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Sustainability and the environment under Team Juncker

Greens/EFA co-presidents Philippe Lamberts and Rebecca Harms express concern sustainable development is an inconvenient afterthought

With the European Parliament set to vet the College of Commissioners proposed by president-elect Jean-Claude Juncker, Greens/EFA group co-presidents Rebecca Harms and Philippe Lamberts give a sceptical assessment of Team Juncker and its possible implications for EU policy in key areas like sustainable growth and the environment.



The European Union needs a strong Commission at this challenging time. The highly political structure proposed by Jean-Claude Juncker, with political heavyweights in strategic positions, ostensibly seemed like a promising attempt for better governance in Brussels; a move towards a stronger Commission that can hold its own and defend European interests vis-à-vis national governments. However, the political direction presented by president-elect Juncker is a source of concern and not what Europe needs in response to the challenges it is facing. While it is clear that this is a Commission that means business, it seems to be only concerned with the interests of big business. We have [written to the president-elect](#) to outline our concerns. Jean-Claude Juncker has proposed a Commission in which environmental protection will be a peripheral inconvenience, rather than a central priority. None of the 7 vice-presidents proposed by Juncker has been given a remit to ensure sustainable development or 'green growth'. Whether as regards the titles of their portfolios or the 'mission statements' they have been given by the president-elect, the role of these designated 'super-commissioners' seems to be to promote corporate interests, rather than sustainability and social justice. Europe's high standards of consumer protection, food safety, health and the environment are one of the major successes of the European Union and the envy of consumers and citizens around the

world. However, the remit of the 'first vice-president' is clearly to pick this apart under the guise of 'better regulation', a euphemism for libertarian deregulation. This may be music to the ears of big corporations but it is exactly the opposite of what the EU should be doing to reassure citizens who are already concerned about the excessive influence of the corporate lobby in Brussels. Nothing symbolises this corporate approach better than the nomination of Miguel Arias Cañete as commissioner for energy and climate action. Regardless of his now openly acknowledged links to the oil industry, Cañete (and the government of which he played a prominent part) has a bad track record, whether as regards promotion of coal or ambivalence to renewable energy. With just a year until the crunch UN climate summit in Paris, it is an outrage that he is being tasked with the responsibility for European climate policy. The proposal to merge the energy and climate change portfolios is a major concern. It is hard to see this as anything other than a further downgrading of the EU's commitment to climate action at a crucial juncture. It is clear that the EU's energy policy needs to be designed in a way that ensures it can help the EU meet its climate change goals. However, climate policy goes far beyond energy policy, and should not just be an afterthought for an energy commissioner. Another alarming element of Team Juncker is the proposal to merge the fisheries and environment portfolios, both more than full-time jobs for the previous respective commissioners. There is a real fear that this will lead to a dilution of the EU's commitment in both of these key areas. This Commission needs a vice-president with an explicit remit for sustainability and climate change. Commissioners-designate who have been revealed to have problems with conflicts of interest and political independence, such as Cañete, must be replaced or moved. Given the depressing gender imbalance in the proposed Commission College, these candidates must be replaced by women. In its scrutiny and appointment of the Commission, the European Parliament has a duty to European citizens to ensure their interest is defended. Tough hearings in the European Parliament lie ahead.

- [Read the letter to President-elect Juncker on sustainability](#)

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