



Union of European Federalists
Union Europäischer Föderalisten
Union des Fédéralistes Européens

The role of European civil society in the fight against climate change



A priority for European civil society

- **Priority of European voters and key issue for Elections**

- Second main issue that encouraged citizens to vote in 2019 EP elections: combatting climate change and protecting environment (37%)
- Crucial factor for Greens' success in some latest EU MS elections (Germany, Luxembourg, Belgium...)

- **Many marches for climate**

- Youth for Climate: 2 M. young people in the world on 15 March 2019
- 20 September 2019: 1,4 M. in Germany, huge mobilisation in London, Portugal, Greece...
- Not new: already in September 2014, 300.000 people in New York City



- **Plurality of activists: environmental NGOs, social movement, young people, independent citizens...**

Civil society, a driver of changes?

What are the levies of actions of European civil society in the fight against climate change?

- I. How can civil society act and have an impact?
- I. Which impact for the future of the EU?

I. How can civil society act
and have an impact?

Available mechanisms at EU level



- Consultations on the matters under discussion by the EU institutions
- European Citizens Initiative: Right for EU citizens to ask for new EU legislation
 - ECI « A price for carbon to fight climate change » launched in July 2019
- Mass actions/ demonstrations to put pressure on the policy-makers
 - Frans Timmermans, designated EC VP for Green Deal meeting with young activists in Brussels on 20.09.19
 - Fight against climate change included in the political program of many lists for European Elections
 - U. Van Der Leyen formulated a strong ambition to make Europe the first carbon-neutral continent by 2050

Available mechanisms at EU level

- Assessment of governments' accountability and compliance with environmental agreements

- **People climate cases:** citizens taking their government into the courtrooms to hold them accountable for their inaction to protect people from climate change impacts (in the NL, Belgium, UK, Germany, Ireland, Portugal, France...)

Currently 1200 climate disputes throughout the world (database of Colombia university)

- Even at EU level, the so-called **people's climate case** launched by 11 families from EU, Africa and the Pacific against EU climate policy. They claimed before the European court of justice that the EU goals for reducing emissions are insufficient to meet the commitments of the Paris Agreement and breach their fundamental rights to life, health and property.

The Union judge ruled that the action was inadmissible but a first important case.



II. Which impact for
the future of the EU?

An impact on the future of the EU ?

- A connection between the federalist fight for Europe and the fight against climate change
- How can these two fights be synergic to produce results?
 - How can climate and energy policies support the process on the future of the EU towards a federal EU?
 - How can climate and energy policies benefit from the process on the future of the EU towards a federal EU?



Cf. WG "Future of the EU – the role of climate and energy policies" – with funding from the Stiftung Mercator, brought together senior representatives from trade unions, business, think tanks, academia and EU institutions. It met three times between April 2018 and March 2019 in Brussels.

II. Which impact for the future of the EU?

How can climate and energy policies support the process on the future of the EU towards a federal EU?

Reframe the debate on the future of Europe and give a new positive project for EU



- **The absence of a common vision** is one of the EU's fundamental problems
- *More Europe versus Less Europe*
- In a context of growing success of anti-European and anti-immigration parties, as well as the politics of fear used by the far right to mobilize their voters, **the European civil society fighting against climate change is offering a positive and inclusive change in favour of environmental, economic and social responsibility, freedom, democracy and openness to the world.**
- Climate policy has **a strong rationale for institutionalised international cooperation.** Climate change doesn't know borders.

A new legitimacy for the EU



- The EU is able to act and deliver policies to the benefit of all MS and their citizens
- Between 2017 & 2018: significant reforms of the emission trading scheme, Renewable Energy Directive, Energy Efficiency Directive, the Climate Action Regulation, Agreement on the Regulation for the Governance of the Energy Union, Ratification of the Paris Agreement.
 - EU energy and climate policies have been contested but it is **a policy area where the EU proved that it is willing and capable of working together.**
 - The adopted policies might be insufficient but **they are probably more ambitious than the actions that Member States would have taken acting solely on a national level.**
- > **EU energy and climate policies also show that the EU has worked towards cohesion among Member States:** they contain a number of instruments to improve solidarity between Member States – the ETS redistributes auctioning revenues to poorer Member States, and the Climate Action Regulation contains a so-called safety reserve for less wealthy Member States.

A new legitimacy for the EU

- **Citizens' dialogue and citizens consultation**

« *What would make you prouder of belonging to the EU ?* » -> combating climate change and strengthening use of renewable energy

- **Eurobarometer on climate change (August 19)**

93% of respondents see climate change as a serious problem

More than half of all respondents think national governments (55%) or business and industry (51%) are responsible for tackling climate change, while almost half (49%) mentioned the European Union.



> **A widespread support for EU-level measures to tackle climate change.**

A stronger EU foreign policy



- **EU foreign policy has a mixed record with a number of successes and a greater number of failures.**
- **This contrasts with the EU's comparatively successful role in shaping the international climate policy agenda.**
- **The EU's international climate policies offer some lessons for EU foreign policy.**

In contrast to EU foreign policies, Article 218.9 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU offers the potential to adopt positions by qualified majority, where they are based on internal legislation (although consensus remains the uncontested practice for determining the EU position in international climate negotiations).

- **This legal set-up has been instrumental for a united EU that speaks with one voice in international climate negotiations and should be an example for the whole EU foreign policy.**

II. Which impact for the future of the EU?

How can climate and energy policies benefit from the process on the future of the EU towards a federal EU?

Make climate a hallmark of the EU



- The Process on the Future of the EU could help make climate and energy policies a hallmark of the EU.
- EU climate and energy policies are not yet fully recognised for what they are: « a genuine opportunity to improve the quality of life for citizens, to modernize economies, to increase competitiveness, to seize the markets of the future and to enhance transparency and public participation ».
- The Process on the Future of the EU could provide important impetus and direction to EU climate and energy policies by acknowledging that they are a hallmark of the EU of the future.

Benefit from proper EU resources



- Today the European budget entirely depends on the contributions of each member state.
- Federalists advocate moving to a **largely independent European budget funded by European resources**. The EU should hold the right to **raise taxes** on trans-border activities affecting all Europeans and in areas where only Europe can achieve efficient and fair taxation, such as carbon-dioxide emissions or the use of plastic.
- **Such budget and own resources could fund necessary investments, research and compensation measures for a carbon free Europe.**

Benefit from a more efficient and democratic EU

- 92% respondents of the Eurobarometer (April 2019) agreed that the EU economy should be made climate neutral by 2050.
- But the Council in June didn't manage to adopt a plan for neutral carbon by 2050 since 4 MS were against:
 - Poland but 87 % citizens in favor (totally agree or tend to agree)
 - Czech Republic but 89% of citizens in favor
 - Hungary but 95% of citizens in favor
 - (Estonia but 83% of citizens in favor)
- The results of the Eurobarometer show the increasing seriousness of climate change for respondents and **the necessity to overcome unanimity to reach the expectations of citizens & questions the role of the European Council vis-a-vis legislative processes**



Benefit from a more efficient and democratic EU

- **The ordinary legislative process** – the standard way of energy and climate law-making in the EU – has been **instrumental for adopting relatively strong policies**.
- However, **some issues with great significance for climate action** – such as the choice of national energy mixes as well as taxation or spatial planning – **are still in principle subject to the special legislative process, requiring unanimity in the Council and granting the European Parliament only consultative status**.
- The special legislative process is less likely to produce ambitious policies because each Member State has a veto and because the European Parliament is not a full co-legislator.
- Expanding **the ordinary legislative process would not only help strengthen climate and energy policies, it would also enhance transparency and democratic legitimacy because the European Parliament, the only directly elected EU institution, would become an equal co-legislator in nearly all aspects of EU energy and climate policies, including energy taxation**.

Benefit from a federal Europe



The federalists advocate for a shift to a federal system, which implies that:

- **the Parliament** should be on an equal footing with the Council of Ministers in all matters, thereby acting together as the legislative branch of the European Union and then **the body representing the citizens will have a equal say in the policy-making process;**
- at least a part of members of the European Parliament from 2024 should be elected in transnational lists in a single European constituency, to promote real European political parties and movements; which will also allow **a better consideration of issues raised by civil society at European level.**

Only a federal system will ensure the transparent decision-making and a more participatory, democratic and accountable process asked by the civil society demonstrating against climate change.

Conclusion

- There is a need to integrate movements against climate change in a broader perspective.
- The climate crisis could be the levers for other kinds of transformative changes in the EU.
- Without a federal Europe the proposals of such movements remain only on an idea level.
- The European civil society fighting against climate change should realise the importance of the reform of the EU for addressing climate change. Ambitious climate policy requires a federal Europe. And the federalists should realise that the European civil society fighting against climate change may help them to reach the necessary EU reform.
- The federalist activists and the climate ones should combine their force to reach their goals.
 - => *Towards a sustainable Europe = Towards a federal Europe*

