

Reforming the EU: What Role for Climate and Energy Policies in a Reformed EU?

Workshop Summary,

Tallinn, 4 December 2017 (9.00-13.00)

About 40 participants attended the workshop (participant list and programme attached). Participants came from the Parliament of Estonia, different ministries, several European embassies, civil society, and the private sector. The workshop took place in an optimistic and pragmatic atmosphere. Given the state of the political process, discussions were surprisingly focused on solutions to concrete problems. Main results of the workshop include:

- **Role of climate action in the EU reform processes:** Participants agreed that climate action must play a strong role in the EU reform processes. It is an essential element of a successful reform. Thanks to President Macron's proposals, the debate is changing and ecological transformation has become a strong element of the debate. This offers opportunities that must be seized now. It was also agreed that climate action – as a genuinely international issue – can support EU reform.
- **Climate action at EU level:** There was an agreement that climate and energy policies require action at EU level. The issue cannot be addressed effectively by Member States alone: for all its flaws, EU climate policy is probably more ambitious than all 28 EU Member States pursuing their own agendas. Targets should be set at EU level. Single market also requires action at EU level. In consequence, there was an agreement that a strong EU is essential for successful climate policies – not only in international negotiations, as an advocate of international climate efforts, but also as a driver of ambitious climate action at home in Member States.
- **Is the EU flexible enough:** Participants discussed whether the existing flexibilities in the EU law are sufficient to reflect specific national circumstances or not. Participants were aware of the numerous existing flexibilities but some made a case for more flexibility – without specifying to what extent existing flexibilities need reform.
- **Estonian optimism:** Estonia is remarkably optimistic about the EU and the EU reform process. Participants felt that EU debates in Estonia benefited from honesty: by and large, and unlike many other EU countries, Estonian politicians managed to avoid the blame game of taking credit for everything popular and blaming everything unpopular on Brussels. Estonia is strongly committed to the EU, sees itself in the core of Europe, and participates, for example, in Schengen, in the Euro and in the Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) in defence policies.
- **Crises are not only negative:** One effect of crises is that they can also accelerate progress on political dossiers and create unity. For instance, the rapid progress in the European de-

fence policy, which was achieved largely under the Estonian presidency, can also be seen as a result of Russia's aggression against the Ukraine, Brexit and the Trump presidency and marks a development that would have been difficult to conceive one or two years ago. Still, it is by no means a given that bodies like the EU will emerge stronger and more unified from a crisis – there is also the risk that, in times of crises, things may start to unravel.

- **Don't overpromise:** Participants agreed that the EU discusses some topics for too long. Too much time, for example, passed after the conflict in the Ukraine or Brexit, which partly explains negative attitudes towards the EU. Participants agreed that the EU should only promise as much as can be delivered and should show why it was founded: despite all the differences between Member States, there are many challenges that they have to address together (this should not disguise the fact that there are different ideas on where the EU should go more or less).
- **Macron and Juncker speeches:** The workshop discussed in detail Macron's speech and proposals on Europe and climate action, including the coalition of Member States that intend to phase out coal. Participants welcomed the proposals. They also discussed Juncker's recent State of the Union in detail.
- **Issues on institutional changes:**
 - At this point, institutional reform is not a priority although a number of participants think that the involvement of the European Council in the details of climate and energy policy making is a problem (unanimous vs. qualified majority voting (QMV), role of the European Parliament).
 - Expanding QMV was discussed and a number of participants welcomed this idea. As a point of caution, one participant flagged that QMV in migration policies deepened division in the EU; he argued that expansion of QMV in environment could have a similar effect.
 - Two institutional issues particularly affect climate policies: according to the Treaty, the EU is not entitled or has a very limited mandate to adopt policies affecting energy sources and forestry. These policies remain within Member State discretion.
 - To engage better with the citizens, public consultations on EU policies should not only refer to the Commission's proposals, but to the entire legislative process. Genuine engagement of citizens must ensure that exclusively EU issues are discussed, not national problems.
 - Cities play a strong role in climate action and the EU should facilitate this. There were no concrete ideas how to achieve stronger involvement of cities and regions. A reform of the Committee of the Regions could help engage regions and cities more but this idea was not discussed in detail.

- An informal council on institutional issues will take place in February 2018. This council will discuss the *Spitzenkandidat*, transnational lists and will have a legal debate on what is possible without treaty changes and what requires treaty adjustments.
- **Framing the debate:** The right framing of the debate is crucial. It makes a big difference whether the debate is framed along the question “more or less Europe” (or “more or less Brussels”) or along the question “do we need more cooperation and integration to manage migration, to fight terrorism and crime, to deal with autocratic and aggressive neighbours, and to stop climate change?”
- **The ideal outcome:** It is desired that current process reaches a shared understanding on how to move forward by spring 2019. The next Parliament and Commission will continue working on EU reform.