

Conference of the Diversity Europe Group of the European Economic and Social Committee
Paris, 2 March 2022

'Climate Change and Energy Transition'

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



EXTRAORDINARY MEETING OF THE DIVERSITY EUROPE GROUP

Climate Change and Energy Transition

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Hybrid event



Conference
on the Future
of Europe



@diversEESC
#ClimateChange
#EnergyTransition
#EUGreenDeal

Preamble

As with peace and war, climate change and the energy transition will directly affect our **common future**. They will shape our **values, humanity and survival**. They will determine our decisions on **socio-economic policy, geopolitics and participatory democracy**. The reality is that **Climate change** is already upon us and there is **nowhere left to hide**. Regular severe floods, fires, droughts and hurricanes. This is what the world looks like at **1.1 to 1.3° Celsius** warmer than when the steam engine was invented. Today, with extinction rates of animal and plant species **100 times faster than the natural rate**, it is simply **impossible to ignore the impact of climate change** on our daily lives, nor can we ignore the necessity for an energy transition. All of bio-diversity is interlocked and humankind is totally **reliant on this biodiversity**. Ultimately, **humans have irreversibly shaped out planet** and the decisions we make over the next few years will irreversibly shape its future. **What happens next, will depend on all of us. We must begin by urgently delivering on our common promises.**

Changing mind-sets in the 21st Century

- Successfully managing climate change and the energy transition will require a **societal mental shift**: investing today and reaping the benefits in the next generation;
- It will necessitate a **change in values, attitudes and aspirations**, whereby citizens review their concept of a 'good life', **nature is recognised** as having a **true value** and humankind has an honest and long-term **responsibility towards it**;
- **Responsible marketing and advertising** will have a key role in persuading consumers to **reduce consumption** levels, change their way of life and **re-evaluate their actual needs**;
- But above all, there must be **regular and constructive dialogue** between citizens and policy-makers. Citizens will only be mobilised through **honest debate on the benefits, trade-offs and transitional costs that societies will undergo**, as a result of climate change and the energy transition;
- This discussion should take place at all levels and across the **widest possible social spectrum**, including with **vulnerable and marginalised citizens**. If we do not invest in this dialogue, there will be a **towering public backlash** and opposition to the transition measures. Without citizens on board, it simply will **not be possible** to take the necessary actions to mitigate climate change, nor to prepare for the energy transition;
- Within this context, the **European Climate Pact platform**, which aims to connect citizens, raise awareness and collectively develop and implement climate solutions, is an example of **best practice**, which could be reproduced at the **national level**;
- Ultimately, climate mitigation and the energy transition should be firmly **anchored within European values and identity**, thus becoming a **positive narrative** at the European, national and local levels.

Working together in partnership

- Organised **civil society organisations** want to be and must also be allowed to be at the **heart of** the climate and energy transitions. Every socio-economic sector of civil society must be empowered to **lead, design and implement** this process, thus **co-building the society of tomorrow**;

- **Youth organisations** in particular, should be at the **centre of reflections** on possible solutions, on educating and **raising awareness** among other sectors of the population on the challenges ahead, as well as on how to move from **individual responses to systemic societal approaches**;
- The **private sector** also has a key role to play in promoting the necessary **entrepreneurship** and **investment**. There should be significant increases in **public-private partnerships** for **R & D** and greater provision of **technical assistance to SMEs**, in order to meet environmental standards such as energy audits;
- However, without doubt it is **civil society**, in all of its **diversity**, which has the ambition and creativity to imagine a **sustainable, resilient and fairer world**. It is civil society which will have a pivotal role in **driving** and in **maintaining the momentum** on climate mitigation and adaptation among **communities** and **citizens**;
- It is these same actors who will have the tenacity to **invest in, accelerate and embrace change** with **bottom-up initiatives** which respect the opinions and the rights of **local people**, whilst also promoting **new economic models**, such as the **social economy**, which have proven very useful in addressing previous socio-economic challenges;
- The **EESC**, representing European civil society organisations and notably the **Diversity Europe Group**, must also fully play their role in **mitigating** the climate and energy transitions, acting as **intermediaries** between European policy-makers and citizens;
- In this context, the **EESC** can help to establish **viable and constructive alliances** between civil society organisations, to the benefit citizens and policy-makers. For example, the **Biodiversity Strategy** and the **CAPs' sustainable land use** (greening) both share the common objectives of the **European Green Deal** and success in each sector is dependent on mutual delivery.

Transforming rhetoric into action

- **Cutting emissions**, even at faster rates, will not be enough. We must also heavily **invest** in preparing **emergency plans** and in **adapting to the changing climate** and the **energy transition**;
- The **European Green Deal** and the **'Fit for 55' package** are both necessary and urgent. However, they must be accompanied by **commitments, action and measurable results** at the national, regional and local levels;
- There is a necessity for **better planning** and **coordination** of **overarching EU strategies, national, regional and local policies**. Policy-makers should **avoid silos** and promote **holistic, systemic and multi-disciplinary approaches** to tackling climate change and the energy transition;
- In this context, the success of the **city of Paris** in implementing its ambitious **Climate Action Plan** is an inspiration to other urban centres and clearly illustrates that **cities** should be at the **forefront of tackling climate change**;
- Similarly, the positive example of the **Paris Resilience Strategy**, co-financed by **EU Regional Funds**, should be reproduced elsewhere. This strategy has enabled citizens to directly **co-create the future of their city** and has a proven record of increasing **social cohesion**;
- The **direct participation of citizens** in the transition to a low-carbon economy will be integral to investing in **renewables** and in ensuring **innovative, decentralised and democratic models of development**, which will **create jobs** and **modernise the European economy**;

- Currently, **energy** accounts for **2/3 of greenhouse gas emissions** and hence, it is imperative to **invest in renewable, affordable and home-grown energy supplies**;
- This strategy is crucial, in order to render Europe more **geo-politically independent**, with **stable** and **diversified power supplies**. To this end, the EU and its Member States must take steps to rapidly **increase production capacities** for local renewable energy sources;
- Particular attention should be paid to the **role of prosumers** in the transition to a low-carbon economy, as this blending of consumers and producers in renewable energy epitomises the **ownership of sustainable development by citizens**. To facilitate progress, European and national authorities must establish conducive **administrative, legislative, financial and fiscal environments**;
- The EU has the funds to realise these objectives, but must **remove all subsidies to fossil fuels**, massively **invest in R & D** and strongly encourage business to take up its role seriously and generously;
- At the **global level**, the EU should continue to take the **leadership** on climate change and the energy transition. Such leadership is crucial for its own **energy supplies** and for **geopolitical stability**.

Protecting the most vulnerable

- **Access to energy** and clean energy, is a **right**. Hence, it is imperative that the climate and energy transitions are also **just, fair and inclusive transitions**, leaving nobody behind;
 - In this context, the EU's '**Fit for 55**' must be directly linked to the **UN 2030 Agenda** and crucially, it must be "*about people and for people*";
 - Without doubt, the climate and energy transitions will result in **job losses** and **higher living costs**. Consequently, they must be well prepared, informing, involving and assisting **vulnerable consumers** and **citizens**, whilst providing opportunities for upskilling and re-skilling to deal with the economic changes and **digitalisation**;
 - Particular attention should be paid to the impact of climate change and the energy transition on the **European households and families**. The decision of the Diversity Europe Group for the EESC to **commission a study** on this issue is a welcome step in the right direction;
 - Assistance must go well **beyond financial redistribution** and include **preventive and structured actions** at European, national, regional and local levels;
 - Policy-makers must explicitly recognise the **interrelated relationship** between multiple **policies** (e.g. housing, transport, construction, agriculture, etc.), as well as the necessity to **align policies** under the overriding objective of poverty reduction;
 - EU Member States should agree on a **comprehensive EU political strategy** to tackle **energy poverty**, to be based on common EU definitions, metric systems and indicators;
 - The **EU Social Climate Fund** to tackle **energy poverty** is a welcome step, but will be insufficient to meet all of the demands of the transitions. Additional financing through the **Cohesion Fund**, the **Just Transition Fund** and the **Recovery and Resilience Facility**, should also be directed towards reducing energy poverty;
 - **Incentives for consumers** to **renovate smartly** and sustainably are also necessary at the national, regional and local levels, in tandem with the operationalisation of the EC's **Renovation Wave**.
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