ACCLIMATE policy brief

TOWARDS A JUST, ORDERLY, AND EQUITABLE TRANSITION AWAY FROM FOSSIL FUELS: OPTIONS AND PRIORITIES FOR THE EU AFTER SANTA MARTA

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There is growing scientific and legal consensus on the imperative of a just, orderly, and equitable transition away from fossil fuels. Combustion and production of fossil fuels accounted for the vast majority of global greenhouse gas emissions and a third of methane emissions in 2024. Projected emissions of existing fossil fuel-consuming infra-structure alone are already projected to exceed the remaining carbon budget for the Paris Agreement's 1.5°C limit with 50% probability and high confidence. Transitioning away from fossil fuels (TAFF) is therefore the central pathway towards achieving the Agreement's mitigation objectives. This imperative received further legal backing in the July 2025 International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion, which warned that a state's failure to take appropriate action to protect the climate system – including through fossil fuel production, consumption, licensing, or subsidies – may constitute an internationally wrongful act.

While this imperative was acknowledged in the outcome of the first Global Stocktake at the 2023 UN Climate Conference in Dubai (COP28), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) process has struggled to implement this call. At the most recent UN Climate Conference (COP30) in Belém, Brazil, parties to the Paris Agreement could not agree on moving forward with a global fossil fuel roadmap. In response, the Brazilian COP30 Presidency undertook to develop such a roadmap on its own initiative.

The First Intergovernmental Conference on Transitioning away from Fossil Fuels, held in Santa Marta, Colombia, in April 2026, offered an opportunity for a coalition of willing countries to move forward on this topic. The conference was co-hosted by Colombia and the Netherlands, and provided a unique setting in that not all countries were invited to come to the conference, and there was no negotiated outcome. At the end of the conference, a second TAFF conference was announced, to be co-hosted by Tuvalu and Ireland in July 2027. Moreover, the co-hosts created a coordination group of TAFF-related international coalitions and established three workstreams (on national and regional TAFF roadmaps, fossil fuel-related macroeconomic dependencies and addressing barriers in the global and domestic financial architecture, and producer-consumer alignment), with a separate Science Panel for the Global Energy Transition also being launched at the conference.

The Santa Marta conference took place amid a global fossil energy crisis following the war in Iran and the subsequent closure of the critical Strait of Hormuz. These geopolitical developments have led to broader questions concerning the reliability of fossil fuel supplies. These questions are particularly pressing for the European Union (EU). **Tackling these geopolitical uncertainties, however, can go hand-in-hand with pursuing the EU's long-standing climate leadership aspirations.** Following the withdrawal by the United States from the Paris Agreement and the UNFCCC, the EU has a clear opportunity to realise its climate leadership aspirations whilst also reducing its reliance on uncertain fossil fuel imports.

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Against this backdrop, this policy brief identifies **several areas where the EU and its Member States could make meaningful contributions** to making progress on TAFF.

First, the European Commission and EU Member States could **strengthen existing international coalitions**, notably by supporting the Government of Ireland in the **organisation of the second TAFF conference**, as well as by promoting the **broadening of the participant base** ahead of the conference. The latter would include not only encouraging other EU Member States to join, but also using the diplomatic capital of the EU and its Member States to reach out to countries critical to TAFF, such as China, India, Indonesia, and South Africa. EU institutions such as the Council and the Commission can also **strengthen intra-EU coherence on TAFF** by backing international initiatives led by its Member States, notably including the **Coalition on Phasing Out Fossil Fuel Incentives Including Subsidies** (COFFIS), led by the Netherlands), and the **Beyond Oil and Gas Alliance** (BOGA, led by Denmark), as well as initiatives in which Member States play a prominent role, such as the **Clean Energy Transition Partnership (CETP)** on international public finance. The European Commission and Member States could also seek to strengthen existing initiatives that promote producer-consumer alignment, such as the **Equitable Framework and Finance for Extractive-based Countries in Transition** (EFFECT) launched by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. In doing so, the EU could leverage its legacy oil and gas imports in a dialogue with its suppliers to incentivise them to decarbonise and diversify their economies away from fossil fuels.

Second, the EU and its Member States could **develop new international coalitions**. Notably, the EU could **pioneer TAFF roadmaps that are integrated with Nationally Determined Contributions and Long-Term Low Emission Development Strategies** under the Paris Agreement. Doing so could form the starting point for the development of a broader coalition of countries developing such roadmaps. Furthermore, the EU could enter into **structured bilateral agreements with key oil and gas suppliers** in North Africa, the Middle East, and Central Asia, coupling predictable fossil fuel reductions with targeted support for clean energy and economic diversification. To prevent investment treaties from undermining domestic climate action, the EU could also **build a coalition focused on reforming the investment treaty regime**, specifically by removing access to investor-state dispute settlement for fossil fuel investors.

Third, **within the UNFCCC process**, the EU could **advocate the uptake of the outcomes of the first Global Stocktake in the second one** (which will run from 2026 to 2028), thereby ensuring that TAFF remains on the formal negotiation agenda. The EU can also leverage other formal negotiation tracks, including shaping the **operationalisation of the Just Transition Mechanism** under the Just Transition Work Programme and engaging in discussions within the **Mitigation Work Programme**. In addition, the EU can support informal ways of integrating TAFF in recently launched initiatives, including the COP30

Presidency's **fossil fuel roadmap, the Belém Mission to 1.5, and the Global Climate Action Agenda.**

Lastly, international efforts by the EU should be flanked by **domestic action**. In this regard, there is significant potential in the upcoming **revision of the Regulation on the Governance of the Energy Union and Climate Action** to not only strengthen the phase-out of fossil fuel subsidies through Member States' National Energy and Climate Plans and Long-Term Strategies, but also addressing TAFF more broadly in such plans and strategies. Completing the **revision of the Energy Taxation Directive** would further complement these efforts by removing perverse tax incentives favouring fossil fuels. In addition, the EU institutions should also **ensure that existing measures that impose restrictions on fossil fuel production, including notably the Methane Regulation and the moratorium on Arctic fossil fuel extraction under the EU Arctic Policy, remain intact**, even if their implementation is delayed.

I. Introduction

Under current global policies, the world is on track for a temperature rise of 2.8°C by the end of the century, significantly overshooting the Paris Agreement's 1.5°C goal (UNEP 2025; 2026). This temperature projection implies immense hardships for human health, prosperity, and security, as well as the destruction of whole ecosystems. Even if all national climate pledges are fully met, warming is expected to reach 2.3°C to 2.5°C, with only the most optimistic net-zero scenarios keeping the increase below 2°C (UNEP 2025).

Transitioning away from fossil fuels (TAFF) is the central pathway towards achieving the Agreement's mitigation objectives, as combustion and production of fossil fuels accounted for the vast majority of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and a third of methane emissions in 2024 (Crippa et al. 2025). Projected emissions of existing fossil fuel-consuming infrastructure alone are already projected to exceed the remaining carbon budget for the 1.5°C limit with 50% probability and high confidence (IPCC 2023). Moreover, studies underscore that the "committed emissions" from fossil fuel-producing infrastructure by far exceed the remaining carbon budget associated with keeping warming below 1.5°C (Trout et al. 2022; UNEP 2023). Beyond energy, these fuels remain vital industrial feedstocks, with the petrochemical sector described by the International Energy Agency "as the anchor of global oil demand growth", already accounting for 12% of this demand in 2018(IEA 2018; 2024: 9). Transitioning away from this foundation is historically unprecedented, as the 20th century's economic growth was tied directly to a 17-fold increase in energy use (Smil 2017).

Still, there is growing consensus on the imperative of a just, orderly, and equitable transition away from fossil fuels. A major step in this direction was the decision on the outcome of the first Global Stocktake (GST) adopted at the UN Climate Conference in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, in 2023 (COP28). In this decision, parties to the Paris Agreement were called upon "to contribute to the following global efforts, in a nationally determined manner, taking into account the Paris Agreement and their different national circumstances, pathways and approaches: … (d) Transitioning away from fossil fuels in energy systems, in a just, orderly and equitable manner, accelerating action in this critical decade, so as to achieve net zero by 2050 in keeping with the science" (UNFCCC 2023, para. 28). Although non-binding and couched in hortatory language, this COP decision was the first acknowledgement by parties that a just, orderly, and equitable TAFF is needed to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement (van Asselt 2023).

Implementing this call domestically and at the international level has proven difficult, however. While parties representing close to 80% of global GHG emissions submitted new Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), the uptake of specific GST signals, in particular about TAFF, has remained limited (Beuermann et al. 2026). At the international level, no progress was made at COP29 in Baku, Azerbaijan, in 2024, as attempts to build on the GST

decision ran into headwinds with, for example, the Arab Group making clear that it would not accept any text that would target fossil fuels (Obergassel et al. 2025). During COP30 in Belém, Brazil, in 2025, more than 80 countries called for a roadmap to phase out fossil fuels in the Belém Declaration on the Transition Away from Fossil Fuels (Obergassel et al. 2026). Despite this broad alliance, no agreement on language on fossil fuels in the final COP decision could be reached. Under the circumstances, Brazil pledged to move a global fossil fuel roadmap forward on its own initiative (COP30 Presidency 2026).

In parallel, the Governments of Colombia and the Netherlands announced that they would organise the First Intergovernmental Conference on Transitioning Away from Fossil Fuels (following an initial announcement by the Colombian government in September 2025). Five months later, at the end of April 2026, this conference took place in Santa Marta, Colombia. The conference can be seen as a parallel track that does not challenge the consensus-based approach of the COPs but rather seeks to complement it. The conference set itself apart in that not all countries were invited to come to the conference. It further distinguished itself by not seeking to develop a negotiated outcome (e.g., a political declaration).

A further backdrop for the Santa Marta conference was provided by the Advisory Opinion on Obligations of States in Respect of Climate Change by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) from July 2025, which offered a legal boost for TAFF. Although the Advisory Opinion is not legally binding, and the ICJ does not prescribe any particular conduct, it put major fossil fuel-producing and -consuming states on notice by suggesting that the "[f]ailure of a State to take appropriate action to protect the climate system from GHG emissions – including through fossil fuel production, fossil fuel consumption, the granting of fossil fuel exploration licences or the provision of fossil fuel subsidies – may constitute an internationally wrongful act" (ICJ 2025, para. 427; see van Asselt & Rao 2026).

The Santa Marta conference also took place amid a global fossil energy crisis following the war in Iran and the subsequent closure of the critical Strait of Hormuz, which led to uncertainty in the global supply of oil and gas as well as significant volatility in energy prices. This energy crisis followed a previous one just a few years earlier driven by the Russian invasion of Ukraine. These geopolitical developments have led to broader questions concerning the reliability of fossil fuel supplies and hence the resilience of societies where fossil fuels form a major pillar in heating, mobility, and industry.

These questions are particularly pressing for the European Union (EU). Although the EU has sought to wean itself off Russian fossil fuels following the start of the Russia-Ukraine war, it still faces major uncertainties when it comes to fossil fuels supplied from the Gulf and the United States (Van de Graaf 2026a).

Tackling these geopolitical uncertainties can go together with pursuing the EU's long-

standing climate leadership aspirations (Van de Graaf 2026b). This view was clearly expressed in a comment by Frank Elderson, a member of the European Central Bank's Executive Board, in which he highlighted the negative economic impacts of Europe's energy dependence and concluded: "the real question is no longer whether Europe can afford to make the energy transition. It is whether it can afford not to. From a central banking perspective, the answer is clear" (Elderson 2026).

Several EU Member States have already adopted measures restricting fossil fuel supply (Carter & McKenzie 2020). France launched its own TAFF roadmap during the Santa Marta conference (République Française 2026), with the Netherlands and Germany following suit (Federal Government of Germany 2026; Ministerie van Economische Zaken en Klimaat 2026). And Ireland, which also holds the EU Presidency in the second half of 2026, is the co-host, alongside Tuvalu, of the second TAFF conference in July 2027. Following the withdrawal by the United States from the Paris Agreement, as well as its parent treaty, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the EU therefore has a clear opportunity to realise its climate leadership aspirations whilst also reducing its reliance on uncertain fossil fuel imports.

Against this backdrop, this policy brief explores options for the EU and its Member States to move forward on TAFF in the wake of the Santa Marta conference. Following a discussion of what was on the agenda in Santa Marta and what came out of the meeting (Section 2), the policy brief examines how the EU can make progress on TAFF through international cooperation (Section 3) and outlines options for domestic action (Section 4).

2. The Santa Marta conference: Process and outcomes

The Santa Marta conference sought to provide a safe harbour for honest conversations about practical pathways and challenges in the transition away from fossil fuels. To ensure that only willing actors engage in this first conference, the co-hosts invited a selected group of countries that participate actively in initiatives or coalitions that demonstrate a commitment to implementing the transition, such as the Powering Past Coal Alliance (PPCA), the Beyond Oil and Gas Alliance (BOGA), as well as countries that were signatories of the Belém Declaration on the Transition Away from Fossil Fuels. Ultimately, 57 countries attended the conference, representing about one-third of the world's economy. These countries included various EU Member States, namely Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, and Sweden (Dunne 2026). The EU also attended the conference with several Members of the European Parliament as well as EU Climate Commissioner Wopke Hoekstra. Member States from Eastern Europe were virtually absent, however.

The conference was designed as a bottom-up, participatory process to balance grassroots legitimacy and political commitment. This approach differs from the formalised structure of the COPs and incorporates as well as anticipates input from non-state actors. Doing so, the conference was divided into two main parts: it started with Stakeholder-Led Dialogues, including a scientific pre-conference and a People's Assembly, followed by a High-Level Segment serving as a ministerial-level gathering. Selected representatives from the Stakeholder-Led Dialogues joined the High-Level Segment to report on outcomes of the dialogues, to raise demands and to propose pathways (Colombia & the Netherlands n.d.). Before the conference, stakeholders had opportunities to engage via written contributions and virtual dialogues.

Thematically, the conference was structured along three thematic pillars, aiming at overcoming barriers and strengthening the enablers of TAFF. The input from the stakeholders were also organised along these pillars as well as the discussions during the High-Level Segment. The three thematic pillars were: (1) overcoming economic dependence – addressing the macroeconomic challenges of fossil fuel-reliant economies; (2) transforming supply and demand – targeting the practical phase-out of fossil fuel production and use; and (3) advancing international cooperation and climate diplomacy – strengthening international frameworks and addressing international legal barriers. Under the final pillar, many participants in the run-up and at the conference supported a new international legal instrument to phase out fossil fuels, such as a fossil fuel treaty. Moreover, participants underscored the risks of investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) for countries adopting fossil fuel phase-out measures, and called for reform of the investment treaty system.

As the set-up of the TAFF conference differs from the UNFCCC process, the discussions during the High-Level-Segment took place in a more open and less formalised structure. After the opening plenary, where political and civil society representatives gave two-minute statements, closed-door discussions on the thematic pillars took place. These breakout sessions were facilitated by selected Ministers from the Global South and the Global North (Allan & Jones 2026). The discussions were rather free flowing, with participants describing the format as refreshing and constructive (Allan & Jones 2026).

Given that the conference was not meant as a negotiation space, a negotiated outcome let alone some kind of legal instrument was not on the cards. However, the outcome of the High-Level Segment can be perceived as a process towards a stabilisation or even institutionalisation of an emerging "coalition of the willing". Key outcomes of the conference, as contained both in an initial "co-hosts takeaways" document published right after the conference, and a later, more elaborate conference report (Colombia & the Netherlands 2026a; 2026b) include:

- **Announcement of a second Conference on the Transition Away from Fossil Fuels**, co-hosted by Tuvalu, where the main conference will take place, and Ireland, the location of pre-conference meetings. In September 2026, it was announced that the conference would take place in July 2027, with a pre-conference in Ireland.
- **Creation of a coordination group** to ensure continuity towards the following conference(s), consisting of Colombia, the Netherlands, Tuvalu, and Ireland, as well as countries that lead TAFF-related international alliances.
- **Establishment of three workstreams** in preparation for the second conference. The workstreams focus on: (1) *national and regional TAFF roadmaps*, supported by the newly established Science Panel on the Global Energy Transition and the NDC Partnership; (2) *fossil fuel-related macroeconomic dependencies and barriers in the global and domestic financial architecture*, supported by the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD); and (3) *work on producer-consumer alignment for TAFF*, supported by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).
- **Launch of the Science Panel for the Global Energy Transition**, which is intended to support countries in implementing TAFF, addressing country-specific enablers and barriers.

Although the two documents do not set out substantive recommendations, which is unsurprising given its non-negotiated nature, the conference (Colombia & the Netherlands 2026b) sets out a "vision" from the co-hosts for TAFF. This vision suggests, among others, that TAFF is essential for achieving the Paris Agreement goals, and that countries should cooperate through an "open and flexible coalition of doers", both within and outside the UNFCCC (Colombia & the Netherlands 2026b).

3. Options and priorities for international cooperation

The Santa Marta process points to a range of opportunities for the EU and its Member States to cooperate internationally on TAFF. This section discusses how the EU can strengthen its role in existing international coalitions, develop new coalitions, and engage on TAFF within the UNFCCC.

3.1 Working with existing international coalitions

In its submission to the COP30 Presidency on a global TAFF roadmap, the EU (2026) underlines its participation in various cooperative initiatives and alliances, and highlights that dialogues on a roadmap should involve these coalitions, including the Global Energy Transition Forum, PPCA, BOGA, CETP, Coalition on Phasing Out Fossil Fuel Incentives Including Subsidies (COFFIS), and Just Energy Transition Partnerships (JETPs).

Against this background, the first and most immediate priority for the EU to make progress on TAFF should be to support the Santa Marta process itself. With Ireland and Tuvalu co-hosting the next conference, and Ireland acting as President of the EU Council of Ministers from July until December 2026, the EU has ample opportunity to play an important role in strengthening the process. One key lever in this regard is for the Commission and Member States that participated in the first conference to promote participation of Member States that did not participate. Moreover, the European Commission could offer technical and logistical support to the Government of Ireland to help prepare the second conference (including the pre-conference in Ireland). Furthermore, the EU and its Member States could use their diplomatic capital to persuade other countries to participate, including JETP partner countries Indonesia and South Africa (which were both absent in Santa Marta), and to build bridges with key countries such as China and India.

A second, short- to medium-term priority for the European Commission should be to offer further support to international coalitions spearheaded by EU Member States to ensure their durability and enhance their impact and credibility. These initiatives notably include:

- **COFFIS**: Building on the EU's own efforts to curb fossil fuel subsidies, the European Commission could provide more support for COFFIS by joining as a member and encouraging EU Member States to join. COFFIS was established in 2023 at COP28 and is chaired by the Netherlands. The initiative aims to remove barriers against the phase-out of fossil fuel subsidies by facilitating the transparency of these subsidies (The Netherlands et al. 2023). In tandem with domestic legal and policy reforms (see Section 4), the European Commission could advance COFFIS implementation, for instance by developing guidelines for fossil fuel subsidy inventories and subsidy phase-out plans (COFFIS Observatory 2025).

- **CETP**: The Commission and participating Member States could also advance efforts to restrict *international* public finance for unabated fossil fuels through the Clean Energy Transition Partnership (Daley 2026). The partnership was launched at COP26 in Glasgow in 2021. Although it is led by the United Kingdom, several EU Member States (including France, Germany, Italy, and Spain) have signed on to its pledge, as has the European Investment Bank, an EU body. Participating Member States should ensure they meet their commitments (Jones et al. 2025) and, together with the Commission, seek to attract other Member States as participants.
- **BOGA**: Likewise, the Commission and Member States could support another key initiative in which an EU Member State already plays a leading role, namely BOGA, which is co-chaired by Denmark with the Canadian province of Québec. BOGA was founded in 2021 and launched at COP26 with the aim to end new licenses for oil and gas production and set end dates for extraction (Schell et al. 2026). Among other activities, it supports Global South governments in their exploration of development pathways beyond oil and gas through the BOGA Fund, working with the NDC Partnership (BOGA n.d.; BOGA 2026). Chad, Kazakhstan, and Trinidad and Tobago have already established new programmes under this initiative. In addition to Denmark, several EU Member States are core members of BOGA (France, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden), and Finland, Italy, and Luxembourg serve as "Friends of BOGA". Although it may be difficult for the Commission to join as a core member (as it would have to meet certain criteria such as setting a phase-out date for oil and gas production), the Commission could signal its support by joining as a "Friend".

A third priority, particularly in light of the ongoing volatility in fossil fuel markets, would be for the EU to leverage its legacy oil and gas imports in a dialogue with suppliers to incentivise them to decarbonise and diversify their economies, working through the OECD's EFFECT initiative as well as new bilateral arrangements (see Section 3.2). The EFFECT initiative was launched at COP27 in 2022. Its framework consists of three interrelated pillars: (1) decarbonising extractives and managing uncertainties, (2) sustainable fossil fuel exit strategies and just transition plans, and (3) systemic change and economy-wide decarbonisation (OECD 2022). At COP30, the OECD launched the "Plan to Accelerate Collaborative Exporter-Importer Governance for Shared Prosperity Post-Fossil Fuels" (OECD Development Centre 2025), which by 2028 seeks to: (1) establish a blueprint on collaborative exporter-importer governance through a multi-stakeholder consultative process, (2) have up to two partnerships up and running by COP31, and (3) facilitate importer-exporter dialogue and experience sharing. Through the EFFECT initiative, the European Commission can thus learn lessons and disseminate experiences on partnerships with suppliers in support of their transition away from fossil fuels.

Lastly, the Commission should further develop its own international initiatives towards the energy transition. This includes the Global Energy Transition Forum, launched in January

2025 at the World Economic Forum in Davos (European Commission 2025a). The initiative brings together countries including Brazil, Canada, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Kenya, Peru, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United Arab Emirates. The threefold goal of the initiative is to feed global energy targets into NDCs, transform targets into concrete projects, and to unlock more investment. In addition, the EU should re-invigorate JETPs and put real money behind them, in the form of grants rather than loans. JETPs are plurilateral initiatives to support fossil-fuel dependent countries to support their energy transition. The EU was one of the key international partners for the first JETP with South Africa, which was launched at COP26 in Glasgow in 2021. It also supports JETPs with Indonesia, Senegal, and Vietnam that were launched shortly after (Directorate-General for Climate Action et al. 2025). However, Indonesia's quiet abandonment of plans to close its Cirebon-1 Coal plant, a key part of its JETP, has raised questions about this approach (Daley & Lawrie 2026). The Commission should learn lessons from the first few years of JETP implementation, and consider how these initiatives can be strengthened.

3.2 Developing new coalitions

In addition to existing coalitions, the EU can help fill governance gaps by leading or contributing to new relevant coalitions.

A first priority for the EU would be to produce its own TAFF roadmap and build on that to form a coalition to support the adoption and implementation of such roadmaps. The lack of national and regional roadmaps that are aligned with parties' NDCs and Long-Term Low Emission Development Strategies (LT-LEDS) under the Paris Agreement was a key gap highlighted in Santa Marta. As noted in Section 1, France, Germany, and the Netherlands have already published their own TAFF roadmaps. Moreover, in its submission to the Brazilian Presidency on a global roadmap, the EU pointed to Member States' experiences that could inform the development of a global roadmap (EU 2026a). Accordingly, the EU can lead the way by developing its own roadmap aligned with its NDC, LT-LEDS, and domestic legal and policy framework, including its 2040 target and other relevant EU policies such as the Commission's Electrification Action Plan. An EU-wide roadmap would not only be an important signal to the market and other countries, but it could also serve as a starting point for building a broader coalition of countries to develop national and regional roadmaps, potentially working through the NDC Partnership. Such a coalition could specifically identify and share principles and best practices in the development of national and regional roadmaps (e.g., Picciariello et al. 2026).

Second, building on initiatives such as EFFECT (see Section 3.2), the EU should explore the idea of producer-consumer (or buyer-seller/importer-exporter) coalitions. The EU should seek to form an alliance with other large fossil fuel importers and consumers that have an

incentive to move away from fossil fuel for economic and energy security reasons, to enhance its impact and build an inclusive narrative around TAFF. The Global Energy Transition Forum is one possible venue for such discussions, in addition to bilateral dialogues to be pursued with China and India. These coalitions can build on existing initiatives that bring together fossil fuel producers and consumers, such as the EFFECT initiative.

In parallel, the EU could pursue bilateral cooperation in the form of "structured bilateral agreements with key supplier countries in North Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia, coupling a gradual, predictable reduction in fossil-fuel trade with targeted support for renewable energy, carbon sequestration and low-carbon industrial development" (Van de Graaf 2026b, p. 338). This would allow the EU to mitigate fossil fuel supply shocks, align its domestic TAFF planning with third countries, and offer trade and other economic incentives for these countries in return for phasing down production. Equity considerations can be built in the choice of suppliers, for example favouring small, low-income producers that have not benefited from oil rents and require revenues to diversify their economies, along with security, political, and industrial policy considerations. As EU Member States are in charge of external energy policy, this will require careful coordination by the Commission, in particularly DG ENER and DG CLIMA. Such coordination was already called for in the 2026 AccelerateEU Communication (European Commission 2026), but could be further strengthened through a dedicated fossil fuel supply strategy (Van de Graaf 2026a).

Lastly, the EU could explore a coalition to tackle the challenges posed by investor-state dispute settlement to fossil fuel phase-out measures. Participants in Santa Marta drew attention to the need to reform the investment treaty system, and particularly the need to address ISDS (Colombia & the Netherlands 2026b). The EU is well positioned to contribute to coalitions seeking investment treaty reforms that support TAFF. The EU, along several Member States, has already withdrawn from the Energy Charter Treaty (ECT), following concerns that the treaty's ISDS procedure stymied climate policy measures in the fossil fuel sector. For instance, under the ECT the Netherlands was challenged by the utilities RWE and Uniper for its coal phase-out policy (though both cases were discontinued), and Slovenia was challenged by a fracking company for requiring an environmental impact assessment for an oil and gas field. At the same time, many bilateral investment treaties are still in place between Member States and third countries, particularly in the Global South, posing a barrier to TAFF in these countries (Lee & Dilworth 2024). Drawing on its experience with the ECT withdrawal, the EU could aim to build a coalition to remove access to ISDS for fossil fuel investors in existing investment treaties, remove ISDS altogether in such treaties, or pursue a coordinated withdrawal (Tienhaara et al. 2025). However, diverging Member State positions on ISDS – as highlighted also in the initial takeaways by the Santa Marta co-hosts (Colombia & the Netherlands 2026a) – may hamper a unified position by the EU on this matter.

3.3 Engagement in the UNFCCC

Another international forum where the EU should advance the discussion on TAFF is the UNFCCC. Although the Santa Marta process was designed to run in parallel to the international climate negotiations, it will be important to connect its topics to the UNFCCC process. The EU can do so in three ways.

First, the EU should seek to ensure that the second GST – which starts at COP31 in 2026 and will conclude at COP33 in 2028 – addresses how the outcome of the first GST (including the call for TAFF) has been taken up nationally and in international cooperation. Doing so keeps TAFF on the agenda at the next three COPs, and would create an enduring hook through which TAFF can be discussed in a UNFCCC context. Moreover, as this option would not focus solely on TAFF, but rather the uptake of all outcomes of the first GST (including for example on climate finance), this option may also be more palatable to other parties.

Second, the EU should promote the uptake of TAFF in informal initiatives, including the Brazilian COP30 roadmap, the Belém Mission to 1.5, and the Global Climate Action Agenda:

- **Brazilian COP30 roadmap:** The EU can support efforts to follow up on the recommendations of the Brazilian COP30 roadmap by endorsing its findings, implementing relevant recommendations in its domestic policies and external action, and encouraging others to do so.
- **Belém Mission to 1.5:** The EU can also ensure that policy options focused on reducing the supply of and demand for fossil fuels are considered in the new Belém Mission to 1.5 initiative by the COP30 Presidency. This initiative seeks, among others, to enable ambition and implementation of NDCs, and strengthen international cooperation to this end. The EU's submission to the call for inputs to the Belém Mission already flagged fossil fuel subsidies, TAFF, and methane emissions as "areas of tran[s]formative solutions with high mitigation potential" (EU 2026b, p. 8). A report on the Belém Mission is due before COP31. However, it remains to be seen whether any follow-up process will be agreed upon at COP31, meaning that the potential of this avenue may be limited.
- **Global Climate Action Agenda:** The EU could further ensure that cooperative initiatives focused on fossil fuels are supported as part of the Global Climate Action Agenda (GCAA) and the related Global Implementation Accelerator (the latter being another initiative by the COP30 Presidency). The Global Climate Action Agenda comprises commitments and initiatives by a range of non-state actors and cooperative initiatives, driven by topic-specific "activation groups" that include TAFF (COP30 2025). The TAFF-related initiatives include some of the ones mentioned above, such as BOGA, the Global Methane Pledge, the PPCA, COFFIS, and EFFECT. These initiatives could be further supported by the Global Implementation Accelerator under the auspices of the COP30 and COP31 Presidencies, which seeks to promote GCAA solutions with the "highest

potential to trigger positive tipping points and drive transformative change at a global scale" (COP31 and COP30 Presidencies 2026), which could include solutions promoted by the various initiatives addressing fossil fuels.

These informal initiatives do not require consensus, and as such it may be feasible for the EU to advance discussions on TAFF in these contexts.

Third, it may nevertheless be worthwhile exploring ways in which the EU could raise TAFF in the context of formal negotiations. This includes ongoing discussions under the Just Transition Work Programme, in particular in relation to the Just Transition Mechanism agreed at COP30, which could be operationalised at COP31. Although the mandate and scope of this mechanism are still subject to negotiations, and its remit will not be restricted to TAFF, the EU could push to ensure that its objectives and scope are sufficiently broad to support countries in pursuing a just, orderly, and equitable transition away from fossil fuels at the domestic level. Another part of the UNFCCC process where the EU could raise the issue of TAFF is the Mitigation Work Programme. However, although the Mitigation Work Programme is a part of the formal negotiations, progress has been very limited due to ongoing disagreement as to the scope of the programme, particularly whether it should address sectoral actions (including to transition away from fossil fuels), and its future beyond COP31 is still uncertain (C2ES 2026). More generally, given the resistance to "sectoral" discussions or fossil fuel-focused discussions in recent COPs, it is likely that trying to integrate TAFF in any formal process (particularly one that may lead to a formal output in the form of a COP decision) would be an uphill battle.

4. Options for domestic action

In addition to international cooperation, the EU can pursue domestic reforms, both at the EU and at the Member State level, to pursue a transition away from fossil fuels. Three options at the EU level stand out.

First and most importantly, the EU should seek to integrate measures to transition away from fossil fuels in the framework for EU climate law and policy. The Regulation on the Governance of the Energy Union and Climate Action (Governance Regulation) requires Member States to develop long-term strategies (LTSs) covering at least 30 years as well as 10-yearly integrated national energy and climate plans (NECPs, which are to be updated every 5 years). European Commission Guidance already suggests that Member States' NECPs should reflect "several decisions on energy and climate planning, including the phasing down of coal power, the phasing out of fossil fuel subsidies, and the consideration of further actions to reduce non-CO_2 emissions, including methane, by 2030" (European Commission 2022). Moreover, in their biennial NECP progress reports Member States are required to report on "national objectives to phase out energy subsidies, in particular for fossil fuels" (European Commission 2018, Art. 25).

In a recent review of the Governance Regulation, the Commission concluded that the Regulation should "incentivise the phase-out of fossil fuels and fossil fuel subsidies" (European Commission 2025b, p. 13). The upcoming revision of the Regulation thus offers a clear opportunity to agree on requirements for Member States to integrate TAFF roadmaps and strengthen measures to phase out fossil fuel subsidies in their NECPs and LTSs, commit to pursuing related key performance indicators (see also Section 3.2), and provide guidance on how to do so. The need for strengthening NECP guidance on fossil fuel subsidies was acknowledged in the Commission's 2026 Work Programme (European Commission 2025c, Annex I, point 8). Irrespectively, individual Member States could explicitly set goals for phasing out fossil fuels and fossil fuel subsidies in their domestic climate legislation.

Second and closely related to the suggestion to update NECP guidance, the EU should also consider other measures targeted specifically at fossil fuel subsidies. The EU's 8th Environmental Action Programme already established a mandate for "phasing out environmentally harmful subsidies, in particular fossil fuel subsidies, at Union, national, regional and local level, without delay" (EU 2021, Art. 3(h)). However, the European Environment Agency (EEA 2025, p. 73) finds that the EU is currently "likely off track" to meet this benchmark by 2030, and the Commission itself concluded that while half of the Member States partially address the Commission's recommendations on fossil fuel subsidies, "a list of existing fossil fuel subsidies, concrete timelines, and measures to phase them out are largely missing" (European Commission 2025d, p. 4). In addition to updating the NECP guidance in the context of the revision of the Governance Regulation, reform of

the Energy Taxation Directive could also remove perverse tax incentives for fossil fuel use (Schell et al. 2026). However, although the Commission already tabled a proposal in 2021, any amendment to the Directive would require unanimity within the Council as a fiscal measure; this has so far proven impossible notwithstanding attempts by several Council Presidencies.

Third, the EU should defend the policies it has developed to address emissions from fossil fuel production. A flagship policy in this space is the 2023 Methane Regulation. The Regulation requires monitoring and reporting of methane emissions in the oil, gas, and coal sectors in the EU. Moreover, the Regulation applies to methane imports, with importers required, initially, to implement monitoring, reporting, and verification requirements, followed by reporting on methane intensity, and, ultimately, meeting methane intensity standards. This application to importers has led to significant pressure from oil and gas companies and the United States government to loosen the rules (Munster 2026). The Commission has indicated that it will seek to delay the implementation of the regulation, but it will be important to ensure that this delay is kept to a minimum and that the core of the regulation remains intact (see also Van de Graaf 2026a). Another area under pressure concerns fossil fuel exploration in the Arctic. In 2021, the EU adopted its Arctic Policy, in which it committed to "push for oil, coal and gas to remain in the ground, including in Arctic regions" (European Commission 2021, p. 11). Five years later, this commitment came under pressure in the context of an update of the policy (Heubeck 2026). However, the European Commission has indicated that the moratorium will remain in place (Euronews 2026), thereby sending "a clear signal that Europe's long-term security and prosperity lie in accelerating the energy transition – not expanding frontier fossil fuel extraction in one of the planet's most vulnerable regions" (Jones & Yanguas Parra 2026, p. 2). Other areas of EU environmental law and policy are also increasingly under pressure for competitiveness and other economic reasons. It will be important for EU institutions – the Commission, Council, and Parliament – to ensure that the EU's "simplification" drive does not bring about fossil fuel expansion. Indeed, it can be argued that new fossil fuel projects would in fact be precluded under prevailing EU law, such as the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive (Kaupa 2024).

5. Conclusions

The outgoing UN Secretary-General António Guterres recently underscored that "the costs of fossil fuels are measured not only in climate disasters, but also in energy insecurity and geopolitical instability" (UN 2026). Following the second major fossil fuel crisis in just a few years, the EU and its Member States are all too aware of this. Transitioning away from fossil fuels is therefore not only important for the EU's climate leadership aspirations and for meeting its international legal obligations, but also for its longer-term energy security.

In the absence of progress on TAFF within the UNFCCC process, the Santa Marta process, as well as various issue-specific international coalitions offer important opportunities to ensure that the EU acts in concert with other state and non-state actors. Following an overview of the outcomes of the Santa Marta conference, this policy brief highlights several areas where the EU and its Member States could make meaningful contributions:

- The EU could strengthen the TAFF conference process by supporting the Government of Ireland in the organisation of the second TAFF conference and by broadening the participant base ahead of the conference.
- EU Member States and the Commission can support initiatives led by, or prominently involving, Member States, including notably COFFIS, BOGA, and the CETP.
- The European Commission could strengthen Member State coordination in pursuit of bilateral or plurilateral producer-consumer coalitions, leveraging the EU's legacy oil and gas imports in a dialogue with its suppliers to incentivise them to decarbonise and diversify their economies away from fossil fuels.
- Following the lead from some Member States, the European Commission could pioneer an EU-wide TAFF roadmap that is integrated with its NDC and LT-LEDS, and support the emergence of a broader coalition of countries developing such roadmaps.
- Within the UNFCCC process, the EU could advocate the uptake of the outcomes of the first GST in the second one, thereby ensuring that TAFF remains on the formal agenda. In addition, the EU can support informal ways of integrating TAFF, including through the COP30 Presidency's roadmap, the Belém Mission to 1.5, and the GCAA.
- Domestic action should complement the EU's international cooperative efforts. There is significant potential in the upcoming revision of the Governance Regulation to strengthen not only the phase-out of fossil fuel subsidies, but TAFF more broadly. In addition, the EU should ensure the full implementation of existing measures that regulate emissions from fossil fuel production, including the Methane Regulation.

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