



14.06.2023

### “Climate Change and the Future of Europe”

#### Online debate (Zoom)

#### -Event Report-

The Trans European Policy Studies Association (TEPSA) in partnership with the European Institute of Romania (IER) organized, on **Wednesday, 14 June 2023**, the online dialogue “Climate Change and the Future of Europe”. The event follows the launch of the book “**Climate change and the future of Europe: views from the capitals**” and aims at presenting the importance of Romania’s contribution to achieving the European targets, while facing deep-rooted sectoral flaws. The perspectives on Romania were presented by the two co-authors of the Romanian chapter, **Eliza Vaş** – Head of Unit of the European Studies Unit (EIR) and **Mihai Sebe** – Head of Unit of the Training and Projects Unit (IEIR).

Furthermore, a series of views from Bucharest, concerning the topic of climate change and the future of Europe, were introduced by two experts in combatting disinformation and advancing sustainability, **Alina Bârgăoanu** (Professor at the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, President of the Administrative Board, European Institute of Romania) and **Ciprian Stănescu**, President & CEO, Social Innovation Solutions. The dialogue was moderated by **Michael Kaeding**, Honorary Board Member of TEPSA, Professor of European Integration and EU Politics at the University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany.

The opening session included a welcoming address by **Oana-Mihaela Mocanu**, Director General, European Institute of Romania, who highlighted the role of the European Institute of Romania as a key player in the debates on circular economy and climate change, as shown by recent studies conducted at EIR, such as the one on “Youth and climate change: policies and response measures at European level” or the recent event organized with EUROPE DIRECT (ED) Bucharest on increasing awareness on climate change among teachers. One recommendation drawn from the ED’s event is the need to allocate adequate financial resources to develop their own green skills and to support the students they are working with.

The moderator, prof. **Michael Kaeding**, expressed the view that climate change will determine the future of Europe, given that unusual weather effects can already be seen in various parts of Europe, such as the drought in Sweden or the floods in Western Romania. To this, he mentioned that 1 in 7 people is estimated to be affected by climate change in Europe. He also praised the contribution from Romania to the collective volume, and highlighted the importance of all the book chapters, which depict a true “European journey through diverse approaches in member states”.

In the first part of the debate, the two authors presented in brief the main highlights from the Romanian’s contribution to the book. Eliza Vaş, co-author of the chapter, mentioned the following key points:

- ✓ Romania contributes to the EU’s ambitious targets in fighting climate change, while facing structural problems in endorsing the green transition. The structural problems are related to member states’ particularities, as well as cultural aspects. For instance, about half of the Romanian households use wood for heating.

- ✓ It is important to frame climate change as a social, economic, cultural, environmental and political issue.



✔ Domestic transportation ranks third in the sectoral shares of greenhouse gas emissions, with 23.80% recorded in 2020. Over the past two decades, Romania has heavily imported second-hand vehicles from Western Europe making worse an already heavily polluting car fleet.

✔ Measures to counter importing pollution from one state to another are highly important, especially in the transportation sector.

✔ Public funds to support the installation of solar panels or heating pumps are limited, which makes it difficult for individual consumers to access the financial resources required to update their heating systems.

✔ It is important to create large-scale projects that can be implemented locally with the purpose of renovating and modernising households.

✔ Another measure should be directed at increasing the general knowledge among the citizens on climate change and circular economy, while allocating adequate funds for building awareness on the topic of climate change.

**Mihai Sebe** expressed several points related to geopolitics, climate and migration, planning and population, climate inequality and solidarity.

✔ Currently, climate change is felt and perceived directly by the public and policymakers alike, triggering, thus, deep societal concerns. As a result, previously unpopular decisions which will curb emissions may become easier to take and implement. At the time of writing, our political systems are, however, not undergoing the necessary radical changes, increasing the risk of 'runaway' (i.e., uncontrollable) climate change up to 2030.

✔ Cutting fuel subsidies and shifting to a greener economy is a painful step that can be exploited by populists worldwide; global warming will constitute an important aspect of the debates for the incoming 2024 European elections.

✔ Climate change impacts differently countries and regions, which is why the answers must be correlated, and costs distributed in accordance with the impact produced, but also in correlation to the different capacity of mitigation, as displayed by member states, regions etc.

✔ Climate change will be in five or ten years, an important part of the European policy on security, especially in the context of climate migration.

✔ Climate change is also about a planning efficiently. Increased temperatures will be particularly felt in cities, making urban planning even more important for mitigating climate change. To only give an example, higher temperatures will lead to a drop in productivity and to more emissions, in a downward spiral, because of air conditioning. It is estimated that by 2030, the loss in productivity due to warmer climate will mean the loss of more than 1.7 trillion euros globally.

✔ We can identify several types of inequality:

*Impact inequality:* Some regions are more affected than others – the role of inequality in climate change. Also, inequality of contribution for mitigating its effects. Larger cities, regions can better mitigate the effects. In the end, climate change is also about costs and about who is going to pay the costs.

*Polluter inequality:* Disparities between rich and poor countries, as well as between regions in terms of producing pollution.

*Capacity of action inequality:* different capacities of acting in relation to the transition towards a greener economy: some individuals have more means than others to replace one's car,



adopt smarter solutions to increase the energy efficiency of the household, protect the house from drought/floodings etc.

*Cost inequality*: the real cost of damaging the environment (including the hidden and the indirect costs) are often neglected or under-estimated.

✔ The current geopolitical shifts prompted by Russia's military aggression against Ukraine are renewing the sense of urgency to accelerate the twin transitions (green and digital transitions), and to reinforce the EU's resilience and openness. They also enhance the need to secure access to critical raw materials, needed to feed the twin transitions and for which the EU is still highly dependent on third countries.

✔ Finally, the EU's role as a global standardisation power will be important to enable twinning. Both to protect EU consumers from non-sustainable products or processes, and to ensure that international standards respect the EU's sustainability and ethical ones.

✔ Fairness and affordability should be at the heart of both transitions, to benefit all Europeans, sectors and regions in Europe and beyond. People with low and medium income are more vulnerable to the impact of the twin transitions in term of jobs, access to digital public services, higher energy and good prices. The twin transitions will also change profoundly labour markets and skills. The EU will need to be attentive to strengthen social and economic cohesion along the transitions.

In the second part of the dialogue, the two guests **Ciprian Stănescu** and **Alina Bârgăoanu** commented on the topic of climate change and added new perspectives on the subject.

**Ciprian Stănescu** made the following points:

✔ Climate change has no borders; therefore, it is useless to think of it in national, regional, or county terms.

✔ Climate change is perceived as a threat, in negative terms, but at the same time we should look at it through the lenses of solutions and opportunities.

✔ Currently, Romania does not consider the opportunities which could arise in relation to tackling climate change: green energy, agriculture, circular economy, efficiency.

✔ Several perspectives can be identified, depending on the category involved: politicians, general public, businesses.

✔ *Politicians* use climate change differently, depending on their immediate goal. Most often, they view and use it as a real threat or as a political tool, as a scapegoat.

✔ *The general public*: An increased number of citizens are more and more aware of climate change. For instance, according to a 2022 poll, conducted by Social Innovation Solutions, 89% of Romanians believe climate change is real and that it has an impact. However, the challenge is to affect individual behaviour and to change it.

✔ *Businesses* are the most affected parts of the society, when it comes to climate change especially because of broken supply chains, abnormal production.

✔ The 2030 objective related to climate change cannot be achieved anymore, but there is hope for attaining the 2030-2035 objectives.



**Prof. Alina Bârgăoanu** raised the following points in relation to climate communication, disinformation and misinformation.

✔ Disinformation is real. Whilst the data indeed indicate that Romanians accept the existence of climate change, deeper measurements show the following four narratives, which circulate in correlation to each other:

*The human role* is denied in relation to climate change.

*Traditional media* is accused of spreading panic.

*Recycling* and other processes are believed not to be the real solutions.

*People* denounce the hypocrisy around climate change and diminish its importance by not treating it seriously.

✔ Even when climate change is perceived, the willingness to make personal changes is very limited.

✔ One should be aware that an increase in the level of understanding climate change can lead to polarisation.

✔ Fighting climate change is being weaponized. In the post-pandemic context, there is a resurgence in imagining climate change as a hoax or that “Brussels want to steal our resources”.

✔ Transparency is very important in shaping public opinion.

✔ Among the solutions: promoting innovative solutions and changing the way we communicate about climate change. For instance, the weather forecast in France is used to build awareness and to educate the general public on climate change. This is a good example of innovation in journalism. The way data is used and presented can be innovated especially in connecting climate change to human stories.

During the **comments, questions and answers session**, the participants raised a number of topics such as:

✔ Climate change has to be fought at a higher level, not just at the level of the member states.

✔ Education plays an important role. Therefore, it is important to establish who will take on the role/responsibility of providing the information/education in the area.

✔ In order to find the main level of responsibility, it is important not only to look at the bottom and upper level, but also at the middle level – the business sector, the civil society sector; they can have both the responsibility and the power to put pressure on authorities and to act as educators.

✔ Ukraine, especially the process of rebuilding it, represents an important opportunity for addressing climate change.



- ✓ All countries need to be leaders in tackling climate change, but Romania can be a leader especially in the protection of biodiversity.
- ✓ It is more difficult to convince Romanians (and the people in Central and Eastern Europe) on the importance of rationalizing resources, given their communist past, and the restrictions on their lifestyle during that period.
- ✓ The general feeling is that Romanians (as other Eastern Europeans) have arrived at the end of the party, that they haven't enjoyed the benefits of Europeanization, globalization, and they are only asked to "pay" for the bill, without actually having "enjoyed the meal". This frustration is deepened by the decision not to accept Romania in the Schengen Area.
- ✓ Thus, we can say that climate change is also about how to rebuild nations and communities; climate change should be framed as a way to restart economic development, especially with the new innovations, such as vertical farming, AI impact on increasing productivity.
- ✓ Climate change is situated at the intersection of several areas: health, energy, transportation, agriculture etc.
- ✓ One of the main challenges faced by EU is the skills gap and the need to invest in technical education with the aim to produce more experts in the field.
- ✓ The effects of the war in Ukraine impact on everything, including on climate change and food security; It is necessary to reduce the energy dependence on Russia, and to counter the pollution created by the war.
- ✓ We can agree that we share a common responsibility to tackle climate change.

The video recording of the event is available [here](#).

Event report by

**Emanuela Ignățoiu-Sora and Mihaela-Adriana Pădureanu**

European Studies Unit, European Institute of Romania