

Navigating the road from Warsaw towards a climate agreement in 2015

Noriko Fujiwara

5 December 2013

The Warsaw climate conference (Conference of Parties, COP19) finally resulted in a decision to agree on a timeframe for the new agreement due in COP21 in Paris in 2015, and ways to enhance the levels of ambition in pre-2020 mitigation pledges.¹ Warsaw was in effect a halfway step from Durban, where Parties agreed to develop “a protocol, another legal instrument or an agreed outcome with legal force under the Convention applicable to all Parties”² (Decision/COP17), with a view to adopting it in COP21 in 2015 for its entry into effect and its implementation from 2020. It was crucial to ascertain whether indeed all Parties are on board and ready to start domestic processes in order to come forward with proposals for post-2020 mitigation pledges on time.

Hence, the Warsaw decision invites all Parties “to initiate or intensify domestic preparations for their intended nationally-determined contributions” and to communicate them well in advance of COP21 in Paris, by the 1st quarter of 2015 “in a manner that facilitates the clarity, transparency and understanding of the intended contributions”.³ This language refers to the importance of up-front clarity in the information to accompany Parties’ pledges.

Changes in the institutional architecture and processes

This new decision needs to be understood in light of the general shift in weight to domestic processes, Parties’ motivations, and integrity of mitigation and development in climate policy. One of the lessons learned from COP15 in Copenhagen is that Parties came to position themselves rather than negotiate with other Parties, having completed domestic processes long before. It has been also observed that more than 90 countries, none of which were necessarily bound by the legal nature of commitments or actions, were willing in Cancun to put forward their pledges to reduce or limit GHG emissions by 2020 and were ready to implement them.⁴ In addition, the Cancun Agreements encourage developing

¹ Decision, CP19, Further advancing the Durban Platform
(http://unfccc.int/files/meetings/warsaw_nov_2013/decisions/application/pdf/cop19_adp.pdf).

² Decision 1, CP17.

³ Decision, CP19, Further advancing the Durban Platform.

⁴ To date, developed countries pledged economy-wide emission reduction targets (EERTs or ERTs) under the Convention for all, and quantified emissions limitations or reduction commitments

Noriko Fujiwara is Associate Research Fellow and Head of Climate Change at CEPS.

CEPS Commentaries offer concise, policy-oriented insights into topical issues in European affairs. The views expressed are attributable only to the author in a personal capacity and not to any institution with which he is associated.

Available for free downloading from the CEPS website (www.ceps.eu) • © CEPS 2013

countries to develop Low-Carbon Development Strategies (LCDS) or plans in the context of sustainable development,⁵ which could be understood as ‘green growth’ strategies in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) context.⁶ The above shift in focus has been further underlined by a structural change in the institutional architecture, as sketched out below.

The Kyoto-Bali framework can be regarded as a closed and static model: allocating differentiated carbon constraints to selected countries according to their historical responsibilities and capabilities, and fixing the status quo for the coming decades. In contrast, the post-Cancun framework can be viewed as an open and dynamic model: setting out enabling conditions and providing support for willing countries to do more, and leaving flexibility in adjustments to the initial level of ambition under changing circumstances. First-movers would benefit most from the latter model to create and facilitate opportunities.

In the run-up to Warsaw, Parties had extensive discussions on what “applicable to all” means, and how to reconcile the concept with the principles of the Convention, “common but differentiated responsibilities”. They also discussed full implementation of previous decisions,⁷ particularly in terms of the means of implementation that could enhance the pre-2012 ambition. Whether the common word “contributions” adopted in Warsaw has the effect of bridging and unifying developed and developing countries remains to be seen. Nevertheless, the general structural shift to the dynamic model of the post-Cancun framework appears to be irreversible.

Next steps

Warsaw produced two milestones: i) Parties were asked to communicate “intended nationally-determined contributions” by March 2015 and ii) the Ad-hoc Working Group on the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action was requested to identify before COP20 in Lima, the information that Parties will provide when putting forward their contributions.⁸

What would the Warsaw decision mean in practice? Here are some preliminary ideas about what is needed.

International negotiation processes should take into account domestic processes for public recognition and support for the initial pledges tabled by policy-makers.

Domestic processes should be informed and guided by latest science and impact assessment at the international level in order for each Party to reach an optimal choice over policy options.

Key to confidence-building among Parties would be the quality of information to accompany initial pledges as well as transparency and accountability in the level of ambition pledged.

(QELROs) under the second commitment period (2013-20) of the Kyoto Protocol for those assuming the commitments for this period. Developing countries pledged Nationally Appropriate Mitigation Actions (NAMAs) (<http://unfccc.int/focus/mitigation/items/7169.php>).

⁵ Decision 1, CP16 (<http://cancun.unfccc.int/mitigation/>).

⁶ N. Fujiwara, “Green growth in the context of the UNFCCC”, Background Note for the European Climate Platform Workshop, Brussels, 18 October 2012 (www.ceps.eu/content/ecp-workshop-eu-climate-change-policy-looking-ahead-doha).

⁷ These decisions constitute the agreed outcome pursuant to the Bali Action Plan: Decisions 1/CP.18 (Agreed Outcome pursuant to the Bali Action Plan), 2 /CP.17 (Outcome of the Ad Hoc Working Group on Long-term Cooperative Action under the Convention), 1/CP.16 (Cancun Agreements) and other relevant decisions.

⁸ Decision, CP19, Further advancing the Durban Platform.

The required information should be structured by pre-determined criteria and/or objective indicators.

The weight of communication and dissemination would increase in both international and domestic processes.

The choice of criteria and objective indicators would become crucial not only as a benchmark for comparison of different pledges (see iii), but also as a tool for communicating to and winning support from domestic constituencies (see iv).

To measure against the pre-determined criteria/indicators and to collect essential data, domestic processes should involve major stakeholders, especially those with access to such data, clarifying the objective and scope of such exercise.

Along the above lines of thinking, the process of formulating nationally-determined contributions may find inspiration in the operational frameworks designed for LCDS. A vertical framework would consist of three levels: enabling conditions, mainstreaming mechanisms and policy instruments.⁹ Such a framework could be adapted to a template for each Party to complete the information requested. On the other hand, a horizontal framework would be suitable to organise a process engaging policy-makers and stakeholders in several steps, e.g. planning, implementation, governance, monitoring, reporting and verification.¹⁰ Such a framework could guide the process for each Party to take the first step, formulating domestically determined contributions, as part of the planning stage. Both vertical and horizontal dimensions focus on implementation strategies that are country-driven, non-prescriptive but flexible, and tailored to national circumstances and specific needs.

Lessons learned from the development of LCDS would be particularly relevant to the elaboration on the content and presentation of the information to be discussed at COP20 in Lima. Should the numbers and figures of the contributions reveal the outline, the accompanying information would tell the story behind the outline: how the numbers and figures are calculated, which indicators are used for measurement and whether they are weighted. These stories will help us to clarify and better understand what and how each Party is trying to contribute to joint efforts, thereby raising the level of confidence. This will be an important step forward in the second half of the Durban Platform negotiations.

⁹ OECD 2012 in Fujiwara (2012), op. cit.

¹⁰ See e.g. UNDP, ECN and OECD in Fujiwara (2012), op. cit.