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Environmental NGO's perspective on Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union regarding Environmental Matters

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Achieving the goals of the 2030 agenda for sustainable development and the Paris Agreement will require **urgent action** in each of these areas during the **next 10 years**. To be clear, **Europe will not achieve its sustainability** vision of 'living well, within the limits of our planet' simply **by promoting economic growth and seeking to manage harmful side-effects with environmental and social policy tools**. Instead, **sustainability needs to become the guiding principle** for ambitious and coherent **policies and actions** across society. Enabling transformative change will require that **all areas and levels of government work together** and **harness the ambition, creativity and power of citizens, businesses and communities**. In 2020, Europe has a unique window of opportunity to lead the global response to sustainability challenges. Now is the **time to act**.

(2019) European Environmental Agency, The European Environment - state and outlook 2020

The quote you can see is from the European Environmental Agencies' report on the State of the environment, published in December 2019. Urgent action is needed to address the alarming rate of biodiversity loss, increasing impacts of climate change and overconsumption of natural resources. We are facing environmental challenges of unprecedented scale and urgency. In November 2019 European Parliament declared a climate and environmental emergency.

Two years after, EU has agreed on more ambitious commitments. We have the European Green Deal, and the target to reduce the GHG emission for at least 55 % compared to 1990 is set, although this is still not enough for reaching the Paris agreement goals. We have new Climate adaptation strategy and Biodiversity Strategy for 2030. So, in two years the policies have begun to recognize the urgency of the situation and has started to reorient its goals. But the question is how will these policies reflect in the actions and more important in effects and when. EEA is clear, "business as usual" is no more an option. But after watching the last ten years passing by, weak responses in measures even after Paris agreement and IPCC alarming reports, we are afraid there is still lack of will to really transform the ambitious strategic words into effective actions and to pave the new path into the future sustainable, climate neutral EU, where GDP is not the measure of progress anymore.

For instance, during the Slovenian presidency, the national agricultural strategies are in the preparation to comply with the new Common Agriculture policy, which starts in 2023 and is more environmental and nature friendly. We know the current ways of agriculture are a major cause of biodiversity loss. But can the new strategic approach really change the practise? Almost a quarter of all EU agricultural spending from 2014-2020 was earmarked for climate change measures (€100 billion EUR), without improvement in GHG reduction from agriculture since 2010. These are findings of the European Court of Auditors, which is also very critical towards the new CAP. So, some concerns about the prospect of real change in agricultural policy remains.

In this context our expectations from the Slovenian presidency were and are still high, although it takes place during the covid pandemic situation. Why? Because of the urgency of the moment, because of the new IPCC report and because it is time for Presidencies of the Council of EU that are not business as usual, but to step up in the role of leading by example, which is still underestimated and underused. Here we see the opportunity for Slovenia for a new kind of presidency. Unfortunately from the perspective of this moment, we see that Slovenia will not seize the opportunity to be an example of transformation, meaning all levels of government working together and in cooperation with the citizens, civil society and local communities. And there is still resistance of the government and the parliament to officially recognize the climate and environmental crisis.

People have the right to participate at decisions about their environment. And this is what the Aarhus Convention is about - information, participation, right to protect. Slovenian presidency will be distinguished by adoption of the amendments to the EU Aarhus regulation (Regulation 1367/2006) as an important step towards better access to justice in EU. But in the same time Slovenia begun the presidency with a set of legislative proposals that would seriously limit current options for NGOs to exercise access to justice and a yearlong discreditation of NGOs. After this Aarhus regulation success, we hope that this example of good solutions will spread down through our national legislation as well. The success of NGOs and civil society at the referendum on amendment of the Water act in the beginning of July certainly has proven the importance of respecting the meaningful public participation. NGOs have an important role in environmental protection to be a voice of nature and people trust them.

Still the autumn months are ahead of us and NGOs have some specific expectations. We are closely monitoring the Slovenian presidency. Umanotera, in collaboration with EEB, prepared [Ten Green Tests](#) that have been presented to the relevant ministries, and contain among others:

- sustainable covid recovery in the spirit of, soon to be adopted, 8. Environmental Action plan;
- fit for 55 legislation is in discussion and we expect meaningful and ambitious discussions will soon lead to adaptation;
- on the international level we expect the promotion of discussion on EU exit from Energy Charter Treaty;
- we also expect intense promotion and implementation of sustainable mobility, Territorial Agenda 2030, Climate Adaptation Strategy and Biodiversity Strategy – the latter with exemplary national strategy for Common Agriculture Policy
- we support the discussion of zero pollution ambition and Industrial Directive reform.

And of course, we expect full compliance with the Aarhus convention on EU and national level with promoting of public participation in mentioned decision-making processes to support effectiveness and democratic legitimacy of decisions. Including youth in these environmental decisions is crucial and Slovenia should point this out on two important coming events:

- The 7th meeting of parties of the Aarhus convention where Slovenia will represent the whole EU. After a big step forward with amending the Aarhus regulation which indicates that EU is a party

of Aarhus convention equal to other parties, we hope Slovenia will demonstrate the spirit of better implementation of access to justice, and pass this spirit also on other members of EU. At the same time, we welcome the expected declaration for better infrastructure and spatial planning.

- And finally, in the most ambitious and inspiring willingness for action we expect Slovenian government to act on the UN Climate change conference in November in Glasgow. First to ensure fair, inclusive and equitable participation). But most of all Slovenia should promote ambitious agreements on additional measures on climate mitigation, unified target periods (5-years cycles), fulfillment of climate financial agreements and at least 50 % for adaptation – everything in the frame of the human rights respect.