

## The only real benchmark for success

Written by Ana Gallego on 22 November 2019 in Opinion  
Opinion

As important as long-term climate change strategies are, the only way to measure true success is through concrete pledges for additional climate action, writes Bas Eickhout.



*Photo credit: Adobe Stock*

I will attend the annual climate summit as chair of the European Parliament's delegation, which is an honour for me. Especially since it is likely that the European Parliament will travel to Madrid with a strong mandate when it comes to increasing the 2030 CO2 reduction target.

I predict a lot of talk about 'markets' and 'long-term strategies' at COP25. Those are important topics, but it should not divert attention from the most pressing issue of all: the huge gap between what has to be done and what is being done.

We need to close that gap. We need countries coming forward with concrete pledges for additional climate action. That is, in the end, the only real benchmark for success.

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The Paris Agreement provides a framework on how the world will tackle climate change. The details on making that agreement operational are determined in the so-called 'rulebook'. Last year at COP24, the rulebook discussion was not entirely finished.

There is one unsolved issue left: Article 6 on 'Markets'. This article sets out the specific rules under which countries can trade in emission reductions. For example, the rules have to ensure that no double counting can occur: a situation where both countries taking part in a trade count the same reduction.

"It was shameful to see how developing countries were coming forward with additional promises for action, while the richest economies remained silent"

The EU always has a decent position when it comes to this specific topic, but the rules have to be robust.

And is the EU willing to bang its fists on the table for it? International trade in emission reductions is nothing new, but there have been many problems with it, including situations where factories were built only to be closed directly afterwards in order to sell the corresponding emission reduction credits.

Brazil and Australia are particularly problematic in the debate on the new market rules; they are doing everything they can to make them as weak as possible. Brazil wants to make easy money; Australia wants to meet its targets without doing anything.

Interestingly enough, these are also two countries the EU is talking about doing new trade deals with. If you ask me, the EU should not even hold trade talks if the countries involved are so blatantly trying to weaken international climate rules.

Is the EU willing to play that card if needs be, in order to get to an integer outcome on the market rules? Obviously, getting market rules correct is extremely important, but that is not why millions of people are participating in climate marches and strikes.

They want politicians to do what is necessary to avert a climate crisis. They want to see the promises made in Paris translated into concrete measures. The national climate plans (NDCs) of the parties to the Paris Agreement are far from sufficient, including that of the EU.

"If you ask me, the EU should not even hold trade talks if the countries involved are so blatantly trying to weaken international climate rules"

If all those climate plans are implemented to the letter, we still face a temperature rise of more than three degrees Celsius. That is what people want to see changed. Thus far the strongest economies are, at least at the international level, completely deaf to such calls.

Two months ago, a special summit was held in New York by the Secretary General of the UN to push countries to increase their climate pledges. It was shameful to see how developing countries were coming forward with additional promises for action, while the richest economies remained silent. This is the moment for the EU to shine.

Why would other countries make stronger international pledges, if the EU - an economic giant with lots of historical responsibility - does not manage to increase its NDC of minus 40 percent CO2 to at least minus 55 percent in 2030? And that is only the absolute bare minimum of what the Paris Agreement requires us to do.

The clock is ticking. The Paris Agreement will enter into force in 2020. After that, the next official moment to increase climate pledges will be in 2023. Once again we risk losing time that we simply do not have. The vagueness of the new European Commission - on the timing and extent of the increase - is not helpful.

The unwillingness of the European Council to even seriously discuss the topic - exactly twelve minutes during the last Council meeting - is very damaging. It makes the upcoming vote on the COP25 resolution, which will set out the mandate of the European Parliament in Madrid, extra important.

The new Parliament will vote on the question of whether the EU's 2030 target should be increased to minus 55 percent. Is the new Parliament as ambitious as the previous Parliament in this regard? Are the conservatives still voting against this idea?

We will find out during the Strasbourg plenary in late November. I assume, however, that the Parliament will travel to Madrid with a good mandate in this regard. Be assured that I will defend it tooth and nail.

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