

One of the most striking points made in the interview with Traian Basescu, former Romanian president and current MEP for the European People's Party, was the idea that "two or three countries" could exit the EU were serious disagreements about the European Green Deal to arise. Basescu seems to consider the European Green Deal and the development of Member States' economies mutually exclusive, especially as regards newer members. This is not the case. The European Green Deal will not hinder development, but rather transform the previous developmental into a new one which takes into account current and future challenges related to sustainability and climate change.

Basescu makes a good point by stating that the EU has to consider the way each member state functions when it comes to the implementation of the European Green Deal because each country is different. However, the reasoning behind this point is, at best, questionable at.

It is also hard to see how, regardless of how serious disagreements on the financing of the European Green Deal become, "two or three member states" will leave the Union. Disagreements among Member States have always existed no matter the topic debated. And in the light of Brexit, it is unlikely that Member States will seek to leave the EU in the short run.

Basescu suggests that Romania is far from capable of undergoing a green transition, needing, instead to build motorways, modernize the railways and properly fund to the healthcare system and education. Again, the implication is that the European Green Deal will sabotage large-scale infrastructure projects. The railway system in Romania - one of EU's worst - could benefit greatly from a Green Deal which promoted sustainable means of transportations. Healthcare and education, on the other hand, are in no way related to the European Green Deal.

The focus then turns to on Romania's dependency on coal and gas exploitation, and the future of people who work in industries such as mining.

It is undeniable the social cost of a green transition has to be taken seriously - particularly, since it is one of the 'excuses' Member States like to bring up. But when it comes to Romania, the mining industry has been 'clinically dead' since the 1990s. It is not sustainable (economically or environmentally), and poses serious health issues in the regions where it is most prevalent. For those reasons, it is very likely that the industry will collapse in the near future. If this is the case, why postpone the transition for the coal regions and their citizens, as Basescu suggests, instead of creating a viable, socially inclusive transition now with money from the Just Transition Fund? A concrete plan created now for the people is preferable to an uncertain future.

As for energy production in Romania, coal amounts for 25% of it, not 40% as Basescu stated, and oil and gas amount for 17% as of 2018. Instead of maintaining old models, Romania could exploit its potential for solar and wind energy. When it comes to energy importing, Romania has one of the lowest energy dependencies among the EU27 as of 2017. With this in mind, it is arguable that, instead of importing gas, Romania should instead focus on wind energy.

Basescu emphasises on how Exxon and Lukoil should start exploiting gas reserves in the Black Sea in 2021-2022 in order to help the Black Sea region and how the European Commission should support this proposal. Exxon and Lukoil have a significant history of oil spillages, funding climate denial actions and lobbying for the suppression of green policies. This alone should make one wary of them to exploit anything. If there is a wish for investments in the Black Sea region, then offshore wind farms could be safer and more sustainable approach in the long run.

The Just Transition Fund

When it comes to the Just Transition Fund, Basescu states that this money will be “easily accessible only to those experienced in European funds”. This has nothing to do with the European Green Deal and everything to do with Romania being anchored in an overly bureaucratic public administration system, with limited information about EU funding and a top-to-bottom system which facilitates misapplications of EU funds by high ranking officials. The future of Romania in the context of the European Green Deal goes beyond what the European Union can do. The country could benefit from the green transition period. However, this requires the Romanian political class to pull itself together and work towards creating a high absorption of EU Funds (be it JTF or anything else) which provides concrete results.

It is possible that the Green Transition Fund does not suffice for Romania (and other Member States) to reach the set 2050 climate goals. If this proves to be the case, there is one simple solution: increase the funding of the European Green Deal in the framework of the next MFF. And if this does not happen, then use the agreed-upon budget to at least start the transition. Meeting just one of the climate goals is better than not meeting any of them. And postponing necessary measures for the sake of ‘what-ifs’ shows a lack of political will, not an exercise of political caution.

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