

Opinion in preparation of the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP26)

- **Own-initiative opinion**
 - **Prepared by the Energy and Climate Working Group**
 - **Approved by the General Assembly by written procedure on 24 September 2021**
 - **The original language of this opinion is French**
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1. Context

- [a] Given the particular importance of the Glasgow climate negotiations, which should have been held in 2020 five years after the Paris Agreement was approved, the FRDO-CFDD decided to issue an own-initiative opinion in preparation for the COP in order to present its priorities for our country.

2. Opinion

2.1. Introduction

- [1] The FRDO-CFDD notes with concern that the World Meteorological Organization warns¹ that the threshold of a 1.5°C rise in annual average temperature already has a 40% chance of being reached by 2025. In the words² of the UN Secretary General, 2021 is a pivotal year because “We have a small and narrow window of opportunity to do the right thing” to save the climate.
- [2] The FRDO-CFDD stresses the importance of COP26 to bring the rebuilding of the global economy in the wake of the health crisis in line with the climate goals³ and consistent with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- [3] The FRDO-CFDD wishes to recall that climate change also has a negative impact on human health and highlights the issue of environmental and ecological inequalities, placing the impact of climate change most heavily on the most vulnerable. It suggests that special attention should be paid to the disadvantaged in climate change adaptation policies.
- [4] According to the FRDO-CFDD, contributing to the implementation of the Paris Agreement and to the achievement of the EU's energy and climate objectives implies a profound transition to a low-carbon society. Governments, citizens and stakeholders are now convinced of the need for a transition to a low-carbon society and want to see this transition take place in an organized way. In this respect, the governments concerned must make it clear that they are opting for a structural process of sustainable development (in a European and global framework) that is based on the evolution of scientific knowledge.

This should ensure the following:

- respect for environmental limits and the will to combat climate change, according to the principle of common but differentiated responsibility
- security of energy supply, both for consumers and for the country as a whole
- a high-performance economy, ensuring the competitiveness of our companies

¹ [WMO Global Annual to Decadal Climate Update](#) – Executive Summary, 2020, p. 2.

² [Speech by UN Secretary-General António Guterres](#) at the Petersberg Climate Dialogue, 6/05/2021.

³ On Belgian policy, see the following FRDO-CFDD opinions: 2020a07, 2020a10, 2021a01, 2021a02, 2021a04.

- social justice and a just transition, respecting the five pillars of social justice: social dialogue, job creation (investment, research and development, innovation), training and skills, respect for human rights⁴ and workers' rights, and concerted and strong social protection
- policy coherence for climate and sustainable development⁵, ensuring that the transition in Belgium is not at the expense of sustainable development in developing countries.⁶

In this respect, the FRDO-CFDD is convinced that the SDG framework can be an important lever for transformation policy and calls on the governments involved to provide the necessary guarantees for this systemic approach through a transparent and coordinated SDG implementation strategy.⁷

- [5] A policy for the transition to a climate-neutral society requires a global approach, leading among other things to a level playing field for companies, as well as a broad and strategic approach by all levels of government in Belgium, while encouraging proactive initiatives. It should integrate all sustainable development issues, involve stakeholders to ensure broad societal support and be consistent with development policy.
- [6] The FRDO-CFDD recognizes the challenge of organizing an international summit in the context of a health crisis (both virtually and physically) and calls for attention to the importance of full participation of all countries (and in particular low-income countries that are vulnerable to the climate crisis) and stakeholders.

2.2. Reduce emissions to net zero by mid-century

- [7] The FRDO-CFDD recalls that the IPCC report⁸ on the 1.5°C target showed that there is a significant difference in ecological and human consequences between this limit and a warming of 2°C.
- [8] The FRDO-CFDD also highlights the gap between the sum of nationally determined contributions (NDCs) and the objective of Article 2.1(a) of the Paris Agreement, namely to keep the increase in global average temperature well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and to continue efforts to limit the increase in temperature to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. It takes the opportunity to recall the five-year ambition mechanism of the Paris Agreement and stresses in this context the importance of elaborating new ambitious NDCs by COP26 at the latest to close the 'emissions gap' (i.e. the gap between actual projected emissions in 2030 and the 1.5°C target of the Paris Agreement), including just transition measures and rules ensuring a level playing field for our companies.
- [9] The FRDO-CFDD calls for Belgium to be actively involved in climate diplomacy in order to strengthen the common international momentum to address climate change. This diplomacy should aim at the wider adoption of a long-term climate neutrality objective and the joint strengthening of the objectives submitted in the framework of the Paris Agreement which is on the agenda of COP26. This diplomacy, focusing in particular on Belgium's main trading partners, should also aim at a common reinforcement of climate and environmental policies and measures (in particular in the air and maritime transport sectors that are not covered by the NDCs).
- [10] The FRDO-CFDD recalls the importance of the European Green Deal to achieve a climate-neutral society by 2050 as foreseen by the European Climate Act⁹, as well as of raising the European ambition to a minimum 55% reduction of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions in 2030 compared to 1990.

⁴ Following the principles set out in the preamble of the Paris Agreement: the right to health, the rights of indigenous peoples, local communities, migrants, children, persons with disabilities and persons in vulnerable situations and the right to development, as well as gender justice, women's empowerment and intergenerational equity.

⁵ Law of 19 March 2013 on Belgian Development Cooperation.

⁶ On the need to strengthen the sustainability criteria for biofuels at European level, for example, see § [3] of opinion 2018a01.

⁷ See opinion 2019a03, § [11] and opinion 2019a02, § [5].

⁸ The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, *IPCC Special Report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways, in the context of strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development, and efforts to eradicate poverty*, 2019.

⁹ See: https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/eu-climate-action/law_en

[11] The FRDO-CFDD calls for international support, through the agreements reached at the COP, for plans that underpin the transition to climate-neutral economies by 2050, including coherent industrial policies and the use of predominantly renewable energy.

[12] The FRDO-CFDD recalls that the new European targets imply that Member States must establish new strategies – accompanied by adequate financing – to support the revision of these European climate targets.

2.3. Protect people and nature

[13] The FRDO-CFDD asks that Belgium and the European Union advocate for special attention to be paid to the principles of inclusion, human rights, gender justice and *handstreaming*¹⁰ in the context of international negotiations and in the definition of the position of Belgium and the European Union.

[14] The FRDO-CFDD also calls for Belgium to pay attention to the impact of climate change on human rights and to the protection of human rights. The FRDO-CFDD also calls for Belgium to follow this line in international climate negotiations and to take a leading role in this field.

[15] The FRDO-CFDD calls for sufficient attention to be paid to the damage that climate change is already causing to fragile countries and communities. In this context, it calls for Belgium to take a proactive and constructive stance in the discussions on "loss and damage", and in particular for our country to advocate for a robust, comprehensive and reliable financing facility under the *Warsaw International Mechanism for Loss and Damage*.

[16] The FRDO-CFDD also calls for attention to be paid to the growing problem of climate displacement and the need to find concrete solutions at national and international level. In this context, it recalls the recommendations of the UNFCCC Task Force on Displacement, which were approved at the climate summit in Katowice (COP24), and stresses the importance of their implementation at national and international levels.

Gender

[17] The FRDO-CFDD recalls that, at COP25, the States once again noted the low level of integration of gender justice in all activities related to the Framework Convention and adopted the enhanced *Lima Work Programme on gender* and its action plan for gender equality (see Decision 3/CP.25). The FRDO-CFDD underlines that this programme asks Parties since 2019 to integrate gender justice also in their climate policies at the national level, not only at the international level.

[18] In the light of the above, the FRDO-CFDD demands that Belgium, in the framework of international negotiations :

- considers gender justice as one of the essential pillars of just transition
- pleads for the issue of the formal inclusion of gender justice to be given the highest attention during the negotiations, the reporting during the *Global Stocktake Cycles* and the updating of the NDCs
- continues to advocate for balanced representation in terms of both identity and gender expertise.

Nature and climate change

[19] The FRDO-CFDD calls for further anchoring the role of nature-based solutions (NBS) in the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement. For the FRDO-CFDD, NBS are indispensable, particularly with regard to adaptation to

¹⁰ The term handstreaming is a contraction of the concepts of disability and mainstreaming. Mainstreaming is a policy concept for an integrated approach across different policy areas. The concept is known worldwide thanks to "gender mainstreaming". Handstreaming introduces a similar integrated approach for people with disabilities. See: <https://socialesecurity.belgium.be/nl/handstreaming>

climate change, to achieve a sustainable world and to provide an integrated vision of the different components of social, environmental and economic problems. However, these should be the product of inclusive and transparent processes as they affect the living environment of citizens and it is therefore imperative that these transformations of territories take place in consultation with the people concerned. Furthermore, these solutions must offer a net gain for biodiversity and ecosystem integrity.

- [20] The FRDO-CFDD requests that our country advocate at the CBD (Convention on Biological Diversity) COP15 for integration and ambitious targets for NBS as well as for synergies in this area in both international processes.
- [21] The FRDO-CFDD asks that Belgium continues to advocate for the impact of agriculture, forestry and land conversion (Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry - LULUCF) on natural carbon pools to be taken into account. In this context, the FRDO-CFDD also calls on Belgium to advocate for a transition of international supply chains of agricultural products (such as soy, palm oil, cocoa ...) and timber to systems that do not allow further deforestation and/or conversion of rich and/or unique biodiversity ecosystems such as savannahs, grasslands and wetlands.
- [22] The FRDO-CFDD calls for more attention to be paid to the ocean and coastal zone ecosystems so that they are better anchored in the climate regime.

2.4. Mobilizing finance to tackle climate change

- [23] According to the FRDO-CFDD, the climate finance target of USD 100 billion (both public and private) per year must be met and even strengthened when it appears that this target has not been met in 2020 according to projections. The FRDO-CFDD stresses the importance of new commitments from all Annex II countries to close the financing gap in 2021 and in the period up to 2025. This must be accompanied by an action plan on how this target will be achieved and a uniform reporting mechanism to promote transparency.
- [24] The FRDO-CFDD calls for Belgium to work proactively at the international level to develop clear agreements on the process to achieve a new international climate finance target by 2025 that is significantly higher than the current target and includes specific sub-targets.
- [25] The FRDO-CFDD recalls the obligation for Belgium to contribute with "new and additional" means to international climate finance and underlines the importance of international climate funds such as the *Green Climate Fund*, the *Adaptation Fund* and the *Least Developed Countries Fund* in order to ensure predictability of funding, balanced decision-making, a balance between adaptation and mitigation funding and direct access to finance.
- [26] The FRDO-CFDD calls for a new and higher Belgian commitment to international climate finance before COP26, which does not burden the development cooperation budget in accordance with article 4 § 3 of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change.
- [27] In this context, the FRDO-CFDD calls for the decoupling of discussions on intra-Belgian agreements on international climate finance, which are linked to international negotiations, from other intra-Belgian agreements linked to the European level (concerning greenhouse gas emission reductions, revenue sharing of the European emissions market, etc.).
- [28] The FRDO-CFDD recalls the objective of the Paris Agreement¹¹ to make "finance flows consistent with a pathway towards low greenhouse gas emissions and climate-resilient development" and asks in this context that the federal government work on a general strategy to redirect spending and investments in order to make a transition to a carbon neutral society possible, in particular by supporting technologies that make it possible to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

¹¹ Article 2, 1, c).

[29] The FRDO-CFDD calls for accelerating the financing of the decarbonisation of economies. The financial sector should favour sustainable investments that do not increase greenhouse gas emissions, preserve biodiversity, or increase deforestation...

2.5. Working together, encouraging cooperation across borders and across society

Carbon markets

[30] The FRDO-CFDD believes that the agreement to be reached in Glasgow must be in line with the *San Jose principles on the carbon market*, as signed by Belgium.

As a reminder, these principles¹² state that the rules governing market mechanisms must at least:

- Ensure environmental integrity and enable the highest possible mitigation ambition.
- Deliver an overall mitigation in global emissions.
- Prohibit the use of pre-2020 units, Kyoto units and allowances.
- Ensure that double counting is avoided.
- Avoid locking in levels of emissions, technologies or carbon-intensive practices incompatible with the achievement of the Paris Agreement's long-term temperature goal.
- Apply allocation methodologies and baseline methodologies that support domestic NDC achievement and contribute to achievement of the Paris Agreement's long-term temperature goal.
- Use CO₂-equivalence in reporting and accounting for emissions and removals, fully applying the principles of transparency, accuracy, consistency, comparability and completeness.
- Use centrally and publicly accessible infrastructure and systems to collect, track, and share the information necessary for robust and transparent accounting.
- Ensure incentives to progression and supports all Parties in moving toward economy-wide emission targets.
- Contribute to quantifiable and predictable financial resources to be used by developing country Parties that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change to meet the costs of adaptation.
- Recognize the importance of capacity building to enable the widest possible participation by Parties under Article 6.

[31] In addition, the FRDO-CFDD draws attention to the need for safeguards to protect human rights in the context of Article 6 of the Paris Agreement, which includes carbon markets.

Role of non-state actors

[32] The FRDO-CFDD calls for a stronger role for non-state actors (such as businesses, trade unions, NGOs and academics) in developing solutions to the current climate crisis and for Belgium to get involved in strengthening the *Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action* (MPGCA).

Evaluation

[33] The FRDO-CFDD calls on Belgium to advocate for a five-year timetable for the implementation of the NCDs after 2030, which would allow for a proper comparison between them and set an overall timetable for national obligations.

2.6. Agriculture and food

[34] The FRDO-CFDD calls on Belgium to emphasise at the COP the importance of the agricultural sector for the livelihoods of billions of people around the world, as well as to pay sufficient attention to the fragility of this sector in the face of the climate crisis and its present and future negative impacts on food supply.

¹² See: <https://cambioclimatico.go.cr/sanjosoprinciples/about-the-san-jose-principles/>

- [35] The FRDO-CFDD requests that Belgium also highlights the opportunities that the agricultural sector offers and how it can be part of the solution to the climate challenge by sequestering carbon, while providing mechanisms to ensure that such processes do not undermine food security by creating additional land pressure.
- [36] The FRDO-CFDD also draws attention to the Koronivia¹³ process which has been launched within the *Koronivia Joint Work on Agriculture* and which should be able to land at COP26. The FRDO-CFDD requests that Belgium insists that the recommendations on food security, which are therefore in line with article 2, § 1, b) of the Paris Agreement, must be included in the decisions of COP26.

¹³ See: <http://www.fao.org/koronivia/en/>