

## **Copenhagen: a step forward?**

Cristina Narbona  
Spain's Ambassador to the OECD

### 1. A new setting

Since 1992, the Annual Climate Summits, organized by the UN, have concluded with statements by general consent that represented a slow progress in the fight against climate change. In that context, since 1997, the Kyoto Protocol has set binding commitments for emissions reduction for a big group of industrialized countries, led by the EU. But, the consecutive agreements of the UN did not have any practical obligation for the two countries – the USA and China – that make up more than 40% of global emissions of greenhouse effect gases.

This responded to the attitude of their own governments that were opposed to multilateral commitments on the issue; even in the case of the USA, there was a systematic hindrance from public opinion of very accurate reports that confirmed the causes and seriousness of global warming.

Copenhagen represents the beginning of a process in which, the USA and China, finally seem to take an active part. Of course the content of the political agreement of Copenhagen – endorsed by almost all countries, except the 5 countries of the so-called “Bolivarian axe” – proves to be very insufficient and will have to be reinforced in 2010 in order to have a timely agreement which is binding and ambitious enough, that could in 2013 to further and broaden the commitments set by the Kyoto Protocol.

But the steps taken by the USA and China to lay the foundations of this future agreement must be analyzed from a strategic point of view: the will to set objectives to reduce emissions that allow an increase of temperature not above 2°C, international consultations to follow up reduction actions (and their checking in cases involving international financing), the recognition of the obligation of richer countries towards developing ones (initially estimated at 100 billion \$) to support their policies of adaptation and mitigation of climate change, paying special attention to forest preservation. All of them are necessary elements for the future

agreement, in which the participation of the USA and China some time ago was still unthinkable.

Maybe Copenhagen could have ended, as it was the case of many other UN Summits, with a consensus document; but in this moment, it would have been difficult to include a more specific political commitment from the two main emission countries, which governments are obliged to recognize the interdependence of their decisions, in issues related to economy as well as climate change. Any step forward taken by each of them needs the other to guarantee enough support from their own citizens. And this demands, a great effort in the bilateral relation, of which the Copenhagen agreement is the first and important consequence.

## 2. The role of the EU in the implementation of the Copenhagen Agreement

The EU has been decisive in the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol; and, in fact, the EU as a whole, will perform well above expectations with the perspective of

2012, with its own objective – a reduction by 8% compared to the emission levels of 1990. Thanks to the determination of the EU – and the specific policies carried out by countries like Denmark, Germany and Spain – today there are very advanced technologies in the field of energy efficiency and renewable energies. Besides, the European market of emission rights is being used as a reference for the implementation of similar markets in other countries: USA, Canada, Australia, and Japan.

And, the EU has already committed itself to a 20% decrease of emissions in 2020, as compared to the level of 1990, which can be increased to 30% in the case of similar commitments from other industrialized countries. Undoubtedly, the major contribution of the EU in this moment will be precisely to announce the 3% reduction, in order to generate a powerful political, business and citizen dynamics, to foster more ambitious commitments in the rest of industrial countries, and particularly in the USA.

### 3. The Spanish Presidency of the EU: A unique opportunity

The time for curbing climate change is running out. As President Zapatero pointed out in Copenhagen, “environmentalists were right”, and now it is the turn of Spain to show that conviction in the context of the urgent reorientation of our economy.

Spain has a lot to gain in terms of employment and sustainable progress – and of course, in terms of less devastating effects of climate change – if we reach an ambitious international agreement. Nowadays, Spain has the conditions to reach a 2012 complying with the resulting requirements of the Kyoto Protocol, thanks to the reduction of the emissions recorded in 2006 – with an increase of 4% of the GDP – and in 2008 and 2009 – undoubtedly, to a good extent, as an effect of the crisis, but also of the dramatic increase of renewable energies. If we keep the appropriate policies, Spain can also respect its commitments in the European context with the perspective of 2020. Fortunately, the ill-fated outlook is being left behind – the official position until

2004 – of an economic growth which is inevitably associated to waste of energy, CO2 emissions and wild urbanism. The Law on Sustainable Economy, in the context of a broader strategy, will allow making progress towards an economy that guarantees a more sustainable welfare for more citizens, with less pollution and less consumption of our natural resources.

Today Spain is able to lead the EU's position in the coming and decisive months. The new process promoted by the USA will only culminate in a satisfying international agreement if the EU, on the other hand, shows its conviction and responsibility in the fight against climate change, a formidable ethical, economic and technological challenge that deserves all our efforts.