



# **COP21 – a counter in climate policy**

**Column and Mainline Summary**

# COP21 – a counter in climate policy

Walking from Plaça Sant Jaume to Jaume metrostation and further into Barcelona, you typically encounter small “Barça” fan shops. Selling football shirts, shoes and all kinds of paraphernalia, they express the enthusiasm of the Catalans for football and for their club, who play the type of football famous for its dynamics. The very moment a match seems to be settled, successful counters change the face of the game dramatically. The only certainty here is that the rules do not change during the match.

The energy policy landscape is an ever-changing one, but the parallel to the dynamics of football struck me after two meetings on the Paris COP21 results in Barcelona on 5 February 2016. In the morning, I attended a workshop co-organized by the [Advisory Council for the Sustainable Development of Catalonia](#) (CADS) and think tank [CIDOB](#), and in the afternoon I joined the EEAC Energy Working Group. Not only are both football and energy policy affected by ever-changing dynamics, but there is more.

The previous climate conference, COP20 in Lima, had started with hopeful signs of promises to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, but the negotiations shattered on the issue of financing. Looking at the editions before the Lima summit, some of us had already anticipated this, while others were seeing hopeful signs for a potential comeback. And COP21 in Paris was a comeback indeed.

Drawing upon the discussions at the two Barcelona meetings<sup>1</sup>, I would like to look at the results of COP21 from three different perspectives.

First, one could ask how transformative the Paris results are. Sure, there is a mechanism in the updated Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) that can only go in one direction: towards stricter targets. It has to be admitted however that the current INDCs do not suffice, so this will need some time to become effective. But, looking at the CO<sub>2</sub> budget left, one can argue time is quickly running out<sup>2</sup>. Maybe more important from this first perspective however, and in my opinion far more decisive, is coverage. With Europe and New Zealand, the Kyoto Protocol covered only about 14% of global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. The Paris Agreement, with its 196 participants including the U.S. and China, covers well over 90% of world-wide CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

Secondly, a word on the perspective following COP21's outcome to keep the rise in global temperature well below 2 °C and ‘to pursue efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels’. This came as a surprise to many, and no policy scenarios have as yet been developed to support these objectives. Although it is always good to set clear and ambitious targets, there are concerns for the stricter INDCs this will require, especially in the context of economic growth and population rise in parts of the world. The parallel to football here is that without a clear intent to win, one should not bother to enter the pitch, to enter Camp Nou. And innovation, as we have already seen with regard to renewables, is on our side. The clear focus on the end goals mentioned in the Paris Agreement, while allowing for flexibility and room to manoeuvre, is key in this regard. It also helps the updating cycle of the INDCs is dynamic, resulting in possibilities for adaptability.

---

<sup>1</sup> Full minutes of the meetings can be found enclosed

<sup>2</sup> <https://pbs.twimg.com/media/Ca2C1FJXEA7-tn.jpg:large>

And finally, there are the rules of the game. Whereas Kyoto was a legally binding treaty, COP21 has resulted in an agreement that is partly based on voluntary action. As a result, the inter-state compliance regime is weak; if a party to the agreement does not meet its goals, any resulting action is aimed at helping it to do so. Is this mechanism strong enough to yield results? In the Barcelona meetings, it was argued that the transparency of the five-year reporting obligation will hold the partners to the agreement accountable. But it is not states, but regions, cities, citizens and initiatives like Urgenda in the Netherlands that will determine the outcome. The changing role of the IPCC is testament to this shift, with new actors assuming new roles. This development is underlined by the statement<sup>3</sup> made by DNB (the central bank of the Netherlands). In the movement from an inter-state to an intra-state playing field, climate laws are an important factor. The EEAC Energy Working Group will be exploring this issue in the months to come.

Sure: questions and concerns concerning finance, accountability, compliance and the limited CO<sub>2</sub> budget left still remain. At the same time, new players are entering the field who may bring a whole new set of rules to the game, including in the field of climate legislation. And as we are seeing one of the biggest comebacks in climate policy history, we see people sliding to the edge of their seats.

Reaction to this column à titre personnel, both on climate policies –including climate law issues- and football are welcome.

Folmer de Haan f.w.dehaan@rli.nl  
Chair, EEAC Energy Working Group

---

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.dnb.nl/en/news/news-and-archive/dnbulletin-2016/dnb338533.jsp>

# Mainline summary of the Workshop

## ***Introduction***

As part of its 2016 agenda, the EEAC's Energy Working Group was involved in the organization of a workshop on the outcomes of the COP21 negotiations. The workshop was organized together with the [Advisory Council for the Sustainable Development of Catalonia](#) (CADS) and think-tank [CIDOB](#), and aimed to reflect on the results and consequences of the Paris Agreement. On 5 February 2016, over one hundred participants gathered in Barcelona to engage in debate and knowledge-sharing.

A panel of international experts was invited to discuss several key issues following the Paris Agreement. The panel included Prof. Miranda Schreurs (director of the Environmental Policy Research Centre of the *Freie Universität Berlin*, and deputy chair of the EEAC Network), Dr Teresa Ribera (director of the *Institut du développement durable et des relations internationales*), Prof. Josep Enrich Llebot (*Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona*), and Dr Bert Metz (European Climate Foundation).

On behalf of the EEAC Energy Working Group, Alexis Dall'Asta, Arnau Queralt, Christian Hey, Filipe Duearte Santos, Folmer de Haan, Michiel de Vries and Sílvia Canellas Bolta attended the workshop.

This document provides a mainline summary of the event, and is an annex to the piece by Folmer de Haan, Chair of the EEAC Energy Working Group.

## ***Mainline summary***

### *Can the outcome of COP21 be considered transformative?*

During the first round of debate, the panellists were invited to reflect on the question whether the Paris Agreement may be considered transformative. In general, all panellists agreed that this was indeed the case, and a variety of arguments were shared to support this opinion.

Dr Ribera for instance argued that the agreement should not only be considered in technical terms; more than ever, the level of transparency, in combination with changing opinions in society on the need to fight climate change, makes this agreement about the prestige of the countries involved, and about the way they are perceived. Prof. Schreurs argued that the changing role of large states, such as the United States and China, may be considered transformative as well. While both countries have a history when it comes to not participating in climate agreements, both China and the U.S. had supported negotiations leading up to COP21 by signing a bilateral agreement to reduce GHG emissions in advance.

Prof. Llebot saw the changing atmosphere in the climate debate as being transformative. While during the Kyoto and Copenhagen summits, climate scepticism was still widely spread, the debate changed in the run-up to COP21. In general, there seemed to be an understanding of the need to combat climate change. Dr Metz considered the fact that the Paris Agreement delivered a fossil fuel phase-out agenda as a transformative development. The aim to secure a maximum temperature rise of 2 °C by the end of the millennium means that the fossil fuel phase-out process must be finalized by 2060 (and by 2050 if a maximum increase of 1.5 °C were to become the new target). This target sets a clear dot on the horizon.

### *Containing temperature rise*

The panellists agreed it is questionable whether the world is able to contain the rise in temperature to a maximum level of 1.5 °C. According to Dr Metz, there is only a limited period of time left if we were to maintain our current emission levels.

Furthermore, Dr Metz argued that major differences may exist between the goals of the Paris Agreement and the national plans submitted by individual countries, jeopardizing the ability to meet the goals set. Prof. Schreurs shared her concern that world-wide population growth will add additional pressure, making it increasingly difficult to reach the '1.5 °C aim'. Dr Ribera advocated the need to acquire more knowledge in order to be able to determine what measures are required to restrict the rise in temperature to 1.5 °C. Current studies mostly focus on a 2 °C aim, Dr Ribera argued.

### *Voluntary action and policy reversal*

As the Paris Agreement is partly based on voluntary action, the question was raised how countries will be held accountable in a situation that allows for voluntary action. Dr Ribera argued that the combination of transparency (a progress report will have to be drafted every five years) and obligatory elements (e.g. new national aims and targets must be tighter than previous ones) will ensure countries can be held accountable. Prof. Schreurs called for a serious improvement of the knowledge base. Although transparency might reinforce accountability, it cannot be achieved when it is impossible to systematically analyze and compare the progress reported by countries due to an inadequate information base.

Since politicians come and go, and political opinions change accordingly, the question was raised whether there is a risk the Paris Agreement might be discarded as a consequence of changes in the political landscape. The panellists agreed that this is indeed the case. However, they all doubted whether politicians would dare to go so far, considering the strong public opinion on the issue and the ground-swell of citizens, NGOs and local and regional governments supporting the combat against climate change.

When Dr Metz expressed his concern about the possible effects of the U.S presidential elections, Prof. Schreurs argued that the bilateral agreement with China could work as a strong mechanism for the next president to stick to the climate agreement as signed by President Obama.

### *Money talks?*

Dr Ribera argued that although it is possible to make the agreed (\$100 billion available to fight climate change by 2020, a bigger challenge is to steer general investment flows. Capital flows are strong, and if the flows move in the opposite direction (i.e. towards investments in fossil fuels etc.), the \$ 100 billion budget does not make much of a difference, Dr Ribera warned. Prof. Schreurs agreed, and highlighted the importance of initiatives such as the divestment movement, which tries to persuade all kinds of institutional investors to disinvest their fossil fuel related activities. Moreover, Prof. Schreurs argued, at the same time investors can make sure that political leadership will hold course. The Paris Agreement has set the aim, and investors want to get as much certainty as they can. Constantly shifting policies will not be appreciated by the market, so money flows could be as much a threat as they could be a means of support.

Dr Metz expressed an additional concern regarding the financial aspect of fighting climate change. He argued that in twenty years from now, the so-called CO<sub>2</sub> budget will most likely be exhausted. When the fossil fuel phase-out is to be finalized by then, some parties may benefit financially, whereas

others will be faced with (severe) losses. Dr Metz warned that the world needs to prepare for such a situation. The panellists agreed the current financial efforts to tackle the challenges are insufficient.

### *Regions and cities*

Upon discussing the involvement of different governmental layers, it was observed that – besides regions – cities will most likely play an important role. Air quality is a major concern in many urban areas, and municipal authorities are under increasing pressure to do something about it. The combination of health- and climate-related issues as well as environmental concerns has increased public awareness, and boosts incentives to invest in green sources of energy and to make an effort to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

Furthermore, cities will grow even further in the next decades: the population in some cities will outnumber the population of certain countries (as is indeed already the case). Prof. Llebot underlined that cities will become important drivers at ground level, so it would be a mistake to only focus on national measures. Prof. Schreurs added that the Paris Agreement is just a ‘green light’ providing the world with a general goal, a vision of where we are heading, and not so much a roadmap for action.

During the discussion, it was also questioned whether the UNFCCC is still the right forum for action. In reaction to this, the general feeling was that climate must become a concern for other institutions as well. In this respect, Dr Metz reminded the participants that shipping and aviation are still delegated to other agencies, and that progress in these sectors is slow.

### **Disclaimer :**

This summary is an interpretation made by the EEAC secretariat. It does not necessarily reflect the exact opinion of the speakers. Any shortcomings or errors remain entirely the responsibility of the EEAC secretariat.