

Open call from European academics to the European Institutions for a post-growth future

RESUME

On September 18-19, 2018, scientists, politicians, and policymakers gathered in Brussels for a [landmark conference](#). The aim of this event, organised by members of the European parliament from five different political groups, alongside trade unions and NGOs, is to explore possibilities for a “post-growth economy” in Europe. On that occasion, 238 academics had launched a call to the European Union and its member states to plan for a post-growth future in which human and ecological wellbeing is prioritised over GDP.

TEXTE

For the past seven decades, GDP growth has stood as the primary economic objective of European nations. But as our economies have grown, so has our negative impact on the environment. We are now exceeding the [safe operating space](#) for humanity on this planet, and there is no sign that economic activity is being [decoupled](#) from resource use or pollution at anything like the scale required. Today, solving social problems within European nations does not require more growth. It requires a fairer distribution of the income and wealth that we already have.

Growth is also becoming [harder to achieve](#) due to declining productivity gains, market saturation, and ecological degradation. If current trends continue, [there may be no growth at all](#) in Europe within a decade. Right now the response is to try to fuel growth by issuing more debt, shredding environmental regulations, extending working hours, and cutting social protections. This aggressive pursuit of growth at all costs divides society, creates economic instability, and undermines democracy.

Those in power have not been willing to engage with these issues, at least not until now. The European commission’s [Beyond GDP](#) project became [GDP and Beyond](#). The official mantra remains growth — redressed as “sustainable”, “green”, or “inclusive” – but first and foremost, growth. Even the new UN [sustainable development goals](#) include the pursuit of economic growth as a policy goal for all countries, despite the fundamental contradiction between growth and sustainability.

The good news is that within civil society and academia, a post-growth movement has been emerging. It goes by different names in different places: [décroissance](#), [Postwachstum](#), [steady-state](#) or [doughnut economics](#), [prosperity without growth](#), to name a few. Since 2008, regular [degrowth conferences](#) have gathered thousands of participants. A new global initiative, the [Wellbeing Economies Alliance](#) (or WE-All), is making connections between these movements, while a European [research network](#) has been developing new “ecological macroeconomic models”. Such work suggests that it’s possible to improve quality of life, restore the living world, reduce inequality, and provide meaningful jobs – all without the need for economic growth, provided we enact policies to overcome our current growth dependence.

Some of the [changes that have been proposed](#) include limits on resource use, progressive taxation to stem the tide of rising inequality, and a gradual reduction in working time. Resource use could be curbed by introducing a carbon tax, and the revenue could be returned as a dividend for everyone or used to finance social programmes. Introducing both a basic and a maximum income would reduce inequality further, while helping to redistribute care work and reducing the power imbalances that undermine democracy. New technologies could be used to reduce working time and improve quality of life, instead of being used to lay off masses of workers and increase the profits of the privileged few.

Given the risks at stake, it would be irresponsible for politicians and policymakers not to explore possibilities for a post-growth future. The conference happening in Brussels is a promising start, but much stronger commitments are needed. As a group of concerned social and natural scientists representing all Europe, we call on the European Union, its institutions, and member states to:

1. Constitute a special commission on post-growth futures in the EU parliament. This commission should actively debate the future of growth, devise policy alternatives for post-growth futures, and reconsider the pursuit of growth as an overarching policy goal.

2. Incorporate alternative indicators into the macroeconomic framework of the EU and its member states. Economic policies should be evaluated in terms of their impact on human wellbeing, resource use, inequality, and the provision of decent work. These indicators should be given higher priority than GDP in decision-making.

3. Turn the stability and growth pact (SGP) into a stability and wellbeing pact. The SGP is a set of rules aimed at limiting government deficits and national debt. It should be revised to ensure member states meet the basic needs of their citizens, while reducing resource use and waste emissions to a sustainable level.

4. Establish a ministry for economic transition in each member state. A new economy that focuses directly on human and ecological wellbeing could offer a much better future than one that is structurally dependent on economic growth.

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<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/sep/16/the-eu-needs-a-stability-and-wellbeing-pact-not-more-growth>

Complete list of the signatories here : <https://postgrowth2018.eu>

You can sign the call here:

<https://you.wemove.eu/campaigns/europe-it-s-time-to-end-the-growth-dependency>

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