

TÜRKİYE'S EMERGING ROLE IN GLOBAL CLIMATE GOVERNANCE AT COP31

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- ♦ What were the dominant themes on the agenda at COP30?
 - ♦ Why was Australia not selected to host COP31?
- ♦ How did Türkiye emerge as the deal-maker in the COP31 hosting battle?
 - ♦ How is Türkiye's rising climate profile taking shape?

The 30th Conference of the Parties (COP30), held in Belém, Brazil, once again brought countries together to advance collective action against climate change. This year's conference revolved around the increasingly contentious debate on "phasing out fossil fuels," framed by broader discussions on climate finance, just transition and adaptation. However, COP30 carried a particular significance for Türkiye: the host country for COP31 to be held in 2026, would be decided. The competition between Türkiye and Australia, both officially announced their candidacy in 2022, was ultimately resolved through an unprecedented formula in the history of climate diplomacy.

THE DOMINANT THEMES DISCUSSED AT COP30: THE BATTLE OVER PHASING OUT FOSSIL FUELS AND THE LONG-STANDING CLIMATE FINANCE DEFICIT

Fossil energy sources such as oil, natural gas and coal—long debated under the broader heading of environmental pollution—are now increasingly expected

to be phased out entirely as global warming accelerates. Yet, a large number of countries, including major fossil fuel producers and exporters as well as many developing economies, continue to resist such a decision.

The COP26 summit held in Glasgow in 2021 was the conference that came closest to an explicit decision to phase out the use of fossil fuels. In the final decision text, however, the commitment to "phase out" coal consumption was diluted to "phase down" under pressure from a group of countries led by India. In the following years, rising opposition at conferences hosted by major oil and gas producers such as Egypt, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Azerbaijan prevented this language from being strengthened.

COP28, held in Dubai in 2023, was the latest example of this trend: the summit concluded with a decision to "transition away from fossil fuels in a just, orderly and equitable manner." It was hardly surprising that such a formulation emerged from a climate conference chaired by the head of the UAE's national oil company. Long before the summit convened, the country's role as host had been heavily criticized in

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light of its position in global oil markets. Azerbaijan, which hosted COP29 the following year, was likewise subject to criticism, albeit to a lesser extent. With conferences being held consecutively in hydrocarbon-producing countries, the prospect of an impartial stance on phasing out fossil fuels was widely seen as limited. This year, Brazil's role as host—given its significant place in global oil production—has also come under scrutiny.

In the draft text circulated before the conference concluded, several alternative formulations referring to scenarios for phasing out fossil fuels were still on the table. Throughout the summit, more than 80 countries – including the EU, the United Kingdom and Colombia – pushed hard to insert language into the Mutirão outcome on a “fossil fuel roadmap” or a “transition away from fossil fuels.” In addition, Belém's proximity to the Amazon basin – and the mounting damage suffered by the Amazon rainforest as a result of global warming – had fueled expectations that the Brazilian presidency would adopt a distinctly anti-fossil fuel stance. However, a bloc led by Saudi Arabia, Russia, India and other major producing and exporting countries declared any reference to fossil fuels in the agreement a “red line,” and in the end more than 100 countries closed the door on that option. As a result, both explicit mentions of “fossil fuels” and any reference to a “roadmap process” were removed from the final text.

On the finance front, COP30 produced what can best be described as incremental but insufficient progress. The Global Mutirão / Belém Package calls for efforts to at least triple adaptation finance by 2035 relative to 2025 levels, signaling political intent rather than creating a legally binding obligation. Read alongside the “Baku to Belém Roadmap to 1.3T,” this outcome envisages scaling annual climate finance for developing countries to a minimum of USD 1.3 trillion by 2035, although the roadmap remains largely indicative and falls short of firm compliance mechanisms.

On loss and damage, Belém consolidated the emerging architecture around three pillars—the War-

saw International Mechanism, the Santiago Network and the new Loss and Damage Fund—by clarifying roles and providing guidance on the Fund's governance and operations. Yet, the crucial questions of volume, predictability and speed of disbursement remain largely unanswered. Taken together, COP30 modestly strengthened the institutional framework for adaptation and loss-and-damage finance, but left the underlying climate finance gap structurally intact, reinforcing the sense that progress is real but still far behind the scale and urgency of needs.

THE DILEMMA OF FOSSIL FUELS GIANT: REASONS WHY AUSTRALIA WAS NOT SELECTED TO HOST THE COP31

The question of who would host COP31 was one of the key political issues on the agenda in Belém. Two countries that had formally announced their candidacies as early as 2022—Türkiye and Australia—engaged in intensive diplomatic outreach to secure the organization. In the end, a formula was crafted that points to a new phase in climate diplomacy: Türkiye was chosen to host the conference and hold the COP presidency, while Australia was selected to lead the negotiations.

At Antalya COP31, the formal presidency will rest with Türkiye, meaning that Ankara will shape the summit's political narrative, overarching priorities and public-facing “vitrine.” Australia's Climate Change Minister Chris Bowen, who will effectively steer the negotiations, will serve as the operational nerve center of the process—coordinating technical bargaining, drafting cycles and text management. In this way, Türkiye positions itself as both host and political agenda-setter in global climate diplomacy, while at the same time smartly sharing the heavy day-to-day burden of negotiations with Australia.

Australia's prospective role as host continued to draw criticism until the very last moment. According to 2024 data, the country ranked as the world's largest exporter of both liquefied natural gas and coal.

Fears that this “fossil fuel giant” would organize a conference similar in tone to previous COPs held in hydrocarbon-producing and -exporting countries formed the core of the objections. The Australian government’s failure to adopt a strong stance on phasing out fossil fuels in Belém was widely interpreted as confirmation that these concerns were not misplaced. Warnings from within Australia itself that the summit could provide a platform for fossil fuel lobbyists further fueled the perception that COP31 risked turning into a de facto fossil fuel fair. Faced with objections from a group of countries including several Western European states, Australia was ultimately forced to step back, paving the way for Türkiye to remain as the sole candidate.

TÜRKİYE’S EMERGING ROLE AS DEAL-MAKER IN THE COP31 HOSTING BATTLE

With both Türkiye and Australia putting themselves forward as candidates to host COP31, selecting the venue required one of the two to withdraw its bid. Türkiye had previously been a candidate to host COP26, but ultimately chose to step aside in favor of the United Kingdom, leading to that conference being held in Glasgow. This time, Ankara made it clear it had no intention of withdrawing a second time: it proposed a joint hosting arrangement to Australia, signaling its determination to remain in the race. The offer, however, was rejected by the Australian government. Under the combined pressure of a compressed negotiating calendar and mounting criticism focused on its fossil fuel profile, Australia eventually accepted Türkiye’s candidacy.

The final compromise designated Türkiye as the official host country and COP31 President, while assigning Australia the role of lead negotiator for the conference. This formula inaugurated a “shared competences” model in global climate governance, separating political presidency and operational leadership of the negotiations in an unprecedented way.

Australia’s responsibility for steering the negotiations on behalf of Pacific countries is also significant in terms of safeguarding the interests of that group of states. Island nations in the region are among those most acutely affected by the adverse impacts of climate change, which already places a heavy burden of responsibility on Canberra. How Australia will reconcile defending their interests with its continued protection of the coal and LNG industries remains an open question. By contrast, Türkiye’s role in putting forward a solution to the hosting deadlock underscores its capacity to manage crises and broker compromise within the climate diplomacy arena.

BEYOND HOSTING: TÜRKİYE’S RISING CLIMATE PROFILE

Since its initial bid in 2021, Türkiye has consistently argued that its central position bridging Asia and Europe make it a highly suitable candidate to host the Conference. One of Ankara’s strongest arguments is that, thanks to this geographical location, delegates travelling from all over the world would be able to reach the venue with comparatively lower associated carbon emissions. This matters all the more given the growing criticism in recent years of the way heads of state and government attend COPs—often relying on numerous private jets and convoys of vehicles, thereby significantly increasing the carbon footprint of meetings that are meant to tackle climate change.

Beyond Australia, Türkiye also compares favorably with many recent COP host countries in terms of having a more balanced energy profile, which is another key factor that has strengthened Ankara’s candidacy. Looking at the share of renewable energy sources in total installed electricity generation capacity, renewables account for around 59 percent in Türkiye, compared with 52 percent in Australia. As of October 2025, renewables share in Türkiye’s total installed capacity has already risen to 62 percent. This picture clearly illustrates the extent to which the country is taking emissions reduction seriously.

Inclusiveness and climate justice are another set of themes that Ankara has been keen to highlight in its climate diplomacy. As a developing country located in the Mediterranean belt, Türkiye is itself exposed to the adverse impacts of global warming. Its efforts to address these challenges without sacrificing its economic development underscore the importance it attaches to a low-carbon development model. Türkiye's role as a strong "bridge country" between the global South and the global North is rooted precisely in this dual experience of vulnerability and development ambition.

Consequently, hosting COP31 in Antalya is placing a serious responsibility on Türkiye; at a summit where global attention will be firmly focused, debates on phasing out fossil fuels, climate finance and just transition mechanisms will once again move to the forefront. In this context, the fact that the negotiation process will be led by Australia effectively amounts to a sharing of both the burden and the political risk for Türkiye. The conference will, on the one hand, position Türkiye as a key player in global climate diplomacy, and on the other, showcase it as a crisis-solving, inclusive and pragmatic actor through an innovative model in which responsibility is jointly shouldered.

