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Opinion: Re-energising Europe through a post-2020 Common Energy Policy



Domingo Jiménez Beltrán is the former director of the European Environment Agency

Let us dream of a new storyboard for Europe, one in which energy would become a vector of change that prepares and empowers the Union in the face of pressing global challenges.

Transforming the energy model is not only an obligation due to climate change, it is a golden opportunity to re-energize the EU towards a hopeful future, in which the citizens' collective image converges with the EU's institutional architecture. Borrowing from the words of the leader of the French Greens Yannick Jadot, there is now a "climate for change" in which the EU can lead the change towards "saving the climate" and thereby save itself.

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having direct application at Member State level and via available resources from the European budget – which, in the case of the CAP, accounts for almost half of it.

The absence of a CEP is all the more surprising given that there were more reasons to establish it than there were for the Common Agriculture Policy (CAP) when the latter was created in the 1960s. Let us not forget that energy was a building block of the European Economic Community and its two founding Treaties (ECSC, for Coal and Steel, and Euratom, for nuclear energy).

In 2015, President Juncker failed short of proposing a Common Energy Policy at the 19th March European Council, and pursued an Energy Union in which “we would share capacities, pool common resources and negotiate joint agreements”.

This was probably due to the aversion of several member states – the UK in particular – to the idea, and the tepidity of most of the EEP members, to which Juncker belonged. This was a major lost opportunity to address climate change and rebuild Europe. Now is the time to change our approach.

A CEP would allow for an urgent phase out of coal and, in general, of fossil fuels, as well the progressive closure of nuclear power plants and their substitution with renewable energy sources.

Given its strategic and political implications, a CEP would require a strong governance model under the leadership of the European Commission, as well as the exercise of shared responsibilities through fiscal (EU-wide taxation) and budgetary means (through a substantial increase of the EU’s budget, to up to 5% of the Union GDP). These two dimensions would be mutually reinforcing, since having a more predictable budget that is subjected to the vicissitudes of Member States’ politics would strengthen the European Commission’s hands in terms of policy implementation.

A Common Energy Policy would become the central action in a new European storyboard for the renewal of the EU that would empower citizens through electrification, shared use, self-supply, electric vehicles, and so on.

A CEP would allow Europe to achieve a connected self-sufficiency at all levels, including home, industry, agricultural exploitation, neighbourhood, industrial state, municipality; and, by extension, at European level, in contrast with our current energy dependence (which represents around 50% of our consumption today).

Neither common taxes nor the proposal for a Common Energy Policy are brand new ideas. What is new is the current political situation in which a rejuvenated European Parliament and the possibilities of progressive majorities could facilitate ground-breaking policies responding to a “climate emergency”.

First, according to many political analysts, the results of the elections to the European Parliament show that pro-EU policies will continue to be implemented, against all the forecasts predicting a greater presence of the extreme right and, in general, of forces critical of the community project and calling for less Europe.

This dominance allowed the two majority groups – the EPP and the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats, S&D – to reach absolute majorities, distribute power among themselves and take turns in the governing bodies of the community institutions, reducing the possibility of broader and more plural alliances, and, above all, orienting the course towards strengthening pro-European policies and not power sharing.

The new situation already forces negotiation between several groups, and not only on the distribution of power, but also – and especially – on the political priorities. There has already been a rapprochement of the S&D to the Liberals of ALDE (Liberals and Democrats for Europe). Together, they make up more than a third of the hemicycle, and with the Greens, who burst with force into the European Parliament thanks to their triumph in Germany, they would become a progressive majority that could shape ambitious and even disruptive energy policies.

Though it had more weight in some countries, such as Germany, as shown by the pull of the Greens, than in others, like Spain, the Climate Change Energy tandem was a constant element in the electoral campaigns of the European Parliament. This tandem has also been reinforced as a citizen priority by the movements of young students – "Fridays for Future", inspired by Greta Thunberg – which demand the urgent declaration of a "climate emergency" and, consequently, a disruptive change of our energy model.

More than 100 years after the first predictions of climate change by Arrhenius, let us seize this unique opportunity for the EU and for the climate, declaring the de facto "climate emergency". This can be done by making an ambitious Common Energy Policy a main priority for the new Commission – as will hopefully be required by the new Parliament as a condition for the formal election of the new Commission President before November.

What better way to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the European Environment Agency, which since its creation **has consistently warned policy makers** that Europe is generally too late to react proportionally to well-known environmental catastrophes – as is already the case with climate change.

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AUTHORS

Domingo Jiménez Beltrán

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