

## **COP 27 – Outcomes and strategic prospects**

### **Premise**

On November 20th, the negotiating table of the Conference of the parties held in Sharm El Sheikh ended.

Two months later we have enough distance to avoid the distorting perspective of controversies. In the face of an acclaimed need to avert catastrophes due to human pressure on ecosystem balances on a global level, the outcomes of the COPs have often been denounced as inadequate. In each session of this event there are steps forward but also important measures that are postponed or circumvented. **This justifies the perception of the results of each COP as partially unsuccessful.** An opposite attitude consists in making the most of the positive results achieved in any case and building on them. The high temperatures of recent years, together with extreme weather events, have also begun to make ordinary people understand the effective reality of climate change, after three decades of wanting to believe those who denied it. However, still not everyone knows what COP is.

Faced with the need to involve even those who are not experts in the field, it seems appropriate not to take everything for granted among all types of audiences. In this sense, as well as to better understand the results of the last COP, it may be useful to recall its context, starting from the stake and the history of the issue.

## **At stake**

The existence of global climate change has long been the subject of debate. Although there are still sectors that can be defined as deniers in this regard, the notion of climate change has gained attention. This is thanks to the amount of scientific documentation that offers certain and **incontrovertible data**.

The challenges are numerous and interconnected: **rising sea and ocean levels, extreme weather events, mass extinctions**. The scenario of devastation and poverty that humanity would have to face has not been sufficiently understood, but these are reliable and concrete projections.

The destruction of entire ecosystems, together with the damage to the port infrastructure, in a planet where food needs are guaranteed by global exchanges, would lead to the return of food shortage levels on a very large scale. With imaginable consequences: humanitarian upheavals such as to innervate, due to migrations never seen before, geopolitical crises of epochal historical significance.

It is what we want to avoid and there are technologies and economic models capable of avoiding that kind of future, but the time window within which to act appears limited.

# History, meaning and results of the COP UN

In the last decade of the 20th century, after almost 20 years of alarm from the international scientific community, the evidence on climate change became less and less elusive.

Following the "Earth Summit" held in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro, the United Nations promoted the first international treaty on the environment in 1995. It was the Rio Accord. The acronym UNFCCC, which stands for United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

On the basis of this Framework Convention, the Conference of the Parties, abbreviated as COP, has met regularly since then. There are 197 member nations in the Conference of the Parties, whose meetings are held annually. The first COP, held in 1995 in Berlin, marks the birth of two basic instruments: the SBSTA which summarises the scientific elements for political decision-makers, and the SBI, which should check that the parties are compliant with the commitments signed.

The **first real climate agreement came in 1997** with the COP 3 held in Kyoto, when a protocol was signed to reduce climate-changing gas emissions. As confirmation of the difficulties encountered along the way, the Kyoto Protocol was ratified only in 2005, because the concept of climate change was not unanimously accepted.

In 2007, another important result was obtained at COP 15, held in Copenhagen, in which it was proposed **to keep the increase in global temperature below a maximum threshold of 2°C.**

The COPs held in Bali, Poznan, Copenhagen, Cancun, Doha, Warsaw, Lima see the creation of common mechanisms and parameters for evaluation.

In 2015 there was a second fundamental turning point, at the COP 21 held in Paris. The Paris Agreement represents a global climate agreement with a pre-established objective: the contracting parties undertook to carry out a progressive reduction of climate-changing greenhouse gas emissions. The declared common goal was **to achieve zero by 2050.**

Subsequent COPs in Marrakech, Bonn, Katowice and Madrid confirmed the Paris agreement, but with little progress. In practice, **the Paris Agreement remains disregarded.**

In 2021 COP26 is held in Glasgow and the Glasgow Climate Pact is signed, with the **significant absence of Russia, China and India.** The signatories pledged to set concrete commitments on emissions, but an implementation of the pact has been delayed.

Finally, in 2022, we have arrived at the COP 27 held in Sharm El Sheik.

## Concrete outcomes of COP 27

An important result achieved with COP 26 is the **establishment of a compensation fund for losses and damages** deriving from **extreme events**, drought, sea level rise, all

phenomena caused by climate change. The fund is dedicated to countries considered particularly vulnerable to environmental crises or financially unprepared to react to them. It can be considered a result of primary importance, given that it was the object of the requests of the less industrialized countries, which are not responsible for the emissions but suffer the greatest consequences. A non-negligible aspect is the implicit admission of a moral responsibility on the part of the more industrialized countries, to which a request for financial compensation can be linked

COP27 reaffirmed the target set in Glasgow of **not exceeding 1.5°C in global temperature increase**. However, the fact that binding guidelines have not yet been established remains a cause for disappointment. Furthermore, the phase-out of fossil fuels has continually been delayed. In fact, no reduction in oil and gas consumption is expected. And the use of coal, the most polluting fossil source, is not suspended but only limited.

However, **a sign of change comes from 80 countries**, led by European states and India, which are asking for a more effective push towards the transition to renewable sources.

On the one hand, the success of the **establishment of the Loss and damage fund**. On the other hand, the absence of incisive cuts with respect to climate-changing gas emissions. The balance sheet of the last COP cannot be said to be negative but not entirely satisfactory either: many issues remain unresolved and postponed to the next Conference of the Parties. It is urgent to commit oneself, in the awareness that time passes by eroding many possibilities. Decarbonisation could also pass through pioneering experiences on a voluntary basis. It is therefore necessary to go beyond the level of state delegations and to involve and motivate corporate management more, as a potential strategic driving force.

## COP and geopolitics

The last Conference of the Parties was held against the backdrop of an exceptionally serious international crisis. It is well known that the **entire global energy system** has suffered the aftermath of the war in Ukraine. Conflicts with military operations disrupt supply chains of raw materials, in this case Russian gas ([read our insights about it](#)). The price of fossil fuels has received a heavy increase, given that the price basket is based on gas. **In 2021 its price in Europe grew by 500%**. It is the most significant energy shock after the one generated by the oil embargo of the Arab countries in the 1970s.

Many hope that the current crisis will have the positive effect of accelerating the energy transition. A well-known historical precedent is the transition from coal to oil, which took several decades. The new energy sources do not immediately replace the old ones, but join them and progressively make them obsolete.

An unexpected help could come from the international market. Despite the uncertainties of the financial sector, it can be expected that it will increasingly reward renewable energies, for the simple reason that they represent an investment that is not evanescent and not based on mere short-term speculation. And the market is starting to need solidity. This is a crucial factor, as the public sector and the spending of state actors are not enough to give

momentum to the transition. However, the markets are feeling the effects of the ongoing military confrontation.

There are many reasons to be interested in the strategic factors investigated by geopolitics. In the context of COP 27, the European Union asked that the countries responsible for most of the extraction and marketing of gas and oil not be included among the recipients of aid, despite being in areas affected by environmental crises. These are in fact the expected result of climate change induced by the use of fossil fuels. It is a measure that affects the Gulf countries, which are asked to invest their oil revenue in the transition to sustainable sources and in interventions to safeguard coasts and populations.

Not the latter It is about something more than a simple opposition, because the interests at stake are such as to be able to give rise to a fault line that would intersect other strategic games in the Middle Eastern chessboard, with possible reverberations also in the Indo-Pacific one. Moreover, the latter is not the only latent conflict that has been brewing since the COP negotiations.

The main actors that NGOs turn to to implement climate agreements remain primarily state-owned, even within supranational bodies. The fate of the planetary ecosystem depends on decision makers and apparatuses of national states, therefore it seems appropriate to adequately perceive the geopolitical disputes that agitate the planet.

In order to have maximum effectiveness, action to safeguard the planetary ecosystem must be aware of the strategic agendas of the various actors in a conflicting world.

A tragic lesson from history for the future is that great rivalries for hegemony do not always and necessarily end with a clear winner: from Thucydides to today we often observe the simultaneous collapse of rival powers. Environmental action, based on scientific, technical, economic and cultural objectives, pursues a devolution of state powers, which gives substance to supranational structures. This could happen not only by mutual agreement but due to the progressive weakening of the national structures involved in the geopolitical macro-contest of the 21st century.

For these and other reasons, the geopolitical dimension must be kept in mind with great attention, in any debate on the climate and the future of the planet.

## **What to do?**

Having verified the slowness with which Countries implement the indications of scientists and economists and the inertia with which these are embodied in binding international projects and treaties, we must speak of COP 27 beyond the limit of the usual reference actors.

An assessment of the results achieved by 27 Conferences of the Parties must start from the fact that the environmental and climate issue involves resistance. Cultural friction breeds political friction and this limits the scope of choices made by institutional decision makers.

To have a useful impact, it is necessary to change current cultural paradigms in large parts of the world. For this reason, dealing with the results of the COPs **cannot be limited to technical analyses among experts**. Content of this importance requires extensive public dissemination, a storytelling of the ongoing planetary challenge. Because state decision makers tend to always respond to motivated voters.

It is legitimate to deprecate the resistance that derives from certain sectors, but not sterilely. If anything, it is necessary to transmit fully convincing economic models, alternatives both to the madness of consumerism and the predatory economy of the twentieth century, as well as to the prospects of pure degrowth, which translates into a spectre of poverty for the vast public.

The adoption and success of every successful strategy in the battle for the defence of planetary ecosystems will depend on ordinary people. The frontier of intellectual engagement can therefore be found in a work of international pedagogy, of which the so-called ocean literacy is an example, capable of involving the largest number of people on major issues of global importance.

We must avoid falling into the trap of despising those who appear to be behind in regards to the perception of the problems and what is at stake. These must be communicated with patient passion and will be able to pass only if combined with a reassurance on the future socio-economic structures that can be built.

Today climate change, together with expensive energy and war, result from polls at the top of the concerns of the general public, even in Italy. There is a lack of direct involvement of people in political actions and self-responsible conduct, but this largely occurs due to still insufficient or unconvincing communication.

Apart from simple ignorance or widespread obsolete mental and cultural models, it is necessary to generate conscious adherence to alternative economic models. These may be achievable especially if reassuring, for the majority who, in the first place, **fear mass unemployment**.

In order to launch and implement incisive reforms, there is a need for truly involved populations and this cannot be achieved only through fear of the effects of climate change, but also simultaneously giving concrete hope in a new economy: green, circular, sustainable.

Only a public opinion converted to trust in the future will resist the conservative demagogic sirens, easily fueled by any repercussions of the energy transition. The Green New Deal must therefore not be abandoned or used as a rhetorical slogan, but filled with meaning: **it must become a shared project and dream, the commitment of a young generation**.

**COP 28 will be held in 2023 in Dubai**. And the battle that leads to the approval of future clauses will not be played out only within the walls of the resort that will host the delegations. It is now being played out in the civic propaganda that will be able to be put in place to educate and mobilise public opinion in every single state.

We intend to make a contribution in this sense.

