

Too much hot air

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Opinion

Talking about climate change is one thing, taking the drastic measures needed to combat it is quite another – so let's move from words to action, says Henri Malosse



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Tackling climate change is not about, as President Macron said, how to “make our planet great again”. Rather, it is about how to ensure that humanity survives.

As the Native American proverb says, “We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors, we borrow it from our children.”

Over the last decade, the European institutions, pushed by civil society movements and the electorates, have ‘greened’ their speeches and declarations. However, nothing concrete has really been achieved.

By continuing to import products from heavily-polluting countries such as China and the United

States, there is no chance that we will drastically reduce CO2 emissions in Europe, nor will we achieve the COP 21 objectives defined in Paris.

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The wheels of destruction are already rolling: scientists and the United Nations have declared that it is now too late to save the Arctic ice flows, which will disappear by the end of the century.

Polar bears and other animal species are rapidly becoming extinct and, for humans, the destruction caused by climate change will potentially see human migration flows driven by environmental displacement and extreme weather conditions.

In the face of such ecological urgency, this 'greening' of EU policies not only falls short of citizens' expectations but it is also fraudulent.

"By continuing to import products from heavily-polluting countries such as China and the United States, there is no chance that we will drastically reduce CO2 emissions in Europe"

Putting some "additional green points" as an addendum to our actions or creating policies will not appease Europe's younger generation, nor it is it a route to effective and lasting change.

I continue to advocate for the fight against climate change and to do so through our words, not our actions.

Taking transport as an example, the EU's policy over the last two decades has increased road, rail, shipping and air transport to the extent that 40 percent of CO2 emissions now come from transport alone.

The "Single European Sky" policy, of which the European Commission is very proud, has actually tripled air pollution over the last ten years.

The application of the posted workers directive in transport has doubled road pollution from heavy goods vehicles on European roads.

Looking at the example of trade, it is easy to understand that the Commission's passion for free trade and trade for trade's sake.

It has resulted in an influx of shipping containers filled with cheap goods, particularly clothes, from Asia, produced without any environmental concerns (nor indeed concerns for human rights or labour rights, for that matter).

“Greening our declarations in European policies makes no difference to the irreversible environmental damage our greed inflicts”

‘Greening’ our declarations in European policies makes no tangible difference to the irreversible environmental damage that our greed inflicts.

If we are genuinely seeking to make a difference, the environmental impact of policies needs to be the primary consideration.

Europe must start to enforce regulations throughout the entire supply chain, where the terms apply equally both inside and outside Europe.

This would support local production, enable shorter distribution chains and reduce environmental damage.

Demand for this radical change will not come from the politicians; ultimately it will come from the people.

It is only then that the politicians and the European Commission will ensure that change actually happens.

I am convinced that an “Ecological Europe”, with a simultaneous vision and action plan is a necessity for our global citizens, for all the inhabitants of planet Earth today and for the future.

About the author



Henri Malosse is the 30th President of the European Economic and Social Committee

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