



FoEE Big Action, Rond-Point Schuman, Brussels, opposite the EU Council
Speech by Tony Juniper, Executive Director Friends of the Earth EWNl
9 March 2007, during the European Summit of Heads of State

Dear activists, dear friends of the Earth,

Country leaders gathered in Brussels today have the power to make history, to make a decisive difference to the future of the world, indeed, to the future of life on Earth. The question is will they seize the opportunity, or will they show timidity in the face of what is now widely held as the gravest threat facing humankind?

Courage will be demonstrated by a commitment agreed at this meeting to reflect the climate change science in a promise to cut the EU's emissions of greenhouse gases by 30 per cent by 2020. Timidity will be demonstrated by anything less, including a cut of 20 per cent that is proposed by some of the leaders meeting here.

It would be very wrong to see this meeting as being about negotiating numbers on the basis of political compromise. It is about critical atmospheric concentrations of pollution that if exceeded could cause extremely serious damage to the economy, people and of course ecosystems. A 30 per cent cut by 2020 is, based on an optimistic reading of the science, the absolute minimum action necessary.

No doubt even this will come under attack as the discussion between Europe's leaders will highlight the need for a global agreement on climate change. We do need a global accord that helps to reduce emissions from all the big polluters. The world already has the modest Kyoto Protocol, but it needs to be considerably strengthened in its next phase beyond 2012. The question is, how will we do that?

When it comes to international environmental politics, It seems to me that the 'do as we do' approach to negotiation has more potential than the 'do as we say' one. It's obvious, but of course does not always inform how countries behave.

The UK for example has convened a potentially very important informal process on climate change under the G8 with the big developing countries, including India and China, involved too. It could make some positive impact on the parallel and formal UN negotiations, but could do so much more if the British Prime Minister's leadership role in this forum was backed by stronger action and achievement at home.

This is what EU leaders need to realize – that they must lead. The EU has for years been the most progressive voice among the industrialized countries in the international climate negotiations. If there is to be any serious prospect of avoiding dangerous levels of temperature increase and the climate change it would cause then the EU needs to keep up and intensify that role, and to back calls for action with policies that will actually deliver cuts in emissions.

After all, if we can't deliver cuts in the EU, where will the leadership come from, Brazil? Indonesia? South Africa? I think not. Those countries, and many others, are waiting for those best placed to act, and who bear most responsibility to take action, to show that they are serious.

After all, why should the developing countries cut back on pollution when most of the carbon dioxide that is already in the atmosphere because of human activities, and which is already causing climatic disruption, was put there by the rich countries, including EU countries.

The questions of global justice embedded in the climate change issue are not only about who should go first in making cuts, it is also about who will suffer first and most.

Developing countries will bear the brunt of climate change, it will damage infrastructure, impact on food production, lead to the spread of disease and exacerbate the impact of extreme events. It will synergise with other already serious environmental problems, such as deforestation and freshwater depletion, and thus cause serious impacts on many countries' prospects for development. The EU, as a block of long-term and large scale polluters, thus has a responsibility to act. It also has the means.

The EU is very far from powerless. Indeed, it is uniquely placed to move ahead in ways that will impact positively on the whole world. EU citizen's are increasingly aware of the problem and see the need for political action.

Leaders, including Tony Blair and Angela Merkel are vocal on the subject and are, they say, prepared to put in place the measures needed to cut greenhouse gas emissions. European companies say they are increasingly willing to act. Europe has a strong economic and technical base that could support rapid innovation, while in the process creating new business opportunities and jobs.

This more positive mood in Europe is already causing influence outside the EU. For example in the USA the level of action being discussed (and in part being implemented) here is causing firms there to urge federal action on climate change.

This is helping to change a long-standing and really problematic political dynamic whereby industry groups have by and large backed a skeptical Whitehouse in resisting any action at all. Because US firms can now see that they are being left

behind, and that their standards and production methods are in danger of getting out of kilter with international markets, they are beginning to worry. Given what happened to US auto firms following years of head-in-the-sand campaigning against fuel efficiency standards, it is clear that those companies now demanding official action have good reason to be worried.

But a 30 per cent cut across the EU will not happen just because a meeting this week sets a target. It will need policies and measures to get there. And this is where EU leaders will need to buck their ideas up somewhat. It is already clear that the only way the EU as a whole will deliver on its modest existing Kyoto target is through buying carbon credits accumulated under the so-called Clean Development Mechanism that was agreed as part of the Kyoto package. Doing that does comply with Kyoto rules, but so much more powerful would have been action to achieve those cuts actually in the EU. It could have been done, and so could a 30 per cent cut.

To do it here in the EU will, however, need some really determined political follow through on various measures that are either already in place or now being discussed. These range from the more effective use of the EU's Emissions Trading Scheme to stronger mandatory standards on vehicle efficiency and from renewable power targets to product energy efficiency improvements.

For example, Friends of the Earth is urging that the emissions reduction target is backed up with sub-targets to produce 35 per cent of electricity and 25 per cent of heating and cooling energy from renewable sources. These and other policies could give the EU the critical leading edge needed to inspire the world to see what is possible.

If in Europe we can quickly get on course to deliver a 30 per cent cut, and do that while creating jobs, maintaining living standards and protecting the economy, including from sudden energy price increases, then the signal to India, China and the USA will be clear. They will see that it is possible to go low carbon, that it need not be socially harmful or economically damaging, and that it can indeed be a strategy for renewal, innovation and development.

Thank you