

# IS THERE A FUTURE FOR EUROPE?

*At a time when the European Union and the world were discussing green agendas and combating the climate crisis, the war in Ukraine brought notions and principles that Europe had long since buried out of the depths of history. Suddenly, taboo subjects like defence and nuclear energy are back on the table. Does this Europe really have a future?*

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**T**he European Union promoted an ambitious agenda for 2030 and even beyond, with goals to be achieved by 2050. This agenda mainly included two relevant points for the future of Europe: the fight against the climate crisis and the energy issue.<sup>1</sup> Its program, which we will deal with in greater detail below, was based, on the one hand, on providing the member states of the European Union with the means to move towards the sustainability that could adapt them to climate change and, on the other hand, on influencing not only the neighboring states but globally so that this new climate agenda could be universally adopted. This is in accordance with the Paris Conference program.

The idea of a green agenda will allow, according to the European leaders, not only an ambitious and rapid adaptation to the challenge of climate change but also, consequently, an immediate creation of jobs, with an increase in social and egalitarian values, giving rise, finally, to a brave new world.

Amid this vast and ambitious green climate, the *real politique* has reappeared: that is to say, the European leaders, from the height of their optimism, have seen a war break out in the middle of Europe, which represents a challenge, also putting, ironically, all other possible ambitions into question. The war in Ukraine has drawn notions and principles from the depths of history that Europe had long since buried. Suddenly, taboo subjects like defense or even nuclear energy are again on the table without complexes.

This sudden change ends up being a source of concern, not because it is necessarily at odds with the aforementioned initial agenda. Still, suppose European leaders rush to include previously forbidden topics in a new European policy agenda. In that case, any long-term program may be redefined or changed, giving the idea or the image that nothing is guaranteed in terms of Brussels' public policies.

We propose to analyze here the possibilities that may arise from the conflict between what the Union wants - or wanted before - and the opportunities left to it in terms of climate change and energy.

To achieve their objectives, the three European institutions (Parliament, Council, and Commission) have to some extent, agreed to harmonize their ideas and wills to reduce the forces of opposition as far as possible. This means a consensus among the major political forces to set the European will in motion.

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<sup>1</sup> For textual reasons, we have left aside the agenda for the implementation of fundamental rights in the fight against the various forms of racism and discrimination, but also issues related to gender equality, among others.

The goals for 2030 involve reducing greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55 percent. This target is achieved through “ambitious legislation,” which can only be put into practice with the general agreement of the European legislative power. The targets imposed are also those of the Paris Agreement on climate. These targets imply significant changes at the level of European industry and at the level of the increase in energies that can replace fossil energies.

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In addition, the Union aims to stimulate a range of benefits for the diverse populations of member states through climate-neutral impact by 2050. It wants to create jobs, stimulate sustainable economic growth, manage health and environmental benefits, and contributing to long-term competitiveness. And as icing on the cake, it wants all this to be done in an equitable and socially just way.<sup>2</sup>

However, the war in Ukraine has highlighted several wounds in public policy, both on the issue of defense and migration, but also - and especially for what interests us here - in the way in which the ‘disunity’ of member states in terms of energy policy. This is primarily due to the conflict with Putin’s Russia, and it is forcing a redefinition of this, and this change needs to take place quickly and effectively.

The invasion of Ukraine is forcing the various European countries to find a solution to energy dependence on Russia, but also in terms of alternatives beyond the issue of gas. Nuclear energy and the issue of hydrogen have been ways of trying to introduce new forms of energy consumption within the Union. The nuclear issue is fascinating, as it has been a taboo subject in the European Union for about ten years.

Alongside the phenomenon of diversity, we find, in parallel, the question of energy routes, also as alternatives to Russian gas. The question of the Eastern Mediterranean and its energy basins may be, if the European political powers so decide, an exciting solution for the supply of gas to the countries of the Union.

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<sup>2</sup> “Alterações Climáticas: Medidas Que a UE Está a Tomar.” *Consilium*, (26 April 2022). <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/pt/policies/climate-change/>

It should not be forgotten that the Union is trying to collaborate, particularly with the United States, on various issues where Western hegemony could be challenged by external entities, notably China. These are the so-called hybrid threats about which the Union has been so concerned.

Convergence with the United States is important for the EU since the conjunction of principles for combating climate change and guaranteeing European and Western energy security is common to both parties, as outlined at the Energy Conference on 7 February. Moreover, the United States has already offered to supply liquefied gas to the member states of the Union to avoid the Russian one.

In short, being at a crossroads, Russia is trying to use all its possibilities to make itself indispensable in supplying the essential energy to the EU countries.

### ***Challenges Await the European Union***

The challenges ahead are enormous and represent a harsh reality for several critical sectors in the Union. The European productive sector should adapt to the fight against climate change and the related EU regulations - and, on the other hand, to the energy crisis and the various consequences of the war, which is opening wounds in various industries such as the agri-food and automotive industries.

While European leaders continue to say that the climate agenda is there to stay, strong and firm, the truth is that there are several obstacles that may limit or prevent it. For example, demand for solar panels drives producers in the Czech Republic to sell to foreigners because the selling price is more attractive, posing problems for the domestic market.<sup>3</sup> This case, which appears to be easy to solve, maybe one of many challenges resulting from the conflict in Ukraine. The search for more profitable markets will put an end to the predominance of internal markets unless there is protection that may be against the spirit and the law of the European Treaties. Extremely important is also the question of time and the rules of doing business in the energy market. It will be difficult to combine necessities, transitional periods, and wills of providers and receivers.

On the other hand, we should not forget what happened with the two years of the Covid 19 pandemic, which created immense difficulties for European industry and the circular economic chain.

Another point of view that needs to be considered when considering the future of

<sup>3</sup> "Green Technologies Shortage Looming in Cee." *Www.euractiv.com, EURACTIV*, (3 May 2022). <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/green-technologies-shortage-looming-in-cee-2/>

the European Union is, the famous dichotomy between nations and regions. The old Brussels idea of using the power of the regions as a counterweight to the central power of national capitals has lost steam with the Catalan issue, but also with Brexit and the Scottish case. However, the regions continue to claim greater weight in the key regional development issues.<sup>4</sup>

Regardless of whether we are more or less skeptical about the Union's environmental agenda, Brussels needs to be more pragmatic: Even if the fight against climate change requires concrete and rapid action, the truth is that European citizens cannot face a new economic shock at the risk of rewarding the most Eurosceptic parties at the ballot box. The turnaround should be systematic, thought through, and analyzed in terms of immediate and long-term effects.

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History has proved that it is not over and is always unexpected. These two evidence factors should be part of the Union's potential policy scenarios. Putting the academic hypothesis of possible adverse developments on the table may help to discuss them and analyze the various ways to prevent or avoid them.

A constant optimism, which was seen at the time of the Covid-19 vaccination issue, does not facilitate the positive message of the European Union to its citizens. See also the case of Brexit and the “Little England” issue which, when it came to a quicker response in favor of Ukraine in the recent conflict, ended up damaging the image of the 27, unlike the English Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, who was, at the beginning of the conflict, in a difficult phase.

In conclusion, the European Union has maintained a progressive, modern agenda that aims to reconcile sustainable adherence to climate change while creating a set of social advantages that can benefit citizens. This policy agenda has met with a challenging response from voters to proposals from Brussels. Even if the European

<sup>4</sup> Maria Moya. “La Rioja Representative: Future of Europe Linked to Future of Regions.” [www.euractiv.com, EURACTIV](https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/hold-wed-la-rioja-mayor-future-of-europe-directly-linked-to-future-of-its-regions/), (16 Feb. 2022), <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/hold-wed-la-rioja-mayor-future-of-europe-directly-linked-to-future-of-its-regions/>

voter himself is not sure what he wants, this does not prevent Brussels from being more realistic and pragmatic when implementing a set of horizontal measures within the Union. This attitude may cause structural problems for the Union's political decisions, citizens, and industries.

The Union wants to be the global beacon of the progressiveness we now live in, but it cannot and must not undermine all those who give it the constituent power that gives it its own legitimacy. This is where the future of Europe is at stake, which, in my view, may have two possible paths, one on the road to environmental sustainability and the other, on the opposite path to that intended by the European regulator.

Pragmatism is even more necessary when the political center is in increasing decline, both at the level of member states and at the level of European elections. Note that the conjunction between electoral absenteeism and voting for parties critical of the Union is clearly disadvantageous and dangerous for the political center that has governed the Union since its inception.

Leadership is also created by acknowledging difficulties and mistakes. It is not enough to be constantly positive to become a good leader. It is necessary to go further because only in this way can the challenging dilemma of the Eurosceptics be put back into a marginal corner of the European political spectrum. This is what is expected of European leaders, which will define the course of Europe.