

EU leaders to debate push for zero emissions by 2050

June 17 2019, by Lachlan Carmichael And Martin Trauth



Spurred by a wave of student strikes, voters in many EU countries put climate at the top of their concerns

EU leaders will this week discuss setting a target of zero net greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, European officials said Monday, following

elections that highlighted climate change fears.

European Union leaders meeting Thursday and Friday in Brussels will debate the 2050 target of "climate neutrality" that the environmental group WWF says now has the support of 16 of the EU's 28 countries.

"As the effects of climate change become more visible and pervasive, we urgently need to step up our action to manage this existential threat," a draft of the EU's strategic agenda for the next six years says.

"The EU can and must lead the way, by engaging in an in-depth transformation of its own economy and society to achieve climate neutrality," according to the draft, which was obtained by AFP.

The draft contained a footnote saying the wording may be adjusted to reflect the results of the summit debate, which an EU source said would focus on the 2050 target.

The source told AFP that a number of EU countries want more debate on financing the shift from an economy running on fossil fuels, especially those in eastern Europe, to one driven by clean energy.

The source, speaking anonymously, that "I'm sure everyone will agree on this target, but only in December," when the leaders hold their annual year-end summit.

The growing stress on climate action comes after May 23-26 elections to the European Parliament where Green parties made substantial gains.

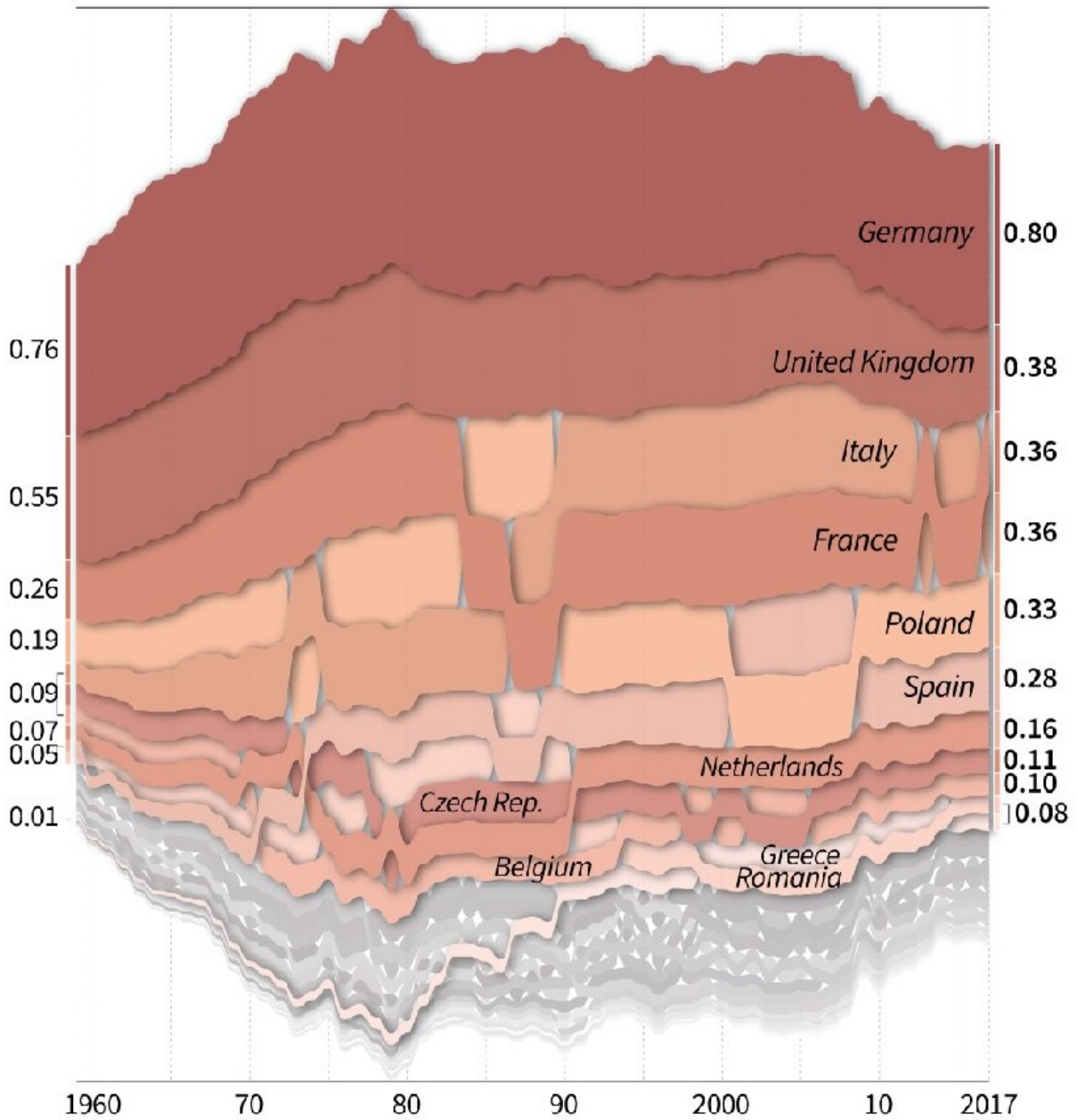
Spurred by a wave of student strikes, voters in many countries highlighted climate concerns and the parliament's main political blocs for the first time adopted climate action as a rallying cry.

Sixteen 'on board'

The World Wildlife Fund said Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Britain are "on board" for the 2050 goal.

Europe's greenhouse gas emissions

In billion tonnes of CO₂ per year



Source: Global Carbon Budget. In grey: 17 other European Union countries

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Greenhouse gas emissions by European countries from 1960 to 2017, according to the Global Carbon Project.

The British government last week presented draft legislation to reduce carbon emissions to net zero by 2050 in what it said would be a first for a major economy.

The WWF said Austria and Ireland appeared increasingly likely to support the target.

Still uncertain or hesitant, it added, are Belgium, Croatia, Estonia, Lithuania and Slovakia, though they are "unlikely to block" it.

It said Bulgaria, the Czech Republic and Bulgaria remain "strongly opposed," but Hungary and Romania could overcome opposition to do a deal.

Under the 2015 Paris climate change treaty, the EU pledged to reduce its carbon emissions by 40 percent below 1990 levels by 2030.

The 195-nation UN pact sealed in Paris calls for capping the rise in Earth's temperature at "well under" two degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit), and 1.5C if possible.

If the December summit endorses the 2050 target, the EU source said, the bloc would still be ready for a 2020 review set under the Paris agreement.

Under the landmark deal, countries agreed to announce by 2020 new efforts to strengthen their national plans to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

But the WWF said June is the "last official opportunity" for EU leaders to set a higher target before the UN secretary general's Global Climate Action Summit on September 23 when up to 80 countries will likely improve their pledges.

The UN Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change warned in October that warming is on track towards a catastrophic 3C or 4C rise, and avoiding global chaos will require a major transformation.

In their first summit since the elections, the leaders are to discuss appointing new heads of the European Commission, the European Council, the European Central Bank and the EU's diplomatic arm.

They will also endorse the 2019-2024 strategic agenda, which in addition to climate action aims to bolster democratic values, manage migration and boost employment in the digital era.

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