

The European Commission has just announced it will drop a mechanism to monitor progress in limiting greenhouse gas emissions in the Western Balkans. The decision will make it difficult to track and manage climate goals in a region that is highly vulnerable to climate change impacts, warns Dragana Mileusnić.

Dragana Mileusnić is the energy policy coordinator for Southeast Europe at Climate Action Network Europe.

European leaders will be meeting their Western Balkan counterparts at the annual high-level summit taking place in Trieste on Wednesday (12 July). Last year, they committed to stepping up climate action in the region, so the European Commission worked with Western Balkan countries on a mechanism to monitor progress in limiting greenhouse gas emissions. At the summit, the leaders will take stock of progress made since last year's meeting, when they committed to financing projects that benefit the citizens of the region, including the upgrading of the railway networks and of the insulation of people's homes. Unfortunately, one important promise made last year has been broken: the commitment to step up climate action through the so-called Monitoring Mechanism Regulation .

Despite the endorsement of this proposal by the countries of the region and its relevancy when it comes to measuring climate action, the Commission has just announced it will drop it for very questionable reasons.

You cannot manage what you cannot measure

The Western Balkans is highly vulnerable to climate change impacts, yet little is being done on either the mitigation or the adaptation front. The price tag of climate impacts is rising each year and has surpassed €5bn in Serbia in the 2000-2014 period.

An analysis of the pledges these countries made under the Paris Agreement shows that they face serious challenges to monitor their emissions, which is a necessity to ensure informed climate policymaking. This lack of data makes their climate goals difficult to track, compare and manage with adequate policies and measures.

The leaders of the Western Balkan countries committed to improving their greenhouse gas emissions monitoring systems at their summit last year. This was to be done by the implementation of the MMR, a piece of legislation regulating the monitoring of emissions at EU level.

Since this is a highly technical task, the European Commission has put cooperation programmes in place to ensure that the Western Balkan countries get the support needed. The MMR was rightly meant to become the stepping stone of climate policy in the Energy Community, a coordinating body gathering the EU and South Eastern European leaders on the energy agenda, paving the way for integrated long-term climate and energy planning in

this region.

European Commission's internal division damages its external reputation

Responding to the needs of the countries, the Commission started working on the MMR proposal for the Energy Community early this year. However, it seems that the Commission has literally been speaking with two voices on this issue. While the Commission's Directorate General for Climate Action negotiated the MMR proposal with the Energy Community countries, DG Energy, with the backing of Commissioner Arias Cañete, announced it no longer supported this approach.

This U-turn has come very late in the process and has made the bloc come across as an unreliable partner to its immediate neighbours. It contradicts the EU leaders' repeated strong commitments to the Paris Agreement and sends a bad signal to the Energy Community members on efforts to make their energy systems more sustainable.

Questionable arguments

The Commission mainly argues that the monitoring regulation might change once it is integrated into the Energy Union Governance. This justification is puzzling for several reasons.

Firstly, the MMR has remained unchanged within the proposed Governance Regulation and it has only been adapted to the requirements of the Paris Climate Agreement.

Secondly, neither the European Council nor the European Parliament have so far expressed interest to amend it. In our view, delaying the implementation of this monitoring mechanism will mechanically delay the overall climate policy in these countries, which is unacceptable.

The Commission also announced it will recommend that the countries look into National Energy and Climate Plans, mirroring the ones that EU member states are developing. But how are they supposed to develop such plans without the proper data provided by the MMR?

We believe it is not too late to turn things around. The Commission can put key elements of the MMR back on the table for adoption this year. Tomorrow's meeting should send a strong political message to the region that climate action will continue.

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