ROAD TO COP24: A JUST ENERGY TRANSITION AHEAD?
The Polish city of Katowice will host the United Nations climate summit in December for a make-or-break attempt to make the Paris Agreement a reality. EURACTIV looks at where the global climate action effort stands at the moment, and what may lie in wait in southern Poland.

The 2015 landmark Paris Agreement on climate change aims to limit global warming to “well below” 2 degrees Celsius and hopes to even keep it to 1.5 degrees.

But what has changed since the international community decided to pursue such ambitious terms in the French capital? And what lies ahead in Katowice?

This Special Report looks at where the global climate action efforts stand at the moment and what may lie in wait in southern Poland.
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Towards Katowice: We’ll always have Paris?

By Sam Morgan | EURACTIV.com

As December’s UN climate summit in Poland rapidly approaches, it is shaping up to be a race against time to prepare the so-called Paris rulebook, which will govern how the landmark climate agreement will actually be implemented.

Between 3 and 14 December, a circus of international diplomats will descend on the former coal mining hub of Katowice in southern Poland for the latest annual UN climate summit, which is this year billed as the last chance to make the Paris Agreement a reality.

More than 1,400 delegates will have to reduce hundreds of pages to a single, coherent paper upon which all countries that have ratified the agreement can agree.

Many of these pages are of technical nature, such as how countries monitor and report their greenhouse gas emissions or keep track of climate change efforts. But they all aim to describe measures governments must take to achieve the Paris goal of keeping the global temperature increase “well below” 2°C, aiming for 1.5°C.

Negotiators have to act fast: summit follow-ups in Marrakech and Bonn were mostly geared toward setting the timeline for implementation of the Paris deal and containing the fallout from US President Donald Trump’s intention to scrap his country’s involvement in the agreement.

In preparation for COP24, negotiators have already met in Bangkok in order to try and whittle down the vast amount of documents and texts already on the table, so that Katowice will be all about picking from a number of pre-prepared options.

However, the Bangkok talks, which were added to the agenda after slow progress in May, also yielded “uneven progress”, according to UN climate change leader Patricia Espinosa. An extra negotiating day has since been added to the Katowice talks.

One of the major bones of...
Contention is a China-backed plan to create a two-speed rulebook that will split developed and developing countries in two on certain issues. It’s an idea that has already been opposed by both the EU and the US.

That is in addition to a debate on how ambitious countries should make their commitments, or Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), which has quickly turned into a political issue, one that will need to be looked at in Katowice.

Non-state actors are getting in on the action too. Following on from the 2017 Bonn summit, which saw two US delegations show up with very different attitudes to tackling climate change, September’s Global Climate Action summit saw a call of action issued by more than 4,000 leaders to governments to roll up their sleeves in Poland.

For now, world leaders are at least talking the talk. At the United Nations General Assembly in New York last week, Secretary-General António Guterres called climate change an “absolute priority” for the multilateral body he heads.

“The commitment [at the Paris climate summit] was universal – but we are nowhere close to where we need to be to meet these minimum targets,” Guterres added.

French President Emmanuel Macron also gave a bombastic speech to delegates where he insisted he would not sign off on large trade deals with countries that do not “respect” the landmark climate agreement.

It was a clear shot at Donald Trump but could also be interpreted as a warning to countries like Brazil and Australia, which are flirting with the prospect of watering down their commitments or even scrapping the deal altogether.

However, Macron’s pledge is a little empty, given that France does not sign trade deals on its own, as the EU handles commercial wrangling on behalf of its member states.

Brussels has already moved to make Paris a key tentpole of its trade deals and a new sweeping agreement with Japan and an updated version of the CETA pact with Canada now include promises to effectively implement the climate accord.
Europe has been one of the driving forces behind the quest to make the Paris Agreement a reality. But how serious is the EU about the landmark deal and what is Brussels doing in its own backyard to keep global temperature increase ‘well below 2 degrees Celsius’?

Since US President Donald Trump decided last year to haul the United States out of the Paris Agreement as soon as legally possible, Europe has been keen to reassert its leadership position on climate change, given the vacuum left by the Barack Obama White House.

That ambition survived its first acid test in September 2016, when the European Parliament approved the bloc’s ratification of the agreement, which in turn tipped the climate deal over the necessary benchmark to enter into force.

EU leaders have since met with Chinese and Canadian counterparts under the auspices of the Ministerial on Climate Action (MoCA) in order to “galvanise” increased emission reduction pledges and react to increasing concerns among the general public.

That leadership quest was reiterated at the Global Climate Action Summit in San Francisco on 15 September, when a delegation from the Parliament’s environment committee called on the EU to “fill the leadership gap”.

MEP Francesc Gambús said the gap “works as a drag on the UNFCCC process”, adding that if the EU does not “step up to the plate” then “no one else will”.

In a report adopted in June, the European Parliament also insisted that the EU should speak with a “single and unified voice” when it comes to global warming and other international issues.

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In order to export climate diplomacy beyond the EU’s borders, lawmakers also said that ratification and implementation of the climate accord should be a pre-requisite for future trade deals, although critics have already pointed out that measuring implementation is problematic.

Trump’s lack of time for climate action is set to scupper any remaining hopes of Brussels and Washington striking large-scale commercial deals, while fledgling talks with Australia could come to nothing given the latter’s roll-back on ambition.

Brazil, one of the world’s largest emitters, could also follow Trump’s course of action, as the frontrunner in its presidential elections this weekend, Jair Bolsonaro, has threatened to scrap the climate deal.

Home to the world’s largest rainforest, Brazil is meant to host 2019’s edition of the COP, although its uncertain political future means that it is still to be confirmed officially.

WORDS IN ACTION

In terms of policy, EU lawmakers have had their hands full finalising important elements of the European Commission’s raft of clean energy laws. Earlier this year, negotiators signed off on new rules for renewables, energy efficiency, building performance and governance.

Negotiations are still ongoing on reforming the EU’s internal electricity market but enough progress has already been made in brokering 2016’s Clean Energy Package for climate boss Miguel Arias Cañete to suggest an increase in the bloc’s emissions reduction commitment.

“Both new targets would de facto mean that the EU would be in a position to raise the level of ambition of the NDC and increase its emissions reduction target from the current 40% to slightly over 45% by 2030,” the Spanish official said at the second edition of the MoCA in June.

Cañete’s boss, Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, said in his 12 September State of the European Union speech that upping the target to 45% is “scientifically right” and “politically necessary”.

But Juncker failed to elaborate on how this should be done, given it would need approval from the EU’s 28 heads of states and governments. He also neglected to mention ongoing efforts to draw up a long-term climate strategy for 2050, which is required under the Paris Agreement.

A spokesperson for the EU executive told EURACTIV that new rules adopted at EU level this year mean that emissions reductions could reach 45%.

But “this does not mean that the Commission will present a new target,” the spokesperson added, saying the Commission will be discussing the issue over the coming weeks.

In Brussels, climate policy observers doubt that the increase can be moved forward at all before the UN’s annual climate summit kicks off in December. Securing an agreement to increase the EU’s emissions target at the Katowice climate change conference would be a “coup”, they say.

Earlier in the year, Cañete suggested that the idea could be looked at by October’s meeting of environment ministers but any notion of formally raising the target is a non-starter, according to sources.

LONG-TERM THINKING

Meanwhile, Commission services are already using the data from the new clean energy rules to come up with a long-term strategy for 2050 and beyond, which is meant to be released before the Katowice summit.

The long-term strategy, which will be a series of milestones rather than a legal act, is meant to drag Europe onto a Paris-compliant climate trajectory, through sufficient cuts to emissions from the transport, energy, agricultural and building sectors.

In terms of what will be put on the table for discussion, sources familiar with the file say the 45% cuts will be used as a baseline for business-as-usual, with other options taking in 85%+ cuts, net-zero emissions and maybe even something near zero emissions.

Climate experts have already warned that Cañete’s push for net-zero emissions by 2050, although well-intended, overestimates how much time Europe has to mitigate climate change. NGOs like the European Environmental Bureau have called for net-zero by 2040.

KILLING EMISSIONS SOFTLY

‘Net-zero emissions’ – a scenario where CO2 removals balance emissions – is markedly different to ‘zero emissions’ and there are few plausible scenarios under serious consideration where Europe emits nothing by mid-century.

Instead, carbon neutrality through carbon absorption and negative emissions are presented as the most likely outcome, because it will allow EU economies to continue emitting to some extent.

Negative emission technologies (NETs) include measures as simple as good forest management, as well as afforestation and reforestation. More trees means more carbon dioxide absorption and oxygen production.

It also includes carbon capture and storage, a technology that was initially touted as a potential silver bullet but which failed to pick up because of the high costs involved and a lack of incentives to make it commercially viable on a large scale.

Scientists have also been looking at steps as radical as geo-engineering but none have yet established themselves as a credible alternative.
As Poland readies itself to welcome the world in December, the man tasked with organising the COP24 Katowice summit told EURACTIV how preparations are going for what is likely to be make-or-break climate talks for the Paris Agreement.

Michał Kurtyka is secretary of state in Poland’s ministry of environment and is government plenipotentiary for the COP24 presidency. He responded to written questions.

Do you have a specific set of goals for the Katowice summit and how confident are you that you will achieve them?

There are several challenges we are facing at COP24 in Katowice. Given this conference is about operationalising
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the Paris Agreement, which provided us with a framework, but did not crunch the details of how to actually get to the goals the global community set out for itself, I could enumerate here a whole list of technical details which must be finalised in various decisions. But let me focus on two areas I see as particularly sensitive, and which will require political guidance in December. One is the issue of differentiation.

We are talking about how to move forward as a global community in achieving the goals of the agreement, implementing a system which takes into account differences between countries. This concerns the standards for transparent reporting by all countries and information pertaining to their contributions. Second, there is an issue of reporting on finance provided in the past and to be provided, so that the recipient countries commit to ambitious mitigation action having a reasonable degree of certainty they can pull their plans off the ground.

I just returned from New York where we hosted informal consultations on these and other issues with a representative group of countries from all negotiating groups. I am reassured there is a will among the Parties to deliver the Katowice outcome. We are hard at work and we will do all in our power to facilitate this delivery.

Katowice, a small city compared to previous COP hosts like Paris, is set to host diplomats and negotiators from across the world in December. What was the reasoning behind the decision to use a former mining centre as the venue for such an important climate summit?

We hosted the UN climate conferences in Poland twice before. Poznan hosted COP 14 and Warsaw hosted COP19. Both cities are smaller than Paris and both COPs delivered good results. The very notion of the intended nationally determined contributions (the INDCs) was coined at the meeting in Warsaw. On symbolism, we are of the view that if a much-needed transformation is to take place, those affected by it the most must be invited to the conversation.

In any situation in life, this is a logical approach, as it should be in the climate change policy arena. Katowice is the place where climate policy will dramatically alter the way of life of large communities. It is only fair to recognise that. This is why I made the topic of just transition prominent during our Presidency this year.

How much planning has been put into this presidency of the COP and how important do you assess its role in delivering the aims of this particular summit?

Admittedly, our team was put in place later than usual. We are, however, quite determined to make sure that the Polish Presidency delivers a good outcome, as it has done in the past. To put things in perspective, every time Poland is set to take the lead of the global process there is scepticism. I will let the fruit of the conference speak for itself. Long held opinions are usually hard to change no matter the argumentation.

The lead-up to COP24 has been hectic. Talks in Bangkok failed to completely narrow down all the options that leaders will pick from in Katowice and an extra day has been added to the summit. Is that the key resource in this process: time?

I strongly disagree with the notion that the Bangkok talks failed. They were very helpful in injecting momentum into the process and resulted in a strong mandate for the officers presiding over the respective strands of the discussions to produce draft textual proposals. Obviously, there is still a lot of work ahead of us but we probably achieved more progress in one week in Bangkok in September than in two weeks in Bonn in May. The options for the ministers are always distilled only during the COP. Parties do not let go of their positions earlier than that. It is not realistic to expect that. What’s more important is that the chief negotiators gain a good understanding of where the discussion is going and this is happening as we speak.

The presidency of the Paris COP also raced against time to put together what would eventually be the Paris Agreement. They largely achieved this through informal negotiations on the sidelines and a willingness to be flexible. Does your presidency intend to follow a similar approach, if needed?

We already held and will hold further informal consultations. We have an experienced team in place who know the process and its actors. I have paid visits to China, India, South Africa, Singapore, Norway, Germany, France, Canada and the US. I met with ASEAN and the BASIC countries. I am on my way to the Middle East. There is much in the planning and we are hard at work. The informal approach is very useful and must complement the formal process.

Three years on from Paris, the agreement looks shaky at times, given Donald Trump's decision to pull out when possible, Australia’s eroding ambition and the chance that Brazil's next leader may decide to nix it too. Does that give this COP even more added importance?

I see the role of the successive Presidencies as that of stewards of hard work which took many, many years. We are the ones responsible for

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sending it safe and sound on its way into the future. The Paris Agreement is historic, but only in Katowice will we show the world it is implementable. This is important.

Is Poland alone in hosting this COP or can we consider this a European effort? To what extent have other countries lent support or assistance?

COP14 and COP19 were a global effort, as all other conferences before, in between and after. Every COP is an effort of all Parties. In the run-up to any COP, a number of governmental and non-governmental actors assist by hosting discussions in various configurations and we are grateful for that. Any effort which brings the Parties’ understanding closer to a landing ground is valuable. Poland as the Presidency of the global climate process fulfils a role of a proud host and a keen assistant to the final delivery. COP 24 is no different in this respect.

The European Commission plans to unveil its 2050 long-term climate strategy either just before or at COP itself. Is this good timing in your opinion and do you think this forward-planning from the EU will help the effort needed in December to finalise the rulebook?

These two issues can be treated in a different manner. The EU, in light of its internal legislation and based on the impulse given by the European Council in March 2018, will be developing a long term strategy based on national plans. Implementing the Paris Agreement is a totally different discussion where the most useful input from the EU is rather its capacity to come forward with proposals that will build bridges between the positions of Parties.

It is the expertise of the EU negotiators on the way to Katowice and during the COP itself that can help to finalise the Paris Agreement Work Programme at COP24.
Great Expectations from COP24’s Polish hosts

By Sam Morgan | EURACTIV.com

Poland’s turn at holding the UN’s annual climate summit is meant to be the one shot at making the Paris Agreement a reality. But the hosts also want to make sure “no-one gets left behind” by what promises to be a major societal change.

Decarbonising Europe’s economy and meeting the Paris Agreement’s targets of keeping global warming “well below 2 degrees Celsius” and making efforts to limit it to 1.5 degrees will mean big changes across the EU in how we power our homes, businesses and infrastructure.

But phasing out fossil fuels and upping the share of renewable energy sources in national power mixes is not as simple as flicking a switch, despite the clear and present danger posed by climate change, due to be reinforced by a landmark IPCC report next week.

That is why the hosts of COP24, Poland, are keen to make sure those most affected economically by the pending changes are “invited to the conversation”.

According to the head of Poland’s presidency efforts, Michał Kurtyka, “climate policy will dramatically alter the way of life of large communities”.

One of the biggest concerns about an energy transition away from fossil fuels is the impact it could have on jobs, especially in regions that have traditionally relied heavily on sectors like coal mining.

Poland is a prime example of an EU country heavily tied to coal, as a large majority of its electricity needs are satisfied by that fossil fuel. European coal association Euracoal estimates that the sector employs 100,000 Poles.

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But given new EU energy rules, a climbing carbon price and a pending deal on electricity market design, coal looks to have a decidedly shaky future across Europe, not just Poland.

Germany is currently looking into how to phase out coal and a dedicated commission has been convened to take account of all the factors that come attached to such a landmark move.

That is why the European Commission launched the Coal Regions in Transition Platform in December. Under the mantra “no region left behind”, the EU executive hopes its new framework will help coal-dependent countries chart a sustainable course towards other energy sources.

Energy Union boss Maroš Šefčovič said during the launch that “our objective is to see every region reaping the benefits of the clean energy transition while creating new jobs and promoting investment in new technologies.”

The Commission estimates that coal mining provides 185,000 direct jobs in 12 member states but insists there is potential to create 900,000 jobs by the end of the next decade in areas like renewable energy.

At an event in the European Parliament last week, Paul Hodson, head of energy efficiency at the Commission, suggested that the platform could look at how coal miners might be retrained in building renovation.

Updated rules on energy performance of buildings are meant to boost Europe’s meagre 2% building renovation rate, which is seen as crucial in reducing emissions. Buildings are responsible for more than a third of the EU’s carbon dioxide output.

**PEATY PROBLEMS**

The price of carbon is on the up, so the so-called polluter-pays principle is starting to take effect through the EU’s Emissions Trading System (ETS). Carbon was priced at around €7 per tonne last year and is now above €20.

During the update of the ETS last year, EU negotiators agreed to include a ‘Just Transition Fund’ that can be topped up with profits from auctioning carbon permits, which allow industries to pollute.

But the Fund is optional and it is up to member states to decide whether to divert permit profits into that mechanism or use them for clean energy and decarbonisation investments.

As EU countries draft their national energy plans for 2030, an obligation imposed by the bloc’s various clean energy laws, they will have to decide whether to make use of the Fund, which is meant to help re-skill and up-skill workers.

Irish MEP Sean Kelly (EPP) said in a statement on Monday (1 October) that the government should “ensure that an adequate percentage of auction revenues are ring-fenced for impacted areas, such as those whose local economies are dependent on jobs in peat and coal power plants”.

Peat is big business in Ireland and it is used as a feedstock in power plants and for domestic heating. But the industry has a significant environmental impact as it destroys the habitat of local species and releases a lot of CO2.

Plans are afoot to include a dedicated Fund in the EU’s next multiannual budget after 2020, and a leaked draft UN declaration revealed in September that the Polish COP presidency wants a programme to monitor national progress on protecting workers that rely on traditional industries.
The Polish Electricity Association is an association of the power sector, whose activities focus on the functioning of the industry in a modern market economy.

We engage in actions and projects thanks to which the Polish power industry can better meet the challenges related to the European integration, ensuring energy security, competitive market, environmental protection, and development of state-of-the-art technologies.

Visit our website to know more. (http://www.pkee.pl/)