

Ms Ursula von der Leyen
President of the European Commission
European Commission

Copy to:

Mr Maroš Šefčovič
Vice-President of the European Commission for Interinstitutional Relations

By electronic mail

1st September 2023

Dear President von der Leyen,

The past few months have once again been marked by a series of distressing environmental events, including heatwaves, forest fires, flooding, and droughts across the European continent and worldwide. These events serve as a strong reminder of the urgent need to accelerate our efforts in combating climate change, and the breakdown of ecosystems.

The European Green Deal, which you initiated as Commission president, has been timely and crucial for environmentalists across Europe and the world. As the first Executive Vice President for the Green Deal, Frans Timmermans was instrumental in driving forward numerous initiatives on climate, energy transition, deforestation and nature restoration. However, much remains to be done. Europe and the world, and especially the most climate-vulnerable communities, cannot afford a pause, or a slow down.

We are eager to collaborate closely with Executive Vice President Maroš Šefčovič to ensure that the European Union keeps working to be on the road in achieving the goals of the European Green Deal. These should include ensuring the adoption of a strong and workable nature restoration law.

At his hearing the candidate Climate Commissioner will need to demonstrate the determination and integrity required to lead work on multiple significant items, including:

- leading the preparation of a proposal for an ambitious EU 2040 climate target and laying the grounds for a 2035 climate target, in a trajectory bringing the EU close to climate neutrality at the latest in Q1 2024
- defending increased global efforts to achieve the 1.5 degree goal of the Paris Agreement and forging alliances with Global South partners at COP28 in UAE, including ensuring concrete steps forward in putting an end to the fossil fuels era
- finalising the remaining climate related files of the European Green Deal package, including on efficiency standards for buildings
- defending the recently agreed EU decision to require 100% emission free car sales by 2035 by not allowing fuels to undermine the CO2 standards, and by proposing a zero emission fleets regulation.

However, we are therefore very concerned about the nomination of the Dutch Designate Commissioner Wopke Hoekstra as Climate Commissioner. We are highly sceptical that Wopke Hoekstra possesses the required credentials and expertise to lead on this critical portfolio, which includes a number of upcoming critical processes. Our concerns are based on:

- his lack of expertise on EU climate policy,
- his lack of experience of climate diplomacy at UNFCCC level,
- his record of both having worked in the private sector for Shell, a multinational oil and gas company,
- his performance in public roles. This last includes providing 3.4 billion EUR in support to the aviation company KLM during the COVID19 crisis as Dutch Minister of Finance and as a leader of the CDA party, and abandoning government objectives to reduce nitrogen emissions to bring them in line with EU obligations.

The European Green Deal has been pivotal to accelerate the path towards a deeper, faster and fairer transition. We count on you to take personal responsibility for ensuring that the commissioner designate fully fulfils the responsibilities of Climate Commissioner in these times of growing climate catastrophe and uses his considerable skills to truly advance the agenda. We rely on you for personal ambitious leadership and to continue promoting a transformative European Green Deal that you committed to and that Europe and the world need. We also ask you to support Executive Vice President Maroš Šefčovič in promoting the EGD and helping realise the vision of it, the “person on the moon moment” you promised in your political declaration at the beginning of your mandate, and which is still so clearly essential now.

Please be assured our networks and citizens across the EU are looking forward to supporting bold transition steps towards a more sustainable and resilient future that puts life in the centre of EU policy making.

Yours sincerely,



Ester Asin, Director of WWF European Policy Office and current chair of the Green 10.

On behalf of:

Ariel Brunner, Regional Director, BirdLife Europe & Central Asia

Chiara Martinelli, Director, Climate Action Network (CAN) Europe

Mark Martin, Executive Director, CEE Bankwatch Network

Patrick ten Brink, Secretary General, European Environmental Bureau (EEB)

Jagoda Munić, Director, Friends of the Earth Europe

Magda Stoczkiewicz, Programme Director, Greenpeace European Unit

Génon K. Jensen, Executive Director, Health and Environment Alliance (HEAL)

Andrea Lichtenecker, Executive Director, Naturefriends International

William Todts, Executive Director, Transport and Environment (T&E)