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To:

Amb. Torbjörn Haak, Deputy Permanent Representative of Sweden to the EU
Virginijus Sinkevičius, European Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries
César Luena, MEP, Rapporteur on the Nature Restoration Law

Brussels, 7 June 2023

Open letter

Ambitious and enforceable urban greening targets for healthier cities

The current biodiversity loss is unprecedented and the pressure on natural habitats is increasing. According to the [most recent figures](#), wildlife populations have plunged by an average of 69% between 1970 and 2018.

Urban areas are among the places where the reduction of biodiversity is critical with clear consequences for its inhabitants. As cities are dependent on healthy ecosystems within and around them, the loss of natural habitats greatly reduces their resilience. [Research](#) published by the Barcelona Institute for Global Health in 2021 showed that 62% of the European population lives in areas with less green spaces than recommended and [nearly half of the EU population projected to live in urban areas by 2050](#).

The path for renaturing cities for the next decades is therefore clear, biodiversity loss must be halted, and green spaces increased to restore natural habitats in urban and densely populated areas.

The European Commission has envisioned renaturing of cities when publishing its [proposal for a Regulation on nature restoration](#) (the Nature Restoration Law). In particular, Article 6 of the proposal would mandate Member States to halt the net loss of urban green spaces by 2030, and increase the green spaces in cities by 3% in 2040 and 5% by 2050, compared to the area of green spaces in 2021. The European Parliament, in the [draft report of its rapporteur](#), MEP César Luena, suggested to further increase those objectives to 4% and 6% respectively. We welcome this vision.

A significant increase of urban green spaces will support the restoration of natural habitats for pollinators, insects and birds, the return of biodiversity in cities as well as the crucial ecosystem services they provide. Above biodiversity, greening cities reduce [air, water and noise pollution](#), and improve citizens' physical and mental health. Greening the built environment will also have a key role to play for climate mitigation and in supporting urban areas to adapt to a changing climate and extreme weather events.

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This letter, co-signed by 30 organisations from 19 countries, calls on European policy makers to support the inclusion of ambitious and enforceable urban greening targets in their respective positions on the Nature Restoration Law. If well defined, urban greening targets can boost the systematic integration of vegetation into urban planning, including in public spaces, infrastructure, and in the design of buildings their roofs and facades.

The introduction of urban green infrastructures will be supported by European citizens. We should not forget the lockdowns due to the Covid-19 pandemic. During those difficult times, we all learned about the importance of access to nature and green spaces for our mental health and wellbeing. Increasing urban green spaces is also key to support other EU's energy and climate policies. For example, biosolar installations, combining vegetation and solar panels, increase the efficiency and the electricity output of those renewable installations, contributing to the goals of the REPowerEU plan.

We strongly believe that a clear European framework built around mandatory and quantifiable targets will ensure that no city is left behind in the necessary transformation from grey to green.

We hope you will support the inclusion of urban greening targets within the Nature Restoration Law. These will catalyse investment and incentivise planning in the long-term allowing to restore biodiversity in European cities and deliver healthier, wealthier and more beautiful cities for the good of their inhabitants and many future generations to come.

Thank you for your consideration.

Your sincerely,

