

Warsaw, April 2025

## **Avoiding the mistakes of the 1990s: Poland must fight to secure just transition funding for coal regions**

Dear Prime Minister,

Poland requires dedicated funding for the just transition in the 2028–2034 Multiannual Financial Framework – at least matching the current EU budget allocation of approximately PLN 17 billion. The extension of this support will be determined during the upcoming budget negotiations, where the Polish government holds a strong position. The Polish Presidency of the Council of the European Union offers an additional opportunity to advance this agenda. However, should the Polish government fail to secure these funds, millions of Polish citizens risk being pushed into social and economic decline. We therefore urge the Council of Ministers to take decisive action to obtain a funding mechanism dedicated exclusively to Polish regions in transition.

Over the past decade, the share of coal in electricity generation has fallen rapidly – from 82 per cent in 2015 to 57 per cent in 2024. According to the draft update of Poland's national energy and climate plan, this figure is expected to fall further to only 22 per cent by 2030. This current favourable trend requires just transition allocations to be maintained. Without them, we risk repeating the mistakes that led to the social disintegration experienced by regions such as Wałbrzych in the 1990s. The Polish government's response to reducing coal mining and combustion, which reflects global economic trends, must be accompanied by targeted support for local communities. To this end, the Just Transition Fund is a guarantor not only of their future, but also of social stability and the democratic rule of law.

The Just Transition Fund is a key instrument of EU cohesion policy, designed to reduce regional disparities by supporting communities most impacted by the planned reduction in the extraction and combustion of the country's coal resources. For instance, the Silesian Voivodeship alone has received more than PLN 9 billion from the Fund, supporting investments in small and medium-sized enterprises, youth and adult education, job creation, and the redevelopment of post-mining areas. Other beneficiary regions include Bełchatów, Wałbrzych, Eastern Wielkopolska, and Western Małopolska.

Regrettably, recent communications from the European Commission indicate that the new EU budget may consolidate existing instruments into a single fund, which would spell the end for the Just Transition Fund in its current form. We are also alarmed to see that the priorities proposed for the new programming period do not explicitly include measures to support these coal regions in transition. In light of this situation, it is crucial that Poland and other countries in the region take concerted action. Without support for the coal phase-out, these regions are likely to experience monumental social and economic challenges.

The Polish Presidency of the Council of the European Union could prove pivotal in achieving this goal. The Council of Ministers should seize this unique opportunity to place the continuation of the Just Transition Fund firmly on the agenda of intergovernmental discussions. The adoption of the Council's conclusions on cohesion policy during the Polish presidency represents a chance to advocate for continued and targeted funding of the just transition.

Such engagement may now be the most effective way of shaping the next budget in a way that is truly accountable to citizens. Poland is currently the largest beneficiary of the Just Transition Fund, a resource that must remain available in the years to come, particularly because Poland began its energy transition from a different starting point than western Europe and will require more time to phase out coal.

Providing substantial financial support for a just transition also complements the EU's broader policy goals. Strong, resilient Polish coal regions that develop new specialisations and promote entrepreneurship will directly contribute to the EU's competitiveness agenda. These measures are also essential for the effective implementation of the Policy for the Economic Promotion of Poland, adopted by the Council of Ministers in February of this year.

There is a growing public awareness in Poland that the government's move away from coal is necessary. The same can be applied to understanding the principles of a just transition – a process that coal regions must be empowered to undertake. Failure to support these communities would not only waste an opportunity to improve lives, but also undermine the effectiveness of government-led initiatives.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

To meet these pressing challenges, the Polish Green Network, together with the signatories of this letter, recommends the Polish government take the following actions:

1. develop and clarify the Polish government's proposal on the Just Transition Fund within EU cohesion policy, clearly indicating the need to continue this crucial financial instrument for coal regions;
2. advocate for its inclusion in the Council's conclusions on cohesion policy;
3. integrate this position into mainstream EU budget negotiations;
4. identify and engage allies among other Member States to support this position and involve them actively in the EU's decision-making process; and
5. leverage the negotiating influence of the Polish government in the EU legislative process, as well as its soft power – following the example of Professor Jerzy Buzek's pivotal involvement in securing the Fund during previous budget negotiations.

In light of the above, we respectfully request the Prime Minister's response to our letter. With the Polish Presidency of the Council of the European Union approaching its halfway point, we emphasise the urgent need for the Polish government to take swift and decisive action. At the same time, we wish to express our readiness – as an expert organisation – to collaborate closely and provide substantive support throughout the development and implementation of these much-needed measures.

Yours sincerely,

Joanna Furmaga, President of the Polish Green Network

Individuals and organisations supporting the position expressed in the letter:



Radosław Gawlik, EKO-UNIA Ecological Association

Krzysztof Gorczyca, Society for Nature and People

Andrzej Kassenberg, Institute for Sustainable Development

Maciej Kozakiewicz, New Energy Area Cluster (Kleszczów)

Bartosz Kwiatkowski, Frank Bold Foundation

Jolanta Pacura, Kresu Culture Foundation / Belchatow 5.0

Mateusz Piotrowski, Association for a Healthy Europe

Aleksander Śniegocki, Reform Institute Foundation

Joanna Tokarczuk, Association for the Development of Energy Innovation

