



European Network of Advisory Councils on Climate Change, the Environment and Sustainable Development

The Hague, April 20th 2020

Responding to Covid19:

Building social, economic and environmental resilience with the European Green Deal

Introduction

In response to the Covid19 pandemic, the Board of the EEAC Network¹ hosted a meeting of council members, secretary-generals and directors of its member bodies to discuss the pandemic and what it will mean for the sustainable development and environmental agendas. There was a consensus that the pandemic reinforces the need to actively pursue an enhanced European Green Deal and the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The Covid19 pandemic and its consequences

It only took a few weeks for the pandemic to sweep the world. After the first known case of Covid 19, the virus rapidly spread from country to country. Early warning systems did not function particularly well and the healthcare systems in many societies were poorly prepared for the surge in patients. Tens of thousands of people have died so far and many more have been hospitalized. The impacts of the Covid19 pandemic on public health, life, wellbeing and the economy have already been vast, and when and how the spread of the virus will be controlled is still unclear. Whatever the case, the ramifications are likely to be long lasting.

Countries have scrambled to respond, shutting down “non-essential” businesses and ordering their citizens to greatly restrict their movements and in some cases ordering them not to leave their homes. Already we see staggering unemployment rates in some countries, with millions of individuals and families losing their income and livelihoods. The socio-economic consequences include lost income, lost jobs, unemployment, increasing healthcare costs and rising debt, along with the many social-psychological problems that have accompanied the drastic protection measures. The crisis is uncovering the growing inequalities and tensions within many of our own communities and societies, both locally and globally.

The Covid19 outbreak should be seen as a warning to humanity. It is not just a health pandemic. It is a compound crisis: a crisis of loss of integrity of the biosphere, a crisis of human health, a crisis of lack of preparedness, a crisis of social inequalities, a crisis of the current model of globalisation, a crisis of

¹ The EEAC is a network that brings together 17 advisory bodies on climate change, the environment and sustainable development from 13 European countries and regions.



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a global economic system that has no plans and means. The International Monetary Fund is predicting that the crisis will trigger the worst recession since the Great Depression.

Similar and even greater challenges could emerge in the years ahead. We know that climate change is already contributing to the spread of diseases, and environmental degradation will give rise to other crises.

Recommendations for learning and responding to the Covid19 crisis and its aftermath

- The Covid19 pandemic and its aftermath will probably bring about changes in values, rules and societal and economic systems, but for now we do not know what these changes will entail. In this context, we call upon governments to **act on the advice of experts** from a range of scientific disciplines, focus on **strengthening social, economic and environmental resilience**, to ensure a **just transition** to a sustainable economy and society where **no one is left behind**.
- In addition to the much-needed emergency response, it is now the moment to push forward the important changes called for by the European Green Deal and the UN 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda. We call upon European governments and EU institutions **to utilise the framework of a strengthened European Green Deal as the pathway out of the Covid19 crisis and its aftermath**.
- To ensure a cross-silo and holistic approach comes out of the crises, **policy coherence between the Green Deal and other EU Policies is of the essence**. This is especially relevant for the coherence between the upcoming Farm-to-Fork-strategy, the Biodiversity Strategy and the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). We therefore urge the European Commission to utilise the additional time created by postponing the launch of both strategies to ensure enhanced policy coherence.
- The Covid19 crisis should be seen as underscoring the importance of **mitigating climate change while also preparing for and adapting to its impacts**, as Covid19 has clearly shown our interdependence and interconnectedness with nature. We therefore call for continuous commitment to reducing Green House Gas Emissions to curb global temperature rise while simultaneously continuing to develop adaptation strategies.
- Increasing scientific evidence shows that biodiversity loss, through human impacts and climate change, has brought people and animals into closer proximity, and this is a major factor in the development and spread of viruses. **Enhancing nature conservation to provide safe spaces both for biodiversity and for humans** is crucial. In the light of these findings, we call for an ambitious EU Biodiversity Strategy.
- Value chains may change in the wake of the Covid19 crisis. Shorter value and production chains may become more appealing, resulting in more local/regional structures. This might

create opportunities for **more resilient and environmentally friendly ways of production, such as those associated with the circular economy and bio-economy**. We underline that these trends should be utilized to achieve the ambitions of the European Circular Economy Action Plan.

- Due to the importance of the issues outlined above, it will be critical for governments to resist the calls to weaken environmental standards or to unduly delay initiatives on the environment and climate change in response to the economic impact of the crisis. On the contrary, the crisis makes ensuring that current investments are future-proof more urgent than ever. **EU environmental policies should be seen as a tool to steer the economy towards a sustainable future** for the sake of societies and in order to make the economy itself future-fit and resilient. Businesses clearly need the support of governments as well as civil society and science to increase the pace towards sustainable business practices.
- As the costs of economic interventions by government will be enormous, it is important to ensure that all interventions contribute to co-benefits and do not undermine medium and long-term sustainability goals. Therefore, **stimulus funds and bailouts should be consistent with the EU Green Deal**, including its Climate Law and the carbon border adjustment mechanism.
- Furthermore, Sustainable Finance Mechanisms ought to be used to better support the aims of the European Green Deal and **accelerate EU sustainable finance policies** to shift the trillions of euros currently being invested in *brown* development to *green and sustainable/blue development*.
- We would like to remind the EU that when the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) is revised in response to the Covid19 crisis, it should state that **all funding decisions be made in consideration the European Green Deal Investment Plan (EGDIP), also referred to as the Sustainable Europe Investment Plan (SEIP)**.
- The magnitude of the **upcoming transition will require societal cooperation, and governments should consult with stakeholders** to develop ideas on how to respond to the challenges of the Covid19 crisis. Lessons can be learned from governments that have already initiated such stakeholder forums or similar bodies. Hence, we reiterate that the response to the Covid19 crisis requires a multilevel governance system (from global to local) based on transparency, the defence of collective and individual rights and proper inclusion of stakeholders.
- The European research community needs to better prepare for future shocks to societies and economies. This can be done by fostering research on future scenarios and future studies. We therefore call upon European governments and EU institutions to **strengthen Horizon Europe**, the EU's next funding programme for research and innovation (2021-2027). The results of this research – and the transfer of these results to policymakers and society – should contribute



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to successfully overcoming current and future sustainability challenges. In this context, we call upon the European Union to also **enhance science capacity in every country in the world**. Understanding circumstances locally will require the insights of the scientific community.

- The European Community is in a strong position to analyse and compare the responses of the individual EU Member States and European regions and cities to the crisis. This comparison could help **identify best practices and share information on how to strengthen resilience for the future**.
- The crisis also shows **the need for global regions to learn from each other and for countries to cooperate across borders**. In the early phase of the spread of the disease, experiences in Asian countries were not appreciated quickly enough in Europe. Only together we will be able to face the challenges of the crisis.

To conclude

The **Covid19 pandemic** is a tragedy. Much as with past tragedies, it is a moral obligation and a responsibility of societies to **learn from it and to follow a more resilient and more sustainable way forward**. We are not only stopping the Covid19 crisis, we are building a new world. In this context, **the recovery from Covid19 must become an opportunity to steer Europe towards the much-needed sustainability transformation. Leaving no one behind**.

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Chairman of the EEAC Network