

# Macedonian modern centre-right policy and the climate and environmental related challenges

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# Macedonian modern centre-right policy and the climate and environmental related challenges

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by Dame Dimitrovski PhD

*We are patriots and we love our nation, we want our children to grow here and to grow in health and wealth, hence we must create healthier and greener country. One of the strategic goals of the Macedonian centre-right is fighting the environmental pollution.*

*There is a common belief in people for the Macedonian centre-right parties: Ones a project is written in their program, it becomes an obligation and they work until the project is fully implemented.*

*This article adds to developing thesis and base for problem analysis that can contribute in the creation of the program of projects for environmental and climate challenge issues in the next period.*

## **The major problem of the local environment** **Balancing the system**

According to the World Health Organization, more than 3000 people per year die as a consequence of air pollution in the country; there is an excessive number of diseases due to the air pollution, waste mistreatment, avoided waste water treatment, etc. Environmental issues are growing bigger than the future of “just some plants or animal species”; They are threatening the future survival of our youth and kids.

To start handling the challenges of improving the environment is a task full of commitment, hard work, continuous struggle with one or more interested groups, fighting the “as usual” scenarists, etc. It requires a great amount of dedication, committed people, broad funding, time and involvement of the public. But at the end of the tunnel there is a validation for all hard work: better health of the population, better conditions for the young people to grow, work and stay in the country, healthier food... and at the end of the list even better and greener products from the industry, tourism, higher added value to the export, technological growth, new knowledge and technology development resulting with wealthier society. Creating a zero-pollution and toxic-free environment requires more action to prevent pollution from being generated as well as measures to clean and remove it from air, water, soil, and consumer products.

The modern Macedonian centre-right has the task of evolving a resource prioritization system for accomplishing the goals of healthy and educated youth in our own country.

Financial contributions to the budget of the country collected for environmental codes need to be gathered in an Environmental or Green fund. The Green fund would promote, support and aid projects for environmental improvement and other municipal or state projects that benefit the environment and the climate change adaptation and mitigation aspects. The fund should create programs, so that the public and private sector can use green funding in investing in environmental projects or investing in projects that contribute to lowering pollution, improving climate change adaptation, etc. Pursuing green finance and investment is a long term ambition that needs to start today. In managing the transition, company models, talent needs, and relative prices will undergo major structural changes. Tackling the environmental issues is a long term fight, it requires some urgent work and more strategic planning. Unfortunately, at this time we are facing several problems that need urgent attention.

- Very high air pollution with particle matters in most of the cities during the heating season (Skopje, Kumanovo, Tetovo, Bitola, Kavadarci, etc.)

- Municipal solid waste management and unregulated landfills and dumps.
- Waste water treatment and the quality of rivers and underground waters.
- The hazardous waste sites.
- Urban planning and prioritizing quality of life.
- Healthy food from farm to fork and many more environment related problems.

All of the urgent challenges have a program or a project that can resolve them. Some of them in a short period of time, and some (like the high air pollution) in a decade. But to resolve them, we must start acting today and tomorrow.

Air quality in Macedonian cities is a challenge that must be addressed urgently and strongly. It requires all the attention and available resources, starting by strong monitoring and modeling, development of real air quality plans, strengthening provisions in the environmental legislation regarding large industrial installations and strict control of all combustion processes (small or large).

### **Challenges of energy planning and the environment**

The question of the energy system of a country is a multilayer problem involving: exploitation of natural resources, environmental aspects of the construction of large energy systems, environmental pollution from the production of energy (electricity and/or heat), energy needs of the consumers (providing a better result with less energy – energy efficiency), using suitable renewable energy resources and their influence on the environment, availability of strategic resources of materials, waste as an energy resource and more.

In this type of energy crisis, the importance of having local energy potential, contemporary energy conversion plants and interconnection to a wider energy system become obvious. Energy efficiency of households and industry is also highlighted, as it can give the same or better service or product while using less energy.

On the other hand, the possibility to create energy communities, promote zero emission energy or net zero emission systems among final consumers can significantly contribute to lowering the energy needs from the network, and using nearly zero emission energy for the community.

In the process of modernization of the energy sector and the industry, there is a great possibility to use local awareness, to develop more innovation and science, to implement new skills, to raise the level of technical knowledge to transfer modern technology, to invest in young people. The process of lowering energy needs, using low emission energy sources and technologies and at the same time improving the final product (having quality and green product), becoming more competitive on the market, can only

*Image source: Canva*



be done by increasing the amount of knowledge invested in the processes. This can also contribute to having higher level job requirements, creation of high quality local staff and increasing the value of the local employees, that can reduce the pay gap to the EU level.

### **Strategic resources**

Securing long term sources of strategic resources for the vital and sustainable development of the country, setting the development directions with the resources acquired (energy, fuels, and other) in a long term strategy, investment in green and high value technologies can push the economy of the country to greater anticipated growth in a longer period.

The list of strategic resources for growth is linked to the current technology used in the energy sector and the industry and even more to the directions in which the modern industry and contemporary energy technology to be used by the energy sector

or the final consumers will develop. These directions will be guided by the possibility to use advanced technology and by the reliability of the supply chain of strategic resources for “new technologies” and green growth. This can contribute to opening new high value jobs, development centers, research capacities and innovation centers. All these activities have a double or a triple contribution to the environment: they create greener products or services, provide more funding for the basic needs of the society including environmental education for higher income, sustainability of the Green fund – so that it can follow up and multiply the positive environmental impact.

### **Educational, preventive and repressive measures and activities**

Education of the wider population has a key role in the transformation towards green society. Continuously raising the awareness and improving the skills and knowledge of the people can produce a change in attitude towards a greener environment and a better understanding of the climate change challenges. Educating the work force in environmental challenges can produce improved procedures, norms and standards in all fields of work.

As in all systems that encompass a wider population, the circle of activities must be well balanced between education, prevention and repression. Till now, most of the funding in environmental projects was supporting education and public awareness, hence the public awareness at this time stands better than the systems of prevention and repression in the country. For example, the public awareness in urban areas for selecting household waste is much higher than the possibilities of the waste management systems in the Macedonian cities. At the same time, the environmental inspectorates are divided on three vertical levels with overlaying authority and extremely low capacity and motivation. It just might be that weakest links of the environmental system are the environmental inspections and the environmental funding (Green fund).

The task of an administration willing to guide to the environmental issue as a priority will be to establish a functional environmental prevention and repression system and state bodies to support it, and provide funding in the Green fund for all needed activities.

### **Waste – environmental challenge or resource for sustainability**

Writing about the terms: circular economy, sustainability, clean production is in fact writing about appropriate waste management technologies. Holistic waste management approach starts at design and production of products and services. One of the requests from the product design is to avoid creating waste or minimizing it. The waste that cannot be avoided in the phase of product design and production must find its way to the secondary raw materials and by-products markets. A regionally customized selected waste collection scheme will ensure clean secondary raw materials for the industry.

With the quantities and the content of the waste created in the households in 2021 in Macedonian cities, after primary and secondary selection, the created waste is a significant resource for energy production. There is a need for wider improvement of the practices in waste management: primary selection, collection, transfer, secondary selection, material extraction, preparation of fuels and energy, biogas extraction and safe landfilling. Using waste, a resource for creating fuel in the energy sector and in the industry, reduces the external dependence on fuels, provides secure source of domestic fuel, mitigates the environmental impact at the landfills and introduces high tech in the country's portfolio. When introducing any of the technologies for “waste to energy” the country should not rely on the trust we have in the system and the industry, but on a strict system of control, measurements, verification and inspection of all processes related to waste management and energy production. Prioritizing the reduction and reuse of materials before recycling them can help the circular economy of the country and should be most focused on resource-intensive sectors such as textiles, construction, electronics and plastics.

The Macedonian centre-right has environment as an integral part of all its program areas. Environmental challenges and energy efficiency play a significant role in the economy and the financing of the green growth and green policy sectors. But not less in the agricultural, social and educational programs, as well as in public health and international cooperation. Environmental and climate change programs have a significant place among the scientific programs of the next decades.

## **Climate adaptation challenges**

17% of the workforce in the country is employed in the agricultural sector. There are roughly 193,000 family farms in a nation with 2 million people. Despite the fact that it is ideally suited for growing a wide range of goods, at the moment the agricultural industry and other rural economic activities are particularly sensitive to climate change due to extended heat waves and dry spells that cause considerable production losses. As temperatures rise and more frequent and severe heat waves and droughts are brought on by climate change, less than 10% of agricultural land has been marked as irrigated. However, some studies suggest that, if there is enough water available, rising temperatures may result in higher harvests in some regions of the nation. Due to the widespread lack of adaptive capacity and the lack of irrigation in many regions, these advantages are likely to be outweighed.

An adaptation project for agriculture should include: irrigation systems and farming in protected areas and by adapting to climate change use it for growth.

Water resources are quite vulnerable to climate change's effects in terms of quantity, quality, and timeliness, with the nation's overall average precipitation anticipated to decline. Lack of access to fresh water in rural regions is a problem that climate change may make worse. This will even affect areas in the western part of the country that are relatively rich in water resources.

Flooding occurrences may become more frequent and more severe as a result of climate change. This is especially problematic in the spring, when planting summer crops may not be possible, and in the late summer, when harvesting could be delayed or roots waterlogged. Due to its potential to lower soil and water quality, erosion is another significant issue in the nation.

Lack of access to water poses threats to the environment as well as to human health.

We live in one of the hotspots of biodiversity in Europe due to its diverse geography and climate. Increased temperatures and decreased precipitation will likely lead to a much higher risk of forest fires and there is always potential for great loss during forest fire events. The lake and wetland ecosystems of Lake Dojran, Ohrid and Prespa are very vulnerable to disturbances in the water regime.

Dramatic losses in both flora and fauna have been recorded during previous drought events and can be expected to continue as precipitation decreases and temperatures increase.

The Macedonian centre-right has shown that adaptation challenges can be met and resolved with dedication to work and with local expert involvement, as with the Dojran Lake in 2000. Investment in this kind of projects, supplemented by waste water treatment plants that will provide clean water and clean lakes for future generations are a pure form of patriotism.

“Farm to Fork” strategy of the EU should design a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system and the Macedonian traditional food, that we are all so proud of for being high quality, tasty and safe, must be a part of it.

Forestry (preservation and restoration) program has been a trade mark of the last centre-right wing/ conservative governments. It is a big part of the program for the preservation of ecosystems and climate adaptation. Due to the challenges of climate change, lack of local energy resources for household heating, the forests in the country are under a significant threat. Managing and planning the forests, with the premise that “we did not inherit the Earth from our ancestors, but we borrowed it from our children” should provide us with sustainable forests, with greater quality and quantity, and eco systems that will provide food, water and clean air.

## **Our view on the EU Green Deal**

“The European Green Deal is a response to these challenges. It is a new growth strategy that aims to transform the EU into a fair and prosperous society, with a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy where there are no net emissions of greenhouse gases in 2050 and where economic growth is decoupled from resource use. It also aims to protect, conserve and enhance the EU's natural capital, and protect the health and well-being of citizens from environment-related risks and impacts. At the same time, this transition must be just and inclusive. It must put people first, and pay attention to the regions, industries and workers who will face the greatest challenges. Since it will bring substantial change, active public participation and confidence in the transition is paramount if policies are to work and be accepted. A new pact is needed

to bring together citizens in all their diversity, with national, regional, local authorities, civil society and industry working closely with the EU's institutions and consultative bodies. The EU has the collective ability to transform its economy and society to put it on a more sustainable path. It can build on its strengths as a global leader on climate and environmental measures, consumer protection and workers' rights. Delivering additional reductions in emissions is a challenge. It will require massive public investment and increased efforts to direct private capital towards climate and environmental action, while avoiding lock-in into unsustainable practices. The EU must be at the forefront of coordinating international efforts towards building a coherent financial system that supports sustainable solutions. This upfront investment is also an opportunity to put Europe firmly on a new path of sustainable and inclusive growth. The European Green Deal will accelerate and underpin the transition needed in all sectors." – GREEN DEAL

*Image source: Go Green*



We are part of Europe and all environmental challenges that Europe is facing are challenges for our citizens also. Having the same pace in the implementation of change will be a key in taking the same development directions with the EU countries. Implementation of the strategical ways given in the Green Deal will determine the norms, standards and regulation of the EU, and the possibility to use the European market as our own.

### Industry green challenges

The construction sector is one of the wheels of the Macedonian industry, especially in the last 20 years and the transformation of the sector towards building and renovating in an energy efficient manner and saving resources and creating less waste can be the green wheel we need. Buildings consume more than 30% of all energy in the country and that presents a great potential in energy savings. Renovation of existing housing buildings is a commitment present in the energy efficiency regulation. Despite the initial investment in the renovation and the building systems, it strongly supports resolving two of the major challenges of today: lowering the energy bills and by that reducing energy poverty. At the same time it employs local work power to do the reconstruction and building. It also gives an opportunity to develop zero or nearly zero energy buildings that have the possibility to be nearly zero emission objects. Optimizing the energy consumption of public buildings in the health and educational sector can lower their energy bills and provide more funding for public education and public health systems. Energy poverty challenges need to be balanced between the energy needs of the socially vulnerable groups and state policy. Research done in Skopje in 2013 stated that a part of the socially vulnerable households uses a variety of materials as a fuel for heating and it does not help the air quality in Skopje. The approach must start with the implementation of energy efficiency measures in the buildings and thus lower the energy needs up to 75%. After the renovation, the households can afford to use suitable fuels, air pollution from this group of small polluters will drastically decrease and the waste will go into the waste selection streams.

Science has a responsibility to respond to the needs of the society and to the global challenges. Citizens must be able to make educated personal and professional decisions and actively participate. This should be made possible through the popularization of science. The green deal states under the title Mobilizing Research and Fostering Innovation that: "New technologies, sustainable solutions and disruptive innovation are critical to achieve the objectives of the European Green Deal. To keep its competitive advantage in clean technologies, the EU needs to increase significantly the large-scale deployment and demonstration of new technologies across sectors and across the single market, building new innovative value chains. This challenge is

beyond the means of individual Member States. Horizon Europe, in synergy with other EU programs, will play a pivotal role in leveraging national public and private investments. At least 35% of the budget of Horizon Europe will fund new solutions for climate, which are relevant for implementing the Green Deal." The domestic industry and science will be a part of the research and implementation of new technology that will provide greener future. Integration of local scientific and research capabilities to the large innovation centers, use of the large potential of the "digitally literate" youth can produce technological breakthrough and progress for the green technologies. Smart infrastructure and regional cooperation will help achieve clean environment transition.

Image source: Go Green



## **Future transport**

Future transport will be based on two pillars.

Local transport – inner city transport, will be based on the concept of smart communities and the 15-minute city plans. It should provide up to 15-minute travel to any destination of the city by using public transport or personal green transport (cycling, walking, etc.). Cities' transport policies will move toward large scale mass transport with no local emissions, new interconnections and more space for green mobility. New vehicles will become more efficient and more environmentally friendly and we should provide

the smart infrastructure to make safe, fast and green travel possible. The cities should start the implementation of plans for the integration of smart parking, automated traffic guidance, smart traffic management systems and smart ticketing. With good governance, the transport system of the cities in the next 15 years will push the personal vehicle to the second or even third place as a choice of transport. The transport system will be a zero emission system of safe and secure mobility with more affordable, accessible, healthier and cleaner alternatives to their current mobility habits and will support new sustainable mobility services that can reduce congestion and pollution, especially in urban areas.

*To waste, to destroy our natural resources, to skin and exhaust the land instead of using it so as to increase its usefulness, will result in undermining in the days of our children the very prosperity which we ought by right to hand down to them amplified and developed.*

- Theodore Roosevelt

The future in which our children are well educated, healthy and wealthy and live prosperously in the country is the green future, and today we should start investing in it.



# On the importance of the implementation of European green deal policies in the political platforms of the parties

by Dejan Dimitriev and Radovan M. Spiridonov

*The European Green Deal is on the one hand our vision for a climate neutral continent in 2050 and it is on the other hand a very dedicated roadmap to this goal. It is fifty actions for 2050... Our goal is to reconcile the economy with our planet, to reconcile the way we produce and the way we consume with our planet and to make it work for our people... we owe [it] to our children because we do not own this planet. We just do have for certain time the responsibility and now it is time to act... This is Europe's 'man on the moon' moment.*

*- Ursula von der Leyen, European Commission President*

## **Small document - giant step forward**

The ambitious, yet promising agenda of The European Green Deal (EGD) from 2019 was disrupted in 2020 by the global political disorder caused by subsequent crises from the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, the largest global recession since the Great

Depression, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine. When we add the current deadlock in EU enlargement, with the possibility of protracted political crises with Republic of Bulgaria and the likelihood of a veto in the coming Council's meeting the words of the President von der Leyen sound too distant for most Macedonians.

*Image source: Go Green*



According to an EU survey, 93% of its citizens consider climate crises to be a serious problem.<sup>1</sup> A similar survey conducted in the Western Balkans region (WB) revealed that in North Macedonia, the climate crisis is not thought of as among the most important subjects in terms of socio-economic development, being given a single digit percentage.<sup>2</sup>

In the EU's Commission progress reports it is continually stressed that the country needs to step-up its ambition to properly implement the acquis chapters of the Green Agenda: Transportation policy (14), Energy sourcing (15); Trans-European networks (21); Environment and Climate Change (27).

Aside from this, the Commission argues that these efforts will increase the efficiency of the new Economic and Investment Plans.<sup>3</sup> Administrative capacities need to be strengthened in these sectors. In addition, strategies, action plans and legislation in these sectors need to be coherent with the principles and priorities of the Green Agenda and to ensure consistency between relevant sectoral documents, among all affected countries. This cohesive approach, is particularly important nowadays, when Europe is blackmailed by various authoritarian regimes from around the world.

### **Do not be afraid to be ambitious: Balkan's problems as EU's challenges**

Despite the mentioned challenges, the EU promoted the Green Agenda for the region aimed to reflect the EGD in a proportionate and adapted manner in the WB. It is one of the regions in Europe most heavily affected by the impact of climate change and this trend is projected to continue, with estimates of temperature increases of 1.7 – 4.0°C, and even exceeding 5.0°C by the end of the century, depending on the global effort in greenhouse gasses emission reduction.<sup>4</sup>

The objective is to turn environmental and climate emergencies into opportunities. Given that natural resources and climate change do not know any borders, the Green Agenda foresees joint actions, which will contribute to the sustainable socio-economic development and the green recovery of North Macedonia and the entire region in the post-pandemic period.

The five pillars of the Green Agenda for the WB are:

1. Climate action, including decarbonization, energy and mobility;
2. Circular economy, addressing in particular waste, recycling, sustainable production and efficient use of resources;
3. Biodiversity, aiming to protect and restore the natural wealth of the region;
4. Fighting pollution of air, water and soil and
5. Sustainable food systems and rural areas.

The process of Digitalization will be a key enabler for the above five pillars in line with the concept of the dual green and digital transition.

The transition to climate-neutrality must be socially just and economically inclusive in order to be successful in the Macedonian society. A system equivalent to the European Just Transition Mechanism foreseen in the EGD could be implemented here. A broad consensus is emerging that carbon pricing would be significant in achieving climate neutrality. The early inclusion of North Macedonia in the Emissions Trading Scheme, needs to be proportionately implemented. It could be a key tool to create green economic investments for taking climate action and help smoothen the transition of heavy industry to climate-friendly enterprises.

Now in dire and 'dark time' when the nightmare's of Picasso's Guernica are reality in Ukraine... Do we

as a country, have the capacity to adapt ourselves to the imminent changes? Now... when peace on European soil has died once again and our Ancient and Christian values and ethics are violated by the forces of totalitarianism.

In such conditions, some fear and some bravely face the changes. An old wisdom from the East says: "when the wind blows, some build walls and others windmills." Let us be the people who build windmills. For the reason that even though it sounds counter-intuitive it appears that only nearby emergencies can catalyze our much-needed transition. Much to the disdain of anti-European forces, the EU has delivered.

The EGD is an expression of what the EU does well: long-term thinking even in this time of inconceivable aggression on its eastern borders.

The challenge remains to bridge long-term goals with consistent policies and actions in the shorter term with a view to climate and environmental mainstreaming. Yet the EGD did not come with a claim for new competences for the Union, unlike the single market and EMU. The EGD draws on the existing EU economic governance framework for implementation, most notably climate and energy policies.

Last but not least, the EGD has the potential to contribute beyond environmental sustainability, it could also be a valuable mechanism, through which the country's EU integration process would be strengthened. To the extent that it curbs the negative and promotes synergies, the EGD feeds back into and complements the qualitative changes that the single market and EMU made to the European economic model and contributes to economic and political sustainability.

### **Can the citizens of North Macedonia learn how to love their country, not in words, but with appropriate actions!?**

So far, the EU has been leading the way in the transition towards a climate-neutral economy and has much to offer in terms of experience with decoupling economic growth from the use of various (fossil) resources. The EU's experience, know-how and resources can support our country in its efforts to enhance resilience and adapt to the unavoidable impacts of climate change.

Nevertheless, despite the urgency and the Commission's willingness to assist, the policy makers in the country face a serious challenge when trying to mainstream the **EGD agenda**.

Oikophilia, the love of home and homeland, gives itself to the environmental cause. This is even more pronounced and distinguishable in today's reality. It is therefore, of the outmost importance that all political actors regard this issue as one most pressing. It is also an indicator and an argument for the leading centre-right party in our Country, which has not yet involved and immersed itself fully with this issue and in the process is expected to provide adequate and ambitious representation with regards to this issue.

The European Union and thus all EU member states, since the delivery of the **European Green Deal (EGD)** [and on the basis of the same] delivered the more ambitious **REPowerEU plan**<sup>5</sup>, through which the EU has provided a roadmap for diversifying the energy supply to the Continent and mitigate any future energy crises brought upon due to large energy dependency on a single partner. In addition to that and equally crucial to the future development of the energy sector in EU[rope] is the even more ambitious target set for producing and delivering to the end costumers clean energy coming from renewable energy sources and the clearly stated support for additional buildout of all relevant supporting technologies and the further increased development of the energy grid.

Thus, a conclusion can be drawn and an argument made on the basis of the forementioned. It is evident and undisputable that our partners and other countries, to whom our country has long looked up to, have taken the issue of combating the challenges arising from Climate Change to an even more serious level, additionally it is also clear today that the security of a nation's energy supply can only be achieved with new and clean energy sources which would be based upon conscientious and reliable outlooks and domestic strategies. The argument to be made here is that all political actors are morally obliged to diligently approach this issue and communicate to the people of our country that this aspect of their lives will be appropriately dealt with by those in power. Within the political environment in the Macedonian society, there is room for large and ambitious improvement and action at this time will only prove that some of the contesting political

players are serious and do not take this issue lightly. The political actors themselves stand to gain significantly in their own campaigns as well.

Frankly, the problem arises because the Green Agenda in the country so far has been relatively neglected and shadowed by other more populist issues. Instead of focusing on developing long-term, lasting, existential policies and solutions in relevant areas, every government has tackled these challenges only sporadically and under immense pressure.

Another problem is that only self-proclaimed green parties take exclusivity over the environmental policy agenda. Moreover, by concentrating on the so-called Green parties' activists we have been distracted from the many environmental problems that could be, and often have been, solved by people acting in the conservative spirit.

In the words of the British political thinker Roger Scruton, environmental problems arise when homeostatic systems break down – in other words, when the feedback loop that establishes equilibrium is, for whatever reason, destroyed. The homeostatic system that has been most studied is the free market, which returns to equilibrium in changing conditions, provided the participants bear the costs of their actions. Left-wing thinkers refuse to accept this, and constantly invent the bogeymen – ['neoliberalism', 'corporate greed', 'market failure'] – in order to justify their ideological intrusion.

The European Union has thus far set and proclaimed a strong position in regards to this issue, setting the example for the developing countries of Western Balkan region as well. The leading centre-right political parties in Macedonian society are obliged by their doctrine on one hand and their long vocal support for the European Union on the other hand, to incorporate and boldly embody the European ambition to achieve net – zero emission societies, to ambitiously strive for clean green energy and sustainable daily life, overall. Oikophilia is patriotism at its best, for our generation and the times ahead.

The present series of crises which have struck the Macedonian society revealed the lack of long-term strategic thinking within the whole political spectrum. Additionally, the citizenry does not recognize figures of leadership who are willing to

take their policies beyond the next election cycle. Such a conclusion can be drawn from the numerous polls conducted by both domestic and foreign researchers. This is an opportunity for centre-right political groups to profile its leadership in a manner suited for contemporary national unity parties; their leaders should be the pioneers in the promotion of oikophilia.

The response to the present-day crisis triggered some economic governance changes and developments that consolidate the role of the EGD as a pillar of the EU economic model. The EU crisis response considerably reinforced the available budget for green transition, though it also hardened soft governance by introducing reform conditionality and increased ownership, giving more implementation power to the Commission. The Commission has shown entrepreneurship not only through the initiative of the EGD but also by seizing the opportunity to use it as an exit strategy to the pandemic crisis to accelerate the green transition. As a response to Putin's unprovoked war in Ukraine and the radical subversion of the regular flows of natural gas to the countries on the European continent, the additional momentum gained by the even bolder REPowerEU plan and the consequential legislation, must be recognized and embodied within the Macedonian society just as much.

### **How not to be 'lost in translation'?**

The Macedonian society has long been in the 'waiting room' for the EU accession, thus the capacity of the institutions for adaptability has numbed, while the general public has lost interest in the novel policy developments. The country has lost interest in innovation as a method for general social development, and is instead relying on the promises of 'enlargement benefits'. This has in turn, created a mood in which there is a clear lack of proficient and meaningful policies through which the issues central to the EGD could be tackled. This can be said for centre-right politicians as well, since the experts in these fields have not recognized any sufficient policy documents regarding these issues. It is yet to portray and take a promising stance when it comes to these topics in order to prove to the people of our country that this is a party that can keep up with the rest of Europe.

But the reader might still wonder why we push the EGD and the relevant consequential document

policies, which came to be after the EGD, when to the Macedonian public the issues tackled by the document are not among the most important issues? Allow us to point to a few gaps in this line of thinking.

The Macedonian government has enacted extensive legislation to 'tick the boxes' in the progress reports, while neglecting to build the appropriate capacity of the institutions designated to perform and administrate the foreseen change and legislation. Secondly, the public campaigns have not been adjusted to the needs and existential anxieties of the people in the country. Thirdly, the above-mentioned lack of leadership in taking upon serious challenges has resulted in the creation of political apathy, which has been clearly visible and duly noted. Thus, we can see why we have single digit concern about this topic. Simply put, the decision makers have been all inert to adapt and take upon the challenge of delivering the Green Agenda adjusted to our domestic needs. It is the fault of the 'political elites' not the Populus, hence we should look for a solution in the minds of the decision makers.

As a result of this behavior, during each election cycle, the voter outcome has been either stagnant at a low number or decreasing and the political actors have been recording historically low turnout rates of their 'stable' voting basis. This implies that there is a mismatch between the offer of the parties and the citizen's actual needs and demands.

Thankfully, we can recognize several positive developments in the Macedonian society. The youth, as it is the case in other European countries, is keen on taking the science-based approach regarding the persisting climate crisis, and is more seriously concerned than other demographics. However, in order to exit the "bubble" this advocacy requires proper mainstreaming with appropriate public campaigns. Secondly, the ongoing energy crisis contributed to a larger public interest and higher pressure on all political stakeholders to enact green and sustainable energy policy. As such, all relevant political factors were 'forced' to come up with plans for resolving the crisis. This is valuable evidence on how public commitments shift towards projects of our concern.

Russia's unprovoked and unjustified military aggression against Ukraine has massively disrupted

the whole energy system. It has caused hardship due to high energy prices and has heightened energy security not only in our country but in the whole of Europe. These days the public is inclined to see the urgent need to rapidly reduce our dependence on fossil fuels, diversify our energy supply and move fast forward the clean energy transition by joining forces to achieve a more resilient energy system.

Now we have a strategic opportunity to communicate our message to the public, with a promising and stable political manifesto by the centre-right parties in North Macedonia. By virtue of this opportunity, the political actors would be able to simultaneously modernize their outlook and communicate the topics of existential concerns right to their voting base.

All this leads to a single conclusion that adopting EGD-affirming policies in the platforms of the centre-right political parties, would not only be efficient for the parties' interest, but also imminent in light of the much-needed holistic and social development. Here, EPP members have demonstrated a reasonable approach in managing economic growth and providing environmental protection. Partnering with their think-tanks and decision makers would be a valuable input for the policy development in centre-right family of political parties and organizations.

### **You[th] is on or off the table!?**

Young people's unprecedented mobilization around the world shows the massive power they possess to hold decision-makers accountable. Their message is clear: the older generation has failed, and it is the young who will pay in full — with their very future. The future generations are rightly concerned about the state in which our planet is being passed on to them. At the same time, they are ready to act and contribute to the change. Businesses increasingly see the benefits of the new sustainable economy. We don't need fatalism but ambition and action. Let us use this momentum and invest in a better future for our generation and that of our children.

The current health and security crises have showed us that we are able to respond to crises with sufficient urgency. We all need to take lessons from the pandemic and build a more resilient future - with the rule of law, democracy, and real climate action defining what the EU embodies. Young people

around the world already suffer from the effects of the climate crisis.

Now is the time to make climate justice a reality. If protecting human rights is what the EPP family stands for, it needs to abandon its business-as-usual path and build a system that would allow the planet and people to thrive. The climate crisis cannot be merely seen through the lens of an ecological collapse. It has to be seen from a holistic perspective - as an existential crisis - and acted upon and dealt with accordingly. Young people are the future voters and therefore they should not be neglected by the lenses of the party as a demographic component.

To solve the economic crisis, policy makers are readying historically large investments for the thousands of people who lost theirs due to the lockdown. We must avoid channeling the investments into archaic industries by bailing out big polluters. Instead, the investments must be sustainability-mainstreamed. To build a resilient society that meets the needs of future generations and avoids the worst impacts of the climate crisis, governments should focus their economy boosting initiatives on creating green jobs and ensuring a just transition.

Centre-right political actors should collaborate with the relevant CSO's in building a forum which would provide policy inputs from a youth perspective. Macedonian centre-right political parties and interest groups, along with its other sister parties, should learn both from the political theorists and from the policy makers that the upcoming social transformation can only be achieved by an entrepreneurial oriented, yet traditional value - structured community, which understands that nature must be preserved and protected and that this Planet is our only home for now.

"Europe is not just a continent, it is also an idea. This idea is called freedom." These words of Kudenhof Kalergi were written in 1933. That is the year when Nazism came to power, which together with fascism are one of the biggest enemies of freedom, of Europe and of humanity in general. In a time when many had given up on Europe, Count Kalergi believed in Europe. Therefore, let us imitate Count Kalergi, von Habsburg, Schumann, Monet, Adenauer and other founders of Europe. Let's not be slaves to the current mood, to pessimism and fear. Fear is

a filter through which we perceive only the threats, but not the opportunities in front of us. The crisis is a consequence of unused and missed opportunities. It is a matter of obvious fact that the youth have that burning spirit for change right now.

Frankly, our generation and those generations of the future who live and will continue to live in our country, those who will choose to stay in our country foresee an environment and a future that is healthy and are entitled to a nature that will only improve their overall wellbeing. The same generations are entitled to be thought of when all policies and when the wholistic approach to governance is defined and implemented.

They are owed a vision that is bold and open minded, one that can undoubtedly spread the message that North Macedonia and its society are ready and willing to walk in the future. The issue of climate change and the need for a deep rooted and holistic evolution of the energy system may have previously 'ranked low' in the polls, yet the present has attested that it is not something to be disregarded or postponed any more. By virtue of that, we demand that all political actors in our country take firm steps in the European progressive direction when combating climate change and ensuring the rapid and comprehensive evolution of the energy system, when preserving nature and providing clean fresh air. And when ensuring that all who live in the future on that piece of land will be given the chance to live a healthy and prosperous life.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_21\\_3156](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_3156)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.rcc.int/pubs/89/balkan-barometer-2019-public-opinion-survey>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.wbif.eu/news-details/european-commission-launches-32-billion-investment-package-western-balkans#:~:text=The%20Economic%20and%20Investment%20Plan%20for%20the%20Western%20Balkans%20aims,and%20convergence%20with%20the%20EU.>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.rcc.int/news/383/rcc-publishes-study-on-climate-change-in-the-western-balkans-alarming-increase-of-temperature-over-the-whole-territory>

<sup>5</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/repowereu-affordable-secure-and-sustainable-energy-europe\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/repowereu-affordable-secure-and-sustainable-energy-europe_en)







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History of mankind has shown that crises generally invoke the feeling among humanity to resort to societal and technological changes. Facing lack of reliable energy as well as the looming threat of an economic recession, the EU has comprehended the urgency of creating clean energy sources, it's reliance on external parties would be minimized enabling more decisive involvement in international politics, shaping the world according to values collectively deemed as sacred.

The EU agenda has been aimed to keep Europe in its role of a leader in the fight against the climate crises and a champion in driving the energy transition. The European Green Deal, approved by the European Commission, is a set of policy initiatives planned to review existing legislation and its harmonization, and also introduce legislation on circular economy, buildings renovation, biodiversity, farming and to facilitate technological innovation.

Considering the ambitious role of the Commission and the three decades long listlessness of the domestic politicians to deal with this issue, the growing disappointment of the youth in the established political players, we saw the need to provide an youth input, in times when decisive, ambitious leadership is ever more needed.

Having in mind the assertive goals of Brussels, we should also remember that in every country, every year new generations enter the labor market or the academia. With uncertainty looming over their lives, it is politically irresponsible to ignore their demands for an improved economy as well as advancing a holistically greener North Macedonia.

In 'party vocabulary' they are losing voters. In this vacuum populist groups would certainly attract the energy of the youth, exploiting the weaknesses of political parties. The challenge is to bridge long-term goals with consistent policies in the shorter term aimed to deliver financial and social prosperity for all the Macedonian youth. The EGD has the potential to contribute beyond sustainability. With rightfully chosen training and skill-set upgrades we can be the front-runners when it comes to green transformation.

Sadly, we are in the 'waiting room' for the EU accession, thus the capacity of the institutions for adaptability has numbed, while the general public has lost interest in new policy developments. This has in turn, created an open space for actors who don't share the values of this Union to manipulate the public perception.

Thankfully, we can recognize positive developments in Macedonian society. The youth is keen on taking the science-based approach regarding the climate crisis. Centre-right political actors should collaborate with youth CSO's, and give an authoritative voice to academia and expert, and by doing so build a forum that could provide science and facts.

The answer is rather simple. The old systems are broken, and we saw it. We cannot come back to the status quo. We need new economic policies as well as energy projects to bring just recovery to our society. There are few choices in front of us... we should encompass the visionary but achievable EGD aims. Because their time has come.