



# **CLIMATE EMERGENCY: WE CAN'T JUST STOP AT DECLARATIONS!**

ADOPTED AT THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF FEDERATION OF YOUNG EUROPEAN GREENS

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By the summer of 2019, more than 790 local councils across the globe as well as the governments of the Republic of Ireland and the UK have issued a declaration of climate emergency. Carried forward by the increasing awareness of the climate crisis, we can expect that the movement demanding similar declarations will grow in the coming years. While we in principle welcome these developments for providing an accurate label of the situation and a concrete frame for taking action, we believe they also raise several questions. We believe that for the concept of climate emergency to prove successful, the climate movement needs to work intensively towards specifying the demands for measures which should follow any climate emergency declaration.

We realize and acknowledge that campaigns surrounding declarations of climate emergency present a window of opportunity to raise the urgency of the issue, as well as a new frame for radical action. The strength of the concept of climate emergency is self-evident. It is a more than an accurate description of the state of crisis our societies are facing. Many activists across Europe and world-wide have been pushing for climate emergency declarations since 2016 and even more so in the last year. The concept seems to be getting new people excited and attracted to the movement, in particular as the target - the local governments - seem easy to reach and the goal - a declaration - concrete enough to achieve even in the short-term. Climate emergency is thus providing the movement with a new stimulus and perhaps, a sense of achievement. As many political decision-makers are increasingly eager to present themselves as taking matters seriously, the concept of climate emergency could have a key role to play in shaping our thinking and our policies around the climate crisis in the coming years.

Our main objection to calls for climate emergency declarations lies in the fact that we know little about what these carry or should carry in practice. Climate emergency cannot be reduced to a buzzword, let alone a political marketing strategy. Many of those who have declared climate emergency haven't changed their actual policies and used this declaration as a greenwashing communication tool. Worse yet, we have seen and experienced how emergency regimes have been used to curtail civil and political rights, such as freedom of assembly, and applied against climate activists themselves. There is thus a severe risk that a declaration of climate emergency, if misused, could run contrary to our requirement of just transition and even hamper our abilities to organize.

**On this basis, we identify at least two conditions to make climate emergency declarations work:**

First, climate emergency declaration must be considered a tool, not a goal in itself. For the notion to have any meaningful impact, climate emergency declarations must have higher ambitions than bringing about a new label or a more accurate description of facts. It does not bring us any further if governments, local, regional or national start massively declaring climate emergency while continuing status quo politics. Any declaration of climate emergency without a clear explanation of the consequences and measures to take hollows out the concept and deprives it of its potential. As activists, we must not be fooled by attempts of political players to gain credit by declaring a climate emergency while not walking the walk. But also vice versa, we should be able to detect and support those political actors who authentically and consistently act on the climate crisis even when they do not necessarily do so under the label of an emergency.

**Second, climate emergency as a new legal concept has to be fundamentally different from emergency regimes as we have known them in the past.** Looking at how emergency regimes have been misused in the past and recognizing that many of our activist friends operate in semi-authoritarian or authoritarian regimes, it is only correct to be careful not to give governments any additional exceptional powers to make emergency regulations that might affect the freedoms and with that our own opportunities to organize. However, we also do not miss out on the potential of emergency powers to target the climate crisis. The way we propose to use any possibly new exceptional measures created under climate emergency is to target the big polluters from businesses and industry. Since 2017 we know that around 100 companies worldwide are responsible for 80% of greenhouse gas emissions. Yet governments keep failing at tackling their activity. While this failure is undoubtedly due to the lack of political will, in some cases, governments, including local governments, might be lacking the measures and the mandate to tackle the corporate power effectively. The new emergency measures could be designed precisely to rethink the way business law and international private law works, from unfair trade deals to dubious public-private investment dispute settlement mechanisms to the overall focus on the protection of investment interests to the detriment of public good.

**On the European level, declaring climate emergency could include, among others:**

- a European climate law with an overall emergency speed-plan to transition to a carbon negative society by reducing emissions by 70 % by 2030 and reaching a net zero emissions economy by 2035 and a carbon negative economy by 2040
- an immediate stop to all direct and indirect subsidies for fossil fuels be it at local, regional, state or EU level and a total ban on any new fossil fuel, nuclear or fracking projects everywhere in Europe. These banned subsidies can be relocated to investments in the implementation and improvement of renewable energy production and its distribution, as well as research and innovation in the sustainable energy sector.
- a complete phase out of coal and other fossil fuels and a full transition to renewables by 2030, relying in particular on supporting decentralized modes of energy production by local communities

- increase in the price of carbon, either by establishing a minimum price of carbon or a CO2 tax, while simultaneously investing in good, carbon-free transportation networks
- ambitious and binding carbon budgets and emission reduction targets for all EU Member States and EEA/EFTA countries with clear sanctions for not fulfilling them. In addition, the EU can offer a platform for european governments, research institutes, universities and companies so that member states can support each other in innovation. Financial support in the form of subsidies or loans can be organized by the european union for member states where possible as well as expertise by the european agencies.
- a reform of the ETS in order to end free allowances and to include the shipping and aviation sectors
- a reform of the Common Agricultural Policy to support small farmers working on the principles of agroecology and enhancing biodiversity
- an immediate stop to all EU-funded investment in airport expansion and a European-wide kerosine and aviation tax including measures targeting specifically frequent flyers, the revenues of which would be invested in a European wide railway network
- an annulment of all trade agreements and private investment projects which harm the climate
- spending at least 60 % of EU budget on investment in just transition

**As FYEG, we will:**

- fight for full public recognition of the urgency of the climate crisis, at any level regardless of whether this is framed as “climate emergency”, “climate breakdown”, “climate crisis”, or else,
- fight for public declarations of climate emergency to be always accompanied by concrete action
- push for the policies above, regardless of whether adopted in the framework of climate emergency or under any other label
- call out any hypocrisy of declaring climate emergency without taking appropriate steps, encourage FYEG activists and Member Organisations, as well as other climate activists and movements, to work towards filling the notion with our own content,
- work towards rethinking the existing instruments to tackle the climate crisis and exploring ways in which climate emergency could be used to tackle big climate polluters while protecting and upholding political as well as social rights of individuals