

# Time to Put the Cards on the Table

<http://www.social-europe.eu/2010/01/time-to-put-the-cards-on-the-table/>

January 27, 2011



On the 31st of January 2010, it is time to put the cards on the table. The 'Copenhagen Accord', a document that was presented during the last plenary session of COP 15 and which serves as a basis for the international negotiations until the next climate conference in Mexico at the end of 2010, requests all parties to submit their pledges before this deadline. For the European Union, several questions arise in this context. Firstly, should Europe submit a common reduction target or 27 separate national targets?

Secondly, is the conditional offer to submit a reduction target of 20% still viable given that others did not agree on similar targets, or should the EU instead focus on a unilateral target of 30%?

The first question is comparatively easy to answer. The European Union should act as one single actor on the international stage. It would send out a bad signal if member states were to present their own reduction commitments and initiate a race to the bottom concerning climate protection ambitions. Additionally, it has become more difficult to separate national from European climate action. With the start of the third period of EU emissions trading in 2013, the system will be a truly European one. National emissions statistics will be largely independent from national action. National measures might result in savings or in additional emissions at a completely different place inside the EU. Therefore, speaking with one voice is not only a political must, it is also, from a practical point of view, reasonable.

The second question – should Europe move towards a 30% target – is slightly more difficult to answer. Looking at our present situation, there is a range of issues that we should take into account.

Firstly, only by committing to ambitious cuts in emissions can global temperature rises be limited to 2°C. If we want to meet this target, we cannot afford to exceed a concentration of carbon in the atmosphere of more than 450ppm. Today, carbon levels stand at 390ppm and, according to analysts, unless significant cuts are made, these levels will rise to over 550ppm by 2020. Such a concentration of carbon would mean catastrophic average global temperature rises upwards of 5°C. Such dramatic increases would have severe consequences. Large parts of the earth would become uninhabitable and millions of people would be forced to leave their homeland in search of an environment where they could survive.

G20 leaders have already agreed on the need to cut global emissions by at least 50% by 2050, with a cut in developed country emissions by at least 80%. While the longer-term targets are crucial, setting interim targets for 2020 will ensure that we follow a path that is not only manageable, but also affordable. The longer the inevitable changes are delayed, the more expensive they become.

Secondly, the EU has played a pivotal role in pushing negotiations in the past and can do so again. It was the EU that first adopted the 2°C target, which was subsequently agreed on by the G8 in 2006. The IPCC found that developed nations as a group will need to cut their emissions by 25-40% of 1990 levels by 2020. As we approached Copenhagen, we saw other countries forging ahead as the EU stood still. Japan recently announced a 25% cut in emissions and Norway will make a 40% cut. There is

encouraging progress in developing countries too. Although China is receiving well-earned criticism for having contributed to the failure of Copenhagen, it has announced energy intensity targets. Brazil, South Africa, Indonesia and Mexico have also taken very positive unilateral steps in domestic policy. In a world where other large economies are prepared to set themselves ambitious targets, the EU should feel prepared to raise the bar of its own ambition.

Thirdly, and closely related to the second point, there are distinct economic advantages in a shift to a low carbon economy. Far from damaging the economy, an ambitious deal would be good for growth and employment. Business stands ready to respond to a clear signal from government that future prosperity comes through low carbon growth. Politicians have a duty to set that direction. It is in the EU's own self-interest to set a high target because of the rewards that will follow. While recent economic history is littered with examples of unreformed industries being ill suited to the modern economy like the stricken US car industry, it is rare to find sluggish economic growth following the passage of progressive environmental legislation. It was encouraging to see that the different industries and workers' organisations viewed the changes needed in the production model to fight climate change as an opportunity rather than a threat during the informal meeting of the Council of Ministers of Energy and Environment in Seville last weekend. To be sure, the likes of India and China are not setting themselves stringent environmental targets out of the goodness of the hearts – they have looked at the numbers and they see where the future lies.

So it is time for the EU to step up and demonstrate resolve ahead of the Mexico conference. An unequivocal move towards a 30% target will act as a much-needed catalyst to create a positive negotiating dynamic where policymakers worldwide would feel encouraged and able to take a more ambitious stance, and to unlock the potential for economic growth of the second industrial revolution in Europe.

No related posts.