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How to strengthen the European Union's climate contribution by 2020?

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The objective of the One Planet Summit, which was held in Paris on 12 December 2017, was to reinforce global mobilization in the fight against climate change. The event gave rise to some landmark announcements, most noteworthy among which was the World Bank's announcement that it will cease—except “in exceptional circumstances”—[the financing of upstream oil and gas projects after 2019](#). This new kind of summit—that the French President Emmanuel Macron is calling upon leaders to repeat every year—marked the first high point of the “[Talanoa Dialogue](#)” and helped provide a platform for an array of initiatives by state and non-state actors and expand the mobilization. The relative lack of announcements regarding the climate contribution of States, who are encouraged under the terms of the Paris Agreement to review and set increasingly ambitious targets every five years starting 2020, shows the need for deeper and

more rapidly conclusive discussions at the domestic level. When it comes to the European Union, which presented a single, common contribution to the Paris Agreement, it seems clear that serious reflection must be engaged now in order to accelerate this review process and make it more flexible.

How, therefore, can the process to raise European ambition be initiated? By when could we realistically see an agreement on a new European target for limiting greenhouse gas emissions? The next meeting of the European Council to be held on December 18, 2017, will be the first step, as Member States are likely to use the occasion to adopt a governance framework that can ensure the achievement of current objectives. Following this, any new climate objective will need to be integrated within the Paris Agreement's schedule of review cycles, and be in alignment with the sectoral policies of the EU. Reopening the legislation deployed to implement the climate and energy policies agreed upon in 2014 would involve, under the current decision-making process, another 4-year cycle of negotiation, and would probably wait for the new European Parliament and Commission in 2019 to be launched. Discussions around the issue should therefore be initiated before the next elections so that the Parliament and Member States can be in a position to give a mandate to the new Commission for a more ambitious contribution to be set in 2020.

In the interim, climate issues must be kept at the top of the political agenda. Raising European ambition must rest on a clear and shared understanding of the strategies, levers and necessary conditions for the achievement of the long-term objectives. To do so, the rapid formation of a coalition of Member States—which could urge the Commission to begin the process of defining a new long-term roadmap for carbon neutrality—would be a useful first step. The [progress made by Member States in defining their Climate and Energy Plans to 2030](#) could provide a useful foundation to the Commission's work in this regard.

The mobilization of financial flows remains a necessary condition for the success of the fight against climate change. However, policymakers should focus their efforts first and foremost on identifying the economic, technological and social levers that could unlock the transformations necessary for the deep decarbonization of the economy.

Indeed, merely mobilizing dedicated public funds for low-carbon investments or establishing new standards will not suffice; they must be accompanied by suitable legislative and regulatory incentives as well as enabling frameworks. In sum, this implies going beyond aggregate emission reduction targets in order to mainstream the low-carbon transition at the level of all economic sectors, regions and concerned stakeholders. This could, for instance, entail promoting the rapid uptake of low-carbon vehicles and enabling the modal shift towards low-impact means of transport (walking, cycling) or public transport through a better coordination of national policy, urban policy and public funds; strengthening the electricity network and reforming market design to integrate renewables; and [supporting the just transition of workers and regions dependent on the coal sector](#).

Finally, the EU must come up with innovative solutions to manage differences between Member States' willingness to tackle climate change issues. Eastern European countries—which are the most coal-dependent and concerned about their energy security as a result of their reliance on Russia for their gas supply—will be the most difficult to persuade. European partners must then find a balanced combination of political incentives and commitment requests for the more reticent Member States within the framework of high-level political dialogues. In this regard, strengthening the place given to the fight against climate change in the EU budget and integrating climate-related conditionalities in projects financed by the budget—especially within the Cohesion Policy—could be potential solutions to helping Member States move forward together and limit the risk of a two-speed Europe in terms of climate and energy policies.