



10 March 2026

Dear President von der Leyen,
Dear President Costa,

Subject: Environmental civil society input ahead of European Council 19-20 March

Ahead of the European Council meeting on 19 and 20 March, we write on behalf of five of the largest environmental civil society organisations, representing more than 45 million Europeans who are increasingly worried about the rapid decline of nature, the worsening impacts of climate change, and the growing health risks linked to pollution.

The commitment to strengthen and further integrate the Single Market, as agreed at the Informal EU Leaders' Retreat of 12 February and to be taken forward through the "One Europe, One Market" roadmap, can be a real turning point for Europe. That requires forward-looking measures that build resilience, reduce inequalities and support long-term prosperity, as outlined below to inform your ongoing discussions.

Although still flawed, the Single Market has enabled the EU to put in place some of the world's strongest protections for climate, nature and public health. It has also reduced regulatory fragmentation and eased administrative burdens for businesses operating across Member States. However, its benefits have not been shared equally. Social dumping and tax competition remain widespread, and environmental standards in areas such as air quality and chemical pollution are still insufficient.

The current focus on regulatory simplification unfortunately goes far beyond genuine simplification and is now putting key standards at risk, weakening several of the achievements delivered through the Single Market. Rather than strengthening Europe, this approach risks delaying essential investment, deepening fossil fuel dependence, accelerating nature degradation and allowing other global powers to lead the clean industrial transition. It undermines Europe's long-term competitiveness, worsens the cost-of-living crisis and reinforces vulnerabilities already felt by citizens. It also penalises companies that have invested in the green transition, while rewarding laggards and foreign interests pushing for weaker rules.

A clear course correction at EU level is needed. Your upcoming decisions on the Roadmap offer a crucial opportunity to safeguard existing protections offered under the Single Market and address its shortcomings. At the European Council meeting in March, we ask you to reflect the following proposals in your conclusions:

- **Commit that regulatory simplification will not further weaken environmental, climate or social protections**

Delaying or rolling back EU standards would fragment the Single Market and undermine efforts to complete it. A major obstacle to competitiveness is political and bureaucratic

inertia – not strong protections. Governments and EU institutions move too slowly on existing agreements and implementation. [Fully implementing existing environmental legislation would save the EU economy an estimated €180 billion each year.](#) We urge you to strengthen national administrative capacity, improve implementation, and support companies and stakeholders in aligning with existing EU rules that make our economies more resilient. This is essential to protecting the Single Market from unfair competition, polluting practices and products that do not meet our EU standards.

- **Reorient the competitiveness debate towards the real solutions: delivering large-scale investments in the green transition**

The Draghi and Letta reports both make clear that lasting competitiveness depends on strong investment in the green and fair transition, innovation, skills and industrial decarbonisation. [The ECB estimates that nearly €1.2 trillion in annual investment will be needed between 2025 and 2031 to meet the EU's green, digital and defence goals.](#) Private finance alone cannot deliver this alone. Europe must also increase public investment, including by exploring new joint financing tools to ensure funding matches the scale of the challenge. As part of this effort, the next EU multiannual financial framework should dedicate at least half of its budget to the green transition, and binding targets for social and environmental goals should be set for public procurement, which accounts for over 14% of EU GDP.

- **Strengthen Europe's energy independence by rapidly phasing out fossil fuels**

The war unfolding in the Middle East once again expose the inherent instability and volatility of fossil fuels. This volatility drives up costs for European households and businesses and creates far greater uncertainty for European companies than any EU regulation. A secure and affordable energy system – which underpins companies' ability to compete internationally – can only be achieved by accelerating the shift to renewables-based electrification, energy efficiency and demand management, supported by smart, more integrated grids. This must go hand in hand with regulatory and market rule stability, including a strong, predictable carbon price. Companies need a clear and consistent carbon pricing framework. Undermining it through short-term rollbacks would only prolong dependence on unstable fossil fuel markets and weaken EU's resilience to geopolitical developments. Fossil fuel independence is central to strengthening Europe's security.

- **Recognise the economic cost of inaction on nature, climate and health**

[The Commission's own figures show that all existing simplification omnibuses combined would save only around 12 billion euros,](#) while putting public health, environmental protection and legal certainty at risk. By contrast, [the projected cost of climate inaction is expected to reach €5.6 trillion for Europe alone within the next three decades.](#) These are costs that will fall on public budgets, making safeguarding public health, climate and nature protection not only an environmental necessity but a matter of economic rationality.

Climate and environmental action is too often framed as a cost in political debates, when evidence shows that inaction is the true liability. Environmental measures deliver wide-ranging benefits: improved public health, better quality jobs, stronger communities, healthier ecosystems and essential services such as clean water and productive soil. This

supports people, businesses and the economy. It is therefore essential that the EU's focus on competitiveness must go hand in hand with accelerating the green and just transition.

- **Balance engagement with stakeholders and civil society**

Civil society organisations and businesses leading the green transition must have equal access to decision-makers. We ask you to ensure balanced stakeholder engagement, transparent consultation processes and to uphold civil society as a key democratic partner.

Public trust erodes when decisions that affect health and future generations are taken behind closed doors, rather than through open and democratic processes. When polluting industries receive financial exemptions while households absorb the consequences, inequality deepens. And when governments or the EU appear more responsive to lobbyists than citizens, political polarisation deepens and Europe's unity is weakened.

Recent developments, including [exaggerated claims of industry support made around this year's Industry Summit ahead of the Alden-Biesen meeting](#), highlight the risks of disproportionate access and unbalanced influence. Europe cannot afford policy-making that appears captured by those most resistant to change.

In a matter of weeks, [350,000 citizens joined a campaign calling on EU leaders to stop dismantling environmental laws](#), with numbers still growing. Many businesses are also raising the alarm through public [statements](#) and [letters](#), warning of the risks linked to deregulation and the rapid rollout of omnibus packages. We urge you to listen to citizen and stakeholders, defend the laws that protect people and nature, and show that European democracy still works for the many, not the few.

Only the latter stands a chance of restoring trust, resilience and democratic legitimacy in a Europe that desperately needs all three.

Yours sincerely,

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Chiara Martinelli, Director, CAN Europe

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William Todts, Director, Transport & Environment

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