Deal or No Deal: Possible Hurdles for the European Green Deal

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The summer of 2022 saw the mercury rising to record heights[1], as the topic of conversations turned once again to the problem of climate change. This was a particularly recurrent discussion with my group of friends – one that has been persistently bobbing up every few months over the years. The reactions – for when it comes to solutions there were none – were also not very innovative, and we may often hear that "*It is pointless to have children in these circumstances*", "*if this goes on like this, humankind will perish*", or "why won't someone do something". This conversation in the sweltering room is repeated all over Europe. People are gazing at their sweating navels, crying for solutions, but seldom offering any. They feel their plea is falling on deaf ears. However, it is not the case.

Politicians and decision makers are eagerly listening to such fears. They are also anxious to offer help. Whether this help is, in fact, helpful or not is another matter. Populists play into the deepest fears of people – exploiting them and offering illusory solutions. Meanwhile, populism is on the rise in Europe[2], because populists listen. They pay attention to the masses suffering climate anxiety[3] – a growing problem in itself. Instead of solving issues, populist create

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POPULISTS PLAY INTO THE DEEPEST FEARS OF PEOPLE – EXPLOITING THEM AND OFFERING ILLUSORY SOLUTIONS

more problems so that they can be seen as the ones who are protecting people from these[4].

It is painfully clear that one of the key priorities of the European Union (EU) is, undoubtedly, to tackle the issue of climate change. However, climate policies can be easily hijacked by populists offering unrealizable solutions and impossible outcomes. This is just one of the many hurdles standing in the way of the European Green Deal.

In order to be successful, caution must be taken to stay on point and not to be sidetracked by populist or *feel-good* policies or get trapped in echo chambers, while at the same time prepare for future challenges and innovations as well as factor in a multidisciplinary approach – involving global, regional, and local politics, science, trade, economics, and psychology.

[1] Kirby, P. (2022) "Heatwave: Ferocious European Heat Heads North*"*, [in]: *BBC News*. Available [online]: https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-62216159

[2] Collinson, S. (2022) "Trump-Style Populism Rises in US and Europe as Putin Assaults World Order", [in]: *CNN*. Available [online]: https://edition.cnn.com/2022/04/12/politics/rise-of-extremism-us-and-europe/index.html

[3] Schwartz, S.E.O. et al. (2022) "Climate Change Anxiety and Mental Health: Environmental Activism as Buffer", [in]: *Current Psychology*. Available [online]: https://doi.org/10.1007/s12144-022-02735-6

[4] 4liberty.eu (2016) "Populism, Radicalism, Migration", [in]: *4liberty.eu Review,* No. 4. Available [online]: http://4liberty.eu/4liberty-eu-review-4-is-already-available-online-and-for-download/

Furthermore, it is important to implement and communicate the proposed policies in a way that will bring results while not alienating people. Let us, therefore, focus on the possible hurdles, examine them, look at various examples and best practices, and of course, offer solutions.

The European Green Deal is a dramatic challenge for an unhealthy European economy. Let us hope we will remember the EU and the Green Deal as a torchbearer in many fields – such as sustainability, energy, research and innovation, trade, and not as overambitious desire to be first at any cost.

There are (and will be) some challenges, and policymakers must take heed not to stumble on the hurdles in the way. Only then can the Green Deal be a victory for all. It is time for the sweltering rooms to turn into cool areas where people lift their gaze up from their navels, look each other in the eyes, and start talking about realizing a livable future.

DREAM OF A "GREEN AND PLEASANT LAND"

Ever since the dawn of time, humankind has been dreaming of both living in growing comfort and in harmony with nature[5]. William Blake contrasts the wish to find heaven in "*England's green and pleasant land*" to the "*dark satanic mills*" of the industrial revolution, according to the popular interpretation[6]. Art, history, and philosophy are awash with a primordial will to live in peace with nature. Yet, environmentalism

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CLIMATE POLICIES CAN BE EASILY HIJACKED BY POPULISTS OFFERING UNREALIZABLE SOLUTIONS AND IMPOSSIBLE OUTCOMES

in the true sense did not get any considerable traction until recently, and progress was slow.

The problem is far from being solved. Despite public support and enacted green policies, more efforts are needed. Policies are often not ambitious enough, or their net effects are more harmful than beneficial[7]. In all the zeal to protect the environment, it is not enough to take action to soothe our conscience. The difficult part is that the right action must be taken. The European Green Deal has been criticized[8]

[5] Horton, P. and B. Horton (2019) *Re-Defining Sustainability: Living in Harmony with Life on Earth*. Available [online]: https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2590332219300259

[6] Lienhard, J.H. (1999) *Poets and the Industrial Revolution.* Available [online]: https://uh.edu/engines/epi1413.htm

[7] https://theconversation.com/why-some-green-policies-can-actually-harm-progress-on-climate-change-130904

[8] https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy-environment/news/green-package-unleashes-criticism-against-von-der-leyen-inside-the-college/?utm_source=pocket_mylist

a lot, yet it provides a historic opportunity. However, its implementation lacks details, and as such, the policy needs to be honed to be effective.

Thus, the EU's policy greatly depends on European citizens, as well as the decision makers.

The main hurdle, of not enough traction for green policies has been overcome, through time and effort. Environmental policies are gaining popularity. Yet, often adjacent science (that is not environmental, but other fields such as psychology), and politics are lagging behind. There are several more hurdles in the way to a successful implementation.

CRYING WOLF

For so long so many baseless claims[9] were made, and as a result, many warnings about climate change became noise, making difficult to distinguish between scientific facts and scaremongering. Umberto Eco argues[10] that important information can be hidden by creating noise, which is talking too much about a topic. Reporting about a politician partying all the time[11] will rob the topic of being newsworthy, so when something scandalous happens, it will be hidden in the noise. The same notion is applicable to climate change. The media tends to over exaggerate issues, so when scientific claims are made, it may be difficult for an average Joe to filter all the information about climate change, and, in the end, it all boils down to average citizens. They vote, influence decisions and policies, and make choices that add up

> ## CLIMATE ANXIETY IS A VERY REAL AND WIDESPREAD PROBLEM

to detrimental actions for mitigating or worsening climate change. According to Espen Stoknes, a Norwegian psychologist and politician [12], *"More than 80 percent of all news and mainstream media play up the issue of doomsday or catastrophe. From psychological research, we know that if you overdo the threat of catastrophe, you make people feel fear or guilt or a combination. But these two emotions are passive. They make people disconnect and avoid the topic rather than engage with it"*[13].
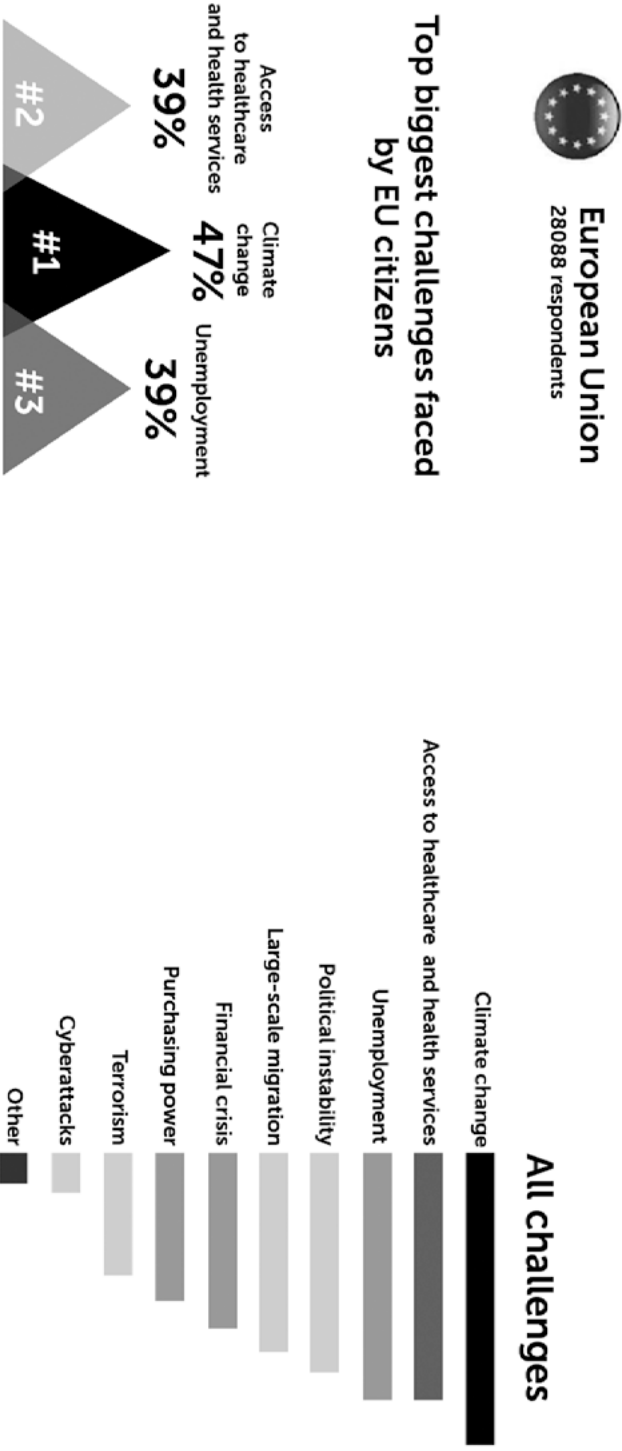
There is no doubt that people are worried about climate change. A survey by the European Investment Bank fund[14] revealed that people in the European Union deem climate change the biggest challenge (47%), while healthcare and unemployment are the next to most pressing challenges (with both 39%). If, however, alarmism will continue to weigh on people's minds, it will lead to a passive stance on tackling the

[9] https://www.aei.org/carpe-diem/50-years-of-failed-doomsday-eco-pocalyptic-predictions-the-so-called-experts-are-0-50/

[10] Eco, U. (2020) *How to Stop a Fascist,* London: Harvill Secker.

[11] Ibid.

[12] https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_to_overcome_apocalypse_fatigue_around_climate_change

[13] Ibid.

[14] European Investment Bank (2020) *The EIB Climate Survey 2019-2020*. Available [online]: https://www.eib.org/en/publications/flip/the-eib-climate-survey-2019-2020/index.html#p=17

Figure 1: Biggest Challenges Faced by European Citizens

> **NOT ONLY SHOULD THE EUROPEAN UNION BEWARE OF ENVIRONMENTAL POPULISM, BUT IT SHOULD ALSO FOCUS EVEN MORE ON EXISTING RIGHT- AND LEFT-WING POPULIST MOVEMENTS TO SEE WHY THEY ARE SUCCESSFUL**

problem and will, in the end, create fatigue [See: Figure 1].

It is one thing to think of climate change as a challenge and a desire to do more about it, but worrying about the topic too much is another thing entirely. Climate anxiety is a very real and widespread problem. According to a study in The Lancet, 75% of young people are seriously worried about the future, and almost 50% of the respondents said that climate anxiety negatively affects their everyday lives[15].

Anxiety can obviously be debilitating, and as such, the European Green Deal will also aim to "*improve our health and well-being*" [16]. This should also focus not only on physical, but also on mental health, which a greener environment would undoubtedly bring. Fearmongering about climate will not solve the problems but would only beget more issues. Anxiety is something everyone must live with. Resilience, however, should be a key factor so that these anxieties will not get out of hand.

FEAR AND LOATHING

From Brexit to Trump, Hungary and Poland, populism emerges in all places. Yet, we often associate populism with right-wing movements. This is not necessarily accurate, but instead depends on definitions.
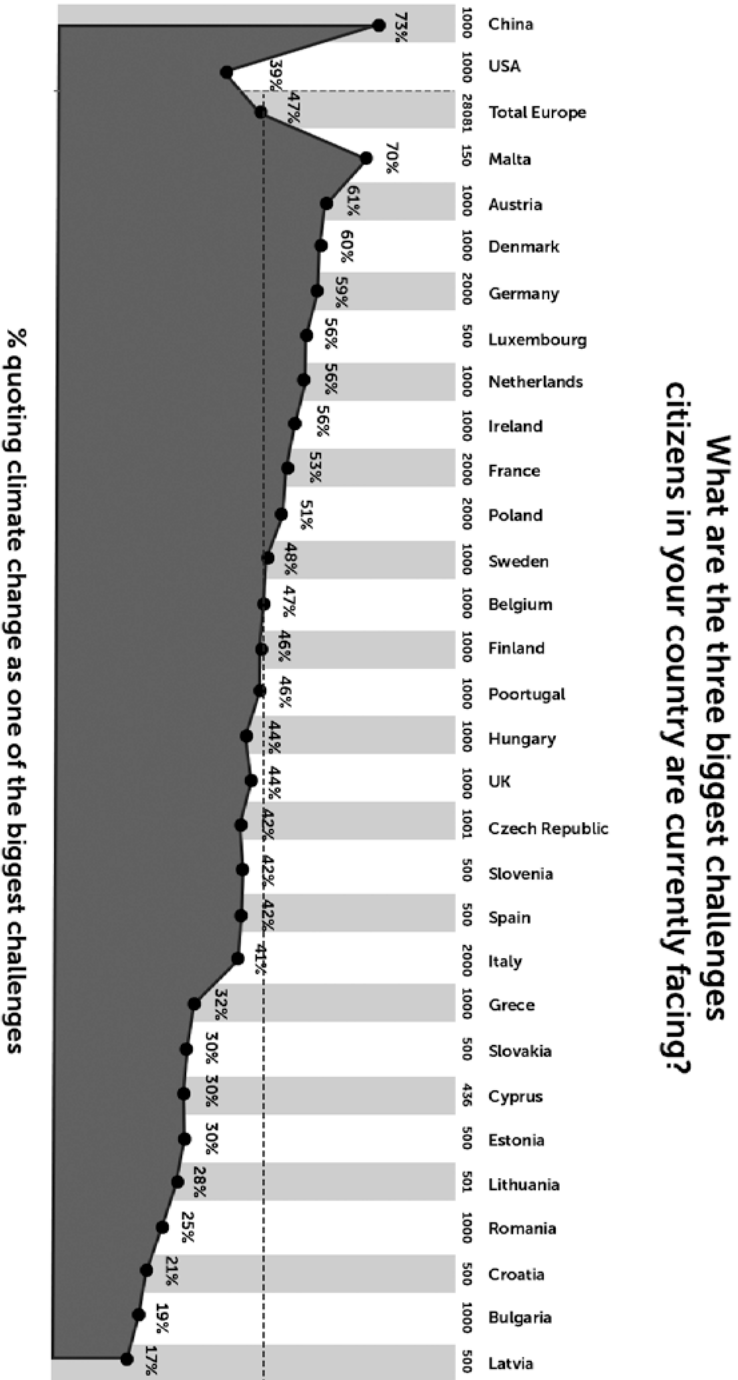
Needless to say, populism can occur anywhere – there is not only right-wing populism, but left-wing, liberal and green populism may exist as well. As populist politicians contrast the people they champion to others, or blame circumstances rather than bad actions, it is necessary to make those people whose vote they covet, afraid. Whether the target of this scaremongering are minorities, immigrants, the EU, or something else, populists build on the Carl Schmittian idea[17] of identifying the

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[15] Mufarech, A. (2022) *Your Crushing Anxiety About the Climate Crisis Is Normal*. Available [online]: https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/how-to-deal-with-the-anxiety-caused-by-the-climate-crisis-180980093/

[16] https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/delivering-european-green-deal_en

[17] Schmitt, C. (2007) *The Concept of the Political*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Figure 2: Citizens of Western Europe are more likely to cite climate change as an issue than Eastern Europeans

What are the three biggest challenges citizens in your country are currently facing?

% quoting climate change as one of the biggest challenges

China	73%
USA	39%
Total Europe	47%
Malta	70%
Austria	61%
Denmark	60%
Germany	59%
Luxembourg	56%
Netherlands	56%
Ireland	56%
France	53%
Poland	51%
Sweden	48%
Belgium	47%
Finland	46%
Poortugal	46%
Hungary	44%
UK	44%
Czech Republic	42%
Slovenia	42%
Spain	42%
Italy	41%
Grece	32%
Slovakia	30%
Cyprus	30%
Estonia	30%
Lithuania	28%
Romania	25%
Croatia	21%
Bulgaria	19%
Latvia	17%

foe, and then they build up fear against it. The populists in turn will promise protection against this enemy.

According to a study, anxiety features heavily[18] in populism: "*By employing the power of imagination, myth, and fantasy, and by capitali[z]ing on ontological insecurity and existential anxiety in times of uncertainty, far-right leaders can reach a large subsection of society. […] That is, the emotional governance of far-right populism is principally oriented towards naming groups and individuals to be feared, rather than towards an acceptance of anxiety as an insurmountable and necessary feature of subject-formation.*"

In case of green populism, the enemy is climate change. The Green New Deal in the USA, championed by Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez,[19] is a prime example of green populism. The program, though it failed to pass, would have been untenable in the timeframe, would have robbed private enterprises of doing what they do best, and public services would have substituted well established and working private ones. As the goals outlined were unattainable, it was an empty promise to gain political capital by riding the waves of climate anxiety.

According to an essay on populism by the Centre for Understanding Sustainable Prosperity "*One way in which the climate 'emergency' has been welded together with political tactics of an 'exceptional'*

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nature is in the 'Climate mobile[z]ation' movement, which seeks to model climate policies along the lines of wartime mass mobile[z]ation of economic and civic infrastructures. This type of emergency response, at national and international scales, is one possible manifestation of what a democratic 'green populism' might look like" [20]. It is vital that the European Green Deal does not go down this particular alley and outlines unattainable goals and dangle empty promises in front of people afraid of the future. So far, environmental (or green) populism does not seem to threaten the EU's policy so much, but there is all too well-known right-wing populism that does[21].

[18] Kinnvall, C. and T. Svensson (2022) "Exploring the Populist 'Mind': Anxiety, Fantasy, and Everyday Populism", [in]: The British Journal of Politics and International Relations, Vol. 24(3), pp. 526-542. Available [online]: https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/13691481221075925

[19] Davies, W. (2020) "Green Populism?: Action and Mortality in the Anthropocene", [in]: *Environmental Values*, Vol. 29(6), pp. 647-668.

[20] Ibid.

[21] https://www.iemed.org/publication/the-resistable-rise-of-populism-in-europe-and-its-impact-on-european-and-international-cooperation/

❞ NEWS ABOUT CLIMATE ACTIONS ARE FRAUGHT WITH DISINFORMA- TION

While green populists fear an environmental crisis, right-wing populists fear green activism, whether it manifests in EU policy that overrides member states legislation, or they are simply afraid that people working in polluting sectors would lose their jobs[22]. People in more affluent areas do not depend on the brown economy.

It is logical that more affluent areas can afford to be greener. For example, they can afford sustainable energy, and will not have to scrape together whatever they can to burn during the winter, so they will not freeze to death.

The Eastern part of the EU, which is historically poorer, is by far a larger air polluter. According to the European Environmental Agency, "*[t]he (...) data show that air pollution is still a major health risk for Europeans. In central and eastern Europe, the burning of solid fuels for domestic heating and industry results in high concentrations of both fine and coarse particulate matter, as well as benzo[a]pyrene, a known carcinogen*" [23]. Yet, it is exactly the areas with worse air quality, where people do not cite climate change as a problem as much as in Western Europe [See: Figure 2].

Populist movements, though omnipresent in the EU[24], tend to be strong in the poorer regions, as populists thrive on of anxious people, and less affluent areas spawn a lot of people with an existential dread[25]. Eastern Europe is a hotbed of populist movements[26]. Seeing how green policies tend to affect the poor much more[27] with energy prices rising, it is, unfortunately, not surprising that green policies are looked at with somewhat of a dubious eye.

Not only should the European Union beware of environmental populism, but it should also focus even more on existing right- and left-wing populist movements to see why they are successful. Only then can the EU act on the fact that poorer areas care less about the environment and favor populists more.

[22] Bohnenberger, K. (2022) *Greening Work: Labor Market Policies for the Environment*. Available [online]: https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10663-021-09530-9

[23] Balfour, R. (2017) "Air Pollution Still Too High in Most EU Member States", [in]: *European Environment Agency*. Available [online]: https://www.eea.europa.eu/highlights/air-pollution-still-too-high-1#:~:text=The%20EEA%20data%20show%20that,%5Dpyrene%2C%20a%20known%20carcinogen

[24] https://www.iemed.org/publication/the-resistable-rise-of-populism-in-europe-and-its-impact-on-european-and-international-cooperation/

[25] Simard, A. et al. (2022) "Job Satisfaction and Psychological Distress among Help-Seeking Men: Does Meaning in Life Play a Role?", [in]: *Behavioral Sciences*, Vol. 12(3), pp. 58. Available [online]: https://doi.org/10.3390/bs12030058

[26] Populism and Party System Change in Europe. Available [online]: https://europe.columbia.edu/content/rise-and-resilience-populism-eastern-europe

[27] https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/how-green-policies-hurt-the-poor

Unfortunately, every single EU policy will be a thorn in someone's eye. Most will be used by Eurosceptics to whip up anti-EU sentiments, extolling the merits of decision making on a local level rather than a centrally planned one-size-fits-all policy. There is truth even in the most blatant populist Eurosceptic lie. Local decision making is usually better (given proper checks and balances, a mature democracy, and the rule of law) than centralized legislation. However, there are EU core values on which most member states should agree on – at least on paper. Having a sustainable economy that is beneficial for both people and the environment is something nobody disagrees on. How to bring it about, however, is a matter of much schism. For this reason, a strong public-opinion campaign is necessary to show the benefits of the European Green Deal.

THE PUBLIC EYE

It is no secret that the European Union is not doing well in terms of communicating its policies[28]. On all levels, it mainly follows a *shoot-and-forget* strategy from a PR perspective. It acts without stressing the importance of explaining the *why*, the *how*, and the benefits of such actions to the public. It hopes, rather naively, that actions speak for themselves – they do not. Eurosceptic voices thus easily sway the public opinion, at least to some extent, by pursuing a very vocal marketing campaign against the European Union, while the EU fails to do an adequate marketing campaign for itself.

> **THE PROBLEM WITH GREEN POLICIES IS THAT THEY REQUIRE A GLOBAL EFFORT TO BE EFFECTIVE**

Mounting Euroscepticism, which had been left virtually unchecked for years, culminated in Brexit, which gave a new boost to those wanting to leave the EU[29]. These movements, mostly led by populists, exploit the EU's lack of sufficient communication, and depict every EU policy as the meddling of EU bureaucrats[30].

Disinformation, colloquially known as 'fake news', features heavily as a hurdle in implementing and popularizing EU policies. In fact, Eurosceptics used disinformation against Brussels so much that it got its own name: 'Euromyth'. These are the familiar, ridiculous scrapes about bureaucrats legislating the curvature of the cucumber or banana and forcing farcical rules on people. Most have a grain of truth at their core, deliberately blown up, distorted and misunderstood. Their funny nature is almost like

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[28] https://www.friendsofeurope.org/insights/eu-communication-what-are-the-biggest-challenges-and-what-can-the-institutions-do-to-address-them/

[29] Riss, N. (2019) *Euroscepticism in the Face of Brexit*. Available [online]: https://www.ie-ei.eu/Ressources/FCK/image/RECHERCHE/Theses_2019/RISS-Nikolaus.pdf

[30] https://www.dw.com/en/hungary-orban-accuses-eu-us-of-meddling-as-election-looms/a-59607853

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ENERGY POVERTY IS NOT A NEW THING IN THE EU

a folk tale, with decision makers in Brussels, and the common, honest folk, fighting their eternal battles. They are designed to be entertaining and popular. Whether they are believed or not is beyond the point. If even a fragment of them sticks, they have achieved their goal.

News about climate actions are fraught with disinformation. Whether it originates from actors willing to undermine the integrity of those bringing actions[31] (in this case the EU), which is the modus operandi of Russia, for instance, or from corporations[32] wanting to pose as smaller polluters than they actually are, it is easy to get lost in the wilderness of fact and fake news. The most vulnerable people who will be affected by climate action are apt to believe this sort of disinformation due to positivity bias. They would believe that if green policies hurt them, the EU actively wants to cause them harm, take their jobs, or that climate change does not really exist at all, and that it is all a hoax[33].

The EU has a huge responsibility in paying attention to these people and addressing these issues not only on a policy level, but also on a communication level. Just imagine that you are someone living in the EU, working in a sector that will soon cease to exist due to the green policies, as that sector is too polluting and will be substituted by a sustainable one. You are already poor and can barely afford to sufficiently heat your home. Green policies are bound to further increase energy prices, so you will have to transfer to other heating methods. You are unable to afford heating or refurbishing, and are about to lose your job[34]. How keen would you be on green policies then, which are the privilege of those able to afford it?

The sad fact is that the European Union is aware of the problem of energy poverty and just transition to new jobs. There are proposals and strategies on a policy level, but their effectiveness is another question. But have you ever heard of the Just Transition Platform[35] for instance, set up by the EU and accessible to people and citizens? Clearly, the EU is not doing a good job at communicating its solutions, and thus can easily alienate people who assume that nothing is being done. Eurosceptic voices and dissenting people can be a significant obstacle in the way

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[31] See: 4liberty.eu Review (2020) *DisinforNation: Disinformation Practices in CEE*, No. 13. Available [online]: http://4liberty.eu/category/review/review-13/

[32] https://www.pbs.org/newshour/world/climate-disinformation-continues-to-leave-a-mark-as-world-gets-hotter

[33] https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/08/is-climate-denialism-dead/

[34] According to the European Commission, *"[a]n EU-wide survey concluded that in 2020, 8% of the EU population said that they were unable to keep their home adequately warm. Energy poverty therefore remains a major challenge and lifting vulnerable citizens out of it is an urgent task for the EU and its members"*. See: https://energy.ec.europa.eu/topics/markets-and-consumers/energy-consumer-rights/energy-poverty_en

[35] European Commission (2020) *The Just Transition Mechanism: Making Sure No One Is Left Behind*. Available [online]: https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/finance-and-green-deal/just-transition-mechanism_en

of the successful implementation of the Green Deal.

REAP WHAT YOU SOW

The road to hell is paved with good intentions, goes the adage. The problem with green policies is that they require a global effort to be effective. This has never been done before. Thus, there is a lot of *trial and error*. Numerous rushed policies were enacted (whether in private or public) only to show that something is being done, so that those who passed it, and those who see it being done, feel good.

Take the example of nylon bags for example. They are not good for the environment, true. However, by phasing out the trusted nylon bag, it is being replaced by single-use paper bags, which one can only hope will not disintegrate at its first use, or by canvas bags. Even these two solutions (nylon and canvas) are a bigger burden on the environment as a net effect than the plastic bags[36].

A particularly good representation of feel-good policies backfiring is Germany's rushed closing of its nuclear power plants. Now with the war in Ukraine, Germany, which is among the wealthiest nations, faces an energy crisis. Finally, after a long struggle, it decided to reconsider closing[37] its nuclear plants.

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> EUROPE'S NAIVE RELIANCE ON RUSSIAN ENERGY IS ALSO PROBLEMATIC, DESPITE THE LATEST EFFORTS TO DISCONNECT FROM THE CLUTCHES OF PUTIN

Yet, energy poverty is not a new thing in the EU. Rising prices cause an increase in people unable to afford utility bills[38], though in recent years this number is decreasing (not factoring in the recent energy crisis with Russia)[39]. Not to mention what happens in more poverty-stricken places, such as parts of Africa where people cannot afford clean energy and due to rising prices, they burn waste in order not to freeze. The smoke billowing from these fires is, needless to say, extremely polluting – not only to the environment, but

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[36] The Danish Environmental Protection Agency (2018) *Life Cycle Assessment of Grocery Carrier Bags.* Available [online]: https://www2.mst.dk/Udgiv/publications/2018/02/978-87-93614-73-4.pdf

[37] Financial Times (2022) *Germany Rethinks Nuclear Power Exit Due to Threat of Winter Energy Crunch*. Available [online]: https://www.ft.com/content/cc422ece-92b3-41fa-a05c-900270bfe824

[38] European Commission (2020) *Arrears on Utility Bills*. Available [online]: https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/DDN-20200120-1

[39] Ibid.

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THE GREENEST COMPANIES ARE USUALLY THE LARGEST MULTINATIONALS – SUCH AS MICROSOFT AND APPLE

also to people[40], causing a large number of deaths.

Europe's naive reliance on Russian energy is also problematic, despite the latest efforts to disconnect from the clutches of Putin. Ever since the last crises in Ukraine in 2014, insufficient efforts were made. European countries had eight years and failed to be independent energy wise. Now, even the most optimistic transition period is not enough, and Russia can further back the EU into a corner of its own creation.

Landlocked countries with no access to direct tanker shipments are left stranded, giving the Hungarian government (already overly friendly with Vladimir Putin) more cause to strengthen its narrative against the European Union, make more deals with Russia, and to do Putin's bidding of weakening the EU.

The European Union is already vulnerable. Many energy-rich countries are not exactly the champions of liberty and dealing with them is an out of the pan into the fire kind of situation. In the area of waste management, China has already caused great disruptions by placing a ban on import waste[41].

Offshore drilling and shale gas might be a solution for the EU's energy independence, but it is not a green way forward. Dealing with authoritarian nations[42] will only discredit the European Union's effort in democratic values. Environmental causes also would not be helped globally, as a lot of energy-rich yet not-so-democratic countries are polluters[43].

On paper, the EU Green Deal is prepared for sustainable energy and energy independence – for example, by decarbonizing the gas sector. But the question remains if it can be achieved in time without damages to vulnerable people, and what will happen until then?

Although innovation is part of the Green Deal package the European Union should continue to lay a great emphasis on it. Still,

[40] https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/household-air-pollution-and-health

[41] Yoshida, A. (2022) "China's ban of imported recyclable waste and its impact on the waste plastic recycling industry in China and Taiwan", [in]: Journal of Material Cycles and Waste Management, Vol. 24, pp. 73–82.2

[42] Staden, C. (2022) "Green Energy's Dirty Secret: Its Hunger for African Resources", [in]: Foreign Policy. Available [online]: https://foreignpolicy.com/2022/06/30/africa-congo-drc-ev-electric-vehicles-batteries-green-energy-minerals-metals-mining-resources-colonialism-human-rights-development-china/?utm_source=pocket_mylist

[43] Neumayer, E. (2002) "Do Democracies Exhibit Stronger International Environmental Commitment? A Cross-Country Analysis", [in]: Journal of Peace Research, Vol. 39(2), pp. 139–164. Available [online]: http://www.jstor.org/stable/1555-296

it is impossible to predict future technologies, their environmental impact, and energy needs (think of Bitcoin for instance)[44] of new tech, and what new solutions upcoming innovations will produce to the problem of climate change. Innovation is mostly driven by the private sector[45], and the EU should put more focus on cooperating with them, and not only regulating their activities.

The greenest companies are usually the largest multinationals – such as Microsoft and Apple[46], and many are not headquartered in the EU. It is not funding nor grants, but leeway, that private solutions need most. A balance should be found so as not to do damage or discriminate positively or negatively. Too much freedom in environmental issues may cause bad actors (such as Russia or China) to exploit it as a weakness of the EU.

Regulations, however, are also not necessarily the solution. For instance, Volkswagen famously lied[47] about its emissions, and ExxonMobil[48] even tried to influence the Green Deal. The answer to this issue

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could be Special Economic Zones, set up to serve as sandboxes where innovation is driven by a freer environment and – should it not go well – it is contained. Freedom would not cause the chaos that is feared by many. Corporations can still lie despite regulations, and honesty[49] is an excellent way to stand out.

CONCLUSIONS: THE BEST IS YET TO COME

Despite criticism, the European Green Deal is a historic step forward towards a better and sustainable future. It was the best possible policy in the current political, global, and economic climate. Some might say it is not ambitious, while others say that it is overly ambitious – to the point

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44 Hinsdale, J. (2022) *Cryptocurrency's Dirty Secret: Energy Consumption.* Available [online]: https://news.climate.columbia.edu/2022/05/04/cryptocurrency-energy/

45 https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/03/should-government-leave-innovation-to-the-private-sector/

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where it cannot be realized. Obviously, compromises had to be made otherwise the Deal could not have been passed in as diverse a place as the EU with different interests, ideologies, and opinions. It is what it is.

However, for it to succeed, it yet remains to be seen how policies will be implemented. There are also a lot of hurdles in front of the green policies that need to be overcome. As indicated above, there are several broad categories that could make or break the Green Deal – alarmism, populism, communication, consequences, and innovation. It is, therefore, important that the conversation about climate change is done in a factual, calm, and solution-based manner, rather than rooted in scaremongering. The latter might lead people to lose trust in the process, become passive or scared – which populists may then exploit.

Populism comes in many shapes and forms – left, right, liberal, and green. It builds on the *us and them* mentality, rides on the fear of people, promises protection and undeliverable goals. It is okay that people have anxieties, but it is resilience that should be built upon, rather than a political career. It is important to recognize false prophets and quick-fix policies. People should, therefore, prepare for the *blood, toil, tears, and sweat* rather than in the *heaven on earth* tomorrow.

All this is futile if the European Union is not communicating effectively. Good policies might exist, but if nobody knows about them, it will not matter. Hoping they will speak for themselves is just wishful thinking, Eurosceptics will fill the gap in communication and hijack it.

Feel-good policies are also a big hurdle due to unintended consequences. Optics are not enough, and their full-blown effects must be considered. Usually, more research is needed. Rushed policies might at first soothe people and pose as actions, but they will not solve environmental issues – more likely, they will make matters worse.

Innovation will always be a factor one cannot anticipate. Nonetheless, it can still be driven by a lenient regulatory environment. Trust and honesty are gaining importance on the market, and over-regulation will lead to lying and avoidance. Special economic zones could pose as a good solution.

There might be other, unforeseen hurdles, which the Green Deal has to deal with, which should also be factored in. There is a long way to go, with many unknowns. Yet, it is a road all of us are taking for the common benefit. The most important thing is to work together in bringing it to success and create a win-win situation for both the people and the environment.

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