Climate Diplomacy Media Monitoring

March round up

Hi,

It's been a heavy and confusing few weeks as Russia's attack on Ukraine shook the world. Reading through this month's coverage felt somewhat surreal, with neighbouring countries' solidarity and civilian efforts to host refugees the only rays of hope in the stormy skies. If, like me, you're struggling to make sense of it all, I came across this list of ways you can help.

In such dark hours, it's important to look for answers and understand how we got here. I found Vladislav Inozemtsev's article on how Russian society has been trapped in a systemic crisis fascinating. Francis Fukuyama's piece, 'Putin's war on the liberal order', highlights the fading of democracy and explains why the war in Ukraine should matter to all of us.

So this month's climate diplomacy coverage is heavily influenced by the geopolitical conflict and will reflect on the most important energy and climate related debates related to it. The newsletter also looks at coverage of the latest IPCC report and briefly touches on the latest COP27-related articles.

The number of monitored climate diplomacy related articles increased by 2.9%. While engagement grew by 5%, in social media I picked up 19% more mentions over the last four weeks.

I'm very grateful for any feedback on this newsletter as we're trying to tailor it to your needs. My email is just below. And If you think this newsletter will be of interest to friends or colleagues, please do send them this link.

Happy reading,
Dorka
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This month in numbers

EUR 1 billion

the amount EU countries pay to Moscow every day for oil and gas

2035

the new date by which Germany plans to rely fully on renewable power

17% - 22%

the amount by which Spain and the Netherlands reduced their gas use from 2019-2021

International media coverage

The energy war?

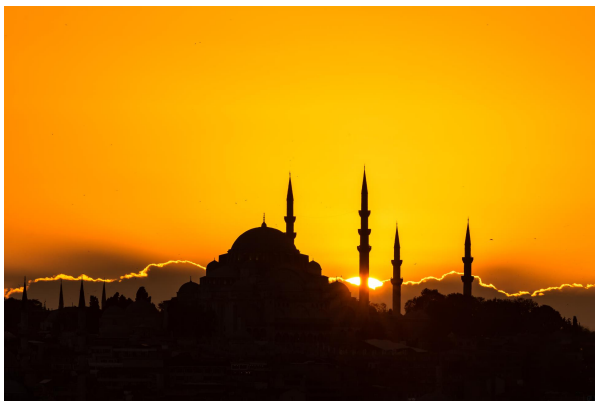
The Ukraine war's ties to the climate crisis quickly became the most discussed topic by climate commentators. The world's shift away from Russian oil and gas brought global dependence on fossil fuels under scrutiny. Commentators drew direct links between the global economy's fossil-fuel addiction and the fragility of peace. Svitlana Krakovska, a leading Ukrainian scientist, stated that this was a "fossil fuels war" as "the roots of the climate crisis and invasion are in fossil fuels". Fiona Harvey at the Guardian argued that the "Ukraine crisis is not a war over resources, but it has many implications for resource use".

Commentators highlighted why this crisis may "super-charge the transition to renewables". According to Bloomberg, the EU and US cutting gas imports from Russia "could [see] warp-speed deployment of green energy this decade". The European Commission also proposed a plan to speed up the transition and wean the bloc off Russian gas faster. It includes a short-term increase in coal and LNG supply while investing in energy efficiency and a mass scale-up of renewables.

However, experts pointed out that a continued reliance on gas will not address the "vulnerability to future shocks". The IEA's plan that renewables could reduce reliance on Russian gas has been covered widely. While the 10-point plan also argues for the diversification of fossil fuel sources, experts said that importing LNG from the US in countries like the UK is "neither realistic nor cost-effective". Building up renewables was described as a means to increase energy self-sufficiency. Bloomberg reported that renewables stocks surged over the past few days.

Oil majors have been heavily criticised. As the NYT wrote, oil companies are using energy security as a cover to lock in more fossil fuels. Shell even bought oil from Russia after the invasion. However, after a media backlash, it pledged to cut ties. Other oil companies such as BP are also divesting from Russia. However, pro fossil fuel arguments did pop up in major outlets. For instance, Vijaya Ramachandran, the director for energy and development at the Breakthrough Institute, wrote in Foreign Policy that Germany should replace Russian gas with gas from Africa, while the American Petroleum Institute said that the current crisis demonstrated "how important natural gas and oil are and will continue to be".

Despite widespread outcry against Russia from countries and industry alike, there is a sense from many commentators that simply switching off Russian gas does not do enough to resolve the structural power issues related to heavy dependence on fossil fuels. The Labour Party in the UK accused Boris Johnson of shopping for oil from 'one dictator to another', after the prime minister met with Saudi Arabia to encourage the kingdom to increase its output.



"It has become very important that Turkiye and the EU form a common strategy for the energy transition"

- Nuran Erkul Kaya
Anadolu Agency

The vulnerabilities of our food systems were also revealed amidst rising food prices. The UN food agency warned the Ukraine war could trigger a 20% jump in food prices. Coverage in Reuters, Bloomberg and others focused on export bans, issues with wheat production and governments easing environmental regulations to increase domestic production. As Politico wrote, the war may push farmers away from the Green Deal. The BBC reported that the war in Ukraine could have devastating impacts on African countries. The redirection of aid and increase in commodity prices could place significant strains on countries like Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sudan and Egypt.

Social media conversations have been dominated by discussions around the war. Paris architect Laurence Tubiana expressed her solidarity with Ukraine. Solutions to Russian gas dependency were also widely shared. For example Bill McKibben tweeted that President Biden should get America to start producing electric heat pumps. His tweet inspired discussions in the White House. As a result, #Pumpsforpeace is a widely-shared hashtag.

IPCC reaction

At the end of February, the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released its Working Group II report. IPCC reports usually enjoy significant media attention. However, given the current geopolitical situation, we saw roughly 50% less coverage compared to the last AR6 report released in August. Experts and commentators drew parallels between the findings of the WGII report and the war, including UN Chief, Antonio Guterres, who emphasised the timeliness to accelerate ambition and transition to renewables. Krakovska's speech at the plenary was also widely reported.

"My people in Kiribati are effectively paying the price for the world's addiction to fossil fuels"

- Anote Tong
The Age

As a result of the report, the urgency to increase climate adaptation and decrease emissions came into focus. In many major international outlets, the report was called “a call for urgent emissions cuts” and an “alarm signal” - as damages are expected to accelerate without greater mitigation. Guterres branded the report as “an atlas of human suffering and a damning indictment of failed climate leadership”. The coverage of the report also highlighted the costs of inaction and emphasised the lack of available funding to address the adaptation needs of the world. Kenyan think-tank Power Shift Africa released the ‘Adapt or Die’ report, detailing the costs some of the world’s poorest countries are already paying for adaptation. Journalists writing for domestic papers in countries like Australia, India and the US highlighted that nearly all countries, regions and cities will be impacted.

As reporters dived into the details of the report, they focused on topics like food insecurity. The world’s food production systems in particular received criticism. Solution-oriented narratives praised “farming methods that coexist with nature to scale up production, such as using agroforestry”. As climate change accelerates, places are becoming uninhabitable, which not only puts food systems under immense pressure but will also trigger migration. Narratives around migration focused on how important it is to prepare for large scale internal and external displacement in countries like India. Reporters also warned that inaccurate narratives “labelling climate-induced migration as a security threat are misleading and fuel media panics and xenophobia”. For an extensive analysis of the IPCC WGII Report, please check out Carbon Brief’s Q&A.

COP27 preparation

Priorities for the next UN Climate Summit are slowly crystallising. Camila Hodgson at the FT highlighted the fight over compensation for developing countries ahead of COP27. At the moment, the number of articles discussing expectations around the Sharm El-Sheikh Summit remains low. Arabic outlets mostly covered the ongoing preparations ahead of the event, and the COP27 president’s meeting with US climate envoy John Kerry and other high-level officials. The US and Egypt launched a joint group to prepare for the summit. Concerns have been raised after the Egyptian Tourism Ministry proposed an unusually high price for hotels. Participation may be at stake, according to activists.

A number of outlets also covered some UN climate diplomacy related news. Former World Bank vice president and minister of investment, Mahmoud Mohieldin, took the role of COP27's climate champion. Meanwhile, the NYT argued that the war could stall climate action. Chloe Farand and Joe Lo reported that there are moves to “isolate Moscow diplomatically in the climate space”. For example, the Umbrella Group (a UN negotiation

group) no longer coordinates with Russia and Belarus, while Ukraine has asked for the exclusion of these countries from the climate process. Egypt is reported to 'seek to remain neutral around the Ukraine-Russia conflict'.

"We have to use this African COP to make a very clear connection between the climate and development agendas"

- Tasneem Essop
UN Climate Summit

Insights from key geographies

China

While Chinese diplomats are trying hard to keep neutral on Russia and Ukraine, China's state media has been quoting Russian sources disproportionately and amplifying pro-Russia narratives. The economic implications of Russia's invasion will be indirect to China - it is not planning on placing any sanctions on Russia and openly argues that sanctions will not solve conflicts. However, the disruptions to agricultural exports from Ukraine and soaring prices of oil and gas are giving Chinese policymakers a headache. At the core of Chinese leadership's response to external uncertainty is stability, which was clearly demonstrated during the National People's Congress meeting in March. The government looked to ensure energy and food security by increasing domestic production of fossil fuels. Energy security had already become the government's top focus after the power shortage occurred last winter, and now concerns over energy security are further intensified by the ongoing crisis in Ukraine. This is pushing down the government's ambition on climate, with alarming trends emerging as China's coal consumption rebounded and coal power expansion restarted.

Brazil

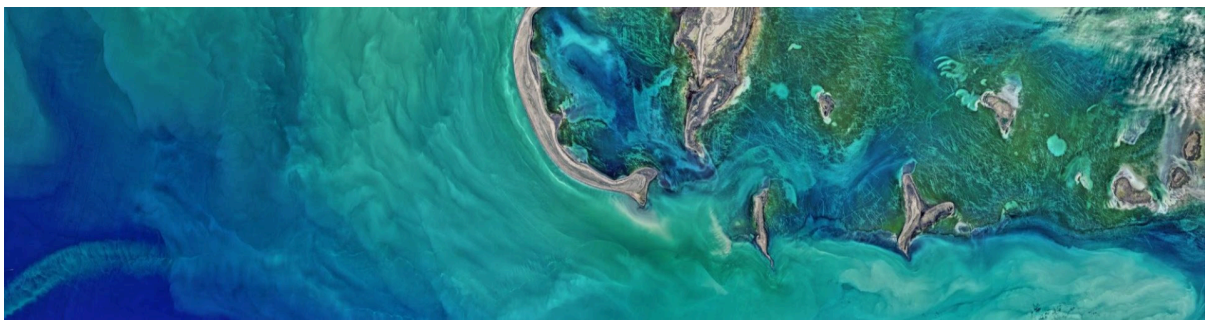
Brazilian diplomacy tries to position itself as neutral in the Ukraine conflict, while various political noises from Bolsonaro's trip to the Kremlin days before the conflict continue to reverberate in this election year. The reasons for the trip are still the subject of speculation (fertiliser supplies, digital spy weapons?), as are the expenses of the tour, not least for the participation of one of the president's sons, a Rio de Janeiro city counsellor with no federal or diplomatic office.

Opinion polls for the presidential election in October show little has changed since the end of 2021: Lula leads with 40%-43%, followed by Bolsonaro on 27%-30%, Ciro Gomes (centre-left) and Sérgio Moro (right) are tied for third place with 6%-9%.

Statements by the military that they will respect the election result have been exploited by the press, as many bet that Bolsonaro will attempt an insurgency movement mimicking the attempt by Donald Trump's supporters in January 2021 in the US.
High inflation, especially in food prices, fuel and electricity dominate the political and economic agenda, along with the growing indebtedness of the middle classes and unemployment.

The US

The US conversation has been taken over by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Biden banned Russian oil imports and imposed sanctions, but omitted their energy sector. As US inflation and gas prices rise, and concerns about Europe's security grow, the fossil fuel industry and politicians are calling for increasing and expediting oil and gas drilling and infrastructure build-out, and blaming the climate agenda for hindering the US's "energy dominance." They have been given an audience for these views on broadcast and in editorial pages. This is being countered by the climate community, and Biden himself, who asserted the best long-term pathway to affordable energy is to accelerate the clean energy transition. The LA Times editorial board put out a memo also calling for a faster energy transition. But while deliberations over a major clean energy policy package continue behind-the-scenes, politicians' priorities may be elsewhere. Biden barely mentioned climate in his State of the Union address, and this year's budget delivered much less international climate finance than requested, or expected. There is also increasingly loud pushback against a key federal oil and gas regulator considering climate and environmental justice impacts for new fossil fuel infrastructure.



Stats corner

To see statistics and top articles on the key issues we care about - climate, energy, transport, finance and nature - across mainstream and social media from the past 30 days, take a look at our live monitoring dashboard.

ENTER GSCC DASHBOARD

This analysis is based on data from the social listening tool Talkwalker, English-language media coverage from the media database Factiva, and expert insights from GSCC

colleagues.

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