

Introduction

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It is now clear that we are in a condition of planetary emergency: the interconnected crises of biodiversity loss, pollution, resource depletion, degradation of ecosystems and climate change – caused to a great extent by unsustainable production and consumption – require immediate global action.

The acceleration and interaction of these phenomena, as indicated by science, is causing irreversible damage, with economic and social consequences and aggravation of poverty and inequalities, since the poor have fewer opportunities and economic resources to cope with and adapt to environmental shocks. However, together with efforts towards sustainable production and consumption patterns, nature-based solutions can deliver multiple benefits across these challenges, and are integral to tackling these issues.

The scientific community has confirmed that the past decade was the hottest ever recorded globally, underlining that there is still time to tackle the threat, if actions are taken swiftly and decisively.

The actions taken collectively in 2021 will very likely shape at least the next decade of climate actions. Since “the next decade” is all that is left to stop the climate crisis and to promote the energy transition, the stakes could not be higher.

I would like to emphasize the importance of science in our shared efforts towards achieving internationally agreed climate and environment targets. It is in effect crucial to raise awareness and understanding through scientific investigation in order to find proper solutions to major economic, social and environmental challenges and to ensure sustainable development. Since no country can reach these goals on its own, international scientific cooperation contributes not only to scientific knowledge but also to create peaceful relations and solidarity.

In this regard, the key role of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in assessing the science related to climate change comes to mind. As we know, its establishment stemmed from the need to improve the understanding of climate change and related phenomena. Acting as an interface between the scientific world and politics, it provides policy-makers with invaluable

scientific assessments on climate change, as well as its implications, impacts and potential future risks: key elements that help politicians to take accurate decisions at national and international level.

It is thanks to the latest scientific reports that we know for a fact that 2021 will be a key year in the fight against climate change, and Italy, as G20 Presidency and partner of the UK for COP26, intends to work strenuously to ensure the success of the negotiation processes, reaffirming and strengthening its role as a virtuous, ambitious and supportive country. This will be a testing ground for multilateralism, as well as for our country's ability to lead by promoting a recovery based on the ecological transition, conscious of its great potential to generate wealth, well-being and employment.

We believe indeed that recovery offers a unique opportunity for transformative change as a global community: while restoring the health of our economies, we need to invest in the health of our planet and to put people and nature at the heart of our political leadership.

This is why with our G20 agenda, we focus on the enhancement of those public goods – People, Planet, Prosperity, which are a condition for preventing and addressing shocks like the ones we are experiencing.

We have to imagine a new development model, and tackling climate change will be the core of these efforts.

The nexus between climate and energy is crucial to advance towards these three priorities. Building back better requires advancing towards universal clean energy access and centring all our policy actions on people.

This is why we are holding, for the first time ever, a Joint Energy and Climate Ministerial meeting. The Ministerial focuses on series of common priorities, seizing the opportunities offered by innovative technological solutions, the role of sustainable cities and the alignment of global financial flows towards a green, sustainable recovery that will be key in ensuring prosperity and environmental sustainability while eradicating energy poverty.

Moreover, the G20 Environment Ministers Meeting offers the opportunity to tackle issues regarding the protection of biodiversity, ecosystems and oceans and seas.

Specifically, the Environment Ministerial is an important moment to facilitate negotiations and push for ambitious positions for the new post-2020 Biodiversity framework that could be defined at the 15th Biodiversity (CBD) COP in Kunming. The Ministerial has a specific focus on protected areas, oceans and seas, which are fundamental to life on our planet and to our future, as well as being an important source of biodiversity and playing a vital role in the climate system and in carbon and water cycles.

As we know, oceans and seas supply us with oxygen to breathe, they absorb over a quarter of the total carbon dioxide that we produce and they contribute to food security and to the creation of decent jobs and livelihoods. With this in mind, Italy will step up effective actions to expand the Marine Protected Areas by as much as 30%, responding to the challenges arising from climate change and pollution, and supporting a sustainable blue economy. We will also promote commitments aimed at the reduction of emissions deriving from the maritime sector, focusing not only on greenhouse gases, but also on other air-polluting substances, which are harmful to the environment and to our health.

As the leading global voice on the environment, UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme) plays a key role by inspiring, informing, and enabling nations and peoples to improve their quality of life without compromising that of future generations. Its commitment to facilitating the transition to low-carbon societies, improving the understanding of climate science, facilitating the development of renewable energy and raising public awareness is crucial in combating climate change.

As mentioned, this year we have an important role in view of COP26, which the UK chair in partnership with Italy. With COP26, we hope that 2021 will be the year that sees the full and effective implementation of the Paris Agreement, as well as a driver for countries to elaborate and implement ambitious national climate commitments in the short term and the successful transition to climate neutrality in the long term, anchored in concrete instruments for reducing emissions.

As partner for COP26, Italy is hosting a series of significant preparatory events to the Conference, including the Pre-COP in Milan, the preparatory meeting of ministers traditionally held about a month before the COP, with the aim of offering those ministers who represent the main negotiating parties an opportunity to informally discuss key political aspects, thus providing a very relevant step on the path to a successful COP.

Italy is also hosting an event in Milan called *Youth4Climate: Driving Ambition*, which will be linked to the Pre-COP. The event will give young people from around the world the opportunity to draw up concrete proposals, which will be taken into account in the pre-COP and COP26. We have decided to unite the two events, as we deem it crucial to promote the engagement of young generations in order to channel youth mobilization in positive ways.

Furthermore, in October we are hosting a high-level ministerial outreach event in Rome on environmental and climate challenges in Africa, *Incontri con l'Africa*.

In our vision, these events are an opportunity to broaden the perspective of the theme of ambition to all the actors involved in the global climate action: in addition to young people, civil society, the business world, the academy, local authorities and regional institutions.

This holistic approach is indeed a factor behind the recent establishment in Italy of the Ministry of Ecological Transition, which was created in order to promote an integral ecological transition of the Country. Merging the competences for the environment, climate and energy sectors further strengthens the centrality of the energy-climate nexus as a qualifying aspect of Italy's foreign policy, in a pivotal year for Italy at the international level with regards to climate change.

These developments at the national and EU level, with the ongoing work on the Recovery and Resilience Plans, reinforce our resolve at the international level, as G20 Presidency and partner of the UK in the COP26, to make this year a real turning point for all countries towards more sustainable, green and inclusive economies and societies.