

THE WAY OUT OF THE CRISIS IS GREEN

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Now that macroeconomic data shows slight signs of improvement, it would be advisable not to let ourselves be carried away by inertia. We would be wrong if we evaluated this crisis as one more of the natural evolution of the macroeconomic cycle of the market economy and we continued with the usual recipes.

The collapse in aggregate demand experienced has been a structural warning that things are not working as they should.

The system is mired in a serious crisis of values. Speculation and immediate profit outrageously take precedence over long-term profitability and sustainability and we forget about the serious effects of our actions on the environment and natural resources, treating them as if they were infinite and inexhaustible. The climate crisis that we have generated and continue to fuel is the most obvious example of this.

Without doubting that the tax, financial and labor market reforms, which have occupied so much media interest in recent weeks, are urgent and necessary, which they are without a doubt, I believe that our future really lies in a field other than is so present in the public debate. Very bad times await us if we are not capable of taking advantage of the end of the crisis to carry out a profound transformation of our lifestyle, with more sustainable habits that guide us towards a greener economy, low in carbon and oriented towards people and their talent.

The ball is in our court and we cannot evade our responsibility with the excuse that these matters of global importance are decided far from our borders. The fundamental step is to join the European climate leadership, making the necessary effort to limit our greenhouse gas emissions to move towards an economy less dependent on oil. If we are bold, what today seems like obligations and limitations that weigh down our economy, will be transformed, in a much shorter term than we imagine, into global competitive advantages for our companies and substantial improvements in the quality of life of our people.

It is a task that is the responsibility of society as a whole and specifically, it represents a radical leap in our energy model. The effort made in the Basque Country in the last 20 years with the incorporation of natural gas has meant great progress in terms of energy diversification and is a great asset that has enabled, in addition to the use of this fuel in industry and in households, a highly efficient electricity generation park (combined cycle power plants and cogeneration systems). We have, however, to go further by launching an ambitious plan to neutralize the CO₂ emitted by these plants, striving to be at the forefront of testing, and promoting carbon storage and capture technologies, taking advantage of the capacities of our technological system that has already taken some steps in this field.

On the other hand, the "Pact for Wind Energy" between the Departments of the Basque Government for Industry, Innovation, Commerce and Tourism and the Environment, Territorial Planning, Agriculture and Fisheries, together with the Provincial Councils of Bizkaia and Gipuzkoa, and the Association of Municipalities Basques (Eudel), has to be the definitive element that allows progress in the use of all renewable energies, and particularly wind power, in the Basque Country, putting an end to the important disagreements that occurred in the past that hampered the use of potential existing energy. The commitment reached must also serve to create a favorable breeding ground for the development and implementation of distributed and intelligent renewable systems for the generation and use of energy, which is a field with enormous potential both for energy and for the creation of new business fabric.

The energy model goes beyond the generation of energy and its transformation has to do fundamentally with the use we make of it. The key is to save and be more efficient, and this is the task not only of large industrial consumers who have already taken great steps motivated by the significant cost savings that this entails, but also of companies in sectors that are not so energy-intensive, in industry and services, as well as families. In the latter case, the bulk of the savings are in adapting the buildings and in transport and the use of vehicles. In both cases, the effort and

individual investments will have to be accompanied by policies and regulation systems that encourage energy-saving behaviors and facilitate the necessary infrastructures, mainly public transport.

On June 5, 2009, just one year ago now, the Lehendakari signed the Urdaibai Declaration and proclaimed the signing of a Social Pact for EcoEuskadi 2020 Sustainability. If we align all public action, and initiatives such as the new energy plan and the climate change law are key to this, together with the demonstrated desire for progress and development manifested by the whole of Basque society, we will not have any difficulties in facing the current challenges, no matter how hard the times we are going through may be.

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