

# Oxford Climate Policy Blog

Initiating debates on international climate policy

## Common Time Frames — Synthesising the Options for a Decision in Glasgow

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## Background

It has become increasingly clear over the past 18 months since COP 25 in Madrid that the Parties to the Paris Agreement are intent on finishing the negotiations on 'common time frames for nationally determined contributions referred to in Article 4, paragraph 10, of the Paris Agreement' at COP 26 in Glasgow. Indeed, the UK COP 26 Presidency has made this one of their top three priorities regarding the completion of the Paris Rule Book in Glasgow.

At present, there are ten options – listed in an [Options Note](#) published at the end of COP 25 in Madrid – under consideration. The question, as raised by a growing number of Parties in the course of recent informal consultations, now is: how can this multitude be whittled down to a smaller more manageable number (preferably just one) of revised ('synthesis') options without losing the support of the proponents of original ones.

To do this, this blog post looks at the 'action content' – i.e. the concrete instructions (if any) they contain on **who** is meant to do **what**, **when** and with regard to **which NDC** (identified by the time-frame/end-year) – of these proposals with the aim to demonstrate that what has become known as the '[Glasgow Ambition Cycle](#)' (GAC)[1] can serve as an overarching synthesis option, delivering the advantages of all the Madrid options, without suffering their shortcomings.

## The Glasgow Ambition Cycle:

1. *Request* Parties to communicate by 2025a nationally determined contribution with a time frame up to 2035, and to do so every five years thereafter, pursuant to Article 4, paragraph 9, of the Agreement
2. *Also request* Parties to consider in 2025 updating any nationally determined contributions communicated before, and to do so every five years thereafter

But before turning to accomplish this, a few words on the historical background of this issue.

At COP 21 in Paris (2015), it was agreed that the Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties to the Paris Agreement (CMA) “*shall consider common time frames for nationally determined contributions at its first session*”[Art. 4.10]. In Marrakech, the year after, the CMA agreed to refer the matter to the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI) which, in 2017 in Bonn (SBI 47), “*invited Parties and observers to submit, by 31 March 2018, their views on common time frames for NDCs ... including on, but not limited to, the usefulness of and options for common time frames and the advantages and disadvantages of those options, for consideration at SBI 48 (April–May 2018)*”[SBI 47 conclusions].

By May 2018, 15 Parties had made submissions, which were analyzed in an OCP/ecbi Discussion Note (see below), but the SBI deliberations didn’t progress beyond [List of Bullet points by the co-facilitators](#) (SBI.48.2, September 2019).

The first, and hitherto only decision on the matter was taken at CMA.1 in Katowice when it was decided “that Parties shall apply common time frames to their nationally determined contributions to be implemented from 2031 onward”(Decision 6/CMA.1).

SBI.50 (June 2019) resulted in an informal note listing [6 options](#), which was picked up and expanded to [10 options](#) at SBI.51 in Madrid (December 2019), where however the deliberations were rolled over under Rule 16 and have not been taken up since due to the COVID pandemic.[2]

What did take place since then was an Informal and a [Technical Dialogue](#) in November 2020, and an Informal Consultation of heads of delegations by the COP Presidencies in April 2021, all of which pointing to a desire by Parties to settle this issue at COP 26 in Glasgow, and consequently, to reduce the number of options that are currently under consideration.

## What Timeframes?

One of the key obstacles to progress in the CTF negotiations has been that Parties do not have a common understanding on what ‘timeframe’ actually refers to, let alone what it is to have a ‘common timeframe’.

In June 2018, OCP published an in-depth analysis of this situation on the basis of the Party submissions requested at SBI.47 (Müller 2018.a). It showed that Parties were essentially using two types of interpretations of ‘timeframe’: a material- and a procedural one. The material interpretation is about time intervals associated with the NDCs – to be precise, about *target-* and *implementation periods*, and mostly involves references to their lengths. The procedural interpretation is about timetables for the processes of communicating and updating NDCs.

Subsequent work based on this analysis (listed below in *Selected Publications*) did suggest a way to “synthesise” CTF proposals, such as the ones contained in the SBI.50 Options Note, by describing their **specific action content**, that is to say the concrete instructions they contain with regards to **who** does **what, when** and with respect to **which NDC** (as identified by its endpoint<sup>[3]</sup>).

The paradigm formulation of this type of specific action content is given in paragraphs 23 and 24 of [Decision 1/CP.21](#), and the same language is used in formulating the Glasgow Ambition Cycle proposal to be discussed in the next section as synthesising these two paragraphs into a single common time frame proposal in a way which preserves the advantages of both while avoiding the disadvantages of either:

### **Decision 1/CP.21 (Adoption of the Paris Agreement):**

23. *Requests* those Parties whose intended nationally determined contribution pursuant to decision 1/CP.20 contains a time frame up to 2025 to communicate by 2020 a new nationally determined contribution and to do so every five years thereafter pursuant to Article 4, paragraph 9, of the Agreement

24. *Also requests* those Parties whose intended nationally determined contribution pursuant to decision 1/CP.20 contains a time frame up to 2030 to communicate or update by 2020 these contributions and to do so every five years thereafter pursuant to Article 4, paragraph 9, of the Agreement

### **Analysis of SBI.51 Options**

Turning now to analysing the proposals listed in the SBI.50 Options Note (appended below) with regard to their specific action content, the first thing that needs to be highlighted is that not all of them actually have this sort of specific action content: Neither Option 1 nor Option 4 contain references to specific NDCs or communication/updating years. As reflected in Table 1, the others do contain information as to **who** is meant **to do what, when**, and with respect to **which NDC**.<sup>[4]</sup>

Table 1 clearly shows that:

- Option 9 has the same action content as Option 2, and
- Option 8 the same as Option 10 (namely the communication procedure of the GAC).

Given that with respect to action content, Option 3 covers Option 6, and Option 5 is covered by Option 2, **there are really only three distinct Options in the SBI.51 Note** with respect to actions they refer to, namely Options 2, 3, and 7 (with their action content graphically represented in Tables 2, 3, and 4, respectively).

## Option 2:

1. *Decides* that common time frames ... shall be five years between the end points of two successive NDCs.

2. *Further decides* that Parties should communicate two successive nationally determined contributions, starting in 2025, with starting points of 1 January 2031 and 1 January 2036 respectively and ending in 2040.
3. *Urges Parties*
  1. to communicate and update their nationally determined contributions in 2025 and every five years thereafter, consistent with progression.
  1. to communicate by 2025 a nationally determined contribution with a time frame up to 2035 or 2040 including an indicative waypoint in years ending in 0 and 5.

### **Option 3 ('Continue-with-Status-Quo' Option):**

1. *Invites* each Party to communicate by 2025 a nationally determined contribution with a time frame up to 2035 or 2040.
2. *Requests*:
3. those Parties whose nationally determined contributions contain a time frame up to 2035 to communicate by 2030 their respective new nationally determined contributions with a time frame up to 2040; and
4. those Parties whose nationally determined contributions contain a time frame up to 2040 to communicate or update by 2030 these nationally determined contributions.

Table 3.a illustrates the action content of Option 3, and Table 3.b illustrates at first sight that Option 3 is simply the continuation of the status quo as prescribed in §23 and §24 of Decision 1/CP.21.

## **Option 7.**

### ***Sub-option 7.1***

- Agrees that the NDCs referred above will have a time frame up to 2035.
- Parties may further include an [indicative] 2040 target.

### ***Sub-option 7.2***

- Agrees that the NDCs referred above will have a time frame up to 2035 or 2040
- Should a Party communicate a NDC with a time frame up to 2040, such a Party shall include an [indicative] 2035 target [and][or] adjust its NDC by 2030.

### ***Sub-option 7.3***

Agrees that the NDCs referred above will have a time frame up to 2040.

Table D shows that sub-option 7.1 is the same as §23 (Table C) with the addition of optional indicative (+5) targets, and sub-option 7.2 the same as Option 3 (with mandated additional indicative mid-term targets for §24 Parties). Sub-option 7.3, finally, is the §24 (Option 3.2) without the updating.

## The Glasgow Ambition Cycle

### Introduction

The Glasgow Ambition Cycle is a proposal with a pedigree reaching back to before Paris (see Müller *et al.* 2014). It first appeared in its current formulation it first appeared in an eponymous [OCP blog post](#):

- *Request* Parties to communicate by 2025a nationally determined contribution with a time frame up to 2035, and to do so every five years thereafter, pursuant to Article 4, paragraph 9, of the Agreement
- *Also request* Parties to consider in 2025 updating any nationally determined contributions communicated before, and to do so every five years thereafter.





Table E illustrates not only the 'core' application of the GAC instructions (GAC.1) with just one new NDC being communicated in each round, but also variations ('versions') with additional actions:

Thus, in variation (1+i), an 'indicative 2040 target' (ind-T) is included in the 2025 communication; while GAC.2 includes the communication of a second NDC with a time frame up to 2040.[5]

While nothing in the GAC formulation prohibits these additional actions, it needs to be stressed that they are optional and not required by the GAC language.

## Prerequisites for Maximizing Ambition

In order to discuss and compare the action content of SBI.51 options and that of the GAC – in particular with respect to their capacity to support the enhancement of (nationally determined) ambition – we need to clarify, what it is for an option to contain a '*common*' time frame in this action specific context.

For the action content of proposal to enhance the impact of the Global Stock Takes and ensure comparability of ambition, it must involve ***synchronous NDC end-years***, in the sense of all NDCs having the same end-years, which is what we mean by 'having a *common* timeframe.'

If one is also intent on maximizing the potential for enhancing ambition, then it has been shown[6] that there is also a need for

- ***synchronised updating*** (ambition enhancement), and
- a ***notification window*** – i.e. the time between the communication year and the end year of the preceding NDC – for (first-time) communications ***of at least 5 years***, in order maximize the potential of the synchronised ambition enhancement.

## The GAC as Synthesis Option

As Table F clearly illustrates, all four options under consideration here have notification windows of at least 5 years.

However, only the GAC and (sub-) Options 7.1 and 7.3 have a CTF in the above-mentioned sense: the status quo Option 3 clearly allows for some Parties to have NDC end years not which others don't (2025, 35, 45,...), and the situation is not remedied by introducing a (indicative) target in those 'mid-term' years (Options 2 and 7.2)

Table F also illustrates the way in which the GAC variations and SBI.51 (sub-) options under consideration (2, 3, 7) are included in each other:

- The basic GAC activities, illustrated in (GAC.1) turn into the GAC.1+i procedure by adding a '+5 indicative target', which in in the case of GAC.2 is replaced by a full '+5 NDC'.
- The relationship between the SBI.51 sub-options and the GAC variations is graphically illustrated in the rows of Table F: sub-option 7.3, for example, is transformed into 2.b/3.b/7.2.b by adding an indicative mid-term target to the initial communication, and a mid-term update of the communicated NDCs.

Following the line of argument in Müller and Kumarsingh (2020), it follows that the GAC proposal is flexible enough to harness the advantages of all the Madrid while avoiding their disadvantages.

[1] For more on the features and background of the GAC see the list of selected literature below.

[2] Rule 16 Any item of the agenda of an ordinary session, consideration of which has not been completed at the session, shall be included automatically in the agenda of the next ordinary session, unless otherwise decided by the Conference of the Parties.”[[Draft Rule of Procedures](#)]

[3] There are many diverse conceptions of the nature of target periods and periods of implementation of a particular NDC, but in practice, they always have the same end-year, which is why they can be identified by reference to this end year, as is the case in para. 23 and 24: ‘containing a time frame up YYYY’ means, in practice, the same as ‘ending in YYYY’.

[4] ‘YYYY NDC’ = ‘NAC with end-year YYYY’ = ‘NDC containing a time frame up to YYYY’

[5] For more on this version, see ‘The case of the European Union’ in Müller, B., C. Bhushan and X. Li (2021), [‘The Glasgow Ambition Cycle – Domestic Considerations’](#), *Oxford Climate Policy*, 16 March 2021.

[6] See, for example, Müller, B., and K. Kumarsingh (2020), [‘The risks of not adopting a Paris Agreement Ambition Cycle at COP 26 in Glasgow’](#), *Oxford Climate Policy*, August 2020

This entry was posted in Uncategorized on 26 May 2021 [<https://blog.oxfordclimatepolicy.org/common-time-frames-reducing-the-number-of-options-for-glasgow/>] by Benito Muller.

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