There is no doubt that the impact of the current health crisis will affect all sectors of the economy and of society and last far longer than we would like. This will certainly be the case in the buildings sector where much activity has slowed down or ground to a halt. To be prepared, many of us are already turning our attention to the identification of what factors are the most promising to rely on in the recovery period, once the health crisis is over. Drawing on our experiences that followed the global financial and economic crisis that struck just over ten years ago will help, although the policy landscape has changed dramatically.

The most dramatic changes that have occurred relate to the growing political acceptance, under pressure from the citizens, that climate change is an existential threat that cannot be ignored. This change manifests itself in at least three key moments:

- The adoption of The Paris Agreement in 2015;
- The publication of the European Commissions’ European Green Deal in December 2019;
- The commitment of all (but one) EU Member States to achieve climate neutrality by 2050, made in December 2019.

It is the second of these moments that I wish to reflect on in this Oped.

During the health crisis, we are hearing calls from various quarters asking that the pursuit of the measures in the European Green Deal be paused, put on ice or halted altogether. We are hearing some sectors of the economy are asking for extensions to reporting deadlines that fall during periods of confinement and reduced commercial activity.

No, we should, on the contrary, place the European Green Deal at the heart of the recovery and thus ensure that the stimulus measures to be adopted after the immediate health crisis is over, put us firmly on the path to climate neutrality. Our lives and our economies have suffered an unexpected shock, and to recover from it, we should seek to do it by greening our economies and improving our daily lives.

Before the measures to slow the spread of the COVID-19 virus were put in place, we were spending around 90% of our time in buildings. That percentage has undoubtedly increased for many of us. In current times, we more than ever feel how important living in a healthy indoor environment is for our well-being. Having affordable decent homes, working in a bright, warm workplace and learning in a safe environment are all qualities that we strive for and deserve.
For this reason, and for many more, I remain convinced that a key pillar of the economic and societal recovery that we must engineer today, will be the Renovation Wave concept that is included in the European Green Deal. The ideas in the Commission’s Green Deal are sketchy and we must wait until the end of September 2020 before we see its Strategic Communication on the Renovation Wave. My expectation is that it should be a long-term renovation strategy for the EU. The measures it will propose must give substantial support to the efforts of Member States, regions and cities as they transform our buildings to be highly energy efficient and decarbonised by 2050.

The partners of the Renovate Europe Campaign, run by EuroACE, have published a Position Paper (link here) on Making the EU Renovation Wave a Success in which we read 10 principles that are recommended for inclusion in all future deep energy renovation programmes. The principles are sound and, although not necessary original, combining them together in the design of future deep energy renovation programmes will certainly strengthen those programmes and increase their chance of success.

The recommendations advise, inter alia, putting energy efficiency first to ensure actual energy consumption is reduced, that good practices are scaled up, that specific building typologies and ownership models are considered and that stakeholders are meaningfully engaged in devising and implementing deep energy renovation programmes. It also points to the need to ensure that the right number of pertinently qualified workers (all along the value chain) are drawn into the sector and that tailored financing is made more widely available.

In their operational phase, buildings consume around 40% of primary energy in the EU and emit above 36% of all energy-related CO₂ into the atmosphere. Without tackling this waste and pollution, the EU will never meet its goal of achieving climate neutrality by 2050. At the same time, the economic and social impact that increased activity on deep energy renovation can have is positively huge. In the ramp-up phase from today’s low level of activity to the necessary level, GDP in the EU can grow by 0.7% per year!

From this, we can clearly see that the road to recovery must see us all Riding the Renovation Wave, making it a success through increased rates and levels of energy renovation and improving the lives of millions across the EU in the years ahead. Let’s maintain the solidarity that we have seen during the fight to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and focus our future efforts on combatting the effects of climate change and improving lives in the long-term, by addressing the sector that has the most to deliver – our buildings.

END
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About EuroACE
EuroACE represents Europe’s leading companies involved with the manufacture, distribution and installation of energy saving goods and services for buildings. EuroACE members employ around 200,000 people in these activities in Europe and have around 900 production facilities and office locations. The mission of EuroACE is to work together with the EU institutions to help Europe move towards a more efficient use of energy in buildings, thereby contributing to Europe’s commitments on climate change, energy security and economic growth.

EuroACE Members (2020)