

## ANALYSIS | Durban: a success, after all

Analysis, Climate, Policy

December 12, 2011

The European Commission and Polish EU presidency celebrated a "historic breakthrough" in the international climate talks on Sunday as world governments signed up to Europe's roadmap for a new legally binding climate agreement to be signed by 2015 and enter into force by 2020. For the first time, all major emitters – the US, China and India above anyone else – will work together with the Earth's other nations to negotiate a legally binding climate deal.

"This is a moment comparable only to, if not surpassing, the [climate conference] from 1995, when the Berlin mandate was established which led to Kyoto," said the Polish environment minister Marcin Korolec on Sunday, as the longest UN climate conference ever drew to a close in Durban, South Africa. The road to a global climate deal will be a lot longer, however.

What exactly will be done will be clear by 2015, as the recognition of a common goal might have been there, but making steps towards it will require another four years of work plus still another five for the agreement to enter into force.

### A CENTURY LOST?

According to environmentalists, for example, that no action will be taken faster spells the effective end of human efforts to tackle climate change in the 21st century. The world has just come to terms that the immediate reduction of CO2 emissions is not going to happen. Neither will the world's average temperature be prevented from rising more than 2 degrees Celsius as compared to the pre-industrial period, because it would take the world's economy to become virtually fossil fuels-free in only a few years. "We are now closer to a rise of 3-5 degrees Celsius," said Climate Coalition, a Polish NGO organization.

According to political decision makers, however, there's a good chance that a global commitment will be in place to tackle the climate and that the climate change will be contained some time in the future. But fears remain that anything beyond the politicians' traditional scope of next elections they will not bother to notice.

The immediate consequences for the EU relate to the Kyoto Protocol. The Durban conference gave it a second life. By May next year it must submit an emission reduction target for 2020 to the UN for review. This will revive the debate over whether it should adopt a 30 percent rather than 20 percent emission reduction target for 2020.

Internationally, governments next year will also have to decide on the length of the second commitment period and what to do with some 10 billion unused Kyoto credits (AAUs). Member states remain divided over the issue, with Poland accused of helping stifle debate on it in Durban. Poland, along with Ukraine or Russia, is among the biggest holders of unused AAUs, so-called "hot air" – a result of communist economies going under in 1990s, rather than a deliberate effort to reduce emissions..

The conference did adopt new accounting rules for land use, land-use change and forestry (LULUCF), which has been identified as Kyoto's second biggest "loophole".

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#### LACK OF AMBITION, MARKETS INDIFFERENT

If Durban was hailed as a success by negotiators, many NGOs said its postponement of any deeper emission cuts to after 2020 flew in the face of science, which calls for emissions to peak by 2015. According to Friends of the Earth, an environmental NGO, UN climate negotiations have ended in Durban with an agreement by consensus, but the lack of ambition will not prevent the suffering of millions of people in Africa and across the world due to climate change, according to the NGO.

"For yet another year the international climate talks have failed to make real progress to tackle climate change. Developed countries spent their time trying to unravel previous agreements and shift the burden on to poorer nations like China or India," charged Susann Scherbarth, climate justice campaigner for Friends of the Earth Europe.

Rich nations, including the European Union, must go home and recognise their historical responsibilities and urgently commit to higher ambitions. At least 40 percent emission reductions by 2020 without offsetting are necessary," Ms Scherbarth said.

"Rich countries want a deal where they continue to pollute, their corporations profit from pollution and destructive carbon trading, and the poor and the most vulnerable to climate change pay the price. It is clear in whose interests they were working here in Durban, and it wasn't the 99 percent of people around the world," said Bobby Peek of Friends of the Earth South Africa.

Coming from a radically different perspective, the reaction of the financial world of CO2 trading was not enthusiastic, either. The markets hardly reacted to the deal, according to Maciej Gomolka, Poland country manager at Carbon Warehouse, a Prague-based brokerage and analysis firm.

"CER [certified emission reduction] futures are now cheaper than spot deals, meaning that the investors don't trust the effect of the Durban talks. One doesn't fool the CO2 market and investors so easily – they simply don't believe that the Durban negotiations will be effective. I'm afraid that what the Durban talks achieved was just putting the Kyoto protocol on a respirator," said Mr Gomolka.

#### AS GOOD AS IT COULD GET

Others said Durban delivered what it could. As well as the roadmap, Durban agreed a governance structure for the Green Climate Fund, which is set to deliver USD 100 billion in climate aid a year to developing countries by 2020. Innovative sources of finance to fill the fund, such as a levy on international aviation and shipping emissions, did not survive in the final text.

Governments also agreed the conditions under which carbon capture and storage projects can be included in the Kyoto Protocol's Clean Development Mechanism and decided that a new market-based mechanism is needed in future.

Negotiators said market mechanisms as well as private and public finance, could be used to combat deforestation in future through REDD+, a program to reduce emissions from deforestation and forest degradation. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) hailed a "significantly advanced monitoring, reporting and verification framework".

The reality of global climate change politics was that Durban could never provide a turnaround and pave a clear way to contain the world's temperature growth within the safe level. Instead, the Durban talks kept Kyoto and the climate talks alive, an achievement few counted for anyway. Next year's annual climate conference in Qatar will have to start thinking about saving the climate rather than the talks.

by Sonja van Renssen in Durban, South Africa and Wojciech Kość in Poland

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