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How did the COVID-19 crisis relate to meeting global climate targets for 2020?

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The current coronavirus outbreak 2019 (COVID-19) may be a double-edged sword in the fight against climate change. In fact, 2020 marks a key assessment of climate protection initiatives and progress made by individual countries, which are due to submit their updated Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) as agreed in the Paris Agreement (1).

Although pre coronavirus crisis global GHG emissions are expected to continue growing by 1,9% (2), recent CO₂ calculations in Europe are predicting a surprising scenario. For instance, the German climate target for 2020, which until February 2020, was considered unattainable, should now be met (3). Due to this year's mild, stormy, windy winter, and, above all the coronavirus crisis, the target of 40% CO₂ savings, compared to 1990, is within reach.

While COVID-19 is “first and foremost an issue of human health and safety”, the change in people's behaviour to contain the virus is having “some subtle effects on the environment” (4). Some of the spreading virus tangible effects on the environment have been, among others (e.g. air pollution, wildlife etc.), the decreasing use of gasoline, electricity, as well as a drop on fuel production and consumption. If similar trends can be proven for the performance of the G20 countries only, 2020 could represent an epic cornerstone not only for climate negotiations but also for the future world economy.

Yet, the COVID-19 crisis may also have negative implications and impacts on the climate, as a rebound effect is expected once the pandemic is over (5). In the short-term, some are already affecting electric vehicles (EV) and the solar sectors, challenged by dips in oil/gasoline prices, the decreasing demand, and disruptions to both supply chains and manufacturing facilities (5). Besides, low commodity prices may drastically alter food supply chains, resulting in increased levels of food loss and waste, as well as exacerbating existing scenarios of food insecurity, especially in developing countries (5)(6).

Notwithstanding the future developments, the current global situation is an opportunity to consider structural changes that may go hand-in-hand with the economic and environmental reforms needed to achieve a sound paradigm shift to avoid destabilizing the climate in order to have the best possible chance to avoid setting off irreversible chain reactions (e.g. melting glaciers etc.). This shift can and needs to be taken now (7)(8). While rethinking unforeseen and unexpected scenarios when drafting global climate targets, policy-makers and global leaders should envision a new world economy without fossil fuels, with a higher reliance on renewable energies, decreasing travels, shortening value chains, and challenging first-world living standards (9)(10). This pandemic is showing us that refinements are possible. Investments and measures taken beyond and after the coronavirus



crisis are what would define the global fight against climate change.

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