



World leaders failed to reach agreement on climate-related targets at COP25 last week

COP25 Flash

A rapid-fire update on the progress—or lack of it—made at the 25th Conference of the Parties in Madrid last week and over the weekend.

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UN Secretary-General, Antonio Guterres, said he was “disappointed with the results” of COP25. That means things really did not go well.

We knew the outstanding talks on Article 6 of the Paris Agreement were going to be difficult. They had already been deferred at the last COP in Katowice and are now being deferred again to the next COP in Glasgow.

The Paris Agreement still stands without implementing provisions on the cooperation mechanisms of Article 6.

Frankly speaking, an agreement on Article 6 is only worth having if these mechanisms are done properly. They can reduce the cost of fulfilling targets, but they do not actually decrease emissions, as whatever emissions are deemed to have been avoided in one country are used to cover extra emissions in another. This may make economic sense, but they must be done well if the environment is not to suffer.

The UN’s track record so far in developing such mechanisms, such as the Clean Development Mechanism of the Kyoto Protocol, is not good. The Europeans are right to insist on high environmental integrity, or what is the point of them?

The EU seems set on doing what it believes is right anyway. The *European Green Deal* announced by the Commission last week is the platform for this. The EU is relying on being able to demonstrate the economic and technological advantages of being ambitious.

I know from experience how difficult and exhausting these COPs can be. One must nevertheless ask whether these annual climate talks are still fit-for-purpose?

People are astonished that this has been the 25th Conference of Parties (COP) to the UN’s Framework Convention on Climate Change, and global emissions are still rising.

There is an alarming disconnect between the diplomacy around these negotiations and the

science. Concentrations of greenhouse gas emissions in the atmosphere are increasing year on year, breaking all historic records.

These annual climate conferences continue basically because no one has thought of anything better. It has been suggested that the G20 meetings might

provide some kind of political steer, given that the G20 harbours all of the world's major emitters. But the G20 conclusions are not more than politically binding, so has neither "teeth", nor is it inclusive.

For now we have to content ourselves that every few years there is a successful COP, which makes material progress. In between, are "technical" COPs where efforts must be made not to slip backwards. That was, in effect, what COP25 was.

Of course, it is welcome that all countries

agreed at COP25 to submit more ambitious pledges before the next COP. Most of us thought that was already part of the plan. However, there ought to be a far greater focus on implementation in these talks. Emissions are not going to be reduced without policies. Which policies work? What new ones can we introduce? Can we strengthen the policies we have? There is a great potential for learning from others, and learning-by-doing.

At least the EU is intent on strengthening its policy response, as is evident from the numerous initiatives listed in the Annex to the *European Green Deal* communication. That provides plenty of work for the Commission, the European Parliament and Member States, not to mention companies that will be impacted.

One of those measures may be a carbon border tax, or "adjustment". The purpose of that is to protect those willing to be ambitious from being disadvantaged in relation to "free-riders". That possible measure, like so many other components of the *European Green Deal*, will need careful watching, and commenting upon in due time.

