

FORSKERKLUMMEN

The EU at COP17 and the question of global leadership

Lau Blaxekjær about the challenges for the EU as a global leader in the climate change negotiations field. The EU tries to be a leading example while juggling the interest of China and the USA which are not compatible. Should the EU work on an extension of the Kyoto Protocol as China wishes or secure an agreement on a new rule based regime as the USA wishes?

Af ph.d.-studerende Lau Blaxekjær, Institut for Statskundskab, KU



Since COP15 the EU has been seen as a global leader in the climate change negotiations field. It has been acting more as a single

unit and taking on a more active role as a global leader. However, EU has recently said, that even though they are still committed to extending the Kyoto Protocol (KP) they will not stand firm on the issues at the COP17 meeting. Instead the EU wants to secure an agreement on a process towards a new rule based regime altogether. This is due to the fact that the EU needs other big emitters such as USA and China to join with binding emission targets. The EU wants to be seen as a global leader in terms of fighting climate change but cannot win the fight alone. One of the problems is that USA and China do not agree on these issues.

China wants to extend the KP with a second term (the first term runs out by the end of 2012), based on the principle of "common but differentiated responsibilities" (CBDR). It thereby avoids having to commit to binding emission targets. China is not ready to negotiate a new rule based regime based on global standards for measuring, reporting and validating (MRV) carbon emissions. China will see it as a loss of sovereignty if international experts will be in charge of validating it's progress.

USA wants to bury the KP and the principle of CBDR and is in contrast to China more agreeable to a new regime based on global standards of MRV. However, the domestic political deadlock in the USA makes it practically impossible for the USA to negotiate anything at the global level – at least on this side of the presidential election. It is worth noting, though, that there is political will in the USA to join the fight against climate change. At the state level and in the private sector, we see many green initiatives, e.g. Walmart taking substantial action to reduce emissions from their global supply chain.

So what's left for the EU to do – and to lead – if the USA and China stand firm on their very different and opposing positions? The EU's response is that in the

short term, the EU is taking the lead to create a process towards the long term global agreement (deadline set to 2020 in the Cancun Agreement). In the short term process as many specific measures as possible should be set up. The EU stresses market based mechanisms as the best institutional solution. So the EU has decided to lead by example and demonstrate that it is both economically and technologically feasible to change to a sustainable growth path. The actual leadership of the EU has then moved outside of the UNFCCC field. This has both positive and negative consequences.

On the positive side, EU is creating a different kind of global market structure taking advantage of the EU's market size. China is actually also going this way as exemplified in the current five-year plan (2011-2015). It is the world's number one in investments in green technologies. And if fossil fuels continue increasing in price and becoming scarcer, China will soon enough acknowledge the economic and energy security incentives to shift to non-fossil energy sources to keep the Chinese economy going. The Chinese leadership is also very worried about the environmental impact (and thereby risk of social unrest) of relying on fossil fuels.

If both the markets of the EU and China follow a sustainable growth trajectory, the rest of the world, especially USA, can be forced to follow as a result of pressures from both within and from the global infrastructure of markets and businesses.

On the negative side, the shift in focus to a new regime through regional and national market-based policies might make it more difficult to achieve a long term global legal binding agreement which according to climate change scientists is necessary.

The EU is therefore in a dilemma in it's attempt to act as a global leader. By leading as an example, it might be moving further away from the USA and thereby a global agreement.

Forskerklummen skrives på skift af forskerne på Center for Europæisk Politik. Klummen er ikke udtryk for en fælles CEP-holdning