

# Oxford Climate Policy Blog

Initiating debates on international climate policy

## Here's looking at EU again! The European Climate Law



*European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and Greta Thunberg (Virginia Mayo/AP)*

On 4 March 2020, the European Commission presented “a proposal to enshrine in legislation the EU’s political commitment to be climate neutral by 2050, to protect the planet and our people. The European Climate Law sets the 2050 target and the direction of travel for all EU policy, and gives predictability for public authorities, businesses and citizens.”<sup>[1]</sup>

While criticized by climate activists like Greta, who sat next to Commission President von der Leyen, for not being ambitious enough, both with respect to the near term (enhancing the ambition of the 2030 target) and the 2050 net-zero target (too late), the law proposes a process of how to reach the net-zero target that is worth highlighting. According to the [press release](#):

- [a] The Commission proposes the setting of a 2030-2050 EU-wide trajectory for greenhouse gas emission reductions, to measure progress and give predictability to public authorities, businesses and citizens.

- [b] By September 2023, and every five years thereafter, the Commission will assess the consistency of EU and national measures with the climate-neutrality objective and the 2030-2050 trajectory.
- [c.1] The Commission will be empowered to issue recommendations to Member States whose actions are inconsistent with the climate-neutrality objective, and Member States will be obliged to take due account of these recommendations or to explain their reasoning if they fail to do so.
- [c.2] The Commission can also review the adequacy of the trajectory and the Union wide measures

This illustrates very nicely how a long-term strategy (net-zero in 2050) can be linked to periodic ambition adequacy reviews to ensure not only that the long-term goal is achieved, but (*pace Greta*) to allow for a rule governed review of the long term target [c.2]

It is also clear that the 5-yearly assessments are meant to coincide with the Global Stocktake cycle of the Paris Agreement, and it seems reasonable to assume that the trajectory [b] is going to be aligned with the EU's post-2030 NDCs (Nationally Determined Contributions, i.e. targets). What is not so clear is what exactly is going to be assessed in these 5-yearly reviews. And while it seems again reasonable to assume that the 2023 assessment is going to be about achieving the initial (2030) NDC, nothing is said about objects of the subsequent assessments in 2028, 2032 etc.

It stands to reason that the trajectory [a] is going to be given as a sequence of EU-wide targets, most likely as multi-year emission budgets of equal duration, which essentially means 5- or 10-year budgets. Figure 1 illustrates the two options.[2]

### Plan A. Ten-year Target Period



### Plan B. Five-year Target Period



Figure 1. Options for the Assessment Trajectory

## Plan A

The initial EU has a ten-year target period from 2021 to 2030. Under Plan A, this would be maintained in subsequent NDCs, with the effect that there would be two more NDCs until 2050: the second one with a target period from 2031 to 2040, and the third one from 2041 to 2050. Given the 5-yearly rhythm of the assessments, this means that each of them would be assessed twice, once with an implementation period of 12 years, and once with an implementation period of 7 years.

## Plan B

This plan introduces four 5-year target periods post-2030. Each assessment follows exactly the same pattern, established under the assessment of the initial 2030 NDC:

- 2021-23: Assessment of EU and national measures with regards to achieving the 2030 NDC and recommendations in September 2023, with a 7-year implementation period till 2030.
- 2021-24: Review of the adequacy of the [c.2]-trajectory, with communication of an updated 2030 NDC in 2025, if appropriate.

## Which?

Given that steps 1, 3, and 5 of both Plans are identical, there cannot be any institutional/legal reasons why Plan B could not work if Plan A does. However, there is one significant political difference between the two.

There is a good reason for the Commission to propose a trajectory towards net-zero in 2050, and not just a single emission budget for 2030 to 2050. Having intermediate milestone targets prevents the natural temptation to procrastinate action ('don't worry we have time, we can make up for current inaction later in the period'). Plan B is clearly superior in combatting procrastination than Plan A, and since we cannot afford to procrastinate, it is superior *tout court!*

In short, to keep with the spirit of the proposed trajectory [a], the EU must adopt 5-year target periods for its post-2030 NDCs and follow Plan B in the assessments [b] and reviews [c.2] proposed in its new climate law.

Internationally, this would also have the advantage of aligning with an idea of how to synchronise ambition enhancements under the Paris Agreement that is gaining traction. For more on this, see [The Dynamic Contribution Cycle: Enhancing Ambition on the Basis of Equity](#), and also the sisters of this post:

- [Leipzig in September: Birth of a new G2?](#)
- [Enhance Climate Ambition in 2020: Here's looking at EU, kid!](#)

[1] [EC Press Release](#), 4 March 2020.

[2] While there is theoretically time to carry out a 2048 assessment the 2050 (net-zero) target, we can sensibly discard such an assessment as not particularly useful, given that it would only leave two years to implement any [C.1] recommendations.

This entry was posted in Uncategorized on 7 March 2020 [<http://blog.oxfordclimatepolicy.org/heres-looking-at-eu-again/>] by Benito Muller.

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