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**Prospects for the Paris climate summit**

The Paris climate summit, formally the conference of the parties of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), will probably to reach an agreement. That is not certain, because the UNFCCC can only decide things by unanimity, so every country has a veto. But it is likely, because Christina Figueras, the head of UNFCCC, has accepted that a top-down legally binding agreement is not politically possible. So a ‘Paris agreement’ will collate what national governments have said that they will do.

The negotiating process and attendant media attention has put some pressure on national governments. But not much. An agreement has emerged because the world’s top two polluters, China and the USA, both want one. China wants a deal because the public there are fed up with air pollution, so the government is less favourable to coal and more favourable to clean energy. This makes it more willing to make promises on greenhouse gas emissions. And a constructive role in Paris will boost China’s standing with some developing countries which it wants better relations with (and more influence over).

The US administration wants a deal because president Obama sees action on climate change as part of his legacy. The key part of this legacy (provided it survives the continuing legal challenges) will be the regulation being enacted by the Environmental Protection Agency to control greenhouse gas pollution from power plants and so close many coal plants. An international agreement would be a nice addition to his legacy. And a US president is able to ratify an international agreement without submitting it to Congress if the agreement does not require the US to do anything which it would not have done anyway. This is the main reason why the UNFCCC is going for bottom-up. The chances of Obama getting a climate agreement through the Senate for ratification are zero.

The EU has set itself a target of a 40% reductions in emissions by 2040. Ed Davey succeeded in getting the words “at least” into this EU agreement, but they are never mentioned by his successor Amber Rudd (or indeed any other EU politician).

The arguments in Paris will not be about targets – though NGOs will point out (correctly) that governments are not doing enough to keep global warming to within 2 degrees, the agreed international objective. The arguments will be more about money. In Copenhagen governments promised that $100 billion a year of climate finance will be available by 2020 – though much would be leveraged from the private sector. This would be spent on cutting pollution (mitigation) and responding to a changed climate (adaptation). A Green Climate Fund, based in South Korea, has now begun operating, but has only around $10 billion. Only about $6 billion of this is additional money (ie not taken from existing aid budgets) from developed country governments. ( <http://www.wri.org/blog/2015/10/insider-getting-100-billion-climate-finance-how-close-are-we>)

Much climate finance in the past has been delivered through the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM); governments investing to make emissions reductions abroad which they can count towards their domestic target. This has been controversial: for example, investments in ‘more efficient’ coal power stations have been included. Nevertheless, the CDM has delivered substantial money to renewable energy in developing countries. As there will not be legally-binding targets under the Paris agreements, it is not likely that there will be many more CDM payments.

Much of the money for climate finance could and should come from governments ending fossil fuel subsidies – as they promised to do in the G20 in 2009 – and reallocating that money to mitigation and adaptation. (See <http://www.cer.org.uk/publications/archive/policy-brief/2014/international-climate-negotiations-should-focus-money-not-tar>).

*The UK’s stance and performance*

The UK has set itself quite strong targets under the Climate Change Act. The Committee on Climate Change will publish its proposal for the fifth carbon budget (2038-32) in November. So this is likely to dominate UK political climate discussions in the run up to Paris.

The UK is doing much worse on finance. The government has increased the amount it is providing to £5.8 billion in 2016-21 - about a 50% increase in the amount in provided for 2011-15. But this is not enough, and not as good as other governments (eg Germany) are doing, as Oxfam and others have said (See

<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/sep/28/uks-6bn-climate-finance-pledge-is-welcome-but-not-its-fair-share>).

The UK’s own energy policy is in chaos, with subsidies to renewables being slashed and the Green Deal energy efficiency scheme being closed without a replacement. A ‘reset’ is promised for early November. This may set a date for the closure on coal power stations without carbon capture and storage. Meanwhile the government is offering new subsidies to almost 3 Gw of new diesel power stations to act as back up to intermittent renewables.

The Comprehensive Spending Review may allocate some new spending on energy efficiency and clean energy, but probably not much. George Osborne is not interested in climate action (unlike David Cameron).

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