

Post-Lima headaches: Which role for the EU heading towards Paris?

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Intended to prepare the ground for a new global deal, the Lima Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP20) held in December 2014, failed to live up to its promise; as an agreement on a clear legal architecture and mechanisms for a Post-Kyoto deal was not reached. The European Union arrived in Lima with a unified negotiating position, as member states had agreed to reducing CO₂ emissions by 'at least' 40% by 2030 compared to 1990 levels well before the summit (and did not make further commitments dependent on those of others as it was the case in 'Hopenhagen'/COP15). The harmonized negotiation position clearly strengthened the voice of member states, who vote individually during negotiations. However, the process of agreeing on a target, demonstrated the incoherence within the union again as particularly Eastern European states wanted to make the overall goals less ambitious, non-binding and – yet again - dependent upon other actors' commitments.¹ Internal cohesion is a good first step, however, the EU's emission reduction target is only region-wide and will need to be backed up by national action plans to prove its credibility. Furthermore, agreement was horse-traded against passing a future (Post-2030) EU climate and energy framework by unanimous vote. This act of prioritizing national interests was also visible in Copenhagen where the EU had to call two European Council meetings to reconcile positions. Furthermore, the target seems less ambitious in international comparison with some developing countries already outperforming the EU.²

Further adding to internal disagreements within the EU is the merger of climate and energy portfolios in the new Juncker Commission. Meant to signal more policy coherence, it may also relegate environmental issues below geostrategic priorities, especially in light of prioritized energy security due to the Ukraine crisis. And the new European Commissioner for Climate Action and Energy, Miguel Arias Cañete, yet has to prove that he is able to overcome his agricultural-themed past and shares in an oil company by pushing environmental topics on top of this merged agenda. So far, his negotiating record has not been too impressive with the EU not being able to push its goal of a more transparent and competitive ongoing evaluation of Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) in Lima. Instead, targets will be reviewed only after all pledges have been summited, limiting the concrete time for negotiations before Paris even further. Last but not least, it is the paradoxical logic of climate negotiations itself that leaves countries with high emission reductions with less negotiation leverage (or further reductions to offer).

Looking at all these prospects and the slowness of nitty-gritty climate negotiations, reaching an agreement before the next UN Summit in Paris seems rather ambitious, or, as United Nations Framework Convention for Climate Change (UNFCCC) Executive Secretary, Christiania Figueres, puts it: “[The INDCs made until Paris] will not get us onto the 2°C pathway”.³ With

the prospect of changing from an emission specific trajectory to an institutional trajectory to reduce carbon emissions, the biggest task for the European Union will be to keep expectations down in the run-up to the Paris summit and the door open for further discussions thereafter. Furthermore, the EU's role as a 'leadiator' in global climate negotiation or, in other words, its ability to act as a leader by backing up its pledges with credible actions, whilst at the same time mediating between and among potential partners,⁴ may still be valid if it can prove that economic growth and sound climate policy can be combined (despite falling oil prices and economic crisis in the South) and build upon its alliances with vulnerable island states and other countries of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP) at the same time.

The EU's diplomatic charm initiative launched in January with 90,000 diplomats in over 3,000 missions lobbying to win new pledges on carbon cuts is a step in the right direction. Further ambitious pledges to the Green Climate Fund and the development of a roadmap for its long-term funding approach to finance climate actions in the developing world would continue this path and furnish the trust of prospective allies and, thus, may prevent Paris becoming another empty bubble of delayed expectations.⁵ This is particularly important as a 'second Copenhagen' would not only have severe consequences for the global climate but also further erode the credibility of the UN System and its capacity for solving problems of common goods through

international cooperation, consequently leading to further fragmentation in global governance. If this was about to happen, the EU could still try to globalize its climate goals, but less effectively and through other channels (such as carbon taxes on imported goods or reopening discussions on the inclusion of transcontinental air traffic into the European Emission Trading System).

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1. For individual Member States' positions, see <http://www.euractiv.com/sections/energy/member-states-positions-2030-climate-and-energy-targets-revealed-309279>

2. See OECD Climate Action tracker, available at <http://climateactiontracker.org/countries.html>

3. Goldenberg, Suzanne and Neslen, Arthur: Paris climate summit: missing global warming target 'would not be failure', The Guardian, 4 February 2015, available at: <<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/feb/04/paris-climate-summit-missing-global-warming-target-would-not-be-failure>>

4. See Elgström, Ole; Skovgaard, Jakob: "Reviewing Paris 2015: The EU's 'Leadiator' Role in Future Climate Change Negotiations", Georgetown Journal of International Affairs, 16 December 2014, available at: ><http://journal.georgetown.edu/previewing-paris-2015-the-eus-leadiator-role-in-future-climate-change-negotiations/><

5. See Euractiv: EU to launch diplomatic offensive ahead of Paris climate talks, 20 January 2015