

POLICY BRIEF (March 2026)

Expectations towards the Santa Marta Conference on Just Transitioning Away from Fossil Fuels

Key message:

The Santa Marta conference comes at a moment when strong political and diplomatic leadership is urgently needed in the face of escalating violence and geopolitical tension. CAN Europe stands in solidarity with the people of Iran and the wider region, who are facing the devastating human cost of escalating violence and war, as well as authoritarian oppression – including human rights defenders who, for many years, have faced repression for standing up for fundamental rights and freedom. Beyond the devastating human toll, the conflict has once again exposed how fragile Europe's dependence on expensive and risky imported fossil fuels is. Co-hosted by the Colombian and Dutch governments, the Santa Marta Conference comes at a critical moment for both European and Global South governments to address continued dependence on unstable fossil fuels. The Conference must deliver a clear signal: the fossil fuel era is ending, and governments must act now to plan a fast, fair, and people-centred transition, grounded in international law, human rights, and stronger diplomatic cooperation between countries. There can be no lasting peace in a fossil fuel economy.

Context:

Plurilateral leadership among small and middle powers is increasingly important as international cooperation comes under strain, including from the current US administration's efforts to undermine climate action. Coalitions of willing countries have already demonstrated their value in responding to geopolitical crises and advancing cooperation, including support for Ukraine.

In the climate and energy space, initiatives such as the Beyond Oil and Gas Alliance (BOGA), Powering Past Coal Alliance (PPCA), Coalition on Fossil Fuel Incentives and Subsidies (COFFIS) and Global Energy Transition Forum provide platforms to coordinate action and build political momentum towards fossil fuel phase-out. Emerging initiatives, including discussions around a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty, highlight the growing recognition of the need for international governance frameworks addressing fossil fuel production and expansion. The Santa Marta Conference presents the opportunity to reinforce and give rise to new initiatives, provided they deliver added value, with robust governance, impact monitoring and alignment with the UNFCCC and other multilateral rules-based processes. For example, strengthening the Brazilian COP30 Presidency-led Roadmap for Transitioning Away from Fossil Fuels in Energy Systems will be key, as a next step towards a strong international framework and potentially a future treaty.

Countries in Latin America and the Pacific are playing a central role in driving momentum. Colombia's leadership on the Belém Declaration and the Brazilian COP30 Presidency's work are advancing international cooperation. Pacific nations, led by Vanuatu, are further strengthening legal momentum through a UN General Assembly resolution welcoming the International Court of Justice Advisory Opinion on climate obligations. The EU and its Member States have also played a key coalition-building role, including through the Belém Declaration and the launch of the Santa Marta Conference process.

CAN Europe expectations for the Santa Marta Conference:

European active participation will be critical to sustain momentum. The EU has a strong foundation in its climate and energy policies, which, if reinforced and aligned with setting a clear fossil fuel phaseout framework, can accelerate the transition and boost international momentum. The Commission, Member States, and like-minded countries should attend at ministerial level, announce concrete commitments, and strengthen dialogue with partner countries to build momentum on international cooperation.

CAN Europe highlights five priorities for the Conference:

<p>Launch a global fossil fuel phase-out roadmap</p>	<p>Santa Marta should advance the Brazil COP30 Presidency-led Roadmap for Transitioning Away from Fossil Fuels in Energy Systems</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commit to working towards clear timelines to end fossil fuel expansion and phase out production and consumption • Strengthen the coalition of countries committed to ending fossil fuel dependence and supporting the Global Methane Pledge • Support an open and inclusive process that enables the exploration of all forms of international cooperation for a just and equitable transition away from fossil fuels, including initiatives complimentary to the Paris Agreement and a potential future treaty.
<p>Accelerate the European fossil fuel phase-out</p>	<p>Europe has already shown that fossil fuel dependence can be reduced rapidly, including through the reduction of Russian gas imports since 2022.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commit to phasing out coal by 2030, fossil gas by 2035, and reaching 100% renewable energy across all sectors by 2040 • Deliver a clear EU framework for fossil gas phase-out, building on annual demand reductions achieved since 2022 and cutting the EU's gas demand by a significant 20%. Phase out Russian fossil gas imports by 2027. Introduce as well a phase out objective for US LNG imports in the early 2030s. • Anchor a phase out framework with the above mentioned measures in the Energy Security and Governance Regulation revisions. • Stop any deregulation attempts on the EU Methane Regulation and ensure strong implementation in Member States.
<p>Finance for a just energy transition</p>	<p>A global fossil fuel phase-out requires significantly greater financial support and addressing barriers in developing countries.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Member states should announce planned contributions to international climate finance for 2026–2035 to deliver the \$300 billion NCQG target; the new EU budget Global Europe Instrument must play a key role • Increase fiscal space in developing countries, since sovereign debt burdens reinforce fossil fuel lock-in, by working towards a UN Debt Convention

<p>End fossil fuel subsidies and tax fossil fuel profits</p>	<p>Public finance continues to sustain fossil fuel production and consumption worldwide.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At EU-level deliver a binding and harmonised fossil fuel subsidy phase-out framework covering the Governance Regulation, EU budget, State Aid framework and Energy Taxation Directive • Introduce at EU-wide fossil fuel profit tax • Address fossil fuel profit taxation through the UN Tax Convention
<p>Remove legal barriers to a fossil fuel phase-out</p>	<p>Investor-state dispute settlement (ISDS) creates a systemic barrier to a just transition away from fossil fuels.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commit to not include ISDS in future agreements, as well as to review existing treaties and explore options for terminating or withdrawing from treaties with ISDS, ideally agreeing with treaty partners to neutralise 'sunset clauses'. • Support or join an ISDS-free alliance: a coalition of governments committed to exploring collective disengagement from ISDS.

Conclusion

- The Santa Marta Conference is a critical opportunity on the global fossil fuel transition and should also catalyse development of a clear domestic fossil fuel phaseout framework for the EU.
- Governments must send a clear signal that fossil fuel expansion has no place in a 1.5°C-aligned world, and should support that the outcomes feed into the COP30 TAFF roadmap process.
- The EU has a particular responsibility and opportunity to actively contribute to the successful initiation at Santa Marta of a policy process towards phasing out fossil fuels.
- Outcomes must ensure that the transition is fair, inclusive and supported by international cooperation. Santa Marta can accelerate the shift towards a just and resilient global energy system that is 100% renewable.

