

EU unveils sweeping climate change plan

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Renewable energy, like wind power, is gradually replacing coal in many EU countries

The European Union has announced a raft of climate change proposals aimed at pushing it towards its goal of becoming carbon neutral by 2050.

A dozen draft proposals, which still need to be approved by the bloc's 27 member states and the EU parliament, were announced on Wednesday.

They include plans to tax jet fuel and effectively ban the sale of petrol and diesel powered cars within 20 years.

The proposals, however, could face years of negotiations.

The plans triggered serious infighting at the European Commission, the bloc's administrative arm, as the final tweaks were being made, sources told the AFP news agency.

"By acting now we can do things another way... and choose a better, healthier and more prosperous way for the future,"

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said on Wednesday.

"It is our generational task... [to secure] the wellbeing of not only our generation, but of our children and grandchildren. Europe is ready to lead the way."

The measures are likely to push up household heating bills, as well as increase the cost of flights in the EU. Financial assistance will be available for people to install insulation and make other long-term changes to their homes.

"We're going to ask a lot of our citizens," EU climate policy chief Frans Timmermans said. "We're also going to ask a lot of our industries, but we do it for good cause. We do it to give humanity a fighting chance."

Opposition is also expected from some industry leaders, such as airlines and vehicle manufacturers, as well as from eastern member states that rely heavily on coal.

One EU diplomat told Reuters that the success of the package would rest on its ability to be realistic and socially fair, while also not destabilising the economy.

"The aim is to put the economy on a new level, not to stop it," they said.

The measures, billed as the EU's most ambitious plan yet to tackle climate change, have been named the Fit for 55 package because they would put the bloc on track to meet its 2030 goal of reducing emissions by 55% from 1990 levels.

By 2019, the EU had cut its emissions by 24% from 1990 levels.

Some of the key proposals include:

- Tighter emission limits for cars, which are expected to effectively end new petrol and diesel vehicle sales by 2035

- A tax on aviation fuel, and a 10-year tax holiday for low-carbon alternatives
- A so-called carbon border tariff, which would require manufacturers from outside the EU to pay more for importing materials like steel and concrete
- More ambitious targets for expanding renewable energy around the bloc
- A requirement for countries to more quickly renovate buildings that are not deemed energy efficient

But corporate lobby BusinessEurope denounced the plan, saying it "risks destabilising the investment outlook" for sectors such as steel, cement, aluminium, fertilisers and electric power "enormously".

And Willie Walsh, head of the International Air Transport Association, said: "Aviation is committed to decarbonisation as a global industry. We don't need persuading, or punitive measures like taxes to motivate change."

At the same time, environmentalist campaigners have said the proposals don't go far enough.

"Celebrating these policies is like a high-jumper claiming a medal for running under the bar," Greenpeace EU director Jorgo Riss said in a statement.

"This whole package is based on a target that is too low, doesn't stand up to science, and won't stop the destruction of our planet's life-support systems."

Climate campaigner Greta Thunberg said that unless the EU "tears up" its proposals, "the world will not stand a chance of staying below 1.5C of global heating".

In September **the EU Commission set out its blueprint for reaching the 55% reduction** by 2030, and said at least 30% of the EU's €1.8tn (£1.64tn; \$2.2tn) long-term budget would be spent on climate-related measures.

The targets are part of a global effort to tackle climate change by cutting atmospheric pollution, especially carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions.

The Paris climate deal, signed in 2016, aims to keep global temperature rise well under 2C, and preferably within a maximum rise of 1.5C, to prevent the worst effects of climate change.

The scale of this 12-pronged plan is breathtaking. It will likely have an impact on every citizen of Europe in almost every aspect of their lives.

The scope is so huge because the target is so tough.

From 1990 to 2019 the EU cut carbon emissions by 24% - now it proposes to slash CO2 by another 31% in just 9 years. That's what's needed if the 2050 net-zero target is to be achieved.

So as well as boosting renewables, the EU is now set to tackle the really tough issues of home heating and transport. The proposals would see the end to new petrol and diesel cars by 2035.

Europe's emissions trading scheme will also be reformed to include heating and road transportation. Fossil fuels used in shipping and aviation will face tax rises.

One of the most eye-catching proposals is a carbon border tax on goods like steel, cement and fertiliser to ensure that European industry, which has to pay for permits to use carbon, can compete. However, the proposal is contentious and could spark a trade war with China and the US.

The ambitious package will now face months of negotiations with member states, with poorer countries wary of new policies that could raise costs for consumers.

The commission is betting that instead of hordes of yellow-vest protesters taking to the streets, citizens will be willing to pay a price for cleaner air, lower emissions, and more sustainable lifestyles.

The rest of the world will watch this huge gamble with interest.

EU unveils ambitious climate package as it cools on fossil fuels

By [Luke McGee](#), CNN

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(CNN)The [European Union](#) has unveiled some of the world's most ambitious proposals to reduce carbon emissions and wean its 27 members off fossil fuels, including taxes on emissions-heavy imports into the union and non-renewable energy, such as oil, gas and coal.

The package of measures looks to fundamentally transform the world's single largest trading bloc. It touches on almost every area of economic activity -- from how citizens heat their homes and commute, to a total upheaval of manufacturing practices.



Unprecedented heat, hundreds dead and a town destroyed. Climate change is frying the Northern Hemisphere

The EU last month enshrined in law its target to reduce emissions by 55% by 2030, compared with 1990 levels, but on Wednesday unveiled the aggressive 10-step program, titled "Fit for 55," which is a roadmap for how it will achieve its reduction.

- At a press conference in Brussels on Wednesday, EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said that Europe had become the first continent with "a comprehensive architecture" to meet its climate ambitions.

- "We have the goal, but now we present the roadmap to how we are going to get there," she said.

"We know, for example, our current fossil fuel economy has reached its limits. And we know we have to move on to new model one that is powered by innovation, that has clean energy that is moving toward a circular economy."

While the package is bold, climate activists have criticized the 55% target for not being strong enough to prevent global temperatures from rising to 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels, which scientists say is necessary to stave off more severe impacts of climate change.

The European Union accounts for around 8% of the world's carbon emissions from fossil fuels. Containing rising temperatures will need firm action from bigger economies, including the US and China, the world's two biggest carbon emitters.

The plan is also unlikely to be implemented in the way that von der Leyen and her fellow commissioners have envisioned. First, it must go through the EU's exhaustive legislative process, which could take many months, even years. It will need to be read, amended and approved by

both lawmakers in the EU Parliament and the EU Council, the forum in which the elected leaders of each member state debate such matters.

What else is in the roadmap?

The plans -- which form part of von der Leyen's broader Green Deal, a key plank of her Commission's 2019-2024 agenda -- takes particular aim at transport, both personal and commercial, across the bloc.

Von der Leyen announced cars with combustion engines, for example, would not be produced within the bloc from 2035. Financial incentives would be offered to countries that replace traditional fuel with a sustainable alternative in aviation and maritime transportation.

'Fit for 55' proposals

- A carbon tax for selected imports that are emissions heavy
- An end to combustible engine cars by 2035
- Target to produce 40% of energy from renewable sources by 2030
- A phase-out of free emission allowances for aviation
- Lowering the cap of the Emissions Trading System (ETS)
- An inclusion of shipping emissions in the ETS
- Target to plant 3 billion trees by 2030, part of an effort to remove 310 million tons of carbon from the atmosphere
- Target for land use to be carbon neutral by 2035

The proposed carbon border would place tariffs on certain goods produced outside the bloc, depending on their carbon footprint, subjecting them to the same standards that already exist for goods produced within the EU.

The plan is to discourage EU companies from importing cheaper materials from places where environmental standards are lower. In the initial implementation, the sectors affected would include cement, iron and steel, aluminum, fertilizer and, crucially, electricity.

Minimum tax rate for petrol and gasoline fuels would be increased by significant margins, as would tax on kerosene.

Another key pillar of Wednesday's package is a lowering of the cap in the EU Emissions Trading System (ETS), the world's first and largest carbon market.

Created in 2005, the ETS works by placing a cap on the carbon emissions companies within the EU are allowed to produce each year. If a company goes over, they are fined. They can also buy "allowances" from others in the ETS, roll over unused allowances. Over time, the cap set by the ETS goes down across the entire carbon market.

Presenting the package, von der Leyen said that these measures, which would cost €500bn "at the Europe level alone" would also create financial "incentives for the private sector, so that they complement" the EU's overall ambition.

Is it realistic?

There is likely to be pushback against many of the proposals within the EU. EU officials admitted to CNN that even getting the college of commissioners to agree on what von der Leyen put forward on Wednesday was a struggle.

Some member states are poorer than others, meaning the transition to Brussels' goals are harder, while other member states have economies built on industries that by their nature produce more emissions.



[Climate change is fueling mass-casualty heat waves. Here's why experts say we don't view them as crises](#)

It will also be politically difficult, as member states are currently divided on many other pan-European issues -- from rule of law to human rights -- and will likely use this debate on climate change as a proxy for other ongoing rows.

EU diplomats told CNN that they expected opposition from countries like Poland and Hungary, who are currently embroiled with the European Commission, but also potentially wealthy and powerful nations like Germany, which has a mixed history on climate change due to its large manufacturing base.

But there are also many Members of European Parliament who think the proposals don't go far enough. If the Council waters down von der Leyen's initial text to appease opposing member states, there is also the possibility that parliamentary objection could grow.

"The proposals presented by the Commission, postpones the most stringent climate measures until the past 2030," said Michael Bloss, a German MEP sitting in the parliament's Green group.

"In their proposal, free allowances for industry will only end in 2036, the kerosene tax only applies fully as of 2030 and the internal combustion engine will only be phased out in 2035. Although it is technologically and economically possible to implement these policies earlier, in this form, the Green Deal will not be enough to limit global warming to 1.5C," he said.

On the other side of the debate, MEPs like Gunar Beck -- who represents the right-wing nationalist Alternative fur Deutschland (AfD), Germany's largest opposition party -- say that while they don't dispute a need to tackle climate change globally, the EU's position could have negative effects.

"Even if the EU becomes carbon neutral, other developing countries will rapidly increase their emissions. What it will do is worsen the competitive

position of EU companies and further impair the EU's economic recovery," he said.

- If negotiations drag for years, von der Leyen and her allies may not even be around to see them through, as their mandate ends in November 2024.

While climate change is not going to be dropped from the EU agenda any time soon, the political makeup of the bloc could change radically in that time. There are elections in Germany and France that could shake up both countries within the next year and, post-pandemic, the political direction for the future of the EU is uncertain.