

COP21



Week 1: This week I am still at 'home' (and work) and from behind my desk I follow the unfolding events at COP21. On the first day, on the train home, I try to listen to the live broadcast of the heads of state, who have come together in Paris on this first day of the conference to deliver speeches of expectations and hope. Over the week the stream of news is continuous, and blogs from colleagues at PBL and YES-DC-ers who were in the delegation in the first week give me all sorts of tips on where to find the schedules, and inform me about transportation, registration, etc., before I'm due to arrive.

Week 2: Filled with excitement and a sense of about something 'grand' to happen, I travel to Paris on the Sunday preceding week 2. Arriving in Gare-du-Nord some North-African looking people are 'randomly' checked for passports and have their bags searched. Suddenly I am embarrassed to be of European descent, and undisturbed I reach the airbnb apartment that will be my home for the next few days. Even on the 'free' Sunday, COP21-related events happen, and I hasten myself to the Eiffel Tower, next to which a 'Transportation Day' takes place.

On Monday morning finally it is my honour and pleasure to take the metro and shuttle bus to the conference venue. Registration and check-in are a walk in the park, and after picking up my badge, goody bag-from-reused-sweater-material with reusable water bottle, transportation card, and a capuccino, I settle down with my laptop to take a last good look at the programmes and finalise my plan for the day. The venue is enormous. In two plenary halls and a hall filled with 'small' meeting rooms, the negotiations take place. In two other halls, media and official side events — along with a fair of all sorts of information booths from NGOs, student- and other organisations — are hosted. And in the last two halls the pavilions of countries, unions, and other stakeholders are located.

In setting my schedule for the day, I limit myself mostly to the EU and German pavilion, business hub, negotiation meetings, and the official side events. Just so I don't spend more time making the schedule than on the actual events. At 10:30 the first side event (selected in my agenda) starts. Ecofys introduces their report on "Driving regional cooperation forward in the EU's 2030 renewable energy framework", and a panel discussion follows. Especially the discussion is enlightening and encouraging. A few choice quotes: Paula Abreu Marques: "Renewables is already economic. All policy has to do now is remove the barriers and put enabling policy in place."

Claude Turmes: "Individual countries will not lose, only individual lobbies may lose."

Angelina Galiteva: "Incumbents are very strong. Stranded assets have a very loud voice. But overwhelmingly there are winners when it comes to renewables."

This format seems to be fairly typical to many side events. The choice of interesting talks and events is enormous, and sometimes I wonder if this is to distract people from the negotiations. Determined not to let this happen, I make my way to the negotiation halls, hurry past our fresh minister (staatssecretaris) of I&M Sharon Dijksma, who is being followed by NPO journalists, only to find that these days most negotiations are invisible. Topics on schedule for the meeting rooms change all the time, and when I arrive at such a meeting (half an hour past starting time, admittedly) it has fallen apart in little groups, and I have no idea what exactly happens.

Gradually I come to terms with the scale of the event and find my way more easily. The contrast between the circus around the events, and the seriousness and depth of the discussions during some of the events, is enormous. The music at the Caribbean pavilion brings a smile to my face every time I pass it. Some activists have laid out a green and a red carpet, encouraging passersby to choose for a 1.5C scenario with early review of the INDCs to make it possible, versus the 2C scenario with a late review. The crowd cheers when another governmental hot shot followed by a camera walks over the green carpet. Sounds are

positive and optimistic, and I am encouraged by so many stating that the economic argument against taking action towards a more sustainable future is no longer valid. Lord Nicolas Stern (THE Stern) in fact is adamant that the answer to the question: “Climate action and a successful economy. An oxymoron?” is a clear and loud “NO”. Everything taken into account, renewables are cheaper than fossil solutions, smart solutions better than maintaining the old system in parallel, and he argues that “Clear, strong, determined policy from the top is key”. This is a wise man.

In one of the plenary rooms Al Gore gives an invigorating speech – say what you want about him, but he is a convincing speaker. The next time I am in the plenary (overflow) room, as I watch the presentation by the COP President, of the draft agreement, it suddenly hits me. This text is an effort written by 195 countries. Clearly, knowing it and feeling it is not the same, and I am finally internalizing the unlikelihood of this event. Some of my colleagues are actively involved in the side events and can also shed some more light on the process and progress of the negotiations. The excitement is almost tangible.

After long days of talks, information, and suspense, I take a train back to Amsterdam and read the draft report of the agreement. The whole is still inconsistent according to science, but it is a draft after all, and negotiators continue to be informed by the scientists around them trying to iron out the kinks. On Saturday morning I awake with a shock and the first thing I do is check my phone to see if the final agreement has come out. It hasn't yet, and is again postponed to the evening. When at 19:00 on 12 December 2015 finally the text is presented by COP President Laurent Fabius it is final: a historical agreement has been reached!



Conference venue



green=1.5 C, red=2C



Speech Al Gore