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*Program: Klimat i Energia*

## Analizy i opinie

w cyklu:

### **„Zmiany klimatu: wyzwania dla polityki”**

**Nr 5 (grudzień)/2009**

### **„The Copenhagen Accord Is it worth the paper it's written on?”**

**Parker Snyder**



Postępujące zmiany klimatyczne mają wpływ na politykę, gospodarkę i na codzienne życie Polaków. Stanowią one globalne wyzwanie nie tylko dla polityków, ale dla całej społeczności, jak również dla każdego z nas.

Mając na uwadze złożoność problemów związanych ze zmianami klimatu, dostrzegamy pilną potrzebę debaty publicznej angażującej szerokie spektrum partnerów, w tym przedstawicieli świata polityki, nauki, środowisk biznesowych, administracji publicznej oraz organizacji pozarządowych.

Wierzymy, że szanse i zagrożenia związane ze zmianami klimatu powinny być odzwierciedlone w priorytetowych założeniach polskiej polityki wewnętrznej i zewnętrznej oraz na forum Unii Europejskiej i ONZ.

Widzimy potrzebę działań, szczególnie ze strony instytucji szeroko rozumianego społeczeństwa obywatelskiego, zmierzających do podniesienia świadomości społecznej w zakresie zmian klimatycznych oraz wynikających z nich konsekwencji dla Polski.



## **The Copenhagen Accord**

### **Is it worth the paper it's written on?**

Overall, the Copenhagen Accord fell short of its early ambitions. It sets no shared, long-term emissions reduction target. It makes no provision to have developing countries like China and India slow the rate of carbon-intensity with respect to their GDP. And most importantly, even if the emissions targets were achieved, it would not be enough to slow climate change to less than two degrees Celsius.

But it has some good points. It provides "fast track" funding for adaptation in developing countries. It establishes a REDD<sup>1</sup>+ framework to compensate developing countries for preserving their forests. And it can be considered the first international agreement that acknowledges the need to limit climate change to two degrees Celsius. As President Obama said, and other leaders concurred, it needs to be strengthened for it to be effective.

### **Developed Countries**

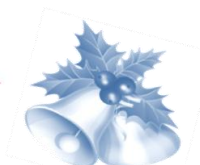
Emissions targets were the most contentious issue during two weeks of strained negotiations. The 4<sup>th</sup> Assessment Report of the international science committee IPCC says for catastrophic consequences to be avoided the world must hold the climate increase to less than two degrees. To achieve this goal, developed countries must agree on emissions targets.

Some negotiators oscillated between "high" and "low" commitments. For instance, the EU offered an ambitious 30% reduction from the baseline year 1990. Others offered a single target, such as the US, whose emissions reduction target will likely be 17%, using 2005 as a base year. But these targets are still missing from the agreement. They will not be added until January 31, 2010.

The NGO community asked for a "Fair, Ambitious, and Balanced" agreement. As for the ambitious part, a global emissions target is lacking. The agreement mentioned only that emissions must peak "as soon as possible." The 80% emissions reduction target by 2050 for Annex 1

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<sup>1</sup> Reduced Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation



countries was stripped out of the final agreement. (Annex 1 countries are the developed countries of the Kyoto Protocol bound by emissions targets, basically members of the G-20). For this reason, many NGO observers declared the Copenhagen Accord had fallen short of its early ambitions.

Concerning mitigation, the agreement provided for a list of nationally appropriate mitigation actions (NAMAs) that will be specified for each developed country. By referencing this list, countries can hold one another accountable. So if a country adopts a policy of using electric cars, actual emissions reduction can be scrutinized to ensure a fair and transparent process.

### **Developing Countries**

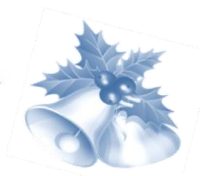
The developed world has been emitting carbon for the past 150 years and bears most of the moral responsibility for climate change. But developing countries – China, India and Brazil – emit large amounts of carbon already and will emit the most in decades to come.

In an early draft version of the Copenhagen Accord, the developing countries in the G-77 group inserted the text: "Social and economic development and poverty eradication are our overriding priorities." Essentially, China's great leap forward has brought millions out of poverty and will continue to do so. For this reason, emerging nations are reluctant to have their economic progress hampered by a global climate regime.

Before the conference began, China announced that it would reduce its carbon intensity emission per unit of GDP by 40 to 45 percent by 2020, though it would not put the obligation into the agreement. At the close of the COP, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao said that any of China's emissions targets will be strictly voluntary, adding that China remains open to "international exchange, dialogue and cooperation."

Small-Island States, who argued for a 1.5 degree Celsius target, endorsed the deal, and so did the African Union who had been in opposition to a global agreement all week. A Latin American bloc of countries led by Venezuela and Nicaragua opposed, saying the agreement had not been worked out according to the UNFCCC treaty. It's not likely that opposition by Latin American countries will stop the Copenhagen Accord from being adopted.

Concerning adaptation, African countries argued for a huge financial commitment because climate models predict Africa will be the most



severely affected. Earlier in the week a number of negotiators walked out, insisting on a minimum contribution for developing country adaptation of 0.5 - 1.5% of rich country GDP, or hundreds of billions of dollars. In a U.S. led effort to "fast track" adaptation funding, the agreement made \$30 billion available over the next three years and \$100 billion annually in contributions from 2020 onward. These financial commitments were less ambitious than hoped for by the African nations and Small-Island states.

The most significant outcome of the agreement could turn out to be the REDD+ framework, whereby developing countries are paid to keep their forests standing and their peat bogs from being drained. These are essentially large carbon sinks and do a great deal to slow climate change. Poor countries have very little incentive to keep their forests standing. REDD+ helps to quantify their value and is a step in the right direction.

### **Challenges Ahead**

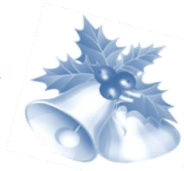
President Obama echoed concerns of other world leaders saying the Copenhagen Accord will need to be improved. Since this latest global climate deal seeks to improve the Kyoto Protocol, what follows is a review of its major shortcomings.

The Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) has come under criticism for doing very little to reduce emissions and for being unnecessarily choosy. CDM has registered only 330 million tones of emissions reductions annually<sup>2</sup>, while billions of tones are needed. Proponents see the CDM as a necessary first step to get rich countries to reduce emissions where it's cheapest, but critics say a carbon price would do better and deliver emissions reductions on the order of billions. Further to the point, the CDM is not even necessary, as a carbon market will reduce emissions on its own provided there's a price signal. Critics add that it's not clear whether CDM emissions credits earned by rich countries are actual reductions, leading some to label the CDM as "a bunch of hot air." The Joint Implementation program has been more effective, particularly in the former Soviet Union. This framework allows developed countries to earn emissions credits by co-financing projects through foreign direct investment.

The Kyoto Protocol has been hotly criticized. The United States, the biggest polluter per capita, never ratified the agreement, while Canada,

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<sup>2</sup> <http://cdm.unfccc.int/Statistics/index.html>



a signatory to the Kyoto Protocol, has seen its emissions increase under successive governments. Canada is not alone in wanting to exploit its fossil fuel resources, especially the profitable "tar sands" in the far north. Many countries depend on cheap fossil fuels. That's why a carbon price is necessary to move toward a low-carbon economy.

Fifteen years ago, when the Kyoto Protocol was drawn up, the distinction between Annex 1 (developed) countries and the G-77 (developing) countries was more clear. In the years since, China has grown to become the world's largest polluter, and none of the giant emerging economies (read China, India and Brazil) are subject to targets, though emissions in these countries are growing in-line with their economic development. The 2013-2020 period under negotiation should be tied to emissions – not to some abstract characterizations of developed vs. developing world.

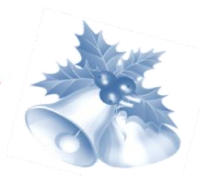
The Kyoto protocol has not succeeded in reducing emissions. That's because the two countries responsible for 40% of emissions – US and China – are not bound to emissions reductions. Further, there is no significant financial deterrent to ward off countries from burning fossil fuels now and paying the cost of climate change later.

Conspicuously absent from the Kyoto Protocol is mention of a carbon price, and nothing about a global regime to establish a carbon market. Economists regard a carbon price as a necessary precursor for a fundamental shift in thinking, away from carbon-intensive production toward cleaner, renewable technologies.

### **What do people think?**

Reaction to the Copenhagen Accord was mixed. Jo Leinen, head of the EU Parliament Delegation, called the agreement a "huge disappointment" and the UN conference system a "highly unsatisfactory and inefficient method." President of the European Parliament Jerzy Buzek was rather more subdued, calling it "a first step," and adding, "The EU should continue to put pressure on the world to come to a more ambitious agreement."

UNFCCC Executive Secretary Yvo de Boer reflected well the mixed feelings of the 35,000 participants in the 15th COP. "We must be honest about what we've got," Mr. de Boer said. "The world walks away from



Copenhagen with a deal. But ambitions must be raised if we are to hold the world to two degrees.”

As for Danes who hoped to stamp a global agreement with their name, their effort was sincere but over-earnest. Mid-way through the second week the head of the plenary Danish Environment Minister Connie Hedegard was dismissed because of frustrations shared by many of the COP-15 negotiators. She wanted too much too soon from an unwieldy crowd and the temperamental heads of some 115 delegations.

### **Parker SNYDER**



Parker Snyder holds a civil engineering degree from Purdue University, U.S.A. His professional career was associated with Southface, an organization working for sustainable development and clean technologies in the construction industry. He published many articles and studies in the U.S. trade journals. Since 2008 he has worked in Poland as a consultant and writer.