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Current Debates

European Commission Statement

A.

Colleagues, there is little need to establish the importance of factors both natural and biological in the present day. As many have seen just this year, economies¹, civil liberties², and more have taken a backseat to the fight against a natural threat that has spiraled out of control. Indeed, perhaps the only positive to arise from recent events related to the coronavirus has been a sense of solidarity among parties, nations, and peoples to defeat the present threat. There has been a broad recognition that in order to triumph over the exogenous threat, we will do so not simply a nation by nation basis, but a global basis³. While the fight continues, a serious criticism of the initial Chinese response⁴ as well as subsequent responses in Italy, the United States, and other nations is the idea that action to curtail the issues we see today was not undertaken early or aggressively enough⁵. The European Commission believes that the threat of climate change presents a similar threat and that a similarly slow response could entail equally catastrophic consequences.

The root of our disagreement at present appears to be a battle over topics related to budgets, economic impacts, and sovereignty of national policy. However, in the end these concerns become secondary in times of significant crisis and indeed some concerns can be counteracted with our policies. As such, the European commission, we will prove that while we

¹ Ayittey, F. K., Ayittey, M. K., Chiwero, N. B., Kamasah, J. S., & Dzuvor, C. (2020). Economic impacts of Wuhan 2019-nCoV on China and the world. *Journal of Medical Virology*.

² Gostin, L. O., & Hodge, J. G. (2020). US Emergency Legal Responses to Novel Coronavirus: Balancing Public Health and Civil Liberties. *JAMA*.

³ Kickbusch, I., & Leung, G. (2020). Response to the emerging novel coronavirus outbreak.

⁴ Liu, S. L., & Saif, L. (2020). Emerging viruses without borders: The Wuhan coronavirus.

⁵ Ullah, E. (2020). The Novel coronavirus outbreak: A challenge beyond borders. *Pak J Surg Med*, 1(1), 8-9.

can account for these prescient concerns, the primary concern for all sides of the issue at present in Europe should be what has ultimately always been the most important: the very survival of our continent and its people.

B.

According to multiple recent studies, the long term effects of climate change and temperature rises will have adverse impacts on human mortality particularly in southern Europe⁶ and significant impacts on food security as ecosystems break down under temperature pressure. Indeed, even conservative models suggest mass loss of plant species diversity across the mediterranean and Eastern European regions, sparking a ripple effect through to the animal kingdom as well⁷ that will no doubt threaten humanity as well both through environmental change and threats to food security.

Additionally, by more dire assessments, the mediterranean could be hit by rapidly rising sea levels that would leave many metropolitan areas to become new Atlantises. As refugee crises are not far in the rearview mirror of most Europeans, sea level rises necessitating migration from coastal Europe should raise alarm for all European lawmakers, not just those along the coastline. All of these examples are aimed at exemplifying why climate change action is a crucial issue for continental and indeed global action, not simply national initiatives.

This is also a matter of solidarity. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change states that limiting global warming to 1.5 degrees as opposed to two degrees will cut the number of people affected by water shortages in half, reduce food scarcity, and save millions from being cast into poverty⁸. As such, swift action to ensure the least harmful outcome is vital

⁶ Ballester, J., Robine, J. M., Herrmann, F. R., & Rodó, X. (2011). *Long-term projections and acclimatization scenarios of temperature-related mortality in Europe*. *Nature Communications*, 2(1), 1-8.

⁷ Thuiller, W., Lavorel, S., Araújo, M. B., Sykes, M. T., & Prentice, I. C. (2005). Climate change threats to plant diversity in Europe. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 102(23), 8245-8250.

⁸Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. (2018). *Global Warming of 1.5° C: An IPCC Special Report on the Impacts of Global Warming of 1.5° C Above Pre-industrial Levels...* IPCC, Switzerland.

given that fractions of a degree carry such enormous social cost. Indeed, lessons from our past inaction linger and remind us of what is to be done. From 1970 to 2017 the global extraction of natural resources tripled, contributing 90 percent of biodiversity loss, water stress, and CO2 emissions over that period⁹. While the EU has been at the vanguard of changing this dynamic, the same practices still account for 20 percent of the EU's greenhouse gas emissions¹⁰. Further, we risk continuing the trend as only 12 percent of material resources used in the EU derive from recycled goods¹¹, sustaining demand for further extraction. Given the social impact that clearly is driving dire negative externalities, and yet likely more dire ones in the future, a rapid shift in behavior is necessary.

Nonetheless, the economic concerns and skepticisms of those not yet ready to take the decisive and aggressive action we seek are not falling on deaf ears. There may indeed be short term shocks as we strive to reach our ambitious targets, both in less mobile labor markets for carbon-intensive industries such, as the aforementioned extraction industries, and short term impacts on the GDP of certain nations¹². Of course, budget impacts will also become part and parcel of continental action. In that sense, the skepticism on our Green Deal proposals is well taken and should be adequately addressed¹³. However, the fact of the matter is that the economic benefits in the long term as society adapts are projected to compensate for the short term transition¹⁴, perhaps surprising some critics. Indeed, a shift from extraction industries towards recycling and recovery focused initiatives has proven to sustain employment, especially

⁹ Oberle, B., Bringezu, S., Hatfield-Dodds, S., Hellweg, S., Schandl, H., Clement, J., ... & Ekins, P. (2019). *Global Resources Outlook 2019: Natural Resources for the Future We Want*.

¹⁰ *ibid*

¹¹ *ibid*

¹² Babiker, M. H., & Eckaus, R. S. (2007). Unemployment effects of climate policy. *Environmental science & policy*, 10(7-8), 600-609.

¹³ Volintiru, C., Popescu, M. F., Franțescu, D., & Ciot, M. G. (2019). Political Support at EU Level for Energy and Environmental Policies. *Romanian Journal of European Affairs*, 19(2).

¹⁴ Krugman, P. (2010). Building a green economy. *The New York Times Magazine*, 5, 2-16.

of lower skilled and often less mobile workers, across the globe¹⁵. In absolute growth terms the results have been markedly positive in Europe as well. From 1990 to 2018 this continent was able to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 23 percent¹⁶. Meanwhile, Europeans were able to maintain rapid growth in the economy, growing 61 percent larger in that same period. In that sense, we are not only furthering our goals of recycling goods instead of destroying them, we are recycling labor into newer, cleaner projects that foster continued economic growth. In short, the progression to cleaner, greener Europe and a strong economy for the bloc is not a dichotomous choice. To the contrary, they are one and the same.

C.

In the end, collective and ambitious action is the only adequate action to ensure our triumph over the crisis that is expected to confront us in the future. To return to the present day, those nations that have taken the strongest corrective action at the earliest stage have proved to be the most effective¹⁷. Indeed, many Europeans will know the results of not taking bold and proactive measures, as many of us now wear masks outdoors due to a lack of containment. In many ways, the masks themselves may be prophetic. A lack of air quality caused by climate change has already motivated mask-wearing as a typical public health social standards in highly polluted areas of China¹⁸. We certainly hope not to be put in a similar predicament, especially when action can be taken now to ensure that such a future does not befall us.

As such, we place our trust in our colleagues that we can agree to reach carbon neutrality in 2050, decrease CO2 emissions by 55 percent by 2030, and commit to strong

¹⁵ Mbeng, L. O. (2013). Informal waste recovery and recycling: alleviating poverty, environmental pollution and unemployment in douala, cameroon.

¹⁶ European Commission 2019. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament: The European Green Deal. Document reference no. COM (2019) 640 Final, 11.12.2019. Brussels.

¹⁷ McCloskey, B., & Heymann, D. L. (2020). SARS to novel coronavirus—old lessons and new lessons. *Epidemiology & Infection*, 148.

¹⁸ Li, X., & Tilt, B. (2019). Public engagements with smog in urban China: Knowledge, trust, and action. *Environmental science & policy*, 92, 220-227.

funding for the Multiannual Financial Framework, marking at least 1.3 percent of gross national income to enhance our financial capacity to take decisive action. Solidarity has been an important word in European history, both in national and transnational contexts. To quote from Pope John Paul II's encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*:

*"In a world divided and beset by every type of conflict, the conviction is growing of a radical interdependence and consequently of the need for a solidarity which will take up interdependence and transfer it to the moral plane. Today perhaps more than in the past, people are realizing that they are linked together by a common destiny, which is to be constructed together, if catastrophe for all is to be avoided."*¹⁹

In promoting our more aggressive plan of action for climate change we ask that our colleagues join not only us in solidarity against the potential catastrophes to come, but with their children and grandchildren that can be saved from such consequences by the actions we undertake right now.

¹⁹ Paul II, P. J. (1987). *Sollicitudo rei socialis*.

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