Visions and Proposals for Better Green Recovery / Green Deal in National Policies

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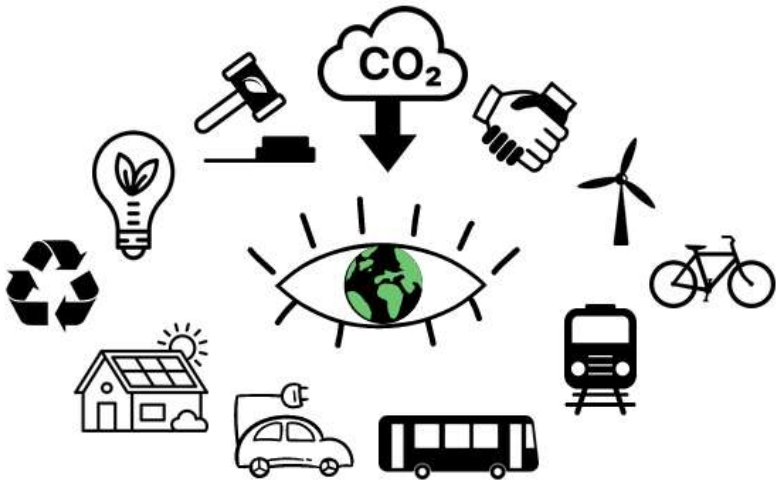

Representatives from civil society organisations from Nordic and Baltic countries, Belarus (in exile) and Ukraine describe in this paper their visions for climate mitigation developments and policies to reach fossil fuel phase-out and large reductions of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions as part of the development to GHG neutral societies or even GHG absorbing societies. This paper describes in many aspects a common vision, but there are also country specific proposals. Of course, our visions include that the Russian war in Ukraine shall be ended and Ukraine will continue with the green reconstruction of the country, and that the authoritarian regime in Belarus will become democratic.

This paper is made by a working group with members from AirClim Secretariat in Sweden, International Network for Sustainable Energy - Europe with Danish CSOs, Norges Naturvernforbund, Latvijas Zaļā kustība/Latvian Green Movement, Žiedinė Ekonomika/Circular Economy in Lithuania, Ecoaction from Ukraine, Ecokoncepcija/Ecodome Lithuania/Belarus. The views expressed are those of the working group authors and not necessarily those of the organisations.

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It is the hope that this paper can inspire additional action for national climate plans to fulfil the objective of the European Green Deal, in line with the 1,5°C climate target. The proposals are both addressing short-term measures for reductions until 2030 and longer-term measures to reach climate neutrality. Most proposals cover energy demand and supply.

Strong reduction of emissions and climate neutrality in 2040

To keep the 1,5°C climate target within reach, we need large reductions. In Europe we need larger reductions than the 55% reduction 1990 – 2030 (the current EU target), to contribute with our fair share of global GHG reductions and to lead the way internationally. Likewise, the EU countries and Norway should set a target of climate neutrality by 2040 instead of the current climate neutrality targets of 2045 (Denmark and Sweden) and 2050 (other countries analysed). As part of this, countries with high 1990 emissions and high income, such as Denmark, should reduce even more in 2030 than the ambitious, Danish 70% reduction target 1990-2030.

The reductions should be achieved in sustainable ways with robust plans without dependence on less mature and riskier technologies, such as Carbon Capture and Storage.

The targets should be followed by plans and policies, developed in an interactive process with civil society, including active persons and local groups as well as larger organisations. The implementation of the plans shall include strategies/guidelines that the governments should follow for dialogues with civil society.

Strong energy efficiency and electrification

The more efficient use of energy is key to reach climate targets, and also a key to build a better and more sustainable society. There are still large potentials for energy efficiency in all the countries analysed. With new technologies and by improving the remaining energy-wasting buildings and industries, the Nordic countries shall continue to reduce energy use. The Baltic countries, Belarus and Ukraine shall follow this and also speed up the improvement of energy efficiency, in particular for buildings. In all countries, energy efficiency shall be increased with a combination of regulations (such as building codes, also for renovations and restorations) and subsidies (prioritising EU structural funds for this), as well as preferential loans. Energy efficiency in heating shall include the improvement of the buildings themselves and of the heating systems that shall be changed to high efficiency heating with heat pumps, or with district heating where that is more feasible.

Energy use shall gradually be changed to efficient use of electricity, including electric trains and cars, heat pumps and the industry. In general, energy use still needed in 2050 shall be electrified, while energy use not needed in 2050, as fossil fuel extraction and distribution, - shall rather be phased out than electrified. A few industries, where electrification is not possible due to the chemical reactions with the fuel or high temperatures can be supplied with green hydrogen or biomethane.

Sufficiency – Build a Sustainable Society

Development of the society shall focus on building a more sustainable society, where car and truck transport is gradually reduced, organising both cities and rural areas so daily personal transport is minimised, prioritising more sustainable forms of transport, introducing better logistics and support for local suppliers. With the priority of more local functions and less transport, the construction of motorways should be stopped and infrastructure investments shall instead be used for maintenance and much needed bicycle infrastructure and public transport including railways and light rails.

To build a more sustainable society also includes that expansion of housing area is reduced, mainly in the countries with large built areas per capita (Denmark, Norway, Sweden). Expansion of housing can be minimised with increased focus on renovation as well as with a range of policies to use existing buildings better and to make it possible for those interested to move to smaller dwellings, even tiny houses for those that prefer.

100% renewable energy – with focus on local participation and local balance

The transition to a climate neutral society should also be a transition to a society supplied with 100% renewable energy, made in sustainable ways. While energy efficiency and sufficiency will reduce demand, we still need to expand renewable energy to cover all energy demands and other uses of fossil fuels. Several scenarios show how this can be done with priority of wind- and solar power, geothermal energy, biogas and solar heat. It is well documented how the 100% renewable energy scenarios can ensure stable and reliable energy supplies in all countries. In some countries, the electricity supply can be 100% renewable already in 2030 (Denmark and Lithuania, as well as in Norway, where it is already the case)

Success with renewable energy developments requires that the local populations affected by the renewable energy are involved and are allowed to benefit from the developments. It is important that local energy communities are given favourable conditions, allowing local citizens to cover parts of their energy needs with the local energy supply. Also, other local ownership structures and local support + compensation shall be used, in particular for larger renewable energy developments.

Nature protection measures shall be taken into account, avoiding the installation of renewable energy where it harms the living nature and can have negative impacts on biodiversity. Renewable energy installations shall not be used as an excuse for deforestation or similar land-use changes, as is proposed in Latvia. Instead, renewable energy installations should be combined with other land-use, even combining windpower and existing monoculture forests, if a proper environmental impact assessment shows that this can be done without reducing biodiversity.

The grid expansion that is following increased power production shall be minimised with focus on the largest possible local balance between supply and demand. This shall include focus on energy use that can match the renewable energy production, such as heat pumps, where the heat can be stored to cover later heat demand.

Bioenergy within local sustainable levels

While a large part of present renewable energy is biomass for energy, a large part of that is not sustainable, as we have seen from several cases of overuse of forest resources, also around the Baltic Sea. Thus, biomass use should be reduced to sustainable levels and sourced nationally. In particular, the large-scale use of wood for power and heat should be reduced. The use of woody biomass from forests for combustion for energy production should not be used to meet climate targets. In a sustainable energy system there will still be local use of biomass including the production of biogas based on waste streams and on residues and manure from organic agriculture. The biogas production shall be part of a circular economy, where the degassed sludge can be used as fertiliser. The present waste incineration shall gradually be replaced with a circular economy system, where the organic parts of waste are used for biogas. Electrification of road transport is given priority and false solutions such as biofuels are phased out.

Green hydrogen - only where it is needed

Certain industries are today using hydrogen from fossil fuels, and others can only replace fossil fuels with hydrogen, such as steel production from iron ore. Also, long-distance shipping, where batteries are not an option, can use hydrogen and hydrogen-based liquid fuels. Thus, a certain production of hydrogen is part of a future, sustainable energy system. The hydrogen use should, however, be limited to these special sectors, as a larger replacement of fossil gas with hydrogen is a very inefficient strategy compared with conversion to direct electricity use. For aviation, a change to hydrogen-derived fuels is only reducing the climate impact by around 1/3 as most of the climate impact of aviation is caused by vapour, particles and NOx emitted in high altitudes. Instead, aviation should be limited and development of emission free aeroplanes should be developed.

Hydrogen must be based on renewable energy (green hydrogen), and the use of fossil fuel-derived hydrogen should be phased out, also when it is combined with CCS.

Hydrogen production sites and use, as well as the renewable energy sources to produce the hydrogen, should be placed as close to each other as possible to minimise construction of hydrogen and electricity networks.

Hydrogen production should not be selected for direct state support, instead state support can be used to support greenhouse gas reduction in conversion from fossil fuel to green hydrogen in hard to abate sectors such as the steel industry.

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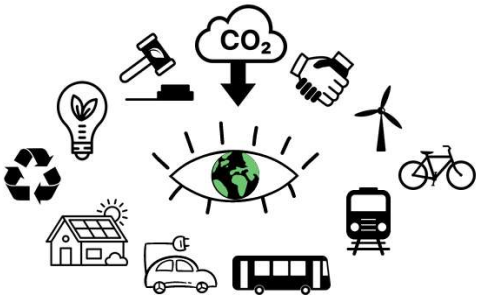

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