



THE ROLE OF PROGRESSIVE EUROPEAN PARTIES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CLIMATE AGENDA POST COP21

By Robert Ladrech



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Progressive Political Parties in Europe and their Role in the Implementation of the Climate Agenda Post COP21

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Table of Contents

About the Author:	4
Foreword:	5
Study: Progressive Political Parties in Europe and their Role in the Implementation of the Climate Agenda Post COP21	6
Executive Summary	6
Introduction	7
Progressive parties and climate change: promises and action	8
Climate policy and the strategic position of progressive parties in national political Systems	10
The challenges to progressive political climate action	12
Conclusion	15
Endnotes	17



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FOREWORD

The position political parties take on climate mitigation policy influences the strength and commitment of regional, national and European climate policy.

In light of the Paris agreement with commitments to limit global temperatures to below 1.5 degrees and ending the use of fossil fuels, looking beyond COP22 the submitted INDCs (Intended Nationally Determined Contributions) will be key in determining how we manage this.

The reviews, forecast to be every five years, will include EU member states, and with the expectation that climate mitigation policy ought to be more ambitious in subsequent rounds, national governments will be pressured to raise their targets, especially in carbon emission reductions.

There are marked differences between political party families on the climate agenda this may be determined by national specific factors but also ideological ones.

Research has illustrated how progressive, European mainstream parties are more likely to propose stronger efforts to reduce carbon emissions, promote renewable energy and implement energy efficiency programmes.

Consequently they hold enormous impact potential in the development of climate policy.

However with deepening electoral challenges more serious choices will have to be made. Therefore do progressive parties have any other choice but to address the transition to a decarbonised society?



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Progressive Political Parties in Europe and their Role in the Implementation of the Climate Agenda Post COP21

Executive Summary

By Robert Ladrech

This study focuses on the role of progressive parties in Europe to advance efforts to combat climate change by way of de-carbonizing their respective national economies, which is necessary to meet the goals of the Paris Agreement and to prevent global warming by no more than 1.5°C.

The urgent need to promote such policies will disrupt traditional ways of doing things, and maintaining an approach based on solidarity can ensure to a great degree public support.

In this sense, this study highlights the key issues surrounding social democrats with regard to climate change.

- Prioritizing solidarity in ambitious climate mitigation efforts also goes a long way in **refashioning the progressive vision and identity for the rest of the 21st century.**
- **Progressive parties occupy a critical position** in national party systems for steering economy and society towards a low carbon future; progressive parties can act as a bridge between the current situation and low carbon policy initiatives.
- Analysis of party manifestos since mid-1990s demonstrates that **social democratic party manifestos contain more pro-climate policy positions than centre-right parties.**
- There is a **clear partisan distinction** between social democratic government policy regarding climate change and centre-right governments.
- By confronting internal challenges on the development of more ambitious climate policy stances by social democratic parties: i.e. environmental vs. industry would likely help electoral success.
- By addressing external domestic political challenges: radical right-wing party positions on climate change; the costs of the energy transition on high energy intensive industry and corresponding trade union members employment protection; outdated business models; etc. would mean leadership on issues people are concerned by.

Introduction

2016 was a year in which many climate change-related events took place, some positive and some negative. On the positive side, the COP21 Paris Agreement was ratified shortly before the convening of COP22 in Marrakesh. Second, COP22 managed to agree a timetable to progress the promises made in the Paris Agreement, with a review of national goals and measure - the INDCs (Intended Nationally Determined Contributions) in 2018 among the actions agreed. Of course, there were a couple of events that many fear can damage the efforts made to combat climate change. In particular, the Brexit vote in the United Kingdom may have an adverse effect on EU climate policy-making, though this is still speculation. Perhaps more importantly was the election of Donald Trump as president of the United States of America, in particular his climate denial posturing during the presidential campaign and proposed appointments to the Energy Department and the Environmental Protection Agency, not to mention his stated aim of withdrawing the United States from the Paris Agreement. Finally, the growing electoral threat from radical right-wing parties has continued, with national elections in 2017 in the Netherlands, France and Germany a test of the resilience of moderate parties in the face of not only anti-immigrant feelings but also positions which come close to climate change denial and certainly anti-EU sentiment that can easily translate into abandonment of agreed EU positions to tackle carbon emissions through regulatory actions or a form of carbon tax.

This study focuses on the role of progressive parties¹ in Europe to advance efforts to combat climate change by way of de-carbonizing their respective national economies, which is necessary to meet the goal of the Paris Agreement to prevent global warming by no more than 1.5°C. The 'bottom-up' approach adopted by the COP 21 process, based on national contributions, puts a premium upon national governments, and by extension parties of government, to develop and implement the necessary policies. The negative events mentioned above are only some of the challenges that social democrats face in the next several years in Europe. The analysis of the position of social democratic parties is based upon a two year research project to which FEPS participated, funded by the UK Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC)² and followed up by the author in co-operation with FEPS in a workshop in Copenhagen on 11 October 2016. The contributions by workshop participants have enriched the analysis, and prospective arguments concerning how progressive parties can navigate the challenges ahead are offered.

Progressive parties and climate change: promises and action

Since the late 1990s, the European Union has been one of the leaders globally in developing policies to reduce carbon emissions and boost the percentage of renewable energy in the production of electricity. As Schreurs and Tiberghien have stated, the EU position is a product of the 'competitive leadership witnessed among member states and the Commission'³ and when 'member state' is opened up for analysis, one quickly recognizes that 'party government' is the key feature to appreciate. The term party government incorporates an understanding of the partisan influence on government policy-making and output. Consequently, when seeking to understand not only the EU position on climate policy but also individual member state governments, it is important to bear in mind the policy positions that so-called 'parties of government' adopt with respect to climate policy. These positions can be taken from what they promise during election campaigns – in their campaign manifestos or platforms – as well as what they actually do once in government.

The political science literature offers many examples as to how national governments engage with climate policy. There are collections of country case studies and small-N comparative studies which include the EU⁴, and comparative studies that treat the type of national political-economic system⁵, but with regard to climate policy and political parties in particular, the amount of published studies is much less than analyses of environmental policy more broadly defined and parties⁶. The ESRC project on Climate Policy and Political Parties sought to investigate the policy positions of centre-left and centre-right political parties in terms of the positions they adopt for election campaigns. Accordingly, election manifestos from the mid-1990s to 2015 were collected from the mainstream parties in six countries, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy, Ireland and Denmark. A method of measuring pro-climate and anti-climate statements was designed in order to compare the two parties in each country over a number of elections⁷ as well as to see how salient climate change was in comparison to other policy positions as articulated in party election manifestos over time. Although we might expect centre-left parties to take stronger positions on environmental concerns⁸, climate policy, in particular the various aspects of climate mitigation policy, impinges strongly on industry, transport, agriculture, etc. more than environmental concerns defined by pollution alone, and so one might expect mainstream parties, with their allied societal interests, to be less enthused about fundamental de-carbonization of the economy.

There are four key findings from the ESRC study: one, that social democratic parties do indeed, on average, promote more positive climate policy policies than do centre-right parties; second, when centre-right parties have promised more positive climate policy positions, this has resulted from pressure from allied parties and/or exceptional political competition and reversed upon the subsequent election (in the former case, the high public profile of Connie Hedegaard of the Conservative People's Party in Denmark added pressure on the Liberal Party for the 2007 parliamentary election; the threat by Nicolas Hulot, a popular environmentalist, to run for president in 2007, prompted Nicolas Sarkozy to strengthen his environmental credentials and eventually propose a carbon tax; and lastly, David Cameron's attempt to modernize the Conservative Party employed environmentalism to 're-brand' the party); third, climate policy-related positions take up a small portion of overall party manifestos; and lastly, as a result of interviews accompanying the manifesto analysis, pro-climate positions are often compromises between different sections of a political party, representing the strength of ties to traditional supporting interest groups and that it is sometimes personal leadership that gives a higher profile to climate policy positions.

Subsequent analyses of how well election promises translate into government policy suggest that the partisan theory of policy-making does indeed matter with regard to climate policy. Carter and Ladrech⁹ and Ladrech and Little¹⁰ report that actual government policy with regard to reducing carbon emissions and promoting renewable energy advanced under governments comprising a social democratic party. Where progress on carbon reductions was reported during the tenure of a centre-right government, this can mostly be explained by the policies put into place by the previous centre-left government (the UK is a good example of this phenomenon since 2010).

For purposes of this study, the question is how much do the findings of the ESRC project contribute to a more general analysis of the role that social democratic, or progressive, parties can play in the post COP21/22 agenda? Indeed, this study argues that progressive parties are indispensable for making any success possible in meeting the goals set out in the Paris Agreement by virtue of their strategic position in national political systems and their critical position in terms of promoting the policies that will contribute to their NDC.

1. Firstly, one would expect Green parties to take strong positions regarding climate change policy, they are not represented to any appreciable degree in most European national parliaments, and where they have a sizable parliamentary representation, as in Germany, to become a governing party they must be part of a coalition, and in all national government coalition cases, this has been with a social democratic party.
2. Secondly, social democratic parties have longstanding ties to societal groups and organizations, in particular trade unions, which will be critical in supporting legislation and its implementation in a continuing transition to a low carbon society.
3. Thirdly, a transition to a low carbon economy will disrupt a variety of 'ways of doing things' that impact on the lives of ordinary citizens, and as solidarity is one of the core values of social democracy, social democratic parties are the central political actor that can reconcile the well-being of citizens with the measures needed to reduce carbon emissions and boost renewables and improve energy efficiency especially in terms of costs to consumers.
4. Lastly, as climate policy is inherently bound up with the direction of national and European political economy, a social democratic response or project designed to overcome the lingering effects of the economic crisis is crucial for reviving the relevance of social democratic parties themselves, seen from the perspective of their many electoral challenges over the past ten years.

The following section discusses these four points in more detail.

Climate policy and the strategic position of progressive parties in national political systems

As mentioned above, one can expect Green parties, at least in their campaign rhetoric and manifestos, to take more fundamental positions regarding the transition to a low carbon economy. For example, die Grünen in Germany argue for a date to be set on an exit from coal as part of their carbon emission reduction proposals as well as to meet Germany's own efforts to meet 2020 targets. Once in government, though, Green parties find that governing requires compromise, and though their policy positions may

influence the policy package of a coalition government, they remain confined to no more than ten European countries. This simple fact means that it falls to the social democratic party in a national political system to aggregate climate policy in its various aspects into a programme of government, and if elected, in most cases it will lead the government from the position of prime minister and other ministerial portfolios. Where Green parties do not exist in any appreciable parliamentary numbers, it then falls solely upon the existing social democratic party to sustain the development and policy coherence necessary for producing the mix of climate policies that will represent the country's NDC, and further, as the Paris Agreement assumes a continual 'ratcheting up' of climate policy ambitions, to defend such policies when not in government. Green parties are therefore useful allies for progressive parties, but national leadership will focus on the party leading a government, whether a coalition or majoritarian government.

The process of de-carbonizing an economy, integrating a variety of related policy areas to advance an energy transition and put on a sustainable basis agriculture, transport, etc., cannot be done by government fiat. It is a societal effort, and therefore civil society actors will have to be involved both in the planning and implementation stage. Although Green parties may be close to certain environmental groups, the breadth of key interest groups potentially involved in the effort is wide, and the experience of social democratic parties to aggregate different interests has been one of their defining characteristics at least since WWII. Among various organized interest groups, trade unions are significant for at least two reasons. First, the sectors that they have strong membership are in those industries to which the energy transition has an enormous impact, e.g. energy-intensive industries such as car manufacturing, cement, steel, extractive industries such as oil and mining, and energy producer and distributors. Second, the political clout of trade unions in such industries is influential, and many examples of their opposition to poorly planned phase-outs of coal mining in many European countries, and the subsequent reversal by government, demonstrate that trade unions ought to be involved in the planning for such transitions. Here social democratic parties with their longstanding formal and informal links with trade unions are in a position to bridge the interests of trade unions for a just transition and the need to promote energy efficiency and reduce carbon emissions by phasing out fossil fuels. This type of partnership, if established, especially in countries with a neo-corporatist tradition, can help create models of a just transition, for at present in 'certain regions, climate change has been on the social dialogue agenda for years. In others it has barely ever been discussed, and even then only in a defensive way, with members worried that reducing emissions means killing jobs'¹¹. Consumer rights and other organizations that defend the quality of life for ordinary citizens also mobilize to oppose fuel poverty, and again, the historic relationships that progressives have developed for decades with such organizations can help to develop a more comprehensive support among public opinion for the goals and measures required for de-carbonization.

This brings us to the third point, solidarity. Progressive parties have, as part of their political DNA, a value system that prioritizes the needs of all levels of society, in particular those not benefiting from the economic policies of the day. The challenge of de-carbonization will be to promote support from all quarters of society, and the focus on solidarity in climate policy development will affect the details and implementation. The urgent need to promote such policies will, as mentioned above, disrupt traditional ways of doing things, and maintaining an approach based on solidarity can ensure to a great degree public support. In this sense, social democrats should lead a progressive alliance with regard to climate change. Prioritizing solidarity in ambitious climate mitigation efforts also goes a long way in refashioning the progressive vision and identity for the rest of the 21st century.

Lastly, progressive parties have a distinct incentive to change the direction of national and European political economy away from the damaging neo-liberal formulae that have guided measures to overcome the economic crisis. In this regard, climate mitigation policies are very much part of the policy fabric for a more progressive economic policy agenda. Not only is a just transition necessary, but a holistic view of a sustainable and circular economy that produces employment in new industrial processes. As Wyns argues, progressive parties are situated in such a position in their respective national economies to develop ‘an enlightened industrial policy that matches reducing greenhouse emissions with improving competitiveness [that] could give oxygen to Europe’s workers and entrepreneurs’¹². An enlightened industrial policy depends on many industries and businesses adopting a business model fit for the transition to a low carbon economy, and incentives emanating from centre-right parties are weak to non-existent in many countries. Conservative parties, by and large, continue to support the argument that too ambitious a climate mitigation policy would undermine the competitiveness of national industries. In this respect, then, as potential parties of government, progressive parties are the critical actors in using government to set regulations and incentives to accelerate a transition, as leaving fundamental change simply to market forces is inadequate in light of the urgency for the promotion of ambitious climate action as set forth in the Paris Agreement.

Countering the austerity and neo-liberal recipe for economic growth, it is also progressive parties that are more ideologically inclined to use the public sector for triggering initiatives that can ‘nudge’ businesses and investors into the right direction, for example through public procurement (which may necessitate EU state aid rules also becoming more enlightened). It is also progressive parties that are more likely, again in terms of their ideological predisposition, to argue strongly that international trade and investment policy should correspond with the Paris Agreement priorities. Although TTIP is fast becoming politically fragile, the fact that it could ‘increase emissions and restrict the ability of nations to adequately mitigate and adapt to climate change’¹³ signals a need to integrate climate change factors into international trade negotiations, first in terms of national positions, then as these national position influence EU trade positions whose weight in multilateral trade negotiations is strong and whose norms can influence other non-EU countries. Indeed, as Piketty has argues, there ‘should be no more signing of international agreements that reduce customs duties and other commercial barriers without including quantified and binding measures to combat fiscal and climate dumping in those same treaties’¹⁴. Again, if there is to be a concerted push nationally and at the European level to rethink the climate agenda and international trade, it falls to progressive parties to provide leadership.

The study has argued so far that progressive parties, that is, the social democratic party family, almost by default, are the key actors at the national level to instigate a fundamental movement towards a low carbon economy. Green parties are not strong nor numerous enough to provide such leadership; conservative parties are tied to outmoded economic policy prescriptions which though not denying climate change leave to market dynamics the hope that business and industry will ‘do the right thing’ quickly enough. Because a fundamental move towards a low carbon economy will necessarily be disruptive in many domains, it again falls to parties for whom social justice – here in terms of a just transition – and solidarity are basic values that civil society can be brought into the policy development, planning and implementation of climate policy. Yet the ESRC research project noted that progressive parties, even in countries considered ‘climate leaders’, face challenges. The next section discusses the challenges to progressive political climate action.

The challenges to progressive political climate action

In addition to collecting and analyzing party manifestos from the mid-1990s onward, the ESRC research project, also engaged in interviews with key individuals inside political parties as well as with national environmental organizations. Although it has been argued above that progressive parties are situated in their national political systems in a position to advance the national climate agenda, and by extension contribute to stronger NDC's necessary for meeting Paris Agreement goals, the reality is that an ambitious national climate policy remains a contested issue. This section considers four areas that represent a challenge to progressive parties formulating and implementing more ambitious climate mitigation measures. They are: the economic crisis; conservative government reversal of the pace of progress; internal party and government division; and potential costs in terms job losses and its consequent exploitation by radical right-wing parties.

The economic crisis

Recent research suggests that with regard to the EU's broad trajectory of energy and climate policy, the economic crisis has not caused any fundamental change. However, the discourse has changed to some extent, with EU policy-makers 'paying more attention to economic problems rather than climate change, renewables or energy efficiency. Secondly, the crisis has strengthened the concerns of cost implications of climate measures'¹⁵. During interviews with members of progressive parties, these same dynamics were present, making the climate change agenda compete with more traditional issues such as jobs, health, education, and of course immigration. This was most clear in two areas. First, social democratic government finance ministers were more likely to assess proposals on measures such as energy efficiency and renewable energy projects through the filter of national budgetary targets, in other words short-to-medium term expenditures. This was the case even in climate leaders, such as Denmark. Second, the same argument employed by conservative parties, namely that too ambitious of climate policies will undermine the competitiveness of manufacturing industry as well as result in higher costs for consumers is also echoed in some parts of progressive parties. Here surmounting the economic crisis in order to reduce unemployment and so to not burden industry is the central or core logic. This position resembles the dynamic witnessed between the European Parliament's two committees which deal with EU climate and energy policies, namely the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety committee on the one hand, usually promoting stronger measures than proposed by the Commission, and the Industry, Research and Energy committee which, while not disputing the need for a strong EU climate and energy policy, usually takes a defensive approach with regard to altering the status quo for business, again employing the competitiveness argument. This dynamic was replicated to a certain extent at the time the French Socialist government submitted its energy transition legislation to the National Assembly for scrutiny and votes, with the Environment and Industry and Energy committees competing to chair the legislative process, both seen by commentators as arranging themselves on the usual two sides of 'be more ambitious' and 'do not put more costs on industry'. So although climate change remains on progressive party and government agendas, the economic crisis has forced advocates of ambitious climate legislation to respond to the imperatives of 'quick' economic growth and job creation, which while not an impossible task, does highlight the lack of a strong consensus within the progressive camp.

Conservative government reversal of the pace of progress

Another challenge for progressive parties, whether in government or in opposition, is sustaining the pace of climate policy development and implementation. In other words, while the Paris Agreement envisions a continual ratcheting up of national ambitions to be outlined in regular INDC updates, the reality even in climate leading countries is that the election of conservative governments, while not *reversing* the direction of climate policy inherited from a progressive government, does *slow down* the pace of meeting targets to reduce carbon emissions and promoting a larger share of renewable energy in a national energy mix. Party politics does matter for climate policy, and at present there is no means of 'locking-in' future governments to agreed targets except at a regional or even global level over time, usually more than a parliamentary term. For example, in the recently published *Climate Change Performance Index, Results 2017*, it is noted that Denmark's ranking has dropped significantly to 13 within the top group, after leading for five consecutive years. The reasons given: 'The driving factor for Denmark's setback is its policy rating. The country suffered major losses in this area relegating it to the bottom group in the policy category. Country experts criticized that the new government [the Liberal-led Lokke Rasmussen government supported by the Danish People's Party] no longer actively supports many of the country's former targets. This affects, for example, the planned phase-out of coal by 2030, the 100 percent renewables target for the electricity and heat sector by 2035 and the 40 percent greenhouse gas reduction by 2020. Furthermore, the government tries to pull out of already agreed offshore wind turbine constructions as well as investments in railway electrification supporting highway construction instead. By doing so, the current government sets out to curtail existing agreements to reduce emissions'¹⁶. This conservative government followed four years of a Social Democratic-led coalition which implemented the policies that Denmark has continued to benefit, notwithstanding the current government's efforts at reversal. Unfortunately this partisan reversal of the pace of climate policy is not confined to Denmark. The UK's ranking also dropped slightly due to government action, or lack of action, for instance in developing a policy framework for renewables such that investments in this sector are now forecasted to fall significantly by 2020. Even in Germany, the coalition dynamics of a 'grand coalition' between the SPD and CDU has witnessed the realization that the country will fail to meet its own 2020 targets, with the Environment minister Hendricks admitting 'I suppose we won't quite reach our goal' and 'end up a bit below it'¹⁷, together with the difficulty agreeing a Climate Action Plan 2030 due not only to mining unions but the conservatives arguments regarding competitiveness voiced by key members of the CDU in the Bundestag and cabinet. So in addition to the economic crisis complicating the climate policy agenda, when progressive parties are not in government, or else share power in a grand coalition with the right, hard-won progress can and is compromised, making it all the more difficult to make up for lost time when leading government in the future.

Internal party and government division

The division between environmental and industry wings within a progressive party has been noted above, with compromise legislation the best output to be hoped for. It is also the case that a looming election can reduce momentum towards new and stronger legislation, especially if it signals short-term negative fallout, such as accelerating the closure of coal mines and jobs in Germany (September 2017 national parliamentary election), or the promotion and expansion of onshore wind turbines in the UK (2015

election). Recent research¹⁸ in Canada suggests there can be (small) electoral costs for governments supporting local wind energy projects, certainly a factor that motivated the current British Conservative government to promise in their 2015 manifesto that the government would no longer financially support onshore wind farms, but rather (costlier) offshore projects. Somewhat reflective of this internal party division is the weakness of government policy integration concerning climate policy.

Although within the EU there is agreement that climate policy goals ought to be 'mainstreamed' into a range of other policy areas, and the move to the creation of offices or ministries of Climate and Energy with corresponding inter-ministerial co-ordination committees is welcome, it is often more a bureaucratic exercise than a real step-change in national policy-making, though this is improving. Still, climate policy integration remains 'a problem that governments must address to ensure that activities in one branch or level of government to reduce emissions do not undermine other policy goals or climate initiatives developed in other branches or levels'¹⁹. From our research, we find that this division depends on the quality of political leadership, especially support from the party leader/prime minister. Quite often an environment minister or climate and energy minister is not a 'political heavyweight' within a governing party, and so support from a prime minister is often the key to getting agreements from Industry ministers and other important policy portfolio holders, for example. Recent research also suggests that in a coalition government, which party holds the environment or climate/energy portfolio makes a difference in the type of national executive, centralized or decentralized²⁰.

Transition costs and radical-right electoral exploitation

Although much of the sentiment that radical right-wing parties exploit for electoral gain is anti-immigrant, it should be noted that many of these parties in Europe also exploit public worries about job losses, often by linking it to the changes in the energy sector. Recent electoral analyses suggest parties such as the Dutch Freedom Party of Geert Wilders, or the Front National of Marine Le Pen, the Danish People's Party, etc., draw dissatisfied voters away from progressive parties as well as from centre-right parties. These parties blame the EU for 'imposing' carbon emission reductions and thereby threatening jobs in coal mining and energy-intensive industries, and to the extent these fears are present, it jeopardizes the support from local and national public opinion. The extent to which these parties promote re-nationalizing many EU policies, climate policy is certainly one of them, thereby possibly influencing inter-governmental negotiations on EU climate and energy initiatives. Though these parties may not be explicit climate change deniers, their 'sovereignist' policy orientation would undermine collective efforts at climate mitigation targets. The real danger is not that these parties may take power in the near future, rather that they may influence public opinion concerning the impact of climate policy in the short-term, drawing voters away from progressive parties and influencing the policy position of centre-right parties in opposition or in government (the shift toward climate denial by Nicolas Sarkozy in 2016 as he prepared to attain the nomination for president of Les Républicains is plainly indicative of centre-right parties courting voters supportive of radical right-wing parties). The set of elections in 2017 in the Netherlands, France and Germany will be a test of the electoral strength of these parties and subsequent influence on various mainstream parties' climate policy.

Conclusion

In a recent report by IDDRI (the Institut du développement durable et des relations internationales), a strong case was made that the EU will miss its 2030 and 2050 climate objectives unless there is strong reinforcement and scaling up, and in particular, and pertinent for this study, the study ‘suggests that the ambition of EU and Member States policies is either a continuation of business as usual in terms of rates of progress, or being dialled down in some cases’²¹. The underlying recommendation in general is a need to design more ambitious policies at the sectoral level as well as the European level, for example with regard to radically rethinking de-carbonization and strengthening the EU ETS. What has been argued here is that the recommendations of the IDDRI report depend on the political will of national governments and in particular progressive parties, in government but also in opposition where they can highlight if necessary the inadequacy of conservative government policy. In the end, although it has been argued that progressive parties occupy the political space in national political systems where climate leadership at the national level would most effectively be led, and though space has not allowed investigation of city and city-regions as climate leaders, future progress and ambition does fall onto the shoulders of progressive parties. What this report highlights is that there is still a need to create a new progressive narrative on climate change, incorporating climate justice and a just transition²², a vision of a low-carbon economy and its benefits to the ordinary citizen, and a plan for a holistic transition. Necessarily, such a narrative on climate change re-invigorates the need for European Union, and thereby gives a positive reason for such support. The success of future COPs and the goals of the Paris Agreement depend on progressive parties’ leadership, but this does take bold action. What the IDDRI report and others argue is that small incremental steps are inadequate facing the challenges of keeping global temperatures confined to no more than 1.5°C (or even 2°C).

As European social democracy itself is in desperate need of renewal and *élan*, facing up to the challenge of climate change could be the key to addressing the interests of citizens now and in the future, but also economic growth and political stability. Progressive parties have a responsibility to act as a bridge from the current state of national climate and sustainable development to a low carbon economy, but this narrative must not pigeonhole climate policy, yet rather integrate it with other policy concerns that are high on the public agenda, such as health (benefits from lower pollution levels due to a decrease in burning fossil fuels), jobs (in the face of declining employment in extractive industries and growing robotization instead growth in high skilled areas addressing the development of smart grids, low carbon technology and installation, more energy efficient building initiatives, etc.), business opportunities as some national industries take advantage of growing markets for advanced renewable technology, and the lower costs for consumers of a maturing technology complementing a just transition. Social democratic parties cannot out-Green Green parties, but because of the characteristics listed above regarding the scope of social democratic links with civil society actors, their ‘natural’ position as parties of government, their fundamental commitment to social solidarity, and finally their responsibility for formulating a humane and solidaristic approach to leaving the economic crisis, they are positioned for leading their national governments commitment to ever ambitious NDCs. It is a responsibility that requires leadership, and our research demonstrates that this quality is variable among progressive parties. Still, in the face of radical right-wing electoral advances, do progressive parties have any other choice but to confront the reality of establishing a new vision for a low-carbon world?

Endnotes

- ¹ Progressive parties in this study refers to Socialist, Social Democratic and Labour Parties in Europe.
- ² ESRC grant Climate Policy and Political Parties, ES/K00042X/1
- ³ 'European Union Leadership in Climate Change: Mitigation through Multilevel Reinforcement', in K. Harrison and L. Sundstrom, eds., *Global Commons, Domestic Decisions: The Comparative Politics of Climate Change*, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2010, 46.
- ⁴ For example, H. Compston and I. Bailey, eds. *Turning Down the Heat: The Politics of Climate Policy in Affluent Democracies*, Palgrave, 2008; K. Harrison and L. Sundstrom, eds., *Global Commons, Domestic Decisions: The Comparative Politics of Climate Change*, MIT Press, 2010; A. Schaffrin, S. Sewerin and S. Seubert, 'The innovativeness of national policy portfolios – climate policy change in Austria, Germany and the UK', *Environmental Politics*, 2014, 23/5: 860-883; and R. Wurzel and J. Connelly, eds. *The European Union as a Leader in International Climate Change Politics*, Routledge, 2011.
- ⁵ See for example Četković, Buzogány and Schreurs, 'Varieties of clean energy transitions in Europe: Political-economic foundations of onshore and offshore wind development', WIDER Working Paper 2016/18, United Nations University.
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