

42 | November 27, 2024

IENE Comment

An alternative view of UN's COP on Climate Change



An alternative view of UN's COP on Climate Change

*By Costis Stambolis **

Having spend three days last week at COP29 in Azerbaijan, and having followed closely its proceedings, before and after, I went away with a feeling of despair. Surely major global problems such as climate change which affect the life of all of us cannot be resolved by convening massive type festive events such as the annual UN organised Conference of the Parties (COP) latest event held in Baku (November 11-22) which according to the organisers was attended by more than 55,000 delegates. (lower than last year's COP in Dubai where attendance reached 70,000!)

Of course, the plenary sessions, committee meetings and side events at COP29 where the actual dialogue took place was attended by far fewer people, but the distraction caused by the endless moving around of thousands of people at any given moment coloured by impromptu happenings, was enough to dissuade any thoughtful and good willing delegate to engage in any meaningful discussion on action that needs to be taken at regional and global level. Which was the prime reason of my visit to Baku, as was also the subject of my presentation at a side event, on "Lessons learned and experiences gained in decarbonisation in South East Europe". ([link](#))

With the main lesson- derived from years long research on the subject- being that in spite of billions of euros spend on renewables and energy efficiency investments the regional energy mix in SE Europe (which counts 14 countries including Türkiye) continues to be heavily dependent, to the tune of 79%, on fossils fuels. With only a minor loss of 3% contribution by fossil fuels in the mix over the last 15 years or so, and with the rest of energy demand covered by renewables and biofuels (17%) and nuclear (4%). As was expected overall CO2 level reduction in the region was minimal during this time (estimated at less than 1%) as electricity (where all RES input goes) still corresponds to a small fraction of gross or final energy consumption.

With energy security being by far the main concern of the countries in the region, as indeed in many countries in other parts of the world, the inclusion of coal and lignite for power generation and oil in transport will persist for years to come, thus raising serious concerns on how energy transition can materialise.

In this vein representatives of western governments and the EU have blasted oil producing nations at the COP29 summit for evading any mention of fossil fuels in important documents on action to be taken to lower emissions, consequently, the omission of any reference in key

documents of plans to “transition away from fossil fuels” attracted heavy criticism with delegates accusing petroleum producing states of renegeing on promises made in last year’s COP at Dubai.

At the same time many people who very willingly traveled to Azerbaijan for COP29 have criticised President Ilham Aliyev and his government of hypocrisy since in their view a major oil and gas producing state should never have undertaken organising an event whose prime goal is supposedly to steer away the global community away from fossil fuel extraction. However, I believe that such criticism is unfair since there are not that many countries willing to bankroll such a massive and hugely expensive events.

With Azerbaijan having of late emerged as a key gas supplier to the EU as the block is trying to wean itself of its dependence from Russian gas imports, and its energy agenda having seriously expanded to include large scale renewables and energy efficiency projects in an effort to differentiate its energy mix, its government has every reason to want to get involved in key decision making processes by the international community, such as COP, as it is eager to safeguard its energy options of tomorrow.

If we are to avoid such controversies over host governments commitment to energy transition while stepping up efforts to actually tackle climate change, the U.N. should urgently re examine the organisation format of COP meetings. Above all it must stop convening populous, festive and grandiose type events and instead focus on the main agenda and discussion exclusively at government level in its excellent facilities in New York or Geneva or elsewhere. Stake holders and civil society groups can still participate in the process by submitting written proposals to the COP secretariat and by holding online calls or even by organising their own separate mega event- although they will struggle to find an eager sponsor to fund it at the level of today’s COP extravaganza. Any serious UN backed global effort in moving forward with climate change prevention and mitigation should put an end to jamboree like events.

**** Costis Stambolis is the Chairman and Executive Director of the Institute of Energy for SE Europe (IENE)***

The “IENE Comment” is an occasional communication published by IENE in its effort to broaden the dialogue on current energy issues of regional and global interest. Contributions to the “IENE Comment” may come from published sources but also from original material contributed by IENE newsletter editors and associates. Interested contributors may send material attention to the Editor, IENE Comment at marketing@iene.gr.

IENE Comment – NOVEMBER 27, 2024 - Issue No.42– ISSN:179-9163

IENE Comment is published by the INSTITUTE OF ENERGY FOR SOUTH-EAST EUROPE (IENE)

3, Alex. Soutsou Str. 106 71 Athens, Greece, T: +30-210 3628457, 3640278, F: +30 210 3646144, marketing@iene.gr, www.iene.eu

© 2024 Institute of Energy for South East Europe All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, scanned into an electronic retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying and recording, without the written permission of the publish.