



## European Climate Solidarity

### Making the climate revolution just for all generations

**Sergei Stanishev**, President of the Party of European Socialists

*If we do not overcome the twin crises that we face – climate change and COVID-19 – we risk total disaster. As socialists and democrats, we will approach these challenges by putting social justice and sustainability at the centre of our efforts. And intergenerational solidarity must be the starting point. We cannot win this battle by prioritising the needs of one generation over another.*

We have always fought to transform our society and economic system for the better. The crises we are facing will require deep transformations, that must be used as opportunities to revolutionise our societies. We want more equality and well-being for all. **We want to make our system future-proof, for the climate emergency and now COVID-19 too.** Solidarity - between citizens, countries, and generations - will be the key driver to reach this goal.

As progressives, we have been united in the task to make our continent climate neutral by 2050. We have been pushing for strong environmental policies and strong social policies alike. We understand that this challenge will not go away - climate change is real. Record temperatures throughout the EU, followed by heavy rain and floods, caused great damage in our Member States last year. Everyone was affected - the young, older people, those living in the North, the South, the East and the West. Climate change does not discriminate on any dimension, including age. The change we want should be just as broad – everyone must benefit.

Transforming our economies means addressing what is fundamentally wrong with the current model. Neoliberals have been too influential for too long. They have protected a system that privatises profits and communalises costs, increasing inequality within and between our societies instead of fighting them. We saw this in the way they addressed the 2008 economic crisis, making low-income people – often the young and the elderly - pay the debt of corporations and banks, whilst also blocking long overdue rises in wages, pensions and social benefits. **This political agenda of furthering inequality has harmed the social cohesion in our communities** and it has hindered us to provide better social services and economic opportunities to our citizens. And we see the same pattern for the environmental costs of neoliberal capitalism. This cannot continue.

**Our economies and our societies need fundamental change. This needs to happen in a socially fair way, benefitting all demographics and territories, leaving no one behind. If we cannot get this right, the transformation won't happen at all.**

That is why the green transformation must come with a strong social dimension which supports intergenerational solidarity. This approach – environmental and social - is the foundation on which all the big strategies of our era must be built. The European Green Deal, the European Pillar of Social Rights, the Sustainable Development Goals, these frameworks must be at the centre of the overhaul and recovery of our economies in the years to come. This will benefit all of us – young and old – and it will ensure a fair transformation within and between regions. It is the first step to making sure the climate revolution benefits our societies, our economies, the environment, and all generations.

Several policies of the European Green Deal and the European Pillar of Social Rights will be instrumental in achieving this vision. I want to highlight three: **The Renovation Wave, the Just Transition Fund and the Zero Pollution Strategy:**

**The Renovation Wave** is a key instrument in shaping the European housing market through the European Green Deal. It is a response to the increasing difficulties many Europeans face when trying to find affordable housing, especially in cities. These difficulties are particularly persistent for many young people at the start of their professional lives. It also

affects the elderly, who are often priced out of areas as neighbourhoods change over their lifetimes. It is particularly important to offer the young and the elderly good quality and affordable housing conditions. **Renovation is a tool to achieve more intergenerational justice on the housing market, and our climate goals.** Subsidised property renovation will improve energy efficiency, reduce the increasing financial burden of heating, and contribute to lowering energy demand and therefore greenhouse gas emissions. And it supports principle 19 of the European Pillar of Social Rights - the right to good quality housing. This policy is a simple way we can make the climate revolution fairer for all generations

Another progressive initiative, **the Just Transition Fund**, will address the needs of carbon intensive regions. It is designed **to support those areas most affected by decarbonisation**, to kick-start new economic opportunities where traditional ones disappear, and to prepare workers and their families for a new future, touching upon the right to active support to employment and life-long learning which is outlined in the European Pillar of Social Rights. The fund can help older workers get opportunities to find their place in the changing economy, through well-targeted re-training and upskilling schemes. Younger people's prospects will be improved too by a strong local economy and good preparations for the local, carbon-neutral, labour market. This is another way we can make sure that no citizen, region or generation is left behind.

Lastly, through **the Zero Pollution Strategy**, the European Union will contribute to a **toxin-free environment**, benefiting all. Air pollution from the traffic around us, toxins in the products we consume, and exposure to toxic substances, including at the workplace, remain one of the main drivers of premature deaths and health problems in the EU. This predominantly affects those groups that are most vulnerable to health hazards, including the elderly and the youngest.

Zero Pollution can better protect citizens, through regulation and prevention measures which support good health. By cutting down on pollutants, we will lift a large long-term burden from nature and also protect the health and wellbeing of citizens. This action, with intergenerational solidarity at its core – will guarantee an environment, a workplace and a home that is free of toxic substances and health threats.

These are just three measures being put forward by socialists and social democrats to make this transformation towards ecological and sustainability also a transformation towards equality and intergenerational justice. Our family has long been outspoken about this - we have made it clear to our political partners and our political opponents many times that **the social agenda and the ecologic agenda are mutually beneficial**. Put simply, one cannot succeed without the other. In the same way, we cannot win this battle by prioritising the needs of one generation over another. **We must build our common future on the basis of sustainability, equality and - above all - solidarity.**



#### About the author

Sergei Stanishev was one of the most successful prime ministers of Bulgaria, and leader of the Bulgarian Socialist party for 13 years. He is currently president of the Party of European Socialists and a member of the European Parliament. He was born in 1966, has a PhD in History and has done visiting fellowship in International Relations at the London School of Economics and Political Science. Prior to his political career he worked as a journalist.