

IEEP/GLOBE EU Training for MEP Assistants – Session 3, 13 November 2009
The UNFCCC, international carbon trading and agreements building towards Copenhagen

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Draft Final

Jason showed participants the Climate Coalitions recent video on climate action this can be viewed at <http://liveearth.org/en/liveearthblog/thousands-dance-for-the-climate-on-belgian-beach>

On the recent down-playing of expectations for Copenhagen

The past month has seen a coordinated attempt to tone down expectations for the upcoming climate change conference in Copenhagen (UNFCCC COP 15 meeting), 7-18 December 2009. Key political figures in the negotiations have spoken openly about their expectations for the conference, including:

"A fully fledged new international treaty under the Convention - I do not think that is going to happen,"

Yvo de Boer, Executive Secretary, UNFCCC. Financial Times, 20 October 2009¹

"We would have preferred a full legal treaty, it has to be said. I think the important thing about the agreement we now seek in December is that while it may be a political agreement it must lead, on a very clear timetable, to a legally binding treaty.

Ed Miliband, Climate Secretary, UK Government. BBC, 5 November 2009²

Why have they done this?

They are trying to save face in case things don't work out as hoped in Copenhagen, i.e. if a fully conclusive international agreement to succeed the Kyoto Protocol is not reached. If you don't expect success, you won't be disappointed with failure. It is thought that there are ongoing efforts to move closer to an agreement through 'backroom' (informal) talks, but overall the official UNFCCC negotiations have not made the progress needed to prepare the ground in time for the December conference.

Reasons for not reaching a full deal at Copenhagen

- Slow progress at UNFCCC negotiations – run out of time:

Heads of government think at a strategic level, whereas negotiators are concerned with the minute technical details of the negotiating text, which can seem completely irrelevant to the political level. At the climate talks, these two elements clash and make progress difficult. The negotiating texts are very detailed, and sometimes it cannot be distinguished between elements

¹ http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/f66285c8-bd10-11de-a7ec-00144feab49a.html?nclick_check=1

² <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/science/nature/8345501.stm>

which are politically important or not. It's possible to get hung up for a long time on a paragraph which requires high level politics.

- Individual country targets, or lack of:

The United States does not currently have a target for CO₂ emission reductions. It's the only big country without one, and it won't have one in time for Copenhagen due to the slow progress of its domestic climate legislation through the Senate.

- Special interests:

These negotiations are like a house of cards. If you want special interest for your issue, the whole thing falls apart.

Possible alternative outcomes

- Extension

There has been talk about needing an extension to the current process. This is worrying. The Bali Action Plan expected an agreement in at the December 2009 conference in Copenhagen. If an extension is given, it opens up the idea that the process can continue indefinitely and invites repeated blocking from unsatisfied parties.

- 'Politically binding' agreement

The political details could be agreed upon in the text, with the technical details such as targets and concrete numbers added as Annexes when they have been decided. This idea prompts the question – how *binding* is a COP decision? Or is it just a procedural decision? COP decisions were empowered by the treaty – their acceptance and implementation varies hugely between countries.

Reasons to be cheerful: whatever shape it takes, agreement must still be reached at Copenhagen

All the news of delay is not good. The actual DEAL (i.e. reaching an agreement of all parties) still needs to happen in Copenhagen and there are still some roadblocks to overcome. Technical details can be decided after, if necessary.

We need to try to keep expectations high, so that people feel empowered to achieve. Thinking more positively we are much further along the road to an agreement than was the case before the meeting in Kyoto that ultimately resulted in the Protocol.

On the role of the United States

Most parties view the US as the main roadblock. If President Obama used political clout to get a target before Copenhagen, that would be good, but he is reluctant to do so (though not unable) due to the experiences under the Clinton administration ie the President agreed to targets but was then totally unable to gain approval for them through the US Senate. Perhaps he might be able to at least provide an idea of what the US target would look like.

Given that the US failed to ratify Kyoto, unlike other major emitting developed countries, they have no emission reductions targets (under the Kyoto Protocol). This means that countries on the non Kyoto or 'LCA track' of UNFCCC negotiations (the Ad-hoc Working Group on Long-term Cooperative Action) consist in essence of the US and developing nations. This is like a fox in the henhouse! As a consequence it makes little sense to have a two track process ie for Kyoto

signatories and LCA countries as it means that compromise with LCA countries is unacceptable as a unit as this would afford the US privileges not received by other developed countries.

The EU

The EU tends to view itself as a mediator between the US and developing countries. It also views itself as special case as it has to reconcile disparate opinions between Member States, especially between the (newer) eastern and (older) western Member States. It has experience of accommodating diverse circumstances and politics, and reaching compromise.

Also, the EU is the closest neighbour to Russia. Russia is something of a wildcard in these negotiations, normally appearing very disorganised or silent, then come in at the last minute with unreasonable demands. Unlike China who is strategically quiet.

The EU proposal for a 30% emissions reduction target by 2020 (on 1990 levels), but on the condition that others sign up, has not affected other countries much. The EU views itself as a good guy, but others maybe think it is just harmless. But it has a plan B to fall back on. Perhaps it expected this perceived failure at Copenhagen?

The most recent UNFCCC negotiations, Barcelona 2-6 November 2009

In Barcelona some progress was made on the detailed texts, but the talks also started to focus minds on what is actually feasibly achievable at Copenhagen. The EU finance offer was received coldly, called 'peanuts' and 'nothing new'.

There was a walk out by the African Group (who are normally very quiet) – they want more clarity about how Annex I targets will be increased and achieved. The NGOs were pleased to see them finally making some kind of stand, as surely reaching a bad deal is worse than reaching no deal?

NGOs in the negotiations

In terms of NGOs, at the negotiations in Barcelona there were 40-45 people from WWF present. In Copenhagen there will probably be about 100, enough to follow all groups at the negotiations. Sometimes they are restricted on what they can report back on, but they still follow every word that is discussed and meet frequently to discuss that which they are able to pass on. We also work with the press and talk to delegates about issues. NGOs are generally viewed as good to have conversations with – it gives a good entrée into negotiations on a technical level. They also talk to governments etc, so get a picture from all angles.

Links

WWF International: <http://www.panda.org/>

WWF work in EU:

http://www.panda.org/what_we_do/how_we_work/policy/wwf_europe_environment/

Earth hour: <http://www.earthhour.org/>