

The world's rising green power?



Europe must help Beijing's low-carbon revolution succeed, writes Björn Conrad

With the looming Copenhagen conference now more than likely to turn into a major disappointment, climate activists are ready to clutch at any straw that offers a chance for progress. Now that the US straw has been lost in the long hallways of Capitol Hill, the strongest straw comes from an unlikely source: China, the world's largest emitter of carbon dioxide.

In recent years, China's leaders have initiated momentous advances in the country's domestic climate-change efforts. The opportunity presented by Beijing's new-found enthusiasm for low-carbon development is as fragile as it is promising. The world cannot afford Beijing's low-carbon revolution to fail. Therefore, helping China succeed should move to the top of the European climate agenda. In fact, the EU-China summit on 30 November offers a timely opportunity to redefine the EU-China partnership on climate change.

Even environmental activists, usually first in line to criticise the Chinese leadership, cannot hide their enthusiasm about the dynamic that the central government has created around the topic of climate change. From energy-efficiency targets and renewable-energy laws to the potential inclusion of carbon-intensity goals in the next five-year plan, China has all but revolutionised its climate legislation. Independent observers estimate that China would save 4.5 billion tons of carbon emissions between 2005 and 2020 if all legislation were to be implemented to the letter. This reduction would actually be about the amount that the EU will ask from China in Copenhagen.

There is, however, an enormous *if*. Many questions regarding the implementation of China's altered approach to emission reductions are as yet unanswered. With the central

government's notoriously weak implementation capability, overwhelming economic pressures on the provincial level and a bureaucratic apparatus still plagued by profiteering and cronyism, it is highly doubtful how much less carbon dioxide will be emitted. In faraway Beijing, global warming might be all the buzz, but in Shanxi province, which fuels China's economy with annual coal production of more than 300 million tonnes, local officials hum a different tune.

Beijing's low-carbon initiative still lacks many of the ingredients necessary to turn national climate legislation into local carbon reduction. Effective monitoring and enforcement requires a much higher level of technological expertise, a vastly greater number of highly qualified officials as well as forceful administrative structures at all government levels. Perhaps most importantly, China is in need of clearly defined internal bargaining mechanisms to create a balanced and commonly accepted mode of cost distribution among regional actors.

If the EU takes its self-proclaimed role of a leader in the fight against global warming seriously, it cannot stand by idly while China's leadership attempts to move towards a more climate-friendly economic architecture. It is the EU's obligation to robustly assist China in its quest for a low-carbon future ... whether Beijing asks for its help or not.

The EU could provide a wealth of expertise and experience on all of these crucial issues. This is not to say that Europe has solved all its problems regarding emission reductions. But the EU has certainly made significant progress regarding the integration of climate policy on the EU level and the implementation of a consolidated emissions-reduction effort across member states. Like China, the EU faces the challenge of distributing burdens and streamlining locally

sensible approaches across a multitude of very diverse regions. In this regard, Poland is not all that different from Shanxi.

Learning from EU experience could greatly increase Beijing's chances of success. However, Beijing is still reluctant to engage in co-operative structures that go beyond the mere transfer of engineering blueprints and cash. In contrast, the transfer of policy-implementation practices requires a particularly deep level of collaboration. As long as China's leadership remains all but paranoid about the possibility of external influence over China's domestic policies, creating effective EU-China co-operation on domestic policy implementation will remain an uphill battle and demand exceptional political craftsmanship.

So why help someone who does not ask for help? Because the opportunity is far too great to be missed and the urgency of the problem does not allow for just letting it go. The EU needs to develop a better understanding of China's internal dynamics in order to tailor its own expertise to the Chinese situation and to send a signal of honest commitment. The EU also has to make its value clearer by putting a stronger focus on aiding China in the concrete implementation of existing legislation.

At the same time, Europe needs to forge strategic alliances with Chinese actors who are open to co-operation and able to carry Beijing's legislative efforts to the provinces. The growing number of open-minded Chinese officials who are hard at work to give greater confidence to their leaders regarding international collaboration should encourage the EU not to shrink from the difficult task ahead. All of this will require a level of knowledge and understanding, strategic thinking and political leadership that the EU policy towards China currently does not possess. It is high time for the EU to smarten up.

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Be bold on climate deal

Ban Ki-moon, the UN's secretary-general, sets out what is needed in Copenhagen

Climate change affects every other challenge we face. Global poverty and public health. Economic growth. Food security. It will re-write the global equation for development, peace and prosperity. It has been my top priority since I took office and in the two years since then we have seen considerable progress. Climate change is no longer seen as a niche issue. In September the United Nations brought together 101 heads of state and government, the largest gathering of world leaders in history. They signalled their determination to reach a deal in December at the UN's climate change conference in Copenhagen and voiced broad support for setting a long-term goal to keep temperature rise to a safe level.

The task now is to translate this vision into political reality. For that to happen, it is essential for there to be an ambitious climate deal in Copenhagen. Copenhagen need not resolve all the details, but it must establish the fundamental basis of a global climate deal.

Right now, it is important that countries agree on a few major issues.

Developed countries need to set ambitious targets to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions.

Developing countries must do more to slow the growth of their emissions.

We need agreement on ways to help vulnerable populations adapt to the climate impacts that are already locked into the atmosphere.

Governments must agree on a sizeable package of financing and technology support to assist developing countries to limit their emissions and cope with the consequences of climate change.

Finally, governments must agree on an equitable, transparent governance structure to manage this support.

A deal in Copenhagen that clearly addresses these elements will satisfy the minimum markers for success. But Copenhagen is not the final arbiter of success, nor is it the end point for collective global action. Implementation will be key.

Ultimately, it is up to governments to decide on the content and form of an agreement. The involvement of heads of state and government is crucial.

EU leaders have already shown bold leadership, by spearheading efforts on mid-term mitigation targets.

I urge them to be similarly bold on climate financing, by committing themselves to a fair contribution to an international package and by supporting fast-track funding for immediate implementation.

Adequate, predictable, and additional financing ... from public and private sources ... is necessary to support developing countries with their low-carbon growth plans.

At their European Council in October, EU leaders recognised the magnitude of long-term financing needs. We now need to see more clarity on precise contributions.

Agreement on financing is a make-or-break element of a successful climate deal.

Ban Ki-moon is the secretary-general of the United Nations.