

## **Beyond Coal by 2030**

**Article by Florent Marcellesi, Joanna Flisowska**

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The COP24 climate talks in Katowice, Poland are set to start on December 2. This year, the negotiations follow a clear warning from the global climate science community, which highlighted in the recent IPCC report that urgent steps are needed to slow global warming. Without action, the world faces the grim prospect of extreme weather events and a massive loss of species. Florent Marcellesi, Green MEP, and Joanna Flisowska, coal policy coordinator at Climate Action Network Europe, discuss COP, the energy global transition, and the gender dimension of climate change.

**Green European Journal: In a matter of days, almost 200 countries will meet in Katowice, a city at the heart of a Polish coal mining region, to try and finalise the details of how the Paris Agreement will be put into force. Increasingly, the main timeline for taking steps to keep the global temperature rise well below 2 degrees, preferably to 1.5, now seems impossible. Where are we going into the talks?**

**Joanna Flisowska:** The objective of limiting temperature rise to 1.5 degrees was in the Paris agreement from the very beginning. But with the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report, we found out just how urgent it has become to act on climate change. The report brings the impact of climate change beyond the 1.5-degree mark to light and shows how disastrous and far-reaching it will be.

**Florent Marcellesi:** The IPCC report is a tipping point. We can now clearly say that we have to go faster and act with greater ambition for two main reasons. First, the drastic consequences if we do not. In Spain, from now to the end of the century the soil could become a desert and Spanish people could end up as climate refugees. Second, the opportunities. Achieving the 1.5-degree limit means people living healthier lives and the creation of new and better jobs. Climate change will have negative consequences for the economy and for identity, traditions, and culture too as it disrupts ways of life. But we must turn it into an opportunity and act with commitment to achieve the goals of the Paris agreement.

**The IPCC report sets out some potential pathways for the world to stabilise global warming at 1.5 degrees. These depend on an unprecedented effort to cut fossil-fuel use, among which coal is a particularly high source of carbon emissions. How can we transition from coal to clean energy sources?**

**Joanna Flisowska:** The way forward is somewhat different depending on whether we look at the global perspective or the EU one. The EU has to consider its historical contribution to today's climate change and must therefore reduce emissions even faster than the rest of world. According to many scientific studies, the fastest and most effective way to stay on the path to 1.5 degrees is to phase out coal by 2030 at the latest. This assessment is certainly true and is why environmentalists are emphasising that coal has to be phased out in order for the EU to reduce its emissions in a timely and cost-effective manner. Today's reliance on coal can be overcome through renewables, investments in energy efficiency, storage, and with better management of electricity networks.

**Florent Marcellesi:** We are phasing out of coal for two reasons. The first is economic: coal is not profitable right now. Many plants are closing simply because it cannot compete with renewables. But second, we need to phase out coal well before 2040 for ecological reasons. The IPCC was very clear on that point and, for Europe, a coal phase-out has to mean 2030 at the latest. In some countries like Spain, coal plants must be closed even earlier by 2025.

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However, this shift has to be a just transition, with nobody left behind and based around three pillars. The first pillar is appreciating the heritage and tradition of these jobs. People must be able to recognise the value of their father's and grandfather's work. Second, we have to say to people that yes coal is over, but also that renewable energy is the future and give them a vision, and a certainty, of a green future based on new decent jobs. The third pillar is participation. We have to be sure that local communities and workers are involved in this transition and that it also keeps the gender perspective in mind.

**Climate Action Network campaigns for 'beyond coal'. How is Europe doing on coal, particularly in the big polluter countries such as Germany and Poland?**

**Joanna Flisowska:** Beyond Coal is a European campaign led by NGOs and supported across the continent. It aims not only to phase out coal in the EU but across the whole continent. 16 EU countries are already either coal free or on the way to becoming coal free by 2030 at the very latest, many even sooner. The Netherlands deserves attention as an interesting case. Coal plants went online as recently as two years ago but the Netherlands still has committed to phasing out coal before 2030. Why? Because they concluded that quitting coal is the fastest and cheapest way to reduce emissions and achieve its climate targets.

Now all eyes are on Germany and its discussions on phasing out coal will be important for the whole EU. It is too early to say what the outcome will be but our position is clear: Germany should show some leadership and commit to an ambitious coal phase-out target.

**In Spain, the government has just agreed a framework for the transition of the coal regions by 2027 with trade unions and companies...**

**Florent Marcellesi:** Yes, there is good news from Spain. The new government has provided some needed leadership on this transition. The government succeeded in getting unions sceptical of this transition around the table, thus opening up the path to a decarbonised world. However, I think that the Spanish pathway to get rid of coal must be faster, especially considering that we don't have much of it. There are only 3000 remaining workers in the coal sector across three regions in 15 plants. 2025 should really be the latest for Spain if we want to a complete phase-out in Europe by 2030 and to be seen as leaders by countries such as Poland.

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We have to remember that for the past 30 years these regions have received public subsidies and that there were also serious cases of corruption and misuse. These funds should have been invested in sustainable infrastructure and regional development. But this government now has a vision, which is important, and will at last make sustainable projects based on just transition materialise.

**As the host of COP24, could Katowice become a model for other coal or mining areas when it comes to setting transition policies?**

**Joanna Flisowska:** Yes. Katowice and the Silesia region have every tool to become such an example but it is clear that they are not there yet. While coal mining and coal power stations are still common, the renewable energy industry is growing too and Katowice remains an industrial region with many job opportunities.

It is important to know that the region went through a transformation in the 1990s. The transition back then was just wrong because it lacked proper vision and there was no assistance to people losing their jobs. In a short period, 100 000 people were fired from coal mines in Upper Silesia and the impact of it is of course still felt. But after many years the region has developed and is on its feet again. Upper Silesia is the region with the second lowest

unemployment rate in the country. Nowadays, the challenge is committing to a long-term vision for the clean energy transition, which means preparing a plan and assistance for workers ahead of time.

### **What is the European Commission's role in the energy transition?**

**Florent Marcellesi:** Huge, the EU has major responsibility over energy and climate policies.

Take fossil fuel subsidies for example, which need to end to assure as green as possible a transition. One of the most important ongoing negotiations and fights between the European Parliament, the Commission, and the Council is about capacity mechanisms. These are payments used to keep power plants working when there are energy demand peaks. Many countries such as Spain or Poland use them and Poland wants to finance coal-fired plants with the mechanism. Without these kinds of subsidies, the plants would not be profitable.

Agricultural policies are also closely linked to climate and energy and we will need to see if there is a commitment to the Paris Agreement in this policy area. The EU common agriculture policy represents 30 per cent of the EU budget and large part of total CO<sub>2</sub> emissions comes from agriculture and meat production.

**Joanna Flisowska:** About capacity mechanisms, countries argue that they need this funding to secure energy supplies but the fact is that the energy is most needed during heat summer waves or winter freezes, precisely when coal plants do not deliver. Coal plants need water to cool down their units and water is in short supply both during heat waves as in very cold winters. In Romania and Greece, we have seen plants failing because of frozen coal too. If we want to guarantee security of supply, then coal is clearly not the energy source to go for. For the heat waves, the obvious solution is to increase solar energy production. In fact, even the Polish energy minister has admitted that the country has to increase solar capacity to contribute to summer energy supplies.

### **Are the current renewable energy and vehicles emissions targets set by the EU enough?**

**Florent Marcellesi:** On renewables and energy efficiency, the last agreements will take us to a 45 per cent CO<sub>2</sub> emissions reduction by 2030 and that is not enough. It's better than before but the IPCC report was clear in saying that much more is needed to slow temperature rise. The European Parliament is asking for a 55 per cent reduction in order to stay in line with 1.5 degrees. Let's see if COP24 can reach it because in the EU we are still using figures agreed on before the Paris agreement was signed and now it is time to update them. The EU is not on track to reduce emissions in a way that would avoid an increase of 1.5 degrees, not even 2 degrees. We are more or less heading for an increase of 3 degrees.

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**Joanna Flisowska:** We need a more ambitious long-term strategy to reach net zero greenhouse gas emissions in the EU by 2040 at the latest and to assure EU leadership on the global stage. That means earlier emissions reductions and increasing the 2030 targets. From our point of view, a 55 percent emissions reduction would still not be enough but at least would be a step in the right direction and the bare minimum for the EU to be able to say it is still leading climate change action. Because right now the EU is lagging behind some regions or countries in the world.

### **Which regions are the European Union lagging behind?**

**Joanna Flisowska:** In the United States, there are differences between the federal level and the cities and the states. Despite Donald Trump's pledges to revive the industry, the coal phase-out continues in the US. Operators are closing down coal facilities and coal energy production is decreasing as it is replaced on a vast scale by

renewables.

**Florent Marcellesi:** Emissions in Europe are rising again and this is a problem. In addition, many emissions are just being moved to other countries so, if we look at the big picture, it is correct to say that EU is not delivering as it should. Our past emission reductions were due to crisis, not proactive policies. The EU has to move from the narrative that says we are the best in the world to making the case in fact through courageous policies based on renewables, energy reduction consumption, and efficiency.

**To introduce another aspect, the action plan on gender and climate change signed at COP23 in Bonn had two main elements: women and climate and the place of women in climate negotiations. Will the gender perspective be sufficiently present at COP24 in Katowice?**

**Florent Marcellesi:** All the figures show that men have predominated in recent COP negotiations. However, the good news from that COP23 was that all countries approved the first climate action gender plans and now we have to put it in practice and see parity delegations in Katowice. We need more women to be part of the climate negotiations. It is not only a problem of equality in representation, climate change affects women much more than men. 80 percent of climate refugees are women and women are most affected by heat waves, like in France in 2003, and natural disasters such as Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

Also, we have to consider the differences between women and men in terms of their roles in society and their consumption patterns. Men tend to have higher carbon footprints than women. For example, men take the car more than women, whereas women use public transport more. A cultural shift is necessary.

**Joanna Flisowska:** In Katowice there will be a gender panel organised by the United Nations and recently a navigation tool on the guidance for nationally determined contributions, for each country's climate plan, has been adopted. The tool invites parties to provide information on the gender impact of policies and set out principles for the planning process. The United Nations is already pushing to include this gender aspect in the formal documents to come out of the talks.

**How should the EU and the international institutions encourage the participation of women in climate transition and policymaking?**

**Joanna Flisowska:** Full participation has to be encouraged. The transition to new clean technologies is an opportunity for women to overcome the gender gap that is very present in traditional sectors such as coal mining or industry. It is also an opportunity to increase women's participation in decision-making processes and the labour market.

**Florent Marcellesi:** We have to increase the participation of women in all sectors, in the economy as in politics. And at the same time, we have to change values too. If we really want equality, we have to change women, men, and their traditional roles as ascribed by culture. Should the vision of a small child be to have a car and eat lots of meat? No, on the contrary, it's to have a sustainable life based on care, people, nature... We are not here to dominate the environment; we are here to give it in a sustainable way to our children and grandchildren.

**To sum up, is a zero-emission economy possible by 2050? At least in the EU?**

**Joanna Flisowska:** Absolutely. Even sooner is not only possible, it's a necessity. We definitely need bold climate action and real leadership on the EU side.

**Florent Marcellesi:** Yes. We need political leadership and civil society leadership. But with these two ingredients, we can make it for 2050.



Florent Marcellesi is an ecological researcher and activist, a member of the editorial council of the magazine *Ecología política* and the coordinator of *Ecopolítica*. He is also a member of the Spanish Green party *Equo*.



Joanna Flisowska is coal policy coordinator at Climate Action Network Europe, working with NGOs from across Europe to create strategies for the coal phase-out, and is based in Katowice, Poland. Before joining CAN, she worked on climate and energy policies with special focus on the coal phase-out at CEE Bankwatch Network and the Polish Green Network. Moreover, she has been involved in the work of Greenpeace for many years. Joanna holds a Masters degree in Law from University of Silesia.

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