Outside shocks are supercharging the EU Green Deal – for now

Nuclear and gas in EU taxonomy is ‘biggest greenwash ever’

China and EU can – must – cooperate on green goals, despite differences

Path to a just transition in Africa is via green industrialisation
Crisis, however, that the EU’s decision to instead of derailing it. There is criticism that – at least for the moment - Russia’s war against Ukraine and, before that, Covid-19, are supercharging the project, and intriguing internal aspects of the EU’s Green Deal. The magazine kicks off with our lead article which says off with our lead article which says EU’s Green transformation. For easier reading, we have divided the magazine into three parts:

First, we look into the more interesting and intriguing internal aspects of the EU’s Green Deal. The magazine kicks off with our lead article which says that – at least for the moment - Russia’s war against Ukraine and, before that, Covid-19, are supercharging the project, instead of derailing it. There is criticism, however, that the EU’s decision to include natural gas and nuclear power as “transitional activities” in its sustainable investments guidelines for green finance could turn out to be “biggest greenwash ever.”

Meanwhile, increasing nuclear energy capacity has re-emerged as an option to help Europe cut dependence on Russian fossil fuels and in Germany, we explore whether the government’s pro-renewables rhetoric is really being translated into easy-to-implement policies.

Second, we take a closer look at the Green Deal’s external fall-out, especially on African countries where the EU has been advocating an “African Green Deal” as a centrepiece of the continent’s economic recovery. Our interviews and articles reflect more nuanced African thinking on the topic and warn that the EU’s much-publicised Global Gateway connectivity initiative as well as the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism are not universally welcomed in Africa.

Finally, we talk to former Green MEP Magic Magid who is campaigning for climate justice and to MEP Mohammed Chahim who says a large chunk of the proceeds from the Carbon Border tax should be used to help low-income countries to build renewable energy systems and clean up their industries. Uganda’s young climate activist Hilda Flavia Nakayese explains why she will not stop her campaign for greening Africa.

With its diversity of authors and views and its globally inclusive approach, we believe the magazine sharpens ongoing EU discussions on the green economy. We really enjoyed putting this magazine together and we hope you enjoy reading it.

Shada Islam
In this issue

6
Outside shocks are supercharging the EU Green Deal – for now

10
Nuclear and gas in EU taxonomy is ‘biggest greenwash ever’

14
German wind energy stumbles

16
Does the Ukraine war mean a renaissance for EU nuclear energy?

20
‘Global Gateway’: In Africa, scepticism about the EU’s green connectivity plan

24
Forget the scaremongers: climate change will not lead to mass migration to Europe

26
Path to a just transition in Africa is via green industrialisation

30
African economies risk suffocation by EU ‘shock’ carbon tax

32
China and EU can – must – cooperate on green goals, despite differences

36
INTERVIEW: Magic Magid: The paradox at the heart of EU’s Green Deal

38
INTERVIEW: The ‘carbon tax’ MEP with one eye on Mozambique

40
‘The government is hearing us, but not listening to us’ Ugandan activist warns

44
Europe’s Green Push

46
An A-Z glossary of climate change terms
Outside shocks are supercharging the EU Green Deal – for now

Russia’s war against Ukraine and, before that, Covid 19 risk derailing the EU’s ambitious Green Deal. Instead, as Wester van Gaal explains, both external shocks have supercharged the project – at least for now.

By WESTER VAN GAAL

European speeches rarely excite. The EU’s lawmaking process is incremental and disjointed, and the stakes are often obfuscated by detail and too many acronyms.

But when European Commission vice-president Frans Timmermans, on December 13, 2019, had to convince the European Parliament to approve the landmark Green Deal, Europe’s overarching policy to become the world’s first “climate-neutral bloc” by 2050, he brought out the big guns.

“We choose to go for climate neutrality in 2050 and do the other things. Not because they are easy, but because they are hard,” he said, adapting the ‘Man on the Moon’ speech by John F. Kennedy.

Wrapped in the pathos of past scientific, industrial and civic success, Timmermans presented the Green Deal as a do or die moment in European history. It would “organise and measure the best of our energies and skills,” he said. “Because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept. One we are unwilling to postpone. And one which we intend to win.”

It was meant to solve the problem of political disagreement and paralysis among EU member countries while also serving the external goal of projecting a unified image. By attaching it to the Cold War narrative of the space race - a symbol of the struggle between liberal democracy and authoritarianism - it presented Europe as a green soft power alternative to China, Russia and the United States.

As we now know, parliament approved the proposal - and even asked the commission to increase its climate ambitions further.

Climate change as national security issue

Fast forward to the first quarter of 2022 and with the onset of Russian president Vladimir Putin’s invasion of Ukraine, gas prices are surging and calls to wean Europe off Russian gas have become louder and more persistent.

“Climate policy is now a matter of national security,” an EU official told EUobserver.

At the time of writing, it is still unclear whether Europe will ultimately sanction Russian oil- and gas imports, given that Germany is especially reliant on Russian gas imports. But the new German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has already halted the controversial Nord Stream 2 project and the EU appears ready to double down on the Green Deal.

“The Green Deal is also the answer to the security challenge in the energy field,” Timmermans said in the wake of the invasion. On March 8, two weeks after the Russian military offensive, the Commission presented plans to decrease Russian gas imports by two-thirds before the end of the year.

RepowerEU introduces some new measures. It will require gas storage across the EU to be filled up to at least 90 percent of its capacity by October 1 each year.

In addition, it projects increased Liquified Natural Gas (LNG) imports from other countries, mainly the United States. It even encourages EU members...
Unwittingly, “patient zero” launched a EU official reflecting back on the first “Everything changed overnight,” was the first human on earth to fall sick away, a Wuhan resident surnamed Chen December 2019, almost 9000 kilometres. Even as Timmermans was presenting his which almost scuppered the Green Deal. Before the war, it was the Covid-19 virus emerged in which uncertainty and the politics and foreign relations, a dynamic emerged in which uncertainty and the pandemic began feeding into and driving the Green Deal. Current policies would already decrease gas consumption by 50 percent by 2030. By speeding up measures, to be paid for with existing pandemic funds, the commission estimates it can reduce Russian natural gas imports to 35 billion cubic meters before the end of the year, down from 355 bcm last year.

Before the Ukraine war, there was the pandemic

Before the war, it was the Covid-19 virus which almost scuppered the Green Deal. Even as Timmermans was presenting his bid idea to the European Parliament in December 2019, almost 9000 kilometres away, a Wuhan resident surnamed Chen was the first human on earth to fall sick to the Covid-19 virus.


By setting the Green Deal up as a geopolitical tool, encompassing both domestic policies and foreign relations, a dynamic was born. One-third of this was earmarked for Green Deal investments, which together with the regular seven-year budget added up to €750bn - more money the continent has ever spent on climate policy.

This collective action was coordinated by the commission, who pushed the Green Deal as the bloc’s main growth strategy throughout the year.

EU banks joined in

This was supported by an unprecedented response from the European Central Bank, which promised to buy up all government debt (€80bn eventually) under its so-called pandemic emergency purchase programme (PEPP).

Financial institutions like the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) pooled their resources to help support pandemic-stricken economies by spending a large part of their funds on climate action.

This set up a system of collective action between institutions and member states, now described by the EU as “Team Europe.”

Climate policy is now a matter of national security.”

From a climate policy perspective, there is no question this approach has been successful.

By the end of 2020, even coal-reliant states like Poland recognised the need (and benefits) to decarbonise their economies with EU money, and agreed to increase the bloc’s legally binding emissions reduction goal from 40 percent to a net 55 percent cut by 2030 - now enthroned in the European Climate Law.

Governments were seen propping up entire economic sectors, changing ideas of what governments and institutions should and could do - tied together into its central climate policy. Reflecting on this moment in May 2021, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell later said that Europeans are “masters of disjointed efforts.”

He added: “Each policy tends to develop according to its own logic and rhythm. The way to go is to use these instruments as part of one political strategy.”

Uncertainty looms

Since its launch in 2019, the Green Deal has become the EU’s linchpin policy, relying together questions of stimulating and investing in the economy, responding to the climate crisis, and foreign policy threats. Questions like joint debt, huge fiscal and monetary crisis support and massive public investments in green infrastructure are now part and parcel of the EU’s policy toolkit.

But even as some of its efforts have proven successful under pressure crises and conflict, it is unclear where it will lead.

For one, the future success of the Green Deal is almost wholly dependent on the availability of money. And there are signs that in addition to the impact of the Russian war, the period of massive monetary interventions and government generosity may be drawing to a close.

The ECB has already decreased its pandemic asset purchases. Although the bank has not yet signalled that it will increase interest rates, worries over inflation will pressure the bank’s management to do so.

This will lead to an increase in borrowing costs for governments, while energy prices will by all expectations remain high. As a result, increasing investments in renewables is likely to become more difficult.

Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi, who previously served as ECB president, has already called for a new version of the NextGenerationEU fund to pay for green investments and weather the financial fallout from the war by issuing mutual debt.

But opposition to joint European debt remains potent among “frugal” northern EU member states. Magdalena Andersson, the Swedish prime minister, recently warned that “some countries always find new arguments why they shouldn’t pay their expenses.” Such intransigence will complicate debates over revamping EU fiscal rules to be held this year.

Even if crises and conflict have driven the Green Deal forward in recent years, this may not continue to be the case in the future. Political will and determination can go just so far. The Green Deal has survived two major external challenges. But without sustainable long-term financial resources - either through governments’ monetary financing or joint European debt - the EU’s flagship initiative is at risk of impasse.

Before the Ukraine war, it was Covid 19 that almost scuppered the Green Deal.

About Wester van Gaal

Wester is a journalist from the Netherlands with a focus on the green economy. He joined EUobserver in September 2021. Previously he was editor-in-chief of Vice, Motherboard, a science-based website, and climate economy journalist for The Correspondent.
Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and EU plans to reduce its reliance on Russian fossil-fuel imports have raised more questions over the fate of the European Commission’s controversial taxonomy proposal.

EU member states were already split over the role of gas and nuclear in the energy transition and, thus, in green finance — even before the war in Ukraine.

The reasons are obvious: gas projects still generate significant greenhouse gas emissions and there is no proven sustainable solution for nuclear waste.

Nevertheless, the decision to include gas and nuclear was partially justified on the ground that it provided energy security for the 27-nation bloc. Critics say the proposal undermines the credibility of the EU taxonomy as a science-based investment tool, gives credence to claims of greenwashing, creates confusion in financial markets, and will cause major delays in the much-needed transition away from fossil fuels.

The taxonomy does not ban outright investment in activities not included in the guidelines — but it is designed to steer investments away from companies and investors which falsely claim to be environmentally sustainable.

‘Gold standard’ gone

Experts have warned that including natural gas (with a higher threshold than the one recommended by experts) and nuclear power in the EU’s sustainable...
finance rules may lead to further green-washing in financial markets.

University College Dublin professor Andreas Hoepner, who has been one of those leading academic opposition on the taxonomy, describes it as probably "the biggest greenwash ever."

The proposal, he said, ignores rigorous scientific analysis and weakens the credibility of the whole EU sustainable finance agenda. And it may even lead to an increase in emissions incompatible with the Fit-for-55 package and the EU's climate targets.

Overall, investment in fossil fuels does well in financial markets — with gas projects gaining a significant increase in profitability in recent years. And experts argue that actually excluding gas projects from the EU taxonomy would not have created a risk of undertransition in gas generation as a transition energy source. Conversely, an analysis from the international EDHEC Business School found that its inclusion in the financial guideline may create price distortions and an incentive to limit future investments in renewables.

Natural gas has been tentatively identified by Brussels as a transition fuel until renewables and storage capacity can operate at a sufficient scale, but many have questioned the financial reasons for including it in the green taxonomy.

Investments for a gas-fired power plant are estimated to take more than a decade to be amortised, and gas plans tend to operate an average of 25 to 30 years in Europe. This raises concerns among experts about the taxonomy leading to a delay in the transition away from fossil fuels.

Ursula Woodburn from the UK’s cross-sector group of business leaders, CLG Europe, said that this transition is supported by many businesses who see the benefits it offers.

The war in Ukraine shows how geopolitical tensions can cause "massive disruption" in an energy system based on fossil fuels, she warns.

"The EU should rapidly transition away from fossil fuels, fossil-fuel investments and subsidies to deliver climate stability," she added.

The decision to include gas and nuclear in the taxonomy was slammed as the outcome of a both lengthy and highly-politicised process. But the European Commission has also come under fire for looking at this tool purely through a domestic prism — despite its impact beyond EU borders.
German wind energy stumbles

A case study: red tape, “Not In My Back Yard” (NIMBYs), and Green vs Green conflicts are putting a brake on Germany’s rapid wind expansion.

By LEON MANGASARIAN

Bureaucracy, local opposition and intra-Green battles will make Germany’s expansion of wind power arduous.

This is not theory. These are my experiences as our family forestry business seeks to build wind turbines on four different sites in eastern Germany.

Wind turbine construction has been strangled in Germany by multiple constraints. The amount of electricity produced by newly-built windmills has plunged to less than half of the record peak set in 2017 for each of the last four years.

The Green party’s minister for economy and climate protection, Robert Habeck, plans to radically increase the number of windmills in Germany. To achieve Europe’s biggest economy, Germany needs to increase the amount of electricity produced by newly-built windmills to 15 percent of Germany’s territory, up from eight percent under the 1,000 metre rule (in Bavaria a de facto 2,000 metres) that says windmills cannot be built any closer to a house. In terms of nighttime noise limits this does not make sense. Studies show that windmills can be located 600 to 700 meters from a house and still not exceed the decibel limits.

A report by Agora Energiewende, a think tank, shows that cutting the limit to 600 metres, and allowing wind turbines in forests, would increase the potential land available for windmills to 15 percent of Germany’s territory, up from eight percent under the 1,000 metre and no forests rule.

Decibels and peregrine falcons

But putting windmills in forests inspires fury — even among many forest-owners who would profit from them. I’ve seen this first-hand in my role as chairman of the advisory committee for a forestry cooperative which manages 17,000 hectares of forest in eastern Germany.

As I have discovered, even where it seems possible to build a wind park, nothing is decided until everything is decided. And, adding a Karlskroner twist, some things cannot even be decided.

Here are some examples.

At my Kleinsie forest about two hours southeast of Berlin, I signed a contract to be part of a wind park in January 2021. First of all, an environmental impact report costing more than €100,000 was needed. Among its most significant findings was a nest used by a peregrine falcon (which is no longer endangered, as the population in Germany and Europe has risen since the 1970s). There are 600 breeding pairs in Germany and up to 15,000 pairs in Europe.

Nevertheless, under present regulations, windmills cannot be built closer than 1,000 metres (in a few cases, 500 metres) from the nest. For this wind park, the nest means that three potential windmills have been axed.

Multiply this across Germany and it means lots of windmills are never getting off the drawing board due to birds that are not really threatened.

Habeck’s ministry says they want to loosen these regulations but Green opponents have plenty of pictures of captivated birds for their PR campaign. Technology may have a partial answer because warning systems can shut down windmills when very large birds approach. Peregrines, however, are too small for the current systems.

The project developer says that if all goes well — a big if — the first wind turbines may start producing electricity in 2027. That’s almost seven years after the contract was signed. And this is a small wind park with just 10 to 12 windmills.

A second wind park that we have been working on for months in the west of the city of Eisenhüttenstadt was suddenly cancelled because the local council said “nein.”

And a third windmill which was supposed to be built near Kyrzitz in western Brandenburg met all the prerequisites and seemed set to go but since there were already a dozen wind turbines in the area, one developer, seeing no chance the local government would approve building further windmills pulled out. The other is slow-walking the project. There is now probably a 10 percent chance it will actually be built.

German polls show big majorities love renewables. Just NIMBY (“Not In My Backyard). Please.” And not in our sacred forests.

Unless it changes tack, this one-third green German government, despite the best of intentions, is not going to be able to deliver on its renewable energy targets.

Leon Mangasarian worked as a reporter and editor for Bloomberg News, dpa and UPI in Berlin, East Berlin, Bonn and Brussels. He now lives on a farm in southeast Brandenburg and in Potsdam.
Increasing nuclear energy capacity has re-emerged as an option to help Europe cut dependence on Russian fossil fuels. But the age-old debate on nuclear safety is still alive — and divisive.

By ESZTER ZALAN

As the EU ramps up efforts to reduce dependence on Russian oil and gas, the focus has shifted back towards nuclear energy — along with renewables — as an option.

Boosting nuclear energy capacity would also fit with the EU’s Green Deal, with proponents of nuclear seeing it as a vital tool to reach net-zero targets. At the start of this year, the EU executive also proposed to classify some nuclear investments as green — a highly-controversial move.

Expanding reliance on nuclear energy is a deeply-divisive issue for many EU member states, however.

The EU Commission has been accused of greenwashing nuclear and natural gas by critics. The plan has also split member states, with Austria and Luxembourg being the most outspoken in opposing the plans.

Those countries in favour remain enthusiastic, however. “Nuclear energy should be considered as one of the solutions, because it has the lowest carbon-footprint [and is] already considered as a green solution by the European Commission,” Bulgarian socialist MEP Tsvetelina Penkova told the European Parliament’s energy committee in early March.

Her assessment was echoed by Finnish MEP Henna Virkkunen. “It is clear that member states can no longer rely on Russian gas and oil for their energy needs. Doubling down and investing in low-carbon energy, including nuclear and renewables, is now imperative in order to achieve both carbon neutrality and energy independence,” she told the committee.

In a 10-point plan in March, the International Energy Agency (IEA) also suggested that the EU reduce its imports of natural gas from Russia by more than one-third within a year — partly

Does the Ukraine war mean a renaissance for EU nuclear energy?
Nuclear facilities [which are] already up already-high energy prices. Russian energy amid a war that is pushing the EU as it struggles to wean itself off Others warn that building new nuclear neutrality. By 2050 to achieve its goal of carbon investment around €500bn into nuclear energy, the EU should Thierry Breton, EU commissioner for the internal market, said. But such a massive shift requires equal- gas demand by almost 1bn cubic metres per month. But such a massive shift requires equal- massive investment. EU commissioner for the internal market Thierry Breton estimates the EU should invest around €500bn into nuclear energy by 2050 to achieve its goal of carbon neutrality. Others warn that building new nuclear power plants will not be a quick fix for the EU as it struggles to wean itself off Russian energy amid a war that is pushing up already-high energy prices.

“Nuclear facilities [which are] already halted could be put back online, but that would only mean a minimum [of] gas savings. If you want to reduce the role of gas in the electricity sector, you must slow down the phasing-out of coal,” András György Deák, senior research fellow at the Budapest-based Institute of World Economic, told EUobserver.

“I can imagine that a nuclear renaissance unfolds because of the war — at least, in terms of policy discussions. But what we start building today, will not be opera- tional until 2035. So what is the point?,” Deák said, adding that companies invest- ing in building plants think long-term and are unlikely to react solely to the Ukraine war.

Deák is also sceptical that Europe can decrease its reliance on gas more quickly than already planned. Accelerating savings could come from speeding up the renova- tion of buildings, in order that some gas used for heating can be channeled into producing electricity, he suggests.

Small modular reactors (SMRs), nucle- ar-fusion reactors that are smaller than conventional nuclear reactors, could also provide a quick bridge eventually, but the technology is still under development, and needs to be examined by the EU Commission for security reasons.

In 2020, 13 EU countries had operational nuclear reactors: Belgium, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Spain, France, Hungary, the Netherlands, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Finland and Sweden. In total, there were 109 nuclear reactors in operation, according to the EU’s statistics office.

Nuclear electricity production accounts for almost 25 percent of total EU electricity. But electricity generated by nuclear plants across the EU has decreased by 25.2 percent since 2006.

France is the EU state which is most reli- ant on nuclear electricity: nuclear energy represented 76 percent of all electricity produced in the country in 2020. In Slo- vakia, nuclear represents 54 percent of all electricity generation, in Hungary 46 percent, and in Bulgaria 41 percent.

In Germany, where Angela Merkel made a commitment to phase-out nuclear power after Japan’s Fukushima disaster in 2011, the final three reactors are ex- pected to stop production this year.

At the other end of the spectrum, Fin- land’s new unit, built by a French-led consortium, came online in mid-March — but only after a 12-year delay, and bil- lions of euros in extra costs.

Elina Brutschin, research scholar with the climate programme of the Vien- na-based International Institute for Ap- plied Systems Analysis (IIASA) said the massive policy shift in Germany: shut- ting down the Nord Stream 2 gas pipe- line from Russia, and increasing defence spending, showed that “anything is possible at the moment.”

Vincent Zabielski, a nuclear engi- neer-turned-lawyer at international law firm Pildisbry, thinks there can be a nu- clear renaissance, citing a U-turn in Ger- many thinking in the last few weeks.

“Germany has some of the best nuclear plants in the world, as well as the best nuclear operators, and they are throw- ing it away,” he warned, adding that any decision to revive nuclear power in Eu- rope’s energy mix will ultimately be a po- litical choice.

And some politicians are far from convinced. “No, I don’t think there will be a nuclear renaissance, I don’t count a possible extension of reactors as a ‘renaissance’,” Slovak MEP Martin Hojsík, one of the European lawmakers in charge of taxonomy, told EUobserver.

“It is just too costly, and takes too long compared to renewable energy,” he said, pointing out that reactors in central Eu- rope are also dependent on Russian fuel.

“Military conflict and nuclear plants don’t mix well.”

This [war] could motivate countries to prolong the lifetime of existing plants, and spur new investments in nuclear en- ergy generally,” Brutschin said, but added that decisions will vary widely, based on EU countries’ national and political contexts.

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“Military conflict and nuclear plants don’t mix well.”
With great fanfare, a Youssou N’Dour concert in Brussels, and talk of a “partnership of equals” Europe tried to rekindle relations with African leaders at the sixth European Union-African Union summit in February.

The EU’s big offer at the two-day summit was Global Gateway Africa — a €150bn connectivity initiative that, among other goals, aims to connect Africa’s mineral wealth to the global market, and invest in the continent’s electrification, preferably using clean energy.

Africa needs roughly €150bn a year for infrastructure investment, so if the EU can deliver on its financial promises, the European scheme could end up becoming a real rival to China’s Belt-and-Road Africa investment plan — launched in 2013, with major financial promises, but recently revised down to €40bn.

Many African nations are sceptical, however, of Europe’s push to promote green energy. Nigeria, Mozambique and Senegal (which hold huge natural gas reserves) have lobbied hard for a continuation of European financial support for new gas projects in Africa.

Nigerian vice-president, Yemi Osinbajo, has gone on record to lambast wealthy nations from the Global North for banning or restricting public investment in fossil fuels, after “decades of profiting from oil and gas” themselves.

Europeans are not ready to say yes to such support, and no commitments were made at the summit. However, it will be difficult to deny African countries access to funding, and potential oil and gas revenues.

European leaders cannot hope to achieve their clean energy goals without African goodwill and African resources. After all, Africa has the richest solar resources of any continent, and countries such as Kenya and Morocco are already significant generators of cleaner energy.

Africa also has 85-95 percent of global chromium and platinum metal reserves; more than 50 percent of cobalt reserves and a third of world bauxite reserves. These metals are essential for the production of solar panels and the batteries needed to store wind energy.

African nations stand to gain from new investments in green energy but some also fear that this will lead to more exploitation of Africans.

“If you look at the history of infrastructure investment in Africa, it has not led to improvements in the situation on the continent,” says architect, environmentalist and poet Nnimmo Bassey.

Bassey, as head of the Health Of Mother Earth Foundation, has fought against injustice and ecological destruction as a result of mining and fossil-fuel extraction for decades. And he has three words...
to describe foreign investment in Africa: "exploitation, domination, colonialism."

He warns: "A transition to renewables does not automatically mean a just transition."

Mines and harbours

Western and Chinese-built roads and train tracks largely connect mines with harbours — they are not meant to help people, but to speed up the export of mineral wealth. Investment schemes such as the EU’s Global Gateway will fail to address exploitation because local people remain excluded from decision-making, he warns. “There is a real drive to scrape the bottom of the barrel from all sides.”

And it is not just Europeans and the Chinese who are at fault. National African leaders like Senegalese president Macky Sall and Nigeria’s Osinbajo, unwittingly or unwittingly, are allowing exploitation to continue by promoting new fossil-fuel projects.

“They hope fossil fuels will give them the revenues they need to transform the country,” Bassey said. “But if you look back at 60 years of oil and gas investments, none of the goals that were set out have been achieved. Instead, all we have to show for it is ecocide, extreme destruction and exploitation of local peoples.”

The UN has estimated that African countries lose €80bn a year in illicit cash transfers to the Global North, with at least half of that related to the export of extractive commodities. The EU insists on good governance and has presented Global Gateway as a watershed moment that will change all this. But there are many other ways wealth continues to flow out of Africa.

New borrowing, fresh debt?

The EU Global Gateway states that Africa will receive €150bn worth of grants and loans to spur further private investment. And while this may increase access to much-needed funding for the energy transition in Africa, new borrowing also means more debt.

Private investors often charge high-interest rates because they perceive African countries as risky investments, resulting in many African countries having to pay a large amount of their budget to debt-servicing — a problem now made worse by the Covid-19 pandemic. At the end of 2021, more than 20 low-income African countries were in debt distress, according to the International Monetary Fund. In the first five months of 2021, 98 percent of the Nigerian budget was spent on debt-servicing. Between 2011 and 2020, Ghana used 74 percent of its petroleum revenue to pay off debt.

“Nigeria can’t transition away from fossil fuels because it depends on oil and gas revenues to pay back investors,” says David McNair, who heads the One Campaign, a non-profit organisation against extreme poverty.

The new funding projected by Global Gateway is undoubtedly substantial. But its emphasis on private investors that charge high-interest rates may deepen Africa’s debt problems, leading to more loss of wealth, which in turn could tempt African governments to invest in new fossil-fuel projects.

“Nimmo Bassey, architect, environmentalist and poet

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Nimmo Bassey

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New borrowing, fresh debt?

The EU Global Gateway states that Africa will receive €150bn worth of grants and loans to spur further private investment. And while this may increase access to much-needed funding for the energy transition in Africa, new borrowing also means more debt.

Private investors often charge high-interest rates because they perceive African countries as risky investments, resulting in many African countries having to pay a large amount of their budget to debt-servicing — a problem now made worse by the Covid-19 pandemic. At the end of 2021, more than 20 low-income African countries were in debt distress, according to the International Monetary Fund. In the first five months of 2021, 98 percent of the Nigerian budget was spent on debt-servicing. Between 2011 and 2020, Ghana used 74 percent of its petroleum revenue to pay off debt.

“Nigeria can’t transition away from fossil fuels because it depends on oil and gas revenues to pay back investors,” says David McNair, who heads the One Campaign, a non-profit organisation against extreme poverty.

The new funding projected by Global Gateway is undoubtedly substantial. But its emphasis on private investors that charge high-interest rates may deepen Africa’s debt problems, leading to more loss of wealth, which in turn could tempt African governments to invest in new fossil-fuel projects.

“Nimmo Bassey, architect, environmentalist and poet

If you look at the history of infrastructure investment in Africa, it has not led to improvements in the situation on the continent”

Nimmo Bassey

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Forget the scaremongers: climate change will not lead to mass migration to Europe

Predictions that thousands, even millions, of people will head to Europe from Africa or elsewhere due to climate change are not substantiated by studies. In fact, the people most affected by climate change are often the most impoverished, and as such are the least likely to migrate.

Others who are better off will leave, but usually they will head to somewhere else within their own country or region. The many Doomsday forecasts which say the opposite are at best intellectual dishonesty and at worst, they are mere fear-mongering. They can also feed xenophobia, says Andrew Harper, a special advisor on climate action at the UN refugee agency (UNHCR).

"When we talk about climate, refugees, or, ‘migration’, it sort of takes the eyes off the people who are most at risk," he said. "The people who are most at risk are those people who are immobile," he said.

True, some 90 percent of the world’s refugees originate from countries that are already impacted by climate change.

But Harper says a whole host of other issues — ranging from poor governance, to lack of education, and corruption — also need to be taken into account.

"If we just focus on climate change, it almost provides a ‘get-out-of-jail-free card’ for the incompetence and corruption that goes on in many of these states," says Harper.

"Look forwards, plan backwards' Climate change should instead be used to trigger a rethink of how humanity and society work with the environment, according to Harper. That means looking ahead and planning backwards to mitigate the harm.

Similar conclusions were made in the most recent report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) published in February.

Aside from the extremely sobering warnings, the report said fundamental changes are needed throughout society to mitigate the damage and give humanity a fighting chance. Already, the rise in weather and climate extremes has led to some irreversible impacts, as natural and human systems are pushed beyond their ability to adapt, it said. And up to 3.6 billion people currently live in contexts that are highly vulnerable to climate change.

It also gives a perspective of a future with a window of opportunity that is “brief and rapidly closing.” But will it force people to move? If nothing is done, the World Bank estimates anywhere between 40 million to 216 million people by 2050 could migrate internally within their regions.

The bank’s two reports, published in September 2021 and based on models looking at the Middle East and North Africa, East Asia and the Pacific, and Eastern Europe and Central Asia, said the worst affected would be sub-Saharan Africa, while the least impacted would be in Eastern Europe and Central Asia.

Both reports focus on climate impacts such as water stress, drops in crop productivity, and rising sea-levels, compounded by storm surges. They also focus on internal migration, meaning migration within a country’s borders, not cross-border migration. And they conclude by saying that “immediate and concerted action” would reduce the scale of climate migration by as much as 80 percent.

“The bottom-line message is that early action is key and the window of opportunity is narrowing,” according to a World Bank spokesperson. However, while the report itself offers a much-more nuanced view, the bank’s press release highlighted the more alarmist figure of 216 million potential migrants.

“I think it is refreshing to see that this report primarily focused on internal mobility,” says Hein de Haas, a Dutch sociologist, environmental geographer, and professor at the University of Amsterdam. He is also one of the founding members of the International Migration Institute at the University of Oxford.

De Haas warns that the World Bank report is not transparent about the methodological grounds for these estimates, and also questions the apparent underlying assumption that less water availability would necessarily imply more people would go on the move.

“There is extensive evidence from empirical studies questioning these assumptions, which failed to find a clear link between environmental stresses and migration, and studies which show that migration may even decrease during droughts," he says.

De Haas also warns against drawing conclusions that more poverty would automatically lead to migration. Instead, he points out that as countries develop, more people move from rural to urban areas. Like the UNHCR’s Harper, he says climate and weather are not the only factors that determine peoples’ decision to migrate.

The Dutch academic also insists that there is no direct link between climate change mobility, especially of people who move long distances. “The poorest countries and also the poorest sections within populations have lower migration rates than the slightly better off and it even accounts for internal migration,” he says.
The credibility of Europe’s approach to a green economic transition abroad will depend on its ability to help create and sustain green industrialisation in African countries, making African countries not just targets of European policy, but key actors of a new and interconnected green economy.

Africa-Europe discussions on climate and energy are overshadowed by the inherent injustice of global climate action and the risks that an accelerated European transition can entail for African countries.

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The historical climate injustice is not a debate the EU can win.

The EU’s response has been a gradual, if hesitant, expansion of its just-transition narrative beyond Europe. The idea of prioritising and concentrating investments in those countries that will be most affected by phasing-out fossil

Path to a just transition in Africa is via green industrialisation

On natural gas especially, African leaders and Europeans do not see eye-to-eye. Simply put, the words “transition fuel” have a different meaning in Brussels and Addis Ababa.

By ALFONSO MEDINILLA

This is not at all surprising. Africa has barely contributed to global CO2 emissions, is disproportionately affected by climate risk, and is now under pressure to forego fossil-fuel powered growth.
fuels was initially reserved for addressing Europe’s own coal-dependent regions and its direct neighbourhood. The Just Energy Transition Partnership with South Africa at the Glasgow COP26 conference extended this to Africa’s biggest coal-dependent economy. The AU-EU summit in February took this concept even further, announcing plans for green partnerships modelled on the South African one across the continent, including in countries with very different energy mixes like Egypt, Côte d’Ivoire and Senegal.

While these are important steps (at least on paper), there are still significant divergences. The challenge of any just transition in Africa is less a matter of phasing out dirty coal, and much more a matter of ensuring that African economies can benefit from an accelerated transition in order to industrialise.

**European demand for critical raw materials like lithium and cobalt is set to multiply by 2050.**

This is also the tone of the EU’s draft climate change and resilient development strategy, which calls for seizing opportunities in low-emissions development and green industrialisation and to position the continent to benefit from a global green economy, as a key actor, not just a target of exogenously-determined policies.

For the EU, this also means backing its optimistic green narrative with more than just a scattering of green energy projects across the continent. It means adopting a much more forward-looking and long-term approach to just transition, one that is firmly rooted in the development and industrialisation ambitions of African countries and societies.

**Brussels vs Addis Ababa**

On natural gas especially, African leaders and Europeans do not see eye-to-eye. Simply put, the words ‘transition fuel’ have a different meaning in Brussels and Addis Ababa.

The EU sees it as a last resort, a way to avoid dirtier coal or ageing nuclear infrastructure. African countries, especially those sitting on significant recently-discovered resources like Mozambique and Senegal, want to leverage the continent’s natural gas reserves and see natural gas as a way to accelerate their economic development and industrialisation.

“One energy we have diverging views [...] We cannot ask the continent to re-nounce fossil fuels” Senegal’s president Macky Sall said bluntly in February. Meanwhile, the war in Ukraine has sparked a stronger EU effort to wean itself off Russian gas and diversify European supply.

EU member states are looking towards existing African suppliers like Algeria, Egypt, and Nigeria. Newer entrants like Tanzania are also expressing interest in supplying LNG to Europe.

Yet infrastructure constraints mean that African gas may not be a quick and easy fix for Europe’s problems. The EU is also unlikely to move to financing long-term fossil-fuel development abroad.

The real challenge is supporting viable alternatives in the short term. The focus should be on showcasing opportunities in green industrialisation which leverages Africa’s clean energy potential for a higher value addition in manufacturing, agricultural processing and service industries while generating employment, revenues and new exports at scale. This includes exploring the many opportunities for the production of green energy solutions for local markets or exports, or EU manufacturing. It also includes generating existing industries like building materials, construction, agro-food processing, as well as a host of circular economy applications.

When it comes to green energy, the focus should be less on competing with China for opportunities to install imported technology, but on establishing new sustainable industries and productive capacities and developing a renewa-

**Avoiding green ‘extractivism’**

An African just transition also requires a different outlook on Africa’s role in the global green transition. The prospects for African green hydrogen to power Europe’s industrial and transport transition, for example, are creating much excitement on both sides, with new potential exporters like DR Congo and Namibia, joining north African countries like Morocco.

The EU should resist the urge to substitute one extractive relationship with another, and ensure that hydrogen investments are also used to power local low-carbon (heavy) industries, and include African countries and companies in the development of new applications from the start.

Similarly, European demand for critical raw materials like lithium and cobalt is set to multiply by 50.

While African countries like the DRC and South Africa may be able to further boost income from royalties, processing currently largely takes place in China. This also risks confining African countries to the extraction stage of green technology value chains. Investments therefore need to address not just Europe’s own supply, but also Africa’s processing deficit and industrial development.

All this is of course easier said than done. The EU is under pressure to back its pro-

**About Alfonso Medinilla**

Alfonso Medinilla is Head of Climate and green transition - geopolitics and energy, European Centre for Development Policy Management (ECDPM).
African economies risk suffocation by EU ‘shock’ carbon tax

What some Africans now are bracing for is a carbon “shock,” where EU tariffs would end up “suffocating some African economies,” a senior advisor at the African Climate Foundation warns. The ability of African countries like Egypt, Nigeria and Algeria to continue their industrialisation could be severely impacted.

By JAMES KANTER

The climate is surely one area where the European Union and African Union should be in step with one another. Curbing global warming and agreeing how to produce clean power would help keep more of the world habitable and prosperous.

Worryingly, however, policy differences between Europe and Africa have been widening. Africans increasingly see Europeans as indifferent to their need to develop their economies and shake off the poverty that leads many Africans to embark on difficult migration journeys, both within Africa and to Europe.

The EU agreement on the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) reached on 15 March has been described a “victory for European climate policy” by Bruno Le Maire, French finance minister, representing the French EU presidency.

The carbon tax will give the EU a tool to speed up the decarbonisation of European industry, while protecting it from countries with less ambitious climate goals and “also incentivise other countries to become more sustainable and emit less,” said Le Maire.

But Faten Aggad is sceptical. The senior advisor at the African Climate Foundation, an organisation that channels philanthropy into efforts to protect the climate, she says that under the CBAM, African exporters that do not meet EU-set standards would have to pay extra for their goods to reach the European market.

What some Africans now are bracing for is a carbon “shock,” where EU tariffs would end up “suffocating some African economies,” she warns. The ability of African countries like Egypt, Nigeria and Algeria to continue their industrialisation could be severely impacted.

Aggad is also adamant that Africans see hypocrisy and double standards in Europeans’ repeated refusal to make a rapid break with coal, oil and natural gas while charging ahead with grand plans to push other parts of the world like Africa towards carbon-reduction.

Guinea pig?

“There is a question as to whether Europe is actually using Africa as a guinea pig, even while its own power consumption patterns, and in general, its consumption pattern aren’t seriously put into question,” says Aggad. “This is actually growing into a major issue between the two continents.”

But Europe may already be reneging on a grand bargain reached among wealthier, industrialised countries and poorer, developing countries under the Paris Agreement on climate change seven years ago. The idea in Paris, says Aggad, was to ensure that requirements on countries to address the climate should be carefully calibrated, so as not to deepen inequality among countries internationally.

“Now what we see, at least that’s the perception, is an attempt by Europe to backtrack on this principle by putting heavy requirements on African countries to push them to move to a European model of decarbonisation,” said Aggad. “This is actually growing into a major issue between the two continents.”

About

James Kanter is editor of the EU Scream politics podcast and a former correspondent for the International Herald Tribune and The New York Times.
Global warming and extreme weather are common global challenges that concern all of us. It is heartening to see that the EU has taken the lead at the UN Climate change talks in Copenhagen, Paris and Glasgow, thereby given a new lease of life to multilateral efforts to fight climate change.

What’s more, the EU is leading the way in pushing the climate goals even higher through its development policies, investment programmes and by providing financial incentives for the green transition. Importantly, the Covid-19 pandemic and its social-economic consequences have further boosted the bloc’s green ambitions.

However, many of us are watching to see to whether these commitments will be impacted by Russia’s war against Ukraine and the worsening geopolitical landscape.

In fact, this sombre moment requires that China and the EU put aside their differences and strengthen their cooperation on the green transition – even if doing so is difficult.

Beijing and Washington have set an example for such cooperation by signing three official climate-related communiques during president Barack Obama’s second term — and the Biden administration has also been in discussion with China on issues related to the Paris Agreement.

This illustrates both sides willingness to work together on tackling climate change despite their many other areas of discord. These US-China conversations should be a reference for policy-makers in Brussels, who may be looking for assurances of Beijing’s determination in moving ahead to implement the Paris Agreement and proof of China’s commitment to international climate politics.

Beijing and Brussels must work hand-in-hand to ensure that there is no backtracking in collective efforts to reduce carbon emissions and achieve carbon neutrality in the years ahead. Importantly, both Beijing and Brussels are turning their international climate pledges into domestic policies.

The sombre moment of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine requires that China and the EU put aside their differences and strengthen their cooperation on the green transition – even if doing so is difficult.

By FU JING
Just as the EU is trying to do through its Green Deal, China’s international pledges of reaching a carbon-emissions peak before 2030, plus achieving carbon-neutrality around 2060 (which were made at the UN General Assembly in September 2020), are being integrated into the country’s 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-2025) for National Economic and Social Development.

By 2030, the share of non-fossil energy in primary energy use will account for around 25 percent in China while EU has set a binding target of 32 percent for renewable energy in the bloc’s energy mix by 2030. According to the document, the central government in China supports the provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions if they have the right conditions to meet these goals ahead of schedule.

EU cutting-edge, but China catching up fast

China has also announced a mega-plan for building 450 gigawatts (GW) of solar and wind power-generation capacity in its western regions, while trying to bring the country’s total wind and solar capacity to at least 1,200 GW and to cap its carbon emission to a peak by 2030.

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Provincial governments in China are competing with each other in trying to take the lead in meeting these goals, scientists and researchers are actively exploring low-carbon technological breakthroughs, financial institutions are offering ample incentives and businesses are seeking new investment opportunities. Many are keen on cooperating with their European partners on an array of green development initiatives.

The EU hosts many renowned research-based universities, excellent scientists, and many cutting-edge companies, which give the bloc a strong competitive edge on achieving the green transition. The EU should therefore take a closer look at green investment opportunities in China.

In fact, China is catching up fast. For example, several Chinese automakers are planning to sell electric passenger vehicles in the EU. Hopefully, just as China kept its market open for Europe’s auto industry, the EU will ensure a market-open policy and welcome those low-emission or green vehicles from China, which will help realise the EU’s climate transition. Such cooperation will be mutually-beneficial, helping to create jobs and expand green research and development.

Too many regulatory barriers will also be harmful.

This will not be easy given the current geopolitical environment and fears in the US and the EU at China’s rise. The EU, for example, may turn away from such cooperation as part of its drive for more strategic autonomy and amid calls for protection of its so-called core technologies.

For example, the carbon border tax, included in the EU’s Green Deal, may cause unfair and increased tax burden for Chinese and other exporters. In addition, many have also questioned whether the complicated procedure of imposing the carbon border tax is in line with the rules set by the World Trade Organization.

It is a very challenging world, made even more complicated and dangerous by the Russia-Ukraine war. By working together on the green transition, China and Europe can play their part in building a better world and realizing a global green dream.

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How others see the EU

About Fu Jing

Fu Jing is executive vice president of Xiamen Torch Academy in China’s coastal city of Xiamen. He previously worked as a journalist in Brussels and authored Twin Engines of Global Development (2017) and Testing Time (2019) - both reviewing Sino-EU relations.
Magic Magid: The paradox at the heart of EU’s Green Deal

Former Green MEP Magic Magid talks about organising more evidence-based research to help tackle the devastating impacts of the climate crisis on European communities of colour.

By SHADA ISLAM

Magid describes himself as a “compassionate disrupter”. That’s how he made his mark in Brussels (and beyond) during his short but very visible pre-Brexit stint at the European Parliament representing Yorkshire and the Humber.

And it is through compassion, empathy and disruptive ideas that he is now drawing attention to the Union of Justice, the organisation he founded in March 2020 to press for climate justice for marginalised Europeans of colour.

There is an unspoken paradox at the heart of the European Green Deal, according to Magid.

European black and brown citizens are usually the most acutely-impacted by environmental degradation, toxic chemicals and pollution. Yet their predicament goes unnoticed, and their voice is never heard. “Either European policymakers really don’t care about what is happening to marginalised communities — which are massively overexposed to pollutants which impact health and wellbeing — or they are not willing to actually do something about these injustices,” Magid tells me during a chat on Zoom.

Having first gained celebrity as Sheffield’s youngest mayor, followed by his interventions in the European Parliament as a member of the Green group, “Magic Magid” is now using his fame to turn the spotlight on the different ways in which Europeans of colour can become part of an inclusive climate conversation.

As well as being at the forefront of growing calls for recognition in Europe of the intimate link between the climate crisis, inequality and race, Magid, who came to the UK with his mother, a Somali refugee, when he was five, is also engaged in the wider problem of climate justice for the Global South.

Racism, inequality and climate are interconnected, says Magid. Impacts of the climate crisis exacerbate existing social and related racial inequities — and climate policies, unless crafted with an eye on such issues, can make things worse.

As it progresses in crafting Green Deal policies, the EU must make a conscious effort to acknowledge the interconnectedness of racial and climate injustice, and explicit efforts to address this, he says.

Low-income communities across Europe are on the frontline of climate impacts, yet receive the least support for prevention, mitigation adaptation, building resilience, or reparations for ongoing losses and damages.

Magid’s Union of Justice is about changing that paradigm. With a small team of volunteers, the organisation is working to train people with the campaigning and public speaking skills they need to get their message across to the wider public and to lobby their elected representatives.

It is not just about writing reports, but about the need for actual research which charts the cumulative environmental impacts of the climate crisis on communities of colour in Europe.

There have been active efforts by researchers to assess environmental hazards and whom it impacts in different regions of Europe. However, data gaps persist, Magid warns. As a result, communities of colour continue to be overlooked and denied reparative justice for the environmental hazards they are exposed to.

New two-year project

With this in mind, Magid has embarked on a two-year research project funded by the Open Society Foundation which he says will enable deeper understanding of the climate crisis and how it intersects with racial inequality.

The project will begin by studying the impact of the climate crisis and the EU Green Deal on communities of colour in Ireland, UK, France, Belgium, Netherlands, Italy, Spain and Portugal.

The impact of extractive exploitation each country has inflicted onto the global south due to colonial and post-colonial relations will also be studied.

Magid’s plan is to come up with policy recommendations on a regional, national and EU level which can then be disseminated by scholars, experts, civil society actors as well as community members on the front line.

“We will also be creating and delivering an engaging creative communication and public engagement action plan,” he says. “It will be like a lifetime’s work.”

“I’m very aware that another black person who didn’t have my background would find it very difficult to do what I am doing.”

Magic Magid

“I’m very aware that another black person who didn’t have my background would find it very difficult to do what I am doing.”

Magic Magid

“We’ve just been pushing the calls, speaking to people, making presentations to universities and other institutions,” he says. “We work with anyone that’s interested in the work that we do and in our advancing our cause.”

By SHADA ISLAM

Magid describes himself as a “compassionate disrupter”. That’s how he made his mark in Brussels (and beyond) during his short but very visible pre-Brexit stint at the European Parliament representing Yorkshire and the Humber.

And it is through compassion, empathy and disruptive ideas that he is now drawing attention to the Union of Justice, the organisation he founded in March 2020 to press for climate justice for marginalised Europeans of colour.
Sitting behind his desk on the 15th floor of the European Parliament building, 36-year-old Dutch Socialist & Democrats (S&D) MEP Mohammed Chahim reflects on his already extended career in politics. “I had two passions growing up: maths and politics,” he said. “It is easy to make it sound romantic when it all works out, but you can’t plan your political career.”

Following 14 years of municipal politics in Helmond, a town in the Dutch province of Brabant, he was asked by the Dutch Labour party to be their point man on climate and energy in the European Parliament. A mathematician by occupation - before his time in Brussels, he designed models that calculate the environmental impact of economic policy decisions - he seemed like the right man for the job.

As vice president of the S&D, he is now responsible for all climate and energy-related issues. And his quick mathematical mind gives him an edge in handling complex dossiers. Last year, he was made rapporteur for the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), the proposed carbon tax on imported goods which is planned to come into force in 2026. “At the time, nobody else was interested in it, but I immediately knew I wanted to be the one handling this. It is of central importance to the European climate effort,” he said.

CBAM is meant to prevent EU companies from moving their polluting industries to regions with laxer environmental rules. It would impose a levy linked to carbon prices on an array of products such as imported steel, aluminium, fertiliser and cement. CBAM is central to this effort.

It mirrors the EU’s landmark “cap-and-trade scheme” for carbon emissions (ETS) which helps steer European producers towards cleaner modes of production. But in the absence of a global carbon price, companies face competition from exporters elsewhere who can produce at a lower cost.

He points out the obvious elephant-in-the-room: Europe has already outsourced much of its production — and pollution — to China. “It would not help the world if only Europe reduces its own emissions to zero. We have to set the standard and help other countries adopt European production methods,” Chahim said.

But Chahim points out CBAM is already making an impact. “Turkia has already adopted new environmental rules and ratified the Paris Climate accord by last year because of CBAM,” he said.

Mozambique

Mozambique, for example, depends hugely on its aluminium exports to Europe. CBAM has the potential to rob the country of one of its most important streams of revenue. This is why Chahim has advocated in parliament to use a large chunk of the proceeds to help low-income countries to build renewable energy systems and clean up their industries. “We have the opportunity responsibility to help least developed nations like Mozambique build a clean energy system.”

“Coming from a wealthy country, it is hard for me to tell someone in India they shouldn’t drive a car,” Chahim said. “But I would just love for them to skip this stage and go straight to Lightyears (solar panel driven cars).” And he wants the Global North to make good on its €100bn pledge to help least-developed countries build up clean energy systems.

Chahim, of Moroccan heritage, speaks excitedly about the Noor-Ouarzazate complex, the world’s largest solar power plant in the Moroccan desert. An enormous array of curved mirrors spread over 30km2 that “make you feel humbled.” “We have to be at the forefront of this. We can invest a lot of public money because we are incredibly rich,” Chahim said. “And we have the opportunity and responsibility to help least developed nations like Mozambique build a clean energy system.”

Interview

The ‘carbon tax’ MEP with one eye on Mozambique

Dutch MEP Mohammed Chahim is rapporteur for the proposed carbon tax on imported goods which is planned to come into force in 2026. It is one of the biggest and most complex legislative proposals Europe has ever drawn up.

By WESTER VAN GAAL.
‘The government is hearing us, but not listening to us’ Ugandan activist warns

Hilda Flavia Nakabuye, one of Africa’s leading climate activists and lead of Uganda’s Fridays for Future movement, describes young Africa’s green hopes.

By ELENA SÁNCHEZ NICOLÁS

When Hilda Flavia Nakabuye was a little girl, her family and other farming communities earned their living through agriculture in Masaka, southern Uganda.

Eventually, the rainy seasons became unpredictable, and heatwaves became more extreme and frequent, destroying crop fields and drying up streams and other water resources. The poor harvests at her family’s farmland made it very difficult for her parents to earn enough money to pay her tuition fees.

After climate change forced her to miss school entirely for several months, her family decided to sell the farm and move to the capital, Kampala, where Nakabuye founded Uganda’s Fridays for Future movement early in 2019.

She was motivated by images of Greta Thunberg, protesting outside the Swedish parliament in 2018, into organising her own solo Uganda school strikes to raise awareness over climate change.

But the 24-year old activist says her demands were only met with inaction.

“The government is hearing us, but it is not listening to us,” she told EUobserver in an interview. She was referring to how school strikes attracted attention — and repression by the police — but fell short of driving meaningful changes.

In 2019, Uganda’s Fridays for Future, which now has over 53,000 young members, submitted a list of demands to the government, calling on leaders to act fast to seek unprecedented global action towards the climate breakdown.

“Nothing is being done,” she said, referring to how her organisation’s demands and criticisms have just been ignored so far.

Role of history and colonialism in the climate crisis are at the heart of the debate.
Activists from Fridays for Future Uganda strike to demand climate justice and to protect the Bugoma Forest.

Colonial history

Climate change is rooted in the exploitation of the planet’s resources. But the role of history and colonialism in the climate crisis is currently at the heart of the debate because it has triggered a double injustice: exacerbating social inequalities — while disproportionately harming those communities that contribute least to climate change.

Developed countries, says Nakabuye, continue to burn fossil fuels while Africa suffers the worst effects of climate change.

The G20, which includes Australia, Germany, Brazil, China, India and the United States, accounts for 80 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions, while the African continent is responsible for less than three percent of the world’s emissions. The unfairness is self-evident.

Yet many in developing countries continue to believe that economic growth goes hand-in-hand with fossil-fuel consumption. And, as a result, local authorities in Africa continue to allow fossil-fuel companies to exploit the continent’s natural resources, threatening ecosystems and water sources for millions of people, says Nakabuye.

But she is adamant that new oil and gas projects are simply a “ticket to hell” and a “death penalty” for African countries. “We cannot ‘develop’ on a dead planet,” she points out, starkly.

Instead, to ensure a sustainable future, investments should go into renewables and sustainable agriculture. Nakabuye also wants fossil-fuel companies to stop their polluting extraction and production activities in Africa.

The Ugandan activist, who has attended several UN climate talks herself, says action taken so far by politicians are a huge disappointment and she is not optimistic about outcomes at the upcoming United Nations Climate Change Conference in Egypt (COP27) in November.

These annual meetings, where global leaders make pledges about their efforts to slow down climate change, are full of lobbyists and business interests and are just a “meet and greet” exercise, she says.

This has become painfully clear for African nations because they have seen nothing but broken promises following previous UN climate talks.

Until now, rich nations have failed to fulfil the long-standing pledge to provide $100bn per year to emerging economies to address climate change impact and mitigation.

In the build-up to COP27, developing countries are expected to push rich governments to scale up their financial support from 2023 in a bid to limit global temperatures to 1.5 degrees — the 2015 Paris Agreement target. But Africa has already warmed by more than one degree Celsius since 1900, according to the United Nations.

However, the last few years have marked the rise of climate change activism in Africa, gaining momentum across the continent.

With the increasing participation and engagement of young people in protests, Uganda’s Fridays for Future movement inspired similar movements in other countries, including Kenya, Tanzania, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Angola, Nakabuye says.

Her main aim is to raise awareness about climate change among local communities. But she is also demanding climate action from leaders and the international community.

“Developed countries continue to burn fossil fuels while Africa suffers the worst effects of climate change.”

Hilda Flavia Nakabuye

About Elena Sánchez Nicolás

Elena joined EUobserver in 2019. She covers climate change and tech policy. Before joining EUobserver, she worked on European affairs at the Brussels-based think tank VoteWatch Europe and the Spanish news agency EFE. Elena is a graduate of Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB), where she completed a master in New Media and Society in Europe. She previously studied journalism in Spain, and was part of an exchange programme with the Thomas More Hogeschool, where she focussed on cross-media production.
Europe’s Green Push

More than 130 countries have now set, or are considering, a target of reducing emissions to net zero by 2050. But only a dozen have passed legislation on net-zero targets.

By ELENA SÁNCHEZ NICOLÁS

Historical responsibility

The EU is responsible for about 10 percent of emissions, but it has a greater degree of responsibility for the climate breakdown. As of 2015, the Global North was responsible for 92 percent of emissions, although China and India have caught up rapidly. This issue has become central to the equality and climate justice debate. Today, China is the world’s largest contributor to CO2 emissions.

By reducing carbon emissions to a minimum, and offsetting the remaining emissions, with the help of natural or artificial carbon sinks (such as carbon removals and storage technologies), the EU aims to be climate-neutral by 2050. For this, it is key to build a new economic model that reduces emissions, addresses energy poverty, and reduces energy dependencies to improve people’s wellbeing.

But EU climate action stands at the crossroads between domestic ambition and international cooperation, especially among G20 countries, which are responsible for about 80 percent of all global emissions.

**Fit for 55 & Extra Efforts**

- Increase carbon removals to 310 million of tonnes CO2 equivalent by 2030
- Ban on the sale of new petrol and diesel cars from 2035
- Three billion trees planted across Europe by 2030
- The plan aims to mobilise at least €1 trillion in sustainable investments over the next decade.

**Historic emissions of top polluters**

Source: Climate Watch

**Paris Agreement**

Global leaders pledge to keep global temperature rise to well below 2 degrees Celsius, with the aim to limit the increase to 1.5 degrees, compared to pre-industrial levels.

**Green Deal**

The Green Deal aims to achieve climate-neutrality in the EU by 2050. The plan is to mobilise at least €1 trillion in sustainable investments over the next decade.

**New 2030 Target**

The EU increases the 2030 emission-reduction target to 55 percent (compared to 1990 levels) — including carbon sinks as provided by soils and trees.

**Fit For 55**

The commission unveils proposals to deliver the new 2030 target. The package adapts 8 existing climate laws and presents five brand new proposals. EU’s climate law agreed.

**Carbon Border Tax**

A new levy on iron, steel, cement, fertiliser, aluminium, and electricity imports, designed to prevent firms from transferring production to third countries with less strict climate rules.

**Towards Climate Neutrality**

In the path towards climate neutrality, the world economy in 2030 would be some 40 percent larger than today but using seven percent less energy.

**2015**

Global leaders pledge to keep global temperature rise to well below 2 degrees Celsius, with the aim to limit the increase to 1.5 degrees, compared to pre-industrial levels.

**2019**

The Green Deal aims to achieve climate-neutrality in the EU by 2050. The plan is to mobilise at least €1 trillion in sustainable investments over the next decade.

**2020**

The EU increases the 2030 emission-reduction target to 55 percent (compared to 1990 levels) — including carbon sinks as provided by soils and trees.

**2021**

The commission unveils proposals to deliver the new 2030 target. The package adapts 8 existing climate laws and presents five brand new proposals. EU’s climate law agreed.

**2026**

A new levy on iron, steel, cement, fertiliser, aluminium, and electricity imports, designed to prevent firms from transferring production to third countries with less strict climate rules.

**2030**

In the path towards climate neutrality, the world economy in 2030 would be some 40 percent larger than today but using seven percent less energy.
An A-Z glossary of climate change terms

Confused by the jargon of climate change, not least the plethora of acronyms — ETC, CCS, CBAM — that surround it? Look no further.

By ELENA SANCHEZ NICOLAS

CARBON FOOTPRINT: Amount of greenhouse gas emissions that an individual, group, product or event emits, either directly or indirectly, to the environment.

CARBON BORDER ADJUSTMENT MECHANISM (CBAM): The EU carbon border tax will set a new levy on imports of iron, steel, cement, fertiliser, aluminium, and electricity, aiming at protecting EU businesses from carbon leakage.

CARBON LEAKAGE: The situation that may occur if businesses seek to transfer production to non-EU third countries with less-strict climate rules.

CIRCULAR ECONOMY: A system designed to eliminate waste by reusing, sharing, repairing, and recycling resources.

CARBON SINK: A natural or artificial reservoir that absorbs more carbon from the atmosphere than it releases. For example, forests, the ocean and soil.

CARBON SEQUESTRATION: The natural or artificial process of capturing and storing carbon dioxide.

CARBON CAPTURE AND STORAGE (CCS): Technologies that can prevent large quantities of CO2 from being released into the atmosphere. Energy giant ExxonMobil, for example, is participating in four CCS hub projects in Belgium, the Netherlands, France and the UK.

CLIMATE-FRIENDLY: This adjective is often used to describe a product, policy or process that has a reduced carbon footprint when compared to others.

EMISSION TRADING SYSTEM (ETS): The EU’s cap-and-trade system limits emissions in the power sector, manufacturing industry, and airlines operating in Europe. Within this limit, companies can sell and buy emissions allowances for every emitted tonne of CO2.

ENERGY EFFICIENCY: It refers to the process of using less energy to get the same job done. For example, energy-efficient LED light bulbs can produce the same amount of light as incandescent light bulbs but using less electricity.

ENERGY POVERTY: There is no official definition for the term in EU policy, but it is commonly used to describe the “inability to keep homes adequately warm”.

EU TAXONOMY: It is a classification system that establishes a list of environmentally sustainable economic activities — including highly-controversial “transitional activities”.

FOSSIL FUELS: Fuels (such as coal, oil, or natural gas) formed in the earth from plant or animal remains. They produce large quantities of carbon dioxide when burned.

GLOBAL GATEWAY: The EU’s €300bn plan to compete with China’s Belt and Road Initiative, supporting infrastructure investment around the world.

GREEN BONDS: Green bonds are like regular bonds, but the money raised from investors is used exclusively to finance climate and environmental projects.

GREEN ECONOMY: A green economy is generally defined as low-carbon, energy-efficient and socially-inclusive.

GREENHOUSE GASES (GHG): These gases trap heat in the atmosphere and warm the planet. The main gases responsible for the greenhouse effect include carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide.

GREENWASHING: A marketing and communication tactic that portrays the organization or institution as environmentally-friendly, when in reality its practices do not align with that portrayal.

RENEWABLE ENERGY: Renewables, also known as clean energy, come from natural sources that are not depleted when used, such as wind, tidal, or solar power.

GREEN HYDROGEN: Green hydrogen is generated entirely by renewable energy such as wind, solar or hydropower.

BLUE HYDROGEN: Blue hydrogen is produced mainly from natural gas using a process called steam methane reforming. As a result, carbon and capture (CCS) technologies are needed to prevent the creation of greenhouse gases.

GREY HYDROGEN: Grey Hydrogen is hydrogen produced using fossil fuels such as natural gas.
Concrete roads contribute to a greener and more resilient future for Europe

Climate change calls for a move to green and resilient road infrastructure for the European Transport and Mobility Strategy. The Green Deal targets at least 30 million zero-emission vehicles by 2030, requiring high quality, safe and robust roads.

Four significant reasons to choose concrete

High albedo
Light coloured concrete surfaces have a high light reflection, which counteracts global warming, equivalent to a reduction of 25 kg CO₂/m². In addition, it reduces the Urban Heat Island Effect.

100% circular
Concrete roads are made with local raw materials, have a long life, hence a lower cost and are 100% recyclable.

Less fuel consumption
Heavy vehicles consume less fuel when riding upon smooth and non-deformable surfaces. Changing from flexible asphalt to rigid concrete creates over time an average saving of 78 kg CO₂/m², far beyond the embodied CO₂ amount.

Higher resilience
Concrete roads resist floods, withstand extreme temperatures and retain their structural performance over time.

For more information, visit www.eupave.eu

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