



EUROPÄISCHE KOMMISSION

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– Check against delivery –

Good evening ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for this opportunity to be with you today! As this is the first time we meet, I'll start with a little about myself.

I am a green-minded politician, a pragmatist, a father, proud of my native Lithuania and European to the core. I am from a generation that knows only Europe – my values are cooperation and respect, mutual understanding and an openness to the world. That's what I lived by as Minister for Economy and innovation back home, and they are the values I brought to Brussels.

I studied in Lithuania and in the UK, and I have a Masters in European Studies from Maastricht. At the Commission my portfolio covers oceans, fisheries, and the environment, but I don't think in terms of compartments. I take a holistic approach, because we have everything to gain from tackling these issues as broadly as possible. You can't ignore the connection between the land and the sea. By having one Commissioner for both, we ensure that Europe tackles both together.

I am very pleased to be here today, because I want to make one thing very clear, right from the start of my mandate. And that is, that business and environment are also very closely linked. They have everything to gain from working together. In fact if they don't work together, neither of them works at all. They are two sides of the same coin.

That's always been my personal belief, but it's now European policy as well. When you look at the Green Deal, you see environment and business in lockstep together. It's our new strategy for Europe. It means investment in green technologies. It means solutions that are sustainable and opportunities for new businesses all around the Union.

No one should be frightened of this deal, because it was designed to be inclusive from the start. What's more frightening is the future we would have without a deal like this. Today I'm going to focus on three different elements, three different facets of the deal.

First of all, biodiversity. Now I'm pretty sure that Valdis is going to share some very big numbers in a minute, but I have some impressive numbers too.

Sadly they are not numbers that people like, but they must be heard all the same. Numbers like, 'one million species at risk of extinction'. Numbers like a 76 percent decline in flying insect biomass since 1970, right here in Germany.

These numbers really matter. They show a state of affairs that has to change. They show that there is no more "business as usual". If we try to carry on ignoring climate change, burning through our natural resources, and designing things for waste instead of reuse, then we will end up with no business at all.

Nature cleans our air, it delivers the oxygen we breathe. It cleans our water, keeps soils fertile, and pollinates our crops. It supplies many of the building blocks that industry needs, and it protects us from climate change.

When we lose nature, we don't just lose forests in faraway places. These are our problems, here today, and they have to be solved here in Europe. They touch on how we live, how we farm, how we organise our economy.

We will be addressing all of these issues with a 2030 strategy for biodiversity, with three main axes for action. Protecting nature, restoring the damage, and making sure we take an integrated approach to these problems.

So over the mandate – and especially at the beginning – I want to engage very closely with business on biodiversity. We need to see action and commitment. And here in Germany there are plenty of good examples to follow. Initiatives like the value balancing alliance lead by BASF, and the global Business for Nature alliance. Both are already making extremely useful contributions, but we need to see more.

The second Green Deal element I want to present also needs your cooperation. In a few months, we will present a new Circular Economy Action Plan, which will accompany the EU Industrial Strategy. It will focus on sectors that use a lot of resources, sectors like textiles, construction, electronics and plastics. We need to transform these sectors into circular systems.

The Action Plan will also build on the success of the Plastics Strategy, steering plastics further towards the circular economy. It will also tackle micro plastics, it will develop a regulatory framework for bioplastics, and it will implement the measures we planned on single-use plastics.

Behind all this is an ambition to avoid waste and emissions by supporting circular design, and stepping up the sustainability and durability of products. We will also give consumers – and I mean all of us – more power, by ensuring they have better information about products and services. That way we can see through green-washing claims.

The third major strand will be a zero pollution ambition for a toxic-free environment. That means updated measures to prevent and remedy pollution.

Chemicals are a European powerhouse, and a major part of the German economy. They deserve our full attention, and a self-standing Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability. That way we do more to encourage innovation, and at the same time protect our citizens better against hazardous chemicals. Safe and sustainable alternatives aren't just good for Europe. They help us to lead the world.

That's really the message I would like you to remember. These challenges aren't unique to Europe. Climate change and environmental degradation are global problems. And the Green Deal will bring a global response. Our deal is a credible whole, an integrated approach to the economy that forms a sustainable path, a path any nation or block can follow.

So I want to reassure you that Europe won't be doing this on its own. The EU will follow these policies and actions. We will be using our trade policy. We will be using development support, and we'll be using all the other external policies that leverage European action around the globe. The challenges are global, but Europe will be leading the way, with strong encouragements for others to follow.

As a Commission, we will do all we can to protect you. But for that to happen effectively, we need your support. So we are counting on your involvement and your commitment. We need you to maintain the momentum, and to keep the ambition at the appropriate level. I want to work with you very closely, and very soon, as the details of the plan begin to fall into place.

Today is the start – but I want it to be the start of a long, committed, and mutually productive relationship.

I very much look forward to that.

Thank you.