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Report from the European Front

Contribution to GTI Forum [The Climate Movement: What's Next?](#)

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What is the Climate Movement's State of Play?

The last couple of months has brought an incredible surge in climate protests and debates in a number of Northern and Western European countries. This has been inspiring and heartwarming, and has brought many new opportunities for action. But the movement in Europe is still predominantly white and middle-class, and I agree with Bill McKibben and others that it needs to grow in depth as well as breadth. Let me be a bit more specific.

As Europe gets more divided, due to growing inequality and the upsurge of ultra-nationalist right-wing politics, the climate movement is becoming a politically homogeneous movement. This has not always been the case. A decade ago, Western and Northern Europe had a remarkable societal consensus on climate change. Politicians from left, right, and center advocated for ambitious climate action inside the EU and globally. This sentiment was less strong in Southern and Eastern Europe, where conflicts and wars in the region made environmentalism a mental luxury (to paraphrase Naomi Klein).

Now, the climate issue is becoming a unifying platform across the continent for progressive voices, bringing together pro-Europeans across the different regions. Climate action has become the main rallying cry of the left-green political block, and therefore an increasingly pro-EU, progressive movement that stands up for democracy, inclusion, human rights and integration. The expanding geographical coverage of this development has brought on board the Southern and Eastern Europeans fighting for a progressive EU and the continued participation of their

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countries in the European project. But it also means that the movement can lose many in the Northwest and elsewhere, who have a different view about the future of Europe.

The climate debate in most European countries is at a crossroads. Who will benefit from the transformation? Who will lose out? Who will pay for it? In the context of Europe, the climate movement cannot afford to stay out of the debate about the future of Europe and how this will be shaped. I agree with those who call for a strong, compelling, and inclusive vision, with social and climate justice at its heart, to complement the protests.

“System Change, Not Climate Change”?

Many system changes could aim to change in order to lead to more ambitious and effective climate action in Europe, including the dominant economic system and the political system of the European Union. The climate movement is hostage to the corrupted and corporate-captured national governments. We need to shift the mental system by which people interpret the world, which in Greenpeace we call mindsets. In all our actions and communications, we aim to change mindsets from the dominant paradigm which prevents people from seeing root causes and nurturing core values that can underpin real economic and political system change.

Underlying the diminishing credibility of elected officials and representative democracy is a core issue: the shrinking belief in the power of collective action and solidarity. It will take a deep conviction that we are more powerful if we act together, and finding joy in collective action, to reclaim governments and take back control from corporations. The battle for the future of the EU is the battle of mindsets and thought systems.

Do We Need a Meta-Movement?

At a time of rising nationalism, separatism, and xenophobia in Europe, it is inspiring to see the EU flag as a symbol of protest on the streets. This represents progressive ideas and values and the commitment to push on with the European project. It is gratifying to see the environmental movement standing shoulder-to-shoulder with the pro-democracy, anti-corruption, and human rights movements on this issue. To build this movement, an urgent task is to find entry points for movements representing those who are not yet feeling part of it. It is crucial to find ways to make

people realize that Europeans and people in general—no matter where they come from—are not enemies. As the climate crisis unfolds and people come to understand that collective climate action is the path to a safe future for them and their children, Europe can again become a driving force for climate action—despite the fact that member states are held hostage to corporate-funded climate denialists who spread hate and undercut democracy.

About the Author



Virág Kaufer is the European Campaign Strategist at Greenpeace. She has been involved in civil society during most of her life at grassroots, national, and international levels across different sectors, including human development, rights and justice issues, and animal welfare. She was involved in coordinating global advocacy campaigns, building campaigning coalitions and networks, and developing campaign materials for conflict and humanitarian crises. Before joining Greenpeace, she was active in party politics as MP for Politics Can Be Different (LMP)/Greens in Hungary.

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