

Think small first

The economic benefits of strong action on climate change far outweigh the costs of inaction, argues **Danuta Hübner**, and Europe's regions and cities must be in on the act

Climate change does not respect political or administrative borders. This is a shared challenge and requires a shared response. This is what the Copenhagen summit is about. Europe's climate change policy will guide its transition to a low carbon economy and it will provide growth opportunities for innovative companies and industries. This process implies costs and structural change. It does not happen by itself. It requires strategies, policies and integrated approaches. Diverse situations require tailor-made programmes and actions in many policy areas and all levels of governance. The European contribution to Copenhagen is based on commitment from member states and policies and actions carried out across all European regions and cities, thereby engaging in delivering ambitious reductions of CO₂ emissions.

The question on what kind of growth is desirable if we want to adapt to and mitigate climate change is legitimate. There are convincing studies that show the benefits of strong and urgent actions on climate change far outweigh economic costs of inaction. In the context of the crisis, it is legitimate to ask whether massive fiscal stimulus packages are sufficiently green to allow us to integrate sustainability in the core growth objectives. Policies and investment must be climate-proof. To achieve this we need a strengthened integrated approach, engaging all stakeholders at all levels of governance.

Climate-proof growth will not occur without regional and local actors being involved. The very nature of the challenge, the specific situations in terms of natural conditions and asymmetric climate change impacts, the need to prepare place-based integrated responses engaging research, awareness raising,

proximity of indispensable partners, social pressure and policy tools available at regional and local levels all contribute to the efficiency and effectiveness of their responses. These sub-national responses should play their role alongside European and national efforts. The climate battle will be won or lost in regions and cities. 85 per cent of our citizens see climate change as a priority and 170 million Europeans live in regions where climate impact will be particularly severe. Responses cannot be remote when droughts, floods, coastal erosion and pollution happen around the corner, or when industries which would face significant cost increases due to higher carbon price are territorially concentrated.

European regional policy is an investment policy with a capacity to shift investment patterns towards common European objectives. Climate change related investment has already been incorporated into its 2007-2013 framework. For this period, 30 per cent of all cohesion funding has been allocated to investment in supporting risk protection measures, green jobs, sustainable transport, green technologies and eco-innovation, water related investment, energy efficiency and renewable energy sources, both by sharing good practices and working together.

European regions and cities adapt global commitments to their own territories and they measure and report progress achieved. The number of regions and cities which power their households entirely with renewable energy, where emissions per capita are drastically reduced, where increasing number of citizens choose to live without a car, is growing. The European regional policy has not yet introduced the notion of ecological capital but it has made a clear step in this direction. ★



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