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SUSTAINABILITY IN THEORY AND PRACTICE

Abstract: *In recent years, there has been a growing focus on sustainability and a fair transition. The study is timely given the need for EU Member States to prepare territorially equitable transition plans in order to access the €17.5 billion Equitable Transition Fund. In my study, I seek to answer the question of how to make the economy sustainable and competitive, which cannot be imagined without the sustainability of social processes. Would a fair transition be the social side of economic sustainability? The question that has arisen is: what does a fair transition mean? What kind of programme does it involve, so that no one is left out?*

Keywords: *fair transition, green agreement, sustainable development, territorial transition plan, Mátra Power Plant.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been a growing focus on sustainability and a fair transition. The study is timely given that EU Member States are required to prepare territorial Just Transition Plans (also known as Just Transition Territorial Plans) in order to access the €17.5 billion Just Transition Fund (TFF). To qualify for the Fund, the European Commission requires the submission of so-called Just Transition Territorial Plans, which are being prepared for three counties in Hungary – Heves, Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén and Baranya. Their preparation is coordinated by the Ministry of Innovation and Technology (ITM) with a partner appointed by the Commission, the KPMG consortium, involving other ministries and relevant local stakeholders. The plans should describe the expected transition process, the most affected areas and the full spectrum of impacts, the planned interventions and how participation, monitoring and evaluation will be ensured. The Territorial Equitable Transition Plans are prepared at sub-regional (NUTS-3, in our country

at county level) level, so countries must prepare a separate plan for each region in which they wish to use the Equitable Transition Fund. In Hungary, since February 2021, the three regional ETF planning processes have been intensively implemented with the assistance of the consultant (KPMG consortium), following interviews and expert workshops with stakeholders in each county. The three territorial equitable transition plans are expected to be annexed to Priority 5 (Equitable Transition) of the new Operational Programme for Environment and Energy Efficiency (KEHOP Plus). A new Life+ project could provide additional content for the process.¹

So my first question was, what are territorial fair/equitable transition plans and what is their relevance for employment?

On 11 December 2019, the European Commission presented the European Green Deal, a roadmap to make the EU economy sustainable by turning climate and environmental challenges into opportunities across all policy areas and making the transition fair for all (Press release, 2019)² Ursula von der Leyen said “... we can all be part of the transition and be winners of the new opportunities it offers. By acting first and fast, we are helping our economy to become a global leader. ...”

With this European Green Deal, the Commission reaffirms its commitment to tackling the climate and environmental challenges that are the defining challenge of our generation. The atmosphere is warming and climate change is being felt year by year. One million of the Earth’s eight million species are threatened with extinction. Forests and oceans are being destroyed by pollution.³ The European Green Deal responds to these challenges. As a new strategy for growth, it

¹ *Status of the Territorial Just Transition Plans in central and eastern Europe*, CEEBankwatch Network, Briefing, 3 March 2021, 1-11. <https://www.portfolio.hu/gazdasag/20210205/evtizedes-atalakitasba-fogott-a-matrai-eromu-kiemelten-fontos-a-munkahelyek-vedelme-468472>, 10 April 2023. <https://www.napi.hu/magyar-vallalatok/kilenc-evig-tarto-atalakitas-indult-matrai-eromubenyos-penzbol.722820.html>, 10 April 2023.

² The European Green Deal outlines how we can make Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050, while boosting the economy, improving people’s health and quality of life, caring for the environment and leaving no one behind, President Ursula von der Leyen said: „The European Green Deal is our new strategy for growth. Our new green growth strategy is our new green economy. The new strategy sets out the way for us to transform the way we live, work, produce and consume so that we can live healthier lives and innovate our businesses. We can all be part of this process of transformation and be the winners of new opportunities. By acting first and fast, we are helping our economy to become a global leader. We will do our utmost to make our strategy a success, for the sake of our planet and the life on it, for Europe’s natural heritage, for biodiversity, for our forests and seas. By showing the rest of the world how we can be both sustainable and competitive, we can convince other countries to join us on this journey.”

³ See about this: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC): *Special Report on the impacts of a 1.5°C increase in global temperatures*; ii. Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services: *2019 Global Assessment Report on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services*; iii. International Resource Panel: *2019 Global Resources Review: Natural Resources for our Desired Future*; iv. European Environment Agency: *Europe’s Environment – State of Play and Outlook 2020: Knowledge for a Sustainable Europe*.

aims to transform the EU into a just and prosperous society with a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy, where net greenhouse gas emissions are eliminated by 2050 and where economic growth is not resource-dependent.

This *transition* must be *fair*, and the *fair transition mechanism* itself will support regions that are highly dependent on carbon-intensive industries. The mechanism will support the most vulnerable citizens in the transition, giving them access to retraining programmes and job opportunities in new economic sectors. (COM(2019) 640 final) ⁴

The question, then, is how to make the economy sustainable and competitive, which cannot be imagined without the sustainability of social processes.⁵ Is a fair transition the social side of economic sustainability? The question that has arisen is: what does a fair transition mean? What kind of programme does it involve, so that no one is left out?

In the Action Plan of the Pillar it is stated: The same unity, coordination and solidarity will be needed also in the years ahead to bounce forward towards a greener and more digital decade in which Europeans can thrive. Although in varying degrees, the challenges ahead are similar across all Member States. We need to enhance social rights and to strengthen the European social dimension across all policies of the Union as enshrined in the Treaties[4]. This will ensure that the transition to climate-neutrality, digitalisation and demographic change are socially fair and just, and making the European Green Deal and the upcoming 2030 Digital Decade successes for all Europeans.⁶

At its 102nd session (2013), the International Labour Conference adopted a resolution and a set of conclusions on a framework for sustainable development, decent work and green jobs policies and a just transition. Labour has much to gain from the transition to environmentally sustainable economies and societies: (a) the realisation of the significant productive potential to achieve full employment can create many more decent jobs through environmental investment, sustainable

⁴ „.... At the same time, the transition must be fair and inclusive. It must put people first and pay attention to the regions, industries and workers for whom it will be most challenging. As the changeover will involve major changes, active public participation and trust will be necessary for policy action to be effective and accepted. With the effective involvement of the EU institutions and advisory bodies, we need to bring citizens together in a new alliance with national, regional and local authorities, civil society and industry in all their diversity. ...”

⁵ Here, I think it is important to point out from the European Green Agreement that the areas of action in question are closely interlinked and mutually reinforcing, but we must not lose sight of the fact that trade-offs between economic, environmental and social objectives will be necessary in some cases. The smart and green ideas on the Interreg Central Europe Applicant Community website are also the ones that show what applied and basic research is needed in the near future. https://community.interreg-central.eu/marketplace?country_asset_ids=98&priority_ids=410&priority_ids=450, 27 January 2023.

⁶ See the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union 2016/2020-03-01, cfr Art. 3 and Art. 9. and <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/empl/european-pillar-of-social-rights/en/> 27 February 2023

production and consumption, and the management of natural resources; b) large improvements in job quality and incomes can be expected through more productive processes and greener products and services in sectors such as agriculture, construction, recycling and tourism; c) social inclusion through better access to affordable, environmentally sustainable energy and, for example, payment for environmental services, which are particularly important for women and people living in rural areas.⁷

According to the International Labour Organisation, greening economies in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication will require a country-specific mix of macroeconomic, industrial, sectoral and labour policies that create an enabling environment for sustainable enterprises to flourish and decent work opportunities to be created by mobilising and managing the population. The aim is to create decent jobs throughout the supply chain in dynamic, high value-added sectors that encourage job and skills development, as well as job creation and productivity improvements in more labour-intensive industries that offer a wide range of job opportunities. scale. As the challenge is cross-cutting, there is a need for mainstreaming sustainable development in all areas and for cooperation and coordination between employment authorities and their counterparts in different fields, including finance, planning, environment, energy, transport, health, economic and social development. Institutional arrangements should be adapted to ensure the involvement of all stakeholders at international, national, regional, sectoral and local level in the development of the appropriate policy framework. In order to effectively integrate the three dimensions of sustainable development, internal coherence should be sought between institutions at national level and within international institutions at regional and global level.⁸

For our topic, a fair transition in Europe means that as part of the Sustainable Europe Investment Plan, the Commission will propose a fair transition mechanism, including a Fair Transition Fund, to ensure that no one is left out. The transition can only be successful if it is implemented in a fair and inclusive way. The most vulnerable are those who are most exposed to the adverse impacts of climate change and environmental degradation. At the same time, managing the transition will lead to significant structural changes in business models, skill needs and relative prices. Depending on their social and geographical circumstances, individual citizens will be affected differently. Different Member States, regions and cities will not start the transition from the same starting position, nor will they have the same capacity to respond. These challenges call for strong policy responses at all levels. It will also seek to protect citizens and workers most vulnerable to the transition, by offering access to retraining programmes, jobs in new economic

⁷ Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally *sustainable economies and societies for all*, International Labour Organization, 2015, 5.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 6.

sectors or energy-efficient housing. The Commission will work with Member States and regions to help them develop transition plans for their territories. And as the International Labour Organisation summarises, transition plans need a country-specific mix of macroeconomic, industrial, sectoral and labour policies.⁹

Conversion plans are therefore linked to employment policy instruments. However, in my opinion, this is not enough to ensure that no one is really left out in the transition. This is also borne out by the fact that the Green Agreement stipulates that a coherent and holistic approach is needed to ensure that climate and environmental policies are perceived as equitable.¹⁰ Social dialogue is of key importance in the transition, as it is through active social dialogue that businesses and their employees can prepare for and successfully implement change. Mobilising education and training is key to a fair transition. Under the Green Agreement, the Commission will develop a European Competence Framework to develop and assess knowledge, skills and attitudes to climate change and sustainable development. It will also provide background materials and promote the exchange of good practice in EU networks of teacher training programmes.¹¹

I then examined the values along which a fair transition can be achieved from a social protection perspective.

2. VALUES

According to the Green Agreement, the European Pillar of Social Rights will ensure that no one is left out by providing guidance for action. In other words, in my opinion, the Pillar supports a fair transition, is part of the fair transition mechanism in the Green Agreement and is also in line with the conclusions of the International Labour Organisation.

The Commission published its proposal for a European Pillar of Social Rights on 26 April 2017. The Pillar was finally launched at the Social Summit on Fair Jobs and Growth in Gothenburg on 17 November 2017, further strengthening the social dimension of the Union in cooperation with the European Parliament and the Council. Juncker set the goal of creating a fair and fully pan-European labour market that is responsive to changes in European societies and the world and that can serve as a compass for the members of the eurozone. He stressed that the

⁹ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: *A European Green Deal*, Brussels, 11.12.2019. COM(2019) 640 final. The fair transition mechanism will focus on the regions and sectors most affected by the transition due to their dependence on fossil fuels or carbon-intensive processes.

¹⁰ See COM(2019) 640 final, 20.

¹¹ See COM(2019) 640 final, 21.

Pillar should incorporate what the EU has already achieved in the field of worker protection. He attached particular importance to the social partners.¹² At the same time as the Pillar was launched, the proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on work-life balance for parents and carers, the proposal to repeal Council Directive 2010/18/EU, the consultation on the repeal of the Information Directive, the extension of social protection and the Working Time Directive were launched.

Hendrickx writes about the millennium shift in European labour law. What does he mean by that? It does not refer to a moment in time, but rather to a time-frame shortly before and after 2000, when a new approach to labour law emerged. The traditional understanding of labour law was confronted with the new economic challenges of competitiveness and supranational economic liberalisation. The shift is therefore a response to the complex reality of globalisation, new labour market trends, the enlargement of the European Union and the eurozone. *But it is also an appropriate response to the change that the Action Plan of the Green Agreement also envisages.*¹³

The Pillar provides guidance to meet people's basic needs. Where a principle applies to employees, it applies to all employees, regardless of their employment status, the type of employment or the duration of employment. In my view, the minimum standard of a *life worthy of a working person* is set out in this document, in which the value of work is unquestionable. A work-based society is one that can remain truly competitive in the 21st century. In the Pillar, the European Commission provides a guideline on how and under what conditions this should be achieved.

The social and labour market programme covers several areas: labour law, support for jobseekers, and the operation of the social protection system. In fact, the principles and rights are a good illustration of the Union's social and labour market agenda.

The employment model is based on equal opportunities. In this context:

- Everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and life-long learning.

¹² „We need to step up work to create a fair and truly pan-European labour market (...) As part of this effort, I would like to see the creation of a European Pillar of Social Rights, which takes into account the changing characteristics of European societies and the world of work and which can serve as a guide for renewed convergence within the euro area. The European Pillar of Social Rights should complement what we have already achieved together in the protection of EU workers. I believe we are right to launch this initiative within the euro area, while allowing other Member States to join if they wish.” State of the Union 2015: *Time for Honesty, Unity and Solidarity*, Strasbourg, 9 September 2015, Jean-Claude Juncker President of the European Commission.

¹³ Frank Hendrickx, *European Labour Law and the Millennium Shift: From Post to (Social) Pillar*. In: *Game Changers in Labour Law. Bulletin of Comparative Labour Relations – 100*. (eds. F. Hendrickx, V. Stefano), Kluwer Law International BV, Netherlands 2018, 52–53.

- Equal treatment and equal opportunities for women and men must be ensured in all areas.
- Everyone has the right to equal treatment in employment, social protection and education, as well as access to goods and services available to the public.

After that, everyone has the right to active support for employment, which brings us to the employment policy leg of the social and labour market programme. The provisions state that jobseekers must be offered services that will get them back into the labour market as soon as possible. The principles of the transit labour market are also set out in this section.¹⁴

The section on fair working conditions describes the basic rules of the game of labour law, with the following principles and rights as the main pillars: safe and flexible employment, protection of wages, information on terms and conditions of employment, protection against dismissal, social dialogue and employee participation, work-life balance, a holistic, safe and decent working environment and data protection.

Alongside the employment policy and labour law pillars of the social and labour market agenda, the social protection system is also emerging. Personally, I see employment policy as part of the social protection system, but here it seems to be separate. Social protection and social inclusion are important building blocks of the social dimension.¹⁵

It can therefore be seen that a fair transition can be ensured along the lines of the values summarised by Pillar. It provides security while requiring an incredible degree of flexibility from all labour market participants.

This is in line with the key policy areas formulated by the International Labour Organisation to address environmental, economic and social sustainability simultaneously: macroeconomic and growth policies, industrial and sectoral policies, enterprise policy, capacity development, labour protection, social protection, active labour market policies, rights, social dialogue and tripartism.¹⁶

¹⁴ Everyone has the right to receive timely and personalised help to improve their employment or self-employment prospects. This includes the right to receive job search, training and retraining assistance.

Everyone is entitled to social protection and training when changing career.

Young people have the right to continuous education, apprenticeships, traineeships or a decent job offer within 4 months of becoming unemployed or leaving education.

The unemployed have the right to personalised, continuous and consistent support. Persons who are long-term unemployed have the right to a personalised and detailed assessment at the latest in the 18th month of unemployment.

¹⁵ Childcare and support for children, Social protection, Unemployment benefit, Minimum income, Retirement income and old-age pensions, Health care, Social inclusion of people with disabilities, Long-term care, Housing and assistance for homeless people, Access to essential services

¹⁶ *Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all*, International Labour Organization, 2015, 7.

The principles of the International Labour Organisation in this process are:

A strong social consensus on the goal and pathways to sustainability is essential. Social dialogue should be an integral part of the institutional framework for policy making and implementation at all levels. There should be adequate, informed and continuous consultation with all relevant stakeholders.

Policies must respect, promote and enforce fundamental principles and rights at work.

Policies and programmes should take into account the strong gender dimension of many environmental challenges and opportunities. Specific gender equality policies should be considered to promote equitable outcomes.

Coherent policies across the economic, environmental, social, education/training and labour portfolios should enable businesses, workers, investors and consumers to adopt and promote the transition towards environmentally sustainable and inclusive economies and societies.

These coherent policies should provide a fair transitional framework for all to promote the creation of more decent jobs, including, where appropriate, anticipation of the impact on employment, adequate and sustainable social protection against job losses and job losses, skills development and social dialogue, including the effective exercise of the right to organise and collective bargaining.

There is no “one size fits all” solution. Policies and programmes need to be designed to suit the specific conditions of countries, including their level of development, economic sectors, types and size of enterprises.

In implementing sustainable development strategies, it is important to promote international cooperation between countries. In this context, we recall the outcome document of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio+20), including the sixth United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) outcome document on the means of implementation (UNCSD VI).¹⁷

3. FAIR TRANSITION IN PRACTICE

An important segment of the development of a territorially equitable transition plan in our region is the development of sustainable and replicable mobility solutions in the Mátra Power Plant Region.¹⁸ This will include the implementation of the first full industrial coal drainage best practice in Central and Eastern Europe, innovative prototypes to improve the energy efficiency of lignite-fired households, a complex training programme ("Caring Career Change") for Mátra Power Plant

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 5–6.

¹⁸ See <https://igazsagosatmenet.eu/fenntarthato-mobilitas/>, 13 April 2023. See also The Just Transition Fund will support skilling in regions facing higher socioeconomic challenges from climate transition. <https://op.europa.eu/webpub/empl/european-pillar-of-social-rights/en/> 27 February, 2023

employees, the application of 5 innovative climate-friendly prototypes to replace coal-fired technology, and a reduction of CO₂ emissions by 6.5 million tonnes. The first Hungarian Coal Region Committee (50+ organisation) (high-level consultative forum and working groups) has been set up. A corporate mobilisation programme has been established for about 250 companies (suppliers and subcontractors of the Mátra Power Plant). The first complete industrial lignite export in Central Europe will thus be realised.¹⁹ As can be seen from the above, many of the principles of a fair transition are being fulfilled by the process under way.

Main numerical achievements in the area of Just Transition: setting up of the National Coal Region Committee; participation in the development of *Territorial Just Transition Plans* for the counties of Heves and Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén; training and retraining of 500 power plant workers; assistance to 250 companies (suppliers, subcontractors) dependent on the power plant to enter new markets.

Support for suppliers will play a very important role in the transformation. The Mátra Power Plant is facing a transformation of its energy production: in the coming years, lignite will gradually be replaced by other fuels (e.g. biomass) and a new solar park will be installed. The transformation of energy production will affect the plant's current suppliers and partners in its industrial park to different degrees and over different time scales. The partners of the Mátra power plant can join the mentoring programme free of charge, where they can benefit from the help and support of expert mentors in a wide range of areas to help them implement possible developments and development paths. It is important that the driving force behind any cooperation is to integrate businesses into the green economy through their processes, products and services.

The focus areas of mentoring activities are: business development advice (legal, finance, business planning and modelling, finance, marketing), supplier support in new market areas, support for foreign market entry, innovation: support for product and/or service development, green economy, training advice, training organisation. The range of mentoring tools is very broad. Following an assessment, it is possible to develop staff through, among other things, vocational training, training courses, visits to exhibitions or study visits. We support companies' exhibitions and the exploration of supplier opportunities at national and international business events.

The Mátra Power Plant is a good example of managing the decarbonisation process. The European Commission's and the International Labour Organisation's vision of a just/fair transition is well reflected in the solution of one of the most important decarbonisation challenges in Hungary, which is the conversion of the lignite-fired Mátra Power Plant to low-carbon technologies, thus phasing out coal

¹⁹ See *Ibid.* Sustainable mobility aims to limit the negative impacts of heavy traffic and reconcile economic, environmental and social criteria.

and lignite from domestic electricity generation by 2030. Little information is available at the moment, as the project is in the early stages of implementation, but it is clear that stakeholder involvement is taking place and that training and retraining are being given high priority. All this means, in my view, that coherent policies across the economic, environmental, social, education/training and labour portfolios will enable businesses, workers, investors and consumers to adopt and promote the transition towards environmentally sustainable and inclusive economies and societies.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

My first question was, what territorial fair/equitable transition plans are and what their relevance for employment is. Conversion plans are therefore linked to employment policy instruments. However, in my opinion, this is not enough to ensure that no one is really left out in the transition. This is also borne out by the fact that the Green Agreement stipulates that a coherent and holistic approach is needed to ensure that climate and environmental policies are perceived as equitable. Social dialogue is of key importance in the transition, as it is through active social dialogue that businesses and their employees can prepare for and successfully implement change. Mobilising education and training is key to a fair transition. Under the Green Agreement, the Commission will develop a European Competence Framework to develop and assess knowledge, skills and attitudes to climate change and sustainable development. It will also provide background materials and promote the exchange of good practice in EU networks of teacher training programmes.

After this I examined the values along which a fair transition can be achieved from a social protection perspective. It could be seen that a fair transition can be ensured along the lines of the values summarised by Pillar. It provides security while requiring an incredible degree of flexibility from all labour market participants. A strong social consensus on the goal and pathways to sustainability is essential. Social dialogue should be an integral part of the institutional framework for policy making and implementation at all levels. There should be adequate, informed and continuous consultation with all relevant stakeholders.

Finally an important segment of the development of a territorially equitable transition plan in our region is the development of sustainable and replicable mobility solutions in the Mátra Power Plant Region. The Mátra Power Plant is a good example of managing the decarbonisation process. The European Commission's and the International Labour Organisation's vision of a just/fair transition is well reflected in the solution of one of the most important decarbonisation challenges in Hungary, which is the conversion of the lignite-fired Mátra Power Plant to

low-carbon technologies, thus phasing out coal and lignite from domestic electricity generation by 2030.

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Одрживост у теорији и пракси

Сажетак: Последњих година све је већи фокус на одрживости и праведној транзицији. Ситуација је благовремена с обзиром на потребу да државе чланице ЕУ припреме територијално правичне планове транзиције како би присилуиле Фонду за праведну транзицију од 17,5 милијарди евра. У својој ситуацији настојим да одговорим на питање како економију учинити одрживом и конкурентном, што се не може замислити без одрживости друштвених процеса. Да ли би праведна транзиција била социјална страна економске одрживости? Поставило се питање: шта значи праведна транзиција? Какав је то програм, да нико не остане по страни?

Кључне речи: праведна транзиција, зелени споразум, одрживи развој, план територијалне транзиције, електрирана Мајра.

Датум пријема рада: 04.05.2023.

Датум достављања коначне верзије рада: 14.10.2023.

Датум прихватања рада: 10.11.2023.