



# BULLETIN

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## Climate Pledges Ahead of the Paris Conference Fail to Meet Expectations

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*Emissions reduction targets so far submitted by parties to the Paris Climate Summit will not be enough to limit global warming as required to below 2°C. Although these climate pledges lack ambition, they could become a solid foundation for further climate actions. The Polish government should support the effort by promoting an increase in financial and technological help for developing countries.*

To counter climate change, Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) were developed during the 19<sup>th</sup> Conference of Parties (COP19) in Warsaw in 2013. This mechanism is intended to become one of the pillars of a future global agreement. It enables all of the parties to be included in the negotiations of a deal but to take individual approaches in their climate change efforts. Each party has until the Paris Climate Summit (COP21) to define its own fair contribution between 2020 and 2030, preferably mitigation, to limiting greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs).

The INDCs submitted by early September show that the actions planned by the countries will not be adequate to achieving the target of limiting global warming to 2°C by the end of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The declaration lack not only ambition but also they are not clear or qualitatively comparable. Moreover, they will not be internationally binding, so achieving even the conservative targets they set is uncertain. Still, they are the only mechanism for global climate change mitigation to be launched to this point.

**Lack of Ambition.** As of 7 September, a total of 58 countries that, combined, account for almost 65% of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions have submitted their national commitments. According to the *2015 World Energy Outlook Special Report on Energy and Climate Change*, the scale of mitigation presented in the INDCs and political statements (made to June 2015) is not enough and could lead to a 2.6°C increase above the pre-industrial era global temperature by the year 2100. The gap between the efforts needed and these planned by the countries exceeds 9 gigatonnes in energy-related CO<sub>2</sub> emissions (almost three times as much as the EU energy sector emitted in total in 2013).

Among developed economies, the EU submitted the most ambitious target, aiming to reduce at least 40% of domestic GHGs by 2030 compared to 1990 levels. Using 2005 as a base year, this target reaches about 36%. In comparison, the U.S. pledged to limit GHG emissions by 2025 by 26–28% below the 2005 level. The EU and U.S. INDCs are difficult to compare, though. They not only have different base years (1990 and 2005) but also different target years (2025 and 2030), which makes it impossible to compare the efforts clearly.

However, it seems certain that the widely discussed “Clean Power Plan” that U.S. President Barack Obama presented in August can be assessed as less ambitious than the EU pledge. The U.S. is supposed to have reduced emissions from power generation in 2030 by 32% from the 2005 levels. According to the European Commission’s impact assessment of the *EU 2030 Climate and Energy Framework*, emissions from the power generation sector are estimated to fall by 57% by 2030 from the 2005 levels, which gives an impression of the conservativeness of the U.S. plans. Other advanced economies are also not as ambitious as the EU, including Japan, which states that it intends to reduce its GHG emissions by 25.3% by 2030 compared to 2005 levels.

**The Lack of Comparison with Other INDCs.** Instead of submitting a GHG reduction target, China chose to focus on reducing its carbon intensity factor by 60–65% by 2030 from the 2005 levels. It also declared CO<sub>2</sub> emissions will peak by 2030 or earlier, which means China will still be increasing them most likely until sometime after 2025. Such indicators mean the pledge is not comparable with other submissions. On a positive note, though, this INDC can

be seen as a sign that China is willing to declare to the international community a contribution to the global efforts of tackling climate change.

One of the biggest disappointments is the Russian INDC. It states that the country will reduce GHG emissions by 25–30% by 2030 from its 1990 levels, which actually means an increase in emissions in comparison to the 2010 levels when emissions were already 34% below those in 1990. The Russian pledge also includes a declaration that it will use to the maximum extent possible the Land Use, Land-Use Change and Forestry (LULUCF) sector to reduce climate change. With this stipulation, the Russian INDC may actually be a declaration that it will reduce GHG emissions by only 6–11% from the 1990 levels (according to the NGO Climate Action Tracker).

LULUCF takes into account the role of forests in CO<sub>2</sub> accumulation (reduction). By planting and rehabilitating forests, a country may increase its forest “carbon stocks,” which can be counted as an emissions reduction. Deforestation and poor forest management, on the other hand, result in a decrease in the stock. Inclusion of LULUCF in the INDC makes it unclear when accounting for reductions or increases of emissions because the methods applied in this sector are not commonly agreed. The EU also included LULUCF in its INDC, stating that it will define the exact role it will play after the Paris Agreement, but this decreased the clarity of its declaration.

**Non-binding and Conditional Pledges.** In contrast to the demand-centric Copenhagen Climate Conference in 2009, COP21 in Paris takes a “bottom-up” approach of voluntary and grassroots pledges. INDC form the core of this principle but these independently declared contributions will not be internationally binding. What is more, there even will not be an international system for assessment or ensuring compliance with the INDCs because China and the U.S. reject such solutions. Therefore, until these nationally determined contributions are fully implemented it will not be possible to determine the success or failure of the mechanism.

Another factor of uncertainty in regard to the delivery of the goals of the declared contributions is, paradoxically, what makes the INDC process valuable. Mexico intends to reduce its emissions unconditionally by 22% by 2030 from a scenario in which no mitigation action is undertaken. Moreover, Mexico expressed the ambition to increase its targets (by up to 36%) if it receives support from other countries.

This type of conditional mechanism enabled other developing countries—even Least Developed Countries (LDCs)—to participate in the submission of INDCs, including Ethiopia, Kenya, Morocco, Dominican Republic, Algeria and Democratic Republic of Congo. They all submitted their mitigation targets dependent on international financial and technological support. Without external help, these countries, which bear no so-called historical responsibility for CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, would concentrate only on economic growth and reduction of poverty, likely at the expense of climate.

**Objectives for the Paris Conference.** Despite these uncertainties and reservations about the INDCs, the chance exists that the declarations may become a pillar of the Paris Agreement and they might set a solid foundation for future global actions more tailored to climate action needs.

To meet these hopes, the Paris Agreement has to define accounting methods for such areas as LULUCF. This will add a higher degree of clarity to the process. It may even motivate a few countries to increase their reduction targets after accounting for LULUCF. The negotiators should also include in the agreement a 5-year review cycle of the INDCs. If such a mechanism is agreed in December, at least the countries that have made pledges with 2030 as their target year will need to submit new ones with sub-targets for 2025. This gives the possibility for more ambitious submissions before 2020. If the first 5-year work goes to plan, the countries may even review their targets in 2025 and increase planned reductions for 2030.

Another positive sign from all this is that almost all of the biggest emitters are part of the process. Only two major economies have not submitted any pledge—Brazil and India—but they both intend to do that before COP21. Involvement of LDCs means the Paris Agreement can become a fully worldwide effort to tackle climate change. Although the efforts are, for now, not meeting expectations or the obvious needs, it should be understood that politicians working in four- or five-year election cycles are not willing to make other, more ambitious long-term commitments.

**Leader without Followers.** The submissions from the LDCs and Mexico have shown the need for important external actions that should be taken by the EU. Financial support and technological transfers to developing countries and emerging markets highly dependent on fossil fuels can be seen as an enhancement in the EU’s INDC. The transition of these economies to low-carbon ones can also motivate and increase collective global efforts.

The EU states’ proposals might seem too ambitious in comparison to the other pledges, but it is not the case from the global perspective. When assessing Europe’s economic capabilities against the needed global reductions by 2100, they can be seen as a fair contribution. One area in which the EU is certainly too ambitious is its willingness to play the role of leader. The EU’s INDC was intended to motivate its partners, but the contributions submitted by those countries did not meet the EU’s hopes. If the EU is a leader then it lacks followers and the capability to impact the decisions of others.

Polish negotiators should try to make their European partners aware of the EU’s lack of leadership on this issue. They can argue that LULUCF offers room to manoeuvre to scale the EU’s commitments in response to the conservative submissions of other parties. The Polish government should also promote increased engagement by the EU in support of other countries to help them fulfil their reduction targets. However, to increase trust it needs to develop its own climate financing policies first.