

**How the Encyclical Laudato Si' can steer the EU's role
in a just recovery after the COVID-19 crisis**

28.05.2020 - Speech by Patrizia Toia MEP

First, let me thank the European Laudato Si' Alliance for organizing this meeting, very important and timely indeed, and Ms Josianne Gauthier, Secretary General of CIDSE, for moderating the seminar. A warm greeting also to the keynote speakers invited today - Professor Mazzucato and Monsignor Bruno-Marie Duffé, from the Vatican Dicastery for the Promotion of Integral Human Development. I know how valuable their inputs and reflections can be, when speaking about **the model of society and economy** we want for the post-Covid world.

Because, due to the pandemic, we face the following dilemma - what kind of model we want to pursue for a new social and economic system?

It is no doubt that Europe is facing the hardest challenge since the end of WWII.

Economically speaking, the projected fall of GDP is expected to be harsher than in other continents - estimates from the documents released yesterday by the Commission suggest that EU GDP fell by 15% in the second quarter of 2020 as compared to the same time last year. Moreover, supply chains and production lines have been disrupted and the trade in goods/services has been largely affected.

Socially speaking, the number of unemployed and people on precarious work is rising enormously, being the women population the most exposed and negatively affected. Health systems have been dramatically hit. Older generations too often left without proper cure or protection, while child poverty is getting worse in an alarming manner. **Insecurity** among the population will be, in short, a key issue to deal with.

Frankly speaking, we are paying the price of unsustainable and unjust choices made in the past, which have **put at risk even the environment** we live in.

“Business as usual” is no more valid: it is clear that we are living an epochal change. So, it is up to politics to lead the way...in a new way!

That is why the restoration and recovery path for our continent must be "**green and fair**". What the pandemic has clearly shown to us is that nature and human beings share **common destiny** - when the one is suffering, the other suffers the consequences.

Our **common home**, as Pope Francis teaches in *Laudato Si*, is the perimeter of our action. I share here the words of Cardinal Turkson, Prefect of the Dicastery, when he says, “*living in a common home requires solidarity in accessing the goods of creation as a "common good", and solidarity in applying the fruits of research and technology to make our home healthier and more liveable for all*”.

I cannot agree more, especially the reference to R&I. For instance, I have been calling the EU to be at the forefront of the research for a vaccine or a cure against Coronavirus, accessible and affordable to all, anywhere, because it must be considered as a “**global common good**” in the full sense, as indicated also in the recent WHO Covid19 Resolution.

I can see positive support for the idea of “common good”. Everything that strongly relates to upholding the right to life (health, cure for diseases, but also healthy environment) has to go beyond market rules and be subject to a “**common path**”. State intervention, together with a strong role of the public in economy is more than needed as “**development agent**”.

The development we need is therefore “green and fair”, but we cannot afford any more setbacks that can have detrimental effects on our climate, biodiversity and environment as well as on human health and our economies. Therefore, the "**integral approach**" promoted by Pope

Francis in the Encyclical, which links the ecological with the social, is **unavoidable**. It is a necessity, I would say, which should be however also an **informed, free and value-based choice** to make.

For me, this is a crucial point, and I give another example. In the European Parliament, we are now discussing the forest package, in view of a reform of forest policy by the Commission next year, for which I am shadow rapporteur in DEVE Committee. My position - also shared with my colleagues and reflected in my amendments - is that preserving natural resources is not just a matter of protecting biodiversity, but also a **question of social justice**, in the vision of an **'ecological restoration'**. The relationship between human beings and the environment is sacred - as they are both God's creation. The challenge, in short, is to **reconcile** the **market** with its social and ecological dimension, without putting aside the fundamental rights of individuals.

The **Green Deal** is therefore the most **appropriate growth strategy** for the EU, because it aims to giving positive stimuli to our economies, to creating jobs while accelerating the green transition in a cost efficient way.

Yesterday, the Commission released the **recovery plan**, with a huge firepower of € 750 billion embedded in an updated long-term EU budget. I am glad to see that some of the requests put forward by the Parliament over the past few months have been taken on board - for instance, the capital increase intended to finance the Just Transition Fund, from 7.5 billion to 40 billion with a significant top-up of 30 billion from NextGenerationEU, or the creation of a new policy window in InvestEU for strategic investments.

Now, the objectives initially set for the Green Deal are framed into a long term feasible and far-reaching investment plan. We need to keep these achievements and be more ambitious too, calling on the Member States and governments to avoid any cut-price agreements (=accordi al ribasso). The Parliament stands ready to reject it, if necessary. Not because the EP wants to lapse into ideology, far from it - we have been

advocating for years for more solidarity in EU and now with this new Plan, we are putting the basis for a different path. Finally, a real “common path”, where **solidarity** - among Member States - can really go hand in hand with **responsability** - among citizens, who proved to be more collaborative in this emergency, less passive, called upon to play their part for the “common good” of our societies. I hope that these changes will lead to more, bottom-up EU integration through the empowerment of a real, participatory EU citizenship.

Thank you again!