



EU GREEN DEAL MAKE IT REAL

#EUGREENWEEK
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GREEN WEEK 2022 MEDIA BACKGROUNDER: UKRAINE

LESSONS ON SOLIDARITY, RESILIENCE
AND A BETTER PLANET FROM UKRAINE

First it was COVID and now the war in Ukraine confirms what matters most. Here, we reflect on our resolve in times of crisis to learn and do better for people ‘and’ the planet

It has been a tumultuous 48 months. We are facing the truth about environmental damage and its impact on human health. We are learning first-hand how linear supply chains and dependence on (outsourced) fossil fuels breeds insecurity. We are coming to grips with a world of vast geopolitical gyrations.

Russia’s invasion has galvanised communities behind the Ukrainian people first and foremost. But it has also focused attention on our collective security, how we strengthen resilience in our response to crises – both man-made and natural – and how everything is linked in a big sticky ‘ecosystem’ of interests and co-effects.

Climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution don’t go away when war breaks out. If anything, their impacts are more gravely felt by millions of people directly, and billions more with the inevitable ripple effects. Further degradation (and growing scarcity) of resources, especially water, will only fuel more crises and unrest.

War leaves a lasting scar on people and the landscape, but also on the environment. Mined agricultural fields hamper primary production. Damaged industrial plants release toxic chemicals. Wide-scale pollution of water, soil and air can persist for decades, harming human health, habitats and species. In the aftermath, reconstruction of damaged infrastructure and buildings is resource and energy intensive.

Europe is exploring various ways to help Ukraine. Talks have already started in April about it joining the EU’s LIFE programme, which would then make the country eligible for funding to protect and restore damage to the environment.

As a major primary producer of wheat (~10% of global exports) and corn (~13%), the war in Ukraine is affecting vital food supplies, pushing up prices, and causing shortages

in highly dependent regions such as Africa and the Middle East. Together with partners worldwide, the EU is stepping up efforts to keep crops growing and food flowing where it is most needed. Longer term, more work needs to be channelled into fostering more resilient and sustainable food systems in line with the EU Farm to Fork and Biodiversity strategies.

Russia is a major supplier of gas and oil to many EU countries. Market uncertainties and geopolitical realities are forcing European governments to rethink their energy policies and accelerate their clean-energy transition. The EU announced a new joint action (REPowerEU) for affordable, secure and sustainable energy, which aims to reduce EU demand for Russian gas by two-thirds by year’s end. “The quicker we switch to renewables and hydrogen, combined with more energy efficiency, the quicker we will be truly independent and master our energy system,” noted the Commission on 8 March.

MAKING THE GREEN DEAL REAL

Today more than ever, we need big ideas and even bigger plans to bring them to fruition. The European Green Deal is a major contribution to building resilient societies in Europe, and abroad. The focus of Green Week 2022 (‘EU Green Deal – Make It Real’) is to explore innovative ways to implement Europe’s ambitious targets and tackle the root causes of planetary crisis and the havoc that it wreaks on our built world (society, business, infrastructure) and life as we know it.

We are facing massive-scale global threats that are all connected and making each other worse. The Green Deal is an integrated and calibrated response, ambitious yet rooted in reality, with targets aimed at pollution, low-to-no carbon and achieving a circular economy – all within the foreseeable future. Reducing demand for primary resources and rationalising our sources and uses of energy – including oil and gas from the East – can be considered part of Europe’s green transition plans, to make our economy more resilient, more sustainable and more circular. A healthy environment is not a luxury for the good times. It is the foundation of a healthy society – and the more solid the foundations, the more solid the society that emerges and flourishes around it!

EUROPEAN GREEN DEAL

Climate change and environmental degradation are existential threats to Europe and the world. To address them, the European Green Deal seeks to transform the EU into a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy, ensuring there are no net emissions of greenhouse gases by 2050, that economic growth is decoupled from resource use, that nature is restored and protected, and that no person or place is left behind. The Green Deal is a lifeline out of the Covid-19 pandemic and a pre-emptive strike against future crises including wars and natural disasters. One third of the EUR 1.8 trillion investments from the NextGenerationEU Recovery Plan, and the EU's seven-year budget will finance the European Green Deal.

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Circular Economy Action Plan

A circular economy, which keeps resources in productive use for longer, is pivotal to the Green Deal. Addressing the whole product life-cycle, the Plan seeks to reduce consumption and double Europe's circular material use rate in the next decade by changing the way we produce and consume. Many actions are already in motion, such as new, revised or nascent regulatory frameworks for batteries, bio-based plastics, packaging and packaging waste, as well as strategies targeting sustainable products, textiles, sustainable construction materials, and the EU Taxonomy and environmental verification and labelling schemes (i.e. [ETV](#) and [EU Ecolabel](#)). Many of these actions make Europe more sustainable, and less dependent on imported resources.

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EU Biodiversity Strategy

We have a small but closing window to restore nature and guarantee what the [latest IPCC Report](#) calls a "liveable future", which takes into consideration the vulnerabilities, capacities and limits of the natural world and human societies to adapt to climate change. The Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 has long championed the protection of nature and sensitive ecosystems, but a radically different mindset is now needed to return nature's balance. Upcoming EU legislation is expected to start that healing process, restoring degraded ecosystems across the EU. Near-term targets and obligations will focus on natural carbon sinks and countering the impact of natural disasters. Revised EU rules on sustainable use of pesticides and nature restoration targets are expected in June 2022. The launch of Europe's '[3 Billion Tree](#)' planting pledge is a concrete example of EU actions to restore nature while improving the health and wellbeing of citizens.



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Zero Pollution Action Plan

Pollution is bad for the environment and terrible for our health. It is the largest environmental cause of many diseases and premature deaths. Children, the elderly and people with certain medical conditions and from lower socio-economic groups are the worst affected. It is also a major driver of biodiversity loss, and hampers ecosystem services. The Green Deal-sponsored Zero Pollution Action Plan wants to see air, water and soil pollution reduced to levels considered no longer harmful to health and natural ecosystems, creating a toxic-free environment, and all by 2050. A new chemicals strategy for sustainability, and new rules on industrial emissions are some of the latest initiatives in motion, while work is underway on revised lists of surface and groundwater pollutants, new policies on microplastics, stronger rules on air quality, and revised classification, packaging and labelling of hazardous substances.

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