

30 | JANUARY 29, 2024

# IENE Comment

## European Parliament Elections Could Change the Course of the EU's Transition



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*By Irina Slav\**

Earlier this month, a climate economist warned the European Union it had to pass as much transition action into law as possible and as fast as possible. It was a grim warning and it was issued in anticipation of the June elections for European Parliament.

"We cannot afford to lean back now," Ottmar Edenhofer, chairman of the European Scientific Advisory Board on Climate Change told the FT. The EU "needs to provide long-term policy signals based on long-term plans for the net zero transition", he concluded.

Given the EU's tireless efforts to implement its energy transition plans, the above begs the following question: why was such a warning necessary? The answer came from the European Council on Foreign Relations, which reported the upcoming elections could see what it called "a sharp right turn".

"The 2024 European Parliament elections will see a major shift to the right in many countries, with populist radical right parties gaining votes and seats across the EU, and centre-left and green parties losing votes and seats," the Council warned. It went on to say that "anti-European populists" were likely to win the vote in nine member states and come in second or third in another nine.

Faced with this prediction, many European voters will probably feel compelled to ask some questions. The most important among these is why "anti-European" parties are gaining so much popularity that they threaten to upset the status quo in the European Parliament, this massive, 705-strong, transition engine.

The answer to this question is quite obvious to everyone who has been paying cursory attention to energy policies in their respective EU member countries or watching from abroad. It would also be obvious to anyone who pays their own electricity bills.

The energy transition is certainly not the EU's only huge problem but it is huge nevertheless. And people, contrary to politicians' expectations, have started to notice that something is not quite right with that transition.

For starters, they were promised cheaper electricity because wind and solar, we keep being told, are the cheapest source of energy known to humankind. Instead, people have got more expensive electricity and the explanation that “It will only be expensive for a little while until we get wind and solar really going, and then it will be cheaper.”

People in Europe were also told inflation was temporary and it would soon be over. Only it wasn't, despite the dozen rate hikes by the ECB. Inflation continues to rage across the EU. Official figures pegged the rate for December at 3.4% for the whole EU and 2.9% for the eurozone. It doesn't sound like much, but it is – just ask the average German, or Greek, or Belgian, or Portuguese.

People in Europe were also told other things. They were told they should stop eating meat, cheese, and eggs, and switch to insects. To save the planet.

They were told to stop driving cars or at least drive electric ones, to save the planet.

They were told travelling was a bad idea and they should stop travelling. To save the planet.

They were told floods, droughts, rain and snow, and summer heat were all extreme weather now. And it's their fault.

For three years now, people in Europe have been subjected to a constant flood of scares, warnings, and unveiled threats aimed at one single thing — guilting them into swapping their relatively comfortable lifestyles for the bare essentials. To save the planet.

Perhaps most importantly, all this was happening alongside assurances that the transition will, in fact, enhance living standards, even as it was becoming blatantly obvious it would not. Not in the form it is being pursued by the EU leadership.

Is it really any wonder that opposition parties across the bloc saw this discrepancy between promises and realities for the opportunity that it was and seized it? Fears are running high in Brussels, prompting the calls to speed up setting transition plans in stone by passing them as laws.

That's because the current EU leadership and its many climate advisors and researchers have staked all on the transition. For many, upholding the status quo is a matter of literal survival. “A sharp right turn” at the EP elections may well signal the rise of an anti-transition wave that could only too easily become tidal unless the transition advocates in Brussels change their rhetoric and inject some realism in their plans. For better or worse, this is unlikely to happen, judging by these advocates' track record. And this may only seal their fate of getting voted

out of office, in June or later.

***\* Energy Journalist and Contributing Editor, IENE Newsletters***

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**IENE Comment – JANUARY 29, 2024 - Issue No. 30 – ISSN:179-9163**

IENE Comment is published by the INSTITUTE OF ENERGY FOR SOUTH-EAST EUROPE (IENE)

3, Alex. Soutsou Str. 106 71 Athens, Greece, T: +30-210 3628457, 3640278, F: +30 210 3646144, [marketing@iene.gr](mailto:marketing@iene.gr), [www.iene.eu](http://www.iene.eu)

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