

**ANSWERS TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT**  
**QUESTIONNAIRE TO THE COMMISSIONER-DESIGNATE**  
**Virginijus SINKEVIČIUS**  
**Commissioner-designate for Environment and Oceans**

**1. General competence, European commitment and personal independence**

**What aspects of your personal qualifications and experience are particularly relevant for becoming Commissioner and promoting the European general interest, particularly in the area you would be responsible for? What motivates you? How will you contribute to putting forward the strategic agenda of the Commission? How will you implement gender mainstreaming and integrate a gender perspective into all policy areas of your portfolio?**

**What guarantees of independence are you able to give the European Parliament, and how would you make sure that any past, current or future activities you carry out could not cast doubt on the performance of your duties within the Commission?**

I was born after the re-establishment of the Independence of Lithuania and was growing up when my country took its first steps towards becoming a member of the European Union. Therefore, the European idea is in my DNA, I cannot imagine Lithuania without Europe. For me, Europe is a synonym of freedom and opportunity. It always was my motivation. I was able to use the benefits of Europe from free travel and studies in other European countries to fulfilling my ideas in politics. I will therefore always stand for Europe and work for it in any position I will be appointed to in the future.

My political career began when I was elected as a Member of the National Parliament in my native Šeškinė district of Vilnius, after visiting some 10,000 apartments and meeting people of my constituency. I was honored to represent the people not only as a Parliament Member, but also as a Chair of the Economy committee, as well as a member of Ethics commission and head of the delegation to the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

I also had the honor to become the Minister of Economy and Innovation of Lithuania. In that capacity, I have been participating in the Competitiveness Council and supporting initiatives at the EU level. At the national level, this was a position that allowed me to present a number of important initiatives such as an innovation reform, an industry digitalisation package, one of the first national artificial intelligence strategies in the EU, a startup ecosystem development package and a life sciences strategy. In terms of green initiatives, I should mention financial instruments, which have been developed in cooperation with other Ministries to boost the energy efficiency of business in Lithuania and to reduce pollution through eco-innovation. I strongly believe that my knowledge in industry and innovation is important when working on environmental and marine challenges, innovation will be key when addressing them.

I am truly committed to make the European Green Deal a reality, delivering on the President-elect Political Guidelines. I will help to deliver on our climate ambitions while creating jobs and sustainable growth. I will put forward a new Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, looking at everything from Natura2000, deforestation, land degradation, protected species and habitats, and sustainable seas and oceans. I will also lead on delivering on our common zero-pollution ambition, which will require a wide-ranging approach looking at air and water quality, hazardous chemicals, pollutants' emissions, pesticides and endocrine disruptors. I will also be leading the work on a new Circular Economy Action Plan. We need to accelerate Europe's transition towards a circular economic model. This is essential to achieve a competitive and future-proof economy. I am fully committed to the prosperous and sustainable fishing and a thriving blue economy. I will focus therefore on the full implementation of the Common Fisheries policy and, by 2022, will evaluate it to identify how to address issues not sufficiently covered in the current policy. We need a Common Fisheries policy that works for fishermen, coastal communities and the environment alike. The EU is a global leader in ocean governance. I want our sustainability principles to be respected globally, and I will work strongly towards that. I will also lead the way to develop a new approach for a sustainable blue economy, which should bring together everything from marine knowledge and research to maritime spatial planning, marine renewable energy, blue investment and regional maritime cooperation.

I would also like to highlight two important principles that will guide my action if I am confirmed as Commissioner. During my mandate I will ensure the policies under my portfolio contribute to a fairer society, leaving nobody behind. Ambitious climate and environment policies per se bring greater social justice since they improve health, quality of life and wellbeing for all. But I want to go a step further to ensure that the green transition works for all. We need targeted measures to improve the resilience of vulnerable people and communities. The adoption of the announced Just Transition Fund will be fundamental to secure flanking measures. Second, we need to ensure our policies are evidence based. An important part of this is having a strong scientific base, and so I will work closely with knowledge providers such as the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) and the European Environmental Agency (EEA), and the scientific community in general. Well-designed policies based on a rigorous understanding of the science and the environmental, economic and social impacts will be easier to implement, and will deliver more for all.

As a Member of Parliament and Minister, I have been very open in the way I approached policy making. I was regularly meeting with my constituency, visiting regions in Lithuania and also using every possibility that the digital age enables to hear the voice of society. If confirmed as Commissioner, I commit to continuing with the same focus: engage with the European Parliament, visit the Member States and meet their people, as well as promote EU's policies under my responsibility with all digital tools, thus ensuring visibility of the strategic agenda of the Commission in my fields.

I am a strong believer in gender mainstreaming. As a Minister, I was a supporter and promoter of the Women Go Tech initiative, which aims to increase women's participation in IT and engineering in Lithuania. The number of programme participants has been doubling each year, with an increasing number of women choosing to work in technology companies as a result. I would like to continue in a similar vein and integrate a gender perspective into all policy areas of my portfolio in the European Commission. This planet is the only one for all of us, therefore, environmental challenges and solutions require engagement of every European, despite gender, age, religion or any other differences. Gender perspective will be important to deliver my agenda. President-elect von der Leyen has put gender equality high

on her agenda and committed to lead by example by forming a fully gender-balanced College. I intend to apply the same principle to my team. I will strive for gender balance in all activities organised by my services (panels, experts groups). Internally, I will ensure my services pursue a strong gender policy.

As regards my independence guarantees, I will fully respect the letter and spirit of the Treaty, in particular the obligation to act in the European interest and without taking any instructions from any Government or other institution, body, office or entity. I will also honour the Code of Conduct of Members of the European Commission and its provisions on conflicts of interest. My Declaration of Interests is complete and accessible to the public, and I will update it as soon as any change is required.

## **2. Management of the portfolio and cooperation with the European Parliament**

**How would you assess your role as a Member of the College of Commissioners? In what respect would you consider yourself responsible and accountable to the Parliament for your actions and for those of your departments?**

**What specific commitments are you prepared to make in terms of enhanced transparency, increased cooperation and effective follow-up to Parliament's positions and requests for legislative initiatives? In relation to planned initiatives or ongoing procedures, are you ready to provide Parliament with information and documents on an equal footing with the Council?**

I am proud to be part of President-elect Ursula von der Leyen's team. I see my role as a member of the College, working in close cooperation with other members of the College. If confirmed as Commissioner for Environment and Oceans, I will be working to ensure that our environment, blue economy and fisheries sector form an integral part of the European Green Deal. For that, I will work closely with the Executive Vice-President responsible for this area, but also with other Members of the College. The challenges we face in the fields of environment and oceans concern us all. If confirmed as Commissioner, I will strive for an effective mainstreaming of environmental and biodiversity priorities across all policy areas to ensure effective systemic change. To deliver on our climate and environmental ambitions, we need to ensure political coherence and ensure our policies support each other.

As a Minister and Member of a national Parliament, I always attached great importance to parliamentary work. I therefore believe in the need to ensure the European Parliament is adequately involved if we want our action to be ambitious and meet our citizens' expectations. I think this involvement has to be based on the principles of openness, mutual trust, efficiency, and regular exchange of information. If confirmed Commissioner, I will therefore ensure extensive cooperation with the Members of the European Parliament in all the most important projects of my mandate, in full respect of the Treaties. I will be accountable to the European Parliament and I wish to maintain a regular, fruitful and constructive cooperation with the ENVI, PECH or any other Committees. I will manage my interactions with Parliament in an open, transparent and constructive way, to build relationships of mutual trust.

I am also fully committed to implementing wide-ranging provisions on transparency and the flow of information in the Framework Agreement on relations between the European

Parliament and the Commission and the Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-Making. President-elect von der Leyen supports a right of initiative for the European Parliament. She committed that her Commission will follow-up on Parliamentary resolutions adopted by a majority of its members with a legislative act, in full respect of proportionality, subsidiarity and better law-making principles. I fully subscribe to this objective and I will work closely with the relevant committees to make sure that the Commission acts accordingly in areas under my competence.

I know that the provision of information and documents is an essential aspect of deepening the partnership between the European Parliament and the Commission. The Lisbon Treaty sets out the equality of the European Parliament and the Council as co-legislators, and I will ensure that the European Parliament and the Council are informed in line with their respective competences stemming from the Treaties, on all files where both co-legislators are involved. I also commit to continuing constructive exchange of information on international negotiations in both parts of my portfolio. The first big milestone ahead of us is going to be the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in 2020 in China (COP15). In this respect, I will ensure that the European Parliament is regularly informed at all stages of the process.

#### Questions from the Committee on Fisheries

**3. What are your ambitions for the next five years with regard to the advancement of sustainable fisheries and aquaculture policies, striking the balance between the conservation of fisheries resources and the achievement of a secure and profitable fishing industry, and would you consider a reform of the Common Fisheries Policy during this term to better achieve the challenges at stake?**

I am extremely proud of being asked to lead the portfolio of environment and oceans. Within this portfolio, fisheries will remain a cornerstone, and I will work with dedication to ensure that the Common Fisheries Policy delivers on its social, economic and environmental objectives, and provides sustainable food for our citizens.

The President-elect has stressed in her Political Guidelines for the next European Commission 2019-2024 that we should be a Union that strives for more. I will do my utmost to strive for a more prosperous and sustainable EU fishing and aquaculture sector. I know that I can count on the European Parliament to help in leading this important work and I will certainly make my cooperation with the Fisheries Committee a priority. For me as Commissioner-designate for Environment and Oceans, sustainable fisheries and aquaculture must be an integral part of the EU's reply to global challenges, such as higher food demand and the increased pressure on our planet caused by human impact. The EU has already come a long way: for instance by increasingly managing fish stocks sustainably or successfully fighting illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing across the world. But we still have a lot to do, both at home and internationally, where the EU must lead by example.

First, if I am confirmed, the full implementation of the Common Fisheries Policy will be a top priority for my mandate. We must achieve the maximum sustainable yield objective, to keep our planet healthy, but also to ensure the development of our coastal communities. The evidence speaks for itself: when stocks are healthy, fishermen and -women make more profit and coastal communities thrive. In principle, 2020 is the first year when stocks have to be

managed in line with the maximum sustainable yield target. This will require political will and commitment from all sides. And where sustainable fishing is not yet in reach next year, efforts must be stepped up further to get there and to support fishermen and -women in the process. This is particularly important in the Mediterranean, where 87% of the stocks are overfished, to the detriment not only of ecosystems but also of fishermen's and -women's livelihoods and future. Commissioner Vella has created a strong political momentum and commitment for sustainable fisheries with all riparian states around the Mediterranean and Black Sea. I intend to continue this path in line with the existing political commitments. Whether for achieving maximum sustainable yield across our sea basins, implementing the landing obligation or fighting illegal fishing, we need to have control rules that are fit for purpose and we need to ensure a level playing field. The other side of the control coin is the enforcement of the rules – a precondition to achieve sustainable fisheries. I am committed to take enforcement actions and I therefore count on your support to help strengthen the fisheries control system in its ongoing revision. This will not only help achieve sustainable fisheries but also honour the vast majority of honest fishermen and -women who respect the rules. The successful transition to sustainable fisheries in many parts of the EU in recent years is thanks to the determination of our fishermen and -women, not least the small-scale ones. Public investment should support their efforts and it is therefore of paramount importance to agree as soon as possible on a new European Maritime and Fisheries Fund for 2021- 2027.

Second, and as part of a European Green Deal, I would like us to draw on the potential of sustainable seafood to contribute to a Farm to Fork strategy on sustainable food. With the EU's fishing fleet landing over 5 million tonnes of fish and our aquaculture sector placing 1.4 million tonnes of seafood on the market, we have an important role to play to ensure the EU's sustainable food security. In this respect, our actions will be about ensuring that our sustainable food strategy brings broad-based benefits for all, greater economic sustainability for our fishing and aquaculture sectors (including our small-scale fishing sector), and that it minimises the negative impacts on the marine environment. As part of the sustainable food strategy, I intend to review the current Commission Strategic Guidelines for aquaculture and to continue to implement the market policy pillar of the Common Fisheries Policy, which also plays an essential role in contributing to the Common Fisheries Policy objectives.

Third, sustainable fisheries does not end at our borders. Our fleet is active in all seas and oceans, and we import 60% of our seafood from outside the EU. This conveys a huge responsibility on us, and the EU must continue to be a global leader for sustainable fisheries and ocean governance more generally. In line with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, we must push for science-based fisheries management and improved control worldwide, through all means and fora: in regional fisheries management organisations, global bodies like the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation, or through sustainable fisheries partnership agreements. And with an estimated one-fifth of worldwide catches being illegal, unregulated and unreported, fighting this scourge will be high on my agenda. This is also about providing our own fishermen and –women with a level playing field.

Fourth, I intend to work closely with the Commissioner-designate for Trade to ensure that Europe leads discussions in the World Trade Organization on finding a global agreement to end harmful fisheries subsidies that contribute to overfishing, illegal fishing and overcapacity, thus honouring its commitment to fulfil Sustainable Development Goals.

When undertaking the evaluation of the Common Fisheries Policy – due by the end of 2022 – I will examine carefully whether the policy remains fit for purpose in addressing the current and new challenges that we face, such as climate change, socio-economic development and other areas. Dialogue with our fishing sector and civil society will be indispensable and I intend to reach out and listen to all stakeholders' views very closely, not least during my visits to the Member States. The PECH Committee and all other European Parliament committees concerned by this policy will be a privileged partner when we assess the current Common Fisheries Policy and reflect on its future development.

#### **4. How will you ensure and improve the control procedure and compliance of imports of fisheries and aquaculture products with EU legislation, also in order to increase consumer trust?**

The EU is the world's largest trader of fishery and aquaculture products. Imports from non-EU countries reached a 10-year high of EUR 26.5 billion in 2018. On the one hand, this gives us a huge responsibility towards our citizens who rely on us and expect us to ensure that these imports are safe and compliant with our legislation. On the other hand, this gives us the tools to align our trading partners with our policies and principles, for example when it comes to sustainability and ocean governance.

We take that responsibility, first of all by making sure that imported products originate from legal sources. We already have many tools allowing us to act in that sense, such as the Regulation on Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated Fishing or the Fisheries Control Regulation. But supply chains in the fisheries sector are complex, and a risk always remains. This is why I believe we have to reinforce traceability, for imported products but also for the EU market in general.

Modern technologies play an important role here. Digital tools can help us to ensure that our rules are respected, checking the legality of catches, compliance with the Common Fisheries Policy or, in the context of our trade policy, with the rules of origin. The CATCH system, the EU-wide digital system for the management of 'Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated' catch certificates, was launched a few months ago and has the potential of boosting our work towards more coherent and effective controls on imports of fishery products. If confirmed, I will work closely on this matter with my fellow Commissioners responsible for policy areas such as the digital economy and food safety.

Ensuring synergies and coherence with other EU policies, such as trade, customs, sanitation and even consumer information is essential. This will enable our citizens to make informed choices, based on quality, safety and sustainability. This will also help us reduce unnecessary administrative burden, which is a key principle of the President's-elect programme.

If confirmed, I will of course continue to apply a zero tolerance policy on Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated fishing. The EU is a world leader in this area and our policy has proven extremely successful in this regard. Our trading partners know that we are not afraid to use our market power to enforce compliance, whilst maintaining dialogue and mutual respect, irrespective of the preferential trade relation a third country holds with the EU.

In this respect, I believe it is important to keep on working at bilateral level with our main likeminded partners, who are often the largest importers of fisheries products, to encourage them to enhance their import control systems and apply a similar approach to ours.

I will also continue to push for improving traceability and transparency at the international level. This can be done for example through bilateral trade agreements, support of multilateral

initiatives, such as the development by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of a global record for vessels that engage in fisheries activities, or through the promotion of the implementation of international instruments, such as the FAO Voluntary Guidelines on Catch Documentation Schemes.

I am convinced that there is scope to further improving transparency also within the EU market. This will allow us to ensure fairer competition between EU and imported products, but also to build consumer trust.

**5. In regard with your portfolio, how do you intend to articulate environmental policies and maritime affairs in general and fisheries in particular?**

As one of her political priorities, the President-elect has asked her team of Commissioners, if confirmed, to ensure that Europe leads on the transition to a healthy planet and to make sure we become the first climate-neutral continent. These are two of the greatest challenges and opportunities of our times and our mandate will be decisive in achieving this. The world's seas and oceans are in the frontline. Climate change and pollution already affect sea surface temperatures, make our oceans more acidic and reduce the concentration of oxygen. This affects habitats, marine ecosystems, fish stocks and their distribution, in some case threatening the survival of species, but also potentially affecting our fishermen and -women and their economic activities.

Intimately linked to climate change, the protection of the marine environment is also a global challenge. The most recent scientific report by the International Panel on Climate Change has assessed the many alarming impacts of climate change on oceans and on coastal and polar ecosystems, as well as on the communities that depend on them. It has only strengthened my conviction that the EU must continue to be a global leader in this fight against climate change, reinforcing the articulation between its environmental policies on the one hand and its maritime affairs and fisheries on the other. It will be my ambition to agree a global treaty on High Seas Biodiversity under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea as soon as possible.

Preserving our marine environment and its biodiversity is not only good for nature. Resilient and well-managed oceans will allow our fishermen and -women and our coastal communities to continue the activities on which their livelihoods depend. To deliver on our ambitious environmental and sustainability objectives, I consider it fundamental to engage with all our stakeholders and Member States. I will need in particular the European Parliament's help for this. I therefore pledge both to ensure a continuous dialogue with the PECH committee and any other European Parliament committee concerned by this policy, as well as the broader fisheries community. I will also visit our coastal communities across Europe.

I believe that the proper implementation of the Common Fisheries Policy is central for the sustainable use of our marine resources. One of my priorities will be to achieve the maximum sustainable yield target and to fully implement the landing obligation. Both concepts reflect the right policy direction, and we should be bold in implementing them. The figures do not lie: fishing at sustainable levels has led to record profits for our fleet, which is beneficial for our fishermen and -women and for Europe's coastal communities.

As fishing activities do not take place in a vacuum, I am committed to further strengthening the synergies between protecting the marine environment on the one hand and ensuring sustainable fisheries practices under the Common Fisheries Policy on the other hand. I am

convinced that there is mutual benefit in that approach. Marine Protected Areas are another instrument, which I will certainly look at from both the fisheries and the environment perspectives. It is not enough to simply establish marine protected areas. They also need to be expanded, better connected and more effectively managed, in close consultation with those who will be most concerned and fully mindful of what scientists tell us. While conservation measures are important, it is essential for fishermen and -women, who may be directly impacted by them, to understand that they also pay off economically. I will work with dedication towards these objectives.

In times where competition over ocean space is increasing, it is crucial to ensure that we manage our seas and oceans sustainably. It is time therefore to assess the implementation of the Maritime Spatial Planning Directive, which requires Member States to establish ecosystem-based maritime spatial plans by March 2021. For instance, Member States' plans to increase offshore renewable energy fourfold times by 2030 make sense in the context of carbon-neutrality, but we also need to ensure that this goes hand in hand with the protection of Europe's marine environment. The better protection of our sensitive species in the marine environment is another part of the environment-fisheries nexus. I am convinced that we need to have mitigation measures in place in fisheries across all of Europe's sea basins to protect marine mammals such as seals or dolphins, seabirds or marine turtles. The new Technical Measures Regulation is a step in the right direction, and I am fully committed to take all necessary measures, which will help us to strengthen the resilience of our marine ecosystems.

We also need to step up our efforts to implement the Port Reception Facilities Directive and the extended producer responsibility for fishing gear, to incentivise the fleet to bring waste and discarded fishing nets back to shore. I will work closely with my fellow Commissioner for Transport on that important endeavour.

The European Maritime and Fisheries Fund will help financing the collection of marine litter, including fishing gear, and help the fishing sector becoming more involved in these initiatives. I want the fishermen and -women to become part of and play a key role in the ecological transition. They know the seas and the oceans well, and we can succeed only with their support and engagement. Protecting the marine environment is a global challenge, intrinsically linked to climate change. If confirmed, I will work with all stakeholders and institutions involved to develop and implement the means allowing us to address this challenge successfully.

#### Questions from the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety

### **6. Biodiversity and deforestation**

**In view of the insufficient progress towards achieving the 2020 targets, how will you ensure that the EU meets its biodiversity targets and that nature protection is reflected in all EU policy areas, including the CAP? Will you commit to an ambitious EU biodiversity strategy for 2030, including legally binding measures? At global level, how will you ensure Europe takes the lead in fostering an ambitious international agreement that leads to significant and measurable progress globally? How do you intend to ensure that the EU steps-up its actions to preserve marine and coastal ecosystems and what will you do to fulfil the EU's commitment to achieving the conservation and sustainable use of oceans and seas and marine resources? What will you do in the next months to step up EU action inside and outside the EU to fulfil the global commitment to halt**

**deforestation by 2020? In particular, which concrete steps and legislative measures would you propose to ensure that no products placed on the EU market are associated with deforestation and ecosystem degradation?**

Biodiversity and healthy ecosystems are integral to a resilient nature, human life and wellbeing, as well as our economy. While some progress has been achieved, more efforts are needed to address the unprecedented biodiversity loss we are currently facing. The President-elect has committed to ‘setting new standards for biodiversity cutting across trade, industry, agriculture and economic policy’ and I am determined to deliver. This will require mainstreaming biodiversity objectives across all the relevant EU and national policies, building on initiatives set out in the Political Guidelines. For example, our future trade agreements will need to set the highest standards for environmental protection. Likewise, by refocusing the European Semester to integrate the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals, we will proof our Member States’ economic development from the angle of environment and biodiversity protection. Another example is the proposal on the future Common Agricultural Policy: it is critical that the essential elements allowing Member States to support farmers in their transition to a sustainable agriculture are maintained in the context of the ongoing negotiations between the co-legislators. I am thinking in particular of provisions on enhanced conditionality, eco-schemes and on the earmarking of at least 30% of the second pillar funds for environmental and climate measures. I will count on the determination of the European Parliament to secure these crucially important provisions.

I have been entrusted with the responsibility to ensure that Europe leads the world to an ambitious agreement at the 2020 Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in China and to put forward a new Biodiversity Strategy for 2030. Failure to curb the ongoing biodiversity loss is not an option. We must succeed. To that effect, I will first work towards a biodiversity equivalent of the Paris climate 1.5°C goal – and rallying the world behind it.

For the EU to meet its ambitious objective at the Conference of the Parties in China, it will need to lead by example. That is why the President-elect asked me to look at everything from Natura 2000, deforestation, land degradation, protected species and habitats to sustainable seas and oceans. Domestically, this means improving the sustainability of our farming and fisheries practices and addressing the environmental impacts of the way we produce, distribute and consume food in Europe. I am also convinced that our ambition may justify a fresh look at the health of our soils. We will also need to develop further our reflection and action for effective, nature-based solutions for climate mitigation and adaptation. Finally, I will pursue the essential objective of adequately financing all the above-mentioned measures, not only through the relevant EU public funding programmes but also by mobilising private capital through the Sustainable Europe Investment Fund, which should support EUR 1 trillion of investments over the next decade.

The preservation of the marine and coastal ecosystems and the sustainable use of our oceans will be at the heart of my concern in delivering on our European Green Deal. Marine biodiversity loss is worryingly weakening the ocean ecosystem and its ability to withstand disturbances, adapt to climate change and play its role as a global ecological and climate regulator. In this area, I intend to focus my action alongside four main work strands. Firstly, I would like to see our marine protected areas expanded, better connected and more effectively managed. Secondly, we need to continue striving to fish sustainably, with zero tolerance for illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing and by eliminating unsustainable fishing practices. Thirdly, we should continue our fight to reduce pollution, including marine litter, nutrient

losses, microplastics and underwater noise. Finally, we need to make better use of the relevant Regional Sea Conventions to ensure that our seas are kept clean, healthy and productive.

On forests, I will pursue the implementation of measures included in the recent Commission Communication on deforestation.

## 7. Circular economy

**What concrete measures will you propose to reduce the total environmental footprint of EU production and consumption? Other than addressing resource use in textile and construction industries, what kind of key measures do you plan to propose in the new Circular Economy Action Plan, and what will be the timetable for these measures? What role do you see for the EU bioeconomy, and how would you balance possible trade-offs between a growing bioeconomy and increased environmental pressures? Are you prepared to commit to a non-toxic circular economy, to the development of non-toxic material cycles so that recycled waste can be used as a major, reliable source of raw materials? What further legislative and non-legislative measures do you plan to address plastic pollution, especially from plastic packaging?**

In a world of limited resources, we need to find new ways to produce and consume that respect the ecological boundaries of our planet. Europe still produces too much waste and squanders resources while the global competition for scarce resources continues to increase. Today, we still waste 88% of the value of the products we place on the market. President-elect Ursula von der Leyen has entrusted me with the responsibility to deliver a New Circular Economy Action Plan under the coordination of the Executive Vice-President-designate Timmermans, as a key element of the European Green Deal. My intention is to scale up the experience gained so far, in particular from the first Circular Economy Action Plan, and to bring the transition from a linear to a circular economy to a new level. This will contribute significantly to reaching our objective of a climate-neutral Europe and feed into our industrial strategy to help us make the most of the opportunities from the climate transition.

We need to find ways to further reduce the environmental footprint of our production and consumption. I will focus my efforts on phasing out single-use or short-lived products and on their replacement by more durable ones. To this end, I will be looking at a wide range of measures to achieve more circularity in our economy. Building on the first Circular Economy Action Plan, we need to go further in tapping the potential of the life-cycle approach. Firstly, we need to address the production phase, e.g. through new eco-design approaches and a more active promotion of reuse and repair. Secondly, we need to empower consumers, notably by providing them with the information they need to make choices, for example by taking action to ensure the reliability of green claims. The development of the sharing economy should also be supported to the extent that it contributes to environmental sustainability. From the perspective of public authorities, we should better exploit the considerable potential of green public procurement. This will enable public authorities as sustainable purchasers, thereby also contributing to drive the supply side towards more sustainable products and services.

My objective will be to achieve a genuine paradigm shift during my mandate: moving from recycling to preventing and minimising waste in the first place. This will be the third axis of my action. I will see that we urgently take steps to prevent waste creation, including as regards food waste, and other important waste streams. To ensure successful delivery, we need to develop a robust monitoring framework to assess progress and closely engage with

stakeholders. Finally, I will commit myself to securing greater support to innovation, a key condition for the scaling up of process industries, manufacturing, digital technologies and new business in relation to the circular economy. The shift towards sustainable business models should provide for new opportunities, in particular for SMEs. To accompany this, and on top of redirecting funding programmes to the right priority areas, we need to tap into the leveraging potential of private financing, notably within the framework of the Sustainable Europe Investment Plan.

All sectors and companies can benefit from the circular economy. We need to tailor our action to address material- or product-specific life-cycle challenges. Beyond textiles and construction, I will explore options to address other resource intensive sectors, such as food or information and communication technology.

Our bioeconomy is the renewable segment of the circular economy. Biological resources remain finite although they are renewable. Therefore, like other sectors, the EU bioeconomy needs to fully integrate our sustainability and circularity objectives. All primary production sectors and all economic and industrial sectors that use biological resources must contribute to the goals of halting biodiversity loss and land degradation, moving towards zero pollution and achieving climate neutrality by 2050. To do so, our bioeconomy must be based on sustainable primary production on land and at sea, and on an optimised use of biomass. The preservation and productivity of healthy ecosystems in seas, oceans, forests and soils is key to a sustainable bioeconomy. We can only achieve this by creating synergies between our climate and environment policies and our economic instruments and by continuing to address the direct and indirect impacts of land-use change. I will work in close cooperation with my colleagues towards that goal.

I also believe that boosting markets for high-quality secondary materials is critical to bring the transition from a linear to a circular economy to the next level. That will imply building trust in the quality of secondary materials, by improving knowledge about – and control of – hazardous chemicals, with a view to develop non-toxic materials cycles. We must look into how information on the presence of chemicals of concern in products throughout their lifecycle can be made available along the whole value chain. Hazardous chemicals in products should be replaced with safer alternatives and the design of products should be based on the appropriate consideration of the toxicity of the materials. This is why we need to make sure that information is available to recyclers. This would allow for recycled waste to be used as a reliable source of secondary raw materials. As part of the zero-pollution ambition, a wide-ranging approach looking at hazardous chemicals, pesticides and endocrine disruptors will be crucial.

Finally, with regards to plastic pollution, you may rest assured that this will remain a priority for my mandate and that I will continue our fight to free our oceans from plastic. We will need to build on progress made on plastics and go further by finding concrete measures to fight microplastics. In particular, we will act firmly on deliberately added micro-plastics. I want to identify plastic applications for which biodegradable applications can bring added-value for the environment and establish a clear regulatory framework. By 2030 all plastic packaging must be easily reusable or recyclable, and we have to tackle over-packaging and prevention of packaging waste in accordance with the Packaging and Packaging Waste legislation. Finally, fighting plastic pollution and single use plastic should be high on the UN and the G7 agenda, but also in bilateral relations with our partners. Without comprehensive international action, led by the EU, we will not succeed.

## **8. 8th EAP and zero-pollution strategy**

**How will 8th Environmental Action Programme support and help deliver the European Green Deal (which priorities, what targets, tools and measures)? What concrete proposals and measures do you foresee under the new cross-cutting zero-pollution strategy and how will you make sure that all sectors concerned are adequately addressed? How will the work on the strategy focus on pollution prevention and reflect the precautionary and polluter-pays principles? When it comes to air pollution, what immediate actions do you foresee to cut emissions at source - including from industry, transport, agriculture and domestic heating - and to ensure that existing EU air quality standards are respected in all Member States while you work to align EU legislation with the latest WHO guidelines, expected in 2020/2021?**

I am fully aware that European environment policy has a long tradition of common programmes for the Union and its Member States. The adoption of Environment Action Programmes is required under Article 192 of the Treaty. I believe they provide for the requisite shared commitment and understanding of the challenges and objectives of our environment policy, as agreed by the co-legislators. This is important to ensure coherence in the implementation of the EU's environment policy, which is highly decentralised between the Union, Member States and regional and local governments, in line with the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. Building on the evaluation of the current programme, a new Environment Action Programme should further outline the objectives defined in the context of the European Green Deal and decisively contribute to guiding its effective implementation on the ground. This will contribute to delivering on the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals under my responsibility. Finally, we will need to monitor and measure progress to ensure we remain on track in the delivery of the programme.

As a father and as a citizen, I am extremely concerned about the quality of the air we breathe, the water we drink and the impact of chemicals and industrial emissions on the health of our children and on all of us. The health of Europe's most vulnerable populations remains disproportionately affected by these hazards, despite overall improvements in Europe's environmental quality. This is why in designing modern environment policies, we need to ensure a just transition for all. In this transition, we do not all start from the same point, and it is important nobody is left behind. This is why, as the President-elect has already emphasised, while sharing the same ambition, some may need more tailored support to get there.

The President-elect entrusted me with leading our zero-pollution ambition. This will require a wide-ranging, cross-cutting approach, that will tackle all persisting sources of pollution, in full respect of the precautionary and polluter-pays principles. Without prejudging the final College decision, I believe there are three main areas we need to focus on.

Firstly, we would need to reinforce measures to address pollution and its main sources and tackle persistent contamination more effectively. I aim to tackle these issues through specific initiatives in all key areas where we need to fight pollution. For example, in the area of water, we need to focus on new or particularly harmful sources of pollution, such as nutrients, microplastics and pharmaceuticals. We also need to address systemic causes of pollution and to mainstream water security and resilience in other EU policies. As a key factor to water and air pollution, our zero-pollution ambition cannot be successful without tackling pesticides use. In synergy with the Farm to Fork strategy, we must aim to reduce dependency on pesticides and stimulate the take-up of low-risk, non-chemical alternatives. I will work closely with the

Commissioner-designate for Health, under the guidance of the Executive Vice-President-designate for the European Green Deal.

Secondly, we need to step up implementation, working with all relevant levels of government to deliver on the ground and promote awareness-raising measures to accelerate behavioural change across society. We need to stimulate a just transition towards less polluting ways of moving, consuming and producing. I am committed to using all instruments available to make sure that the results on the ground match our legal obligations and our citizens' expectations.

Thirdly, we will not successfully deliver on the ambition of the European Green Deal without mobilising both public and private funding. To this end, I will work with my colleagues in charge of cohesion and agriculture funds, but also those responsible for the Sustainable European Investment Plan, the Just Transition Fund and InvestEU, to ensure they help us deliver on our priorities.

To conclude, on the question on air quality, I intend to deploy our efforts alongside four main lines of action. Firstly, I will provide all possible support to our Member States in implementing the measures that they have the obligation to take to meet their national emissions ceilings for air pollutants. In meeting their goals, Member States will dramatically reduce background concentrations in ambient air and put Europe on a path to halve the health related impacts of air pollution. Secondly, I will defend a zero-tolerance approach to exceedances of air quality standards in our Member States. Thirdly, we will need to address our air quality legal framework to ensure air quality in the EU meets the latest, authoritative scientific advice and to improve the ability of national and local authorities to act more decisively to end air pollution exceedances as soon as possible. Finally, we need to address pollution at source. This is why, for example, I will work closely with my colleague in charge of Energy, to reduce emissions from our energy production and consumption further. I will also work with my colleagues in charge of the internal market and of transport to ensure that the entire mobility system is geared towards clean and active modes of transport, especially in urban areas, where most of our pollution is concentrated, so that our citizens have viable, clean alternatives to benefit from. We will need to further reduce pollutant emissions from agriculture, where the implementation of an ambitious Common Agriculture Policy and the future Farm to Fork strategy will be critical to deliver.