

OPINION • COP28

Greenhouse gas emissions: 'Europe must show the way to sustainability' at COP28

OP-ED

Group letter

In this op-ed, 36 leaders of 'positive-impact' companies call on the EU's representatives at COP28 to promote their shared decarbonization aims.

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A COP in Dubai, chaired by an oil tycoon: Two reasons why politicians, business leaders and the general public have little faith in the next climate summit. Yet, this is an opportunity for Europe to live up to its convictions, explains a group of European impact companies.

It has not even started yet, and COP28 is already getting bad press. Hosted by the United Arab Emirates and presided over by Sultan Al Jaber, the Emirati Industry Minister and CEO of the national oil company [Abu Dhabi National Oil Company, ADNOC], the COPs have been denounced by some as having become a hotbed of lobbying for the fossil fuel industries. Do they still serve any meaningful purpose? Initially ambitious, many of the measures taken at these meetings end up falling by the wayside. Just recently, we learned about the failure of negotiations on compensation for countries in the Global South, which are particularly affected by climate change. The agreement was initiated at the last COP in Sharm El-Sheikh.

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Beyond the form, there is also the discourse. Sultan Al Jaber believes that it is indeed important to discuss a gradual end to CO₂ emissions. However, he contends that this doesn't inherently imply a complete elimination of fossil fuels.

'Technology is not a license to pollute'

In other words, oil is not the root of the problem (the United Arab Emirates is the world's seventh-largest producer of black gold), and the real battle must be waged against CO₂ emissions. This can be done through carbon capture and storage technologies. These technologies would obviate the need to rethink – among other things – mobility, agriculture, industry and our uses of energy, and would certainly not force Abu Dhabi to draw a line under its unbridled production of barrels of oil. Yet we must dramatically reduce fossil fuels at all costs, given that they contribute to the emission of 36.8 billion tons of CO₂ into the atmosphere ([IEA, 2022](#)). Oil is definitely a problem.

The Emirates cannot be criticized for supporting techno-based solutions. The Middle East is an arid zone where forests do not grow and water is increasingly scarce, so supporting the emergence of such solutions is strategic. However, we mustn't forget that these solutions are not very mature or scalable at the moment and that they require huge financial investment before they can be effective. If our technologies have to evolve and adapt as quickly as the climate changes, we will be starting a race lost

in advance. Above all, let's be clear about the fact that while technology is a valuable aid, and ultimately part of the solution, it is neither our salvation nor a license to pollute.

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