



On the Road to a New International Climate Policy Architecture

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There has been widespread complaining about the tenacious negotiations in Poznań without any results. With the world far from sharing a common vision towards climate protection and negotiations in Copenhagen jeopardized and with them the agreement on mandatory goals regarding emissions reductions after 2012 – whoever had thought that international climate policy would simply continue onwards based on the architecture of the Kyoto Protocol, should think again. The world community certainly made no recognizable step in this direction at the negotiations in Poznań.

The establishment of a fund for adaptation measures in developing countries fell through due to a controversy about the structure for the use of the funds and lack of support from the donor countries. Agreement on the facilitation of greater forest conservation in developing countries also failed (as it already did in Kyoto) due to simple inherent contradictions: carbon sequestration in forests just is not tropical forest conservation. The idea to incorporate technologies for carbon capture and sequestration into the mechanism for sustainable development also collapsed, at least for the time being.

Reason for Hope

However, even though the results achieved in Poznań appeared to be in between small and negligible, the feeling remains that the majority of the countries that were negotiating have finally recognized the seriousness of the situation. They seem to understand just how imperative dramatic cuts will be in Copenhagen. Statements from the 2007 G8 meeting in Heiligendamm and the 2008 summit in Toyaku form the basis of this optimism. These announcements had made remarkable cuts in CO₂ emissions of 50 percent by 2050 seem feasible for the first time.

Another source of hope comes from the “reincarnation” of the USA as an international climate policy protagonist. The election of Barack Obama as 44th U.S. president and his speech to representatives from the automobile industry in Los Angeles, in which he announced a minimum U.S. target of 80 percent by 2050, are the kind of promises from which a new agreement in Copenhagen can materialize. So in spite of its inadequate results, Poznań has produced some optimism.

These recent developments also mark the transition to a new international climate policy architecture that will gradually replace the Kyoto Protocol. The distinctive characteristics of the post-Kyoto architecture will be long-term goals and the participation of some of the major emitters amongst the developing countries – initiated by negotiation processes at different levels within and outside of the United Nations. Consequently, the debate on a continuation of the Kyoto Protocol during the phase from 2013 to 2018 was almost degraded to a mere sidetrack of the Poznań negotiations, with most of the attention instead focused on the UN Convention negotiation track and its goal to establish a “Common Vision” as basis for a post-Kyoto agreement that would also include the United States and other main emitters.

The Design of a Post-Kyoto Architecture

The outline of this new climate policy architecture became clear in Poznań: First, the industrialized countries will obligate themselves to dramatic cuts in their greenhouse gas emissions. Second, the major emitters from the developing countries will obligate themselves to “national action plans” for climate change mitigation aiming at a significant divergence from business-as-usual scenarios, with the industrialized countries providing extensive financial aid packages to support this. Third, the poorest countries of the world and the countries that will be most adversely affected by climate change will receive additional financial aid from the UN in order to protect themselves against the effects of climate change whereby the largest part of the funds will be made available through CO₂ pricing in the industrialized countries, i.e. through revenues from the trading of emission certificates.

From my point of view, Poznań marked the start of the road to a new agreement, which will one day worthily replace the Kyoto Protocol. The observation that many participants had to “go back to square one”, is therefore not misleading. We are indeed approaching a new beginning – with a different constellation of players acting at different levels of negotiations. In this respect Poznań was a place for reorganization. It was an important intermediate step on the road to a new post-Kyoto architecture.

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