

<https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article3869>



Climate Change

A European agreement?

- IV Online magazine - 2015 - IV481 - February 2015 -

Publication date: Monday 16 February 2015

Copyright © International Viewpoint - online socialist magazine - All rights reserved

“The European Union has concluded an ambitious agreement on climate”: thus was the unanimous media verdict on the decisions taken at the EU summit in October 2014. A careful examination shows that this message is very largely propaganda.

A 40% reduction in emissions

The heads of state and government of the EU agreed on three new objectives: reducing the emissions of greenhouse gases by at least 40% by 2030 (compared to 1990), increasing the share of renewable energy to 27% of energy consumption and increasing energy efficiency by 27 %. The third objective is not binding; the first two are to be achieved at the level of the EU as a whole.

It is clear from the reports of the IPCC that, to have one chance in two of not exceeding two degrees Celsius of temperature increase compared to the 18th century, the developed countries, because they are mainly responsible for global warming, should reduce their emissions by 80-95% by 2050, passing by an intermediate step of 25-40% by 2020. The agreement concluded on October 24 targets the higher end of the range, but ten years late.

A misleading figure

Most importantly, the figure of 40% is misleading because it ignores “grey emissions”, in other words emissions caused by the production of goods consumed in Europe but imported from other countries. The accounting of emissions is based on the place of production, not on the place of consumption. This mode of calculation has been adopted in the framework of international negotiations. It is not neutral. Indeed, given that an increasing share of goods consumed in developed countries is produced in the emerging countries, an accounting system based on places of production means that a part of the emissions due to rich countries is attributed to poor ones. This gives a distorted image of the responsibility of the former and of their efforts at “mitigation” of global warming.

Of course, there are not only goods produced in the South and consumed in the North, but also goods produced in the North and consumed in the South, goods produced in the South and consumed in other countries of the South, goods produced in the North and consumed in other countries of the North, and goods produced in a country of the South which pass through another country of the South before being consumed in the North - it is all quite complicated, but the principle is clear: to take the correct measure of climate responsibilities and of the efforts of all parties to limit the damage, we must take into account all these movements of world trade, in order to determine the “net emissions” of each country.

Net transfer of emissions

Researchers have studied the problem to quantify it [\[1\]](#). Their work confirms that a share of emissions attributed to the developing countries is due in fact to the developed countries. In other words: there is a “net transfer” of emissions from the North to the South.

This transfer is very significant and it is accelerating over time. Overall, the developed countries subject to commitments in the framework of the Kyoto protocol have reduced their emissions by around 2% between 1990 and 2008 (significantly less than their promise of 5.2%). During the same period, the “grey emissions” imported by these countries have increased fourfold (0.4 Gt to 1.6 Gt CO₂). Cumulatively, international trade has thus meant that over eighteen years, 16Gt CO₂ have been transferred from the developed countries to the “developing” countries. For 2008 alone, we arrive at this astounding result: the net transfer of emissions from the North to the South is at least five times higher than the reductions made by the North in the name of its responsibility to the South.

I reduce but I increase

Like others, Europe has benefited from this sleight of hand. It boasts of having almost completed its commitment made in the framework of the Kyoto Protocol (an 8% reduction in its emissions). That is correct ... except that these reductions were significantly lower than the “grey emissions” imported in the form of products manufactured elsewhere. From this point of view, in reality, the EU has not reduced its emissions, it has increased them!

The new commitments post-Kyoto hardly change the picture. As the authors of the study cited note: “If the historical trend continues in a linear fashion, the net emission transfers from the group of developed countries to the group of developing countries will reach approximately 2.3 Gt of CO₂ per year in 2020, or 16% of developed country emissions in 1990”. And the researchers note that this figure of 16% is “comparable to the most optimistic offers of reduction made by the developed countries in the framework of the Copenhagen agreement”.

It's not us, it's the Chinese

In fact, after Kyoto, the European Union committed to a strategy called “3 x 20”: by 2020, a 20% reduction in emissions, 20% renewables and 20% increase in energy efficiency. As a result of sluggish growth and the retraction of “grey emissions”, this 20% reduction in emissions by 2020 can be achieved without great difficulty.

However, to follow a trajectory compatible with the limit of 2°C, it would be necessary to go further, to a reduction of at least 30% by 2020 (in fact, 40% would be more prudent). The former secretary-general of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Ivo De Boer had pleaded for this before the European Parliament a few years ago, but in vain.

The new objectives for 2030 are of the same ilk as those for 2020: taking into account “grey emissions”, the 40% reduction announced by the heads of state and government may turn out more like effective domestic reductions of around 15% and possibly less. The conclusion is clear: the leaders of the EU are trying to hoodwink us while they are in the process of leading us to an indescribable and irreversible disaster. At the same time, they know where to place the blame for it all: “It's not us, it's the Chinese”.

Another policy

The fraudulent 40% reduction in reality serves only to lull us but also to ensure the EU the best possible position in the climate negotiations supposed to conclude in Paris in 2015. Depending on the interests of the big companies, more and more are saying out loud that their profits come before the salvaging of the climate that we

A European agreement?

know and under which humanity has developed.

The major environmental NGOS have condemned the decisions of the European Council. Very good. But their arguments are often breathtaking - rather than denounce the mode of accounting which attributes “grey emissions” to developing countries, they are trying to convince governments and employers that a more ambitious climate policy would be more advantageous for the competitiveness of enterprises. This track is doomed to failure. The governments, in this case as in others, act in the best interests of the employers. Rather than wanting to act as advisors, it is important to mobilize en masse for another policy which is both social and ecological.

[1] See “Growth in emission transfers via international trade from 1990 to 2008” <http://www.pnas.org/content/108/21/8903.full.pdf+html>