



Press release

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EU must seize opportunity to adopt new political vision and give global leadership on sustainable development -says leading EU CSO coalition SDG Watch Europe in Open Letter to EU Leaders

Urgent need for a new political vision for EU

In advance of the planned European Council summit in December (14th & 15th), a leading European civil society network [SDG Watch Europe](#) has issued an open letter to EU Leaders highlighting the urgent need for them to focus on the Union's future by adopting a strong political vision and showing global leadership on sustainable development. The coalition claims that there are very real political risks linked to the current, almost exclusive, focus of EU leaders on the management of Brexit and associated political issues.

"There is a sense that just like Nero fiddling while Rome was burning, the EU is distracted with Brexit while political conditions are deteriorating across the Union," says Deirdre de Burca, member of the SDG Watch Europe steering committee. "Our coalition's broad membership calls on European political leaders to urgently adopt sustainable development as a core political mission of the Union. We believe this important mission could help unite Member States at this critical time, while allowing Europe to assume an important global leadership role."

Slow pace of EU implementation of the SDGs

"The Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development is an ambitious global agenda which includes 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) that were adopted by all UN member states in September 2015," says Leida Rijnhout of Stakeholder Forum for a Sustainable Future and member of the SDG Watch Europe steering committee. "The EU was an important player in the negotiation of this global agenda" she says. "There were high expectations that sustainable development would move to the top of the EU's own political agenda and those of its member states. Unfortunately these expectations have not yet been met. NGOs are very concerned about the missed opportunity that this represents for Europe and its citizens."

SDG Watch Europe and its members claim that the pace of implementation of this global sustainable development agenda by the EU has been "very disappointing". They point to the fact that a full three years after the adoption of the SDGs, the EU has not yet developed an overarching European Sustainable Development Strategy 2030 to implement the goals.

Poverty & hunger

"Ending poverty and hunger and reducing inequalities are core objectives of the SDGs - in Europe and globally" says Ingo Ritz, Director of the Global Campaign Against Poverty (GCAP) and member of the SDG Watch Europe steering committee. "EU policies often negatively affect the lives of people around the world: European agricultural policies directly impact on small farmers in Africa. EU trade agreements and tax policies can negatively affect entire economies and undermine the achievement of the SDGs in many countries. The SDGs are global - all countries including the EU have a responsibility to implement them."

Climate change

"The key findings of the recently published IPCC report on climate change again remind us that humanity has moved beyond planetary boundaries. Climate change and the destruction of ecosystems pose serious risks to the survival of humanity. We now have a window of opportunity over the next decade to radically change how our economy and society works, or we will need to face the ever more devastating consequences of not acting in time." says Klára Hajdu, of CEEweb for Biodiversity, a Central and Eastern European environmental NGO network, and member of the SDG Watch Europe's steering committee. She continues, "We must restore the planet's ability to provide us with a stable climate and other essential services like pollinating crops, protection from floods, producing nutritious food or controlling pests and diseases. This all underpins the implementation of the whole 2030 Agenda".

External impacts of unsustainable EU policies

"The EU has much work to do to provide a healthy, environmentally friendly and prosperous life for its citizens," says Marie-Luise Abshagen of the German NGO Forum on Environment and Development and member of the SDG Watch Europe steering committee. "Similarly, the external impacts of unsustainable European policies can be felt all over the world. We believe that many of its current policy processes, the various bilateral trade agreements in plan, new plans for deregulation within environmental programs, or security policies in violation of human rights are actually carrying us further away from realizing the SDGs. The failure to address these common European challenges would risk further disillusionment of the people in the EU."

Sustainability not yet a genuine European brand

"Civil society is keen to work with the Commission to accelerate the transition to a sustainable future," says Patrizia Heidegger from the European Environmental Bureau and member of the SDG Watch Europe steering committee. "However, President Juncker's complete lack of focus on sustainable development has prevented this Commission from delivering on the SDGs," she says. "Sustainability is a European brand' is a slogan frequently used by Commission Vice-President Timmermans. This slogan is empty rhetoric if the EU and its member states do not face up to their unsustainable use of energy and natural resources. These practices damage the environment, not just in Europe, but around the globe. We want the EU to agree on clear targets to substantially reduce its global environmental footprint."

"SDG Watch Europe has issued this open letter to EU leaders at this critical point in time because we are concerned about the EU's lack of responsible and timely action on sustainable development," says Barbara Caracciolo, member of the SDG Watch Europe steering committee. "We hope that the EU political leadership will hear our call and work with our members and other stakeholders to ensure that the SDGs are fully implemented by the EU in its internal and external actions," she says.

Link to Open Letter: <https://www.sdwatcheurope.org/documents/2018/12/sdg-weu-letter-to-european-leaders-7-december-2018.pdf/>

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