

*European Environmental Bureau  
40th Anniversary Conference  
“Europe at the crossroads: the challenge of environmental  
sustainability”  
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Questions and Statements  
Please check against delivery*

*Panel Debate: “The next 40 years: placing  
sustainability at the heart of Europe’s policies”*

*1. What should the EU's top environmental priorities be over the next five years? And what are the greatest obstacles to achieving them?*

- Transform to a low carbon society by giving strong support to a strengthened policy agenda in the light of the 2050 GHG targets, including an ambitious reform of the European Union Emissions Trading Scheme. Such a transition must be in line with the 2°C objective, the UNFCCC framework, and the energy and climate roadmap towards 2050. This means we need 80 to 95 % reduction of GHG emissions until 2050. Our next steps have to be in line with that objective.
- Take a leading role in addressing major global environmental challenges. Strengthening the global environment agenda is crucial. Relevant issues in this respect are, e.g., the adoption of a new UN climate agreement and of ambitious Sustainable Development Goals.
- Stimulate sustainable land use aiming at a land degradation neutral Europe. Soil degradation and the loss of related ecosystem services in Europe continue to remain unchecked on a regular basis, largely due to incoherent policy and targets at national, regional and European levels. We need to look at the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) in this context in particular.

- *The sustainable use of natural resources: At present, the global rate of consumption of raw material is twice of that just 30 years ago. The Roadmap for a Resource-efficient Europe must be fleshed out further and implemented in the Member States. We need a concrete target for improving resource efficiency, as proposed by the European Resource Efficiency Platform (a target for a substantially increased decoupling of growth from the use of natural resources in Europe).*
- *Support full, coherent and appropriate implementation of the environmental acquis across Member States. According to the 7th Environment Action Programme (EAP), the environment acquis is the area of Union law with the most infringement proceedings. The costs associated with failing to implement legislation are broadly estimated at around EUR 50 billion a year.*

*2. Considering that remaining within a 'safe operating space for humanity' is probably the biggest issue facing society today, why does it receive so little attention from the politicians whose decisions could make a difference?*

*It is true that a "safe operating space for humanity" is probably one of the biggest issues society is facing today. It is an issue which requires a precautionary approach with a long-term*

*perspective towards sustainable development that respects the limits of our planet.*

*We are currently facing an economic crisis, which results in many instances in increased pressure on environmental policy to justify its proposals and initiatives. Despite the on-going discussion about the economic potential of a "Green Economy", it appears that environmental policy at times is perceived as more of an obstacle to economic growth than part of the solution to economic recovery. In fact it is just the other way round.*

*3. How should the Europe 2020 Strategy be revised to take greater account of environmental and social priorities? At a time when the global community is negotiating a set of universal sustainable development goals, should the EU review and renew the EU Sustainable Development Strategy and assert it as the overarching strategy for Europe's future?*

*The environment dimension of the Europe 2020 Strategy should be strongly reaffirmed<sup>1</sup> in the ongoing review. Resource efficiency should be integrated, providing potential for green growth, employment and for reinforcing synergies between the different components of the Europe 2020 Strategy.*

*We need a stable and long-term policy framework including ambitious long-term targets.*

*Also very important is a change in the economic framework. Shifting taxation from labour to pollution, energy and resource use in a budgetary neutral manner may be an appropriate tool to promote employment creation and greening the economy.*

Furthermore, key instruments which could be strengthened are, among others, green public procurement, eco-design and eco-innovation, the development of green infrastructure and the phasing out of environmentally harmful subsidies.

In addition a review and a refresh of the EU Sustainable Development Strategy is important to promote sustainable development within the EU.

#### *4. How can synergies between environmental objectives and achieving a sustainable and inclusive economic recovery be achieved? Is the old idea of 'economy versus environment' really dead?*

Ecological trends like the global increase in resource consumption, climate change or loss of biodiversity show that our present economic practices are not sustainable and will in the long term destroy the foundations of our prosperity. The concept of the Green Economy acknowledges the importance of the natural basis for life as the limiting framework for all economic activities.

The transition towards a green economy provides significant economic and employment opportunities. Studies prove that ambitious climate protection targets can create new jobs.

*Enterprises that improve resource and energy efficiency have competitive advantages compared to their business rivals. Efficient material and substance flows can help, for example, to cut the costs for material procurement, energy and water. Quite often, this goes along with cost savings due to lower waste or waste water volumes or lower costs for end-of-pipe environmental protection.*

*A central task when implementing a Green Economy is to stimulate eco-innovation, and to anticipate changing market requirements. The EU has the opportunity to take a leading position in the new green markets of the future.*

*5. What kind of instruments and approaches are needed to realize the potential for a genuinely sustainable circular economy with a focus on protection of the environment and ecosystems, eradication of poverty, reduction of inequalities, peace and security? What is the role of political leadership?*

*The EU still has a long way to go when it comes to a circular economy; however important steps in the right direction include:*

- The EU 2020 Strategy, which aims at making the EU a circular economy. In this context, we welcome*

the Commission's Circular Economy Package. The proposals set out by the Commission pose ambitious goals that address the many different challenges faced by Member States.

- However, there is a need for a detailed review of the proposal, particularly regarding its practical implementation, financial feasibility, ecological and economic effects as well as its legal consistency.
- The Ecodesign Directive should be further developed as an instrument with the aim of implementing goals, including waste prevention and reparability.
- It is important to implement the 7<sup>th</sup> EAP targets concerning the establishment of a coherent policy framework for sustainable production and consumption into a coherent legal framework.

6. *What governance changes are needed to ensure that environmental issues are at the top of the political agenda and are not just seen as something for Environment Commissioners, Environment Ministers, environment agencies and environmentalists?*

There is certainly ~~no one-size-fits-all-solution~~ to this problem. However integration is certainly key in this respect.

*The transformation into low-carbon economy and the improvement of ecological resilience require the integration of environment issues into other policy sectors – such as energy, transport, agriculture, fisheries, trade, economy and industry, research and innovation, employment, development, foreign affairs, security, education and training, as well as social and tourism policy.*

*In this context, the prominent integration of environmental issues into the EU 2020 Strategy – such as climate and energy goals, flagship initiative “Resource-Efficient Europe” – is very important.*