

The European Green Deal and the Middle Class

Edited by Lucie Tungul



Bedřich Moldan
Ladislav Cabada
Lucie Tungul
Tomáš Jungwirth

Luděk Niedermayer
Soňa Jonášová
Ondřej Vícha
Kateřina Davidová

Ivan Štefanec
Rumiana Stoilova
Arjen Siegmann
Marlene Mortler

Luboš Palata
Aneta Zachová



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Contact:

©TOPAZ

Opletalova 1603/57

11000 Praha 1

Czechia

For more information please visit: <http://www.top-az.eu/home/>

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Reviewers: Doc. PhDr. Jan Váně, Ph.D., University of West Bohemia, Czechia
Sandra Pasarić, Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies

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Partners

TOPAZ was established in 2012 as an educational platform and think tank associated with the political party TOP 09. Its goal is to open up discussion with the public concerning conservative ideas. Its main activities are focused on social debates with independent experts, cooperation with TOP 09 expert committees, fundraising, presentation of alternative views on the work of public authorities and preparation of analytical and conceptual policy documents suggesting alternative answers.

Hanns-Seidel-Stiftung (Nadace Hannse Seidela, HSS) was established in 1967 as a German political foundation to promote civic education. The foundation is currently active in more than 50 countries all over the world. Their projects focus mainly on empowering civil society, strengthening the rule of law and democracy. The foundation's motto is "Serving Democracy, Peace and Development." It bears the name of the former chairman of CSU and Bavarian prime minister, Mr. Hanns Seidel.

The Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies (WMCES) was established in 2007 as the political foundation and official think tank of the European People's Party (EPP). The Martens Centre has four main goals: advancing centre-right thought, contributing to the formulation of EU and national policies, serving as a framework for national political foundations and academics and stimulating public debate about the EU. It promotes a pan-European mind-set based on centre-right, Christian-Democrat, conservative and like-minded political values.

Contributors:

Ladislav Cabada is Associate Professor of Political Science and guarantee of the Political Science (MA, PhD) degrees at the Metropolitan University Prague/Czechia. He is also co-editor of the scholarly review *Politics in Central Europe*. He has been working as the President of the Central European Political Science Association (CEPSA) since 2012. His research covers political systems in East-Central Europe, mainly political institutions, bodies, political culture and regionalism.

Kateřina Davidová works in the Centre for Transport and Energy. Her areas of expertise are the EU and Czech climate and energy policies and the Central European transition to low-carbon economy. She is also a researcher in the EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy focused on the European Green Deal. She graduated from the American Studies M.A. programme at Charles University, Prague, and studied in Bath (UK) and Melbourne (Australia).

Soňa Jonášová is the founder and director of the Circular Economy Institute. She graduated from Mendel University and is currently enrolled at the Social Ecology PhD programme at Charles University. She focuses on the systemic transition to circular economy, waste handling, and eco-innovations. She is a member of governmental, business, and municipal working groups and advisory groups related to the application of circular economy principles into everyday life

Tomáš Jungwirth is Head of Climate Team at the Association for International Affairs (AMO) and a project coordinator at the Centre for Transport and Energy. He graduated from law at Charles University in Prague and then studied democratization and human rights in Sarajevo and Bologna. During his fellowship at the European University Institute in Florence he explored climate mitigation and adaptation in a transnational context. He is interested in decarbonization trajectories and systemic changes required for a sustainable functioning of the society.

Bedřich Moldan is Full Professor at Charles University in Prague and Deputy Director of its Environmental Centre. His main areas of interest are indicators of sustainable development and various aspects of science policy interface. He was the first Czech Minister of the Environment in 1990 and served as Senator of the Czech Parliament between 2004 and 2010. He has held various national and international positions including Chair of the UN Commission on Sustainable Development (2001) and Chair of the Scientific Committee of the European Environment Agency (2000-2006).

Marlene Mortler has a Master's diploma in rural home economics. She has been Member of Nürnberger Land County Council since 1990, Vice-chair of the Middle Franconia district branch of the CSU between 2009-2019 and Member of the German Bundestag between 2002-2019. She was the spokeswoman for agricultural, food and environmental policy of the CSU Group in the German Bundestag between 2014-2019 and National Coordinator for Drug Policy between 2014-2019. She has been Member of the European Parliament since 2019.

Luděk Niedermayer has been a Member of the European Parliament since 2014 (TOP 09). He is a member of the European People's Party group in the EP and chairs the Czech national delegation to the EPP. He is the first Vice-chair of the Economic and Monetary Committee (ECON). He studied Operational Research and System Theory at Masaryk University (formerly UJEP). He has worked in the Czech National Bank since 1991; he was Vice-governor of the Czech National Bank from 2000 to 2008.

Luboš Palata (1967) is EU editor at *Deník* and cooperates with *Deutsche Welle*. He graduated from the PhD programme in History at the Faculty of Arts at Jan Evangelista Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem. He also studied Applied Ethics at the Catholic Theological Faculty of Charles University and Politics and International Relations at the Faculty of Social Sciences of Charles University. He was awarded the Ferdinand Peroutka Prize, the Austria "Writing for Central Europe" Prize and was twice the Czech nominee for the European Parliament Prize.

Arjen Siegmans is Research Associate at the CDA Research Institute (Wetenschappelijk Instituut voor het CDA), Associate Professor of Finance at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and member of the executive board of the Wilfried Martens Centre for Economic Studies.

Rumiana Stoilova is Professor at the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. She is former Director of the Institute for the Study of Societies and Knowledge at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (2010-2018). She is Chair of the Bulgarian Sociological Association (since 2018), Research Associate at the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies and Board Member of the Bulgarian Centre of Women in Technology (since 2012). She has written two monographs: *Gender and Stratification* (2012) and *Inequalities and Community Integration* (2001) and more than 90 articles.

Ivan Štefanec is a Slovak economist, former top manager and politician. He was a member of Slovak parliament from 2006 to 2014 and a member of the European Parliament since 2014. He is a member of the Christian Democratic Movement.

Lucie Tungul graduated from Miami University, Ohio (International Relations), and Palacky University in Olomouc (Politics and European Studies). She is currently Head of Research at the political institute TOPAZ and Assistant Professor at the Department of Politics and Social Sciences at the Faculty of Law, Palacky University, Czechia. She is a member of the Czech Political Science Association Executive Board and a member of Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies Academic Council.

Ondřej Vícha is Assistant Professor at the Department of Administrative Law and Financial Law at the Law Faculty of Palacky University in Olomouc, Czechia and law clerk at the Constitutional Court. He graduated from the Law Faculty (M.A.) of Masaryk University and the Law Faculty (PhD) of Charles University. He worked at the legislative unit of the Czech Ministry of Environment (1999-2012). He specialises in environmental law, environmental legal responsibility, mining, energy and climate law in national, European, international and comparative perspectives. He has authored a number of research articles, legal commentaries, books and textbooks.

Aneta Zachová is Editor-in-chief of Euractiv.cz server, news web covering EU affairs. Her areas of expertise are European climate and energy policies. She is enrolled at the International Relations and European Politics post-graduate programme at the Faculty of Social Studies of Masaryk University in Brno, where she focuses on European integration and EU crisis response.

Abbreviations

AfD	Alternative for Germany
BGN	Bulgarian lev
CDU	Christian Democratic Union
CHZJD	Juraj Dimitrov Chemical Plant
CSU	Christian Social Union in Bavaria
CZK	Czech crown
EP	European Parliament
EU	European Union
EUR	Euro
FDI	Foreign direct investment
GDP	Gross domestic product
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
UK	United Kingdom

Communicating the Green Deal

Lucie Tungul

Our societies have been witnessing the effects of climate change, which requires a swift reaction in terms of adaptation and mitigation. The European Union (EU) presented its main instrument to address these challenges, known as the European Green Deal, in 2019. One could discuss the various measures it proposes and their applicability, but another equally important factor is how to communicate this ambitious plan to the European public. While the European public at large agrees that climate change and other environmental challenges are critical problems and general awareness has been rising,¹ differences can be found across the member states and within their societies.² Thus, while we seem to agree that we have a problem and the problem needs solving, we cannot fully agree who – and how – we should fix it.

Czechia displayed the second highest increase in the number of people concerned with climate change in the EU (European Commission 2019c), and a 2021 survey (Krawiecka, Kašpárek and Zákopčánová 2021) sponsored by Czech radio, the public broadcasting service, demonstrated that 86% of Czechs believed that climate change would affect the world. Yet only 39% of Czechs believed that it would affect them directly. They also somewhat lacked the urgency of the matter; 63% wanted immediate measures to be taken while 24% wanted them to start in the next decade. Czechs seemed more concerned about other environmental problems such as drought, shortage of drinking water, and dying forests and failed to understand that they were all the consequences of climate change. Experts explained it by the public's inability to “connect the dots.” Climate change has many aspects and the debate on it has been fragmented, consequently Czechs view the various aspects in their individuality and not in their complexity.

While the Czech public is aware of climate change and demands a reaction, political elites are at best indifferent and ambivalent. The drought in 2018 and 2019 drew more attention to problems of rising temperatures but the covid-19 pandemic and the relatively cold and wet year of 2020 decreased its urgency. Under certain circumstances, a topic can relatively quickly receive high salience in a society as seen with migration and terrorism, which were mostly irrelevant to Czechs until the 2015 migration crisis. The salience of migration was also reflected in the climate change debate as it was after water shortage

(43%) the second most frequently listed serious effect of climate change (36%). It scored higher than damaged nature (35%), lower biodiversity (30%), economic losses (22%) and natural disasters (20%).³

Climate change has not reached its momentum in the public discourse yet. Elites should “help individuals and groups see clearly the linkages between their everyday lives, their specific values” (Nisbet 2010: 44). It is not only that a topic is put on the agenda but also *how* we talk about a topic that matters. This is known as “framing.” Frames organise ideas in a broader context and the audience use them to understand the world around them. Due to frames, people might understand, remember, and assess a problem in a particular way. Frames simplify reality because they highlight some aspects of an issue over others; they connect and link mental dots together – the audience accepts/becomes aware of the connection. As advised by the director of the Environmental Institute, Veronica Yvonna Gaillyová (quoted in Fenyková and Matoška 2021), the elites should not talk about drought and bark beetle calamity (see e.g., Lopatka 2019) but about human produced emissions, which cause climate change. This climate change has been rampaging our forests, has caused floods, storms and drought. In other words, the agenda-setters should help the public connect the dots into a powerful message, identifying the causes and suggesting solutions.

How we frame issues determines the outcome. Many experts believe that if people better understand the processes behind climate change and its catastrophic consequences, they become more responsive to the proposed solutions but as Nisbet (2010: 43) has argued, this is a “misplaced line of thinking.” He argued that climate change was an example of a “gridlocked problem.” While some groups might respond well to the arguments of scientists and experts, society at large is often paralysed by old perceptions. The Czech discussion about renewable resources usually brings up the 2010 solar panel fraud (see e.g., Johnstone 2016) or statements about how Czechia does not have suitable conditions for solar/wind/hydro energy. Even a positive approach is often guided by misconceptions. Let us take the example of water shortage. Many people try to save more water by taking shorter showers but do not realize that meat consumption has a much higher water footprint.⁴ Similarly, more efficient house insulation or changing the type of heating might have a much higher impact on lowering the household CO₂ footprint than selling their car (Mašková, Kropáčková and Marková 2021).

From a more general perspective, the Czech climate change debate has primarily focused on two approaches. First, climate change was presented as a kind of doomsday for the future of humankind, which had a strong shocking effect but had become problematic as it often led to feelings of futility. Environmental psychologists spoke about environmental melancholia.⁵ As the head of the Climate Adaptation Unit at the European Commission, Elena Visnar Malinovska, stated, “when we are scaring people, we are losing them” (quoted in Sedlackova and Erhart 2021). Second, it assessed its economic impact, which mostly focused on “how much it will all cost” and arguments that the proposed solutions were costly and had uncertain outcomes. Czechia, together with Estonia and Latvia, were consequently the least likely among the EU member states to see the possible economic benefits of climate change⁶ and had the largest share of people who did know how to respond to questions about potential economic opportunities (in Estonia exceptionally high 27%). These three countries were also least likely to say that adaptation to the adverse effects of climate change can have a positive impact on their lives (39% in Estonia, 52% in Czechia and 58% in Latvia compared with the EU average at 72%). Hence, the debate addressing not only costs but also opportunities has not started there yet or has not been accepted by the public.

As mentioned above, the Czech public does not seem to recognize that climate change will have a substantial impact on the country, their local communities and their own lives. In order to bring about a genuine change to an issue that will undoubtedly and significantly alter our lifestyles, we need to mobilise public support. This publication looks into the opportunities and challenges that the Green Deal might. The authors are academics, economists, environmentalists, journalists, lawyers, politicians and practitioners and together they present a comprehensive introduction to the Green Deal debate with a special emphasis on the Czech and European middle classes.

Ondřej Vícha examines the Green Deal from the environmental law perspective and emphasises the need to apply a balanced mix of EU and national laws to protect human health, achieve zero pollution and support sustainable growth. Bedřich Moldan and Kateřina Davidová perceive the Green Deal as an opportunity for the Czech economy if it wants to be competitive. Soňa Jonášová presents three examples from the business, scientific and political/administrative environments, which successfully implemented the Green Deal principles. The MEPs Ivan Štefanec, Marlene Mortler and Luděk Niedermayer address

the problem of environmental burdens in the post-communist societies, the need to consider the higher demand on the energy networks caused by the Green Deal policies (Ivan Štefanec), their impact on agriculture (Marlene Mortler) and economies hit by the COVID-19 pandemic crisis (Luděk Niedermayer). All three emphasise the importance of the middle class for the adoption of the Green Deal and the fulfilment of its ambitious goals – people must believe that it is a meaningful policy, beneficial to them, their businesses, and their future.

On the other hand, Luboš Palata warns that the Czech (could be applied to the societies of the other “new” member states as well) middle class could perceive the Green Deal negatively because it is too expensive and threatens to take away their hard-won prosperity. Rumiana Stoilova’s comparison of the Czech and Bulgarian middle class offers several examples such as renewal of buildings, sharing energy P2P and eco-entrepreneurship as different ways how to explain to the people (and not just the middle class) the advantages of the Green Deal, which combine sectoral ready-made solutions and investment with value added. Ladislav Cabada recommends that problems, risks and negative effects are not concealed but directly addressed. He strongly warns against introducing different rules for “old” and “new” member states. The most critical piece by Tomáš Jungwirth warns against too much emphasis on the positive economic effects of the green transition, which could easily lead to unrealistic expectations – a point he shares with Cabada, who expresses his concern that it could push voters to populism and extremism and further destabilise the political landscape. Jungwirth clearly states that we should abandon the prioritisation of economic growth. Like most authors in this publication, he clearly articulates the need of a fair transition and social harmony. He agrees with the other authors that a positive change requires cooperation of the political elite and institutions. Arjen Siegmann concludes the publication by highlighting three important and mutually related tasks: make critics an inherent part of the climate debate, avoid emergence of an overbearing government and adjust the tax system to include the principle of „harm.“

Despite the diversity of their perspectives, we see many similarities. They propose solutions which reflect the reality of European economic and social systems and emphasise that the Green Deal must be subject to a discussion embracing its various effects. Providing people with only data and facts has not proven to be the best communication strategy, just as a pure promotion campaign would do more harm than

good. It is important to avoid partisanship in the debate, which would lead to a loss of confidence in the message and could even strengthen the polarisation of society and its further fragmentation. The fears are often substantiated and need to be effectively compensated. What we need is a communication strategy that would embrace the complexities of the problems and consider the effectiveness of the proposed solutions. This can be done through taking it home, by making it relevant to the individuals and their immediate communities while acknowledging that the transition will create both winners and losers.

We all have something to learn from the COVID-19 pandemic: to stand up to a serious hazard, we need to cooperate, we need to increase social cohesion and solidarity across the member states but also across the EU, which increases the resilience of European society.

Recommendations:

- Take it home - make the Green Deal relevant to individuals and their immediate communities.
- Avoid partisanship in the debate. This could lead to a loss of confidence in the message and strengthen the polarisation and fragmentation of our societies.
- The changes will create winners and losers. The losses must be effectively compensated.

1 In a 2019 Eurobarometer survey (European Commission 2019c), 93% of Europeans viewed climate change as a serious problem and 92% agreed that greenhouse gas emissions should be reduced to a minimum. According to the poll, “climate change has overtaken international terrorism (54%) and became the second most serious problem after poverty, hunger and lack of drinking water (71%).” We also saw a broad agreement that the EU should become climate neutral by 2050 (92% EU average ranging from 98% in Cyprus 85% in Estonia; Czechia 89%) A majority believed that the responsibility laid with their governments (55%) and businesses/industry (51%), while close to the majority (49%) believed that the EU was also an important venue. The perception was that serious challenge climate change was not significantly affected by age, social class or gender. On the EU-level (European Commission 2019c), younger people, people with more years in education, students and managers, and people with higher income levels were more likely to be very concerned with climate change but the differences between sociodemographic groups were small. The Czech survey (Krawiecka, Kašpárek and Zákopčanová 2021) came to similar findings except for women, who displayed a much stronger concern for climate change than men, which the experts found difficult to explain.

2 For instance, the belief that governments should be responsible for tackling climate change ranged from 78% (Sweden) to 37% (Slovenia), the reliance on business ranged from 67% in the Netherlands to 32% in Poland and on the EU from 72% in Sweden to 34% in Latvia and Hungary (Czechia was in all three cases close to the EU average (56%, 54% and 43% respectively).

3 The perception of threats was the most visible dividing factor across the social classes. As might be expected, the lower classes were more worried about the economic effects than the higher income classes, which were also far less likely to worry about the migration effects of climate change. The survey classified classes in terms of different types of capital: economic, social and cultural and used its previous survey from 2019. For more information, see McEnchroe 2019. An alternative classification, based on a similar approach, was presented in Tungul et al. 2019.

4 On average, it takes 1,790 litres of water to grow 1kg of wheat compared with 9,680 litres of water for 1kg of beef (Vidal 2004). See also <https://foodprint.org/issues/the-water-footprint-of-food/>

5 See, for example, Librová (2003).

6 In the 2019 Eurobarometer survey mentioned above (European Commission 2019c), 79% of the respondents agreed that climate change was also an economic opportunity. It ranged from 90% in Portugal and Cyprus to 56% in Estonia (63% in Czechia). Even more (81%) Europeans believed that promoting clean technologies abroad would bring economic benefits to the EU, ranging from 89% in Ireland and Portugal to 65% in Czechia.

Zero Pollution: A New Goal of the EU's Environmental Policy and Law

Ondřej Vícha

The European Green Deal should lead the European Union (EU) to a sustainable, climate-neutral and circular economy by 2050. It also articulated the goal to better protect human health and the environment as part of the ambitious approach to fight pollution from all sources and move to an environment without toxic substances. To reach these goals, the EU strategy enacted the rather ambitious plan to achieve zero environmental pollution (EEA 2020b). On 12 May 2021, the European Commission adopted the EU Action Plan: “Towards zero air, water and soil pollution” (COM[2021] 400 final), a follow-up to some other previously adopted EU initiatives (such as the Circular Economy Action plan, Biodiversity Strategy, Farm-To-Fork, Chemical Substances Sustainability Strategy). Environmental pollution has a serious impact on human health and entire ecosystems. Air pollution causes, for example, around 400,000 premature deaths in the EU every year. Air pollution also causes substantial economic costs because it leads to higher medical expenses and reduces productivity and agricultural revenues (EEA 2020b).

Environmental pollution is defined as the introduction of physical, chemical, and biological agents brought about by human activity into the environment, which are by their nature or amount foreign to the given environment. This kind of environmental pollution is not bound by violating of existing legislation. Environmental pollution is caused both by legal (limits and standards) and illegal activities. Pollution alters the individual segments of the environment (especially air, water, and soil) in a way that can be harmful to human health and nature. Other major types of polluting agents comprise mostly chemical substances, dust, noise and radiation. These polluting substances come from various sources. Some of these sources are dispersed (transportation, agriculture), while others are linked to specific places (for instance various industrial sites, energy producers, waste disposal sites). We also recognize accidental pollution (Damohorský et al. 2010). What all pollution sources share is the fact that they are all deeply rooted in the fundamental systems of our societies: mobility,

production and consumption of energy and food. The same systems are not only primary sources of polluting substances but also the primary causes of climate change and the rapid loss of biodiversity. The way people and goods are transported, how we produce energy and heat, and how we consume food represent in many ways the foundation of our current lifestyles. Thus, it is not and will not be easy to change these systems (either in our mode of thinking or in law).

Environmental pollution is a complex process that has at least three levels (dimensions). Firstly, the biological-technological dimension, involves technical solutions. Measuring the number of pollutants released into the environment and monitoring the environment is a necessary pre-requisite for the other two dimensions of environmental pollution. Secondly, the economic dimension includes economic balance sheets, evaluation of externalities, and measures that stimulate polluters to adopt measures that decrease pollution. Polluter should be motivated to change behaviour or the ways decisions are adopted in order to avoid environmental pollution. Thirdly, the legal dimension includes legal principles and instruments that prevent, control, limit and eliminate environmental pollution.

Law as a social normative system has become a necessary and indispensable instrument for environmental protection and will continue to support the newly defined zero pollution goal. Compared with the times when the EU had implemented its first policies and legislative measures to prevent and control air and water pollution, the situation has visibly improved across the EU member states (EEA 2019). The law has demonstrated that binding legislative measures, formalising several legal instruments (administrative, economic and sanctioning), can successfully reduce environmental pollution.

The law regulates the release of pollutants produced by various human activities. We use administrative instruments such as prohibitions, directives, restrictions and environmental quality standards. Some pollutants have so harmful effects on the environment or human health that, where economically viable, their emission into the environment or production and use should be legally prohibited. In the case of other pollutants, which the environment can partially absorb, we should establish limit values that would not be hazardous to human health or the environment. We use for this the so-called admissible pollution, which is determined by limit values established by individual legal acts or based on them (for example issuing permits based on these legal acts). These limits set some maximal

admissible level which cannot be exceeded and which regulate both the actual discharge of pollutants into the environment (emission limits) and the number of pollutants present in the individual segments of the environment (target values) (Jančářová et al. 2016). These limits should be established in line with the current state of knowledge to protect human health and other living organisms and other segments of the environment while considering the possible cumulative effect or concurrence of pollutants and activities (para. 12 of Act No. 17/1992 Coll. on the environment).

To have an environment without toxic substances, there is a need for legislature which would prevent environmental pollution and take corrective measures. Revising legal acts should ensure better monitoring of air, water and soil pollution, pollution reporting, preventing pollution and rectifying the present situation. It should aspire to sustain and secure healthy ecosystems and the environment, which would not have a negative impact on the health of individuals and populations. These changes should primarily protect the citizens and ecosystems by better monitoring, reporting, preventing and eliminating pollution. To achieve this, the EU and its member states have to systematically re-examine the current policies and legislation, which establish the limit values, and further restrict them. Regarding EU laws, there is a need to adjust industrial emission limits as part of the ongoing revision of Directive 2010/75/EU on industrial emissions and air quality standards set by Directive 2008/50/EC on ambient air quality and cleaner air for Europe to harmonise them in line with the instructions of the World Health Organization (Mácha and Vícha 2020). We have to also ensure more effective control and enforcement of the legal obligations set by the EU and national law.

The fulfilment of the new zero pollution goal must rest on the fundamental principles of EU environmental policy, which include the precautionary principle and the principles that preventive action should be taken, that environmental damage should as a priority be rectified at source and that the “polluter should pay.” The last-mentioned principle can play a key role in our effort to accomplish zero pollution because it leads to environmental protection cost internalisation (Vícha 2014). It is mostly applied in terms of economic instruments (e.g., environmental pollution fees) or when establishing legal responsibility for environmental damages according to Directive 2004/35/CE on environmental liability regarding the prevention and remedying of environmental damage, or Act No. 167/2008 Coll., on prevention and remedying of environmental damage (Stejskal and Vícha 2009).

A balanced mix of legal instruments in the EU and national laws could significantly contribute to meeting the zero pollution goal and to the protection of human health (of not only the middle class) simultaneously accomplishing the basic concepts of environmental protection, *i.e.*, the sustainable development principle.

Recommendations:

To meet the new goal of zero pollution, we need to:

- Revise current EU and national policies and legislation regulating the environment and propose modifications. A balanced mix of legal instruments would ensure better monitoring of polluted air, water and soil, better reporting about pollution, pollution prevention and redemption, including stricter limit values determining the admissible level of environmental pollution.
- Ensure better control and enforcement of legal duties related to environmental pollution and a more rigorous application of legal liability for environmental damages (environmental degradation).
- Apply more rigorously the “polluter pays” principle, which constitutes the basis of EU environmental policy and law. Introduce economic instruments that would motivate polluters to change their behaviour in line with the principles of environmental protection and human health.

The Impact of the Green Deal on the Middle Class

Bedřich Moldan

The European Commission presented its European Green Deal in December 2019 and the European Council (heads of state and government of the European Union countries) approved it shortly after. The agreement was primarily inspired by the current fundamental environmental threat caused by the global climate crisis, but it had a wider focus because it impacted all of Europe's economy. The European Commission (2019a) characterised the concept as: "Climate change and environmental degradation are an existential threat to Europe and the world. To overcome these challenges, Europe needs a new growth strategy that will transform the European Union (EU) into a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy, where there are no net emissions of greenhouse gases by 2050; economic growth is decoupled from resource use; no person and no place is left behind." The plan specified the required investment and available financial means. It explained how to ensure a just and inclusive transition. The EU should also provide financial support and technical support to those specifically hit by the move to a green economy. The EU intends to become a climate neutral continent by 2050, which would require adoption of appropriate measures in all sectors of the economy. The EU's plan fully relied on the current universal development paradigm defined by the famous 17 sustainable development goals (and the 169 detailed subgoals). All the subgoals are defined by around 240 quantitative indicators established with universal global validity.

It is clear that this particularly compelling challenge, which affects all EU citizens - and not only them - has wide global overlap in enforcing the EU's role as a global sustainable development leader and in introducing the tools needed to implement the required transition steps and in developing bilateral and multilateral mechanisms that would gradually ensure the required global reach of this epochal transition. One great hurdle lies in the fundamental inequality between regions and individual countries. The so-called global South, consisting of mostly developing countries, has increased in importance over recent decades and has improved the situation of its inhabitants. The basic inequality, however, in income, social welfare, quality of services and other important areas defining life quality

persists. These countries' efforts to achieve fast and significant economic growth promising general civilisational take-off are completely legitimate and the rich countries of the global North (where we also belong) have to understand these efforts and support them by any means necessary. This simple situation closely follows society-wide consequences in Europe, one of the wealthiest parts of the world. It carries a global social responsibility that needs to be respected.

Regarding specific effects, we need to identify the individual main relevant actors, *i.e.*, social segments. It is plausible that the first positive reaction to this unprecedented call came from industry, which could be seen as a representative of the broadly defined middle class: business owners, self-employed, managers, etc. The director of Business for Society, Daniela Němcová, once said: “We consider the Green Deal a great challenge and opportunity to substantially change the current way of living in all possible directions, to change the way we think” (Byznys pro společnost 2020). Němcová emphasized the primary importance of sustainability, a very wide concept based on three pillars: economic (preserving the good position of companies, their medium- and long-term competitiveness, especially over the long-term); social (social reconciliation, removal of substantial inequalities and inclusion); and environmental.

The middle class is not only comprised of business owners but is much broader. “Industry” was only mentioned as one example. What matters is the main message that we want to highlight, *i.e.*, that the key burden of the move to sustainability rests on the shoulders of the middle class. This does not entail only “reactive” responses to multilevel positive and negative effects but it is a key and indispensable “proactive” role. One cannot imagine the success of this particularly demanding scheme without the wide engagement of the middle class in the broadest meaning of the term.

The second aspect that needs to be emphasized is the unprecedented scope of the required changes. The description above signals how complex and multifaceted process it is. As Němcová rightly noted, it affects our entire current way of life defined by the middle class.

Recommendations:

- The Green Deal is a response to a very serious environmental threat with potentially catastrophic consequences and therefore the situation needs to be taken very seriously. There is a need to look for ways to face it and seek out adequate responses at all levels.
- This is a crisis that can be approached in a defensive and negative way looking for ways to defend and adapt ourselves. There is also a proactive way, which views the crisis as an opportunity for reform that should lead to social behaviour permanently meeting the criteria of environmental sustainability.
- The required transformation scheme is defined by the outstanding width and depth of the required changes. It is apparent that public support is an unconditional requirement. It cannot happen without changing key social norms related to our current waste-based lavish lifestyles.

The Middle Class as a Leading Force of Decarbonisation

Kateřina Davidov

The European Green Deal is, according to Ursula von der Leyen, a “growth strategy” (European Commission 2019b). Many Green Deal provisions and proposals focus on the middle class. The measures are designed to be acceptable for the middle class so as not to be perceived as a threat to their prosperity. Unfortunately, many Czech politicians use the European Union’s (EU) green agenda as a scapegoat in their culture wars and present to the public – and especially the middle class – the idea that the green transition will significantly hurt their wallets and endanger their lifestyles or even jobs. The real threats to the Czech middle class lie, however, somewhere else. They lie in this irrationally dismissive approach to green transition, which has already begun in Europe and elsewhere in the world and which will accelerate in future years.

First, it should be said that the European Green Deal will be what we make of it. The European Commission proposed a rough sketch but the content rests with the member states. This already demonstrates that the EU is not a unitary bloc, and that its member states perceive the Green Deal differently. Over the last two years, as the Green Deal agenda has been discussed at many European summits and as the member states have been preparing their national plans to reduce emissions and to use an unprecedented volume of EU funds earmarked to this end, it has become obvious that the differences between old and new member states persist and are still very visible.

While the northern and western EU member states have been able to quickly evaluate and utilize the economic potential of green transition, the Central and Eastern European member states have lacked the political will and left this potential unexploited, thereby losing economic opportunities and their competitiveness. The Global Green Economy Index (2021) clearly indicated the existing borderline between Western and Eastern European countries in terms of green investment attractiveness. Czechia

ranked 69th while the countries of northern and western Europe ranked in the top ten.

The intensification of European decarbonisation efforts considerably increases the risk that the differences between the old and new member states will further diverge. Central and Eastern Europe continue to emphasise an industry-based economy founded on low value added, low work enumeration and high emission intensity per unit of gross domestic product (GDP). Czechia is a model example. Measured by emissions per unit of GDP, it has the fourth most intensive economy in the EU (EEA 2020a). This economic model has become very risky. The increasing European climate ambitions have been manifested by for instance rising prices of emission allowances and the adoption of more rigorous emission norms and regulations. If the Czech business model does not change, it is highly probable that in only a few years Czech products will not be able to compete with products from lower emission intensity countries. The EU member states absorb, however, more than 80% of the country's total exports (Český statistický úřad 2021b). Maintaining competitiveness on the greening EU single market should become a key priority. The European Green Deal and the related financial funds could be a huge opportunity for Czechia, but political representation has to take responsibility for the future direction of the country and proactively contribute to the formation of the EU green agenda instead of automatically rejecting anything that comes from Europe.

Green transition should be viewed as an interesting topic by centre and centre-right parties and their voters. Modernising the Czech economy is inevitable and an emphasis on cleaner sectors might attract new foreign direct investment (FDI) and create new, high-quality jobs with higher value added. Research and innovation investments in Czechia have been falling behind the rest of the EU (European Commission 2021) for a long time now and the Green Deal is an opportunity to remedy this situation. The global coronavirus pandemic has strengthened Europe's desire to move certain strategic industries back to Europe and Central and Eastern Europe has great potential to become the centre of component production for clean technologies such as batteries and solar panels.

The Green Deal can also help overcome major regional differences in the quality of life often found in those countries which extract and burn fossil fuels and have a large share of heavy industry. Czechia has three such structurally affected "coal" regions - Ústecký, Karlovarský and Moravskoslezský. These can use EU funds to move away from coal and for the correlated structural changes. Structural

changes would, in these cases, help people from socially deprived classes as much as the middle class. A better geographical distribution of wealth in society, high-quality services and high-quality jobs would relieve the pressure on metropolitan centres such as Prague and other large cities, where living and housing costs have soared while wages stagnate.

Finally, the Green Deal can provide the middle class with many practical benefits such as house renovation to improve energy efficiency, installation of photovoltaic panels on roofs, installation of heat pumps or purchasing of electric cars. The middle class in Western Europe helped start the revolution in using renewable energy sources. There is a need for a well prepared and stable regulatory environment and clearly defined subsidy rules, which Czechia still does not have. It is high time to make a political decision whereby Czechia would become an active part of the global decarbonisation trend as opposed to standing by and watching how others reap the benefits. The middle class can become a champion in the transition to a green economy if provided with proper circumstances.

Recommendations:

- Do not blindly oppose the decarbonisation trends which are gaining ground in Europe. On the contrary, actively try to find a place in this process (for instance as an attractive country for relocation of clean technology component production).
- Leave the already outdated economic model based on high emission intensity and products with low value added and instead fully utilise the opportunities offered by modern green industries.
- Establish a stable regulatory environment for the development of a low emission economy and enable the middle class to become green transition champions in Czechia as they are in Western Europe.

Czechia Has Jumped on a Green Wave

Aneta Zachová

“Europe should forget about the Green Deal,” said Czech Prime Minister (PM) Andrej Babiš in March 2020, when Europe was hit by the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic (Vlada.cz 2020). The same words could be heard from other Czech politicians (Perknerová 2020), coupled with manufacturers’ demands to postpone the Green Deal (Svaz průmyslu a dopravy ČR 2020). Only a year later, European Union (EU) institutions passed a climate law, one of the Green Deal’s building blocks. This breakthrough legislation turned the objective of achieving climate neutrality by 2050 into a legal commitment and established a new goal to lower emissions by 55% before the year 2030 (base year 1990). Based on certain political statements, one could argue that Brussels decided “about us, without us” but that was not the case. Czechia did not adopt a negative stance to the Green Deal on the European level. PM Babiš repeatedly approved in Brussels the document, which called for greening EU policies despite the pandemic (Consilium.europa.eu 2020c). The Czech government was always very careful when discussing European climate policy and increasing the target goals for lowering emissions. This has come as no surprise. Coal mines and heavy industry fuel the Czech economy and are heavily hit by the rising European climate ambitions. Czechia never, however, challenged the Green Deal itself in Europe. Doing so could have led to its political and economic isolation from the rest of Europe.

Climate protection is an exceptional topic because all the EU member states agree on its importance. There are more careful countries, mostly in the post-Soviet space, but fighting climate change has full support across Europe (Consilium.europa.eu 2020a). Opinions start to diverge when it comes to turning away from declarations to concrete steps that affect the citizens. The leaders of the European climate policy, e.g., Denmark and Sweden, are pushing for increasingly ambitious climate goals. They are often joined by Germany, France, the Netherlands and Luxembourg. These countries also act very pragmatically, since climate protection is one of their voters’ priorities. Being a green leader in Europe adds points on the national as well as global political scene. Various groups of countries

have emerged across Europe that are working at promoting their own vision of climate protection. It usually rests on their technological possibilities or geographical characteristics. Seven countries (Austria, Denmark, Ireland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, and Spain), for instance, requested that the EU energy rely solely on renewable resources by 2050 (Euractiv 2020). Another group of countries, which included Czechia, Poland, Hungary, and France (Euractiv 2021) requested that Europe achieved climate neutrality by 2050 observing the technological neutrality principle and did not prioritise the selected “clean” sources of energy or business sectors.

Apart from technological neutrality, Czechia asked the EU to calculate the effects of new green policy. Using the EU budget to “subsidise” the modernisation of the Czech economy was another important demand, where Czechia found agreement with the Eastern European EU member states; the poorer countries in the EU. Czechia’s main partner was Poland, whose economy produces far more emissions than Czechia. Together they managed to negotiate very strong financial support in Brussels despite the fact that the traditional V4 did not gain much when discussing the Green Deal. Unlike Poland and Czechia, Slovakia strongly endorsed the climate commitments as its coal mining past is only a fraction of the situation in Czechia. The same could be said for Hungary, which should not face any significant hurdles in meeting its EU climate objectives. This is not the case, however, for Czechia.

The countries’ position on green policy is formed by economic factors and political aspirations. Conservative governments can hardly imagine abandoning the current centralised coal energy. One idea encompassed by the Green Deal is to decentralise and allow EU citizens to consume and produce energy, for instance by placing photovoltaic panels on the roofs of their houses. Similar progressive trends and so-called communal energy policy projects have proliferated mostly in the West; a pioneer being Denmark. Decentralisation has also been supported by the centre-right governments in the UK, Germany and Austria.

Czechia did not have any choice but to jump on this green wave. Czechs can feel the effects of climate change and people do not want to accept the government’s lack of will to do something about it. Climate protection and reducing emissions is “in fashion.” Both the government and the business sector are embracing them, including energy producers and manufacturers. They are aware that they

will have problems on the market if labelled a polluter. It took Czechia some time but at present only few challenge the need to reduce emissions and move to a greener policy. The Green Deal is not a Brussels' invention but the EU's reaction to the global ambitions directed at slowing down global warming. If Czechia were to stand aside, it would lose its competitiveness on the EU market and sooner or later would still be forced to jump on the green wave. It now rides on the same wave as the rest of Europe, which has so far always paid off.

Recommendations:

- Czechia should begin to communicate European climate policy better to the voters. It should not be presented as a threat leading to job losses, but as an opportunity to modernise the economy.
- Czechia should be a constructive partner on the EU level demanding that its climate policy rests on realistic expectations. It should drop its nit-picker approach.
- Czechia should adopt a consistent position when discussing the Green Deal both in the European and national discussions.

True Green Deal Stories Give Us a Chance to Understand It

Soňa Jonášová

It has been clear since the early days of the European Green Deal that its scope and ambition would make it into one of the most important joint initiatives of the European Union (EU) member states. Other than the specific framework and direction, it provides a clear focus for preparing well-designed projects, which go far beyond the vague, hard-to-imagine “low-carbon economy” ideas. Thus, let us look at some cases employing similar principles and yet closer to us because they have already been implemented – even without being presented as examples of “green principles.” I will analyse them in more detail.

Karel Horák is a farmer in Choťovice. He links the principles of a circular economy with innovation in agriculture. His biogas station processes scraps from the farm’s animal and plant products and the station heats up a nearby hotel and a pig breeding station (piglets are born without thermoregulation). Compost composed of local materials and coffee grounds from collected Nespresso capsules enriches the soil. Several kilometres further, there is another biogas station, which processes food waste from restaurants and supermarkets. The village has become energy self-sufficient and the mayor, Milan Kazda, continually introduces innovative approaches. He is currently considering purchasing an electric car available for car sharing. Both men are not afraid of novelties and are engines of change. They are remarkable because they always drive their concepts to higher levels of effectiveness.

Another example is Milan Doubravský, director of Municipal Public Utilities in Zábřeh na Moravě, who has been improving the town’s waste management as every small amount saved can be invested into the development of the local re-use centre, local swimming pool or the household waste collecting centre, which directs only a minimum amount of waste to the landfill. Most of the raw materials are rigorously separated on the SEPAREX sorting line and handed over for recycling. Most of the building materials, for example, used for new projects (whether a playground or a cycling route) are reused close to their place of origin. Doubravský often comments that dumping more waste at a later stage of the production cycle can further accelerate if a good plan and a clear vision are applied.

Lenka Mynářová manages not only research teams but also advanced technologies converting used cooking oil and use of nanotechnologies in cosmetics and personal protective equipment production. She brings together key actors in the relevant segments and Nafigate Corporation is one of the most successful technological companies with several European and global innovation and research excellence awards. The company processes waste oil into one of the few bio plastic materials, which the EU views positively because unlike thousands of unsuccessful products with excellent marketing campaigns, it actually is biodegradable in natural conditions.

All three stories share the leitmotif of strong leaders whether a farmer, mayor, Municipal Public Utilities director or one of the most accomplished women in the Czech circular economy arena. None of them waited for new legislation but perceived waste as a precious resource both financially and environmentally. Each one of them would perfectly fit in the puzzle of mutually linked measures introduced by the Circular Economy Action Plan or Farm-To-Fork, which I perceive as the two key strategies of the European Green Deal. Its main ambition is a transition to a low-carbon economy and even if it might seem too abstract, these stories demonstrate clear links. Using biologically degradable waste to produce electricity and heat is in line with energy modernisation. The so-called second generation of biofuels is replacing the almost omnipresent oilseed rape and instead of monocultures provides space for biological waste. Using biological waste to produce biopolymers is without any doubt more environment-friendly than today's practice of using sugarcane. Considering the overall life cycle, growing monocultures to produce biopolymers (often imported from developing countries) is a far greater environmental burden. It damages biodiversity and the carbon footprint connected with their production and transportation surprises even the most ardent supporters of innovations (Liu et al. 2014). The Zábřeh story also demonstrates that the local re-use centre is fully in line with the repeated use of everything that is not difficult to recycle and when connected to the needs of the local asylum home inhabitants it also has a social dimension. The benefit can also be converted into the number of new jobs created for the employees of the local sorting line and household waste collecting centre as opposed to dumping. The ratio of recycling to dumping is usually 20:1.

The Green Deal is undeniably a huge opportunity, with mention being made of only the small and medium size enterprises and the public sector. Such and other stories are written by the big Czech business players as well, such as Třinecké železářny steel works, which signed the Green Deal for

Moravskoslezský region in August 2020⁷ to express their support for the European Green Deal and prepare concrete projects in the region. The same motivation lied behind the initiative called A Change for the Better (Změna k lepšímu),⁸ which has more than 250 members today ranging from multinational corporations to small and middle size businesses and NGOs. They all believe in restarting the economy based on the Green Deal principles. It is already clear that it is not an empty document but a place where stories turn into positive change for society.

Recommendations:

- Revise resources and assets in the Czech national treasure, whether this be wood coming from forests ravaged by bark beetle, soil quality or the quantity of available resources. This data is difficult to obtain at present.
- Prepare action plans for using these resources on the regional level and draw cities and companies into the debate. Allow them to co-create joint projects based on the principles of cooperation and symbiosis. What one considers waste, another one sees as a resource. Do not linger.
- Put into practice the outcomes of the debates, using pilot projects. Test and calculate CO₂ savings, the number of new jobs created, and the economic value added for the region.
- Repeat the above!

⁷ For more information, see Sdružení pro rozvoj Moravskoslezského kraje 2020.

⁸ For more information, see <https://www.klepsimu.cz>

The Green Deal Is Our Chance to Come to Terms with Old Burdens

Ivan Štefanec

The European Green Deal is usually presented as an important step forward in global climate change and in introducing new technologies into the energy sector. It should lead not only to savings but also to qualitative improvement of society and every individual. European strategic documents like to use elevated language with futuristic terms and do not always present realistic goals. It is particularly imperative for the Central European region to stand firmly on the ground and focus on those problems, which have been troubling the region for decades. These problems are specifically environmental burdens and the energy infrastructure established in the socialist era.

Environmental burdens have historically emerged in close proximity to large manufacturers or mines. The absence of adequate technologies and especially the lack of political will among the communist elites triggered the free release of dangerous substances into the environment or their storage in underground, insufficiently secured, containers. Evidence concerning their exact amount and locations was poorly kept and they are often unknown. The chemical reactions and interactions with the surrounding environment have produced new and even more dangerous compounds.

Looking at the Bratislava region only, around 208 environmental burdens have been recorded (Tomašák 2013). The most noteworthy and well-known example is a landfill created after the closed Juraj Dimitrov Chemical Plant (CHZJD) located in the Bratislava suburb of Vrakuňa, in immediate proximity to populated areas. The underground water there is so polluted that the authorities do not even recommend people using their private wells to water their gardens. It also threatens to compromise one of the largest drinking reservoirs in Europe, Žitný ostrov. The landfill remediation will cost over 30 million euro (Ministerstvo životného prostredia Slovenskej republiky 2017), paid for by the European Union (EU), and the measures will only be temporary with a 30 to 50 year lifespan until another solution arises. This is only one of many such cases in Bratislava, not to mention Slovakia

and the rest of the region. The priority of the Slovak and other Central European governments should be allocation of resources dedicated to environmental policy that would enable the tackling of similar environmental burdens, which directly endanger the population or hamper development of the region such as new construction projects. Lowering greenhouse gas emissions or supporting electric cars will not save us from potential small or medium-size environmental disasters that these burdens can create at any time.

Another area that needs attention when implementing the Green Deal is modernisation of the energy sector and distribution networks. This is not a problem in post-communist countries only; most EU member states will have to address it. Experts argue that if the current speed of introducing renewable resources reaches 50% by 2030, the European distribution network will not be able to handle the new demand (Morgan 2019). Although Germany is best prepared, the adaptation, damage repair due to overload and other inevitable interventions cost up to 1.4 billion euros (Morgan 2019). The costs would be much higher in Czechia and Slovakia. Unpremeditated fast transition to renewable resources, without thorough preparation of the distribution networks as well as companies and households, creates the risk of local power cuts that will have to be compensated for by conventional sources. This would bring about economic costs and damaged confidence in green energy and the EU's environmental policy. The solution is to invest in modernising the distribution networks and their interconnectedness so that potential power cuts could be immediately identified and compensated.

Connecting energy systems is related to energy and strategic security. In 2014, the European Commission announced the goal of establishing an Energy Union that would guarantee cheaper and affordable energy for EU citizens and at the same time reduce dependency on third countries, especially Russia. Up to ten EU member states, Austria, Bulgaria, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, and Slovakia, are 75 to 100% dependent on natural gas supplies from Russia (Lavička and Kačer 2019). Bulgaria, Estonia, Slovakia, and Finland have a comparable dependency on Russia in oil supplies. EU's high goals regarding climate protection are at best puzzling given that Russia is the fourth largest polluter in the world. The level of dependency on Russia is directly proportionate to Russia's influence in Europe and is projected in the people's concerns that Russia could "turn the tap off" anytime if a political or value conflict arises between the EU and Russia.

To lower the energy and strategic risks, there is a need to invest massively into the accelerated emergence of a full-fledged Energy Union with effectively linked systems, their modernisation and diversified origin of resources, which cannot be found in the EU.

Recommendations:

- Concentrate on realistic goals to fight climate change.
- Eliminate old environmental burdens directly compromising the health of the local population and advancing local development.
- Accelerate the establishment of the Energy Union and reduce energy and natural resources dependency on Russia.

Green Deal Solutions with Agriculture and Forestry

Marlene Mortler

The Green Deal comes with a variety of initiatives, all designed to bring our lives more in line with the planetary boundaries of the Earth. The goal is to create a circular economy in the European Union (EU), where resource-saving processing and recycling are central to enabling sustainable growth. Approaches, however, to achieving this goal vary considerably. Some take an ideological approach, others a more pragmatic and realistic one.

Sustainability means balancing three pillars: ecology, economy and social issues. For this reason, it does not make sense to directly confront problems and challenges with bans. Instead, solutions must be sought. The best way to do this is to rely on the innovative power of the middle class. For this, however, we must also set the appropriate course and not make it more difficult for the middle class to work, invest and, above all, live. Environmental goals can only be achieved through research and development. This applies to all sectors of the economy - transport, infrastructure, energy and, of course, agriculture. We need to invest to a greater extent in research in these fields and increase climate-related innovations so that we achieve decarbonisation while at the same time not endangering our prosperity, which depends significantly on the stability of the middle class.

As a politician with a special focus on agriculture, I would also like to emphasise the crucial importance of agriculture and forestry for the Green Deal. There is a reason why agriculture always plays a central element in the EU's initiatives, such as the Farm-To-Fork Strategy or the Biodiversity Strategy. We all depend on natural resources, we create, manage, maintain and consume them. Stricter regulations and unrealistic demands on the many small family farms only endanger Europe's food sovereignty by forcing them to abandon their farms in the long term. Many European farmers are well aware of the environment and act sustainably. Therefore, we should not work against agriculture, forestry and the many private family farms. Our agriculture is the only industry that produces oxygen and sequesters carbon dioxide. This makes it our weapon in the fight against climate change. We must therefore support our farmers and the many regional businesses associated with them.

It is equally important not to only look at the supply side and to imperatively want to change it. The production of organic products and electric cars will not contribute to a sustainable society if the products are not accepted and demanded accordingly. Here again, the middle class plays a central role as the engine of the economy. If we manage to make sustainable products appropriately attractive and educate people about European standards and the importance of regional and European production, it can unleash further investment to achieve the goals of the Green Deal. A strong middle class means a strong Europe. By being open to technology, investing in research and development and then supporting the implementation of novel innovations for small and medium-sized companies and farmers, we can meet the challenges of the next decades and build a green, digital and sustainable future.

Recommendations:

It is therefore necessary for the EU and also for a fast COVID-19 recovery to address the following issues as soon as possible:

- Digitalisation in all areas, especially in the health-sector, agriculture and public administration.
- Lowering bureaucratic barriers and establishing comparable standards between member states.
- Promoting innovation in climate-friendly technologies with technology openness as the prime directive.
- Strengthening the strategic autonomy of the EU, but also fostering international cooperation on cross-border challenges such as climate change.

The Coronavirus Crisis Should Not Turn into a Debt, Social or Climate Crisis

Luděk Niedermayer

The pandemic is not over yet. We will have to deal with its consequences even after the health crisis passes and possibly for an even longer time because of virus mutation risks. Those who escaped the worst effects on life and health might end up suffering now from the difficult social and financial situation. It has affected many households, businesses and states around the globe alike. Apart from the skills and determination of businesses and people in general, governments will play a key role in determining how severe and long the consequences will be.

The crisis brought about an unprecedented fall in economic activity and investment. Private businesses are unable to quickly compensate for these losses and state investment (including support for private investment) will play a significant role in reviving economic growth. Insecurity might hinder a significant part of investment. Many people, who have resources available, might call a stop to investment due to the logic of insecure investment. It might be easier for them to invest if provided with a high-quality and trustworthy state policy, which could positively contribute to restarting the economy and most importantly to the much desired growth.

It is a difficult task that most governments are facing today, and it helps to have available skills and high-quality performance state institutions. It is the state (government, regions, cities, and state institutions) that decide in the end about state investment. The performance of the Czech government during the pandemic has been, to put it mildly, unfortunately incompetent and chaotic (with more than a small share of populism), which does not lead to positive expectations about its future success. It will not be easy to find a good mix of firmly established goals and values, the best economic effect, and the needed share of political pragmatism in Czechia. The Czech government will be responsible for creating rules to use the European Union (EU) funds efficiently. Czechia will probably receive more than 1,000 billion CZK (ca. 39.011 million EUR) in subsidies over the next 5 years, with this amount possibly topped up with additional loans.

The Crisis and the Economy

While the burden of the previous crises was mostly carried by businesses and the public, the economic costs of this crisis have been to a large extent carried by the states. The enormous costs will be projected into a speedy increase in state debt but will have stopped even greater and more extensive economic damage. It is equally legitimate to spend more funds (probably this and the following year) to support fast, sustainable, and - most notably - well-designed revival. Public finances can be obtained under some control and coordination over the next few years. Unfortunately, the Czech economic support programmes have been chaotic and ineffective. The next stage should start soon, and the task will be far more difficult. Instead of blanket state support programmes, funds should be available only to those businesses which need funds to grow quickly and, in contrast, cases with minimum chances should not receive support any longer. With the massive EU budget transfers attempting to revive the economy, we will not face the risk of insufficient funds but the risk of a weak government and low state institutional competences, primarily projected in their decisions how to use these resources.

The Crisis and Its Effects

All Czechs have felt the effects of the many extraordinary measures related to COVID-19, that is all social classes without exceptions, but clear differences, such as the (mostly economic) scope of the effect, will be evident. State employees partially escaped this problem, just like those with stable contracts and working for employers who did not face financial problems or who received state support. The situation was very difficult, however, for businesses, who dealt with poor and late prepared support programmes, especially small businesses which usually do not have reserves for this type of crisis. The government did not give much consideration to the economic effects of the crisis on vulnerable social groups such as single parents or people with unstable work contracts or those who partially work in the grey economy. There have been winners as well; companies whose turnover significantly increased during the pandemic (online commerce, IT sector, sanitary supplies manufacturers, etc.). Some businesses and individuals benefited greatly due to the state and its chaotic decision-making, for instance when purchasing health supplies. It is difficult to assess today the economic effects of the crisis on the economy, its individual sectors and groups due to the massive state support policy, which was based on a blanket survivor strategy for the greatest possible number

of pre-pandemic economic entities. When this support ends and the standard economic mechanisms (including bankruptcies) kick in, we will be able to gradually see the true effects of the pandemic on the Czech economy.

The Crisis and the Middle Class

The share of the middle-class population (median income) in Czechia is still one of the highest among OECD countries. Around 71% of the population falls into this category (OECD 2019). The OECD defines the middle class as households with an income between 75 to 200% of the median income. This is generally good news because the middle class theory perceives its frequency as proof of society's homogeneity, *i.e.*, diminishing class differences. A strong middle class should theoretically contribute to significant social mobility and promising perspectives for further development (Prokop 2020). The condition of the Czech middle class is economically very unstable, however, and mirrors every crisis. Upward social mobility is a major problem from its economic perspective, *i.e.*, mobility from groups with lower income to higher groups, as every even small negative factor, can overturn the upswing.

We can see that a large section of the middle class, especially employees with average and above-average incomes, have not been fully hit by the crisis. This obviously was not the case with business owners and self-employed people, who have been affected. The transition from the usual income (salary or income from business) to state support programmes (support for the self-employed, sick pay or quarantine compensations) had an immense impact on this group. The Czech welfare policy has had traditionally a different effect on people receiving unemployment allowance; it amounted to a small change for low income groups and a major difference for the higher income groups.

One should also consider the real estate price hike, which threatens the middle class. Many find the prices unaffordable or risk high financial instability if individuals or families purchase (surprisingly so from the economic perspective) very expensive real estate. Given that Czechia has not adopted the euro, it faces a much higher risk of rising interest rates. When writing this paper, the Czech government paid the third highest interest on 10 year bonds in the EU (ECB 2021).

The Crisis and the Climate

Adopting measures, which would bring an end to the increase in climate hazard on Earth, should be automatic for any responsible politician. We should not disadvantage young generations by transferring the high burden of climate cost on to them. The current economic-climate strategy must rest on sensible investment and we should not therefore invest in conservation or renewal of unsustainable models of business operations and social patterns, but in support of a change towards sustainability. The EU has summarised these changes in the European Green Deal (Green Deal) and this green, necessary but relatively costly investment (which however also has clear revenues) should be one of the major, if not the major, areas supported by the state.

The Green Deal, its clear goals, and the one hundred billion crowns available to Czechia from the EU budget to implement these changes represent an enormous opportunity for Czechia to modernise the economy and adopt it to the twenty-first century following the principles of permanent sustainability. The success or failure of this strategy depends on the ability of the Czech government and institutions to present the public with a clear cost and benefit analysis brought about by this important and unavoidable change. Efficient use of money is a must because we want all of society to benefit, not just to improve the position of the powerful “big business owners.”

Given the amount of money available to Czechia in the upcoming years, we need to remind ourselves that the main problem is strategy quality and effective implementation. Clear and lucid communication to the public, courage and skills when setting the goals and tools will determine the final effect and the success of this policy. Investment into economic modernisation, better sustainability and securing environmental protection and climate protection for our generation and especially the future generations will amount to strengthening the resilience of the economy. This is one of the plausible and sensible areas to invest money in which would bring broad and permanent social benefit for us all.

Recommendations:

- As part of the post-pandemic economic recovery, support measures that follow the EU climate agenda based on a much more responsible use of resources. Economy must transform into a sustainable and competitive system that uses resources effectively but not at the expense of future generations. The EU expenses should respect the “do no significant harm” environmental principle and prioritize expenses, which are in line with the green investment taxonomy.
- The European citizen is crucial for the green transition because the transition to climate neutral economy must be just and no-one should be left behind. The Czech actors should be able to bring benefits to all citizens and obtain the widest possible support for the changes. The groups most hit by the transition should receive effective compensation to mitigate the higher costs.
- The Green Deal represents an opportunity to modernize the economy and adapt it to the 21st century in line with the principles of permanent sustainability. It is a great advantage that countries like Czechia can use hundreds of billions of euros from the EU funds. High-quality and elaborated communication, well-established individual steps and effective use of EU funds represent a mix that can make the transition successful and support a competitive and sustainable economy.

The Green Deal as a Social Problem in the Visegrad Countries

Luboš Palata

The end of Communism in Central Europe was accompanied by the complete collapse of the former totalitarian system. Poland faced state bankruptcy accompanied by universal shortages and enormous debt. Relatively prosperous Hungary was stricken by its debt in the West. The Czechoslovak economy stagnated for almost ten years and faced rising problems with supplies of goods. What all these countries shared was a deep environmental crisis. All the Communist Soviet satellites in Central Europe suffered from a heavy environmental burden; the immense damage to the environment and human health brought about by their outdated industries. Life in the rivers died off, entire parts of forests withered due to pollution, the hydro plant Nagymaros mega construction threatened to forever destroy the most beautiful part of the Hungarian Danube. People were dying prematurely due to catastrophic air pollution caused by heavy industry in Northern Bohemia, around the city of Ostrava and in the Katowice region. Milan Kučera (1994) stated that life expectancy began to stagnate in the 1970s while it continued to grow in the more environmentally responsible countries in Western Europe. Surface coal mining destroyed hundreds of kilometres under the Krušné hory mountains and tens of villages and cities were destroyed to give way to mining, some over a thousand-years old such as the town of Most (Biben 2019). The awakening of civic society in the late 1980s and the resistance against the totalitarian regime were to a large extent motivated by efforts to stop environmental devastation in Central Europe (Vaněk 1996). The devastation affected every citizen and damaged the health condition of a large section of society, while lowering life expectancy compared with the Western European average (Ústav zdravotnických informací a statistiky 1989).

Three Decades of Democracy, Three Decades of Reviving Nature

Central Europe has taken huge strides in catching up with Western living standards over the last thirty years. More than fifteen years of European Union (EU) membership has brought EU sponsored investment in environmental projects. Democracy and free media have enabled the public to pressure

the major polluters to improve the environment, gradually withdraw from heavy industry, limit surface coal mining, and begin public debates about mega projects such as the Hungarian Nagymaros abandoned in 1990 (Fürst n.d.). The Northern Bohemian brown coal basin has grown very little in the last few decades and the landscape around the Krušné hory mountains had been revitalised and became a good place for living once again. For generations of Czechs, Poles, Hungarians and Slovaks, the current state of their environment is a small miracle. The rivers have cleaned up over the last thirty years, fish have returned, and people can swim in them once again. The air is breathable almost everywhere, the forests do not wither, waste is recycled and not dumped in illegal landfills. Most villages have sewage plants and even large, almost extinct, animals have returned to wildlife including wolves, aurochs and beavers. Not everything is positive however. Gigantic warehouses around large cities and motorways have seized high quality agricultural land, the landscape is devastated by endless fields owned by “agrobarens.” Butterflies, bees and other insects have been disappearing from nature, draught combined with wasting water and the inability to retain water have caused drying up of forests and bark beetle calamities. Yet, the older generations of Central Europeans generally feel that nature is in a much better condition today than it used to be.

Central Europe Grows Rich, Central Europeans Are Poor

Most Central Europeans find it very difficult to accept that a major and costly environmental revolution need to take place now, as part of our fight against climate change. It is partially caused by their low-income levels, with Eurostat data indicating that their income is still much lower than in similar Western European countries. This view is often neglected because PM Andrej Babiš stated that Czechia’s economic performance will overtake countries such as Italy and Spain (Echo24 2021) this year although there is a large gap between the Italian/Spanish and Czech salaries. Most Czechs believe that one thousand euro is a good salary, and two thousand euro is for most an inaccessible dream. The reasons are many but both the EU and national data show that the income of the well-situated middle class in Czechia, the most prosperous V4 country, sits at the bottom of the most developed Western countries (Hospodářské noviny 2021). One slogan echoed during the eurozone crisis several years ago: “Poor Slovaks will not pay for the pensions of rich Greeks.” Greek pensions dropped and Slovak one increased, but their ratio is still 2:1 at present. We observed a similar situation in Poland and Hungary. The situation is more complicated in Czechia because Czechs compare their living standard and income mostly with very wealthy Austrians and Germans.

No-One Can Afford an Electric Car

The European Green Deal is a complex political, economic and social problem in Central Europe. The move from the combustion engine to electric cars is for the average member of the Central European middle class a technical problem (range, number of charge points) but also a social problem. An average middle class family in Czechia, the wealthiest country of the four, cannot afford an electric car costing 40,000 euros. A similar threat is represented by the move from coal to more expensive natural gas in heating plants. Radek Škoda (quoted in Palata 2021) claims that coal heats up more flats in Central European cities than in the West. Raising the prices of plane tickets by adding a green tax is a threat for regular summer sea vacations, one of the Central European middle classes' joys in recent decades. Environmentally friendly food is also a Cinderella in Central Europe, not because they do not want it but because it is expensive and thus unattainable for some members of the middle class.

How to Become Green but Not Poor

The “green revolution” threatens the moderate wellbeing of Czech, Hungarian, Polish and Slovak forty- and fifty-year-olds. Despite the partial understanding of the need to implement environmental changes due for instance to long-term extreme draught in past years, the poorer but also the better off Visegrad public are concerned about the “expensive” environmental revolution. They ask if it is necessary in this extreme form. The young generation, however, is quite different. The spring 2021 Ipsos survey demonstrated that they were more educated and more open to the world than those who remembered the Communist era. Their political weight is small, however, and they represent an electoral minority compared with the retired and productive age voters born in the Communist times. Every political group that wants to succeed in Central European democracies must consider how to sell the “green revolution” to the public; how to do so without considerably touching their wallets. These are the same wallets that Czechs, Hungarians, Poles and Slovaks feel do not have enough money in to save the planet Earth. They do not want to become poorer to save the planet, and this only a short moment after they finally became a little wealthier.

Recommendations:

- Prepare impact assessment of the measures needed to meet the goals of the Green Deal for each member state individually.
- Social Fund of the Green Deal financed from emission allowances should be made available primarily to the poorer member states.
- Postpone the planned ban on sales of petrol and diesel cars in the poorer EU member states for until after 2040.
- Establish a Just Transition Fund for car industry employees.

Opportunities and Risks for the Middle Class in the Green Transition in Bulgaria

Rumiana Stoilova

The European Union (EU) framework for achieving the green transition serves as the basis for the elaboration of fair national policies. Fairness entails that the opportunities created by green policies should extend to people of different social strata; the related risks should likewise be shared by all. Ralf Dahrendorf (1979) introduced the concept of “life chances,” which he defined as a function of the possibility to choose and of the possible actions that are accessible to individuals located in different positions in the social structure. To rephrase Dahrendorf’s view, one might say that in order to achieve the green change, to establish effective policies without detriment to nature, and to ensure sustainable development of the society, the economy, and the environment, the policies in question should lead to improved life chances. Veselý and Smith (2008) take up this sociological concept in their effort to identify the mechanisms underlying social transformations involved in the change in people’s life chances and the possible mismatch between the objective and subjective sides of stratification.

The analysis of public attitudes towards environmental protection demonstrates that the low-income strata are less interested in environmental protection than the high-income ones. The low educational level is a factor working in the same direction: people with a secondary or higher education express a greater concern for the environment than those with a primary education. International comparisons have shown no difference in environmental attitudes between Bulgaria and Czechia. The level of this concern is lower in Hungary than in Bulgaria. It would therefore be interesting to analyse the risks and opportunities that the middle class in Bulgaria face as being informative for those in Czechia (Stoilova and Haralampiev 2020).

The middle-income strata amount to approximately 60% of Bulgarian society, but different trends in their development are visible across regions and also within large cities. The middle-income strata in Bulgaria have decreased from 56% to 48% over the ten years between 2006 and 2016 in villages.

The poor amount to 19% in the large cities, 30% in the middle-sized cities and 48% in villages (Stoilova and Staneva 2018). The unequal territorial distribution of income groups holds a great risk for societies with respect to their green transition. We will discuss below three opportunities facing the Bulgarian middle class in the green transition, which should be extended across the middle class living in different regions and type of settlements in the country:

First Opportunity: Building Renovation

One of the target investments of the green transition is “building renovation.” This creates possibilities for the middle class, for the people who possess homes of their own (this being the majority of Bulgarian households). This opportunity has been implemented in recent years in Bulgaria, and the National Recovery and Resilience Plan envisages its continuation. The building renovation projects, however, have been subject to wide criticism, leading to a reduction in the planned sums for their support in the new funding period. The cause of this is the lack of assessments as to the effectiveness and fairness of public investments made in the previous funding period. Some investigative reporting has demonstrated the excessive cost of renovation. Its results have proven rather weak as regards stimulating cooperation between the residents of large blocks of flats. Roger Scruton (2011) has pointed out in his *Green Philosophy* that there are no empirical studies on successfully managed shared property and no good examples of the development and stimulation of “cooperation strategies.” This is a shortcoming that hampers the continuation and extension of the benefits of what is a potentially good opportunity for the middle class.

Second Opportunity: Peer to-Peer Electricity Sharing Schemes

Another opportunity for benefiting middle class households is related to investments in energy storage systems, in which consumers of clean energy are likewise producers (so-called “prosumers”) of energy. They supply their personal needs but also produce for the electric energy market: thus, prosumers may invest the excess power they create. This opportunity is defined and presented in a Policy Brief of the Centre for the Study of Democracy. The document is entitled *Lost in Transition: Bulgaria and the European Green Deal* (CSD 2020). The recommendations on the side of the think tank relevant to the National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP) and aimed at providing greater opportunities for households and for associations of consumers and producers of renewable energy, have remained

largely unfulfilled. This was pointed out one year later in a subsequent document prepared by the Coalition for Green Restart, an association of civic organizations (move.bg 2021). Recommendations coming from the civic sector and from independent experts have been partially included in the programmes of the parties that, having been in opposition in the summer of 2020, were able to win representation in the 45th National Assembly, elected in April 2021. The protest coalitions still lack, however, the required parliamentary majority to implement deep changes in the existing governance model that creates conditions for the formation of business circles close to the government and to exclude alternative proposals and protagonists. The life span of the 45th National Assembly proved to be very short, and new national parliamentary elections expected to take place on 11 July 2021.

Third Opportunity: Eco-preneurship

Ecopreneurship is a market-oriented trend that is inspired by environmental values and conducts activities aimed at improving the quality of life of people by means of technological solutions (Ivanov 2020). It displays to the highest degree the overlap between the subjective and objective aspects of stratification: shared values with regard to environmental protection, the dedicated work of people with a high level of education who feel responsible for the well-being of future generations; and competence related to the potential of innovations for opening new market niches answering the specific demands of consumers. A sociological study has illustrated the relevant advantages and opportunities of eco-preneurship by providing a concrete example of its success in the production and sales of ecologically clean foods in Bulgaria. The study has analysed and demonstrated the possibility of creating modern companies that provide sufficient produce for the market, their engagement in an integral network of farmer-producers, partners, nutritionists and technicians involved in a value chain that produces both for the local and the European market. Harmonica, a firm created in 2004-2005, had made a profit of 8 million BGN by 2019 (Forbes Bulgaria 2020). It continues to create new products and serves as an example of innovativeness in the field of environmental protection, fairness and social innovations.

Recommendations:

- Policies in the Green Transition which are capable of creating opportunities for the middle class adopt two strategies: one, focused more on final (sectoral) ready-made solutions, renovation of buildings, one-time aid for the purchase of an electric car, replacement of solid fuel heating appliances, and the other on investments with added value (development of energy cooperatives, targeted loans and other financial instruments for the development of energy consumption for own needs). The mix of the two is the most pragmatic approach, which helps middle-class entrepreneurs to carry out successful innovations, and support for massification and reaching a wider range of end users of solutions that reduce the negative footprint on the environment.
- There is a need to specify the opportunities for generating jobs in regions where the coal mining industry is due to be closed down. Entrepreneurship, innovations and market-oriented activities may help create substitutes here for coal mining. Further qualifications and training courses have to rely on the potential of universities and of small training centres.
- Achieving political consensus on a shift to green policies which are fair for everyone is a challenge. There would be a need to take into account the vulnerability of the poor, while also making use of and directing the unused potential of the middle class. It will also be necessary to restrict the oligarchic circles of dependencies that may potentially monopolize opportunities deriving from any social change supported by publicly channelled financial streams.

The European Green Deal. A Programme That Should Not Become a Dogma

Ladislav Cabada

The European Green Deal represents an exceptionally ambitious project based on clear starting points but also shelters a potentially extremely high hazard. Without a doubt, the negative effects of human activity cause climate change and changes in individual ecosystems. They also strengthen the intensity of socio-political risk factors such as environmental distress and disasters leading to migration. When searching for logic and rational arguments while discussing these critical changes or reversal of negative trends, we cannot ignore that society's state of mind is often formed by political emotions, whether it is fear or idealism. Emotions fundamentally affect the behaviour of all society's segments and can be dramatically altered by the media or other forms (let us recall the paradox that the most visible rational anti-vaxxers turned into the most vigorous defenders of inoculation).

Let us look at the key problems, which we can expect when enforcing or implementing the Green Deal and which are related to emotions. The most fundamental one is presenting and rationalising it as yet another transition project. Many scholars, studying post-communist transition societies, have demonstrated that a significant share of the population adopted a negative stance to the transition burden that affected many aspects of their lives and perceive themselves as its victims (Ágh 2021; Ágh 2019; Krastev and Holmes 2020; Ther 2014). The frameworks of democratisation, economic transition, socialisation into the Western world, Europeanisation and globalisation represented for them a nexus of negative factors, which they approached with conservative and nationalist-populist approaches. The German political scientist, Lars Rensmann (2012), described these groups as anti-cosmopolitans and linked them to the rise of nationalist-conservative, even ultraright, groups filled with anti-EU feelings. Sociologically and socio-economically speaking, they mostly represented the "traditional" working class but one cannot deny that these parties also did well among first-time voters.

Anti-cosmopolitanism has a strong anti-liberal potential, and one could wrongly assume that it contradicts the main value orientation of the middle class. This is not necessarily the case in the Czech environment, where the middle class is strongly determined by economic status and is not simply value-based. Anti-cosmopolitanism is not only an issue, however, in so-called traditional Western democracies. The electorate of the Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) clearly demonstrates this claim (the Austrian case has been discussed for a long time as an example of the so-called middle class extremism concept), just like electoral support for political parties such as Alternative for Germany (AfD). One could rationally assume that these groups (and not only them) will perceive an extensive transition programme as a threat because they will associate it with significant financial costs, a fundamental impact on the character of some segments of industrial production, the energy sector and the patterns of consumption and leisure activities. Threat, amplified by the fact that it is a project planned to span over at least three decades, was presented as an eschatological process, *i.e.*, leading to the establishment of a “final” and ideal condition, which the critics can perceive – and more intensively present – as a utopia.

Another risk factor is the “price,” *i.e.*, the financial cost of transition. In Czechia alone, the estimated costs reach 10 trillion CZK (cca. 389 billion EUR), approximately 7 Czech annual budgets (Šustr 2021). The European Commission has promised to establish a Just Transition Fund (PGE 2021) but we cannot deny that agricultural subsidies, for instance, have clearly revealed significant regional disparities (to put it bluntly, a preference for old over new member states). Naturally, if transition is linked to innovation rooted in a knowledge economy with high value added, these costs could easily transform into future revenues. One can also expect that relatively fast changes, linked to abandoning some activities or even entire industrial sectors, would evoke quite a lot of resistance as shown in the first debates about e.g. phasing out production in Sokolov Coal (Vřesová plant etc.) (Šustr 2021).

The main risk factor rests in the effort to hide or suppress some factors, which disturb the optimism of the Green Deal. To illustrate, let us use the move to electric mobility. One of the new monuments in Dresden was *Die Gläserne Manufaktur* from Volkswagen installed twenty years ago. It offered the visitors guided tours, where they could watch how a car was manufactured; they watched the craft production of personalised orders, *i.e.*, luxury cars. Several years ago, the programme changed, and

the presentation and manufacturing focused on electric mobility. During my last visit, I spoke with the guide about the advantages and risks of electric mobility; in private he started talking about the electric cars' serious problems on cold days (temperatures below zero, which are quite common in half of Europe), insecurities about battery production and their ecological disposal, etc. It is simple to find this information, but it is not part of the current one-way communication, which emphasises only the positive sides of electric mobility.

This all reminds me of my friends, both university professors in Lower Saxony. One, already retired, emphasised in 2007, when I gave my first guest lecture there, his disagreement with the common currency, which he considered a bad project for the German tax payers. He was also critical about the decision to shut down German nuclear power plants, as in his view it would have made Germany dependent on supplies from France and other countries, which kept the nuclear reactors. Upon seeing him two years ago, he told me that he left CDU and switched to AfD after 40 years. Second, a cyclist and environmentalist (also a CDU member), told me that the more Germany and the European Union (EU) promoted the Green Deal, the sooner Europe would end up in a situation when it would not be able to compete with other regions.

This short analysis should serve as a memento that the European Green Deal should not be promoted in a dogmatic way but should be subject to constant questioning and searching for more precise and better targeted solutions. Otherwise, it can strengthen those social and political trends, which work with the emotion of fear.

Recommendations:

- Reflect and rationally warn of the risks resulting from the Green Deal, especially related to employment and its economic impact in general.
- Clearly support principles of just transition and warn against any efforts to adopt other than a single approach to all member states.
- Communicate the need for the Green Deal in a sensitive and diversified way to all age groups.
- Emphasise the principles of intergenerational solidarity in relation to the Green Deal project.

The European Green Deal: A Display of Unrealistic Expectations or a Unique Opportunity for Transition?

Tomáš Jungwirth

The Czech green transition debates are repeatedly limited to economic calculations as to “how much will it all cost.” These are more often than not led by the motivation to increase the already very generous subsidies from the European Union (EU) funds. Such a strictly fiscal perspective is understandable but misses the essence of the questions related to the long-term sustainability of this civilisation, which is despite all international commitments and well-meant efforts further away now than ever before. Following ten thousand years of a stable climate and abundance provided by the Earth’s biosphere, which enabled unprecedented development of the human society, we stand only a few steps away from a future filled with climate chaos and environmental destruction, *i.e.*, a world that simply will not be meant for habitation. Our primary task today should focus on what we can do so that future generations have food; it does not make much sense to count the losses of the fossil industries.

The European Green Deal, a key and without any doubt an ambitious agenda of the European Commission, faces criticism from many positions. A “typically Czech” argument would claim that meeting the Green Deal objectives would negatively affect industry, that we would not have enough local energy producers and it would be too expensive. Another perspective is possible, though, which questions the assumptions lying at the very heart of the EU’s green agenda. First, the Green Deal builds on the expectation that we can achieve deep and rapid decarbonisation and at the same time spin the national economy faster than ever before.⁹ This image is obviously attractive because it promises everything at once: a sustainable future and at the same time never-ending economic growth (this growth should even become the engine of sustainability). It is not surprising that big businesses and European political mainstream endorse this view.

Since humankind, and notably developed countries including Czechia, greatly exceeds the planetary limits in almost all measurable aspects (CO₂ emissions, nitrogen and phosphorus cycles, ocean

pollution or mass biodiversity loss),¹⁰ the idea is naive and sharing it with the public (albeit with good intentions) is political insolence. Curbing greenhouse gas emissions, as established by the Paris Agreement targets, is becoming more distant with every percentage point that the GDP has increased (see the emission breakdown according to Kaya identity) and it applies to many more environmental indicators as well. This does not mean that the so-called decoupling is once for all principally impossible. We know that it is taking place in some countries at least in terms of their greenhouse gas emissions.¹¹ However, it cannot be achieved fast enough and in sufficient scope to meet either the European or global mitigation goals.

Kaya identity

$$CO_2 = population \times \frac{GDP}{capita} \times \frac{energy}{GDP} \times \frac{CO_2}{energy}$$

Source: Anthony Patt, according to Yoichi Kaya (2016)

The logic behind the concept of green growth on a limited planet (and without a realistic medium-term perspective as to how to extract resources from space in an economically meaningful way) reminds of efforts to invent perpetual motion. Yet, its effects are far graver. It is high time to admit that the praised triangle of sustainable development – economic growth, social cohesion and environmental goals – is more of a distant aspiration than an attainable reality.

The European green agenda can easily fall victim to unattainable expectations and a lack of will to clearly describe compromises, which the transition to a more sustainable society will require. As demonstrated above, it is imperative we sacrifice the political prioritisation of growth while admitting to the need to cap energy consumption through absolute and not only relative goals. Another issue is to ensure that the transition costs will not hit the middle- and lower-income classes disproportionately. This can hardly be achieved without extensive wealth redistribution in society.

Despite these reservations, the European Green Deal clearly has a transformational potential. First, in a technical sense since Czechia as a high-emission country must undertake vigorous and

immediate steps to move towards clean energy sources and energy savings. An even greater challenge amounts to the decarbonisation of its industry, the backbone of the Czech economy. The catalysts of decarbonisation will consist of rising European climate goals, binding legal regulations and hundreds of billions of crowns made available from the new financial instruments. Second, in a political sense as environmental protection and especially the climate have turned from a secondary topic into a factor determining the global agenda, with this being evidenced, for example, by the spring summit of the US president Joe Biden, where even presidents Vladimir Putin and Jair Bolsonaro swore to respect the climate goals. The European Green Deal confirms that the old continent wants to be at the forefront of these changes. A great challenge remains as to how to ensure the efficiency of the adopted measures (instead of greenwashing taking place on a large scale) and yet not lose the support for the path taken among the public. Without competent and bold partners among the political leaders of all EU member states, it may remain insurmountable.

Recommendations:

- Keeping in mind efforts to achieve a sustainable society, abandon prioritisation of economic growth at any cost.
- Consider long-term climate goals and other environmental indicators in all policy making.
- Always look for ways to avoid disproportionate negative effects of climate relevant measures on low-income groups.

9 To see how the Green Deal is framed as the “new growth strategy,” visit <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/CS/TXT/?qid=1576150542719&uri=COM%3A2019%3A640%3AFIN>

10 It is clearly illustrated by the Doughnut Economics concept developed by the British economist, Kate Raworth. For more, see <https://goodlife.leeds.ac.uk/world-map/>

11 See a recent report prepared by the Breakthrough initiative, which takes into account emissions hidden in international trade. For more information, see Haufather (2021).

From the Centre: What Needs to Be Done to Ensure That Climate Change Is a Common Project ¹¹

Arjen Siegmann

Does agreement at the top lead to activity at the bottom? That is a question that managers are all too well familiar with. And they know that the answer is sometimes “no”: good intentions by leadership can be dwarfed by inactivity or opposing incentives faced by people on the work floor. The problem of climate policies is somewhat similar. Although there is agreement at the top about the need for action, there is no guarantee that it will take place in the direction and to the extent necessary. I would like to highlight three conditions in this piece, or rather, problems that need to be dealt with, for climate policies to be accepted and successful over the longer term.

Dealing with Polarized Positions

Climate change policies will remain a point of intense discussion for the years to come. The knee-jerk reaction of policy makers is to counter the more extreme standpoints and view this as a righteous battle to fight for “the truth.” Seen as an effort to “change people’s minds,” it is doomed to fail. Whether it is financial literacy (Lusardi and Mitchell 2014), religious beliefs or basic health advice (Bryan, Choi and Karlan 2021), conscious efforts by experts to educate people and change their views have little or few measurable effects. More specifically, if climate skepticism is driven by a distrust of the government, more communication by a government organization can have the effect of increasing the skepticism instead of making it less.

The better response is to accept that human reasoning does not occur in a vacuum. It is affected by social conventions, culture and experience. Whatever the education of people, we draw on reasons that we have not always discovered or constructed ourselves. We have a lived experience that informs us about right and wrong and this permeates our thinking about how serious of a problem climate change is, and what we find acceptable as a cost to fight it. Drawing on people’s own experience and cultural knowledge is therefore a necessary ingredient for any movement towards a circular economy.

Seeing Like a State

Climate change transcends national boundaries. There is a legitimate reason why the European Commission felt compelled to announce its own “Green Deal.” The highest level of governance is needed to address a global problem and the Paris Agreement, adopted by 197 countries, is testimony to the worldwide consciousness of it.

A “view from the top” can also, however, be a “view from nowhere” if it is not rooted in existing cultural norms. One of the cultural realities is that people generally resist playing a game that is forced upon them, or they will at least not enjoy it as much as when they have elected to play the game out of free will (Scott 2008). Greening the economy, without it being rooted in an ethics of responsibility, is guaranteed to run into resistance. This might not be the case in every part of the world, but at least in free and democratic countries, there will be resistance to an overbearing, prescriptive government, whatever the good intentions may be.

Beyond norms, there is the issue of efficiency. Any form of economic planning is limited by the question of knowledge (Sugden 2018). Knowledge about supply and demand, but also about the future potential of technologies. The only way to discover “what works” is to allow discovery to take place.

Government could have a role, possibly at the level of the European Commission, in stimulating fundamental research in the form of “Apollo projects” to develop new sources of clean energy, carbon capture technologies and innovations in sustainable farming, for example (von Storch 2021).

The Tax System Needs to Evolve

The reason why we have corporate taxation is not as obvious as it sounds. The profits of corporations are already taxed implicitly through the way those profits are disbursed, either as income, through the products that are sold (VAT) or as capital gains. The rationale for having a separate tax on corporate profits is rooted in a number of considerations: first, without such a tax, corporations can build up an outsized power position. Second, they benefit from windfall gains in having acquired an asset or technology that, by pure chance, turns out to be valuable.

Corporate taxation could benefit from having another principle added, that of “damage.” The activities of firms contribute to sustainability to varying degrees: some damaging, some beneficial. It seems a good time to include the damage principle to the methods of how corporate profits are taxed.

In doing so, we open up the path to a more efficient and effective way in which corporations have their own choice and can use their own explorative initiative to develop products and production technologies that are in line with what is needed for a circular economy. It does away with emotional pleas or court cases in which corporations are being held accountable in a convoluted and sometimes arbitrary way.

Recommendations:

The high ideals of a circular economy should be matched by the realism of how government works.

- First, it should avoid dividing society into “good” and “bad” people. The sceptical attitude of some people against climate change – or the policies – is nothing to be afraid of. We should invite critical thinking as a way for humans to learn and gain experience in a difficult and sometimes intractable problem.
- Second, European initiatives, such as the Green Deal, should avoid falling into the trap of an overbearing state. In the end, it is up to enterprising individuals and households to explore and develop their own initiatives for a sustainable economy.
- Third, fiscal rules could evolve by including an aspect of “harm” in corporate taxation. This would bring incentives in line with principles of sustainable development, while retaining the freedom of corporations to explore new profit opportunities.

11 The chapter draws on insights from Siegmann, A.H. (ed.), 2021. *Climate of the Middle: Understanding Climate Change as a Common Challenge*. Springer.

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TOPAZ
Opletalova 1603/57
11000 Praha 1
Tel: +420 725 001 312
+420 255 790 915
www.top-az.eu



Wilfried
Martens Centre
for European Studies



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Seidel
Stiftung

