Preparing the post-Kioto architecture

By Jakub Adamowicz

If climate change is not to substantially threaten living conditions on planet earth, the temperature increase until the end of this century may not exceed two degrees centigrade taking 1990 as a basis. For attaining this target, it is more important to agree on global limits for emissions than to focus on methods of reducing CO-2 emissions. First elements of a post-Kyoto climate compromise for the years following 2012 start emerging on this on this basis.

With this background in mind, Asem environment ministers gathered in Copenhagen for an informal meeting yesterday. “Industrial countries have a particular responsibility”, comments Lynn Sheppard, an EU-Commission expert in charge of international climate negotiations, on combating climate change. “The European Union stands up to its responsibilities”, says Sheppard with reference to the US abstaining from the Kyoto Protocol. During the last Brussels spring summit, EU leaders have decided to launch an energy policy based on efficiency and to reduce CO-2 emissions by 20 percent taking 1990 as reference. If the recommendations of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change are to be taken seriously – the rise in global temperatures must not exceed two degrees centigrade by the end of this century, again taking 1990 as reference – the EU energy efficiency initiative is just the beginning of a long lasting emission reduction effort.

Niklas Höhne from the energy consulting company Ecofys sets the predicted rise in temperatures in relation to the corresponding levels of emissions. Ideally, the global emission levels of carbon dioxide should not exceed the levels of 1990 by more than thirty percent. By 2050, emissions would have to be ten percent lower than back in 1990. Given the worldwide economic growth, the industrialisation of China and India, and the current scepticism of the US administration towards climate change issues, this target represents a huge challenge. According to calculations presented by Höhne, industrial states would have to reduce their emissions by 30 percent as early as 2020, in order for the two centigrade target to remain attainable. In the thirty years between 2020 and 2050, the industrial states of North America, Europe and Asia would have to cut their emissions
further in order to attain levels fifty percent beyond those of 1990. These scenarios have a chance of success only if the states concerned manage to agree on an encompassing consensus of an emission reduction scenario, says Höhne. For a successful long-term reduction of emissions, it is more important for the states concerned to agree on a binding framework for the reduction of emissions than to focus on detailed plans of implementation.

The United Nations will have to play an important role in the elaboration of a post-2012 climate regime, says Paul Watkinson, member of the interministerial task force for climate change of the government of France.

In the remaining eight years until 2020, developing countries will not be able to grow through the use of energy efficient technologies exclusively. However, the basis for a shift in energy policies of those countries can be changed as early as today. This can be done through instruments such as the "Mechanism for environmentally sustainable development". Indonesia's environment minister Rachmat Witoelar declares: "The use of environmental technology in the framework of our development policy is a priority for Indonesia. In the meantime, it is important for us to grow today as to create the basis for a better future". Denmark's environment minister Connie Hedegaard reminds that in environmental affairs, the cost of non-action is higher than the cost of action. "We should now define what has to be done in order to address climate change, and how far we should go", says Hedegaard while addressing climate experts from Europe and Asia. Hedegaard stresses the link between energy efficiency and the reduction of CO-2 emissions: "Two thirds of all carbon dioxide emissions emanate from the energy sector". According to experts, the giant sum of 23 trillion US-Dollars will be invested in the development and sustainability of the energy sector in the years up to 2020. "As a leading player in this process, the European Union will strengthen its competitive advantages in the field of energy efficiency", according to Hedegaard.

Asem consists of the member states of the European Union, the Association of South East Asian Nations, China and Japan.
Pulling together in one direction

By Jakub Adamowicz

The scientists of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change agree: Climate change is man made and the ecological consequences of global warming are threatening mankind. It's already too late to avoid consequences for humankind's living environment. Yet if consequences of CO-2 emissions such as flooding, melting of glaciers at increased speed or accelerating drought periods are to be avoided, the temperature increase until the end of the century may not exceed two degrees centigrade taking 1990 as a basis. Already prior to the Brussels spring summit, the European Union was the leader in combating excessive CO-2 emissions. Europe has a particular interest in favouring environmentally sustainable energy technologies. No other continent has achieved such progress in the research of alternative energy forms. The EU understands climate change as a great challenge to foster and position its high-tech environmental technologies sector.

Potential climate policy allies are to be found in booming Asia. Because China and the Asean-States are keen to keep up their high growth rates, they can be expected to adopt efficiency-improving energy technologies. High-tech and innovation-focussed Japan shares Europe's drive for climate change responsiveness. Contrary to Washington, Asian and European capitals share an important common aim: the political will to conceive climate change as a constructive challenge and engine for sustainable economic growth. Part of the explanation is that countries such as Thailand, the Philippines or Indonesia are threatened by natural disasters. Asem offers Europeans and Asians the chance to commonly elaborate the foundations for a comprehensive climate change regime for the time after 2012 when the Kyoto Protocol will have expired. If this climate protection regime is to effectively address the challenges brought about by global warming, the participation of the biggest CO-2 emitter is of utmost importance. If Europe and Asia are in one boat, the US will not be able to stay out.