



The Paris Protocol – A blueprint for tackling global climate change beyond 2020

Position paper – July 2015¹

"The EESC recommends that the Commission, the Council and the European Parliament finally engage in intensive and structured dialogue, so that society's fundamental willingness to develop new mechanisms is not jeopardised. The new climate policy cannot and must not be imposed 'from above', but needs to be based on broad support from all stakeholders and to be implemented 'from below'."

Rapporteur Lutz Ribbe, EESC Opinion "The Paris Protocol – A blueprint for tackling global climate change beyond 2020"

Introduction

Since its adoption in May 1992, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has been ratified by 195 countries. These states meet once a year at the Conference of Parties (COP), also known as the UN climate summits. After over two decades of negotiations however – during which global emissions have increased by almost 50% – there is growing consensus that tougher action is needed to cut emissions and cap global temperature increases accordingly.

At the COP16 (in 2010), the parties reached a political agreement to limit the global temperature increase to less than 2 degrees Celsius compared with pre-industrial levels. In order to achieve this, the 21st COP, which will be held in Paris in December 2015, aims to adopt ambitious, fair and binding decisions for all 196 parties in the form of a "global deal" that would enter into force in 2020. Agreement also needs to be reached on what practical measures are needed to protect the climate prior to 2020.

What the EU is doing

The EU's position in the build up to COP21 is summed up in the February 2015 Commission Communication entitled "The Paris

Protocol – a blueprint for tackling global climate change beyond 2020"². The Commission proposes, among other things, making the agreements binding, which should then "enter into force as soon as countries with a collective total of 80% of current global emissions have ratified it". These agreements should be reviewed every five years, says the Commission, enabling parties to increase their ambitions as and when appropriate. In March 2015, the Commission consulted the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) on its Communication.

A negotiating text for the 2015 agreement was agreed in Geneva in February 2015. Before the Paris conference, negotiations will continue at inter-sessional UN meetings in June, September and October in Bonn.

The EESC's position

The EESC supports the adoption of a legally binding agreement in Paris and strongly supports the EU's negotiating position. The EESC welcomes the fact that the EU high representative, Frederica Mogherini, is focusing heavily on climate protection in the form of a Climate Diplomacy Action Plan³. The Committee believes that the EU can play a leading role by demonstrating that climate policy and positive economic development go hand in hand.

The Committee points out however that a globally satisfactory level of emissions can be achieved only if everyone in the world produces an average of no more than 2 tonnes of CO₂ equivalent per year. In Europe (where the average is approximately 9 t CO₂ equivalent per person per year), this could only be achieved by implementing the 2050 target (80-95% reduction in CO₂ emissions in Europe).

More negatively, the EESC views the considerable delays in submitting national emission reduction targets (INDCs) – a central part of the COP21 process – as a bad sign. The EESC also regrets that there are no longer any binding national targets under the 2030 EU energy and climate package, which may make it more difficult to achieve Europe's common goal and to "assign" responsibilities⁴.

1. Disclaimer: This position paper is based on the EESC draft opinion approved by the relevant section and does not take account of any further amendments introduced at the plenary session.
2. COM(2015) 81 final, 25.2.2015.
3. Discussed at the Foreign Affairs Council meeting on 19 January 2015, 5411/15
4. See EESC opinion on a Policy framework for climate and energy in the period from 2020 to 2030 (NAT/636), points 1.2 and 3.3.

Another key point from the EESC's perspective is the role of civil society in this process. A broad-based global civil society movement has emerged that is now calling for rigorous climate protection efforts. Agreements must meet with broad public approval and support from businesses, trade unions and other elements of society.

The EESC therefore finds it "incomprehensible" that the Communication lacks any strategy for how the Commission intends to communicate its positions to civil society, or to organise with it the subsequent implementation of the decisions taken. This, says the EESC, is an opportunity missed.

Civil society has a key role in monitoring what governments do, and is best placed to put pressure on policy makers to ensure they honour their commitments. Secondly, civil society will be instrumental in the actual implementation of the agreement on the ground. And thirdly, civil society partners can share good practices, disseminate knowledge and push for the adoption of new green technologies.

EESC Recommendations

All parties to the framework convention on climate change must, without exception, assume responsibility for meeting the actual goal, namely to stabilise "greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic (i.e. man-made) interference with the climate system". Only then can even greater damage to human beings, the environment and future generations be prevented, says the EESC.

The EESC also supports the principle of common but differentiated responsibility. Countries that contribute little to climate change at present should be supported, to ensure that they can move directly

towards a low carbon economy and thus avoid the mistakes of the past. Major opportunities in the field of green energy are opening up, which must be given political support.

While COP21 negotiations will not cover the issues of "carbon leakage" or "low carbon leakage", it is nonetheless vital that policy makers bear in mind climate issues and their economic and political consequences. The EU needs to promote at all levels, for example, the creation of market-based mechanisms that help to ensure that product-based emissions are taken into account in global trade issues.

Finally, in order to ensure broad support and to encourage implementation "from below", the EESC recommends that the Commission, the Council and the European Parliament (EP) engage in intensive and structured dialogue. EU action in this area has to date been disappointing, says the EESC.

"It is not agreements as such that will save the planet – these just set the framework – it is the implementation of these agreements that is the most important aspect, and this is where civil society can be an indispensable partner for positive change."

Rapporteur Lutz Ribbe, EESC Opinion "The Paris Protocol – A blueprint for tackling global climate change beyond 2020"

Further information

EESC Opinion:

www.toad.eesc.europa.eu/AgendaDocuments.aspx?pmi=RmFYXXWy9u%2BLuC6GAS7racABhLeZ5KVldLxAYnYqvwQ%3D

European Commission Climate Action:

http://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/international/negotiations/future/index_en.htm

European Commission Communication:

http://ec.europa.eu/priorities/energy-union/docs/paris_en.pdf