



TRANSITION NOW

Appeal for transition to a sustainable future now

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Appeal for sustainable **transition now**

The world is out of order. We are experiencing not one but a series of interconnected crises that obstruct each other's solutions. This situation is new: simultaneously the economy is troubled, the climate is threatened, nature and resources are under pressure, unemployment is rising, social stability is in danger and inequality is growing in many countries.

We are 50 young people of the generation, which is to carry on the society of today and ensure a promising future for our own children. We are full of enterprise and ready to take responsibility. But we are also deeply concerned about the lack of recognition, amongst political decision makers, of the interconnected crises. They are trying to solve the problems of the present with the answers of the past.

With different backgrounds, a large variety of skills and strong commitment we gathered on the 23rd of February to put into words our anxiety and our generation's vision of sustainable development.

We face historic challenges that require a historic transition. With this call, we appeal to the European Commission and to the members of the European Parliament to look up, recognize the need for fundamental changes and join us pave the way for a sustainable future. The world is out of order - let's help each other fix it.

The problem

The global economic system is cracking. A growing world population and the growth of material wealth has brought us to a place where the global economy **exceeds the planetary boundaries**. Rather than living off what nature supplies every year, we are eating of its stocks - as eating the seed when the granary is empty.

This has undermined the possibilities for perpetual growth, which has been a prerequisite for wealth for the last two hundred years. Instead we are now experiencing economic stagnation, unemployment, inequality and political instability in our part of the world. It is as if the endeavours to create economic progress by traditional means are obstructing that same progress. We are caught in a **vicious circle**.

This is especially evident in the way we treat resources and the eco-systems. The never ending hunt for more oil, gas and coal leads to the **depletion of the reserves** and increasing prices, but also to increasing environmental costs and disastrous **climate** strain. The hunt for short-term profits undermines the possibility for sustainability in the long run. The fact that we do not pay the right price for fossil fuels and other resources means that future generations will pay an unbearable price.

Today environmental irresponsibility is profitable. Polluters do not pay enough

For a long period of continued growth the global economy has not succeeded in reducing **inequality between people**, and following the recession, inequality has increased. Together with growing unemployment this erodes social cohesion and weakens the trust in the political system and decision makers. This **distrust** becomes a barrier for innovation and visionary reforms that can bring us on a path to sustainability.

Instead we act on a short-term basis. Exemplified by firms producing goods with low du-

rability or planned obsolescence, by politicians avoiding necessary environmental regulation in order to insure their own position, by the encouragement of consumers to increase consumption, well knowing that growing consumption undermines our livelihood in the long run. Frightened by crisis, under pressure from competition, threatened by unemployment and rankled by inequality we are forced to act against our deeper convictions.

It is as if we cannot see what is good for us. We use an abstract measure and convince ourselves that it tells us all about thriving and wellbeing. To **measure wealth in GDP** is equivalent to measuring the flow of water in a river - but the amount of gallons, passing by, tell us nothing about whether the water is clean or poisoned or whether it contains fish or pollution.

To bring environmental sustainability, real wellbeing and human happiness back in the centre of politics and development requires rethinking of the measure for progress, a reform of the GDP-measure.

But it is not all that can be measured, sense of community and social cohesion for example.

The modern human being is often **dissociated from nature** and under the illusion of independence from it. 'The scarce goods of nature can be substituted, and technology can secure the continued value adding', sounds the comforting rationale of economists. And since what we do to the environment does not imply immediate consequences for us - as when CO2-emissions in Europe result in drought in Africa with a ten year delay - it is tempting to tell ourselves that it has nothing to do with us. What we do and what we know deep down is not coherent.

This also counts for the relationship between people. In a society permeated by competition and under the pressure from crisis individual progress and material status are central criteria for success. Individuals, sections of populations and countries fight against each other for opportunities, jobs, resources and the remaining space. **Social cohesion** and sense of community disintegrate.

If we are to overcome the system crisis, we must **all be part of the transition**. The challenge must be articulated in all its complexity - not as single isolated problems. Politicians must find courage to express visions and show leadership - not be chased around the ring by short-term agendas, changing polls and scandalizing media. Firms must commit to societal responsibility and make good examples - not protect status quo and narrow vested interest. The people must be involved as active and responsible citizens - not just addressed from above as consumers, wage earners or recipients of public benefit.

The transition begins in our hearts and our minds.

The solutions

The challenges are many and profound. We are far from knowing all the answers. But we have the will and the power to become part of the transition. We are confident that a sustainable course is possible. We even have the impression that it will be reviving, exiting and fun.

We believe in EU as a frontrunner – a laboratory where we inspire each other. Here are some of our suggestions for solutions and new initiatives:

The transition council is a multidisciplinary council of specialists, authorised to advise politicians and qualify the necessary decisions to initiate and continue a sustainable transition of the society. The council must regularly articulate holistic transition visions in close cooperation with the civil society and give recommendations and guidelines for sustainable societal development.

The exploratorium is a project contributing to the development and testing of new technologies and creative solutions in coherence with local needs on citizen's initiatives. The project is financed by the state and provides credit and consultancy for entrepreneurs with new ideas for social and environmental sustainable production.

An ecological tax reform consists of increasing the taxes on environmental damage and decreasing the taxes on work. Higher taxes on pollution and resource consumption will increase the incentives for resource efficiency, innovation and technological development, while lower tax on work will increase employment.

A green and social GDP will incorporate natural capital and social aspects in the yearly statement of the total national wealth. This new measure is a reform of the existing GDP-measure, where depletion of nature and negative social effects are set against the total national income.

Green investments are vital, if the transition is to gain momentum. In this regard we have three proposals:

- Lower the **discount rate** for sustainable transition projects: Such projects are often fundamentally different from conventional construction projects, because of higher investment costs, lower operation costs, avoided environmental costs and long lasting benefits. A significantly lower discount rate for such projects will make many more of these cost-effective.
- Create incentives for the **pensions funds** to make sustainable investments: Pension funds possess huge assets, which should be invested in long-term projects within sustainable energy, collective transportation and sustainable construction. By changing the focus from short-term profits to long-term investments, the pension assets can be invested in sustainable projects.
- Establish a **society bank**: The society bank is a public investment bank with the goal of allocating funds for sustainable investments leading to permanent jobs. Here private actors can place their savings at state guaranteed competitive interest rates. Furthermore the pension funds are obliged to place a certain percentage of their assets in the bank.

National service must be about the obligation to take care of nature and each other. Everywhere in the municipalities there are tasks not carried out, these regard nature restoration, nature conservation and care in local communities. The existing military national service is transformed to cover environmentally and socially sustainable projects. This will make it possible to solve urgent problems not profitable on market terms.

Use again and again and again... is a break with the culture of use and toss, a transition to a circular economy, where resources are recycled in closed circuits, and products are designed to last as long as possible. Examples of ways to support this development are to rent instead of to own, a drastically expanded deposit system and increased tariffs on resources and packaging.

Employment will be increased by several of the already mentioned proposals, but furthermore we suggest:

- Experiments with **work sharing**: By shortening the workweek new jobs can be created on the basis of existing production. Work sharing has been criticized for weakening competitiveness. We suggest experiments with work sharing in businesses not in competition overseas. A shorter workweek can increase quality of life for the individual, the family and local communities by allowing further engagement in leisure and community activities.
- A sustainable **youth fund**: This fund has the objective of creating job opportunities by financing sustainable projects launched by young people. The fund is targeted at newly qualified, unemployed and untrained under the age of 35. Thus it is to contribute to a culture of flourishing and sustainable entrepreneurship.

Our agriculture must be transformed to sustainable biological principles based on circuits, where nutrients stay in the system, the application of chemicals is stopped and the fossil energy is taken out of production. Agriculture must be seen as a caretaker of nature. The monoculture of today, dominated by fodder cultivation for meat production, must give way for more divers production forms respecting the climate and focussing on national food security.

Urban nature must be given more space and freedom. Fewer cars and less asphalt will make room for new green urban spaces. Unused public spaces will be transformed to urban farming and ornamental gardens. While increased biological diversity, public transport and cycling create more friendly cities for inhabitants of many species.

Sustainability as the new normal must be promoted through a **national project of enlightenment**. Citizens must be engaged in the transition, qualified, motivated and informed. Therefore funds must be allocated to campaigns like the Brundtland-campaign in the 1980's and Agenda 21 from the beginning of the 1990's. Sustainability must become a mandatory discipline in all schools.

The names and professions of the seminar participants:

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