

## Common - Environmental issues: The Croatian Presidency and its support for the European Commission' s Green Deal

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### 【概要 : Summary】

Every six months, the presidency of the Council of the European Union rotates among the EU Member States. On 1st January 2020, Croatia took over the rotating Council Presidency until 30 June 2020. The Croatian presidency will focus on “a Europe that is developing, a Europe that connects, a Europe that protects, and an influential Europe”. During its presidency it will also have to deal with the post-Brexit treaty negotiations with the UK, the EU enlargement and the EU budget for the next seven years. Furthermore, the Council presidency will have to deal with the European Commission' s “European Green Deal” (COM(2019) 640 final), which aims at transforming the EU into a resource-efficient and competitive economy without net GHG emissions in 2050. Based on a new growth strategy, the EU should become climate-neutral by 2050. Regarding the environment and transport agenda for the Croatian presidency, the presidency intends to continue the fight against climate change and discuss on the main initiatives of the European Green Deal. The transition towards climate neutrality of the EU by 2050 and the protection of the marine environment against pollution are amongst the priorities of the Croatian EU Council Presidency in the field of the environment. The Croatian presidency is determined to continue the protection of the environment and the fight against climate change towards a sustainable Europe. It will also discuss the main initiatives of the European

Green Deal and focus on the establishment of a single European transport area, high quality and secure data infrastructure.

### 【記事 : Article】

#### 1. The Croatian Presidency and its goals for the EU

In the EU, the presidency of the Council of the European Union rotates among the EU member states every six months. On 1st January 2020, for the first time since joining the European Union in 2013, Croatia took over the rotating Council Presidency until 30 June 2020.

Under the motto “A Strong Europe in a World of Challenges”, the Croatian presidency presented the four main priorities of its presidency, which includes a Europe that is developing that connects, that protects and that is influential. Also issues related to the Brexit and EU enlargement will be among the priorities during Croatia' s presidency of the Council of the European Union. Furthermore, the actual amount of the next seven-year EU budget still needs to be established by the Council and then approved by Parliament. Agreeing the new seven-year programme has been complicated by, on the one hand, the appointment of a new Commission, and on the other hand, by time-consuming and complex issues such as the Brexit. After the UK' s withdrawal from the EU on 31 January 2020, the new relationship will have to be negotiated with the UK and this will most certainly

dominate the political environment in the first half of 2020.

Besides the work on the UK's orderly withdrawal from the European Union, the Croatian presidency will focus on an agreement on the new Multiannual Financial Framework for the EU, the organisation of the EU-Western Balkans summit on EU enlargement in Zagreb in May 6 and 7 2020, and on preparing the Conference on the Future of Europe. The Conference on the Future of Europe is a political body consisting of the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission. As a political body, the Conference is tasked to draft new EU laws and changes to the EU treaties. The Conference should prepare to determine new agreements, or amendments to the existing ones, on the future of European democracy during 2020-2022.

Considering the contents of the four main priorities of this presidency, under the first priority "A Europe that develops", the Croatian presidency intends to contribute to ensuring better conditions and possibilities for all European citizens through sustainable growth. It intends to fostering balanced regional development, creating a more satisfied society, enhancing the competitiveness and skills of the citizens and protecting the environment by combating climate change. Regarding "A Europe that connects", the Croatian presidency aims at taking the steps to creating a network economy, to achieve a European transport area, high-quality and secure data infrastructure and an integrated energy market. Regarding "A Europe that protects", the Croatian presidency intends to protect the citizens of the EU by supporting the development of a comprehensive and sustainable migration policy. A safer Europe will guarantee the freedom of every citizen as a pillar of a democratic society and internal security. Finally, Croatia will support all the efforts of the Union for taking a leading role on the international stage as "an influential Europe". The aim is to expand the EU's influence, to shape the global order, to eradicate poverty and to stimulate global development. Furthermore, Croatia has a concrete responsibility to its South-eastern neighbourhood to encourage reforms

and to ensure stability. These four themes are the priorities on which Croatia will be working during the next six months.

## **2. The European Commission's Green Deal and the Council's support for carbon neutrality by 2050**

On 11 December 2019, the new European Commission president Ursula von der Leyen presented the policies of the so-called "European Green Deal" (COM(2019) 640 final). It is a new growth strategy that aims at transforming the EU into a resource-efficient and competitive economy without net GHG emissions in 2050 and where economic growth is decoupled from resource use. While previously, the EU committed to reducing its emissions to 40% below 1990 levels by 2030, the European Green Deal raises the 2030 target to 50% reductions and sets the 2050 target at a 100% reduction of GHG emissions, meaning that the EU should become climate-neutral by 2050. By summer 2020, the Commission will present an impact assessed plan to further reduce the EU's GHG emissions.

Under the EU's Green Deal, the new Commission has already emphasised its intention to cleaning up the transport industry. The Commission will propose the necessary amendments to the Climate Law and the European Green Deal intends to extend the EU-ETS to the maritime sector and to reduce free allowances for airlines by 2021. Regarding the "zero-emission mobility", the Commission also plans to propose more stringent air pollutant emissions standards for combustion-engine vehicles. The Commission will assess the possibility of including road transport emissions in the EU-ETS and revise by June 2021 the legislation on CO2 emission performance standards for cars and vans. Thereby, the Commission intends to ensure a clear pathway from 2025 onwards towards zero-emission mobility. The EU transport system and infrastructure will have to prepare to support new sustainable mobility services that can reduce congestion and pollution, especially in urban areas. Automated and connected multimodal mobility and "Mobility as a Service" will play an increasing

role, together with smart traffic management systems. As a first reaction on the new European Commission's Green Deal, the European Parliament Committee on Transport and Tourism's Committee chair Karima Delli stated her disappointment on the scope and ambition of the measures presented. The Commission has not provided the phasing out principle of combustion engines, neither did it suggest measures to ban diesel cars. Furthermore, although the electric vehicles are considered becoming the backbone of the Commission's plans to achieve the target of green mobility, the Green Deal does not mention any extra effort to boosting alternative fuelling.

However, meanwhile, the European Council of EU Member States heads of state and government agreed to support the target of achieving carbon neutrality by 2050 with some exceptions at their meeting on 12 and 13 December 2019. The European Council took note of the Commission's Communication on the European Green Deal and recognised the need to put in place an enabling framework that benefits all Member States and encompasses adequate instruments, incentives and support. The EU leaders discussed climate change, the EU's long-term budget and the 2050 climate-neutrality target, among other issues. The European Council endorsed the objective of achieving a climate-neutral EU by 2050, in line with the objectives of the Paris Agreement. Furthermore, the European Council invited the Commission to report regularly on the environmental and socio-economic impact of the transition to climate neutrality.

However, one Member State, Poland, at this stage, remained against the 2050 climate-neutrality target and the European Council decided to come back to this issue in June 2020.

### **3. The Croatian Presidency's presentation to the European Parliament**

At a first round of hearings at the European Parliament's Committees from 20 to 22 January 2020, the Croatian Presidency explained its priorities for its Presidency of the Council to the European Parliament's Committees.

On 20 January 2020, the Croatian Environment and Energy Minister Tomislav Čorić stated that the Croatian priorities include the transition to climate neutrality by 2050 and the protection of biodiversity, among others. Emission reduction goals for 2030 and the climate law, funding, air and water quality and aviation emission reductions were some of the issues raised by MEPs.

Regarding the transport sector, the Presidency will start a debate on boosting the competitiveness and sustainability of the shipping sector and work on the Trans-European Transport Network and Connecting Europe Facility, according to the Croatian State Secretary of the Ministry of Sea, Transport and Infrastructure Josep Bilaver. Furthermore, rail passenger rights will be one of the priorities as well as the Eurovignette proposal. The European Parliament's MEPs urged the Croatian Presidency to restart the discussions on air passenger rights and the Single European Sky. Some MEPs also called on the presidency to ensure that boosting the air transport sector would not lead to an extra increase in emissions.

### **4. The Croatian Presidency's agenda for the transport sector and for supporting the European Green Deal**

Considering the Croatian Presidency's support for the Commission's European Green Deal, the presidency also intends to work towards the implementation of the Paris Agreement, with a transition to a low-carbon and circular economy, and on conservation of biodiversity, protection of the marine environment and efficient water and waste management. Legislative proposals on the matter are prioritised by the European Commission. Conservation of biodiversity, transition to climate neutrality of the EU by 2050 and the protection of the marine environment against pollution are the three priorities of the Croatian EU Council Presidency in the field of the environment. This Presidency is determined to continue the protection of the environment and the fight against climate change towards a sustainable Europe. The

Croatian Presidency will continue the fight against climate change and discuss on the main initiatives of the European Green Deal. The Croatian Presidency will also focus on the establishment of a single European transport area, high quality and secure data infrastructure. Under the priority “a Europe that connects”, the main areas of concern under this heading are the establishment of a single, European transport area, high quality and secure data infrastructure, an integrated energy market and stronger connections between EU citizens. The existing differences within the EU in terms of the quality of the infrastructure and the availability of transport, energy, and telecommunication and digital networks hamper its development and global competitiveness. During the Croatian Presidency some of the pending legislations could be negotiated, such as charging of heavy goods vehicles (Eurovignette) (2017/0114 COD), and the use of vehicles hired without drivers for the carriage of goods by road (2017/0113 COD), among others.

The European Commission president Ursula Von der Leyen stated she hoped, that the Croatian Presidency would address the implementation of the European Green Deal and the tackling of the climate change. The EU must set an exemplary course of action in the hope that other countries will follow suit in tackling climate change. Von der Leyen added that the cost of failure to act against climate change would be enormous and that the EU must make this vital investment for the future now.

## 5. Conclusion

The Croatian Environment and Energy Minister Tomislav Čorić emphasised at the hearing in the European Parliament’s Environment Committee that the Croatian priorities include the transition to climate neutrality by 2050 and the protection of the marine environment against pollution among others. The Croatian Presidency will also discuss the main initiatives of the European Green Deal. However, it has to be considered that the time frame is very limited and many important issues need to be worked

on in the six months of the Croatian presidency, like the negotiations with the UK on the post-Brexit relations. Therefore, the proper consideration of Green Deal and environment related topics could become difficult due to the time constraints and the accumulation of many important topics.

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