



EU2019FI: Let's simply be consistent and take action for delivering a Sustainable Europe

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Statement by

Finland assumes today, for the third time in its history, the Presidency of the Council of the European Union.



After the strong success of the Romanian Presidency, with their slogan "Cohesion, a common European value", the coming months at the start of a new EU legislature, will be pivotal for the development of the EU as it faces environmental, economic, social and societal challenges, including the still on-going Brexit process and threats from populist forces.

I am pleased Helsinki has adopted my very own slogan for its Presidency 'Sustainable Europe, Sustainable Future', setting the framework for [Finland's Presidency Programme](#).

We all agree there is no other alternative than accelerate sustainability. The faster the transition, the better it will be for prosperity and democracy in Europe.

I strongly welcome the clear message from Prime Minister Antti Rinne "A key priority of Finland's Presidency is the EU's global leadership in climate action."

The Agenda 2030 should be the driving force in the European Union and must become the EU's overarching strategy for the next decade. The next European budget must earmark not just 25%, but 40% of total resources to the sustainable development and climate change agenda. The European Semester should become the main vehicle for managing the Sustainable Development Strategy. I welcome the Finnish commitment in favour of Agenda 2030, which has to be implemented "both within and beyond the EU." Such commitment must be reflected in the appointment of a dedicated vice-president in the new European Commission, and it must be fully and firmly integrated in the future Commission programme, following the recently adopted Strategic Agenda 2019-2024.

European citizens already face direct impacts of climate change. Average annual losses caused by weather and climate-related extremes in the EU amounted to around EUR 12.8 billion between 2010 and 2016. If no further action is taken, climate damages in the EU could amount to at least EUR 190 billion by 2080.

Undoubtedly, there is a cost to the transition to a climate-neutral economy, and it is crucial that no one is left behind, neither enterprises, workers, nor regions or local communities. But let's be clear: the cost of non-action is much higher, it is in fact a cost that we simply cannot afford because not addressing the transition to a climate neutral economy can only have dramatic consequences for EU citizens.

To succeed in this transition, we have to fully take on board the objective of competitiveness of our industries: to remain competitive we need to demonstrate our ability to be the first mover. Only then we will reap the benefits of the transition.

We must encourage research and development and create favourable conditions for Europe, including European industry and business in general. The private sector has already been quite active.

For instance, to date, more than 300 investors with more than USD \$33 trillion in assets under management have signed on to the Climate Action 100+ initiative to ensure the world's largest corporate greenhouse gas emitters take necessary action on climate change. European companies are doing their share in this initiative, since they are more than 32% of them.

However, this is still not enough. The action by some must become the action by all. It is essential that business remains fully involved and mobilised.

Along with climate action, Europe needs a strong social pact for the transition to a carbon-neutral economy. The EU works best when it increases people's well-being and security and reduces inequality.

I would like to reassure Finnish Prime Minister Antti Rinne, as I said during our very good first meeting in Helsinki on 5 June 2019, that the EESC and its constituencies will work closely with the Presidency and the vibrant civil society of Finland to make sure we all walk the walk.

It is now or never. Time is running out, as our relentless and courageous young people taking to the street every Friday are telling us. Europe can make the difference today, for us and for our partners in the world. Let's simply be consistent and take action on what matters.