

Back to basics

The EU must renew its efforts on tackling climate change if the failures of the COP15 talks are not to be repeated in Cancún later this year, argues **Romana Jordan Cizelj**

For anyone reading the newspapers during and immediately after the Copenhagen climate change conference, it would appear that the event was at best a failure. At worst, it saw the destruction of the argument to treat global climate change as a serious threat. Newspapers thrive on catastrophe, and this is part of the problem. These conferences have become a media circus where good news is no news and where side events get more attention than the main conference – but perhaps that is because politicians and other activists are becoming more focused on the impact of the needed measures in their countries than the threat of climate change globally. I do not share the view that we must give up, or carry on with business as usual. Of course, as reflected in the recent European parliament resolution, I am disappointed at the weakness of the accord achieved at COP15, but that means we have more to do, not less. The EU has always been a leading and vocal voice in the fight against climate change and we must critically examine what has caused the public concern and how we can restore the engagement of our citizens if we are to succeed.

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It’s a call to get back to basics. We must recognise that the controversy surrounding a tiny part of the scientific evidence does not negate the vast majority of excellent scientific work and data. And with the conferences themselves – how can we encourage media coverage without the seemingly inevitable distortion of the issues? I do believe in the process and the need for the EU to remain in the driving seat, or at least to be one of the leading drivers. The vehicle needs some modification but it does not deserve to be scrapped. Being in the lead means taking responsibility, promoting changes and demonstrating confidence in the modified process. Others can wallow in accusation and negative self-pity, but we in the EU cannot. We have a duty to our citizens. We must also look at our own house. Are the EU climate change mitigation measures the right ones? Are they enough? What changes and additions are necessary?

Coincidentally, we have a new mandate, a new commission and new commissioner for climate action, Connie Hedegaard. What better time to renew our efforts, challenge the past and set a new agenda for the future?

It is still early days, but commissioner Hedegaard impressed me with her dynamic yet ever-listening approach. She spoke of concrete measures, asked for ideas and concerns and pledged to work with us on the subjects of her mandate. We must respond positively. As I said, the EU has always been a leading voice so why were we not even invited to the negotiating table of the final talks in Copenhagen? Because several months before the conference we announced exactly what we were going to do, giving no room for negotiation, plus our leading measures were a long way from those of other large global economies. We were not just marginalised. We were self-marginalised, and that means we must seriously rethink our strategy for the next summit. Institutional cooperation and greater sensitivity to our citizens’ concerns are key, but will we be able to unlock the deadlock? I believe we can and we must. ★



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Demonstrators take to the streets of Copenhagen in December 2009