

Europe's Post-Covid 19 reconstruction must protect us from the climate crisis

(draft op-ed/letter from national climate coalitions and youth mobilisers)

We represent hundreds of environmental and social organisations in national climate alliances, as well as youth climate organisations in the different EU countries, and for years we have been mobilising to make politicians aware of the permanent dangers that climate change poses to all of us. There is no need to recall what science has been telling us for so long, in particular the limited number of years we have left to change course and avoid a rise in temperature that would cause upheavals with appalling consequences, whether it be our ability to live under heat waves, the challenges of food production, water resources, the increase in weather accidents' or the population movements that these various effects of the climate crisis will cause. Not forgetting the dramatic destruction of biodiversity with multiple health and food consequences.

Among them, moreover, the appalling Covid-19 crisis has brought all our societies to a standstill, shaking our economic system and questioning the certainties on which our lives have hitherto rested. Getting out of it as quickly as possible, ensuring the safety of everyone and putting all the necessary means in place to avoid a social bath, especially for the weakest among us, is the absolute priority.

But to start again as before would be a dramatic mistake. For not only does this crisis make us see the fragility of our way of life and the appalling socio-sanitary impact it can have on the most fragile populations. But it has not put an end to the climate crisis either, far from it: NASA statistics show that March was the second hottest month since temperatures were recorded! If there are uncertainties as to whether or not COVID- 19 will pose a threat in the future, the threat posed by the climate crisis is not even debatable.

While we were critical, we were also pleased that the President of the Commission and the President of the Council both highlighted "the European Green Deal" at the beginning of the parliamentary term as the Union's 'going to the moon' moment. The Covid-19 crisis CANNOT call into question this Green Deal. We are pleased to see that nineteen Member States and many personalities and parliamentarians think as we do. But we are not dupe! We do also know that many other Member States and interest groups such as the automotive sector and various industrial lobbies have multiplied their demands for a suspension of the Green Deal, under the pretext of the Covid crisis...

As youth and citizens' movements, we demand that the Commission and the Council not only preserve the Green Deal, but above all strengthen it, drawing the first conclusions from the tsunami of the current crisis.

First of all, the very first conclusion to be drawn from this is that "when you have to, you can": in the face of the covid-19 threat, governments have been able to decide large scale quarantines, to set new standards of behaviour and to undermine economic activities to protect their citizens. Many experts believe that global warming will have different but far more dramatic consequences for public health than Covid-19. If, like this one, it materialized as a specific and immediate threat, we would certainly have no hesitation in taking the necessary measures to protect us: what are our European leaders waiting for to give the Green Deal the dimension that the climate crisis demands? What is more, a real Green Deal will generate jobs, better living conditions and, certainly, health. And economically, as a study published in Nature during the crisis has proven, it will have a positive impact on the prosperity of States.

Secondly, since a "reconstruction plan" is needed, it is imperative that it be based on the axes developed by the "Green Deal". Moreover, the crisis obliges us de facto to move in this direction, whether it is a question of protecting biodiversity, the violation of which is at the root of the virus, of changing the agricultural model so as not to depend on a cheap labour force that has become confined, or of reducing pollution in cities, which seems to have amplified the number of people affected. For the rest, we know what the fight against climate change requires: a substantial increase of the 2030 climate target towards or beyond the upper end of what is being discussed, a mega-plan for energy efficiency, as well as massive investments in renewable energies and storage capacity.

Finally, the new recovery plan's financial provisions must be much more ambitious than the amounts put forward before the crisis. Even then, these were already far below what the European Court of Auditors had identified as necessary to combat climate change, and their funding was far from assured. The impact of the crisis, according to the IMF's - conservative - analysis, is around 8% of European GDP. Whether we like it or not, we will have to find amounts of this magnitude to avoid a recession and austerity measures that would be socially bloody and leave room for all populist and anti-European parties. Short-term indebtedness seems to be an unavoidable solution, which must be repaid with sufficient own resources, whether it be taxes on company profits, on large personal assets or on polluting activities. Ultimately, it does not matter, as long as the amounts are commensurate with the climate challenges and ensure a fair transition for workers in sectors of activity whose carbon intensity is incompatible with a resilient European economy.

We notice strong regional dividing lines, and wonder whether there really is a need to recall that the crisis climate goes beyond borders?

We, young people and citizens, call on our political, European AND national leaders to finally rise to the challenges of this century and take ambitious collective decisions to enable the European Union to respond at the same time to the health, economic, social and environmental challenges posed by the multiple crises we are facing. If Europe still has its future, it must combine three inescapable principles: prosperity, solidarity and sustainability.

Signatories:

Austrian Alliance for Climate Justice
Belgian Climate Coalition
Climate Action Coalition Bulgaria
Climate Action Network France
Czech Climate Coalition
Environmental Coalition Lithuania
Fridays for Future Bulgaria
Polish Climate Coalition
Plan B for Slovenia Network
Youth for Climate Justice Slovenia
Youth For Climate Belgium