

Unimaginable results: Italy slows down the EU on stopping fossils

I hear about the "unimaginable results" achieved in the last (and first) year of the current government. Without wishing to enter into the merits of all the topics of the discussion that followed, I just say that, if "unimaginable" has a positive value, in the fight against climate change, I have recorded very few results, perhaps none. Of "unimaginable" I saw only examples of the kind I tell in this article.

On 16 October, the Council of Environment Ministers of the 27 Member States, with the presence of the European Commissioner for Climate Change, the Dutch Wopke Hoekstra, met in Luxembourg. The negotiating mandate for the UN Climate Conference to be held in the United Arab Emirates from 30 November to 12 December was to be decided: the position to be held by the EU at COP28. It was unanimously agreed that in Dubai Commissioner Hoekstra, on behalf of the whole European Union, will have to ask to include in the final document a global commitment to the gradual elimination of fossil fuels and related state subsidies.

A good result, you will say. Of course, it is a pity that it could have been much better if Italy, together with a well-defined bloc of other countries led by our partners and the Czech Republic, had not put its finger on it. I say this, after having "gleaned" in the reports of the meeting.

The European ministers who arrived in Luxembourg, in fact, found on the table a proposal from a large number of European countries, with France and Germany in the lead, in which they asked the EU to present to the COP28 in Dubai, in the forthcoming climate negotiations, the call for a global commitment by all States to phase out, albeit gradually, all fossil fuels. The words of the pre-working interview of the EU Vice-President responsible for the Green Deal, Frans Timmerman (resigned in September to stand for election in the Netherlands) that the European Union at COP28 will have to press for a global commitment to phase out the use of fossil fuels "well before 2050".

An absolutely disruptive proposal, that of the States supported by the Franco-German sharing, when we consider that, incredibly, never the theme "fossil fuels" as a cause of aggravation of the global climate situation, was included in the final documents of no COP (except with a timid reference to coal in the COP26). And, amazingly, it does not even figure in the conclusions of the 2015 Paris Agreement.

However, Italy and Czechoslovakia put the grain of sand in the mechanism that seemed to have led, finally, Brussels to support a position of common sense, concrete and with solid scientific foundations. The crux of the matter was the

Commission regulation, which provides for unanimity in the 27 Member States for this type of decision.

So, faced with the real risk of impasse that would have led the entire EU to have no position in the climate discussions, also because of the tight schedule (the next meeting of the EU Environment Commission is scheduled for December, after COP28)The Czech-Italian commissioners pull the rabbit out of the top hat. We may decide to ask for the prohibition of fossils, but not of all, but only of those so-called "non-stop" (this bizarre definition from the English translation of the term "unabated" should refer to those fossils that are not useful to combat energy poverty or to ensure "a fair transition") and, obviously, lacks any temporal reference within which to realize the assumed reduction. The subtle terminology does not appear in the Commission's final communiqué: "The transition to a climate-neutral economy will require the phasing-out of fossil fuels and a peak in their consumption in this decade making the energy sector predominantly fossil-fuel-free well before 2050, as well as aiming for a fully or predominantly decarbonised global energy system in the 2030s".

Where is the evil? To understand what are the "fossils without stop", I did a long search on the net until I got to the site of the English colleagues of Climate Home News and Matteo Civillini's article "What does "unabated" fossil Fuels mean?" (here: <https://www.climatechangenews.com/2023/06/26/what-does-unabated-fossil-fuels-mean/>). And so I found that the explanation of this definition is far from simple and is very controversial ("The answer is not straightforward and agreeing on a shared understanding will be one of the defining battles of future climate Commitments."). One quotes a statement by Katrine Petersen, senior political advisor to E3G (an independent think tank on climate change, their name being the acronym for Third Generation Environmentalism), which states: "There is currently no international definition of what constitutes the reduction of carbon dioxide (CO2)". And Civillini adds "As for the use of coal, oil and gas for energy production, this refers to attempts to reduce the release of pollutants to an acceptable level. What is this level and how to get there is hotly debated." I gather from the above that calling for an end to the use not of all fossil fuels, but only of those that do not contribute to reducing environmental pollution is a meaningless and unscientific statement, for the uncertainty of defining which fossil fuels are more harmful than the others. And that, even if the recommendation of the European Union were to be included in the next Dubai Cop, in its application, the margin for interpretation of individual states will remain very wide and discretionary.

In this blog it has been written over and over again that the mitigation of climate change passes from the reduction of the use of fossil fuels, from the elimination of public subsidies in favor of those who use them most recently, last 19 October ("Join the Fossilfuel Treaty against the proliferation of fossil fuels", here: <https://www.climateaid.it/2023/10/19/aderire-a-fossilfuel-treaty-contro-la-proliferazione-di-combustibili-fossili/>), and we at ClimateAid Network joined the Fossilfuel Treaty precisely to contribute to the appeal for a treaty of no further

proliferation of fossil fuels, also in the perspective of the next Cop28 in Dubai.
You do the same.

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