising the loss and damage fund and funding arrangements, especially for the most vulnerable. It is doable, if we find agreement on the governance and operating rules. And if this is the case, first pledges will become possible, and I will prepare the ground accordingly."

Climate diplomacy

"My view is that if there's one thing where we need to double down, where we actually might need to put much more effort in it in the next 10 years, it is climate diplomacy, and not just for diplomats, but also for our experts to make sure that we actually realise the things we were just discussing. Now that is something I cannot in any possible way just do by myself, also knowing how big the challenge is for the COP28. So in our

engagements with the Global South, we clearly need to focus on, as I said, their interests and their long-term desires to make this work. Secondly, we need to work with our friends not only in the Global South, but also beyond in the US, but also many others – think about the non-European G7 members and others who are on the right side of history in terms of battling climate change to work together."

"We're facing an extremely difficult terrain because of the war in Ukraine and, of course, vis-à-vis Russia and its allies, but also given the tensions in the Indo-Pacific, but also the more contentious situation and the disputes we might have with, for example, China on human rights or on domestic interference and a range of other topics. But that should not keep us away from engaging with them and making sure that with the Chinese, with our friends in the US, with our friends in India and with all our friends in the Global South, we truly put this in motion and we look for what unites us, even though we can easily find a whole bunch of topics on which we actually do not yet agree. But that is what diplomacy is for: looking for what you can do together, even if you agree to disagree on difficult other items."

Economy and finance

Funds and CBAM (Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism)

"I will work to bring our industry along with instruments, like the Innovation Fund to spur innovation, and using CBAM to help create a global level playing field."

"So one of the things I plan to do is look at the Innovation Fund, but also, beyond that, the scope of all our innovation money, and see whether we can land it at business more quickly than we currently do."

"I would like to have a taskforce looking into how we can speed up not only the money we allocate through the Innovation Fund, but actually more broader in the innovation money we have available as a European Union."

"We do need to make sure with our different funds that we help out our people. The Modernisation Fund does it, the Just Transition Fund does it, the Social Climate Fund will be doing it. I think we will need these instruments and potentially more now. [...] I think on how could you actually get more money on the table – well one way, as I said in my opening statement, is to go, for example, after aviation or take a sliver of the ETS."

"One of the things we need to organise [...] is to make sure we create an own resource, and whether that will be a maritime levy or aviation or part of the ETS or CBAM."

"I have addressed the issue of the Innovation Fund in detail, but I think we need to do at least two things: look very seriously at how we can help entrepreneurs and

make sure we reduce red tape and how we can make it easier for public authorities. [...] Hence the idea of starting a net zero desk in the Commission to look at those companies that want to contribute to the transition, who have a demand, who want to make it easier: what can we learn from this and what can we organise?”

“On the financial sector we do have an obligation to do more. And we moved into benchmarking. We moved into transparency. Of course, we came up with the taxonomy. And I think those are all steps in the right direction. But given the tremendous importance, interlinking the role banks play, I think this is something where we need to do more. [...] We did come a long way, actually, in a relatively short term recently in beefing up our expectations from the financial sector in terms of transparency, in terms of the taxonomy, in terms of benchmarking. That is also all the more important given that the financial sector is so extremely important all across industries.”

SMEs

“If you look at our economic infrastructure, you see that we have millions and millions of outstanding SMEs all across the various countries of the Union, and what I would like to organise, of course, together with others in the college, is making sure we start an SME dialogue on how to actually make it through this transition, because they are often the engines of change and I think we should make it easier for them – so for companies large and small to be part of this transition and prosper in it.”

“I also mentioned the dialogue with SMEs, which is particularly important, because the real backbone of our economy is not the few big companies – great work is being done there too, throughout the Union – but SMEs, where millions and millions of Europeans are working with enthusiasm every day: those are the companies that ultimately need to be able to achieve this. I would therefore also like to see with you how best to implement it. [...] I would also like to draw on the experience of real entrepreneurs, as I know less than half of what it should look like. It is precisely knowledge from practice that would be very helpful in this regard.”

Bioeconomy

“I think it is crystal clear that the bioeconomy is part of the future. That is, by the way, also in all the scientific advice. But we have to do it in such a way that we actually respect and further improve the use of land, because there are smarter and more dangerous ways to approach this.”

Stability and Growth Pact (SGP)

“I think there are three overarching challenges that will stay with us for at least the next 20 to 30 years that have a lot of differences, but a couple of things in common. And they are climate change, clearly – they’re all related

– secondly, related to defence, keeping the world safe for democracy and global safety, and the third is the dramatic interruption, technological disruption, disruption that is going to reshape our lives in a way at least I cannot comprehend. And each of these three elements needs European cooperation, because none of us can deal with them by ourselves. They need sustained effort because we will need a much longer period than just the next 10 years to deal with them. And they need substantial investments nationally and from a European perspective. So that will be my overarching approach. Does it have consequences for the SGP? Yes, it does. And yet, of course, I’m fully committed to the changes that the Commission has already suggested to the SGP.”

Development cooperation

Overall aims

“If you then zoom out and you look at the level of trust at a global level, even though I think if you add up all the development aid budgets of the European Union, you would be impressed, even though with the global gateway, we are tremendously serious about our commitments to igniting sustainable and fair economic growth across the globe [...] and what we need to do is therefore tailor our approach, in my view, much more to the long-term interests of our friends in the Global South. And that is typically about indeed making this transition happen and about economic activity.”

Financial support for developing countries

“Our banks could play an important role. I know from previous experience that also the World Bank and the IMF have a role to play and what we can do more – whether it is through special drawing rights or any other part of freeing-up money, helping out our friends in Africa. [...] If you look at Africa, you see the debt levels are actually much lower. And why is that? Because actually the markets will not accept for most of the countries to increase their debt levels because the trust in them is too low and they’re already paying a huge sum in terms of interest. So this is actually something we should help on.”

“The second thing I think is even more productive to do [is] helping them out with technology. [...] We can actually set up the businesses there, help out with technology and knowing that so many African countries [...] do not just want to be players in the transition, they want to be leaders in the transition and be part of the solution. And I think that is what we should ignite.”

“I think there is no workaround of the fact that this [the financial aid to the Global South to participate in the green transition] will cost substantially more money than we are currently allocating to it. That is simply the reality. It will involve fresh money, as finance ministers typically call it. It will include loans and it will include a very substantial chunk of private money. [...] And that is

precisely what we need for our friends in the Global South. [...] We have the obligation from a fairness perspective, from an affluence perspective, we have a lot more money, but also if that all is not convincing from the perspective of doing something for a problem that would otherwise hit us, in any case, do more.”

Relations with the European Parliament

Working together

“Europe’s green transition is a massive task. It needs the broadest possible support to maintain ambition and to take everyone along. And I will set my own bar high for reaching out, for building coalitions and for working together. I will work with you, with my colleagues in the Commission, with the Council, with European citizens, civil society and business, and with our partners across the globe.”

“But I will also be adamant in giving a voice to the next generation.”

“I’m very much looking forward to not only delivering on the various aspects that I have been mentioning, but also to work together with all of you, because I genuinely

believe that is necessary in such a transformative situation we are facing. You simply cannot do it with the majority plus one. In our societies, it’s important to build a broader consensus and deliver on this transition.”

Transparency

“I’ll be completely transparent with you, I’ve never worked for the European Commission while at McKinsey. I’ve never worked for Shell or any other oil company while at McKinsey and, as I try to stress – and I worked for them until six years ago and then I became a finance minister – I will be very explicit to each and every company, within the Union and beyond, about my expectations. As I did before as a finance minister, and to a lesser extent – because there was less interaction – as a foreign affairs minister, I will be clear about my expectations of business.”

“On your [question on providing a consultancy CV], let me let me look into it. I’m all for transparency. So if there’s more that I would need to provide, I will need to look into it. I don’t have that with me. So please allow me to look into that.”

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