

UP! 2021 Sustainable Business Forum: Summary of key conclusions

19. 3. 2021 Events and conferences

At the beginning of March, we organized the largest sectoral event in our country, UP! 2021 Sustainable Business Forum. We brought together important European and domestic representatives of the state, companies and the non-governmental sector, who discussed online the priorities of the future direction of sustainable business in the Czech Republic. They agreed on the importance of continuing to reduce global threats, in particular climate change.



David Klimeš, the moderator of the event, a journalist, writer and university pedagogue, introduced the event as follows: "I think that the global community has already agreed and accepted that human influence on climate change is undeniable."

Michal Broža, head of the UN Information Office in the Czech Republic, summed up that the biggest challenge today is to meet global goals, especially combating climate change, both medium-



term goals till 2030 and long-term goals heading towards carbon neutrality in 2050.

"This goal is absolutely essential. If we fail to achieve it, the planet will become so warm that it is a question whether human life, ie society as such, will be possible on planet Earth at all. So far, however, we are heading for a warming of 3° C and

emissions are the main driver of this unfortunate development," added Mr. Broža.

He indirectly built on the words of the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, who in her [video greeting from the Davos Forum](#) emphasized the need to reflect on climate change, to stop the loss of biodiversity and other phenomena related to human devastation of the environment. She sees the current pandemic as a consequence of the unsustainable actions of our civilization. "Nearly three-quarters of the earth's surface have been altered and disturbed. We see these changes in our everyday life. If we do not seriously protect our nature, there will be another pandemic round the corner. We need to learn from this crisis. We need to change the way we live and do business. We need to focus on the core values that are important to us." Both speakers therefore call on companies not to give up on the principles of sustainable and responsible business in this situation, but instead to seek to strengthen and develop this area.

Dana Kovaříková, Head of the Representation of the European Commission in the Czech Republic, also agrees with this message, emphasizing that: "The steps we take today to combat climate change will bring rewards. Whether in the form of a healthier environment, innovation of production processes, or new job opportunities. It is already clear today that companies that start the transformation sooner will have an advantage." Her contribution thus reflects the European Union's policy, which enshrined its efforts to combat climate change in a package of measures known as the European Green Deal.



The European Union thus occupies a special place in the global debate on the sustainable development of our entire civilization. By 2030, Europe has committed itself to reduce emissions by 55% compared to 1990, and by 2050 it intends to become the world's first climate-neutral continent. Our society as well as business has a huge transition to make in the upcoming decades.



Stefan Crets, Executive Director of CSR Europe, the European network of companies, of which Business for society is a national partner, commented on the current transition of European businesses, which is driven by several trends. "The first is care and recovery. How to recover during a covid pandemic? How to pay enough attention to your people? The second trend is the green

transition, ie combating climate change and emissions. Both of these trends seek to focus on how to achieve the goals in an inclusive, ie fair way. That means to ensure that people are not excluded from the transition from the so-called old to the new economy."

Daniela Němcová, Director of Business for society, stated that, from her point of view, top managers are aware of the urgency of present



times. "Last year, small as well as large companies submitted a record number of applications and strategies to the unique TOP Responsible Company rating. Despite the pandemic crisis, Czech companies are adapting and transforming. We have seen a number of new initiatives and partnerships, companies are actively moving towards sustainable and responsible business, and that is good news," she says.

As a result, she offers companies active cooperation within the Responsibly 2030 call and, in connection with the forum, plans to organize a series of round tables called Responsible Czech Republic. Here, companies will have the opportunity to discuss and act on current issues of sustainable and responsible business, which is now heavily tested by the pandemic as well as legislative requirements.



Jan Kříž, Deputy Minister for the Management of the EU Funds, Financial and Voluntary Instruments at the Ministry of the Environment, stated that new financial support instruments are earmarked for these purposes for small and large companies operating on the Czech market. "We offer a wide range of subsidy tools for companies. A completely new instrument that we will launch in the nearest future is the Modernization Fund, which heads towards the decarbonisation of the Czech economy, especially the energy sector. That is, the transition from coal to low-emission sources."

Companies that want to reduce their carbon footprint can cover their investment costs for installing solar panels or other low-emission technologies that produce electricity, such as biomass and possibly gas. "This is a huge opportunity for small and large companies, municipalities and cities. This instrument should significantly help in reducing carbon dioxide emissions, ie CO₂, and in meeting the Czech share of the global goals. So far, the Fund has at least CZK 150 billion, over a period of 10 years," added Mr. Kříž.

In addition, companies can also use the Structural Funds, specifically the Operational Program Environment. Thanks to this program, companies can repeatedly apply for subsidies in the field of circular economy, ie ensuring, for example, the production of recycled materials or municipal waste sorting. Mr. Kříž also mentioned a program to reduce emissions, specifically pollutants, which are emitted by companies that comply with the legislation, but it is appropriate to consider tightening these emission limits.

Confirmed guests: 184

Viewers who watched the event on YouTube:

Czech stream: 364 views

English stream: 139 views

Mr. Kříž also mentioned a specific tool for the so-called coal regions, ie Karlovy Vary, Ústí nad Labem and the Moravian-Silesian region. The Ministry of the Environment thus offers a helping hand with the transition of regional economies to cleaner resources, so that the phasing out of coal affects local businesses as little as possible, whether small or medium-sized companies, that can apply for various forms of support in order to create new jobs or innovate their operations. Last but not least, companies can also apply for subsidies under the New Green for Savings Program, which is very successful and will continue.



Representatives of municipalities also took part in the forum, including Mr. Vít Šimral, the Prague City Council member. He stated that: "Prague's goals in terms of sustainable development are relatively ambitious. As part of our climate commitment, we have set as

a main goal to complete decarbonise Prague by 2050," and the medium-term goal is: "to reduce the share of emissions by 45% by 2030, compared to 2010."



The next speaker was the mayor of Prague 6, Mr. Ondřej Kolář, who said: "Although the possibilities of city districts are considerably limited in terms of supporting the sustainability of businesses, we still support green infrastructure, such as rainwater retention projects and digital projects."



In the session focusing on sharing best practice examples of how businesses cope with their own decarbonisation or the extent to which they are succeeding in meeting global challenges, we handed over to the Ambassadors for Sustainable Business, such as Tesco Group, Vodafone Czech Republic and ORLEN Unipetrol. Mr. Ján Kondáš, Head of Communications (Corporate Affairs) of Tesco Group, was the first to present the goals of his company: "The first goal is to combat food waste, the second goal is the reduction of plastic waste and our third goal is to combat climate change. Since 2009, we have been

a world leader in the ambition to become completely carbon neutral by 2050."

Another Ambassador for Sustainable Business, Vodafone Czech Republic, was represented by Zuzana Holá, Director of Corporate Communications and Sustainable Business, who assured everyone that throughout the pandemic the company works closely with corporate customers, the state and individual customers and helps them adapt to new challenges. "Systematic support for digitization and online education of children, but also senior citizens is our goal for this year as well," added Ms. Holá.





Last but not least, ORLEN Unipetrol, represented by Mrs. Radka Marková, Project Manager CSR, presented their new plan for the expansion of hydrogen in Czech transport and its emission-free production. "We are planning the first opening of a hydrogen filling station for the summer of 2021, in Prague's Barrandov. First, it will be designed for buses and later also for cars," said Mrs. Marková.

In the panel discussion that followed, David Klimeš focused on a key issue, whether companies in the Czech market are at all ready for the transition or transformation of their business, whether as part of the climate crisis or economic crisis. What companies consider key for their sustainability and whether they are committed to carbon neutrality.

Mrs. Jitka Haubová, Member of the Board, Executive Manager and COO of Komerční banka, was the first to respond, stating that: "... Although Komerční banka's carbon footprint is not so large, it is certainly not negligible. We are therefore committed to reducing our carbon footprint to zero by 2026. We are already getting rid of energy-inefficient buildings, reducing the consumption of additional resources and strengthening the digitization of the entire company."



In his speech, Mr. Ian Hutchins, Group Corporate Responsibility Director of Tesco Group, confirmed the words of his fore-speakers about the importance of acting and engaging. "Diversity, inclusion, animal welfare and other similar issues are very important to us. As well as preventing food waste," said Mr. Hutchins.

Mr. Zsolt Szabo, Market Director of Velux Czech Republic and Slovakia, represented a production company, and described the biggest challenges that the company faces in the framework of its sustainable development. "We have reduced our carbon footprint by 50% compared to 2007, we are investing in energy efficiency, switching to renewable energy sources, installing solar panels on our production facilities and on our office buildings. By 2030, we want to be 100% carbon neutral," Mr. Szabo summed up his company's plans.



Vodafone Czech Republic, represented by Richard Stonavský, Director of Regulation and External Relations, set a more ambitious goal than originally planned: "As a Vodafone Group, we intend to achieve our carbon neutrality ten years earlier, ie in 2040. Since 2011, Vodafone Czech Republic has been buying energy only from sustainable sources and we want to extend this

goal to the whole of Europe," said Mr. Stonavský. Martin Záklasník, CEO and Chairman of the Board of E.ON, shared the opinion of the European Commission, namely that: "within the time constraint, it is more effective to first set ambitious goals and a deadline by which to meet them, and then look for ways of fulfilling the commitment."



ORLEN Unipetrol, represented by Tomasz Wiatrak, CEO and Chairman of the Board, also commented on how Europe should become carbon neutral by 2050. He stated that the company will focus: "on circular economy, in which waste becomes a raw material again, and we also focus on reducing the energy intensity of our production, and in 2050 we want to be completely emission-neutral."

The last session was devoted to CSR managers, responsible for setting up sustainable activities of companies, and their view on the many different ways in which companies deal with the current situation. Mr. Ivan Tučník, Manager for Institutional Relations and Corporate Responsibility in Plzeňský Prazdroj, stated that in addition to the circularity of packaging and other environmental topics, the company also focuses on people: "We emphasize the work-life balance, and gender equality, ie overall diversity and inclusion. Safe consumption is also very important for us, where one of the key ambitions is a 25% share of soft drinks in our portfolio. In our breweries, we want to achieve carbon neutrality by 2030."



Ms. Martina Šilhánová, CSR/CSV Manager of Nestlé Czech Republic, presented the path to zero emissions, as the company focused on: "analysis of our portfolio, to identify points where most carbon dioxide emissions occur. When we looked at our value chain, we found that 70% of CO2 emissions come from growing the raw materials we use for production." For the company, this means a major turnaround in cooperation with suppliers.

The beverage sector was represented in the panel by Mr. Jan Václav Kašpar, Corporate Social Responsibility & Community Manager of the Coca-Cola Hellenic Bottling Company, who, like other speakers, described the change of focus from standard partnerships to: "the immediate assistance to communities in need - to healthcare professionals in hospitals, cashiers, storekeepers and, last but not least, to our employees."





Mr. Petr Křivonožka, Tourism Business Development Manager of the Fashion Arena Prague Outlet, stated that despite the severe limitations of business in the covid years of 2020 and 2021, the company is intensively focusing on developing its sustainability. "Thanks to this, we have the opportunity to focus on our four pillars, which are a sustainable building, committed tenants, loyal customers and a resilient community."

The event was sponsored by the mayor of the capital city of Prague, Mr. Zdeněk Hřib. The event took place online in the [Attend](#) virtual studio, but we broadcasted live from the [Hilton Prague hotel](#), thanks to the [Neocont](#) agency. The media partner of the event was the daily [E15](#). Interpreting was provided by Mrs. [Silvie Ginterová](#) and Mrs. [Pavčina Kovářová](#).

