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What an (ESPON) week!

27 November 2020

“The European Green Deal is a really superb policy document. It has inspired now China to make a commitment to decarbonize by 2060. This is a European accomplishment and Europe should be very proud of that”. **Jeffrey Sachs**, Professor of the Columbia University applauded the EU for leading the way on environmental policies, during the **ESPONweek**.

And in her intervention **Elisa Ferreira**, EU Commissioner for Cohesion and Reforms, noted: “We have to make a recovery green because the planet is telling us that every day. We have to reassess the way we triggered development and should not repeat what was done in the past but work in a future-oriented way”. “We should grasp this unique opportunity and make this transition as positive and as less painful as possible. Because transition will happen anyway”.

The **ESPONweek** was organized between 16 and 19 November by the ESPON EGTC and the German Presidency of the EU Council and included two live online events under the title “Just Transition and Recovery for Cities and Regions in Europe”. The week aimed to address the double challenge Europe is facing by fighting with the pandemic while accelerating its Just Transition plan to support areas in need of phasing the coal industry.

“The emergency instruments will not be stopped, they will continue until 2023 through a special envelope of 47.5 billion that is called the Next Generation EU - something completely different that comes on top of the multi-annual programming” – added **Ms Ferreira**.

On behalf of the European Committee of Regions, **Emil Boc**, Mayor of Cluj-Napoca underlined the importance of regions and cities: “With the Just Transition Fund our Union provides a dedicated tool to the regions whose economies depend on carbon and highly polluting activities. Those regions will be direct beneficiaries but their transition can be also a driving example. We cannot have a climate neutral Europe without climate neutral cities and regions”.

And the former President of the European Parliament, **Jerzy Buzek**, focused on the need to prepare local plans for Just Transition: “It is not enough to prepare Just Transition Programmes on the member states level. It is very important to also prepare territorial Just Transition programs in the regions that will involve self-governments, researchers as well as business enterprises and citizens, because they should feel that is a program to help them to go through the difficult periods”.

“The scale [of transformation] is quite manageable, but it differs a lot by country. Poland is the most affected, about a hundred thousand jobs - maybe half of the total jobs at stake - are in Poland” said professor **Sachs**.

“Coal extraction -be it in Poland’s Upper Silesia, in Germany or elsewhere - has long been a pillar of the regional identity and often the biggest employer in these regions. This is why we need to offer special support to regions affected by the coal phase-out process in all European member states” The idea of a just transition is a binding part of climate protection measures in Europe and it is in line with the goal of the EU to strengthen economic, social and territorial cohesion, with a particular focus on

regions affected by industrial change - added the Parliamentary State Secretary to the Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community of Germany, **Volkmar Vogel**.

The innovation content in the green industry is very promising also for small to medium-sized companies. But it is still a 15 to 20-year process before we have replaced 30.000 - 40.000 jobs in coal extraction and coal burning by a green decarbonized industry”, underlined the State Secretary at the Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community of Germany, **Markus Kerber**.

“Replacing one dependency with another one would not be very smart. So we need patience and capital and a certain empathy for the social socio-economic and geographical setup” **Mr Kerber** concluded

Wiktor Szydarowski, ESPON EGTC director, summarized the results of the **ESPONweek**: “Just Transition and recovery are the two challenges ahead for Europe and we need to address them, ensuring that no region or city is left behind. I am confident these two events provided fresh evidence to the European debate on green and digital transition, supported also by our newly published policy brief on [structural change for the coal phase out regions](#)”.

“The ESPON Programme nourishes the concept of greening and digital transition. For that, we provide territorial evidence to inspire policy responses in turning our economies and societies more green and more digital” -said Mr **Szydarowski**.

You can watch the two events again on our YouTube channel:

[ESPONtalk Is energy decarbonization compatible with just economic transition for regions and cities?](#)

[“ESPONWeek debate: Can Just Transition bring recovery for regions and cities?”](#)



Note to the Editors

ESPON is the European Territorial Observatory Network that provides scientific analyses and advice for territorial and sectoral policies in a number of contexts including economy and finance, unemployment, foreign direct investment, circular and low-carbon economy, healthcare, migration, etc. **ESPON** supports the discussions on the future of EU policies, notably the Cohesion Policy, as well as the upcoming preparation for the next generation of strategies and programmes at national, regional and local scales. **ESPON** is co-funded by the European Regional Development Fund. More at: www.ESPON.eu

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