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Letter | 10.03.2022

Call for a strong and ambitious EU Regulation on nature protection

Cross-party letter to the EU Commission

To: Commission President Ursula von der Leyen

Cc:Executive Vice-President Frans Timmermans
Commissioner Virginijus Sinkevičius

Brussels, 10th of March 2022

Call for a strong and ambitious EU Regulation on nature protection

Dear Commission President Von der Leyen,

Given the recent developments and the interventions of several stakeholders, we, the undersigned, are reiterating our call for a strong and ambitious EU Regulation on nature restoration.

We welcome the Commission's efforts to establish legally binding obligations on EU member states, spanning the period until 2050. In our view, these obligations should

- Aim to achieve ambitious targets;
- Be additional to other efforts to bring back nature;
- Specify targets for different ecosystems;
- Strictly apply to each EU member state.

An ambitious area-based target

Our Parliament has called in the Luena Report for a "restoration target of **at least 30 % of the EU's land and seas by 2030**, which should be fully implemented by each Member State throughout their territory, within and outside protected areas".

This is not overly ambitious, in light of the deplorable state of the EU's ecosystems as evidenced by the MAES report, and in light of the need for resilient ecosystems that help us face the consequences of climate change and are paramount to ensure food and water security. The latest IPCC report has called for the "effective and equitable conservation of approximately 30% to 50% of Earth's land, freshwater and ocean areas". Leading scientists have said that preserving "at least 50% of the planet as intact natural habitats by 2050 is the only path that will enable a climate-resilient future".

Additionality vis-à-vis other EU measures to bring back nature

We agree with the Commission's intention to restore ecosystems that are protected under the EU's Birds and Habitats Directives, even although they actually should already be in a favourable conservation state. The Regulation's overall area-based restoration targets should include these ecosystems, and define obligations to reach good status therein.

However, simply putting a deadline onto the existing requirements of our nature directives (Birds & Habitats, Water Framework Directive) is not enough. The nature restoration targets should **go beyond existing requirements under EU legislation**, and the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (e.g. agro-environment schemes).

The nature restoration targets should be **additional to other measures foreseen under the EU Green Deal**, such as the planned increase in legally protected areas to 30% of the EU's land and sea surface, and strict protection of 10% of the EU's land and sea area. Similarly, the planned increase in EU agricultural area under organic farming, or the planned reduction in pesticide use, should not qualify as restoration measures in and by themselves.

The measures counting towards the nature restoration targets should be clearly defined, so that EU member states cannot count each and every measure taken to improve agricultural and forestry practices, or to otherwise protect the environment, as a restoration measure contributing to the overarching restoration target. Any loopholes or opportunities for greenwashing in this regard must be prevented.

Ecosystem-specific targets for all ecosystems, including forests

Valuable ecosystems such as wetlands, rivers or coastal areas will not contribute greatly to the area-based restoration targets. Our Parliament has therefore called for additional binding "ecosystem-, habitat- and species-specific targets", and specified that these targets should cover "forests, grasslands, wetlands, peatlands, pollinators, free-flowing rivers, coastal areas and marine ecosystems".

Considering the latest developments and attacks by the Nordic forestry industry, we want to reiterate our call for binding targets for all ecosystems, which obviously includes forests ecosystems in the upcoming nature restoration law.

Additionally, we suggest that the EU should, by 2030:

- Place 30 % of drained wetland under restoration, regardless of whether they have been drained for

agricultural production, forests or peat extraction;
- Increase the abundance of wild pollinators;
- Restore at least 25.000km of rivers to a free-flowing state.

National obligations that are measureable and enforceable

The EU has multiple laws in the area of nature protection that are insufficiently applied and enforced, therefore the objectives are not met. This new law must not add to these, but set unequivocal obligations that EU member states cannot dodge. The EU Regulation on nature restoration should

- Set area-based national targets for each member state, that cannot be compensated by action in other member states or outside the EU;
- Monitor both measures taken and outcomes achieved via outcome based targets;
- Provide for financial support for the implementation of the targets and obligations;
- Carry dissuasive sanctions for non-compliance.

Dear Commission President, Executive Vice-President, Commissioner,

The time of half-hearted efforts to bring back nature is over. The EU cannot allow any of its member states to continue paying lip service to nature protection. It can and must get its own house in order if it wants to lead global efforts to stop the loss of nature, and bring back nature that has already been lost. We cannot afford this fundamental law to turn into yet another paper tiger.

We, the undersigned MEPs, are ready to give you our full support for an EU Regulation on nature restoration that can be a true game changer in the fight against the twin crises of biodiversity loss and climate change.

Yours sincerely,

Jutta Paulus

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Responsible MEPs

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Attached documents

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