



EDITORIAL

2014 was indeed an eventful year for Europe: European Parliament elections marked by euroscepticism, the start of a new European Commission, crisis in Ukraine, the non-ending economic recession accompanied by unemployment and increasing social inequality.

2014 was the year of mounting pressures and loss of environmental policies and laws in the EU: the [2030 climate and energy package](#); the [REFIT](#) programme of checks over the “growth potential” of important directives; the environmentally deficient new [Commission's Work Programme](#) for 2015; the mounting [business lobby pressures](#) for relaxation of EU environmental law; the loss of vital national laws and policies on nature conservation primarily in [Spain](#), [Greece](#) and [Italy](#); a “tsunami” of new oil and gas operations threatens iconic ecosystems in the Mediterranean Sea. This rollback is [not just a “domestic” problem for Europe](#). Given the role that the European Union has rightly acquired as a green policy leader in international negotiations, this retreat from pioneering environmental and sustainable development acquis is an issue of global dimensions. Flickers of optimism, such as the EU's position on the [post-2015 sustainable development agenda](#) need to be reinforced.

2014 was also a year of hope, as civil society achieved impressive public mobilisation on many environmental policy fronts: thousands signed petitions for conservation and oil-drill free zones in Italy's [Pantelleria](#) and Spain's [Canary](#) islands. Over 160,000 signed an Avaaz petition that was instrumental in stopping a [destructive coastal bill](#) tabled by the Greek Government, whereas the snap mobilisation of tens of thousands within just two days stopped the Parliament of Greece from voting a ridiculously destructive and legally dubious [forest bill](#). The way towards truly sustainable and living economies was also lit by paradigmatic policies and initiatives, such as [Portugal's green tax reform](#) and WWF Greece's [roadmap for a living economy](#) in the crisis stricken country.

Check out our [2014 timeline](#) for a quick roundup of a year marred by unsustainable policy responses to the crisis and brightened with remarkable civil society interventions and policy wins for living EU economies.

An eventful & inspiring 2014 is behind. A promising new year is here. Warm wishes for a happy & One Planet 2015!

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NEWS

NATURE & BIODIVERSITY

Public outcry stops Greek Parliament from voting anti-forest bill

As environmental rollback on the pretence of economic development has become political routine in Greece, a new bill submitted to Parliament in early December aimed to sanction a new set of illegal land uses and buildings, declassify burnt forest lands from special reforestation status and essentially abolish the most important forest protection legal tool: the forest maps.

The bill titled “Acts for contribution in land and cash – Land expropriation and other provisions” was submitted to the Parliament by Alternate Environment Minister Nikos Tagaras just four months after the voting of the controversial Law 4280/2014 on housing development within forests and woodlands. According to WWF Greece, the bill constituted the latest in a series of blows to legal certainty and clarity, as it is filled with tailor-made provisions that serve particular interests and sanction illegal land developments, whereas at the same time it contravenes settled case-law by the Council of State. An avalanche of last-minute amendments completed the picture of a cronyistic and legally insecure bill that was loaded with favours and ignored the rights of all law-abiding citizens who respect the environmental commons. One specific amendment caused a storm of angry comments: three MPs from the region of Attica proposed the freezing of financial penalties and demolition acts for illegal buildings within forests.

According to WWF Greece, the bill was meant to offer political favours in politically tense times: it was hastily debated only a few days before the failed vote at the Parliament for a new President of the Republic, which eventually led to the dissolution of the Government and the snap national elections of 25 January 2015.

A campaign launched by WWF Greece targeting the bill proved unexpectedly successful: highlighting its unquestionable legally uncertain and obscure character, the environmental organisation built a strong case about the absence of sustainable development potential and the mockery of all law-respecting citizens. Through mass public appeals calling on citizens to directly address MPs, post to social media and sign a petition launched and promoted by Avaaz.org, tens of thousands were mobilised within just two days. The first 41.000 signatures were handed to all MP mailboxes on the first day of the debate at the Plenary. At the final debate of Saturday December 20th, strong objections were voiced by many ruling party MPs. As a result, Minister Nikos Tagaras withdrew the most controversial provisions, improved many others and rejected a series of particularly problematic amendments (including the one submitted by the MPs from Attica).

Using the economic crisis as excuse for the weakening of environmental legislation and policy has become particularly intense during the past two years in Greece. Armed with the policies and legal changes stipulated in the structural adjustment programme, many ministries have launched a relentless offensive targeting environmental legislation relevant to their policy domains. The Ministry for Environment, Energy and Climate Change in particular has embarked in a systematic effort to strip legislation on forests, impact assessment, spatial and urban planning of vital environmental safeguards. In the same time, the notoriously complex Greek legal corpus is becoming increasingly obscure and hard to interpret.

Read more: [WWF Greece](#), [Hellenic Parliament](#) (both in Greek), [CrisisWatch](#).

CLIMATE & ENERGY

EU fails expectations as global climate policy leader in UN international talks

Procrastination in crucial climate policy decision-making was the outcome of the 20th UN Conference of the Parties on Climate Change, at the close of most likely the hottest year ever recorded. The plan finally agreed at the Lima international talks on climate change (1-14 December) paves a hard way to the 21st Conference of the Parties, which will be held in Paris from 30 November to 11 December 2015: extended by two days, due to intense disagreements over who should take the burden of cutting greenhouse emissions and financing climate change policies in developing economies, the Lima Call for Climate Action is a rather vague call for national commitments, which in essence postpones difficult decisions for later.

On the positive side, the Lima agreement marks the first time all states agreed to cut emissions. The landmark U.S.-China Joint Announcement on Climate Change of November 11th was indeed a catalyst in doing away with doubts about the urgent need for a global deal at the Paris COP21. However, it was not enough to curb the rigidity of states in agreeing to the necessary policies and responsibilities for the needed emissions reductions.

The EU's contribution to the aim for a good global climate deal was disappointingly weak: the anemic [2030 energy and climate policy framework](#), which was agreed in October 2014, failed to send a strong and clear signal worldwide before the critical, upcoming climate negotiations leading to COP21.

Read more: [Lima Call for Climate Action](#), [WWF](#), [ENDS](#)

GOVERNANCE 2015 Commission Work Programme marks serious environmental rollback

Fears that the new European Commission plans to scrap important policy initiatives in the fields of air quality and waste management have come true: the [2015 Commission Work Programme](#) (CWP 2015) includes the withdrawal of the proposed new directive on [waste management](#) and its replacement with a new one. It also fails to clarify the fate of the proposed revision of the [National Emissions Directive](#). The work plan also includes “fitness checks” for the Ecolabel & EMAS Regulations (results expected in 2015) and the Natura 2000 Directives 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora and 2009/147/EEC on the conservation of wild birds (due by 2016).

In an open letter addressed to the European Commission’s Vice-President Frans Timmermans, the [Green 10](#) condemn the Commission’s decision to withdraw and retable the proposal on waste management and to create confusion about the air quality package.

Ariel Brunner, Birdlife Europe’s Head of EU Policy and current chair of the Green 10, stated: “*This exercise undermines the Commission’s credibility. In trying to tame some of its critics, the Commission seems to be faithfully executing the ‘kill list’ developed by powerful industry lobby group, BusinessEurope, and then saying it will retable the air quality and waste proposals at a later stage. For a body that prides itself on delivering ‘better regulation’, this is spectacularly inefficient.*”

Read more: [European Commission](#), [WWF EU](#), [CrisisWatch](#)

WHAT’S HOT?

Policy highlights

1. European Commission, Public Opinion: [Standard Eurobarometer 82](#) (December 2014)

Notwithstanding the assertions of the [new Eurobarometer](#) that following the European Elections, trust in the EU has gained ground and the new [Juncker Commission provides a breath of fresh air](#), citizens’ confidence remains low, especially when compared to the [72nd Eurobarometer](#) that followed up on the elections of 2009: 37% trust in the European Union in December 2014 (+6% since pre-election Eurobarometer 71), compared to 47% in [September 2009](#).

2. European Commission, ECFIN: [Post-Programme Surveillance for Portugal. Autumn 2014 Report](#) (December 2014)

“Staff from the European Commission (EC), in liaison with ECB staff, visited Lisbon between 28 October and 4 November under the first post-programme surveillance review. The mission was coordinated with the IMF’s post-programme monitoring mission and staff from the European Stability Mechanism (ESM) participated in meetings of relevance to their Early Warning System. This report gives an overview of the main findings of the mission and of the challenges faced by Portugal.”

3. European Commission: [Questions and Answers: the 2015 Work Programme](#) (16 December 2014)

Media– Web – Publications

- ! [Is it different this time? The Commission’s 2015 work programme](#), by Steve Pears | EU Law Analysis (16 December 2014)

“Politically speaking, the Commission could try to claim some legitimacy to withdraw these proposals if they had mentioned during Jean-Claude Juncker’s campaign for the Commission Presidency, either during the European Parliament elections or when he was asking for a majority of the Parliament (and a qualified majority in the European Council) to approve him. Alternatively, these withdrawals might be legitimate if the other Commissioners had stated their intention to withdraw them in their hearings before the European Parliament. But it can hardly be claimed that withdrawal of proposals on waste or air pollution were a central feature of Juncker’s, or the Commission’s, campaign to be appointed.

Some of today’s withdrawals are supposedly not permanent, because the Commission has announced its intention to propose replacement measures next year. But it’s not absolutely certain that the Commission will keep this promise. Others are contingent, because the Commission has given the legislators a deadline to discuss a possible deal, failing which it will withdraw its proposal. It’s an interesting strategy, which will

empower the half of the legislature that is reluctant to consider these proposals (usually the Council), at the cost of the other half (usually the European Parliament)."

! [Developing countries slam EU silence on climate finance](#), by Wojciech Kość | ENDS (16 December 2014)

"Developing countries have criticised the EU for pushing for many decisions on climate finance to be deferred until 2015 at last week's international climate talks."

! [Scrapping of environmental plans 'alarming'](#), by Klaus Teffer | euobserver (12 December 2014)

"The commission is due to present its so-called working programme next week, but a draft of the 2015 legislative programme was leaked on Thursday (11 December).

The same day, the regional director of BirdLife Europe wrote an open letter on behalf of 10 environmental groups to commission vice-president Frans Timmermans, who is in charge of "better regulation".

! [FTT negotiations fall short of 2015 target](#) | Euractiv (9 December 2014)

"Diplomats from 11 EU member states had hoped to come to an agreement on the future European tax on financial transactions by today, 9 December. But talks failed due to disagreements over how the tax should be collected."

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