

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am welcoming you from the EUREF Campus in Berlin, which is a wonderfully vibrant “place of the future”, where research is being conducted on the future energy grid, mobility and zero-emission houses. There is hardly a better venue for this conference and the focus of our discussion. I hope that the spirit of this place comes alive for you virtually as well.

We are meeting today to discuss the European Green Deal, the EU’s pact for the future. And when we talk about the future, we have to make sure that “the future” is involved – in other words, young people. This is why my ministry organised a youth camp before this conference. I would like to thank the more than 30 youth delegates who participated from over a dozen European countries. Your involvement and commitment is very important to me. Today is about your opinions and concerns. The success of Fridays for Future shows that involvement really does pay off.

The European Commission has sent a strong message of hope with the European Green Deal. Europe wants to become the first climate-neutral continent. The German government has also taken steps in the same spirit. In Germany, our aim is to be climate neutral by 2050. This target is now binding for the first time in climate change legislation that I introduced. We also reached an agreement for the phase-out of coal power, adopted carbon pricing and are investing in rail and e-mobility. In other words, we are on the right track.

The European Green Deal and our climate package were launched last year – before the coronavirus spread around the world. We are all aware that the COVID-19 pandemic shifted our priorities this year. But the major challenges and tasks we face have not changed – climate change, species extinction and the large-scale destruction of ecosystems. They are compounded by migration, poverty, nationalism and threats to social cohesion.

As a result, it was only logical for the EU heads of state and government to adopt a special programme totalling 750 billion euros. Their aim is for Europe to emerge stronger from the current crisis and to prepare Europe to meet the challenges of the future. Environmental protection and climate action must play a central role in these

efforts. Innovative and environmentally friendly technologies are the key to overcoming the crisis, for example hydrogen technology, e-mobility and highly efficient building technology. The European course is set for sustainable recovery and the implementation of the European Green Deal.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I also regard implementation of the European Green Deal as the core responsibility of the German Council Presidency by the end of the year. It involves all areas of policy including industry, finance, agriculture, transport, urban planning and energy. Many Commission initiatives address this too. To mention a few examples:

- the Sustainable Europe Investment Plan and the Just Transition Fund,
- the Circular Economy Action Plan,
- the Farm to Fork strategy,
- the announced Zero-Pollution strategy
- and of course the European Climate Law and the proposal for a new reduction target of at least 55 percent by 2030.

The European Green Deal combines policy areas such as biodiversity conservation with the protection of human health. One of the lessons from the coronavirus crisis is that diseases can be transmitted more easily from animals to humans when natural habitats are destroyed.

This wide range of issues shows that we have to think outside the box, also at this conference. Environmental policy always has to be socially responsible and fair. It requires new networks to be created, new approaches to be adopted and new alliances to be forged.

And this is exactly the added value of the European Sustainable Development Network: informal dialogue within a growing network. We all benefit, paving the way for successful environmental protection and climate action.

I thank everyone who has actively participated. I hope that in 2022 we will be able to celebrate the 20th anniversary of the ESDN in style – and hopefully meet again in person next year.

I wish everyone an interesting conference with new insights and I look forward to our discussions. Thank you.