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Addressing Climate Change in Turbulent Times

Εμμανουέλα Δούση

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1. Introduction

Over the last years, the term “climate crisis” has been increasingly used to emphatically describe the recurrence of extreme phenomena and the severe deterioration of climate, and to awaken society. Sudden and extreme weather events, which are now occurring more frequently and with greater intensity and duration, alongside droughts, heat waves, floods, and wildfires, cause massive destruction and impact water resources, agriculture, infrastructure, health, and security, accelerating population displacement and testing the resilience of governments and national economies.

However, a crisis is typically a temporary phenomenon that peaks and then subsides or transitions into something else. Thus, the term “climate crisis” is misleading because it does not include the parameter of duration. Moreover, it gives the impression that a return to normality is possible. But this is now unattainable. The Earth’s average temperature has already risen significantly, and harmful greenhouse gas emissions are still increasing rapidly. We are therefore facing a phenomenon that is causing an emergency, a situation that requires urgent action in two directions: to drastically reduce the causes (climate mitigation) and to manage the consequences (climate adaptation). Climate change is a phenomenon that we will be constantly confronted with and which we must learn how to manage. There are practices that can help in this direction, but the pace of our mobilization is exceedingly slow.

Despite the heightened politicization of the green transition ahead of the European elections, the European Union, which ranks fourth on the list of global polluters, remained committed to achieving the European Green Deal goal of achieving climate neutrality by 2050. Having adopted most of the necessary legislation, attention now turns to implementation, which requires Member States’ cooperation to achieve the collective European goal. Implementation is far from easy in a world of increasing polarization and competition. It will only succeed if the net-zero carbon emissions target is combined with Europe’s economic transformation. Green policies are needed to establish a technological advantage that will help EU industries compete with other countries. Countries who transition now will also have opportunities to be industry leaders in green manufacturing which will also bring new jobs. However, solutions should not be limited to technical issues, they also need to have a social dimension. The EU and its member states need to look seriously at how they can protect the most vulnerable and give more attention to the just transition. They also need to enhance society’s resilience, so it can deal with interconnected simultaneous crises in the years ahead. It is clear these changes cannot be achieved by the ‘invisible hand’ of the market. Stronger public institutions are needed, which are capable of discharging the state’s responsibilities, serving the needs of the most vulnerable, providing the necessary safety nets, and cutting funding to activities which impede social well-being.

This special issue is about unpacking this fundamental conundrum. A group of scholars from different disciplines reflect on the main challenges in addressing climate change and achieving the goals of climate neutrality and just transition amid turbulent times. Why, despite clear scientific evidence and warnings climate policy actions needed to prevent further catastrophe are so limited and slow? Why has the economy failed to protect us from climate change? What is the role of courts and international tribunals in clarifying states' responsibilities in the global response to climate change? What are the main challenges for the European Union in addressing climate change? How can these challenges be addressed in a world of increasing geopolitical rivalry and economic fragmentation? How can Greece continue to pursue and achieve the goals of climate neutrality and just transition?

Costas Cartalis provides a brief overview of the European Union's climate ambition. He highlights key findings and recommendations from the European Scientific Advisory Board on Climate Change on the consistency of EU and national measures with the overarching climate neutrality objectives.

Andreas Papandreou delves into three fundamental and interlinked questions concerning economic analysis of climate change or climate economics: Why has the economy failed to protect us from climate change? What is the optimal level of climate change mitigation? What are the best means to achieve these goals? The author argues that the evolving debates and approaches economists have taken to answer these questions have profoundly shaped the broader discussion on the strength and strategies of climate action.

Marie-Claire Cordonnier Segger and Markus Gehring explore the role of courts and international tribunals in clarifying states' responsibilities in the global response to climate change. Three international courts, namely the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS), the Inter-American Court for Human Rights (IACtHR) and the International Court of Justice (ICJ) have asked recently, through advisory opinions, to clarify the legal obligations of States in addressing climate change, including the prevention of ocean impacts, and the protection of human rights. The authors highlight the significance of climate advisory proceedings in these tribunals, briefly underlining the legal reasoning of the ITLOS advisory opinion, its implications for international climate governance, and the questions and arguments before the IACtHR and the ICJ. The article discusses the transformative potential of advisory opinions. The authors argue that in their responses to the pressing need for legal clarity, courts are offered an historic opportunity to shape the contributions of international law to global sustainability, justice and the survival of life on Earth.

Emmanuela Doussis presents the state-of-the art of the Greek climate mitigation policy, maps it in the context of the international and European legal and political framework and highlights the challenges ahead to achieve just transition and climate neutrality by 2050. She argues that in a world of increasing polarization and competition, the road to achieving these goals is not covered with roses. It will be smoother if it is combined with transformative and coordinated policies

as well as strong societal support. Relevant stakeholders need to be effectively engaged in this process not simply through formal consultation processes but through an open and constructive social dialogue that will enable them to co-design sustainable solutions.

Nikos Mantzaris criticizes the European Commission on its persistence to enforce the partial privatization of Greece's Public Power Corporation's lignite portfolio in the context of Greece's economic rescue programs, while contradicting even the EU's own climate policies. He further highlights the role of environmental NGOs and think tanks, which, together with key developments in the EU legislation prevented a structural lock-in to lignite and paved the way for the decision to phase out lignite by 2028.

George Dikaïos explores the case of the European port governance, a sector governed mostly through intergovernmental agreements and not directly contributing to the fight against climate change. The author delves into the European Studies literature, and utilizes empirical data, along with European legislation, to showcase that port 'policy' has not been developed and that the penetration of climate policy might lead to a faster development of the former than expected.

Othon Kaminiaris examines the efficiency of climate adaptation policies. He presents and analyses the international framework for climate adaptation and that of the European Union. Then he explores the Greek framework and provides an extensive overview which sets the stage for the evaluation of its efficiency. The author explores Greece's performance and compliance with the international and European imperatives, underlying implementation gaps, including the incohesive division of competences, poor monitoring and compliance procedures.

Finally, **Alexandros Sarris** explores the rising tensions in the Arctic and the EU's interests, examining the role that the EU hopes to play through its environmental policy. In the aftermath of the war in Ukraine, the use of the Arctic doesn't seem to be associated only with peaceful uses since it has been an era of tensions and conflicts among the superpowers. The EU seems to be willing to get more actively involved in the region through its environmental policy even though European Arctic States have their own individual interests and policies in the Arctic Ocean.

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