

# European Grandparents for Climate Newsletter

Number 3 – May 2023



**European Grandparents for Climate:  
we owe all children a planet Earth as  
wonderful as the one we have  
enjoyed!**

In a number of countries worldwide, senior citizens have created or joined organizations that act on climate change issues in order to try to influence local, regional and national policies.

Here in Europe, the European Green Deal is the embodiment of these ambitions at the level of the European Union (EU). Therefore, several European Grandparents for the Climate organizations have decided to create a cooperative network focusing on the implementation of the Green Deal with the aim of exchanging information, knowledge and strategies while supporting actions across Europe.

Self-organized and politically independent, we are connected to many pro-climate organizations in our home countries.

## What's going on in Europe today

### Ostend Declaration

Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway and the UK signed the Ostend Declaration at a North Sea Summit on the Belgian coast on 24 April, pledging to increase their offshore wind capacity to 300GW by 2050. It is a doubling of the commitment for 150GW by 2050 made at the first North Sea Summit last year in Denmark – but this year's summit also doubled the number of participants. Last year's commitment only included the four EU countries with North Sea coasts; this year, five additional countries were added. The Ostend Declaration countries also set an interim goal of 120GW of offshore wind capacity by the end of this decade. Numerous bilateral deals were signed on the side-lines. At the final press conference however, it became clear that a number of disagreements between the participating countries persist. Moreover, within the countries there remain important inconsistencies between the promotion of green energy production and the continuing support for the fossil fuel sector.

See the full declaration at:

<https://www.regjeringen.no/contentassets/78bfc87bb04044c0933002ad7dd6e0f1/erklaring-energiministere.pdf>.

### The European Commission acts against green washing

Today it is difficult for consumers to make sense of the many labels on the environmental performance of products (both goods and services) and companies. Some environmental claims are not reliable, and consumer trust in them is extremely low. Consumers can be misled, and companies can give a false impression of their environmental impacts or benefits – a practice known as greenwashing. With a proposed new law on green claims, the EU is taking action to address greenwashing, and protect consumers and the environment.

Ensuring that environmental labels and claims are credible and trustworthy will allow consumers to make better informed purchasing decisions. It will also boost the competitiveness of businesses who are striving to increase the environmental sustainability of their products and activities.

[https://environment.ec.europa.eu/publications/proposal-directive-green-claims\\_en](https://environment.ec.europa.eu/publications/proposal-directive-green-claims_en)

More environment news from the European Commission at

[https://environment.ec.europa.eu/index\\_en](https://environment.ec.europa.eu/index_en)

## Climate warming, government inaction and the courts

Larry French, *Swiss Grandparents for Climate*

Several court decisions have condemned national governments for their lack of action on climate warming:

 **Netherlands:** on June 24, 2015, the court of the district of The Hague decreed that the government of the Netherlands was not taking adequate measures to protect its citizens from the emission of greenhouse gases and ordered that the government order their reduction as of 2020 by at least 25% compared to 1990. This judgement was subsequently confirmed by Holland's Supreme Court.

 **France:** an alliance of four NGOs fighting climate warming, having collected 2.1 million signatures on their petition, brought a court challenge on March 14, 2019, against the government of France for its inaction in fighting planetary warming. On February 3, 2021, the Administrative Tribunal of Paris found that the nation was indeed at fault.

 **Germany:** the Constitutional Court of Karlsruhe pronounced that the federal greenhouse gas reduction law was in contravention of basic human rights as it did not proscribe adequate measures from 2031 on.

 **Belgium:** on June 17, 2021, the Brussels lower court decided that the climate policy of Belgium's federal government, as well as that of the regions of Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels were in contravention of the Civil Code and the European Convention of the Rights of Man.

(Source: *Breaking the Glass, Reflections on Climate Emergency*, Michel Stevens, p101, Verdict of the Judges)

### **Switzerland: Elder Women for the Climate at the Court of Human Rights**

The association Elder Women for the Protection of the Climate, rebuffed by the Swiss Federal Council, demonstrated in Strasbourg in 2020 in front of the headquarters of the European Court of Human Rights. They charge that the inaction of governments on climate warming, by endangering the health of seniors, is a violation of their human rights. In a historic moment the ECHR heard their case on March 29, 2023, and promised a decision before the end of the year.

### **State of emergency, civil disobedience and the courts. A work in progress**

'Innocent!' proclaimed Judge Philippe Colelough on January 13, 2020, at the conclusion of a hearing of the Lausanne police court. (24 Heures, Lausanne, January 14, 2020). Twelve members of Lausanne Action Climate were charged with trespassing and disobeying a police order for playing a mock game of tennis inside the Crédit Suisse Bank. Judge Colelough decided that there was a state of 'climate emergency' that justified this violation of civil law. After a challenge by the public prosecutor, the court of appeal reversed the Colelough decision while dismissing several ancillary charges.

Presently, the Action Climate activists are awaiting a decision on their appeal by the European Court of Human Rights.

Their case confronts us with an existential dilemma: if law enforcement agencies and the courts are blind to the reality of climate emergency, does civil disobedience become the only viable response?

Afterword: The young Swiss climate activists briefly disrupted activities in a branch of Crédit Suisse. They have been punished by the courts. The irresponsible bonus seeking bankers responsible for the collapse of Crédit Suisse, who forced a bail out of 200 billion frCH by the Swiss government are not facing the courts. A mere threat by some parliamentarians to reclaim part of their bonuses. Criminal bankers have immunity in Switzerland, climate activists do not!

## Actions that are down to Earth

### Some activities of the Finnish Climate Grandparents which may interest European counterparts.

*Matti Nummelin, Finnish Grandparents for Climate*



Finnish Climate Grandparents demonstrate every Friday on the stairs of the Parliament along with Fridays for Future. Grandparents have their own large colourful banners with the text "Grandparents demand climate action". Our banners are displayed in Finnish, Swedish, English, German and, numbers permitting,

Chinese and Russian. In addition, we plan on purchasing others in French and Spanish

Finland had parliamentary elections in April. Finnish Climate Grandparents in Helsinki visited the main square, where political parties had their info booths. Grandparents had discussions with MP-candidates and asked them to join the movement for a just transition to a fossil fuel free future. Grandparents wear yellow vests with the text "Grandparents demand climate action" and hand out bulletins for candidates.

After the parliamentary elections when the new parliament started its sessions Finnish Climate Grandparents sent an e-mail to all MPs inviting them to come and discuss climate matters on the Parliament stairs on Fridays.

Finnish Climate Grandparents have an open-ended literature club discussing books dealing with global change. Books vary from non-fiction and fiction to poetry and children's comic books. The club meets monthly by online video conferencing.

### A march from Geneva to Bern (CH)

*Michel Stevens, Grandparents for Climate Switzerland*

Today in Switzerland women are at the forefront of the fight against climate change.

On 29 March 2023, the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg welcomed the Elder Women for Climate Protection, an association of women aged 64 and over, who are bringing a complaint against the Swiss Confederation motivated by the inadequacy of the measures the Confederation is taking to protect the population from the harmful effects of climate change.



Independently, the lawyer Irene Wettstein, brilliant defender of climate activists accused of civil disobedience, created a remarkable initiative. Also convinced that Switzerland, despite its commitments made at COP 21, is not doing enough in the fight against climate change, she originated the Blue March in protest. Together with Julia Steinberger, an IPCC expert and professor at the University of Lausanne, Valérie D'Acromont, an infectious diseases doctor, also professor at the University of Lausanne, and Bastienne Joerchel, co-president of SWISSAID, an association active in development cooperation, she organised a 224 km march over 22 days from Geneva to Bern in order to deliver a message to the federal authorities demanding that Switzerland respect its commitments under the Paris Accord.

Irene Wettstein explains. "With the Blue March, we want to break the deadlock, show that there are solutions – despite the prevailing eco-anxiety – and ensure that the climate issue finally becomes a political priority. Getting out of fossil fuels, changing our consumption and transport patterns, insulating buildings, etc., are measures that must be taken urgently."

Departing from Geneva on 1 April, the march ended on 22 April, precisely seven years after the official signing of the COP 21 agreement at the UN headquarters in New York.

The project was named the "Blue March" as a tribute to our beautiful blue planet.



## With Omas (for the Future) into the Future

### Successful ZUKUNFTSTAGE on April 22 2023 in Germany and Austria.

*Katja Mannteufel, Omas for Future, Germany*



What does the future have to do with grannies, of all things? What at first sounds like a contradiction soon became clear to visitors to the Future Days on April 22 in Germany and Austria: The Omas for the Future know how the future can be – sustainable, climate-neutral, greener and healthier. To prove it, they demonstrated on this day, known as the international "Earth Day", in Bad Kreuznach, Berlin, Böblingen, Bretten and Ettlingen as well as in Filderstadt, Gauting, Leipzig, Regensburg and even in the Austrian Leibniz.

The goal of Omas for the Future, which is active throughout Germany, Austria and the Netherlands, was and is not so much to encourage people to do without as to educate them and get them talking to each other. And this worked very well on the Future Days: whether in Berlin, where the Omas for Future were guests in the taz lab of the newspaper taz, or in Leipzig at the largest Future Day with Germany's first Future Forest consisting of about 100 Future Trees, 10,000 climate ribbons, lots of workshops, competitions and a total of about 5,000 actors and visitors.

In addition, Bad Kreuznach drew attention to climate change, its consequences and possible solutions, with a climate talk, Freiburg im Breisgau with turnaround tables, Bretten with an impressive climate beam or Gauting, for example, with the well-known Omas for Future quiz. Cordula Weimann, founder of Omas for Future from Leipzig, was satisfied: "The response to our Future Days was great. This shows that people want to take the change and the issues of sustainability and climate neutrality into their own hands. For our children and grandchildren – and an even more liveable future!"

More information about the individual Future Days in Germany and Austria at: <https://omasforfuture.de/standort/> and <https://www.leipzig.de/news/news/festival-der-zukunft-1-leipziger-zukunftstag>

### Background

Omas for the Future was founded in Leipzig in 2019 and currently comprises 70 regional groups in Germany, Austria and the Netherlands. 56 percent of people in Germany belong to the 50 plus generation. As an important part of society, we want to be active. We want to make people aware of how endangered the future of our children and grandchildren really is in view of climate change. We want to show that everyone can play an active role in shaping a climate-friendly society. To this end, we provide comprehensible information in interactive formats and offer concrete solutions on how each individual can help in everyday life with small changes in behaviour. Further information: <https://omasforfuture.de>



### The Dutch government has announced it will allocate some extra 28 billion Euros for climate measures

On its website, the Dutch Grandparents for Climate published some highlights and first comments on the announcement. It seems that the new measures are essentially for subsidising sustainability transition in domains such as electricity production, the limitation of industrial emissions, the renovation and construction of buildings and mobility. The government hardly mentions taxation measures and remains vague about the agricultural sector as this is still fully under discussion. Environmental and mobility organizations are moderately positive about the new budget, but they consider a missed opportunity the fact that the government is doing little extra for fossil-free mobility.

## Events and opinions

### Climate action does not stop at national borders

Jan Stel, GvK Flanders, Belgium



Lützerath became an icon for international climate action against the international energy giant RWE. The Flemish 'Grootouders voor het Klimaat' participated in this protest. © GvK, Liesbet Croughs.

On Sunday, January 8, more than fifty Flemish grandparents, parents and grandchildren supported Lützerath's struggle against the German energy giant RWE. This village is becoming a victim of the expansion of RWE's strongly polluting, open pit, lignite (brown coal) mine. The German government recently made a deal with RWE, in which this expansion was allowed if lignite mining stops in 2030 instead of 2038. Even some German federal Green politicians consider this, in a somewhat longer-term perspective, as a good deal because the increased lignite production is temporarily.

German climate activists did not agree, and occupied the deserted village for more than two years. In January a force of some 1,000 police officers in riot gear put an end to this nonviolent climate protest. They removed hundreds of activists occupying the homes abandoned by former residents after they were evicted, mostly by 2017, to make way for the controversial extension of the mine.

On her way to the World Economic Forum in Switzerland, climate activist Greta Thunberg also participated in the protest. She was arrested, which was widely commented on in the media.

### Setting of the conflict

On Saturday April 15 Germany ended its **nuclear era** that has spanned more than six decades, by shutting down its last three nuclear power plants. This in contrast with several other countries such as Belgium, that postponed a similar decision due to Putin's war in the Ukraine. Despite promises of politicians that the German energy delivery is guaranteed, one can question this step as it can be seen as one of the drivers for using more coal. This is the strongest CO<sub>2</sub> polluting fossil fuel. And, as a consequence, destroying small villages, like Lützerath near Düsseldorf, bordering the gigantic RWE open-pit lignite coal mine, Garzweiler II.

RWE AG is a German multinational energy company, headquartered in Essen, where it was founded in 1898. It generates and trades electricity in Asia-Pacific, Europe and the United States. The company is the world's number two in offshore wind power and Europe's third largest company in renewable energy. Yet, it has a long history of using lignite and coal for electricity generation. The company is responsible for large historic CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, and should be held accountable for that. In 2022 RWE's profit was €3.2 billion.

RWE owns three coal power plants in the Netherlands. In 2021, the company started a law suit against the Dutch State, demanding a €1.4 billion compensation. The reason was a new Dutch law in 2019, prohibiting the use of coal in the generation of electricity from 2030. As a consequence, RWE will have to close its coal-based activities in the Netherlands. RWE's claim was based upon the Investment Dispute Settlement (ISDS) claim system, within the international Energy Charter Treaty (ECT). The claim was rejected by the Dutch court in 2022.

### A strangling law

The fall of the Berlin Wall and Iron Curtain on 9 November 1989, also lead to business opportunities and investment uncertainties in the former Soviet Union. To integrate their energy sectors into the broader European and world markets, an Energy Charter was developed. This Charter evolved into the

ECT, a multilateral trade and investment agreement applicable to the energy sector. It was signed in 1994 and entered into force in 1998. Currently the ECT has 56, mainly European (including the EU and Euratom) parties. The US, China and Russia\* are not included.

The Treaty contains provisions on investment protection, trade and transit in energy materials and products, and has its own international tribunal to settle disputes (ISDS). The latter relates both to States Parties to the Treaty against each other, and between States and the investors of other States who have made investments in the territory of the former. As of 3 August 2021, the ECT Secretariat is aware of 142 ISDS under the Energy Charter Treaty. But, in UNCTAD's overview of 31 July 2022, a number of 1,229 is given. Today, the ECT is the most commonly-used legal instrument by investors to make claims against contracting States.

A lot has changed since 1998. The climate crisis as well as the biodiversity- and chemical pollution-crisis, are leading to a sustainability transition, in which fossil fuels are phased out and another lifestyle is advocated. **The Paris Agreement** marks a turning point in this global process. Due to this the ECT, even in a modernized version, has become an outdated instrument as it:

- prioritizes economic goals over necessary climate policies,
- protects the future earnings of investors beyond and above the property protection of ordinary citizens, and
- removes disputes about fundamental socio-economic changes in the context of the energy transition from the embedded domestic judicial system.

Based upon an intervention of Norway, the EGC-membership is advocating to their respective governments that they withdraw, like Italy did in 2015, from the ECT.

\*The Russian Federation signed the ECT but did not ratify it.

### **Who will save the world from self-destruction?**

*Executive summary of a think piece by Michel Stevens (CH)*

Inter-state conflict, such as the current war in Ukraine, is an obstacle to tackling climate change, as the determination to win over one's opponent removes the incentive for the warring parties to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. Rivalries between states - in this case between Russia and NATO countries - are at the root of wars and must be stopped. Otherwise, the destruction of our planet and the life it supports would be inevitable.

The personalization of power, as well as the nationalist ideology that uses the scarecrow of the enemy as a factor of national cohesion, are the sources of this destructive rivalry. They should be replaced by an ethic of co-operation. The great powers - the United States, China and Russia - by opposing each other, are exacerbating climate change instead of cooperating and playing their role as key players to remedy it.

To save the planet, build peace and promote the common good, the world order must be reformed. The United Nations must be recognized as the only legitimate institution of global governance and its Security Council as the true instrument of peace. Acting in a multipolar world with blocs of nations dedicated to the best interests of citizens, its first task must be to reduce military arsenals and abolish nuclear weapons.

The establishment of a minimum of common rules of governance supervised by an independent authority (Council of Wise Elders?) is indispensable. These rules should include independence of the judiciary, better means of selecting members of the executive branch - in particular the head of state - and term limits, with the aim of ensuring respect for international law.

The United States holds the key to reforming the world order to end tensions between rival great powers, provided it frees its foreign policy from electoral considerations. If it adopted proportional representation, it would allow new political parties to emerge, which would enrich the political debate. This would move it away from the Manicheism that reduces the world to a duality of evil and good, enemy and friend, towards a vision that

accepts differences and resolves them in a constructive way. The example of France and Germany emerging from the Second World War to build Europe is striking. As a first step, the reformed United States could propose progressive disarmament, an end to nuclear weapon and a transformation towards a cooperative effort to solve climate change.

Europe, a friend of the United States, enriched by the experience of its past divisions and strengthened by its pioneering role in creating a supranational structure, could help the United States to bring about this new multipolar world.

Inevitably, some will object to the infringement of state sovereignty and defend the status quo, even though it is leading us to the brink of the abyss. Instead of trying to oppose the domination of the great powers, they will prefer, on the pretext that the proposals made here would be idealistic and naive, to stick to an attitude of voluntary submission to them and turn a blind eye to the destruction of the planet.

If you would like to receive the full article, please write to [michel.stevens@bluemail.ch](mailto:michel.stevens@bluemail.ch).

## **The difficulties in achieving a decarbonized electricity-based economy in Europe**

*Jean-Michel Corre (Grands-Parents pour le Climat Belgique - Wallonia)*

We are all in favour of a fundamental shift toward the use of carbon-free energy sources in transport, heating, and industrial production. Up to now the achieved share of clean renewable energy in the form of electricity has been easily pumped into transmission lines and directly put to use in our societies and economy. Will this still be possible when Europe goes electric to a much larger extent? Europe is realizing its nearly total dependence on imports for "rare earths" (actually metals, key components of clean energy production and storage). In addition, the shift to "clean" electric energy entails huge investments in transmission and distribution capacities.

Will we be able to invest quickly in a new electricity-based society in time for the next generation?

At a recent North Sea Summit (April 24, 2023, Ostend), nine countries (EU members + Commission + UK) concurred in a plan to transform the North Sea into a Green Powerhouse, by multiplying by 4 in 2030 and by 10 in 2050 a present 30 GW to reach 300 GW wind power capacity. Implementation and financing of this "vision" are left to national authorities and economic agents. Political pledges promise coordination, technical coherence and access to technologies to facilitate reaching these goals. "Energy artificial islands," interconnected wind farms areas, and joint security measures should help create and secure an inter-European energy hub. A beautiful picture. However, representatives of the private industrial sector (Wind Europe) point to uncertainties in reaching the necessary production of windmills, securing the parts and components (including rare metals) and lastly the financing of these complex investments. Coordination is in sight; implementation remains a challenge. Bottlenecks are looming.

### **1. Rare earths (and other metals).**

The all-embracing use of rare metals in relation to an environment-friendly shift leads to the prospect of immense increased demand. This created an awareness of scarcity and political dependency mainly on China which processes 72% of the world's cobalt and 61% of its lithium. By 2050 the output of cobalt, graphite and lithium, would have to be more than 450% higher than in 2018 to meet battery demand alone (World Bank).

Europe produces 3% of these metals (as used today). The European Commission would like to reach 10%. That modest increase is not easily achieved (NIMBY and costs). In addition, due to the recent increase in use of these metals, there is no trove of "second-hand" minerals to be recycled. According to the International Energy Agency, efforts to reach the goals of the Paris Agreement would mean a world quadrupling of "mineral requirements" for clean energy technologies by 2040. These are mind-boggling figures in an already investment hungry world keen to finance remediation and compensation for climate change induced damages to population and nature.

Copper, a "traditional" metal is expected to experience a doubling of consumption between now and 2035 to 50 million tons. In spite of recycling, which used to provide one half of consumption, supply is unlikely to keep up. Huge additional deposits have been located worldwide. But "greenfield"

copper mines (in non-traditional mining sites) are all deeply opposed by local populations or wary political authorities. Even just the extension of existing mining operations or areas are said to wait 6 to 10 years for regulatory and political go-ahead. *Hence the many thefts of copper lines along railroad tracks!*

## **2. Electricity connection: the grid quagmire**

Future huge quantities of electrical power generated in a decentralized way (not at former petrol stations or client industries at faraway places) suppose a rethink of distribution grids (high-voltage and low-voltage) and question the investment capacities of our societies. The present grids (transformers, power lines, customer connections) are based on a different industrial and social past. The challenge of electric car recharging is a harbinger of consequential changes. This also obtains for new types of industrial locations.

The new present and future energy sources are and will be located in places very different from steam-powered generators. New transmission lines will be necessary to balance production and use, at transnational level and very often along different routes. Intermittent sun and wind energy will create the need for storing facilities at the consumer-level and at the producer/supplier level. Technical possibilities are well known. But some are very expensive and the magnitude will be immense. These travails will represent an *additional unexpected footprint*. Acceptance by concerned local communities and administrations, the implementation of rather conservative land-planning rules will raise many difficulties. *The financial cost for our generation will most probably be much higher than expected.*

A caveat should be clearly stated, not to slacken the need for the necessary shift, but to make it feasible in due time. The overall social and financial cost of the new energy paradigm is not adequately accounted for.

It is time to mean business to maintain a liveable planet, and to take seriously the implementation of new policies. Goodwill declarations of intent must lead to effective planning and resource allocation. Militancy should now address feasibility, and be ready to make difficult choices and press governments to follow with actions beyond sheer announcements. Moderation in consumption should also be put into the foreground, as a necessary accompanying shift.