

# What's in store for the Green Deal?

From the 'State of the EU' to the 2024 European Elections

RED FLAG

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Commission President Ursula von der Leyen gave the last State of the EU speech of this mandate on 13 September. The Green Deal featured very early on, and very prominently, in her speech. As expected, she highlighted the achievements of her Commission so far, and pledged to "finish the job". She also announced a number of new initiatives such as the Wind Power Package. Very significant was the announcement of an anti-dumping investigation into Chinese electric vehicles, something that is likely to trigger wider political discussions, both in Brussels and EU capitals.

**Although she made an attempt to speak to all mainstream parties, von der Leyen clearly leaned more towards the EPP when it comes to prioritising competitiveness over ambition in sustainability policy.** Notably, she did not clarify the Commission's stance on key pending proposals on climate targets, air quality, sustainable farming and chemicals policy, triggering criticism from centre-left MEPs. She underlined the importance of structured dialogue with industry, announcing the set-up of Clean Transition Dialogues. In a clear nod to the EPP, she explicitly mentioned farmers and praised their role in food security, announcing the establishment of a strategic dialogue on the future of agriculture in the EU.



## From the green imperative to a regulatory break

**The SOTEU confirmed an increasingly visible trend: the Green Deal is losing political momentum.** When it was proposed in December 2020, it was framed as the industrial strategy that would allow the EU to transition towards a climate-neutral economy. Four years later, the results are mixed. While several landmark initiatives have been adopted, the politics around the green agenda have proven to be more complicated than expected.

Unforeseen and very significant geopolitical developments (COVID-19, the war in Ukraine) have shifted priorities from the green imperative to the need to protect businesses and consumers. Political positioning ahead of the elections is also playing a role, with centre-right and centrist parties openly questioning green policy ambitions and calling for a regulatory break. Last but not least, Frans Timmermans' departure from the Commission means that the Green Deal has lost its most influential champion.



## Busy agenda, little momentum

**There is a significant part of the Green Deal that still needs to be completed.** Negotiations on crucial dossiers like the Net Zero Industry Act, the Electricity Market Design, the Gas Package, the Methane Regulation, the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive, the Ecodesign revision, the Critical Raw Materials Act, the Waste Shipment Regulation, the Packaging and Packaging Waste Regulation, the Air Quality revision, the Industrial Emissions Directive, and the Nature Restoration Law are all supposed to be finalised before the end of this mandate, and are therefore susceptible to sudden and unforeseen policy shifts driven by political campaigning. The same goes for regulatory files such as the re-authorisation of glyphosate, and the restriction of PFAS, which carry big socio-economic, and therefore political, significance.

Fresh proposals which were expected to be advanced during this mandate are in doubt. The landmark REACH revision has been repeatedly postponed, and any significant progress during this mandate is highly unlikely. Proposals on sustainable food systems and microplastics pollution are in doubt of even seeing the light of day.

Contrary to five years ago, campaigning for ambitious climate and environmental policies can turn out to be politically damaging. That is why **the final months of this mandate are likely to see those advocating for pragmatic and economically feasible policies gain the upper hand** not only in the Council of the EU, but also in the European Parliament.

## A year of transition and priority-setting

The European elections taking place next June will be a defining moment for the future of the Green Deal. As things stand, the mainstream parties' alliance supporting the European Commission is unlikely to change in the next mandate. What is likely to change are political balances across the fringes, with the right and far-right growing, at the expense of the Greens in particular. This might have an impact on green policies, as the axis is likely to shift to the right.

**The coming months will see intense political positioning, both from national and European parties, who will develop manifestos setting out political and policy priorities, but also from the wider Brussels stakeholder environment.** There will be ample opportunities for positioning and influencing the long-term EU policy agenda, as priorities for the next Commission mandate are discussed across a variety of fora and platforms. There two key intervention points in particular:

- **European parties' manifestos.** The manifestos represent the first milestone towards the five-year agenda of the new European Commission. The development of the manifestos is driven by officials from the secretariats of European parties, so engagement with them should be the key focus area. Influential MEPs / national party officials are also important targets as they often have an important role in defining priorities. Manifestos are usually adopted between six to three months ahead of the elections; this means that engagement should take place in the remaining months of 2023 in order to be effective.
- **Commission transition.** An important part of the transition within the European Commission takes place through handover briefs, prepared mostly by relevant DGs. These documents are usually quite influential in forming the position of new Commission cabinets on specific dossiers. Engagement with key officials in relevant DGs (in addition to new cabinets) can therefore be quite impactful, if done at the right time. The key intervention moment to influence the handover notes will be in Q2 2024, as DGs will start preparing the handover briefings. Another key moment will be immediately after the appointment of new Commission cabinets, likely to happen in early Q4 2024.

Organisations seeking to have their voice properly heard during the EU political transition will need to ensure they stand out from the crowds of stakeholders trying to influence the priorities of the next Commission.

**Integrated public affairs and strategic communication campaigns can make a real difference:** combining traditional engagement tactics with well-calibrated advocacy and communication assets, impactful social media campaigns, creative activations, and a strategic use of partnerships can ensure that a specific narrative reaches the centre of the political and policy discourse.



### About Red Flag

Red Flag is a multi-award-winning strategic communications and public affairs agency. We have mounted some of the strongest and most impactful EU affairs campaigns in recent years, engaging on topics including energy, plastics, chemicals, construction and packaging.

**Should you wish to discuss how Red Flag could support you in navigating the upcoming EU political transition and influencing the long-term policy agenda, please get in touch with Lorenzo Torti at [lorenzo.torti@redflag.global](mailto:lorenzo.torti@redflag.global).**