

EU member states agree 55% cut in carbon emissions by 2030

Accord reached after Poland held out for concessions puts bloc on path to climate neutrality by 2050



European council president, Charles Michel, talks with other leaders before the EU summit in Brussels on Thursday. Photograph: Xinhua/Rex/Shutterstock

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Fri 11 Dec 2020 14.03 GMT

EU member states have agreed to strengthen their target for cutting greenhouse gas emissions in the next decade, in line with their long-term goal of net zero carbon by 2050.

The EU made a commitment on Friday to cut carbon by 55% in the EU by 2030, compared with 1990 levels, after member states wrangled into the early morning as Poland held out for concessions.

“Today’s agreement puts us on a clear path to climate neutrality in 2050,” said Ursula von der Leyen, the president of the European commission. While

member states rejected the stiffer **carbon cuts of 60% that the EU parliament had called for**, the plan puts the EU ahead of most of the world's major economies on tackling the climate crisis.



Workers at the Knurów mine in Poland which is heavily dependent on coal for its power production. Photograph: Janek Skarżyński/AFP/Getty Images

Campaigners said the **EU could have gone further**. Sebastian Mang, Greenpeace's EU policy adviser, said: "Governments will no doubt call it historic, but the evidence shows this deal is only a small improvement on the emissions cuts the EU is already expected to achieve. It shows that political convenience takes precedence over climate science, and that most politicians are still afraid to take on big polluters."

The EU's decision comes ahead of a virtual summit of world leaders on Saturday to discuss the climate crisis, **five years after the adoption of the Paris climate agreement**.

More than 70 world leaders will gather online for the Climate Ambition summit to set out fresh commitments on the climate crisis. Current commitments under the Paris agreement are **insufficient to meet its goal** of keeping global temperature rises well below 2C above pre-industrial levels, which scientists regard as the outer limit of safety, with an aspiration to hold rises to **no more than 1.5C**.

Under the accord, nations must increase their targets every five years in line with the long-term goal, which means submitting new national plans – called **nationally determined contributions (NDCs)** – for the carbon cuts they will make between now and 2030. Many are likely to miss this year’s deadline of 31 December for new NDCs because of the coronavirus pandemic, but the UN, UK and France as co-hosts of the summit are hoping all of the 70-plus countries represented will submit fresh targets.

António Guterres, the secretary general of the UN, told the Guardian in an interview that **new commitments were urgently needed**: “We know that we are not yet where we should be. We know that five years after the Paris agreement, climate change is still running faster than we are.

“I see this summit as a very important moment of pushing for the right momentum to grow.”

Many big economies have come forward with long-term goals to reach net zero emissions around the middle of the century. China will reach carbon neutrality by 2060, while the EU, Japan, South Korea, the UK and a host of smaller economies will do the same by 2050. The US president-elect, Joe Biden, has **signalled his commitment to reach net zero by 2050**, though he will play no official part in Saturday’s summit and the Trump White House has shunned the meeting.

These commitments, if carried through, place **countries responsible for about two-thirds of global carbon emissions under a net zero target**. According to an analysis by Climate Action Tracker, that would put the world on track to heating of 2.1C, within **striking distance of the Paris goal**.

The race is on to sign up the remaining countries, but some will be hard to persuade. Guterres mentioned India, Indonesia, Russia, Australia and Brazil as countries that it was “important to have on board”.

Brazil set out a plan earlier this week to reach net zero emissions by 2060, but it was largely derided as containing little concrete detail and failing to address the need to stop deforestation. Laurence Tubiana, the chief executive of the European Climate Foundation and, as a French diplomat, a key architect of the

Paris agreement, called the pledge “very disappointing” and “lacking credibility”.

The effort was not enough to gain Brazil a coveted speaking slot at the summit, which are open only to countries with strong new plans. Australia has also been denied a slot, after its prime minister, **Scott Morrison, had claimed he would speak**. Russia and Indonesia will likewise be absent but India, another major emitter that is **highly dependent on coal**, will speak at the summit and there are hopes the prime minister, Narendra Modi, will make a fresh commitment.

Guterres said: “India is making an enormous effort. But India has huge challenges in development. So it’s very important to create the mechanisms that make India understand that international solidarity is there ... to allow India to be part of the net zero coalition, as we believe is essential, recognising that they are already making a huge effort.”

The summit is a staging post to the next formal UN meeting under the Paris agreement, which is called **Cop26** and is to be held next November in Glasgow, after a **postponement caused by the pandemic**. Gaining commitments from the missing countries, and more detailed plans from some governments that have signed pledges but have few policies in place to meet them, is now the key goal for the UN and the UK, as hosts of Cop26.

Laurent Fabius, who as French foreign minister was in charge of the Paris agreement, told the Guardian: “There has been some sort of revolution in climate change, internationally, with statements from China, South Korea, Europe and Biden. The great difficulty now is to implement the Paris agreement. Now is the time for action, and the Climate Ambition summit is a moment of opportunity.”