

BLOG POST December 21st 2018

Despite technical progress, COP24 struggles to build political momentum

Authors

David Levai

Associate Researcher

Lola Vallejo

Climate Special Adviser

 Reading time: 5 min

After two weeks of tough negotiations, COP24 ended on Saturday in Katowice, Poland, with the adoption of a set of rules to operationalise the principles of international climate governance set out in the Paris Agreement, but the international community failed to seize this opportunity to answer the unanimous call of the IPCC's scientists and to foster political momentum in support of greater climate ambition.

In a difficult geopolitical context that is very different from the one in 2015, which contributed to the success of COP21 in Paris, the multilateral system has shown its solidity and resilience by giving the Paris Agreement the implementation rules it requires. However, without any clear international leadership on climate change, it is at the national level that the ambitious public policies needed to achieve the ecological transition must now be defined and implemented, and leaders will need to devote their political capital to

this matter. This is a real challenge, since it is clear that many countries are struggling to hold national debates on these issues, despite the mobilisation of numerous civil society and private sector actors. Yet it is essential in view of the summit the United Nations Secretary-General is convening in September 2019, where Heads of State and Government will be expected to ramp up their commitments for 2020, with the goal of accelerating their transition and achieving carbon neutrality by 2050.

After maintaining the suspense for more than 30 hours, the delegates of the 197 countries present in Katowice for two weeks finally put an end to COP24. Although it seemed that a balance might be struck on Friday morning, it was particularly the complex issue of carbon trading mechanisms that slowed the negotiations and left the delegations holding their breath; the responsibility was shared between Brazil, which wanted to continue to benefit from the old system at the same time as the new one, and the hesitant management of the process by the Polish presidency.

The adoption of a rulebook, three years after the Paris Agreement

Three years nearly to the day since the Paris Agreement was adopted amidst almost unanimous enthusiasm, the first goal of this COP was achieved: enacting a set of specific rules to clarify the principles set out in the Paris Agreement and to make this treaty operational and effective. These rules concern the type of information provided by countries regarding their emissions reductions as well as the climate adaptation policies they are implementing and the financing they are mobilising or receiving in order to ensure their transition. Transparency on these issues is a fundamental mark of trust between countries, as is their monitoring and verification, which will be used to take stock of collective action every five years. This is central to the principles established in Paris: a progressive, regular acceleration of action by all concerned.

Financial issues, which are often the main bone of contention within this body, have also made considerable progress. A formal update on the mobilisation of the famous 100 billion dollars per year, to be transferred to the developing countries from 2020 onwards, has shown that with almost 75 billion dollars already mobilised in 2016, the countries are on track to meet this target. Moreover, the numerous pledges of contributions to the different funds¹ (Green Fund, Adaptation Fund, Least Developed Countries Fund) have served in particular to build confidence that, as calls to raise climate ambition multiply, the developing countries, and in particular the most vulnerable among them, will be supported and accompanied in achieving their transition towards a carbon-free, climate-resilient world.

Climate ambition is flagging

However, the second goal of this conference has not been achieved: a great many people, within governments and civil society alike, hoped that this first COP since the publication of [the latest IPCC report](#), which makes no bones about the urgent need for action, would provide a clear, unequivocal political response to the matter. But the reaction to the report was timid, especially due to opposition from Saudi Arabia that was consolidated by the implicit support of the United States and of allies of convenience (Russia, Kuwait). Finally, only the “timely” submission of their research is welcomed in the final decision...

Worse still, the countries did not take advantage of the Talanoa Dialogue,² the first global stocktake exercise, to make a strong commitment to increasing their ambition. The Polish presidency, which had avoided this area all year, deeming it to be a political minefield—due to pressure within the European Union, to internal political divisions within its government majority, and to its geostrategic proximity with the United States—finally put this subject on the

political agenda during the second week of the COP. But without any strong political leadership, the result is at best lukewarm and mixed, since [the final decision](#) does not clearly call for countries to accelerate national efforts and to significantly ramp up their pledges by 2020³.

Above all, it was the repeated addresses by the United Nations Secretary-General (three times in two weeks), his public declarations and his diplomatic efforts that gave this issue greater visibility in the final decision at Katowice. Moreover, it is in order to redefine the concept of climate ambition and to hold the countries accountable that he is convening the summit in September 2019. After a year of wavering international political momentum, nevertheless marked [by greater commitment by civil society actors, from companies to local authorities and citizen mobilisation](#), we are expecting new international impetus in 2019. Chile, an economy that is very committed to its energy transition, will host the next COP. After the procrastination of the past year, this will be a considerable responsibility.

Photo credit: Flickr

¹ Pledges: Green Fund – doubling the contribution of Germany (1.5 billion Euros) and Norway (516 million dollars); Adaptation Fund – pledges amounting to 129 million dollars, a record, including 70 million euros from Germany, 15 million from France and 10 million from the European Commission.

² See two IDDRI blog posts on this issue: in May (<https://www.iddri.org/fr/publications-et-evenements/billet-de-blog/dialogue-de-talanoa-lancement-positif-mais-issue>) and November 2018 (<https://www.iddri.org/fr/publications-et-evenements/billet-de-blog/quels-enjeux-pour-la-cop24>)

³ Paragraph 37.

CLIMATE

NÉGOCIATIONS INTERNATIONALES

COP24