

## Starting Over on Climate

After the Copenhagen debacle, Europe needs a new climate strategy

Sascha Müller-Kraenner | **It was a disaster in every respect: In Copenhagen the European Union succeeded neither in establishing itself as a driving force in climate policy alongside the United States and China, nor in reaching its own basic negotiation objectives. Now Europe has to revive the multilateral climate proceedings with a convincing strategy.**

The mixed reactions to the outcome of the Copenhagen climate summit illustrate who perceive themselves as the winners and the losers. U.S. president Barack Obama saw the agreements as “significant and unprecedented.” China’s foreign minister Yang Jiechi called the result “important and positive.” In contrast, the first European reactions ranged from disappointment to dismay. At a hastily prepared final press conference, European Commission president Manuel Barroso described the Copenhagen Accord as “not perfect, but better than no deal.”

In reality the European Union obtained not a single one of its basic negotiation objectives. Not only did it fail to bridge the gap between the initial emissions reduction proposals of key fellow negotiators like the United States and China and its own goal that called for a reduction commitment of 20 percent to 30 percent, the Europeans did not even manage to incorporate into the closing statement a long-

term goal for industrial nations.

Subject to congressional approval, the U.S. climate protection package had intended to cut its own greenhouse gas emissions by up to 4 percent by 2020. At the last minute China offered to increase its energy efficiency by 40 percent to 45 percent as part of its next five-year plan, a marginal improvement over what would have been expected. The Chinese successfully staved off a call to set a target year for the stabilization of its own emissions increases. The Copenhagen Accord does not resolve whether negotiations will even continue over the next few years with the aim of creating an international agreement.

Above all, however, Europe’s chief negotiators needed to grasp that they were left out of the talk’s decisive phase. The deal between industrial and developing nations—one that was ultimately expressed in the summit’s official final document—was forged in closed-door talks between Obama and

his colleagues from China, India, Brazil, and South Africa. Europeans and others were only permitted superficial approval of the agreement in an expanded G-20 round concerning several developing nations.

Europe's drastically reduced role came as a surprise to its chief negotiators. Just two years earlier at the 2007 climate summit in Bali, Europe had been applauded for its climate protection goals and for its pioneering role on this issue. In the run-up to Copenhagen, however, the Europeans became mired in petty disputes concerning the individual contributions of the member states toward a financial package for developing nations.

The European Union failed to find an independent role for itself next to the Americans on one side and the large developing and emerging nations on the other. Obama came to Copenhagen with the clear goal of avoiding any pre-stipulations that could jeopardize the necessary passage of climate protection legislation through Congress. The Chinese leadership surrounding Prime Minister Wen Jiabao was prepared only to offer voluntary consent regarding increased energy efficiency and cited national sovereignty in its defense against international control mechanisms. The European Union held firm to its climate protection goals announced in 2007 and tried in last-minute negotiations to push through a 10 billion euro financial package for the world's poorer developing nations.

Europe punched below its weight in Copenhagen, the result of three possible, in part complementary factors. For one, even before Copenhagen there was fear in European capitals of

a "G-2" arrangement. However, there was a total of four somewhat geographically significant emerging nations represented at key negotiations; including China, India, Brazil and South Africa—the recently formed so-called BASIC group—with China as *primus inter pares*. The absence of Europe in this arrangement, despite its close coordination with the United States, is difficult to explain.

Secondly, in light of the problematic political conditions at Copenhagen, the compromise between the world's two largest emitters of greenhouse gas, the United States and China, took top priority. It was thus in Europe's best interest throughout to give precedence to these two powers.

Given this factor, Europe's real potential for influence at the conference was modest from the outset. However, BASIC group succeeded in effectively

pushing forward their interests over the course of the conference. Intensive bilateral contact with individual emerging nations in the lead-up to the conference—for example the two summit talks between the German chancellor and the presidents of Brazil and Indonesia—did lead to individual collaboration projects such as the promotion of renewable energies and forest protection, but to no strategic alliance that would have made an impact in Copenhagen.

Lastly, at the summit the European Union did not understand how to exercise its historically established lead role in international climate protection. The disunity (and partly the vanity) of European heads of state

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explicitly brought to the fore Europe's structural weaknesses. The petty dispute over the European Union's internal cost distribution of climate financing dealt an especially harsh blow to the Union's image. In fact, the member states could only be convinced to participate in the financing package because funds partly committed to the budget quite some time earlier were reallocated before Christmas.

### What must Europe do now?

Europe can only be effective in unison. Beside political heavyweights like China and the United States, the voice of the European Union can only be heard in unison. The juxtaposition of Europe's dual leadership positions, the Commission and the Council

Presidency, further complemented by the self-assured secondary negotiators from important member

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states, is counterproductive. However, a future scenario in which the European Commission takes over full leadership of the multilateral climate negotiations would lend itself to an overdue leadership reorganization in European negotiations, while the newly created European External Action Service (EEAS) would assume a key coordinating role.

Individual European states must cease exclusive bilateral action. Important member states like Germany, France, and Great Britain competed for attention before and during the Copenhagen Summit with national initiatives and individual bilateral negotiations. Last summer, British prime minister Gordon Brown presented his

climate finance package for developing nations without coordinating with his colleagues first. In the preceding spring France launched a close cooperation with the African Union (AU), garnering only lukewarm support from other member states. Only Great Britain and France took part in a finance package presented in Copenhagen to protect international tropical forests, while Germany would prefer to act alone in employing its own bilateral instruments, like funds approved by the German Chancellor at the UN Conference on Biodiversity for the protection of tropical forests.

Europe must determine its position before and not during negotiations. At both the 2008 climate conference in Poznan and in Copenhagen, essential policy points were decided at EU Council meetings during the conference. This meant that experts from ministries were removed from the UN proceedings in the heated phase of negotiations in order to participate in the ongoing and self-engrossing EU proceedings. Conflicts between individual member states concerning climate policy positions and cost distribution within the European Union were carried out parallel to the main negotiations and in full public view.

Europe must deepen bilateral dialogue with important players (the United States, China, India). The creation of the EEAS offers a historic opportunity for the European Union to bunch together and further develop bilateral relations with important other players, above all the large emerging nations. The Transatlantic Climate Bridge, launched by the German foreign ministry, would offer a manageable starting point. This initia-

tive could be Europeanized and expanded to include important emerging nations like China, India, Brazil, and Russia. The goals of this strategic dialogue initiative could be to bundle technological and financial cooperation as well as the instruments of export promotion and trade policy.

Europe must create alliances with developing nations. The poorer developing nations and small island states are natural allies of the European Union in international climate proceedings. The European Union can make an attractive and credible offer to these countries by a combination of progressive climate protection policy at home and generous financial support for forest protection and adjustment to climate change. A series of bilateral initiatives were begun before Copenhagen, such as one between France and the AU to provide financial support for renewable energies and African tropical forest protection and one between Brazil, Germany, and France to support the Amazon Fund. In the future these initiatives could be bound together in a pan-European climate solidarity pact with Africa, Latin America, and Asia.

### Effective Multilateralism

At last, the upcoming creation of the climate policy agenda will focus on the reorganization of a global regulatory framework modeled after the central European theme of “effective multilateralism.” In addition to negotiation proceedings within the United Nations, bilateral dialogue between strategic partner nations, EU cooperation with other regional alliances like the AU, and flexible multilateral formats like a “G-20 plus”—which in-

cludes those developing nations particularly affected by climate change—should all play an increased role.

The new EAAS must revitalize the “strategic partnerships” between the European Union and Russia, China, India, Brazil; and, of course, transatlantic relations—partnerships that often exist only on paper. A close cooperation in the areas of energy, climate, and green technologies deserves top priority in these partnership initiatives. The African states have a vital interest in the support they receive from the European Union, both financially and technologically in terms of adjusting to the effects of climate change. The partnership between the AU and European Union could offer the appropriate framework in this respect.

Of central importance is deciding which future role the G-20 will play concerning the advancement of climate issues. The G-8 framework has lost meaning as an appropriate forum because it lacks a critical mass of the nations responsible for global emissions. In relation to climate protection, however, the G-20 format certainly needed to be expanded to target representatives of poorer countries. One task of the European Union should be to prevent China from acting alone as the advocate for the “small guy” amidst the world’s great powers.

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