TIME FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE!

28 - 29 April 2020

Intergenerational solidarity for a green sustainable planet

The €1 trillion European Green Deal: Stuck on the tracks before ever leaving the station?

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The 2020s were supposed to be the years in which the EU would brandish its green credentials. The European Green Deal was supposed to transform Europe into the world's first climate neutral continent by 2050. Those were the plans before COVID-19 made its way to our shores and upset them.

Instead of ramping up their climate action efforts, the EU and its member states will now have to deal with the consequences of the Great Lockdown: the worst economic downturn since the Great Depression and millions of people underemployed or unemployed. According to the ILO, the number of unemployed could skyrocket up to almost 25 million globally. A global economic crisis, massive layoffs, and the future of millions and millions in jeopardy, who could have imagined that the new decade would start in the way the last one ended?

Luckily, governments seem to have learned their lessons from ten years ago. This time, the money being pumped into the economy is not meant to prop up an inflated financial sector. The priority lies somewhere else. **States are intervening and subsidising measures to keep people employed** (even part time) **and cushion the unexpected economic blow**. The economic relief measures announced by different member states and the European Commission in response to the global pandemic are truly remarkable. Conservative governments are spending money on programmes and sectors against which they had railed or even taken an axe to. Upending political orthodoxy while proving that functioning welfare states with a strong security net are indispensable. And for the first time ever the Commission triggered the "escape clause", granting member states the necessary breathing room to save jobs and companies, and support healthcare and people. Astonishing how fast things move once the political will is there!

The relief measures may be expensive, but they are necessary, and no efforts should be spared to help people in these difficult times. Especially not when it comes to protecting the most vulnerable and those at the front lines. The problem is that these unexpected relief measures are happening at a time in which the EU's budget for the following seven year is being negotiated. It is hard to imagine countries contributing more to the multi-annual financial framework when some of them have already taken measures in immediate fiscal impulse, deferral, and other liquidities or guarantees that amount to between 1.9% and 60.1% of their 2019 GDP. There could hardly have been a worse time for the Commission to step up its environmental leadership.

Despite the disadvantageous circumstances, however, the **European Commission should persist and ensure that the €1 trillion European Green Deal it promised becomes a reality**. Even if that amount alone is probably insufficient to meet the challenge ahead, we need every cent to slow and ultimately bring the Great Acceleration to a stop. And when you listen to climate activists, in the streets or online, in the global North or South, and **young or old, we want to see climate justice now rather than later**. Regardless of how much we would like to freeze it in time, climate change will not slow down unless we throw our full weight behind climate action. By any standards we are in a better position to deal with the effects of a warming climate today than future generations will ever be. Unlike them we have a tiny window to act before too many consequences of anthropogenic climate change become irreversible.

To assure the dearly needed financial means to turn Europe into the world's first climate neutral continent and make the just transition a success, Commission and Parliament should continue to look for new sources of revenue, for member states and EU institutions. **Cracking down on tax evasion and avoidance** could be such a possibility. **Changing tax structures to favour social and environmental-conscious choices** can be another option. Or why not set a European-wide tax on the profits of transnational companies, with the aim of moving towards a global minimum of 25%, and earmark the revenue for social- and ecological-friendly investments?

In the meanwhile, national governments and the EU should couple bailouts to carbon intensive sectors to conditions that promote the achievement of the European Green Deal. **A short-term threat does not cancel out a long-term one**.

My generation and the subsequent ones would certainly be thankful, and I am sure we are not alone.

About the author

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