



Climate Defenders or Dinosaurs in Disguise?

Media advisory on the Commissioner candidates' tasks and views on climate

Brussels, 30 September 2019

The hearings of Commissioner candidates in front of the European Parliament from 30 September to 8 October will test the climate credentials of the new Commission.

Commission President-elect, Ursula von der Leyen has put climate policy upfront as a top priority of the new Commission, pledging to present a European Green Deal in the first 100 days of her mandate and giving greater power to Frans Timmermans who, as the first Vice-President for the European Green Deal and as Climate Commissioner will oversee many other portfolios.

However, many of the initiatives which were included in her European Green Deal contain a lot of ambiguity. It will depend on all new Commissioners whether Von der Leyen's promises are translated into concrete policies and measures which will scale up climate action in line with the objective to limit temperature rise to 1.5C. Worryingly, many of the proposed Commissioners, including those in the European Green Deal team, do not have a strong track record on protecting the climate.

Wendel Trio, Director of Climate Action Network (CAN) Europe said:

“Climate is not just an environmental problem, but concerns the whole economy and thus the whole Commission. The promises of the European Green Deal could become nothing more than an empty shell, unless all Commissioners recognise their responsibility for tackling the climate crisis and make ambitious commitments on climate action. Several of the Commissioner candidates have only recently changed their rhetoric in favour of more climate action. They still need to prove that they are real climate defenders, and not dinosaurs in disguise.”

To make the European Green Deal meaningful, each future Commissioner needs to support an increase of the EU's climate targets by early 2020; to be in line with the 1.5C goal, the targets should be raised to 65% emission cuts by 2030 and net zero emissions by 2040. The increase should be followed by a revision of all legislation. The Commission needs to make sure all sectors contribute to achieving these goals through a whole array of climate-related measures.

Frans Timmermans (Netherlands) European Green Deal:

Timmermans' track record on climate policy is rather limited. His greatest achievement in the broader field of sustainability is the ban on disposable plastic products. However, at the same time, under his leadership, little progress was made on the EU's commitment to the UN's 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



Over the course of the election campaign, Timmermans made numerous promises to increase climate action. To follow through, he needs to urgently start a process for increasing the EU's 2030 climate target. If the EU is serious about leading global efforts to stop climate breakdown, the European Commission would need to come up with its proposal to increase the 2030 target to 55% or even higher, by early February. To be in line with the 1.5C goal, the target should be raised to 65% emission cuts by 2030. This should be followed by a revision of all related legislation.

Kadri Simson (Estonia) Energy

Simson was part of the Estonian government which strongly promoted the expansion of oil shale for electricity generation. It is a highly polluting fossil fuel that makes Estonia the [most carbon intensive economy](#) in the EU. Moreover, the Estonian EU Presidency that Simson was part of, intended to allow for massive coal subsidies via capacity mechanisms while leading the market design negotiations.

Given her record in promoting fossil fuels, it remains to be seen whether Simson is a good candidate for the role of Energy Commissioner, whose main responsibility will be to accelerate the transition away from fossil fuels. She also needs to ensure that Member States improve their draft National Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs), which at the moment do not allow the EU to meet its current, insufficient 2030 energy targets. She will also need to propose the revision of these targets as well as all related legislation in line with the higher 2030 climate target promised by Von der Leyen.

Virginijus Sinkevičius (Lithuania) Environment and Oceans

Sinkevičius' [Farmers and Greens Union](#) (LVŽS) scored a very good 96% and was classed as a "defender" in our ranking of the green credentials of the European Parliament's political groups, but Sinkevičius himself was very sceptical about climate action until very recently. He even [tried to convince](#) the Lithuanian government to oppose the Commission's proposal to reduce emissions to net zero by 2050 (fortunately unsuccessfully!). This is a worrying sign, as he will now have to put his heart and soul into achieving a net zero emission economy as quickly as possible.

'Net zero' means that we must not emit more than can be absorbed by nature. A priority for Sinkevičius should be to develop a coherent strategy for how to remove greenhouse gas emissions by natural sinks like forests and wetlands. The strategy should focus on the protection and restoration of degraded forests, grasslands, wetlands and agricultural lands.

Janusz Wojciechowski (Poland) Agriculture

Wojciechowski has experience in agri-politics at European level, having served as the vice-chair of the Parliament's AGRI Committee. He has been praised by environmentalists for his vocal stance against industrial animal farming. He makes all the right noises about the opportunities climate-



friendly agriculture offers for small and medium-sized farms. The big question mark is how independent he is going to be from the current Polish government, who is a strong opponent of climate action.

Stopping the climate crisis will not be possible without a radical change in our food production and consumption. We need to adopt farming practices that work with nature and move away from large-scale industrial agriculture; eliminate food waste and reduce meat consumption. Janusz Wojciechowski will have to help facilitate this transition through the reform of the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP). Moreover, he will need to ensure that the CAP reform will improve farmers' resilience to climate-related droughts, floods, heat waves and wildfires.

Unknown, Transport

At the moment it is unclear who will be a candidate for the Transport Commissioner, as the hearing of Romanian politician Rovana Plumb has been blocked by the EU parliament's legal committee. The Transport Commissioner will need to develop a strategy to phase out all greenhouse gas emissions from the transport sector. This needs to include a zero-emission automotive roadmap, aiming at banning the sale of fossil fuel based vehicles by 2030, a strategy to dramatically reduce emissions from aviation and shipping and to promote a transport modal shift, including public transport and taxation.

Elisa Ferreira (Portugal) Cohesion and Reforms

Funds for sustainable development helped Portugal become a champion of climate action in the EU. In her new role, Ferreira can encourage Central and Eastern European countries to embark on a similar transformative pathway. Europe's leaders are currently planning how to spend billions of euros from the new EU budget after 2020. CEE countries depend the most on that money for their infrastructure investments and therefore, the EU budget can play an important role in driving their zero-carbon transformation.

Ferreira needs to align EU Cohesion Policy with the objectives of the Paris Agreement. She needs to ensure that at least 40% of the future funds are dedicated to climate and environment and that all fossil fuels are excluded from funding. She also needs to make sure that each region in the EU gives sufficient funding to the just transition that supports workers, communities and regions negatively affected by it.

Johannes Hahn (Austria) Budget and Administration

Climate action is absent from the [mission letter](#) of the budget Commissioner, which comes as a surprise, as the new EU budget must facilitate the transition to a net zero emissions economy by 2050 and the increase of the 2030 climate target.



Hahn has a long experience in EU politics and, as long-term commissioner knows that the crux is often in the implementation. His new role as Commissioner for the EU budget gives him ample opportunity to show his commitment to implementing the EU's increased climate commitments. By reserving 40% of the next EU budget for 2021-2027 to climate action, and by ensuring no cent of EU funds is going to be spent on fossil fuels, he can truly become a catalyst for restructuring all sectors of the economy.

Josep Borrell (Spain) A Stronger Europe in the World

Europe's performance as a global climate leader has been very weak. Borrell needs to make sure the EU comes back to the driving seat to promote action to tackle the climate emergency. He comes from a progressive Spanish government, which is promising. But he clearly needs to engage more in climate diplomacy to [better understand](#) the role Europe can and must play, also given its huge historical responsibility, which clearly goes well beyond the current share of global emissions the EU has.

Borell needs to strengthen the EU's climate diplomacy strategy. It needs to incorporate the interlinkages between sustainable development, agriculture, conflict resolution, migration and humanitarian concerns. The EU must use all foreign relations instruments such as international negotiations, strategic partnerships, regional organisations, trade agreements and development cooperation to foster global net zero emissions and the Sustainable Development Goals.

Jutta Urpilainen (Finland) International Partnerships

Jutta Urpilainen will need to ensure that the new European Green Deal does not stop at Europe's borders, but that the new Commission truly integrates its commitment to the Paris Agreement into its external partnerships and development cooperation. This is something sorely lacking from the [Commission mission letter](#) on her role.

Urpilainen has not held any development cooperation or climate post previously, although her longest and most notable previous post as Finnish Finance Minister gave her some time on the board of the European Investment Bank. She will need to use her finance expertise to make sure that external action funding and support helps partner countries to avoid the mistakes we made - relying on dirty fossil fuels. Urpilainen should develop a solidarity package, which will include a commitment to massively scale-up support to developing countries, to help them to cut emissions, to adapt to climate impacts, and to support them in dealing with loss and damage.

Phil Hogan (Ireland) Trade



Hogan has been a climate dinosaur in his role as Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development since 2014 and even [as Irish Environment Minister](#) before that. His track record as a promoter of intensive, export-oriented agriculture is very concerning as it is characterised by mass animal rearing and the heavy use of pesticides and fertilizers.

Hogan will have to ensure that the EU's trade policy is aligned with the Paris Agreement, despite the fact that his [mission letter](#) does not indicate this should be his priority. Hogan must introduce a monitoring and enforcement mechanism in EU trade agreements to ensure countries implement the Paris Agreement.

Hogan should also make it clear that the EU will not pursue any trade negotiations with countries that have not signed the Paris Agreement. He is also responsible for monitoring that goods consumed in the EU do not lead to deforestation in other parts of the world. Investor state dispute settlement mechanisms should disappear as they can undermine climate policy and hinder the phase-out of fossil fuels.

Sylvie Goulard (France), Internal Market

The former Member of the European Parliament and French defence minister Sylvie Goulard will be in charge of a new Circular Economy Action Plan and has to ensure that European industry will contribute to the EU's objective of reaching climate-neutrality by 2050. She will work in close cooperation with Vice-President Margrethe Vestager who is leading on the new long-term strategy for Europe's industrial future. European industrial emissions remained mostly flat in recent years, while we need actual reductions. Goulard needs to put in place measures that will drive emission cuts in a socially just and sustainable manner, so that the industry eventually achieves the goal of net zero emissions in 2050 at the latest. She is very close to President Macron's agenda on Europe, but has not been very vocal on climate so far.

Margrethe Vestager (Denmark) Competition

During the European Parliament elections campaign, as ALDE's lead Commission president candidate, Vestager gave [much more attention](#) to climate change than politicians of her party did over the past five year term. To follow through on her campaign promises to increase climate action, Vestager needs to ensure that European industry achieves net zero emissions by 2050 at the latest. This will not be an easy task, but Vestager has shown she is not afraid to take on powerful interests during her time as the EU's competition chief.

Being in charge of state aid, Vestager needs to ensure that the Commission does not approve any new public funding for coal, in particular via [capacity mechanisms](#). Moreover, those capacity mechanisms that have already been approved need to be revised as soon as possible in line with the



new Electricity Market Regulation so they end funding coal power. Vestager stated that putting this particular legislation into practise [should be a priority](#) for the new Commission.

Valdis Dombrovskis (Latvia) financial services

Dombrovskis will jointly lead on the new strategy for Europe's industry, in cooperation with Vestager and Goulard. He is also expected to present a Sustainable Europe Investment Plan that should unlock 1 trillion EUR in climate-related investment over the next decade. The plan needs to ensure stronger action to incentivise and regulate private finance out of carbon-intensive activities and towards financing the just transition.

In his time as Euro and Social Dialogue Commissioner in the Juncker Commission Dombrovskis developed the EU taxonomy for sustainable activities - a classification system to support investors shifting towards clean assets. However, the proposal did not go far enough as it failed to pull the plug on all money which funds damaging activities. Recently, Dombrovskis became much greener and made several statements supporting strong climate policy. Climate change is now part of his political agenda, but it remains to be seen if it translates into real commitment.

Paolo Gentiloni (Italy) Economy

Gentiloni has a positive track record on climate action. While being Prime Minister of Italy, he pushed his government to support increased investments in the green economy, in particular in buildings renovation through tax credits supporting energy efficiency investments. Furthermore, it was his government that decided to phase out coal in Italy by 2025.

As Economy Commissioner, Gentiloni has an important role to play in greening our economy. He should ensure that the proposed Sustainable Europe Investment Plan brings about a real, sustainable and just transition. Furthermore, Gentiloni has been tasked to promote EU decision-making on the basis of qualified majority rather than by unanimity. This should help bring an end to the concept of veto being used against progress in climate and energy.

Unknown, Neighbourhood and Enlargement

At the moment it is unclear who will be a candidate for the Neighbourhood and Enlargement Commissioner, as the hearing of Hungarian politician Laszlo Trócsányi has been blocked by the EU parliament's legal committee. The Neighbourhood and Enlargement Commissioner must work with the Western Balkans on their alignment of climate and energy policies with those of the EU. The ultimate goal is the extension of the EU Energy Union to the Western Balkans. Investments in energy efficiency and renewable energy, lowering greenhouse gas emissions, coal phase-out, and ultimately



paving the way for the region's carbon neutrality, must be put at the fore of the foreign diplomacy narrative of the EU, and part of the political negotiations.

Didier Reynders (Belgium) Justice

The EU is in violation of the Aarhus Convention by not providing access to justice to individuals and NGOs. In 2018, the European Council asked the Commission to explore options to comply with the Aarhus Convention in a way that is compatible with the fundamental principles of the Union's legal order and with its judicial system.

Reynders will need to lead on the amendment of the EU Aarhus Regulation to allow citizens and NGOs to access the European courts. This would be crucial for many Europeans who are affected by the climate crisis. More and more EU citizens are [demanding protection](#) of their human rights that are being violated by government inaction on climate and are seeking justice for their losses.

Maroš Šefčovič (Slovakia), Interinstitutional Relations and Foresight

Former Commissioner for the Energy Union Maroš Šefčovič will be in charge of interinstitutional relations and improving the Union's strategic foresight and policy-making. A particularly alarming task in his mission letter is the application of the 'One In, One Out' principle, which is inherently incompatible with the need to increase climate and environmental ambition.

At the same time, Šefčovič is tasked with strengthening the culture of evidence-based policymaking. It will be crucial that this effort extends to including costs of insufficient action on climate change (climate losses) into decision making processes. Climate change is already costing the EU about €12 billion euros per year, but so far economic impacts of climate change are not factored into cost-benefit analysis.

ENDS

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Climate Action Network (CAN) Europe is Europe's leading NGO coalition fighting dangerous climate change. With over 160 member organisations from 35 European countries, representing over 1.700 NGOs and more than 47 million citizens, CAN Europe promotes sustainable climate, energy and development policies throughout Europe.