

Europe's New Climate Narrative - The Race is On!

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January 27, 2011



It was an unexpected move and a surprise for many observers of Europe's climate policy: German Environment Minister Norbert Röttgen, French Environment Minister Jean-Louis Borloo and UK Energy and Climate Change Minister Chris Huhne jointly [called for a more ambitious European climate target in international newspapers two weeks ago](#). A reduction target of at least 30% by 2020 would have a positive economic impact and many additional benefits for the European Union, the ministers said. Three government representatives from the three

largest conservative-liberal EU member states calling for stricter climate targets? Having watched conservative politicians for some years now, this came as a surprise. A situation which nobody would have believed a couple of years ago. So what has changed since then?

First, the Copenhagen Climate Conference has provided the European Union with a first glance of what the future of multilateralism will be like. Unless European states speak out loud together, with one unified voice, nobody will listen. Even more important is a closely related factor: Everybody is expecting Europe to be ambitious on climate protection. Europe has a responsibility for ecological transformation and a leading role to play in developing a new economic model. If Europe doesn't change quickly and with strong transformative powers, then nobody will care. It is all about the performance of the first mover. Whoever wins the race will have the chance to lead world markets in the future.

Second, the climate narrative in Europe has changed. When the heads of states and governments decided on the integrated energy and climate strategy in 2007, everybody had the Copenhagen Conference in the back of their minds. The European Union had to take the lead to get the United States and others moving. Copenhagen was a large part of the legitimacy of Europe's climate strategy. Following Copenhagen, however, this legitimacy has been fading away. The United States finds itself far away from getting climate legislation passed. And Europe has been in need of a new story about why climate protection makes sense. The new story has to be the economic success green markets will provide in the future.

The interaction of these aspects has led to a change in the reasoning behind Europe's climate policy. The international process remains important, of course, but it is not the only reason for Europe's ambitious climate targets anymore. It is the European self-interest that should force EU member states to adopt stricter reduction commitments.

Looking at the low price for certificates in the EU emissions trading scheme, taking into account the temptation of currently low oil prices and bearing in mind that political regulation is one of the most important factors for private investments, climate policy is not solely a debt to other parts of the world, or our own dirty history, but it is a vital economic policy for today's and for tomorrow's generations.

It seems like the ministers understand what the future challenges look like. It is time to discuss the design of such an appropriate political framework. The race is on.

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