



## How do we reconcile sustainability with global economic growth, asks Justas Vincas Paleckis

GDP – a huge amount, perhaps, but if this amount of money is not spent on trying to save the planet, the damage will be incalculable. Because of NATO demands, member states spend two per cent of their GDP on defence, with some countries spending even more. The question is, are the resources for combating climate change really sufficient when compared to the amount already spent on defence.

The EU is, and must remain, the leader in the fight against climate change; therefore, there is a great responsibility on EU citizens to be an example to the rest of the world on how to live an environmentally friendly life – and on how to force industry to do the same. We need a new technological revolution capable of delivering a breakthrough in creating new technologies. Large sums of money and the best available human capital needs to be employed to produce clean and emission-free energy. Pricing is an extremely important instrument to encourage change. If governments use taxation on industries, this could provide the incentives to develop and use advanced technologies

**T**o argue that mankind is not responsible for climate change has become faintly ridiculous, even though several prominent politicians in some EU countries are still trying to play this petty game. At the EU summit in March, Javier Solana and Benita Ferrero-Waldner stated that climate change is becoming the biggest security threat in today's world. Therefore climate change must be central to Europe's preventive security policy. The most serious threats to global security could be the possible migratory movements resulting from climate change, as parts of the world become uninhabitable or inhospitable. Floods, heat waves, shortages of drinking water and food in unstable countries would result in mass migrations.

The collective wisdom is that the cost of climate change prevention will be around one to five per cent of global

to produce more efficient products.

It is absolutely critical to develop a 'bottom-up' approach to climate change – the efforts to combat climate change need to be based not only on political impetus, but also on civil society, both in developed and developing countries. Therefore, public information campaigns should be launched, including educational programmes in schools and universities to provide citizens with analysis and evaluations of the state of climate change and propose appropriate measures on how to react, especially changing the way of life in order to reduce emissions.

The poor and developing countries in the world have contributed least to climate change and are suffering the most from its consequences. Thus there is a need to provide developing countries with affordable technologies →



and financial support. Centre right parties might claim that economic growth and the creation of new jobs are more important than fighting climate change, but we socialists argue that both are important. We want economic growth and the creation of new jobs, but not at the expense of our planet. The tax system in EU countries should support the weakest and be tougher on those who are strong. The biggest polluters have to be made to modernise their companies, planes and buses, to change to an environmentally friendly regime. Investment in energy-saving technologies must be stimulated. After all, the cheapest and cleanest energy is energy that is saved.

A lot of environmental pollution problems can be solved if people deliberately change their way of living and thinking: limit their unnecessary expenditures and luxuries, value more active recreation in nature and walk and cycle more. All of this is shown in the lifestyle in Nordic countries, where social democratic traditions have deep roots. They are good examples, showing that economic growth and an environmental style of living do not contradict each other.

Even if centre-right governments come to power, they usually leave the mainstream social and ecological policies unchanged. In these countries, renewable sources of energy are widely used, and waste sorting and recycling are effective. Also in these countries, it is normal for prime ministers and ministers to cycle to work; on the contrary, people would be surprised if one of them were to “show off” by driving an

expensive car which uses lots of fuel and pollutes the environment.

If the Nordic model were to be applied all over Europe and the wider world, it would contribute greatly to the

fight against climate change. Currently, for example, 50 per cent of EU citizens use private cars and only 20 per cent use public transport – and in some countries half the trips by car are made for distances less than 0.5 km. No country is able to reverse climate change on its own. If we want to avoid the worst catastrophic scenarios, we have to make every effort we can, together and worldwide. In other words, the world is a family and as far as climate change is concerned, we will all sink or swim together. ★

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Justas Vincas Paleckis MEP will take part in the Green Week debate on sustainable growth