

Lessons learned? Perspectives for post-Copenhagen

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The UN climate summit in Copenhagen has failed to achieve its main purpose: To seal a global deal that will lead the way towards a low-carbon world. There can be no doubt about this dramatic shortcoming. Despite all the public attention and all the scientific recommendations for immediate action, over 100 heads of states and governments did not agree on an ambitious plan to reach the 2 degrees target. In the coming weeks it is time to analyse the result and draw lessons from Copenhagen in order to make the

forthcoming climate change summit in Mexico City at the end of next year a success.

There were many reasons for this outcome of the Copenhagen conference, but at the heart of all the debates one issue was crucial: global justice, in this case, global climate justice gains growing attention. The Climate conference served, more or less, as a public arena for the dispute about a new definition of equality and justice.

On the surface, this conflict was a conflict between North and South, between rich and poor, between developed and developing countries. But a closer look at the debates clearly shows that the world in general is changing. Developing and emerging countries are no longer the same. It might even be the case that we will witness the demise of the G77 group and that it has, for the last time in history, served as a representation of all developing countries. China and many big emerging economies tried to hide behind the safe wall of moral superiority, which developing countries tend to use as their main weapon of choice.

But in the last night of the negotiations it became clear that China's interests are no longer in harmony with the interests of everyone else in the G77 group. They rather reflect its own desire to become a global superpower without any restrictions by international agreements. Even at the cost of some African countries or the desperate Small Island States, which face disastrous environmental consequences.

In the end, however, it would be too simple to just blame China and dissent among developing countries for the negative outcome of the Copenhagen summit. The developed world carries its fair share of responsibility for the failure of the summit: The hardly ambitious appearance of the US delegation, with Barack Obama's press conference before the end of the negotiations as a climax, the clumsy and not particularly diplomatic behaviour of the Danish prime minister and conference president Lars L. Rasmussen, and finally, the shortcomings of Europe's climate diplomacy in the run up to Copenhagen speak for themselves.

But which lessons can we learn from Copenhagen? What should Europeans concentrate on in the run up to the summit in Mexico City next year? First, climate justice has to become the leading principle guiding future negotiations. The need to reduce global emissions by half in comparison to 1990, while, at the same time, coping with a world population of around nine billion people by 2050, has major implications for every one of us: In the middle of this century, every person on this planet will have to be restricted to the use of not more than one ton of CO₂ per year. This very basic rule has to apply to everyone. It requires both, Americans to fundamentally change their

way of life (a 95 percent emissions reduction in average is required) as well as a different attitude to unlimited emissions growth for China. This crucial aspect ('one man, one ton') has to initiate an industrial revolution that should start in Europe. And better today than tomorrow.

Second, aside from dramatic emissions reductions, Europe has to find a new way for leading international climate negotiations. Unilateral commitments and financial contributions are necessary and helpful, but not completely sufficient. The European Union has to develop a new form of climate diplomacy, using the instrument of Europe's 'soft power' in foreign policy in order to convince other parts of the world to join in. This sort of leadership was missing in Copenhagen.

Third, the United Nations needs a fundamental reform. Without changing its working methods and decision-making rules, global governance will be conducted elsewhere, in other arenas. Heads of states and governments demonstrated their inability to find a solution to one of the most pressing questions for mankind. The parliaments should be more involved. Parliamentary methods – openness and majority voting – could pave the way out of the intergovernmental deadlock.

Despite all the frustration about the result of the Copenhagen climate conference, Europeans have to look ahead and find new solutions to fight global warming. The defeat in Copenhagen is not the end of international climate policy. It is just one step in a long process. In Mexico City, next year, there must be another opportunity to find a global solution for a global problem. In the meantime, we have to develop a new way of approaching and managing international climate policy. There is now some time for thinking.

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