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Autonomy, democracy, solidarity: the Green Deal still at the heart of the State of the European Union speech

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The annual speech of the President of the European Commission Ursula van der Leyen was marked by the continuation of an environmental agenda that remains the compass for Europe, crisis after crisis. This persistence is welcome and well-founded, given that the necessary transformations can address the multiple challenges facing the European Union, particularly that of its autonomy and security. The high political priority given to the Green Deal may, however, still be undermined in a highly evolving political context. Beyond the climate package, the RepowerEU plan and the short-term measures to avoid a hectic winter in terms of energy security and social cohesion, the EU must not delay the mobilization of resources to

accelerate and install as of today and in the long term the structural measures that are the reduction of energy consumption and the deployment of renewable energies: they are the real solutions to achieve the European objectives for 2030, and at the same time ensure structural autonomy and security. Finally, the transition of the food system, which is not mentioned in the discourse, and which is supported by the "Farm to Fork" strategy, would benefit from being recognized at the same level as a [vector of autonomy at the service of the European project](#).

In a speech marked by the geopolitical upheaval caused by the war in Ukraine and its consequences for the EU, and visibly inspired by the concept of [war ecology](#), the President of the European Commission presented the Green Deal as a means of making Europe more autonomous in the implementation of its project based on democracy and solidarity. Combining the search for autonomy and the fight against environmental crises has solid foundations for a continent that is still far too dependent on imported fossil fuels. This orientation also marks an increased awareness of the physical realities of the continent and the need to use resources sparingly so as not to depend on regimes with different values. This awareness, illustrated by the announcement of legislation on access to critical raw materials, is salutary at a time when the door has been opened for a renewal of the European project through a revision of the treaties called for by the President of the Commission herself, in which the rise of ecological issues will have to take its full place.

In the short term, Ursula van der Leyen rightly welcomed the EU's rapid and united response in the energy field, which has enabled important steps to be taken in preparing for the winter by acting on energy storage, and by proposing coordinated plans for saving gas and now electricity. The deleterious distributional effects of electricity pricing on social cohesion can now be addressed, by facilitating the taxation of exceptional and unanticipated profits of energy companies. This European solidarity will have to continue to prove itself over the winter, which will undoubtedly provide lessons on what has worked and what can be improved. However, the way out of the energy crisis is to focus on long-term solutions and not to set the wrong priorities.

First, the current crisis has allowed the issue of [sufficiency](#) to emerge in the European debate, although its concrete translation is limited to short-term gas and electricity savings plans. Once the winter is over, it would be useful to capitalize on the current experience and to launch a reflection on the scale of the Union in order to make this concept a long-term one, as much from the point of view of reducing strategic dependencies as from the point of view of coherence with environmental objectives, and to implement more structural transformations to initiate the changes in lifestyles necessary for the ecological transition and for strategic autonomy.

The energy crisis has led Member States to engage in massive spending to limit the price of energy. However, a major challenge for the EU is to gradually move away from these poorly targeted policies that are costly for public budgets, in order to concentrate resources on long-term solutions: deployment of renewable energies, energy renovation, and mobility aid for the most vulnerable households. A first positive signal came from the European Parliament, which supported increasing the 2030 targets to 45% of renewable energy and reducing energy demand from 9% to 14.5%. But doubling the share of renewables in eight years requires a change of scale and the mobilization of additional financial resources. This should justify the launch of a political discussion on new common resources at the European level beyond the recovery plan, which is all the more justified in a macroeconomic context that is more difficult for Member States' budgets with the rise in interest rates.

It is also important to keep a systemic perspective on the evolution of our energy and food systems. The [development of hydrogen](#) is useful for the decarbonization of certain industrial sectors and possibly in transportation and eventually for the seasonal production of electricity. But, contrary to the words of the President of the Commission, this development will certainly be more of a change for certain sectors than the 'new deal' announced for the European energy system; while it is legitimate to support its deployment today, it will not be useful everywhere

and for everything and should not be the only priority. As the challenges of decarbonization are major and require the development of cooperation in all sectors of the economy, it is also important not to limit EU diplomacy to a search for energy volumes to be imported in the form of gas or hydrogen. Finally, despite the context marked by the energy crisis, the transition of the food system is at the heart of the Green Deal, and would have deserved to be mentioned at the same level given the important deadlines to come. In order to resolve the challenges of European construction, the ecological transition and its transformations on the food and energy systems are all relevant.

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