

TO:

Frans Timmermans, Executive Vice-President Designate for the European Green Deal

Valdis Dombrovskis, Executive Vice-President for an Economy that Works for People

Paolo Gentiloni Commissioner for Economy

Cc: Cabinets; Ambassadors to the EU

**Subject: Public partnership and respect for the Aarhus Convention as preconditions for a green and healthy recovery**

Dear Vice-President Timmermans,

Dear Vice-President Dombrovskis,

Dear Commissioner Gentiloni,

We are writing to you to recall the importance of a European recovery that is transparent, transformative and inclusive. We are concerned that this is not happening, thus jeopardising the pursuit of key environmental and climate objectives of the European Union.

Member States are about to invest unprecedented amounts of EU public funds and resources through both the EU budget and Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF). These represent a key opportunity to fully realise the climate, energy and biodiversity objectives for 2030 envisioned by the European Green Deal. Only urgent action - and investments - can stop dangerous climate change and reverse nature destruction, creating much needed green jobs across the Union at the same time. The investment and reform decisions made today will therefore shape European economies for decades to come, proving decisive to rebuild our economy and deliver Europe's pathway towards climate neutrality.

Yet this will only be achieved with proper citizen and civil society involvement in defining the national plans' priorities, milestones and targets for bold investments and reforms, as well as scrutiny and oversight of the programming and implementation phases. [Preliminary assessments](#) of national plans have already revealed a worrying lack of ambition and other shortcomings in green investments using the recovery funds. In Poland, the draft national recovery plan is still not available, with the government refusing to publicly share any information about its contents. Meanwhile, Bulgaria plans to use its Green Bulgaria Pillar recovery funding for massive investments in energy and irrigation infrastructure, not complying with the priorities of the EU Taxonomy, and not meaningfully contributing to decarbonisation, coal phase or adaptation, while leaving only 0.8% of funding for nature protection projects.

Across the Union, the lack of public involvement and scrutiny in the development of Member State proposals is therefore seriously impacting the level of environmental and climate ambition and undermining the credibility and legitimacy of the whole process.

We acknowledge that the Commission has recently released a [new guidance document](#) to Member States which reflects the RRF triologue agreement. However, while this contains some additional references to consulting with the public and stakeholders, these are still far too weak and vague to facilitate any meaningful improvements. No guidance is provided on how the consultation process should be structured in accordance with existing EU law, or with the public participation requirements of the Aarhus Convention including financial and budgetary plans. Yet this will be of paramount importance to ensure transparency and effective civil society engagement across the Union.

The Recovery and Resilience Facility's main objective is to support the ecological transition: 37% of each Recovery and Resilience plan should be dedicated to protect the climate and stop nature destruction, additional structural and policy reforms should build the accordant enabling framework. The Aarhus Convention requires public participation for any plan or programme related to the environment, including financial and budgetary plans. We therefore strongly and urgently call on the Commission to release a clear and explicit list of public partnership guidelines to Member States, in line with its 'Rule of Law' commitments. In addition, we also ask for the following measures to also be adopted:

- Ask for mandatory SEA in all plans
- Ensure compliance with Aarhus Convention requirements
- Make sure the plans can be refused unless Member States can provide clear evidence of sufficient participation in their preparation
- Ensure the full access to stakeholder, CSOs and citizens to the plans in a timely manner, especially when the MS is reluctant to do so
- Make use of existing partnership structures, respectively establish national working groups, built on existing monitoring committees, with a mandate to monitor the quality of the process and to participate in the development of RRP

The European Commission promotes itself as a strong advocate for public involvement and partnership of EU funds, but we are not seeing these principles adequately reflected in the current planning process. Clarifying and promoting the application of the partnership principle would allow EU funding to be used as a powerful tool for driving the structural transformation of our economies towards climate neutrality.

As a matter of urgency, we would like to propose a meeting with the Commission in order to discuss these issues in greater depth. We remain at your disposal for moving this forward.

Yours sincerely,

Mark Martin  
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CEE Bankwatch Network

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