

Attacks on the **EU green agenda** are increasing in intensity and frequency. Recent high-profile examples, including President of the European People's Party (EPP) Manfred Weber, French President Emmanuel Macron, and Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo, are evidence of a growing political strategy aimed at paralysing the pace of transformative environmental policies. Europe must stand firm and resist deregulatory pressures, EEB Secretary-General Patrick ten Brink writes.

Latest calls for "regulatory breaks" in environmental regulation go beyond short-term vested interests. They are carving out political positions and narratives against [green policies](#) ahead of the 2024 European elections.

It is essential the espoused narrative is shown for what it is: an unfounded deregulatory push. Despite the efforts of this [European Commission](#) to move forward from the years of the market 'laissez-faire' and policy inaction, the echoes of deregulation are creeping back. This threatens the future of the EU: from citizens' health, jobs and livelihoods, to the trust of voters in the leaders and institutions designated to protect their people.

Pressing pause may sound like the right thing to some, but ironically this may erode the competitiveness of industries and activities they wish to promote.

Green Deal at stake

The European Green Deal and the potential for its successor during the next Commission risks being sacrificed in the high-level game of political point-scoring as the EU elections near, despite all the progress made and to be made.

The encroaching impacts of climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution impacts on health will not brake if EU policymakers take a pause. The crises will grow, and the social impacts will become ever more impossible to withstand while global competitors will advance. Years of experience have shown the market and voluntary commitments will not do it on their own, even with public subsidies. Regulation is needed for a levelled playing field that will catalyse innovations.

Can our health wait?

Though ready to be tabled this year, the revision of Europe's largest chemicals regulation has been delayed due to heavy pressure from the German chemicals lobby.

The REACH revision should expand the range of chemicals regulated and reduce our exposure to the most harmful chemicals. It should improve transparency, responsibility and good governance by supporting the "no data, no market" provisions. Who are these policymakers protecting when they oppose the requirements on manufacturers to reveal potential health risks posed by the products on the market?

Industry association CEFIC acknowledged in December 2022 that as many as 12,000

chemicals, present in 74% of consumer or professional products, have properties of serious health or environmental concern. Each of these chemicals represents not just a health risk, but an innovation and market opportunity for safe substitutes.

Pesticides in our water

The Sustainable Use of Pesticides Regulation (SUR) aims to reduce the use and risks by 50% by 2030. Yet lobbies are using food security concerns to put the brakes on its progress. Around 25% of European surface waters and rivers have been shown to exceed legal pollution thresholds. The number of separate pesticide substances in surface water ranges from ten to one hundred types in most EU Member States and, to cite an extreme case, was over two hundred in France in the case of groundwater.

Different models for crop protection exist, and protecting the model that poses major risks to health and the environment is hardly the most convincing strategy. Furthermore, it increases costs for water companies, undermines labour as well as harms farmers' production by killing the natural pollinators they rely on.

Agribusiness as usual

Last week, EU Agriculture's lawmakers voted for a full rejection of the EU Nature Restoration Law proposal. Lawmakers chose to ignore all scientific evidence showing that if we want to ensure food security in the long run, we need to restore nature.

The nature restoration law aims to create healthier, more resilient ecosystems that will also be more productive. Restoring ecosystems can help us deal with droughts, floods and heatwaves, which are even more likely under the climate crisis. The overarching obligation to restore 20% of the EU's land and sea by 2030 can be game-changing.

For the sectors those politicians purportedly seek to support, restoring nature will help ensure productive soils and marine ecosystems, and strengthen the resilience of forests to reduce risks of loss to invasive species or forest fires.

Politicians pushing against restoring nature are not fighting to protect farmers, foresters and fishers. They are not the heroes defending Europeans from higher prices. They are just fighting to defend a broken system that must be overhauled for the sake of us all, farmers, foresters and fishers included.

Progress or inertia

Deregulation brings us to the brink of the climate breakdown that scientists have been warning us about for decades. Good policy can instead drive innovation and competitiveness towards a brighter future.

Several stakeholders, including progressive industries, are calling for robust regulatory frameworks that steer their sectors towards an environmentally friendly, climate-neutral

and toxic-free market.

So who do we want to support: the industry mindful of today's challenges or yesterday's players calling for inertia?

Stopping regulation is the same as hoping that existing policies can solve the multiple crises we are faced with — and we all know that they are not enough. This isn't leadership, this is duping the public, and the public is not stupid.

[European leaders](#) and political parties should be united in the push for a safe operating space for humanity that respects environmental, social and climate justice. We must join forces to reject false arguments calling to brake on progress. It's time to push for a new EU Pact for our common future that embraces social justice and creates the conditions for the EU to have vibrant industries and prosperous societies.

Source: META EEB