

# Proposal to spend 25% of EU budget on climate change

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REUTERS

Schoolchildren have been protesting climate change inaction in recent months across Europe

**Eight European countries have called for an ambitious strategy to tackle climate change – and to spend a quarter of the entire EU budget on fighting it.**

The joint statement says the EU should have net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 "at the latest".

It was signed by France, Belgium, Denmark, Luxemburg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, and Sweden.

The group says their plan can "go hand in hand with prosperity" and "set an example for other countries to follow."

The position paper comes ahead of a major summit of European leaders in the Romanian city of Sibiu, beginning on Thursday, which will discuss the future of Europe and the EU's strategy for the next five years.

But not everyone is on board - there are 28 countries in the EU, and several of those absent from the joint position statement are significant players - including Germany.

## What does the paper say?

The position of the eight countries is that climate change has "profound implications for the future of humanity" and that its impacts are already apparent - citing "the heat waves and scorching fires of last summer".

The group also say that their citizens are clearly concerned "as shown by the recent mobilisation of young people" - in an apparent reference to the wave of walk-outs and marches by schoolchildren across the continent.

The Extinction Rebellion protests in London in April also gained widespread attention and have spread to other countries.

"The EU budget currently under negotiation will be an important tool in this respect: at least 25% of the spending should go to projects aimed at fighting against climate change," the paper said.

Annual EU budgets have spending limits set by what is known as the multiannual financial framework (MFF). **The current one allowed the EU to spend more than €900bn (£775bn) between 2014-2020.**

The eight-nation group is eyeing the next framework, which is set to cover 2021-2027.



Climate change activists from Extinction Rebellion held mass demonstrations in London

The paper also added that "as a general principle" the EU budget should not fund anything which would add to climate emissions.

The group wants the EU to announce a policy of zero emissions by 2050 at the United Nations climate summit in September, and strengthen its existing targets at the same time.

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## A perfect problem for Europe

**Adam Fleming, BBC News, Sibiu, Romania**

This is about the future of Europe as much as the fate of the planet. To some, climate change is the sort of global problem which needs a continent-wide solution and so is a good advert for the existence of the EU.

The leaders who signed up to the Franco-Dutch paper presented this week are aligning themselves with global youth icon Greta Thunberg, the Swedish teenager leading the climate protests by school children.

It also provides a dramatic dividing line in the elections for the European Parliament. And it's an opportunity for Mark Rutte - who could be a contender for the next President of the European Council - to cement his emerging partnership with Emmanuel Macron.

Expect this debate to continue at the gathering of EU leaders in Sibiu on Thursday and to heat up ahead of another summit in June, where the European, ambitious and young(ish) will formally ask the others to adopt tough climate targets before a global conference in the autumn.

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At the moment, EU countries are required to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 20% from their 1990 levels by 2020, with the aim of raising that to a 40% reduction by 2030. But many are set to miss these targets - some by a wide margin.

Some of the eight countries behind the proposal have already made stronger commitments. French President Emmanuel Macron has made climate change a key issue for campaign speeches, while Sweden has already announced plans to become carbon neutral by 2045.

## What about the other 20 countries?

Speaking at a press conference with Dutch Prime Minister Mark Rutte on Monday, Mr Macron said the joint document was "ambitious" and that "we are in the middle of building a coalition on this".

The goal of a carbon-neutral Europe by 2050 is not new - **it was proposed by the European Commission**, which is the starting point for European Union legislation, in November 2018.

The Commission's plan was based around the Paris agreement targets of keeping global warming to "well below" a 2C increase, and "pursue efforts" to reach 1.5 degrees as a limit.

But such proposals need the support of the European Parliament – and ultimately the approval of the European Council, made up of the leaders of each member state. Those leaders will be meeting informally at the summit in Sibiu. The position paper by eight of them is likely to be used as a launching point to bring others on board. But several countries oppose strengthening current commitments, which have proven difficult to stick to just two years after the Paris climate agreement was signed.

Political and economic giant Germany is among them, fearing that further action could damage its industry. Poland, which still relies on coal for power, is among the central European nations opposed to such plans.

The UK, meanwhile, will be represented at the summit – by the Brexit Secretary, Stephen Barclay. Prime Minister Theresa May is not expected to attend.