

Practical solutions to climate change

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Opinion

The demands to act on climate change are correct and justified; let's ensure we use the right tools and approaches in delivering solutions, writes Peter Liese.



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I have been inspired by the passion, conviction and energy of the millions of our young people making their voice heard on our streets and in our hearts. It is our generational duty to deliver for them.”

These were the words of Commission President-elect Ursula von der Leyen in her political guidelines, and she is completely correct.

Not just young people, but also the vast majority of Europeans want to see action on climate. And they are right to seek this; the world has to act to avoid a major catastrophe.

If we are unable to stabilise the temperature at 2 degrees above the industrial level, or even 1.5

degrees, we risk passing dangerous tipping points.

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For example, if the permafrost in Siberia melts, huge amounts of methane will be released into the atmosphere, bringing with it a much higher climate change potential than CO₂.

If the world does not take the right decisions in the next twenty years, in the coming centuries our grandchildren, and all future generations, may no longer be able to control climate change.

The sea level may rise by five metres or more and other devastating consequences will follow. At the COP24 climate conference, the global community came together to discuss how to best implement the targets that were agreed upon in the Paris Agreement.

Although the overall result was not perfect, important steps have been taken towards international climate protection.

"In the coming centuries our grandchildren, and all future generations, may no longer be able to control climate change"

Where we did indeed succeed was on agreeing upon a comprehensive rulebook. This allows for comparisons at international level, to see how each party is getting along with implementation of their individual nationally-determined contributions (NDCs).

This rulebook is applicable to all countries, not just the EU and its Member States, but also to third countries. It is important that large emitters such as China also act and take responsibility in the international fight against climate change.

A huge majority of the European Parliament shares the objective of fighting climate change. This is also reflected in the recent results of the ENVI committee vote on the COP25 taking place in Madrid: 62 committee members voted in favour and 11 members voted against the draft COP25 resolution.

However, there are different positions on how we should approach the challenge. My Group, the EPP, has four priorities.

First, pursuing jobs and growth is not a contradiction to climate mitigation. We want to approach climate policy in a way that does not cause us to lose our industrial base and create unemployment, but rather to support industry to be climate-neutral.

The 2050 strategy of the European Commission shows that if we get the policy framework right, climate neutrality can be achieved with a net gain of jobs and economic growth. But for that, we need

to work with industry, not against it

Second, we need to focus much more on activities in the rest of the world. Even if the EU were to stop emitting immediately, passing the tipping points for dangerous climate change will not be avoided unless other emitters follow.

This is why it is important to focus much more on the rest of the world and work with, for example, major economies such as China, India, Canada and South Africa that are debating increasing their NDCs.

"It is important that large emitters such as China also act and take responsibility in the international fight against climate change"

We think that increasing the European NDC to 55 percent is the right thing to do, if we create global alliances and if a proper impact assessment prepares a concrete way forward.

Third, sustainably-managed forests are the best climate protectors. In contrast to what some political groups and activists may say, it is important that humanity intervenes in the forests.

Natural forests are not the best way to protect the climate; managed forests absorb more CO2 and the resulting wood can replace materials that currently produce a great deal of CO2.

European forests are in a critical state in many Member States; that is why support for forest owners is crucial if we are serious about climate mitigation.

Last, an Emission Trading Scheme (ETS) instead of taxes and prohibition policy. Greens and Social Democrats in the European Parliament very much support policies based on prohibiting technologies and intervening in behaviour by command and control.

We are convinced that this is not the right approach. We think that the ETS, as a market-based mechanism, will deliver emission reductions at the lowest possible cost.

If we want to convince other partners in the world, we need to be efficient and not base our policy on prohibition.

While the ETS has suffered from past weaknesses, it now delivers concrete emissions reductions - a separate ETS for transport and building could be a good way forward.

About the author

Peter Liese (DE, EPP) is vice-chair of the European Parliament's delegation to COP25

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