

Climate Action as a European Responsibility

By Jo Leinen MEP, President, European Movement International

Fighting climate change and supporting an ecologically sustainable development is, by its very nature, a task that should be dealt with globally and multilaterally. Within the European Union, there has always been broad support by citizens as well as governments for dealing with climate policies at a European level. Limiting greenhouse gas emissions or air pollution is best done in a concerted manner between countries. The success reached so far in tackling climate change has been perceived very positively by the European people and can serve as an EU leitmotif people can identify with.

In recent decades the EU has initiated a steady shift from an emission-intensive to a low carbon economy. In 2014, greenhouse gas emissions were 24% lower than in 1990 - to a large extent due to EU climate and energy policies. In the same period of time, the European economy even increased. A major transition can be observed in Energy production - currently 25% of primary energy production from all sources is made up by renewable energy sources. The EU's final energy consumption fell by 6.35% between 2000 and 2014. This positive development will help in pushing for increased climate targets in the future and acting as a pioneer for climate action on the global level.

In turbulent times citizens need to see positive results from EU policies that demonstrate the advantages of European cooperation. The European Movement International and its national member organisations have been an advocate for European unity and integration for decades, promoting intensified policy making at European level where this is especially beneficial. Informing citizens about EU politics and engaging in a dialogue with civil society is another major goal of the European Movement. European unity and the involvement of society is especially needed when addressing climate change. This is why the European Movement is actively pushing for European solutions for climate protection while at the same time promoting projects and initiatives on the ground.

The Paris Agreement - A success of European unity
Ahead of the UN climate negotiations in Paris in 2015, the European Movement addressed politicians to push for a binding and ambitious agreement on global climate action and to take responsibility as industrialised nations to

commit to mitigation efforts as well as financial support for developing countries. Crafting a common European position and acting as a united force and leader in the international arena was particularly important in Paris. The European Movement advocated for increased climate diplomacy ahead of the climate summit in order to promote the European position and respond to other countries' priorities. The European Commission as well as the European Foreign Ministers adopted such an approach and reached out to their counterparts in third countries. This diplomatic effort was key to the positive result of the UN climate talks in France as so many controversies could be anticipated beforehand.

From the climate conference in Lima in 2014 to the Paris Summit one year later, the EU effectively and quite consistently pursued a policy of climate action advocacy internally and externally. The Council of the EU adopted a common EU contribution on emission reductions as one of the first UN parties. The European Commission prepared the negotiation tactics and used its External Action Service to spread the message to other parties outside the EU. The European Parliament served as a watchdog to Council and Commission in Paris itself and asked for a strong and unified EU at the negotiation table that would fight for meaningful long-term targets as well.

When the Paris Summit concluded on 12 December 2015, a global and universal agreement on climate action was on the table and the EU was one of the decisive forces to make it happen. By joining the High Ambition Coalition the EU helped Small Islands States to promote the necessary long term commitments while still brokering between big players like India and Saudi Arabia that asked for concessions. Even if the finalised agreement has weaknesses it is more satisfying than many had expected. Acting as a unit was essential for the EU's negotiating power. If all 28 member states would have fought for their priorities and voiced their concerns, Europe's position at the negotiation table would have been much weaker.

Demonstrating European unity and strength through a single European voice at the climate negotiations is an excellent blueprint for other policy fields. It is a good example for a concrete achievement which has the strong support of European citizens. 60 years after the Treaty of Rome climate protection can serve very well as one of the new narratives for European integration. The younger



IMAGE: PAUL GRECAUD

generation is especially worried about the challenge of climate change. Europe's engagement in this area might add to their identification with the European project.

Engaging citizens

A promising way to create empathy and involvement by young as well as older citizens is to offer opportunities to take part in the debate directly and the chance to voice ideas and criticism. While fostering civil dialogue is one of the most important priorities for the European Movement, it also promotes a transparent and democratic implementation of policies that is based on participation. The European Movement France used the opportunity of Paris being the host of COP21 to engage as a representative of civil society. Ahead of the summit, students were invited to discuss with politicians on the expectation for Europe and its stance in the world. During the climate talks, the French European Movement was active in Paris, bringing together high-level personalities and citizens to discuss the ongoing negotiations.

Communicating the EU's achievements in climate and environmental policies is important to strengthen people's support for the European project. In the run up to the British referendum on EU membership the European Movement United Kingdom launched an extraordinary campaign focusing on improvements EU legislation has brought about in 40 years of British EU membership. European nature protection laws have reduced sewage in British coastal and inland waters, air pollution has been reduced and 652 nature protection sites were established within the European NATURA 2000 network covering

8,000 hectares of British land. The European Movement tried to raise awareness of the advantage of European environmental protection, which cannot be tackled as efficiently at the national level. This is also central to the European Movement UK's new 'red line' campaign that defines key objectives for the negotiations on the UK leaving the EU. Environmental protection is one of four red lines where tight cooperation with the EU must be kept and standards achieved so far should not be neglected.

Working in cooperation with our European partners, demonstrating the benefits of this unity and creating meaningful dialogue with citizens will become even more important in the upcoming years when Europe will no doubt face a difficult period of transition. The European Movement International will engage actively in this process to not just 'reinvent' but also to 'revive' the European project.

The European Movement International is a network of organisations that has advocated the establishment of a united, federal Europe since 1948.

To find out more information please visit:
www.europeanmovement.eu

