



# BULLETIN

No. 122 (575), 8 November 2013 © PISM

Editors: Marcin Zaborowski (Editor-in-Chief) • Katarzyna Staniewska (Managing Editor)  
Jarosław Cwiek-Karpowicz • Artur Gradziuk • Piotr Kościński  
Roderick Parkes • Marcin Terlikowski • Beata Wojna

## UN Climate Change Negotiations: The Rocky Road from Poznań to Warsaw

Artur Gradziuk

*Poland again will host the UN Climate Change Conference. It seems that we are in the same point as five years ago in Poznań, with a global climate agreement far from conclusion. Climate change talks have been difficult, but the results of the previous climate summits on some important issues should not be underestimated. They can help implement a post-2020 climate agreement, if one is concluded in 2015. COP19 should prepare an effective working plan of negotiations for the next two years, but it is hard to predict from the Warsaw conference whether there will be any breakthroughs in key areas of the planned climate deal.*

**Same Dilemma, Different COP.** This is the second time that Poland will host the UN Climate Change Conference. The first time was in Poznań in 2008 (COP14), which was held at the mid-point of the negotiations on a global climate change agreement (which began in Bali in 2007 and had been planned to conclude in Copenhagen in 2009). In Poznań, nobody was expecting any breakthrough in the talks. All of the parties were waiting for newly-elected U.S. President Barack Obama to present a more ambitious and constructive approach to the climate change issue. Furthermore, the European Union was busy finishing its negotiations on a climate-energy package, its roadmap for climate and energy policy until 2020. The great expectations that COP15 in Copenhagen would bring a global, comprehensive climate change agreement did not materialise.

This time in Warsaw, the situation is somewhat similar. We are still far from a global climate change deal. Just as in Poznań five years ago, there is hope that a deal will be agreed in the near future (in Paris in 2015). But it is still unclear what kind of commitments can be expected from the United States and China, two of the major parties in the climate change talks. It is also difficult to predict the effectiveness of the European Union—the main proponent of a global climate change agreement—to persuade major parties to go for such a deal. The road to the negotiations in Paris will be rocky, with many sticking points to overcome, as the progress of climate change talks has not been smooth since Poznań.

**Progress So Far.** Even though there is still no comprehensive, ambitious global climate change agreement, the results of negotiations so far should not be underestimated. Of course, the progress was incremental and proved disappointing for many countries and observers. But some important outcomes were achieved.

Despite the failure to reach a global climate agreement at COP15 in Copenhagen, some countries did submit GHG emissions reduction pledges. Without any common legal document and with the expiry of the Kyoto Protocol (KP) looming in 2012, it was still unclear how to make such pledges binding. As a result, those pledges currently come in various forms. In Doha last year, the second KP commitment period was established, with participating countries aiming to reduce emissions to at least 18% below the 1990 levels, by 2020. But very few parties signed the Doha Amendment to the Kyoto Protocol, and those that did are responsible for just 15% of global emissions. Some important parties (such as Russia, Japan and New Zealand) refused to make any commitments. Countries also presented their so called “nationally appropriate mitigation commitments or actions.” 16 developed countries did so in the form of quantified emissions reduction objectives, while 57 developing countries did so in the form of quantified emissions reductions below “business as usual” levels or through intensity targets or sectoral policies. However, the

pledges presented so far are insufficient to meet another important objective adopted during the climate change talks: limiting global temperature growth to 2°C above the pre-industrial level.

Negotiators were able to strengthen arrangements regarding another important aspect of the talks: adaptation to climate change. COP16 adopted the Cancun Adaptation Framework, which obliged parties to prepare their own national adaptation plans that would identify medium- and long-term adaptation needs and present strategies to address them. It also initiated work on a programme on loss and damages in response to calls from developing countries for compensation for climate impacts based on historical emissions by developed countries.

Finances constituted another important aspect discussed during the climate change talks. In the Copenhagen Accord, developed countries committed to “fast-start” funding. They pledged to mobilise \$30 billion for the period 2010–2012, and reported information on the resources provided to developing countries to reach that goal. At COP16 in Cancun, climate talks also led to the establishment of the Green Climate Fund, which was going to mobilise public and private financial resources and channel them to support projects, programmes and policies related to climate change in developing countries. Now, the task of negotiators is to raise \$100 billion annually by 2020.

Climate talks also led to the settlement of one of the most controversial problems that presented a serious hurdle to reaching a satisfactory global climate agreement: two-track negotiations (the AWG–KP working group, which negotiated the future of the Kyoto Protocol and new emissions limits for the second commitment period for KP parties only, and AWG–LCA which negotiated the long-term actions of parties to the Conventions). With the establishment of one track—the Ad-hoc Working Group on the Durban Platform on Enhanced Actions (ADP)—negotiations were able to focus on working out a single document that would include all major emitters.

**Expectations of the Warsaw Conference.** The likelihood of any major agreement or milestone being reached during COP19 in Warsaw is slim. Nevertheless, talks on other issues should be fruitful, including working-level negotiations on previously agreed decisions, the roadmap for discussion for the next two years, and defining key elements that should be included in the post-2020 agreement. ADP has become the main forum for negotiations, and now includes two workstreams: the first focuses on the post-2020 agreement to be adopted in 2015, the second on enhancing pre-2020 mitigation commitments. In the case of Workstream 1, the discussion so far has been very general and inconclusive, with major sticking points unresolved (e.g., mitigation commitments, financing). There is no consensus about the legal form that a future climate change agreement should take. The EU along with several of the least-developed and island countries will push for a strong legal document, but major emitters such as the U.S., China or India still prefer a less legally binding and more flexible document. No new offer within Workstream 2 is expected in terms of new, more ambitious emissions reduction targets for 2020. It seems that even a new report published in September 2013 by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change stating that carbon dioxide concentration in the atmosphere exceeded 400 parts per million (the goal is not to exceed 450ppm if the world is going to meet the 2°C target) did not affect the perception of urgency of adopting ambitious GHG emissions reduction targets. But voices calling to present new 2020 pledges will be heard at COP19.

The talks are also likely to concentrate on financing. The global financial crisis and budgetary problems of the major developed countries have limited their willingness to add to the \$100 billion pot for climate action from their own pockets. Hence, there is a need to encourage the private sector to contribute to the global funds for climate change action. But the position of the major developing countries of the BASIC group (Brazil, South Africa, India and China) is clear: they call for a stable flow of funds from developed countries for climate actions in developing countries, principally financed by public resources. It is unlikely that the fundamental question of finance will be resolved in Warsaw, but at least it is necessary to advance the discussion on the design and operationalisation of the Green Climate Fund.

Other important aspects are going to be discussed at COP19, but the key challenge will be to move negotiations forward and avoid deadlock on some procedural issues, as was the case at the mid-year session in June 2013 in Bonn. Then, Russia, Belarus and Ukraine expressed opposition to the way the Doha Agreement was adopted at COP18 and blocked discussion on topics that were on the agenda of the climate talks.

**Conclusions and Recommendations.** Progress has been slow since the last UN Climate Change Conference in Poland. With no global climate deal on the horizon and many sticking points on the road to concluding the negotiations, it would not be unfair to state that the situation at COP19 in Warsaw is almost unchanged compared to five years ago in Poznań. However, some progress has been made, with the emergence of new mechanisms and initiatives that should facilitate the implementation of the post-2020 agreement, if one is adopted in Paris in 2015. Work should now concentrate on an effective plan and practical steps that should facilitate satisfactory results in Paris. COP19 in Warsaw should prepare such a plan, with Poland and the hosts of upcoming climate summits (Peru and France) being tasked with making it workable and defining gaps that need to be narrowed. The key challenge will be attracting political attention and increasing the willingness of the major parties to make their commitments more ambitious and confirm their readiness to adopt a legally binding climate deal. The real test of this willingness will be a special leaders’ climate change summit organised by Ban Ki-moon in September next year. Such a summit would facilitate stocktaking by decision-makers, and could answer the question of whether concluding a new global climate treaty that is acceptable to all major parties is a feasible task.