

Mr Martin Schulz  
President of the European Parliament

Mr Herman Van Rompuy  
President of the European Council

Mr Jose Manuel Barroso  
President of the European Commission

By e-mail

17 October 2013

Dear Presidents,

As environmental organizations with more than 20 million members in Europe, we welcome that you will address innovation at the European Council next week. The European Union faces critical economic challenges, including dwindling natural resources and increasing expenses linked to pollution and related health problems. Business-as-usual is destroying the natural foundations on which our economies and societies ultimately depend. Without further action, degradation of nature will cost the EU €1 trillion every year by 2050 [1]. Therefore, our organizations support research, development and application of resource-efficient, sustainable technologies and practices, and we call on you to promote sustainable innovation at the highest political levels.

We are writing to you out of concern that certain companies who masquerade as innovators are actually seeking to block policies that challenge the status quo. With this letter, we want to encourage you to consider the following points in your discussions:

1. **The need for a wider concept of innovation:** Innovation is not limited to products but can involve changes in processes, technologies, science and finance, for example. Innovations can be completely 'new', or can be developments or re-discoveries of existing or forgotten practices and techniques. When innovations lead to less pollution, more resource efficiency, employment, and lessen the Union's dependency on scarce natural resources, they are clearly in the common European interest and deserve political support.
2. **The stimulating role of public policies:** Innovations can be disruptive to established business models. This is why we often witness opposition to innovation from companies that are doing well under the status-quo. Without clearly oriented public policies, dominant companies can use their weight to block innovation. Yet, as we have seen in recent years with EU regulations on chemicals, energy and car efficiency, politicians can create new playing fields and stimulate innovation across the board when they dare to set ambitious objectives to cut the use of natural resources and improve efficiency.

3. **The use of the precautionary principle:** Precaution is an excellent driver for innovation, as it requires politicians to act when delaying action would in the longer term prove more costly to society and nature. Therefore, as has been comprehensively documented in a recent report [2], the use of the precautionary principle in public policy accelerates innovation. The benefits of taking precautionary action often also include resource and cost savings, as well as secondary societal and economic benefits. For example, the development of more efficient, safer alternatives to polluting activities and products simultaneously reduces the costs of harm.

We would further like to express our deep concern about the orientation of the Commission's REFIT Communication. While REFIT aims to simplify the regulatory framework, the focus chosen by the Commission risks accelerating a rollback in environmental legislation and policy in Europe. Environmental standards and policies to improve resource efficiency are essential tools to safeguard natural resources, and to provide economic and public health assets essential to job creation and economic development.

Much sustainable innovation is needed to make Europe's economy more resilient, and for our societies to operate more efficiently and within planetary limits. We look forward to the outcomes of the European Council, and would be pleased to contribute further to your deliberations.

Yours sincerely,



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Head of Naturefriends International EU Policy Office  
On behalf of the Green 10 EU Directors

[1] Cost of policy inaction (COPI): The case of not meeting the 2010 biodiversity target. L. Braat & P. ten Brink (eds.)

[http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/biodiversity/economics/teeb\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/biodiversity/economics/teeb_en.htm) (chapter 6, p. 140)

[2] Late lessons from early warnings: science, precaution, innovation. European Environment Agency, EEA Report No 1/2013.

<http://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/late-lessons-2>

Green 10 EU Directors:

Angelo Caserta, Regional Director of the European Division – BirdLife International

Wendel Trio, Director – Climate Action Network (CAN) Europe

Petr Hlobil, International Affairs Director, CEE Bankwatch Network

Jeremy Wates, Secretary-General – European Environmental Bureau

Magda Stoczkiewicz, Director - Friends of the Earth Europe

Jorgo Riss, Director – Greenpeace European Unit

Genon K. Jensen, Executive Director – Health & Environment Alliance

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