

THE FUTURE OF EASTERN EUROPE AND ECO- DEMOCRACY

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The Green Europe Foundation (GEF) is a European-level political foundation whose mission is to contribute to a lively European sphere of debate and to foster greater involvement by citizens in European politics. GEF strives to mainstream discussions on European policies and politics both within and beyond the Green political family. The foundation acts as a laboratory for new ideas, offers cross-border political education and a platform for cooperation and exchange at the European level.

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This publication is part of the Transnational Project The Future of Eastern Europe and Eco democracy. Democracy in Eastern Europe is hanging by a thread. Authoritarianism is growing and nationalist narratives are reopening old conflicts. The pandemic has exposed governments' inefficiencies to react to any sort of crisis and contributed to heighten polarisation in an already polarised society. On the other side, hope is on the horizon as progressive movements are taking over power at the local level, as well as at the rapidly growing mobilisation of public around environmental issues. How could we leverage these small steps and use them to strengthen the Green movement in the region?

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I The Future of Eastern Europe Conference

Thirty years ago a major shift occurred in global politics and Eastern Europe: states dissolved and collapsed and new ones were established the system radically changed. During this period there was a promise that after a period of long struggle, we would achieve democracy and well-being.

But as we look back today, it is clear that this has not happened, and if it ever briefly did, it was not sustainable. The last few decades have been full of hope as well as misery, protests and revolutions, conflicts and wars, economic uphills and downfalls, democratisation and backsliding.

This story has not ended, it is developing and ongoing, with many more challenges and opportunities ahead. And all of us, Young Greens and activists in Eastern Europe, are part of this. Therefore we at Cooperation and Development Network Eastern Europe, alongside our partners at GEF and other Green political foundations, decided to organise a conference where all the issues we are facing could be discussed.

We began thinking on important questions. Questions like “How did we end up where we are now? What is the role of global powers such as the EU, Russia and China in our region? Should we be hopeful for the future as we see emerging environmental movements and progressive political actors? Can we achieve climate prosperity and what challenges do we have regards energy and transition?”

During the conference, we tried to find answers to these through panel discussions with invited speakers, informal talks, workshops and sharing our perspectives with each other.

The aim of the conference was to provide a space for Young Greens from Eastern Europe to discuss what the common vision for building an authentic Green movement in the region is, and more also what our role in it could be. We wanted to explore existing positive potentials and have the space to meet with other progressive political actors from the region.

The Conference was a part of the **transnational project “Future of Eastern Europe and (Eco)democracy”** that was organised by the Green European Foundation with the support of CDN, the Green Institute of Greece, Sustainable Development Forum Green Window, Green Thought Association and Ecopolis Foundation.

Although the Conference was planned to happen prior to the CDN General Assembly in Tbilisi, Georgia in March 2022, taking everything into consideration and being mindful of delegates’ concerns and safety, the Executive Committee (EC) assessed the ongoing situation and decided to postpone the event. In the end, we met in Riga, in Latvia, on the 6-7th of June 2022.





Programme

Day 1, Monday, June 6

10:00-10:15 **Opening of the conference**

10:15-11:30 **Eastern Europe as a region – a story of turbulent transformation**

Speakers:

- ▶ Sonja Schiffers, Director of Heinrich-Boell Foundation, South Caucasus Office
- ▶ Anastasiya Dorofeeva, Belarusian Green party, Belarusian anti-nuclear campaign, hub “Green foundations”

Description: For more than thirty years Eastern Europe is a region of independent nation-states. During this period there was the promise that after a long struggle democracy and well-being would be achieved. Looking at it today, it is clear that most Eastern European countries are far from democracy and the well-being of citizens.

In this session, we tried to analyse and reflect on the last decades of Eastern Europe, mainly focusing to find the roots of current problems and possible solutions by looking back at the recent history – what shaped the region, how the democratisation and transition took place.



12:00-13:30 **Influence of Global Powers: Eastern Europe at the crossroads between democracy and autocracy**

Speakers:

- ▶ Anton Cherepenko, the Free Hong Kong Center in Kyiv
- ▶ Zarina Burkadze Associate Professor of Political Science, Iliia State University
- ▶ Raluca Besliu, contributor of Green European Journal focusing on Eastern European affairs
- ▶ Teo Comet, European Greens

Description: Discussing political dynamics and transformation of Eastern Europe cannot take place without paying attention to global powers and their involvement in the region.

With this session we aimed to map global powers: EU – China, Russia and US – and their interests; What role do they play in supporting democracy and progressive agenda or the opposite – encouraging and financing anti-democratic, right-wing and authoritarian forces.





15:30-17:00 **War in Ukraine: Context, Present and the Effect on the region**

Description: Russian aggression against Ukraine is continuing. Every day we are witnessing atrocities, war crimes and violations of international law from the Russian side, at the same time Ukraine is bravely defending its people, sovereignty, democracy and even Europe as a whole.

In this session, we took a look at a few different aspects of the conflict: the context of the war, the historical roots of Russian aggression, the current events, as well as what Greens should do to help Ukraine, and how the ongoing war affects countries in the region.



17:30-19:00 **Energy – a veto point and/or a chance for democracy?**

Speakers:

- ▶ Manana Kochladze, Bankwatch Strategic Area Leader – Democratization and Human Rights
- ▶ Yevheniia Zasiadko, Head of climate and transport department at Ecoaction – Centre for Environmental Initiatives



Workshop:

- ▶ Sandy-Kyriaki Fameliari, ElectaEnergy Cooperative

Description: The energy we choose reflects the systems we support. In this session, we discussed energy as the core factor for sustaining authoritarian regimes and the way the energy sector influences political dynamics. As well as focussing on the possibility of democratisation through energy – decentralisation, renewables and the prospect of energy cooperatives in Eastern Europe.



Day 2, Tuesday, June 7th

10:00-11:30 **Eco-Democracy as a new paradigm for Eastern Europe**

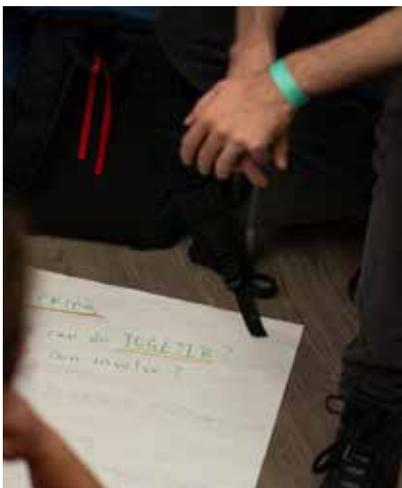
Facilitators:

- ▶ Anna Maniadi and Dimitris Papageorgiou, Green Institute of Greece

Description: The Workshop aimed to add a philosophical, ethical and institutional dimension to the conversations on the Future of Eastern Europe happening at the Conference. It hoped to bring together the different voices and ideas from the wealth of participants and facilitate a meaningful discussion on how to put Ecology at the Centre of Democracy.

How can we make democracy more ecological? What kind of changes do we need to apply to our thinking about participation, institutions and decision-making to put ecology and the environment at the forefront of our political systems?

These are some of the questions that we asked and tried to answer at our Eco-democracy Workshop!





12:00-13:30 **Conflicts in Eastern Europe: the theory and beyond**

Description: The session aimed to provide participants with the basis of conflict theory and conflict resolution and analyze the conflicts in EE through case studies. The session encompasses theoretical and practical parts that were conducted through non-formal education methods. The objectives of the session were 1) to understand the concept of conflict (origin, causes, consequences), 2) to discuss the mechanisms of handling conflict, particularly, conflict resolution, and 3) to explore the conflicts that happened in EE in recent years, their consequences and current state.



15:30-17:00 **Open Mic**

17:30-19:30 **Movements into politics: Green Wave in Eastern Europe**

Speakers:

- ▶ Justine Pantelejeva, Progresīvie, Latvia
- ▶ Sopo Shubitidze, Mtsvaneebi, Georgia
- ▶ Predrag Momčilović, Ne davimo Beograd, Serbia
- ▶ Stefan Vukmanovic, Ura Montenegro
- ▶ Koray Doğan Urbarlı, Green Party Turkey



Description: For the last decades, if you checked the electoral map of Europe intending to see how Green parties have been performing, you would see a clear pattern: Greens in the west and north do well – they get elected in national and regional parliaments, city councils, win mayorships and even participate in governing coalitions; while in the east – you would see a grey colour representing either absence of Green parties from the political landscape or lack of support and therefore relevance. However, in recent years the pattern is dissolving and becoming a blur, the Green wave spreading to the East.

During the panel, we discussed the ongoing Green wave with newly established Green political parties across Eastern Europe with the aim to analyse current success, find the patterns and similarities, understand the importance of grassroots movements and civil society, map challenges, envision the future and their influence on the political landscape



II Ecodemocracy – a just transition for all life

In her book, 'The Democracy of Species', the biologist and writer Robin Wall Kimmerer offers a compelling vision for a profound reassessment of our relationship to the non-human world, based on the traditional ecological knowledge and wisdom to be found in indigenous teachings. At its core is the notion of all species, places and parts of the world as living persons, not as inferior beings or inanimate objects. This notion is also at the heart of the movement advocating for legal rights for nature, as well as making ecocide a crime, both of which have been gaining followers, ground and momentum.

But reassessing our position as a species should also have consequences on the way we govern our affairs. In democratic systems, how can we begin to include our non-human relatives in decision-making? What does it mean to represent not only ourselves, but also to attempt to represent others, rivers, mountains, eagles or micro-organisms in the soil? And could such an expansion of representation lead to a truly ecological form of democracy?



Anna Maniadi and Dimitris Papageorgiou Ecodemocracy workshop, Riga.

The term 'Ecodemocracy' is a relatively open term still under formation. In short, it involves the inclusion of deep ecological principles in our governance systems, aiming for, as Jan Lundberg put it: 'the restructuring of our society for maximum conservation and equal rights of all species'. With our current global trajectory, it is imperative that we begin to question our systems of governance, and by extension production and consumption, and strive to form alternatives that understand and incorporate the earth's limitations and our responsibility towards other species. How can we make democracy more ecological? What kind of changes do we need to apply to our thinking about participation, institutions and decision-making to put ecology and the environment at the forefront of our political systems? These are some of the questions that we must address if we are to bring about the institutional and social transformation needed for a truly sustainable existence.

Critical in this is revolutionising our thinking about ourselves as a species, not as destructive rulers or even well-meaning custodians of the planet, but as co-inhabitants, as equal members of what Kimmerer calls: 'the democracy of species'. Institutions, legal frameworks and especially local and regional governance structures must begin to shift their approach to include non-human beings in their considerations, for example with regards to resource use, especially of land and water, and also economic activity. To this end, the endless growth mindset which has dominated politics for the last 40 years and the extractivist mindset which has dominated for at least over two centuries, must be deconstructed and replaced by a focus on sustainability and degrowth. Giving equal rights to non-human beings and redefining our notion of citizenship is one way in which this shift can be brought about at the institutional level and that of society as a whole. Green politics has always been at the forefront of inclusion; it is time for us to fight for the inclusion of non-human beings as our fellow citizens.

A book that seeks to provide a basis for the extension of rights and citizenship to animals is Zoopolis, by Canadian philosophers Sue Donaldson and Will Kymlicka. The book highlights the need to realign our understanding of rights and responsibilities and what exactly constitutes a citizen, as well as the rights extended to 'citizens of other countries'. It seeks to expand the theory of animal rights in particular, and why it's important to understand that animals do have inalienable rights and must be considered persons before the law. The movements for the rights of nature extend this idea even further to include non-animals, such as rivers, lakes and mountains, as well as nature as a whole.

It can be said that young people already understand the importance of ecodemocratic principles implicitly. At least two to three generations of humans have now lived through some of the fastest changes with regards to the climate crisis and species extinction. It is up to us to reinvent politics, disrupt the status quo and create a solid foundation not only for us but also for the continued existence of biodiversity on our planet. We can do this in a myriad ways, through demonstrations, strikes, advocacy, education, lifestyle changes and also through coming together to debate, discuss and make decisions on our common action. Also working within democratic institutions, in the public sector, civil society, industry and other spheres is crucial. Every effort towards the radical change required from us is valuable, whether individual or collective, but history suggests that for changes of the magnitude required to be implemented and be effective, concerted collective effort is a necessity. Just like a forest, whose constituent beings all strive towards the continuation of life each on their own but at the same time supporting each other, so must we empower and enable our communities to thrive not in competition and not at the expense of the planet.



The River Aaos/Vjosa



In the southwestern Balkans there is an entity which after millennia of unhindered existence is struggling to maintain its freedom and right to exist as it is. This entity is a river in which, in addition to water, sediment and nutrients, flows with life, culture, history, human labour and opportunities that underpin entire economies. It is the Aaos River, or Vjosa as it is called in Albania, which is home to 190 of the total 260 km of its bed. Unfortunately, the valuable contribution of the Aaos is not enough for some who want to sacrifice it and exploit its strength and health by creating artificial barriers, small and large dams along its way to the Adriatic sea.

Fortunately, people and organizations of international and national scope who understand the necessity and value of maintaining it in its current state were on its side from early on. Thus, the Aaos/Vjosa is still one of the last free-flowing rivers in Europe. The fact that it is not being blocked by concrete walls as we speak and has not been fragmented by the ravages of the hydroelectric industry in the Balkans is due to great struggles made by ordinary people, locals who left their daily lives behind for a while and fought for the rights of a river, together with organisations such as Euronatur, Riverwatch, the Mediterranean Institute for Nature and Anthropos (MedINA), Pindos Perivallontiki and EcoAlbania. The fact that some people saw the impending disaster and did not rest on the words and reassurances of politicians, investors and construction companies, ensured the survival of a river and with it the survival and well-being of all ecosystems and societies that depend on or benefit from it.

One wonders why it is so difficult and complicated to claim the right to free expression and movement for an organism other than our own. How much easier it would be to defend and save some of the last refuges of life and freedom if they already had some form of equal representation, as would be appropriate within the rule of law; if the forms of governance of our places, the so-called democracies, took into account other entities with which we coexist and on which we are directly or indirectly dependent; if these democracies worked not only for the landlord, but also for their home, their environment and their fellow citizens; if the Aaos, the Sava, the Soča could defend their right to “walk”, to flow unimpeded, to subsist and keep alive hundreds of ecosystems and with them thousands of species of life, offering, as always, selflessly to human societies.

While in the US and recently in Europe the negative effects of the indiscriminate installation of hydroelectric dams and the irrational diversion of thousands of kilometres of rivers are being observed, in the Balkans the same outdated practices are being promoted (often funded by central European financial institutions), neglecting the environmental, socio-economic risks they entail. Thus, while elsewhere we have river restoration projects, removal of dams and granting of legal/human rights to rivers (Canada-Magpie, New Zealand-Whanganui, USA-Klamath), in the Balkans and Greece we are still trying to delimit and enclose in pipes, artificial lakes and dams what western visitors come to admire as the last wild and unspoiled landscapes of the old continent, Europe.



III Balkans and Eastern Europe: future of energy

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has sent shockwaves across the world, but nowhere has its reverberations been felt more than in Eastern Europe and the Balkans. Still reeling from the shocks of the Soviet Union's legacy of a centralised economy, and the Western neoliberal economic dogma of aggressive privatization, the region is grappling with forming its own cultural, economic and political identity. And nowhere is this in-between state more evident than in the energy sector: Eastern European and Balkan States are still reliant on either a top-down, highly bureaucratic, centralised energy system, or they have moved towards a laissez-faire market approach, opening up to hawkish private investors seeking to extract a quick profit. And of course, fossil fuels still rule the day. In fact, in 2020, 18 coal-fired power plants in the Western Balkans emitted 2.5 times as much sulphur dioxide as the entire EU fleet of 221 plants.

Although some eastern European states have pushed back against other pieces of EU climate legislation, such as the farm to fork strategy, energy has been pushed to the top of their agendas, viewed in light of their geopolitical sovereignty as an existential threat (more so than the climate crisis). Poland, where the heating sector is responsible for nearly a quarter of CO2 emissions, is observing the highest growth in heat pump installations in the EU, paving the way for a decarbonized heating system. Estonia has updated its 2030 target for renewable energy penetration in total electricity consumption from 40% to 100%, thus supercharging the transition to a clean energy grid. Romania and North Macedonia have come forth with updated National Climate and Energy Plans in light of the RePowerEU strategy.

However, a mere switch to renewable energy under a for-profit, fully privatized (or fully centralized) energy system risks perpetuating the same patterns of inequality, extractivism and authoritarianism of the old fossil fuel system. In its landmark 2018 Clean Energy Package of Directives, the EU legally recognized the right of citizens to produce, self-consume, store and even distribute renewable energy, through what is known as 'energy communities'. And the power of these communities should not be underestimated: By 2050, [around 45%](#) of renewable energy production in the EU could be coming from citizens, about a quarter of which could come through participation in cooperatives. Simultaneously, citizens have the capacity to invest up to [240 billion euros](#) toward the energy transition by 2030.

Unfortunately, South-Eastern Europe and the Balkans as a broader region still significantly lags behind in the establishment of energy communities. But the seeds of just energy futures are being planted as we speak. In March of 2022, Czechia inaugurated a [national Union](#) of energy communi-

ties to bring together different stakeholders, advocate for the right of citizens to produce their own energy, and offer technical and financial support to energy communities in the country. Serbia has taken significant steps to enshrine the definition of 'prosumer' into law, while in Bosnia and Herzegovina a regional government is pushing for the deployment of 50,000 PV rooftop PV systems on residential and commercial buildings. Greece, which already boasts a fairly advanced community energy movement, has been in ongoing dialogue with Balkan community energy groups providing technical support, including for just transition regions, and facilitating networking. CommonEn, an energy community based in Ioannina city, in the northern region of Epirus, has started an energy sovereignty campaign with the support of the Guerrilla Foundation, to push for citizens to take control of the grid, accelerate the clean energy transition, while protecting local ecosystems from the impacts of renewable energy technologies like wind or hydro, through careful and democratic planning.

Resilience in the face of geopolitical shocks and the climate crisis can only be built through long term solutions that enhance democratic participation and empower citizens. Energy communities can garner acceptance towards renewable energy by involving citizens at every stage of project planning and licensing. Importantly, they can function as 'hubs' for education and a broader cultivation of energy literacy and sustainability, to empower their members to not only save energy, but make deeper green transformations in their everyday lives and in their broader communities. Haunted by the legacies of state authoritarianism and still traumatized by the neoliberal dogma, Eastern European States and the Balkans can choose an energy future that points to a third way: one of radical re-democratization.

[Chris Vrettos, Electra Energy Cooperative](#)



Community Energy Workshops.

[Electra Energy Cooperative](#) aims to support the transition to a democratic, efficient, and sustainable energy system with citizens and local communities at its core.



IV Russia's ally in the EU: The European Far-Right

The Russian government is strategically supporting far-right parties and movements in both Eastern and Western European countries to build alliances that advance Russia's interests, secure support for Putin's authoritarian regime in the EU and ensure ideological alignment.

This is especially beneficial when Russian interests are in direct conflict with those of the Union, as in the context of the current invasion of Ukraine. The Russian government's ultimate objective is to destabilise the EU and create a dent in the unity of its decision-making processes.

In turn, the far right in European countries also has a lot to gain from their alliance with Russia. It represents a model on which to base their policies and decision-making processes and to justify their actions, while giving them access to financial resources for their activities.

Far-right parties also secure a bargaining position within the EU, by showing that they have an alternative and they are not completely dependent on the EU's support.

Viktor Orban's shifting stance

Perhaps the most serious example of this is the case of Hungary at the moment. The dynamics between Orban's Hungary and Putin's Russia have greatly changed over the years. Until his second mandate as a Prime Minister, Orban was a staunch opponent of Putin's regime, but his stance drastically switched after the 2008 financial crisis.

Orban was allegedly [advised by one of his economic councillors](#), Gyorgy Matolcsy, who currently governs the Hungarian National Bank, that the crisis would lead to the transformation of the world economy with the rise of Eastern powers, particularly Russia and China, and the decline of the West. Orban was also impressed with Putin's social model, in which the [business elite was dependent on the Russian leader](#) with only few additional independent players. He decided to emulate this model.

The Hungarian Prime Minister became [Russia's 'Trojan horse' in the EU](#). When Putin visited Budapest in early 2015, there was a EU-wide consensus of [freezing bilateral talks with Putin](#) after pro-Russian militants destroyed the Malaysian MH17 over occupied eastern Ukraine in June 2014. The discussion between Putin and Orban [an affront](#) to Brussels.

In 2014, Orban gave a speech in Romania, announcing that [Hungary was an illiberal democracy](#) and describing Russia, as well as China and Turkey, as model states.

As his leadership shifted more towards illiberalism, Orban faced increasing backlash from Brussels about his nationalist-populist government. The Kremlin presented itself as a [less confrontational alternative](#), more pragmatic, less ideological and concerned and interested in media freedom and rule of law.

Concretely, how does Russia support Hungary?

One example of Russia's support would be the Paks nuclear reactors' expansion. In 2014, Orban signed without parliamentary backing a [EUR10 billion loan agreement](#) with Russia to renovate and expand the Hungarian nuclear power plant at Paks. Hungary commissioned Russia's nuclear state corporation, Rosatom, to construct two reactor blocks.

The existing Paks nuclear reactors were also based on Russian technology, with Moscow supplying the replacement for the existing blocks, which will need to be decommissioned in the next 10-20 years.

This nuclear partnership would further increase Hungary's dependence on Russian energy, rather than reduce it, despite the fact that Orban had previously called for energy diversification and lessening of Hungary's reliance on Russia, from which it [received 85% of its gas supply and 65% of its oil supply](#).

And the winner is? Russia!

The alliance with Orban has paid off for Putin. He can count on an EU leader who has officially endorsed Russia as a model for its political outlook.

The fact that Orban is a high-ranking official of his country further legitimises the partnership with Russia and creates a space for other far-right parties and movements to rise in other European countries.

Hungary has also proven to be an adamant defender of Russian interests in the EU, when it comes to the current Russian attack on Ukraine. He reluctantly [joined the EU's initial sanctions](#) against Russia, but opposed additional energy sanctions.

A key example of Hungary's actions in support of Russian interests at the EU level was Orban's refusal to approve the EU's decision to ban imports of Russian oil. Since the decision had to be adopted unanimously to take effect at the Council level, Orban's position held a lot of weight and stalled an important process, while enabling other countries, such as [Czechia, Slovakia and Bulgaria](#), to express their dissent on the matter as well. This benefited Putin, not in the least by paralysing the decision on embargo from going forth for a while and by demonstrating the lack of cohesion within the EU.



What does this mean for the EU?

By building alliances with European far-right leaders, Russia is leading a strategic effort to destabilise the EU and undermine it from within, showing its members' discrepancies and lack of cohesion. Russia's far-right allies, such as Orban, promote its interests in the Union, while stalling any decisions that could be detrimental to Russia, such as the oil embargo.

The EU initially approached with hesitancy the growing illiberal tendencies in European countries, including Hungary. However, Orban's substantial victory in the 2022 parliamentary elections seemed to act like a wake-up call for the EU to address authoritarian tendencies. Shortly after the elections, the EU [invoked the conditionality mechanism](#) on rule of law against Hungary, a process that had been delayed for months.

In September 2022, a European Parliament report accused Hungary of becoming a 'hybrid regime of electoral autocracy,' and urged the Commission to use all tools at its disposal, particularly the budgetary conditionality regulation.

Shortly after this, the EU Commission [recommended](#) freezing 65% of Hungary's EU funds, around 7.5 billion, an important amount needed to build the Hungarian economy in a time of inflation and dire economic need. This could put pressure on Orban to revise some of his policies and more closely fall in line with other EU leaders.

V A Green Vision for Greece and Turkey

We start with the story of Sisyphus, the king of Corinth (Ephyra) who betrays Zeus and kidnaps Aigina, the daughter of the river god Asopus. Thanatos, the angel of death, is dispatched to Sisyphus, who cannot escape Zeus' wrath. However, the king who chained him does not want to see his fate when he is taken to the land of the dead. Because of his defiance, the gods' wrath awaited him. The gods of the underworld curse Sisyphus to spend eternity rolling a stone on top of a mountain; each time he approaches the summit, the stone falls down, and this cycle continues indefinitely.

The myth of Sisyphus can serve as a useful metaphor for understanding Turkey-Greece relations. An effort is being made to construct a peace process that includes all cultural, geographical, and social intersections. Unfortunately, we can see that this process is disrupted for various reasons, and we are rolling backwards like Sisyphus' stone. The ongoing conflict between the two countries, on the other hand, heightens the gravity of not only the societal relationship, but also the environmental destruction. At the same time, as the effects of the climate crisis bring more ecological destruction, it is impossible not to notice the commonality of the problems we face.

Can the common problems that both countries face contribute to the resolution of the conflict as societies living in the same world? This is the question that this article aims to answer; we hope to present an assessment under the headings of common problems, fundamental differences between Turkey and Greece, and how an ecological democracy that cares for all living things can help us work together to find a solution. We would like to state that the presentations of our guests who attended the Eco Democracy Workshop in Çanakkale on August 31st, 2022 influenced this evaluation.

Common Environmental Problems across the Aegean Sea

The situations in both countries that have contributed to the transformation of climate change into a crisis and the consequences that resulted from this crisis are extremely similar. Similarly, we must state that each situation that we will discuss by categorizing it in this section intersects with others. We cannot solve the effects and consequences by looking at them separately. Although we hope that both countries will think and act in concert, we will go into greater detail in the following sections.

Fossil Fuels

The primary causes of the climate crisis are fossil fuels. While there is an almost general agreement on the severity of the climate crisis, effective policies to halt the process and phase out fossil fuels are not becoming mainstream. Scientists, non-governmental organizations, activists, and communities have long attempted to make their concerns about the fossil divestment process heard by decision makers. On a local, national, and international scale, numerous studies, campaigns, and projects are carried out. The Paris Climate Agreement was signed with the strength of these efforts, the signatory countries stated their plans for the transition away from fossil fuels in their national declarations of intent, the European Union announced the Green New Deal plan, and they began to develop strategies and plans for a just transition and energy transition. If all of these plans are about intentions, we want to focus on how things are now. With Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the world's agenda, particularly in Europe, began to shift rapidly.



After Russia stopped sending natural gas to Europe, the search for new gas caused natural gas prices to soar around the world. On the other hand, Europe abandoning the planned green energy transition process and reintroducing the operational status of coal-fired power plants appears to be a weakening agenda in the parliament.

The need for 'energy independence' drives nation states to reintroduce fossil fuels in their own countries and demonstrate their legitimacy while doing so.

Oil

We can say that the search for oil in the Aegean Sea is a common environmental crisis for both countries. This crisis, which is not generally regarded as 'environmental', is being assessed in both countries' political contexts. Conflict is created, based on a shared claim to the seas, with past political, economic, and social engagements threatening each other.

The violation of the territorial waters due to the oil exploration process in Greece and Turkey, with foreign policy arguments being: "the oil coming out of this is our right" and the national press of both countries are fueling the conflict by approaching the situation with a nationalist lens.¹ However, there are numerous other critical issues that must be addressed here.

Deep-sea whales are being deafened by seismic explosions used in oil and gas exploration. The existence of these and many other creatures in the Aegean Sea that live, move, and hunt by sound is threatened.² Spills and accidents that may occur not only during exploration but also during deep-sea oil extraction can cross borders, destroy the marine ecosystem, marine biodiversity, and shrink the living spaces of all beings, and in the same way. With the fantasy of constantly using and reusing fossil fuels, the goal of a carbon-free future becomes a dream.

Coal-fired Power Plants

We understand the role of coal as a fossil fuel in the climate crisis. With this information, we must identify coal-fired power plants as one of the dirtiest energy production methods. Although both countries rely on coal-fired power plants for their energy needs, they differ in one important way. Greece, a member of the European Union, is developing a more stable coal exit policy. It announced last year that it will completely phase out coal by 2025, making it the tenth European country to announce a coal phase-out plan for 2025.³ We can track the cooperation of non-governmental organizations in the country and state from project processes to ensure a fair coal exit process.⁴

Turkey, on the other hand, finally ratified the Paris Agreement last year. Despite this, it stated that it would pursue a net-zero carbon policy as late as 2050. As of this date, no policy changes have been implemented to reduce the use of coal-fired power plants. Coal-fired power plants continue to enjoy preferential treatment; new power plants are being built.⁵

Forest Fires

Forest fires are a natural part of the Mediterranean forest's life cycle. However, every summer, we are faced with forest fires that are much larger than the previous year due to population pressure and the increasing severity of the climate crisis.

We've been witnessing a lot of these fires in Turkey and Greece over the last few summers. Thirty different forest fires were recorded in Greece in the first months of 2022, and we continued to receive reports about these fires in the months that followed.⁶ Turkey, on the other hand, announced in October that a fire had destroyed 14,000 hectares of forest land in 2022.⁷

Even if these fires, which last for days, destroy large forest areas and the forest ecosystem and spread to settlements, both countries' agendas lack concrete policy steps taken to improve the process. Despite the fact that fires are becoming more destructive, the necessary steps to gain fire resistance are not being taken quickly and effectively.

Mass Tourism

Combined with the issues discussed in the previous titles, tourism is not the first issue that comes to mind. However, it is a topic worth discussing as one of the primary causes of certain problems and challenges. In the Aegean region, where intense tourism seasons are experienced almost year-round, with both local and international tourists arriving, there is additional population pressure. With increasing population come increased construction, increased energy demand, and uncontrollable increases in both marine and terrestrial pollution.⁸

Locals living in tourist areas may face difficulties in meeting their basic needs. Water resources, which are already scarce, are at risk of depletion as a result of the drought. Similarly, forest fires in tourist areas are a dangerous intersection. According to some estimates, forest fires are used to clear the way for construction in Turkey.⁹

Refugees

The refugee crisis may appear unrelated to environmental policy. However, the situation has heightened tensions between the two countries, particularly in recent years. It is important to discuss the climate crisis and the situation of climate refugees in greater depth in the near future. In this way, understanding the flexibility of adaptation and adaptation processes, as well as the relations between institutions and states, is critical in crises; also planning for tensions, political conflict, and power struggles between countries. In terms of refugees, we can say that both countries are failing. This is an issue that we recommend should be examined further by civil society and institutions.



Future of Eastern Europe and Ecodemocracy

All of these issues can feel like a mountain of difficulties. What should we do to act together when we consider the cultural, political, social, and economic burdens of the past? It is a difficult question to answer. We can assume that a variety of solutions are possible. With this article, we want to emphasize a “holistic” approach. We can evaluate the concept of eco-democracy in the building of peace for healing together, without ignoring the rights of all living things and the planet.

Eco-democracy is a concept of democracy that is based on the active use of the human right to participate in order to represent non-human beings in decision-making processes. It is a flexible structure that takes into account the interests of humans and other species. It also promotes local and democratic participation based on a rethinking of the human-nature relationship. Given the extent of the crises caused by climate change in the Anthropocene era, it is clear that eco-democracy should be adopted as a method of democracy by all citizens. As a result, participation in decision-making processes is critical for climate justice to be available to all living and non-living beings and for an inclusive democracy to be understood. The most important transformation required to respond immediately to the ecological crisis is a democratic transition. This transition is possible through ecological integrity and *buen vivir, as well as eco-democracy for everyone and everything*.

In this context, while discussing the climate crisis and climate justice, we would like to elaborate on this statement by Gül ah Tırn at the Eco Democracy Workshop.

According to Rockström’s theory, the planet has 9 limits, we have exceeded 4 and the others are about to be crossed.¹⁰ These ‘borders’ are much more important than nation-state borders.

As we saw at COP26, there is no solution as long as nation states pursue their own economic and commercial concerns. For example; The target stated in the COP26 draft text as phase-out from coal has been changed to gradually be reduced. The clause to protect the Global South was also removed because Europe and America did not agree. When we say Global South and North, it is not without mentioning climate justice. While the global North is responsible for most of the carbon emissions, the Global South is more affected. Since there is a food crisis, water access problems, among other things, in the Global South, they are both more easily affected by the climate crisis and have a greater chance of being socially affected, also because many countries don’t have a functioning democracy. We can say that ecological decisions can be made and implemented much more easily in places that operate stronger democratic systems. At this point we need to look at inequality. Where inequality is constructed differently, there is both the exploitation of all living things and the exploitation of human labor. It is simultaneously interspecies, intersexual and interracial. When we think about these, the ecological crisis goes beyond the borders of the states and this needs to be a multidimensional, intersectional decision. Ecological democracy, including climate justice, paves the way for us to make many conceptualizations such as food democracy and energy democracy.

We must look beyond national identities, past issues, and political conflicts. We are not only a part of this planet, but we also share a world. And the future that the two neighboring states and society will create in this world is critical for the continuation of life, justice, and trust.

Even though this future structure appears to be more difficult and complicated, we have already begun to discuss it. It shouldn’t take long to put what we’ve been discussing into action. Because we are in the midst of a crisis with little time for change.



Conclusion

At the moment, we cannot discuss a democratic system built by ancient Greek society. We've changed a lot. However, we no longer live in a world where the Gods who watch us from Olympus punish and reward us according to the will of the Gods. Sisyphus is no longer required to carry that stone. He is free to leave. It is always possible to begin again. The lesson we should take from history is that conflict does not lead to a better world.

- ▶ To be aware of the environmental destruction we are witnessing
- ▶ Increasing resilience to the effects of the climate change
- ▶ As soon as possible, eliminate the causes of the crisis.
- ▶ Improving adaptation to the climate crisis
- ▶ Promoting a just transition

- ▶ Supporting local communities' struggles and defending their right to life
- ▶ Improving cultural, social, and economic cohesion
- ▶ Purify the language of hatred, listen to one another, face one another, and plan a common future for the future
- ▶ Participation rights must be protected and exercised.

We would like to propose step-by-step steps toward a green, just, and peaceful future that we must keep in mind and act upon. Making another world possible with all the vitality, diversity, culture, and the sun that warms the heart of the Aegean Sea can be a very enjoyable process. Looking back on our communities and seeing the commonality of the geography we live in and realizing that we share it with everyone else, is a good step toward healing.

Notes

The article 'A Green Vision for Greece and Turkey' was created with the assistance and contributions of the Eco Democracy Workshop preparation team, which includes Ceren Naz Büyükgebiz, Ayça Ceren Akdemir, Gökçe Gamlı, and Onur Elmas.

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VI Mobilising Young Activists: Coming together to enact Change

In the past three years, young people have found themselves in the most turbulent times of their lives. A global crisis that started with the COVID-19 pandemic has now evolved into full-scale chaos with the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the energy crisis, inflation, and skyrocketing living costs.

Even before this period, we have seen some magnificent examples of the mobilization of young activists. The #FridaysForFuture movement intended to raise awareness about climate change, started in August 2018 by a then 15-year-old Greta Thunberg and a few other activists, quickly evolved into a global phenomenon. Until today, FFF protests have been organized in more than 7,500 cities and involved more than 14,000,000 people. This is just one of the very few examples of how strong the mobilization of young activists can be when they gather around a common issue. We have seen similar successes with the #BlackLivesMatter and #MeToo movements.

A 2018 research by Tufts University's Center for Information & Research on Civic Learning and Engagement has shown that young people between the ages of 18 and 24 "...are now three times as likely to have attended a demonstration or march than in 2016". Additionally, nearly one-fourth of all youth have engaged in offline activism, which includes protesting, an act of civil disobedience, making statements in the public space, or participating in a union strike. As expected, young people are also very active in online public spaces. Now, more than ever, young people turn to social media apps like Instagram and TikTok to share their messages and beliefs and encourage others to act for change. Some of them have acquired a significant online following and influenced decision-makers to shape their policies. This shows that, although they are often portrayed as passive and uninterested, young people are truly the driving force of change. They are angry, worried, and frustrated – and they want us all to start working on the solutions now.

Youth activism is a massive opportunity for making our communities better; however, there are two essential things we should keep in mind.

1. To spread their message effectively, young activists must receive a proper education.

We need to help young activists achieve their goals by providing them with resources to help them understand decision-making processes and the context of the issues they are fighting for. Additionally, many young activists would benefit from guidance on how to act, who to reach out to and how to spread their message across communities they are targeting.

European Green Activists Training, a project implemented by Green European Foundation and its partners in several European countries, is an excellent example of a wholesome set of resources that can help young activists achieve change. Through several national training sessions, participants receive all the necessary context, methodologies and other types of knowledge that allows them to pursue activism regarding what they care about.

2. Fighting for a better tomorrow is important, but we must always ensure mental health comes first.

It is incredibly easy to burn out as an activist. Young activists are under a lot of burden while trying to fight for what they believe in. Being proactive in an online and offline world can be very tiring. Especially, fighting against establishments and institutions quickly becomes too much for everyone.

This is why young activists need to have access to help and resources to protect their mental health. As living costs get higher and higher, cost of therapy sessions is also increasing. Some activists simply gave up on searching for additional support because it's too expensive for them. There are some examples of good practice though – some NGOs in Croatia and Europe gather mental health professionals and offer free therapy sessions to activists and everyone else who needs support but is not able to afford it.

Overall, we can conclude that youth activism is an essential aspect of all change-making initiatives happening in the world. However, we must not forget that each of us plays a significant role in ensuring they are supported, have all the necessary resources, and are safe.



Simulation of Local Elections



Project name: Simulacija lokalnih izbora (eng. Simulation of local elections)

Location: Zagreb, Croatia

Project manager: Helena Stepić

Contact: helena-stepic@live.com

Mentors: 17 students of journalism, political science and sociology

Participants: 30 high school students

Simulation of local elections is a project for the development, implementation and evaluation of political and media literacy in an interactive way. In this project, young people assume the role of decision-makers and participate in the process of creating public policies. The main activity of the project is a two-day education on politics, media and sustainable development led by students of journalism, political science and sociology. The two-day training includes different roles such as politicians (creating a political campaign and youth program), journalists (writing articles, interviewing participants, preparing political debate), citizens (developing critical thinking and civic engagement) and activists (searching for problems, creating public pressure).

The participants are high school students from Zagreb. The main reasons for starting the project is research of the political literacy of high school students in Croatia, which indicate that Croatian high school students lack basic knowledge about politics, civic activism and civil society. The goals of the project are to teach young people fundamental democratic values, their civil rights and obligations, how to properly inform themselves and recognize fake news, the basics of public speaking and ultimately empower young people to fight for their rights and initiate positive social changes. Students who were the most active during the simulation also won tickets to the INmusic festival.

The next simulation of local elections will take place in March 2023.

Financing: The project was co-financed with funds obtained from the competition for student projects organized by the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of Zagreb and as part of the project “Challenging Youth”. The “Challenging Youth” project was implemented by the association Krugovi - a center for education, counseling and humanitarian action (<https://krugovi.hr/>), which is financed by the organization Civic Europe (<https://civic-europe.eu/>).

For more information: [Instagram](#)

Photos: [Google drive](#), TV report: [Youtube](#)



Publication Partners



The **Green European Foundation (GEF)** is a European level political foundation funded by the European Parliament. It is linked to, but independent of, other European Green actors such as the European Green Party and the Green Group in the European Parliament.

The mission of GEF is to contribute to the development of a European public sphere and to foster greater involvement by citizens in European politics, ultimately forging a stronger, more participative democracy. GEF strives to mainstream discussions on European policies and politics both within and beyond the Green political family. It works to create a common Green vision for Europe and to communicate this to the wider public.



The **Green Institute of Greece** is a non-governmental, not-for-profit scientific Foundation, active since March 2011. It aims at the study, analysis and dissemination of all aspects of ecological thinking and political ecology. The Institute was created after an initiative undertaken by the Green Political Party "Oikologoi Prasinoi" (Ecologists Greens) of Greece. Although they are affiliated to the Green Party, they do preserve an independent character. They work to promote research and documentation on environment, society, economy and politics from the perspective of political ecology.



Cooperation and Development Network Eastern Europe (CDN) is a capacity-building network of youth organisations committed to the development and implementation of Green ideas in Eastern Europe. CDN gathers 18 member and 6 partner organisations: youth wings of Green parties and NGOs whose work is rooted in Green values. CDN's political focus is on Eastern Europe, where the organisation works with local partners. CDN also collaborates with organisations and activists from the rest of Europe who want to support a Green Eastern Europe.



The **Green Thought Association (Yesil Düşünce Derneği)** was created as an independent association with the main objective of promoting Green ideas in Turkey. Its main fields of works are Green thinking, Green economy, sustainability, anti-nuclear and renewable energy policies, and other ecological and eco-political issues. In order to achieve its aims, it works together with environmental movements, ecologists, and Green political organisations. It organises seminars, workshops, conferences, and training courses, and publishes reports and briefing papers.



The **Sustainable Development Forum Green Window (Forum za održivi razvoj Zeleni prozor)** is based in Zagreb and aims to promote sustainable development, public advocacy of nature protection, environmental and human rights, and the education of citizens, especially young people, on these issues. Green Window works on achieving a free, democratic, pluralistic, tolerant, socially just and nonviolent society and endeavors to foster links and cooperation with other related associations and initiatives in Croatia and elsewhere in Europe.



Ecopolis (Ökopolisz Alapítvány) is a Hungarian foundation, whose main goal is to contribute to the development of political culture in Hungary. The foundation is guided by Hungarian Green Party manifesto and its three core values: sustainability, citizens' participation and social justice. Ecopolis strives to insert these values in the debates and decisions of the political community.





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