

Dear ladies and gentlemen,

My heartfelt thanks to Stara Zagora Regional Economic Development Agency for the invitation to take part in this exciting event, and I sincerely regret that I cannot be among you today. The efforts of this dynamic organization, its professional team and the ambitious director Dr. Romyana Grozeva to organize discussions on the hottest topics not only for Stara Zagora, but also for Bulgaria and Europe are commendable.

In these short five minutes, I will only mention a few keywords that I would like to address to you.

The first one is **ecology**.

Europe has always been at the forefront of efforts to preserve the environment. Our planet needs constant care and attention. Each of us has a personal responsibility to respect nature and take care of this precious gift. Instead, we are often careless and driven by the desire to own, to exploit.

Nevertheless, caring for and respecting nature also requires acknowledging that we humans are part of it. Along with the protection of the environment, there is a need for this *human* ecology, which consists in respect for man and protection of his dignity. The key question is not only what citizens can do for the European Green Deal, but also what the European Green Deal can do for citizens.

The second keyword is **solidarity**.

The main element of European vitality is solidarity. One of the founding fathers, whom we mention less frequently than Jean Monnet, Robert Schumann and Konrad Adenauer, but who has the credits for creating the European Economic Community - the then Prime Minister of Luxembourg, Joseph Bech says: "The European Economic Community will only be lasting and successful if it remains consistently committed to the spirit of European solidarity." This spirit remains as necessary as it was even today, when solidarity is the most effective tool against populism in its modern dimensions. It is in the spirit of solidarity that policies must be developed and implemented so that the European Union as a whole develops harmoniously. Solidarity means those who are better prepared and stronger to lend a hand to the weaker, and they in turn make the necessary efforts to get closer to those at the helm.

The third keyword is **justice**.

"We still don't have all the answers. Today is the beginning of the journey," Ursula von der Leyen said when she announced the European Green Deal and likened it to the first steps of a man on the moon.

Alongside the ambition to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050, a just transition must be ensured for all EU citizens and regions. These goals are two sides of the same coin, both parts of a whole. They go hand in hand. Without the right accompanying social and economic policies, the transition to climate neutrality can strengthen or even create new inequalities within the EU.

The fourth keyword is **dialogue**.

If there is one word that we should not tire of repeating, it is: dialogue. As Europeans, we must promote a culture of dialogue by all possible means. This not only allows the creation of specific policies that involve local and regional communities, it is also a way to build trust between the various actors in the transition. Understanding local conditions and issues has essential importance to meet the challenges of a fair transition. There is a danger that national politicians will transfer all climate actions to the EU and then accuse Brussels of unpopular measures. In this sense, dialogue is very necessary. An important task is to create a strong link between EU and national climate action policy. In order for this to happen, close links and strong synergies must be established between the different levels of government - European, national, regional, local.

If poorly managed, climate policy can deepen the division between the EU and national governments, between governments and civil society, between rural and urban regions, between generations. But if targeted, climate policy can become an important driver for closer integration and unite Europeans in decisive and effective collective action. However, the European Green Deal, as well as the European Union as a whole, needs to be able to deal with many divisions: between richer and poorer countries, urban and rural areas, consumers and producers, East and West, North and South.

The fifth key word is **geopolitics**.

The European Green Deal is an amalgam of political projects - each with its own goals, risks and success factors. The European Green Deal is also conceived as a **climate project** aimed at making Europe a climate-neutral continent; as a **social project** in support of a just transition; as an **economic project** aimed at reviving EU investment and competitiveness; as a **European project** to give a new goal and unity to the EU; and as an **international project** that will use a more geopolitical approach to global climate security.

Climate policy is geopolitics. Europe cannot achieve climate security on its own. For example, Spain has closed its coal-fired power plants but buys electricity from such plants through the Strait of Gibraltar in Morocco. Carbon emissions and pollution are only a few kilometers away. Global climate policy means a strong EU position on global clean technology markets, huge diplomatic efforts and cooperation to set common standards.

I will end with the words of Cervantes - "**To be prepared, this is half a victory.**"

Congratulations on the organization of today's event, on the fact that the organizers have managed to attract some of the best experts on each of the topics.

Successful and fruitful dialogue!

Prof. Ingrid Shikova

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