

Climate Action Beyond COP21: from International Negotiations to International Mobilisation? - 04/11/2015 – Conference Brief

On November 4th 2015, the Ifri Center for Energy held an international conference on the future of Climate Action beyond the COP21. The conference brought together key experts to outline reasonable expectations for the Paris Climate Summit, in terms of binding commitments from the parties and, more broadly, in terms of the profound transformation that an agreement could trigger.

In her welcome address, Ms. Marie-Claire Aoun, the Director of Ifri Center for Energy, pointed that the debate was coming at an auspicious time, just after the last negotiation session held in Bonn in October and less than a month before the official opening of the Conference of the Parties in Paris. A draft agreement is now on the table but many options are still under discussion. Among the topics that still need to be addressed, Ms Aoun stressed the importance of ensuring transparency and monitoring progress made, defining a framework for adaptation and providing clarity on how climate finance will flow to developing countries.

Our first speaker, Mr. Yvo de Boer, Director-General of the Global Green Growth Institute (GGGI), was invited to share his insights on what should be the core elements of the Paris Agreement. Commenting on the more than 150 national contributions submitted, Mr. de Boer suggested that they were impressive in the breadth, but lackluster in their depth. This reality essentially means that Paris must lay the ground for a solid process to review the adequacy of commitments and the adequacy of their implementation, he said. Further on, Mr. de Boer expressed skepticism on the need to include a long-term decarbonisation goal in the agreement, for the reason that it could distract negotiators from short-term priorities. A tangible outcome on climate finance was the second core element identified by Mr. de Boer. Developing countries should be given a strong indication that rich nations are committing not only to the \$100 billion, but also to catalyzing resources beyond this. Finally, Mr. de Boer mentioned the need to step back and consider the efficacy of the climate process itself. As the list of topics under discussion is continuously growing, this process is now overly complex and its nature and content should be modified. In conclusion, Mr. de Boer said he was confident that Paris would be a success, even a resounding success. That success would lie significantly in the foundation that is laid towards a climate crescendo.

Coming back to national contributions, Mr. Jean Jouzel, Climatologist and Research Director at the Commissariat à l’Energie Atomique et aux Energies Alternatives, addressed the issue of whether the below 2°C target was still within reach or not. In the first place, he recalled that if no action was taken, global warming would reach +4°C to +5°C above pre-industrial levels according to the IPCC Fifth Report findings. Containing the temperature rise to +2°C is essential, he said, because it is only below this limit that adaptation is considered feasible. It would require first that the emissions growth decelerates between now and 2020, second that emissions are cut by three between 2020 and 2050 and third that carbon neutrality is reached by the end of the century. Mr. Jouzel underlined that, in practice, INDCs only go up to 2030, which means that strong assumptions have to be taken to define long-term emissions pathways. In addition, even 2030 estimations remain dependant on assumptions, relating to economic growth in China and India for instance. Taking into account these uncertainties, Mr. Jouzel argued that the aggregate effect of current INDCs leads us most likely to a temperature rise of +2.7°C to +3.5°C.

Reflecting the growing importance of commitments taken by non-Parties to the UNFCCC, Minister Kuo-Yen Wei, from the Taiwanese Environmental Protection Administration, described Taiwan’s efforts in combatting climate change. Considering its vulnerability to natural hazards, Taiwan is particularly aware of the need to handle weather risk and more broadly to tackle the climate challenge, Minister Wei explained. While Taiwan is responsible for only 0.55% of global emissions, its mitigation efforts can still have a significant impact. Through the past eight years, Taiwan’s emission intensity of GDP has been

declining, essentially thanks to energy efficiency efforts. Looking forward, Minister Wei explained that further improvements would come from adjustments to the energy mix and industrial structure. Unveiling Taiwan's INDC, Minister Wei announced a new goal to cut emissions 50% from business as usual by 2030, in line with the previously-agreed long-term goal of cutting emissions 50% below 2005 levels by 2050. This would be achieved through the implementation of Taiwan's new GHG reduction and management Act, which covers mitigation, adaptation and green growth. Confirming Taiwan's strong willingness to engage more in the global fight against climate change, Minister Wei referred to carbon trade, industry performance standards, the Green Climate Fund, support to mitigation efforts in South-East Asia and technology transfers as potential areas where cooperation should be strengthened.

Following the presentations, the three discussants, Mr. Takashi Hattori from the IEA, Mr. Oliver Geden from SWP and Ms. Carole Mathieu from Ifri shared their views on whether COP21 could actually become a tipping point and trigger a massive wave of low carbon investments. Reflecting on the IEA's recent analyses, Mr. Hattori emphasized that the energy sector, generating two third of global emissions, needed a strong and clear signal from the Paris Summit to encourage the right investments and avoid the lock-in of highly-emitting infrastructures in the decades to come. According to the IEA, the full implementation of INDCs would lead to \$13.5 trillion investment in low-carbon technologies and energy efficiency by 2030, representing 40% of all investments in the energy sector. Mr. Hattori explained that while these pledges represented a positive trend for the energy sector, they were still falling short of the 2°C limit, meaning that a "bridge strategy" to further action was needed. He shed light on key measures, such as phasing out fossil-fuel subsidies, which could ensure that world energy related emissions peak as early as 2020. Later on, Mr. Geden suggested that there would be no major change as long as the *modus operandi* of international climate negotiations remained unchanged. Coming back to INDCs, Mr. Geden pointed out that their full implementation would only lead to a decrease of the emissions growth but not to a net reduction. While this situation advocates for regular review cycles, there is an important difference between reviewing pledges and ratcheting-up pledges, Mr. Geden said. Finally, he pointed that a coming into force of the agreement by 2020 was very ambitious considering the length of previous ratification phases. In this context, there could be a risk that countries adopt a wait-and-see approach and decide to postpone the implementation of their INDCs. Ms. Mathieu noted that while the key principles of the future Paris agreement were now clearly established, it was still possible to see the glass either half full or half empty. Having a too-wide spectrum of possible assessments could be problematic in the sense that current negotiations are not only about securing national commitments, they are also about shaping expectations and triggering a global shift of attitudes. Ms. Mathieu pointed that that the negotiators' key challenge would now be to make the Paris outcome "less debatable", by strengthening the wording and clarifying the rules as much as possible. To ensure that the momentum does not peak but rather continues after the COP, Ms. Mathieu also suggested that we would need to move rapidly to the implementation phase and potentially set up climate clubs, with small groups of countries agreeing to cooperate on specific aspects of climate action.

During the Q&A session with the audience, participants discussed crucial issues such the feasibility of a global carbon tax, ways to favour stability in climate policies and possible institutional safeguards to ensure the reliability of emissions inventories and review progress made by individual countries. Finally, Ms. Aoun closed the conference by stressing that we were now in the final straight of the negotiation. She explained that the upcoming pre-COP ministerial meeting and the G20 in Turkey could facilitate the discussion and, hopefully, open the way for final compromises to be agreed in Paris in December.