

Oxford Climate Policy Blog

Initiating debates on international climate policy

Enhance Climate Ambition in 2020: Here's looking at EU, kid!



Rick Blaine (Humphrey Bogart) and Ilsa Lund (Ingrid Bergman) in Casablanca

An American looking at a European, a Swede to boot, for increased climate ambition may seem a bit rich, but actually the owner of Rick's Café Americain in Casablanca gave his nationality as "drunkard" which, [according to Capitaine Renault](#), head of the local police, "makes him a citizen of the world". And there is no doubt: the citizens of the world will be looking to the EU to lead the way on enhancing the ambition of the initial Paris Agreement pledges — the initial 'Nationally Determined Contributions' (NDCs) — at the UN Climate Conference (COP26) in Glasgow next December.

[Contents](#) [\[show\]](#)

'Updating' and the reputational risk of 'high-ambition-washing'

The ambition fight, a defining feature of last year's UN Climate Change Conference (COP25) in Madrid, was about whether in 2020 countries should enhance the ambition of their initial NDCs. More precisely, it was about whether two paragraphs (§23 and §24, see Appendix 1) in the Paris Outcome mandate the Parties to the Paris Agreement morally, if not legally, to enhance the ambition of their initial NDCs by 2020.

Tensions grew as the Conference reached its final days. Even though the Chilean Presidency had made 'ambition' a central pillar of COP25, any references to countries being called upon to 'enhance' or 'update' their initial NDCs by COP26 were removed from the negotiating text. All that was left was a very general and rather toothless acknowledgement of "the growing urgency of enhancing ambition and responding to the threat of climate change." [§ 4 Appendix 2]

Reacting to this, the High Ambition Coalition led by the Marshall Islands, with the backing of the European Commission, made it clear that the final COP25 decision text must include a clear call for enhanced ambition in 2020. "We need more ambition than what is currently on offer at #COP25," [tweeted Frans Timmermans](#), Executive Vice President for the European Green Deal of the European Commission on 14 December 2019. "We cannot tell the world that we are lowering our ambitions in the fight against climate change."

In the end, slightly more ambitious wording was added (§§ 5-7, Appendix 2), pointing to the emissions gap between what country pledges currently add up to and what is needed to keep global temperature rise well below 2°C, and urging Parties to consider this gap when implementing §23 and §24 of the Paris Outcome (Appendix 1).

The EU did play a very progressive role in Madrid. They announced a long-term strategy of net-zero emissions by 2050, with an implementing [European Green Deal](#), mandating the European Commission to present by Summer 2020 "an impact assessed plan to increase the EU's greenhouse gas emission reductions target for 2030 to at least 50% and towards 55% compared with 1990 levels in a responsible way." [COM(2019) 640 final]

As regards the COP25 ambition debate, another significant announcement was made in the [Conclusions of the European Council meeting of 12 December 2019](#), during the end-game at COP25, inviting the European Commission "after a thorough impact assessment, to put forward its proposal for an update of the EU's nationally determined contribution (NDC) for 2030 in good time before COP26."

So the initial EU NDC is to be updated by 2020, in good time before COP26. This must be welcomed, provided that 'updating' is understood as 'enhancing ambition'. The reason I am highlighting this is that I have been told by a usually reliable source that some in the EU are thinking of interpreting the term as merely updating some information rather than ambition, a scenario that is unfortunately consistent with the changes that were made to the draft conclusions before they were adopted. The draft conclusions (Appendix 3) emphasised that the EU will follow §24 in 2020 "*in a manner that represents **a progression of ambition beyond the current one and that reflects the EU's highest possible ambition, taking into account the collective further efforts needed and actions undertaken by all Parties in line with the long term goals of the Paris Agreement***". In the final version, however, this was replaced by the statement that in 2020 the EU will update its NDC "*taking into account the need to **increase clarity, transparency and understanding** of its NDC*".

I sincerely hope this will not happen, and I find it difficult to believe it will, not least given the Green Deal mandate (see above). However, if it did, it would be at a considerable reputational cost for the EU. As a climate leader, such a purely informational update of the initial NDC could rightly be branded as 'high-ambition-washing'. What is clearly expected in the 2020 update, as acknowledged by Timmermans, is the increase of the initial (2030) ambition!

"With the #EUGreenDeal adopted and #COP25 behind us, now we look forward to raising global ambitions at #COP26 in 2020."[@TimmermansEU, 13:48h, · 15 Dec. 2019]

A Common Time Frame and the EU: ditherer or high-ambition champion?

The ambition battle in Madrid was about whether, five years after they were initially announced, countries should reconsider their NDCs in light of changed circumstances with respect to whether they still reflect the highest possible ambition. As it happens, this question also lies at the heart of another issue that was not resolved in Madrid, namely the need to complete the 'Paris Ambition Mechanism' by introducing a 'Common Time Frame' (CTF).

This debate has been going on for over five years, and the only outcome thus far has been a decision at COP24 (Katowice 2018) that *"Parties shall apply common time frames to their nationally determined contributions to be implemented from 2031 onward."* At COP25, the issue was again kicked down the road without even a decision on a date for a decision. The main difference was the reaction by civil society. Fired up by what was happening (or not) on ambition they took a very dim view of the lack of progress on the CTF issue, as witnessed in the ECO article of 6 December (reproduced below).

ECO

eco@climatenetwork.org • www.climatenetwork.org/eco-newsletter • December 6, 2019

“C’mon!!! Do we really Need 5 Years to Decide on 5 Year Common Time Frames?”

ECO was becoming increasingly impatient sitting at the common time frames session on Wednesday. For the past years, countries have been contemplating different time frame options. These discussions have demonstrated the clear benefits of a five year common time frame.

During the open informal consultation on Wednesday, nearly every Party said they welcomed a decision on common time frames as soon as possible, with many seeking a decision now. Only the EU suggested that the decision could wait until 2022 or 2023.

ECO is disappointed to hear the EU wants to continue the discussion and wonders for what sake. Is this because the EU can't reach internal agreement on a position?

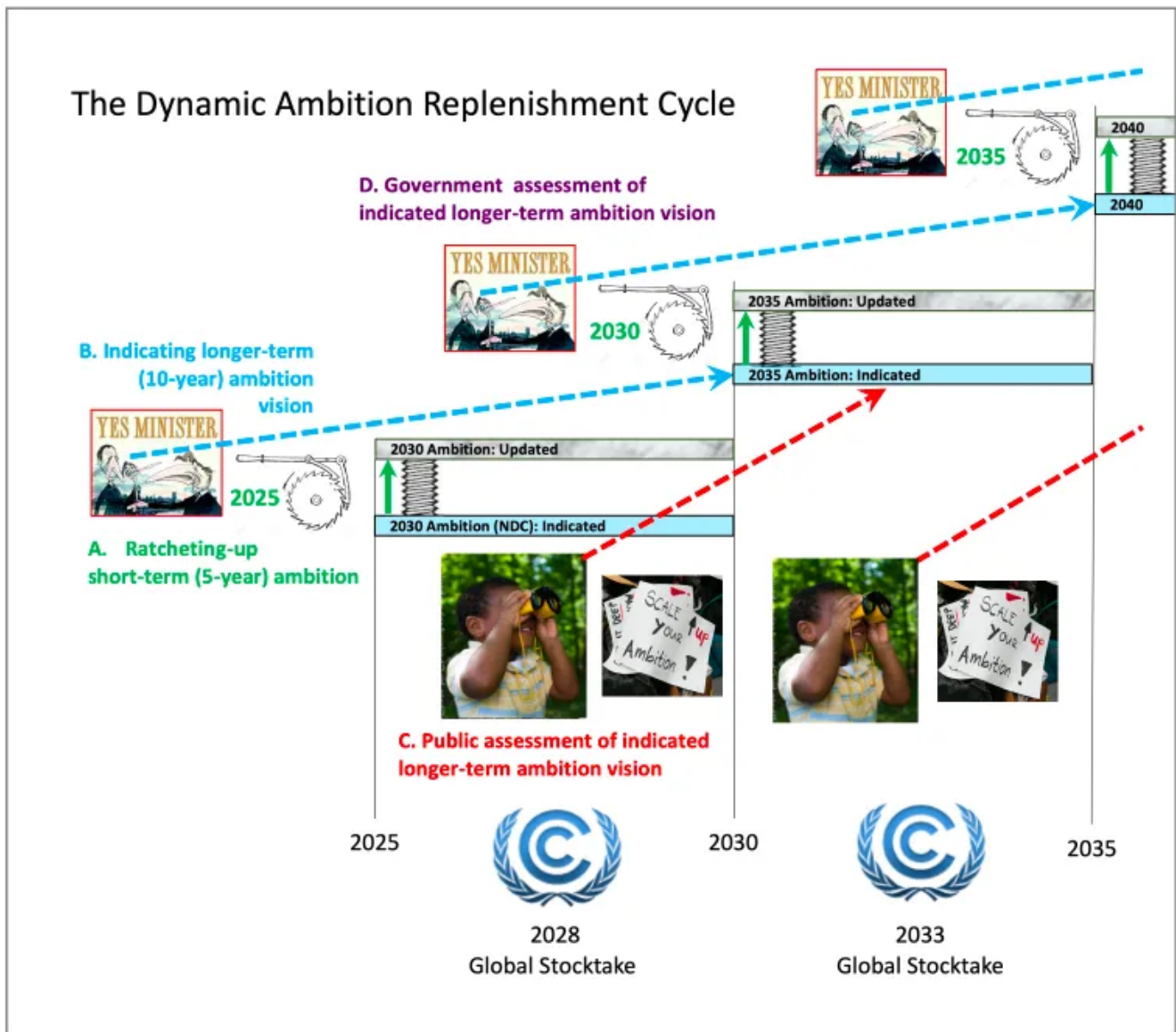
Well, what more do you need? At some point, the EU needs to agree on a position, and there's no reason for it not to be a five-year common time frame — as many of its members already back.

Dynamic Ambition Replenishments

To explain the [connection between a CTF and global ambition](#), let me use the proposal for a Dynamic Ambition Replenishment (DAR) Cycle (a.k.a. [Dynamic Contribution Cycle](#)) which is seen by many as a potential 'landing ground' in this debate. It can be introduced, following the template of §23 and §24 of the Paris Outcome [Appendix 1] with two very simple decisions, namely to:

- *Request* Parties to communicate by 2025 a nationally determined contribution with a ten-year time frame up to 2035, and to do so every five years thereafter.
- *Invite* Parties to consider in 2030 updating their nationally determined contributions with a time frame up to 2035, in line with Art. 2.2 and Art. 4.3 of the Paris Agreement [Appendix 1], and to do so every five years thereafter.

The first is simply a ('5-year+5-year') 'dynamic' compromise between §23 (5-year) and §24 (10-year) which ensures that by 2025, there will always be two consecutive 5-year NDCs communicated. The second is the ambition replenishment component, rectifying the lack of clarity in §23 and §24 that led to the ambition battle in Madrid. It establishes a 5-yearly cycle for simultaneous enhancements of ambitions initially communicated 5 years before.



As graphically represented above, the DAR Cycle involves four activities:

- The 'ratcheting up' ('updating') the ambition of the NDC initially communicated (at least) 5 years before.
- The communication ('indication') of an NDC with a (+5) time frame ending five years after the updated NDC.
- & D. The assessment of the +5 NDC by the public and governments.

This type of process is important for ambition because it creates an 'enabling space' of 5 years where everyone knows and can evaluate Parties longer-term (10-year) ambition in light of Global Stocktakes and changing circumstances, together with a regular synchronised timetable for Parties to get together and discuss potential ambition enhancements. While at present Parties can spontaneously enhance the ambition of their NDCs, it will be abundantly clear to anyone acquainted with replenishments of funds that they are more efficient and effective than such spontaneous 'voluntary donations'.

The Way Forward

As the ECO article notes, the EU has, for some time, been treating the CTF discussion as premature, with a decision only needed in 2023, in time for the communication of a second NDC in 2025. However, this will tie the EU into a 10-year time frame, as it has been suggested that the EU needs 15 years between the commu-

nication and the the end of an NDC. Delaying the communication of the second NDC to 2025 will then mean a time frame up to 2040 (i.e. 2025 + 15).

This said, things do seem to be moving. In the discussion on the issue during the Environment Council meeting of 4 October (see transcript, Appendix 3), the majority of the 12 intervention were in favour of a 5-year time frame. No one mentioned 10 years, and only three thought it was still premature to take a decision. Moreover, the Council Conclusions also recalled "*the importance of striving towards common timeframes for all Parties' NDCs, in line with the Paris Agreement.*"

In fact, the EU could still join the Dynamic Ambition Replenishment Cycle, at it requests communicating a 2035 NDC **by** 2025 and not **in** 2025. So the EU could follow the request (with a 15-year announcement lag) by communicating a second NDC with a time frame up to 2035 at COP26 in December 2020.

This would put the EU on the 5+5 track, and if the promised updating of the 2030 NDC "in good time before COP26" is not just cosmetic, but a genuine ambition enhancement "after a thorough impact assessment" then it should be relatively straightforward to use the same process to come up with a 2035 NDC at the same time.

Therefore, to live up to the reputation of being a high-ambition champion, the EU should by Glasgow not only communicate **an enhanced 2030 NDC**, but **also a 2035 NDC** (or at least decide that **its second NDC is to have a time frame up to 2035**). This would allow them to sign on to the Ambition Replenishment Cycle, thus ensuring that the Paris Agreement processes supports, rather than impedes, a regular enhancement of global ambition.

Appendix 1. The Paris Outcome

Paris Agreement

Art. 2.2. This Agreement will be implemented to reflect equity and the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, in the light of different national circumstances.

Art. 4.3. Each Party's successive nationally determined contribution will represent a progression beyond the Party's then current nationally determined contribution and reflect its highest possible ambition, reflecting its common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, in the light of different national circumstances.

Decision 1/CP.21; III. Decisions to give effect to the Agreement; Mitigation

§ 22. *Also invites* Parties to communicate their first nationally determined contribution no later than when the Party submits its respective instrument of ratification, acceptance, approval or accession of the Paris Agreement; if a Party has communicated an intended nationally determined contribution prior to joining the Agreement, that Party shall be considered to have satisfied this provision unless that Party decides otherwise;

§ 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;

Appendix 2. Chile Madrid Time for Action

Decision 1/CMA.2.

§ 4. *Acknowledges* the growing urgency of enhancing ambition and responding to the threat of climate change;

§ 5. *Re-emphasizes* with serious concern the urgent need to address the significant gap between the aggregate effect of Parties' mitigation efforts in terms of global annual emissions of greenhouse gases by 2020 and aggregate emission pathways consistent with holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2 °C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5 °C above pre-industrial levels;

§ 6. *Recalls* that each Party's successive nationally determined contribution will represent a progression beyond the Party's then current nationally determined contribution and reflect its highest possible ambition, reflecting its common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities, in the light of different national circumstances;

§ 7. *Also recalls* the request to Parties contained in decision 1/CP.21, paragraphs 23–24, and urges Parties to consider the gap referred to in paragraph 5 above with a view to reflecting their highest possible ambition when responding to this request;

§ 8. *Reminds* Parties that have not yet communicated their nationally determined contributions pursuant to Article 4, paragraph 2, and decision 1/CP.21, paragraph 22, to do so;

§ 9. *Reiterates* its strong encouragement to Parties to provide the information necessary for clarity, transparency and understanding of nationally determined contributions, described in the annex to decision 4/CMA.1;

§ 10. *Recalls* the request in paragraph 25 of decision 1/CP.21 to the secretariat to prepare a synthesis report, and requests the secretariat to make this report available to the Conference of the Parties at its twenty-sixth session (November 2020);

Appendix 3. EU Environment Council, 4 October 2019

EU Preparations for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) meetings

Draft Council conclusions: 27 September 2019

[HIGHLIGHTS that the EU will [update] [or communicate] [review] [and enhance] its nationally determined contribution (NDC) in 2020, as agreed in Paris, in a manner that represents a progression of ambition beyond the current one and that reflects the EU's highest possible ambition, taking into account the collective further efforts needed and actions undertaken by all Parties in line with the long term goals of the Paris Agreement [and IPCC 1.5 ° C report], and to increase clarity, transparency and understanding of its NDC.]

Council conclusions: 4 October 2019

HIGHLIGHTS that in 2020, the EU will update its nationally determined contribution (NDC) as agreed in

Paris, taking into account the need to increase clarity, transparency and understanding of its NDC, as agreed in Katowice. STRESSES the need to step up the global efforts to tackle climate change in light of the latest available science, especially the IPCC Special Report on the impacts of global of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels.

Transcript of interventions referring to Common Time Frames

(in chronological order, with references to webcast times [hh:mm:ss]. MS missing in the list did not refer to CTFs in their interventions)

Spain [00:07:15] "We think the text is a balanced one, but we do think it can be bolstered in two ways. The first one is that it needs to be more consistent with the Paris Agreement and the five-year cycle. Like other MS we think we need these conclusions to send out a signal of support for the five-year framework for the contributions to the PA"

Sweden [00:12:15] "The 5-yearly ambition cycle is one of the cornerstones of the Paris agreement and we will need to ensure that it becomes as effective as possible in raising the global level of ambition to meet the long-term targets of the agreement. We should therefore show openness to support having five year timeframes. It's important to note that a five year CTF from 2030 and onwards is entirely without prejudice to the timeframe of the EU internal targets of the post-2030 framework"

France [00:17:42] "Lastly, FR thinks it is time for the EU to take a decision on the timeframe. We need to take a joint decision to ensure that we can participate constructively in the discussions which will take place at COP25. FR is in favour of a schedule which is in line with the Paris Agreement objectives – we need to make sure we are consistent and clear, so a five-year time for all NDCs."

Portugal [00:38:55] "The leadership role of the EU for climate action needs to be reflected in our NDC in keeping with the 5-year cycle for the PA." [00:40:29] "We support the common time frames but we're against transferring units to the Kyoto Protocol."

Belgium [00:52:44] "We have stressed the need to establish a CTF for all NDCs, but this far we have been pretty vague in our position, and that is why we haven't been able to especially constructive in the negotiations" [00:51:53] "Now, FR and SE's comments we can support them as well regarding the CTF, the CTF of 5 years for all NDCs as of 2030, we think that is best in line with optimally performing [...] of the Paris Agreement"

UK [01:00:30] "Further, the UK supports the inclusion of text that seeks agreement of a five year CTF for NDCs."

Malta [01:05:07] "On issues related to CTF for the NDCs, Malta is of the view that it is not yet time for such discussion to take place and would clearly prejudge future discussions"

Germany [01:09:17] "... That is an important point for the next COP – as is the time frame. We think that it's worth working towards a CTF, but as others have said, we need to have some flexibility here. We shouldn't stick too fast to this, because this is still an open point"

Luxembourg [01:15:37] "Thirdly, the EU needs to support a CTF for all parties and then with the review cycle from the PA, which I think would give us a dynamic for reviewing the NDCs which would be more effective and more transparent"

Bulgaria [01:20:06] "As for the proposal to include text about a common five-year TF for implementing the NDCs, we'd like to stress that the current EU legislation effective for the period 2020-2030 is fully in line with the PA. At the same time, we believe it is extremely premature to discuss other timeframes post 2031. Therefore, we strongly oppose the introduction of a 5-year TF to execute the nationally determined programme."

Estonia [01:22:40]“In today’s discussions, there has been references to the CTF – I think it’s too early to reach any decision on this point”

EC (closing remarks) [01:30:26]“The Commission does not see any reason to include additional text on the Common Time Frames, as this issue is not up for decision in Santiago.” [01:30:54]“Any language implying five-yearly greenhouse gas target setting for the European Union remains a decision outside the scope and mandate of the Environment Ministers.”

This entry was posted in Uncategorized on 8 January 2020 [<http://blog.oxfordclimatepolicy.org/enhance-climate-ambition-in-2020/>] by Benito Muller.

This site uses Akismet to reduce spam. [Learn how your comment data is processed.](#)

