



European Commission - Speech [Check Against Delivery]



Remarks by Executive Vice-President Timmermans on the Zero Pollution Action Plan

Brussels, 12 May 2021

Good afternoon everyone,

Commissioner **Sinkevičius** and I are very proud to present to you the Zero Pollution Action Plan.

As mentioned, we also discussed a new approach to the Blue Economy, which is actually an integral part of that. The climate crisis, pollution, and biodiversity loss, the threat of ecocide, they all threaten our marine environment and the long-term viability of the blue economy. The approach we set out is to develop a sustainable blue economy, and Commissioner **Sinkevičius** will come back to that extensively on Monday. I would encourage you to listen to him, because I think this is one of the most exciting things that I have been part of in the last couple of months.

Now for today: the Zero Pollution Action Plan. It is geared to bringing the way we live, produce, and consume within the boundaries the planet has set. Pollution determines how healthy and how long our lives will be. Zero pollution is at the heart of the Green Deal, closely connected with our strategies such as Farm to Fork and Biodiversity.

When we talk about being climate neutral, this is not just about being carbon neutral, but also having zero pollution. That is the only way we can truly become climate neutral and prevent the loss of up to one million species, which we risk doing now. So we urgently need to bring air, water, and soil pollution down.

By 2050, we want all to live in a toxic-free environment. There will still be some deposits, but they will have reached a level that no longer is harmful, neither for our health, nor for the planet.

This is important because pollution in the EU still leads to 1 out of 8 deaths. So, of every eight people dying, one is a result of pollution. Several cancers, heart, and respiratory diseases; they are all linked to pollution. With the most vulnerable in society, like always, suffering the harshest impacts.

Pollution in the EU and elsewhere is one of the five main drivers of the risk of ecocide. So it also contributes to the ongoing mass extinction of species. If we don't deal with this now, our children will have to deal with it, and that will cost a lot more and will be much more difficult.

To create a toxic-free environment, we have to look at all sources of pollution. The cars we drive, the way we farm the land, the pesticides we use, the way we heat, power and ventilate our homes, even the noise we still make. It impacts our health and our lives, but it also determines the fate of the species on which all life on earth depends.

We need to start understanding that if we talk about nature, we also talk about ourselves. There is no such thing as humanity at one side and nature at the other. We are a component of nature.

To give you an example, we want to reduce the health impact of air pollution by more than 55%, and protect biodiversity from air pollution in an extra 25% of our ecosystems. We want to lower the share of people chronically disturbed by transport noise by 30%, and cut in half the loss of nutrients, the use and risk of pesticides, and the sale of antimicrobials for farmed animals and in aquaculture. The action plan also set targets for plastic litter, microplastics, and residual municipal waste. Again, I leave the explanation also to Virginijus.

There is not one source of pollution, and there is not one solution. All our policies and upcoming legislative proposals must work towards achieving this zero pollution vision by 2050.

We need to connect all the dots, and that applies to every single policy area the Commission has responsibility for.

Our overall guiding principle is to avoid creating pollution. If pollution then becomes unavoidable, it has to be minimized, controlled, and where necessary cleaned up. Stricter enforcement will ensure that measures taken are also followed through.

This should also be a clear message to Member States and co-legislators: If you make a decision, and the decision needs enforcement, we will enforce. This is of extreme importance.

Before I hand over to Virginijus, I want to mention a few actions on specific sources of pollution:

- On air, we need to improve air quality, outside and indoors. Our actions will include a proposal to cap ammonia emissions.
- On noise, we will reduce noise pollution from transport by updating our rules for tyres, road vehicles, aircraft, and railways.
- On water, we need to reduce pollution from for example microplastics and pharmaceuticals.
- And on soil, we will focus amongst other things on identifying and cleaning up contaminated sites.

In conclusion, the faster we act, the better we ensure measures are implemented, the more chance we give the planet, and most of all ourselves, room to breathe again. I think this is extremely urgent.

Over to you Virginijus.

SPEECH/21/2467

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