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A common pro-nature and pro-climate future? Steps and pitfalls of a busy international autumn

Auteur

Sébastien Treyer
Executive Director

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Even if the health crisis still imposes a high level of uncertainty, a certain number of major trends, some of which are contradictory, must be taken into account to understand the international context. They structure the capacity to act for an ambitious transformation of our economies in favour of the climate and biodiversity: the race to carbon neutrality, the joint political importance of biodiversity and climate, universal awareness of the risks linked to the effects of climate change already underway, but also the erosion of confidence in the capacity for international coordination. It is in this context that the next major multilateral meetings must be useful. And, in the absence of clear international leadership, Europe will have to invest its

diplomatic capacity in order to guarantee an international stance consistent with the ambition of its Green Deal, and also because it supports multilateralism and wishes to consolidate it. These are all reasons to continue to build forms of shared leadership with other key countries.

Structural and contradictory trends

The first notable trend is that carbon neutrality has become one of the horizons for modernising economies and remains one of the priorities for post-crisis reconstruction, as shown by the recovery plans of major economies such as Europe, the United States and China. But does this milestone, which can be credited to the [political momentum created by the Paris Climate Agreement](#), mean that from now on all structural investments will be in the service of transforming the economy towards neutrality? In many economic sectors, we are rather at a still-fragile tipping point, where the long-term equipment decisions that will determine greenhouse gas emission levels in the coming decades can be made in low-carbon technologies, but this requires an alignment of economic and political expectations, which are still very uncertain at present. The depth of the necessary transformation of economies no longer seems to be denied by most political and economic actors: the withdrawal from fossil fuels, the importance of energy efficiency, the profound transformation of food systems, etc. Embracing the economic challenge of such industrial reconversions, as proposed by the European Green Deal, constitutes a genuine social project and presupposes unprecedented forms of social and macroeconomic support¹ that are only gradually entering the political debate.

The craze for carbon neutrality is inseparable from another striking fact: scientists and political decision-makers are now very clearly stressing that we must protect nature as much as the climate. This is one of the strong messages sent by the French Citizens' Climate Convention and the joint IPBES-IPCC report on the subject. This was emphasised throughout 2019 by China and European countries, including France, in joint statements. In addition to the importance of nature-based solutions, promoted since before COP 21 by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), which are solutions for decarbonizing the economy and which have a co-benefit in terms of protecting biodiversity, IDDRI had also warned in 2019 about the risks for biodiversity of certain carbon neutrality pathways, in particular when they are based too much on hypothetical capacities to offset a sector's emissions thanks to the capture or storage of carbon in the agricultural and forestry sectors. The preparation of the United Nations Summit on Food Systems, to be held on September 23, is illustrative of the many areas of fracture and conflict over the models for transforming agricultural ecosystems that could be compatible with this dual ambition of protecting the climate and biodiversity. The environmental integrity of carbon neutrality commitments will therefore be essential: to do so, they will have to be based on detailed roadmaps aligned with long-term objectives, both to avoid double counting in possible offset systems, as is being discussed for COP26, and to define transformation pathways towards carbon neutrality that are also positive for biodiversity.

The third underlying trend, as highlighted in the IPCC Group 1 report published in August,² is that the impacts of climate change are already here and will be felt strongly in the coming decades. The catastrophic effects now affect not only the most vulnerable countries and tropical countries, but also Russia and Canada, which for a time may have thought themselves immune to, or even net beneficiaries of, some form of warming. The frequency and magnitude of these extreme events, and the degree of unquestionable certainty with which science now attributes them to climate change and its human cause, obviously reinforce the prominence of the climate as an issue for political debate in all the countries of the planet, with a degree of universality that has rarely been achieved, even if the need for preventive action is far from being translated into ambitious action in all these countries.

Finally, the credibility of multilateral institutions and frameworks continues to erode, either because they are directly challenged, as in the case of territorial delimitations at sea, or because the weakening of American leadership is leading to a deep scepticism about any form of international intervention stemming from the institutions created after World War II. Environmental multilateralism, with no formal mechanism for enforcing commitments, is particularly confronted with this problem of credibility; but it is also one of the channels through which powers in conflict continue to negotiate and coordinate (as is the case in the Mediterranean, for example), and may constitute one of the places where the global governance of tomorrow is being invented. To mark the 20th anniversary of its creation, IDDRI is dedicating an international conference to this topic on October 12-14.

Key milestones in international negotiations

In this context, international negotiations are punctuated by key moments, each of which suffers from the complex health conditions that severely constrain any broad, high-level political gathering. COP26 in Glasgow is a case in point: it counts almost less as a negotiating moment as such than as a calendar deadline by which countries that have not yet done so are rightly under pressure from civil society and other governments to announce more ambitious climate protection targets in a revamped nationally determined contribution (NDC). All eyes are on large emerging countries such as India, China, South Africa in particular. The case of Indonesia is quite striking: although Indonesia's 2030 mitigation targets remained unchanged, and the commitment to carbon neutrality by 2060 (literally, '2060 or sooner') remains controversial, the prospect of COP26 has created, as in India, an intense domestic political debate about which short-term decisions are compatible with such a long-term pathway.

In terms of biodiversity, the long race continues to unfold over time, with the October COP15 in Kunming now expected to be finalised in a second part of the COP in spring 2022. However, the negotiation text is now on the table, highly structured and documented by scientific references, and it has been the subject of the first formal gunfights over the last two weeks on substantive issues: the emblematic debate on the protection status of 30% of the planet's surface area in 2030, the role and status of indigenous peoples and local communities in the protection of biodiversity and sustainable development in general, the content of the objectives for changing the agricultural and food model (reduction of inputs, diversity of cultivated species, etc.). As regards the latter, the preparations for the UN Food Systems Summit showed that this would be an essential but very divisive discussion. IUCN World Conservation Congress hosted by France in Marseille at the beginning of September will be an essential moment for taking the temperature of the extent of support from a diversity of public, private and civil society actors for the most ambitious objectives. Building on these two key stages at the end of the summer, everything will be in place to bring out the hard points of this negotiation on biodiversity in order to develop options for a "deal". The more it has been anchored in national political debates, the more likely will it translate into concrete action and thus contribute to the credibility of environmental multilateralism.

At the heart of the COP21 climate deal and the emerging biodiversity deal, the autumn will also be particularly marked by the so-called "resource mobilisation" issue, which in fact concerns public and private financial transfers to the poorest countries to help them transform towards development that is positive for nature and the climate. The minimum target of 100 billion per year from 2020 onwards for climate financing has hardly been met, although it should be renegotiated upwards, and the discussions on biodiversity are anchored in the same financial orders of magnitude. The UN Secretary General is himself mobilising to ensure that this issue of solidarity for the transformation of economies is the subject of clear financial commitments at the UN General Assembly at the end of September. Beyond the possibility of maintaining the agreement between the South and the North on climate action and biodiversity, the solidarity embodied by these financial transfers is one of the central axes for preserving confidence in international coordination, in a context where solidarity in terms of vaccines or support for investments

to emerge from the COVID-19 crisis is itself being questioned.

The European Union at the heart of the game, whether it wants to or not

Without unequivocal legitimacy in these ongoing negotiations, Europe will nevertheless find itself responsible for providing a form of leadership, shared as much as possible with other regions and other key players. Its responsibility will be as much to support coordination and ambition in the negotiations, in support of the Chinese and British presidencies. In particular, it should be noted that COP15 will be finalised at the same time as France holds the Presidency of the European Union, and will therefore be at the forefront of intra-European and European coordination efforts with other major regions. Europe's responsibility is also to make a success of its Green Deal, since it constitutes a political and economic programme that places the same degree of ambition on climate and biodiversity, and as such will be widely scrutinised in the world. The third area of responsibility is that European actors are decisive on a global scale in terms of development aid, and they will inevitably be at the heart of the credibility of financial transfers to the countries of the South. Finally, given the importance of its political and commercial relations with the other major regions of the world, the European Union is expected to engage in bilateral negotiations with India, China, Brazil and even the United States in a cooperative and challenging manner: its ability to make the changes in its trade policy understood, in particular, so that it is perceived as an accelerator of transformation and not as a threat of retaliation.

¹ Read Jean Pisani-Ferry's Policy Brief: <https://www.piiie.com/publications/policy-briefs/climate-policy-macroeconomic-policy-and-implications-will-be-significant>

² <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg1/>

BIODIVERSITÉ

COVID-19

MULTILATERALISM

IPBES

IPCC