

renew europe,

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President of Renew Europe Group
European Parliament
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Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission
Frans Timmermans, EU Executive Vice-President for the European Green Deal
Virginijus Sinkevičius, EU Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries
Didier Reynders, EU Commissioner for Justice
Ylva Johansson, EU Commissioner for Home Affairs

Dear President, dear Commissioners,

Today, after a harsh crisis has hit EU citizens and businesses, the Union bears the responsibility over sustainable recovery and the restoration of damaged ecosystems. Last years have seen the rise in environmental crimes, particularly in illicit waste trafficking and recycling crime, as highlighted by Europol which identifies environmental crime as one of key crime threats facing the EU. This also reflects the global emergency, with Eurojust stating that environmental crime has become the fourth-largest criminal activity in the world, with the annual growth rate between 5% and 7%.

Crimes, like illegal deforestation, arson, water, air and soil pollution, traffic of ozone-depleting substances and protected species, poaching, overfishing and others not only heavily damage biodiversity and harm human health, they also involve corruption, money-laundering, violence and even murders. Green crime comes at a high cost to the European economy, as massive public revenues are being lost and illicit exploitation of natural resources hampers the development of legal businesses. Now when the EU heavily invests in climate, environment and biodiversity objectives under the European Green Deal, it is even more imperative to prevent environmental crime from affecting financial interests of the EU and compromising economic recovery.

Environmental crime remains as a low risk and high profit activity, as acknowledged by the Commission. Europol estimates that it can be as profitable as illegal drug trafficking, but with much lower risk of detection. The lack of reporting and investigations, high rate of impunity and negligible sanctions facilitate illicit activities, attracting more and more individuals who perpetrate green crime.

Considering the strong link between environmental crime and other types of serious organised crimes, its heavy economic cost for the EU economy and individual livelihoods, and long-lasting damage to the nature and human health, the EU needs to design a new approach to

tackle this phenomenon fundamentally. The steps undertaken so far in criminalising environmental destruction have brought limited results. The implementation gap in EU environmental legislation remains the major challenge, which is showcased by a high number of infringement procedures and citizens' petitions.

At this stage, the EU needs to take serious measures to address the insufficient law enforcement and prosecution activity in the EU Member States, as well as the lack of institutional capacities at the national level, with the absence of specialised environmental crime units as one of the main challenges. The EU needs to show coherence with the priority of disrupting environmental crime and needs to show leadership in fighting green crime. Therefore, Renew Europe reiterates European Parliament's call to explore the extension of the EPPO mandate to cover environmental offences and asks to include therein a much stronger institutional framework on cross-border environmental crime that provides for an EU Green Prosecutor within the EPPO, with the focus on tackling environmental crime, operational and coordination support, efficient cross-border green crime prosecution and proportionate sanctions for the crimes against nature. We request the Commission to conclude this exploration as soon as possible and report its findings to Parliament.

A dedicated EPPO EU Green Prosecutor should be built upon existing structures and achievements done at the EU level in tackling criminal activity against environment. Apart from the extension of the EPPO mandate, we also call for the swift reinforcement and increase of budget of the environmental components of Eurojust and Eurojust, as well as of the CEPOL specific training programmes. The EU Green Prosecutor should also encompass measures aiming at creation and reinforcement of national specialised law enforcement units. Such comprehensive and integrated approach will facilitate information gathering, deliver investigative support, coordinate cross-border operations, facilitate prosecution and bring criminals to justice, alert national authorities to risk factors and share best practices. At the same time, it will raise public awareness of the ways to tackle environmental crime and its activities will be instrumental in investigating other types of serious crime facing the EU, such as fraud, tax evasion, money-laundering, forced labour, etc.

We want the EU to be a strong leader in environmental matters both on global level and on the level of Member States. This obviously demands a careful investment and planning of environmental policies, at the same time it also demands equal attention and action on the risks related to environmental crime. EU Green Prosecutor, as a framework of measures, is a progressive, timely and absolutely necessary solution to protect the nature in Europe from criminal exploitation, solution able to finally bring response to EU citizens' legitimate claim for justice in environmental matters.

We rely on your careful consideration of this proposal and stand ready to cooperate on relevant legislative initiatives and institutional arrangements.

Yours sincerely,

Vlad Gheorghe,
Member of European Parliament



Dacian Cioloș
President of Renew Europe Group

