

Incoming EU chief says to launch climate fund

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European Commission Chief Ursula von der Leyen promised to launch an EU fund to help wean members off fossil fuels as she visited coal-dependent Poland on Thursday

The president-elect of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, said Thursday the EU will launch a special fund to wean members off fossil fuels and hold wide-ranging consultations on Europe's future.

She was speaking in Poland, a coal-dependent country which last month blocked an EU bid to set a target of zero net greenhouse gas emissions, and urged measures to compensate the costs of switching to new energy sources.

"There will be a huge investment necessary in regions that have to step up into new technologies and new jobs. That's why we will create the Just Transition Fund, to support those regions," von der Leyen told a joint press conference with Polish Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki.

With Britain scheduled to leave the EU by the end of October, von der Leyen also announced that she would launch wide-ranging consultations on the future of the bloc after she takes office in November.

The initiative means "that we go out in our member states and discuss how people, the European people think the future of their European Union should be," she said.

Von der Leyen also touched on the thorny issue of the rule of law amid serious misgivings in Brussels over judicial reforms pushed through by Poland's right-wing Law and Justice (PiS) government.

'New opening'?

The EU has launched unprecedented proceedings against Poland over "systemic threats" to the rule of law that could see its EU voting rights suspended.

"There are difficult issues we have to tackle like migration or the rule of

law," von der Leyen said, calling for dialogue and mutual respect when addressing differences.

Warsaw was the third EU capital von der Leyen visited since being confirmed in her upcoming post a week ago.

"It was very important for me, after having been in Berlin and Paris, to come to Warsaw," von der Leyen said, also calling Poland an "important" regional EU member.

Morawiecki said he had hoped for a "new opening" between Warsaw and Brussels in the coming years, adding that his talks with von der Leyen would focus on which EU commissioner position would go to a Pole.

He later told reporters he had proposed Krzysztof Szczerski, the current chief of staff to President Andrzej Duda, as Poland's official candidate for the commission.

Morawiecki also said that Poland was primarily interested in posts focused on the economy or finance.

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