

The European Union's climate/energy policy: myth or reality?

Five years into the European green policy, Green Deal oblige, it is necessary, using the opportunity of the upcoming elections, to take a break... and ask the right questions. Some of the Union's Heads of State mentioned a pause... let's do it.

Firstly, in terms of decarbonization targets, extending from a 55% reduction by 2030 to a 90% reduction by 2040, as proposed by the Commission in its February 6 Communication. Today, we're at around 30%, taking account of the Covid and the gas crises we've experienced. If the mandatory 55% target in six years' time already seems hard to reach (remember that it was initially 40% before the Green Deal boost), what about the 90% target by 2040? These goals are set with a view to achieving "net zero carbon" by 2050 along a roughly linear progression, the effort itself becoming increasingly large, since higher hanging fruits are more difficult to grasp. Without questioning the necessity to decarbonize as quickly as possible, we need to take into account the social and societal impacts of this dynamic, and not just the shortcut of "green sustainability". Accordingly, wouldn't it be better to start from a correct assessment of what is achievable while, of course doing as much as possible, but keeping in mind the economic impact on the proper functioning of a society that provides well-being for all? We also need to consider what can reasonably be done by the European Union in a multi-polar and fractured global world, so as to be efficient without penalizing ourselves and acting to the detriment of the societal sustainability of our European Union.

Secondly, regarding energy, hasn't the time come to once and for all stop mingling the decarbonization goals with the means to achieve them? According to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, each Member State is solely responsible and free to choose its energy mix. Consequently, it is unacceptable that, by way of green policy, renewable energy penetration targets be imposed. The last one to date is at 42.5% in the very recent Renewable Energy Directive, RED III. This must stop and, from now on, each Member State must be left free to use other carbon-free energy production means with no additional prescriptions.

In this respect, the document from the Commission Services supporting the Communication regarding the 90% decarbonization target by 2040 raises questions. For electricity, it states that the projected nuclear deployment in 2040 and 2050 is 71 GWe. Even if this document is "preliminary" and based on the 2019 National Energy and Climate Programs, which are due to be revised this year, it is problematic. If we take the hypothesis that the electrification of uses will double electricity demand by 2050, this corresponds to a reduction in the share of nuclear power in the Union's electricity from 20% to 7%... the rest coming essentially from renewables. They continue, then, to be promoted via such documents while they are not charged for the total cost due to their deployment and the handling of their intermittency; these costs are diluted in electricity bills or taxes. It is high time to set the record straight, in the interest of the consumer citizens. This should lead to an electricity market reform (insofar as a market is needed) such that the various forms of electricity production play on equal

terms without bias and prices reflect real costs, giving a long-term view that allows industrial players and investors to invest without recourse to subsidies or other artificial means. An in-depth structural reform of the "market" is necessary and urgent.

Save the Climate welcomes the progress made in recent months by the Alliance of pro-nuclear Member States, led by France. The French Minister Agnes Pannier-Runacher has done a remarkable job in putting nuclear power back on the European political agenda, and battles have been won in the Council. But the fight is not over. We must now move beyond the Taxonomy and the NZIA (Net Zero Industry Act). First of all, we need to recognize that nuclear power is not a transitional energy like gas, as stipulated in the Taxonomy, but that it needs to be deployed with a long-term industrial perspective. Next, European financing tools must be opened to nuclear power, as they have been for years to renewable energies, and on an equal footing. This would send a signal to public and private investors that, after years of wavering, nuclear power is now recognized as useful, not to say indispensable, to the European Union's decarbonization effort. It is not too late, but now is the time.

We dare hope that the forthcoming elections will bring a fresh start, that the European Union's climate/energy policy will no longer be based on myths, but on reality, while ensuring the sustainability of our welfare society.