



To: The Executive Board

Date

15-03-2021

Subject

EUR Carbon-neutrality by 2024 - right of initiative

**By email**

Our reference

UR/MH/38431

Your reference

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Enclosure

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Dear members of the Executive Board,

In response to your letter from 15 December 2020 and based on further discussions in meetings on 26 January and 1 February 2021, we feel the need to express our concerns regarding the sustainability efforts at EUR in written form. The aim of this letter is twofold. On the one hand, we will elaborate on the University Council's concerns and open questions about this topic. On the other hand, we will propose concrete and workable proposals that will facilitate the sustainability transitions at our university. While we appreciate the informal meetings with the Executive Board (EB), Programme manager Sustainability Mariecke van der Glas, and other policy makers, we would like to request a concrete and detailed reply to the points raised in this letter. This will serve transparency and continuity, as it documents progress, issues and open questions for our Erasmian community and future councils with new members.

The Erasmus University has openly pledged carbon neutrality by 2024 in the Rotterdam Climate Agreement. Although EUR has made this promise in our public, it seems like our actions have been lagging. This impression results from several observations.

To begin with, the reports of our CO<sup>2</sup> emissions in the past two years are missing. Additionally, calculations of how we obtain certain numbers are missing. For the EB to track its progress in terms of sustainability and for the UC to fulfil its function as control body, it is vital that we have a comprehensive and up-to-date overview of where we as EUR stand in terms of our sustainability ambitions. Therefore, we ask you to have these evaluations done as quickly as possible and share the reports of 2019 and 2020 with us by the end of April.

Since we do not possess the reports of the most recent years, we would like the Executive Board to reflect on the most recent figures. The last report available (2018) indicated that CO<sup>2</sup>emissions have

increased by 22% compared to the year before. Moreover, we as university generate minimal levels of renewable energy ourselves. Instead, we currently seem to reduce our carbon footprint on paper by compensating for our emissions. Unfortunately, this only happens for less than 8% of total emissions. Compensation happens through purchasing gas ovens in African countries. Even if we disregard the fact that we compensate our own CO<sup>2</sup>emissions by putting others to fossil fuels, we compensate less than 8% of our total emissions. These numbers do not seem promising, and we would like to see more recent and future statistics that paint a different picture. We therefore ask the Executive Board: Where do, we as EUR, exactly stand in terms of our sustainability ambitions? Do you believe we are on track to be carbon neutral by 2024?

Multiple times the previous EB turned down a proposal for a central sustainability office, even though most of our peer universities have such offices. Instead, EUR has clearly deprioritized sustainability by so far dedicating only a single FTE to bring our current emissions of roughly 17,000 tons per year (according to the “Roadmap Sustainable Campus”) down to a net-zero carbon footprint in 2024. As we know, best practices in sustainability are to front-load CO<sup>2</sup>reductions, as it is well-recognised that it is much easier to tackle low-hanging fruit than the difficult structural changes. In order to realise the many policies, proposals and other changes needed for our sustainability ambitions, we need not only financial, but also the personnel resources. We ask this EB to be accountable to our University’s commitment to the Rotterdam Climate Agreement and create a Sustainability Office to ecologically modernise every aspect of our university according to the timeline we have already committed to.

Furthermore, since the decentralised structure of EUR provides faculties with great autonomy and responsibility, we consider it of utmost importance to install Sustainability Officers within all faculties. Having a university-wide network of experts who are accountable for realising our sustainability ambitions would ensure steady progress both on central and decentral level. We see the same approach employed for the topic of Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) at EUR, where a Chief Diversity Officer on central level works together with faculty-based Diversity officers (and is supported by a D&I office; see previous point). As both D&I and sustainability are crucial for a future-proof university, we must ensure that adequate personnel resources are available to work on these themes.

We therefore ask the Executive Board: Will you facilitate the implementation of Sustainability Officers at all faculties of EUR? And if not, how do you justify installing such a system for the topic of D&I, but not for sustainability?

Finally, we would like to propose concrete changes that we believe will not only have a positive impact on our ecological footprint but also raise awareness among our community about this important

topic. Many of these proposals were forwarded from the Erasmus Sustainability Hub, which we explicitly support and appreciate. We would like to receive a response to each of these proposals, addressing when and how we can achieve their realisation.

1. Make Ecosia the default search engine on all EUR computers. Ecosia has planted more than 100 million trees since 2009, funded by the income through search adds. Other prestigious universities, such as the University of Glasgow, Royal Holloway, KU Leuven etc. have already made the switch and we believe that EUR should follow.
2. Develop a coffee mug policy encouraging students to use reusable coffee mugs and making sure that single-use plastic mugs or mixed-plastic cups are reduced to a minimum. Students and staff who possess their own cup should get a QR sticker at different cafeterias. When getting coffee, one can scan this sticker to receive a discount, further encouraging the use of reusable cups.
3. Develop a printer policy encouraging students to only print what they need and ensure that printer settings are defaulted to print double sided to save paper.
4. Limit the use of "Phantom energy" by turning off power in various areas of the building or on campus when not in use or not needed (e.g., PC screens, lights).
5. Provide plant-based milk in the coffee machines.
6. Institute a robust university-wide flying policy similar to University of Groningen, positing that destinations which can be reached in less than 6 hours by train or lay within 500 km of Rotterdam should be travelled to by train. The recent implementation of such a policy by the Erasmus School of History, Culture, and Communication serves as another excellent example to promote more sustainable travel practices.
7. Implement a policy similar to University of Utrecht, in which outgoing exchange students to locations within Europe can reimburse their tickets if they decide to travel to their exchange location by train. Maximum compensation per student should be 185 euros (the price of a four-day interrail ticket)
8. Learn from Radboud University as a case study and explore possibilities to use thermal energy on campus.

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We are confident that the proposals in this letter are useful mechanisms to contribute to EUR's ambition to become carbon neutral by 2024! We look forward to your reaction and our future collaboration to make EUR a truly sustainable university.

Please contact us if you have any further questions.

Kind regards,

H.B. van den Berg  
Chair University Council

A.M. Harmsen  
Clerk University Council

ValidSigned by Hans van den Berg  
on 16-03-2021

ValidSigned by Machteld Harmsen  
on 15-03-2021