



THE DISAPPOINTING COPENHAGEN SUMMIT

Fresh from the disheartening Copenhagen summit, I can but pick up the refrain: urgent decisions are needed to ensure the human race a future. The earth will continue to go the way it goes, but it is far from sure that the new equilibriums spawned by inaction will allow our current civilization and lifestyles to go ahead in their turn.

Despite the feverish preparations and great expectations in the run up, the summit that has just ended was clearly a wasted opportunity. The shortfalls are numerous. Take the final document: it makes no operative reference to the target of pegging global temperature to 2°C, and contains no agreement on specific commitments to cut emissions between 2020 and 2050.

The European Union itself announced that on such a basis it will not be pressing for a -30% emissions target – tantamount to admitting that it will be impossible to stick to a 2°C temperature threshold. No deadline was set for completing a binding mechanism to maintain the progress these two years of negotiations have achieved.

Another complete blank when it came to adding the so-called equity clause, for which I have laboured at the European Parliament. In a nutshell, this refers to “yearly pro capita” emissions. The present world average is the equivalent of five tons of CO₂ per person per year (5 t/pers/a). By 2050 we need to cut this by 80%, achieving an average of 1 t/pers/a. If that level is accepted as “sustainable”, we could fix the rule that each country has a free allowance of emissions according to the size of its population, on the principle of “one person, one emissions quota”. That would mean that an American citizen (20 t/pers/a) ought to pay an average of 19 emissions quotas out of 20, a European (10 t/pers/a) 9 out of 10, a Chinese citizen (already over 4 t/pers/a) three out of four, an Indian (1.5 t/pers/a) one in three. Africa has an average of 0.2 t/pers/a and hence could sell 0.8 t/pers/a on the market, thus gaining some 12 billion euros by today’s rates of emissions quota, as a fund to invest in radical measures to adapt to climate change, especially combating desertification (which is already causing an exodus of what might be termed climate refugees). Binding

mechanisms might here be devised as to how revenue from sales of emissions quotas are used. Unfortunately, this first step towards fair common management of national resources was ignored by Copenhagen, where talk was all of generic funding to developing countries without a mention that this would come on top of present subsidies for international cooperation.

The agreement we reached is thus totally inadequate to save the planet. There remains a commitment not to exceed two degrees warming, but no concrete agreements as to how that goal can be achieved. No doubt something can be done with country or country group commitments, standardizing systems of emissions exchanges and maxima. In particular, one might work on systems of monitoring and assessing country compliance with commitment, but the impact of such action is clearly different from a global agreement.

The only area that made headway was the so-called REDD (*Reduction of Emissions due to Deforestation*) whereby compensation schemes can be set in motion for countries undertaking to respect their tropical forests to the full, in line with the subsidies already awarded for the rapid phase.

Another painful note was the agreement reached by a restricted group of countries: United States, China, India, Brazil, South Africa. Europe was not among them: as though we were automatically expected to agree? Surely not, given the stance Europe had taken.

In short, a wholly dissatisfactory outcome – though that will not curb our efforts to start things rolling again. Maybe at the next appointment – Bonn this coming June – we can get more concrete incisive agreements. If not, the future of our civilization is indeed in peril.

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