

EU sets goal to be 'climate neutral' by 2050

28 November 2018, by Dave Clark



World leaders have been trying to breathe new life into the Paris climate agreement amid backsliding from several nations—most notably the United States

The European Union on Wednesday urged government, businesses, citizens and regions to join its ambitious plan to cut emissions and make the bloc carbon neutral by 2050.

Brussels announced the new target just a day after the UN Environment Program warned that the EU is one of the economies "falling short" on its existing pledges.

"True, there are many challenges on the road," warned EU climate commissioner Miguel Arias Canete said. "But status quo is not an option."

According to Canete, if Europe retains its current targets it will only reduce net carbon emissions by 60 percent by mid-century—not enough to play its part in slowing a potentially catastrophic rise in temperatures.

Delegations from nearly 200 countries are due in Poland next week for the latest COP24 climate summit, aimed at renewing and building on the Paris deal and limiting global warming.

The EU, whose 28 members together form one of the world's biggest and hence most polluting economies, is keen to play its part and become the first major world player to be "climate neutral".

But as Canete told reporters in Brussels: "The proposed strategy does not intend to launch new policies, nor does the European Commission intend to revise 2030 targets."

"It is meant to set the direction of travel of climate and energy policy and to frame what the European Union considers as its long-term contribution to achieving the Paris Agreement temperature objectives."



Heavy smog shrouds Bulgarian commuters and the EU now wants to be "carbon neutral" by 2050

To this end, according to an EU news release, the strategy is "an invitation" to European citizens, businesses and institutions "to show leadership" and to put forward ideas to limit emissions.

Member states are to submit their draft national climate and energy plans to the European Commission by the end of 2018, the commission said.

While more homes will be insulated and transport will be modernised, the key plank of any successful strategy will be to reduce fossil fuel use in energy production by 80 percent by 2050, Canete said.

This implies increasing investments in clean energy from two percent of Europe's gross domestic product (GDP) to 2.8 percent—representing additional spending of between 175 and 290 billion euros per year, he said.

But he promised that this would also reduce the cost of energy imports by two to three trillion euros by 2050.

These plans are to cover commitments already made to reduce greenhouse emissions by 40 percent before 2030, while the strategy now aims "for a climate neutral Europe by 2050".

Pressure group Climate Action Network (CAN) welcomed the more ambitious 2050 target, but warned that the continuing 2030 goals still do not go far enough "to prevent the climate catastrophe."

"As a matter of urgency, the EU needs to massively increase the 2030 target," CAN Europe director Wendel Trio said. "It is the short term emission cuts that will make or break our response to climate change."



The Polish city of Katowice monitors smoke with drones, but the country is defensive about its reliance on coal-fired power stations

Backsliding

But—while they all signed up in Paris for a plan to try to limit global warming to less than two degrees Celsius over pre-industrial temperatures—EU members are not united on strategy.

Germany, for example, has resisted higher targets for emissions cuts on cars, and Poland—the host of next week's global summit—is defensive about its massive reliance on coal-fired power stations.

In France, street protests have broken out over the government's attempts to raise taxes on motor fuels.

World leaders have been trying to breathe new life into the 195-nation Paris Agreement amid backsliding from several nations—most notably the United States—over their commitments.

The accord is to take effect in 2020, and the UNEP now warns that its two-degree goal is already in danger because major economies, including the EU and US, are falling short of their Paris pledges.

Even if all Paris pledges are met, experts warn the temperature rise is on track to surpass three degrees by 2100.

But Canete insisted the EU is the only major economy to have begun to legislate to meet its targets, and said he was proud of the record it would take to the Poland meeting.

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