

CLIMATE PROOFING EU STRUCTURAL AND COHESION FUNDS

FRIENDS OF THE EARTH EUROPE

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Ladies and gentlemen,

Facing climate change and developing a post carbon economy involves all EU and national policies European cohesion policy plays here an important role in influencing long-term investment patterns and connecting anti-crisis policies with long term growth and structural change.

European climate policy guides a transition to a low carbon economy as well as provides growth opportunities for innovative sectors, technologies and companies. This process does not come without a cost and without a structural adjustment. There are convincing studies showing that benefits of strong and early actions on climate change far outweigh economic costs of non-action. Climate-proofing structural transformation will not just occur, we need strategies and policies. Therefore, in the context of climate change impact on growth, a legitimate question is what kind of growth is desirable.

The current crisis has triggered large fiscal stimulus to re-launch growth. Again a legitimate question is whether these fiscal packages are targeted towards low carbon investment. If they were, then we could start moving towards new growth paradigm where sustainability is integrated into the core growth objectives.

Cohesion policy is an investment policy, which has a history of shifting investment patterns into new direction. Cohesion policy has promoted the new growth paradigm in its 2007-2013 edition. Its priorities include sustainable development, mainstreamed through Strategic Impact Assessment and Environmental Impact Assessment sustainability targets into infrastructure project, it promotes green public procurement, energy efficiency and new, sustainable urban transport. It has not introduced the notion of ecological capital yet but it has made a clear step in this direction.

Climate proofed growth will not occur without the engagement of regional and local development actors. My conviction, based also on experience, has always been that without making regions and cities active partners in climate change adaptation and mitigation efforts, EU will not succeed. Subnational responses should play their role alongside European and national efforts. Paradoxically, the more global the challenge, the more important the incorporation of local levels. 85% of European citizens see climate change policy a priority.

170 mln European citizens will be affected seriously by small climate change related phenomenon as floods, drought, coastal erosion, water accessibility. European cohesion policy has allocated for 2007-2013 30% of its funds, i.e. 100 bln euro to support environment risk protection measures, sustainable transport, green jobs, technology products, water investment. Also many initiatives of networking, sharing good practise, cooperating, coordinating better actions by politicians and stakeholders. It is only the beginning of change. Evaluation is needed. It is necessary to ask the European Commission to asses what works and what does not.

All policies and investment must be climate proof. Often what is cost efficient today, can be not viable economically and environmentally if climate change risk is taken into account. These potential risks must be integrated into the design of policy and projects. This requires a strengthened integrated approach at all levels of governance. That is why engagement of all stakeholders at all levels is needed embracing research, industry, private and public consensus, awareness raising, good practice sharing, tools, guidelines, methodologies.

Climate proofing should be done for all relevant policy areas which means that an adaptation check is needed in all policies, all have to undergo it. That means that we will need climate proof check list for different policies. Adaptation aspects should be incorporated in the impact assessment. But this can be achieved only if we are able to translate impacts into economic terms.

Contents of cost and benefits has to change but this has to be well understood and prepared.

To tackle this issue properly, we need research that will lead to increased information, identify best adaptation measures, and clarify costs. We need research on understanding, quantification, impacts and risks.

I believe we need EIA procedures to be modified to require that all growth must be climate proof. That would mean that climate proofing becomes part of good practise in EIA.

For all that to happen we need an effective and continuous dialogue between experts, practitioners, policy makers, civil servants at all levels of European governance.