

September 25, 2021

The European Green Deal and the Young Next Generation

by NAKANISHI Yumiko

On July 14, 2021, the European Commission published a comprehensive proposal consisting of 12 measures to enhance the implementation of the European Green Deal (Delivering). Some of the proposals are well known as they have been in the news such as a de facto ban on the sale of new gasoline-powered cars, including hybrids, by 2035, and the gradual introduction of a Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) to tax imports from countries with lax environmental regulations. This short article will focus on the European Green Deal in relation to the next generation of young people.

In December 2019, the European Green Deal (COM (2019) 640) was published under the European Commission, chaired by Von der Leyen. The term of office for the European Commission is five years. At the beginning of this term, the European Green Deal was published, setting a clear direction for the Commission. The European Green Deal is a blueprint-like document that shows the way forward, including proposals for new measures and amendments to existing measures on environmental protection and digitalization, with a focus on climate change. The actual proposals for measures and amendments are presented separately in a different document. As the term "European Green Deal" is often used, it has a catch-phrase aspect. Initially, some people were skeptical that this would actually be possible due to the EU budgetary restriction. However, in dealing with the Corona crisis, the European Commission has found a way to overcome this difficulty. It is turning the Corona crisis into an opportunity. At first, the vulnerability of the EU was conspicuous, as the EU member states sealed their borders and stopped the free movement of goods and people, which is the core of the internal market. Since then, however, the EU has begun to act in a unified manner, with the EU negotiating vaccine purchases on behalf of the member states and the European Medicines Agency (EMA), a subordinate agency, taking charge of vaccine reviews. In addition, the European Commission proposed an EU recovery fund called "Next Generation EU" as a recovery plan from the Corona crisis, which was agreed upon by the European Parliament and the Council. This EU recovery fund is a EUR 750 billion debt of the EU. This fund will be repaid over a span of 30 years, from 2027 to 2058. The core of the fund is the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), which accounts for EUR 672.5 billion of the

EUR 750 billion. The RRF will be used only for the following purposes: (a) green transition; (b) digital transition; (c) smart, sustainable and inclusive growth; (d) social and community cohesion; (e) health, economic, social and institutional resilience; and (f) policies for the next generation, children and youth. At least 37% of the total plan must be allocated to the green transition (climate change-related investments and reforms), and at least 20% to the digital transition. This meant that the weakness of the European Green Deal issued in 2019, the financial problem, was solved. Member States hit hard by the Corona crisis, such as Italy and Spain, will receive non-repayable financial support (subsidies) through the recovery fund (available until 2023, with payments to be received by the end of 2026), and at least 37% of the funds will be used for environmental protection. The EU recovery fund is named "Next Generation EU" because it ensures beneficial environmental protection and digitalization for the next generation, who will be responsible for the debt.

Let's take a look at the document "Fit for 55" (COM(2021)550) published by the European Commission on July 14, 2021. The term "Fit for 55" comes from the idea of reducing greenhouse gas emissions to at least 55% below 1990 levels by 2030. It is a proposal package consisting of 12 measures to achieve this goal. For example, in addition to the automobile regulations and the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) mentioned above, the package also includes measures to strengthen the European Union Emissions Trading Scheme (EU ETS), revise the energy taxation directive, raise energy consumption reduction targets, increase the share of renewable energy, set targets for carbon removal such as from forests, promote sustainable aviation fuels, provide infrastructure for battery charging/hydrogen refueling, establish and gradually increase the cap on the CO₂ content of maritime shipping fuels, and create a climate/social fund. These series of measures are considered necessary to achieve the goals for the European Green Deal. Apart from this package, proposals for individual measures and amendments were released by the European Commission on the same day, July 14 (together these documents are massive in volume), and will need to be adopted by the European Parliament and Council in order to become effective. The first document from the Commission states that we are at a critical juncture in the world's response to the urgency of climate and biodiversity, and that we are the last generation that can manage to act in time. It also states that if we do not act now, future generations will be exposed to more extreme weather events. Addressing these crises is a matter of intergenerational and international solidarity, and what we achieve in the next decade will be decisive for the future of our children, it said. In addition, the Commission states in the same document that strengthening climate action is an appeal from young people, including today's teenagers. The Commission also takes seriously that young people, as agents of change, are calling on their governments and the EU to act decisively and to

protect the climate and environment for future generations without delay.

In Europe, there have been demonstrations by young people and a number of climate change lawsuits (climate change litigation). NGOs representing the interests of young people and future generations, including teenagers, have become plaintiffs in lawsuits against the state or large corporations. As a result, they have won cases in the Netherlands, France and Germany. In addition, there are currently cases pending before the European Court of Human Rights against several states by young people in Portugal. The "Fit for 55" document is a policy document that will help the European Commission to take into account the aspirations of these young people and ensure that the European Green Deal becomes a reality. The "Fit for 55" document was released only about a year and a half after the European Green Deal document was released. A number of measures have been adopted or amended as a result of the "European Green Deal", and more will be adopted and existing measures amended. The Commission's seriousness about the "European Green Deal" (that it will not lead to end up being just a policy document) can be seen in the large number of concrete proposals.

(This is an English translation of the article written by NAKANISHI Yumiko, Professor, Hitotsubashi University, which originally appeared on the e-forum "Giron-Hyakushutsu (Hundred Views in Full Perspective)" of GFJ on July 31, 2021.)