

THE PARIS CLIMATE CONFERENCE

AN AMBITIOUS PRESIDENCY FOR A DECISIVE CONFERENCE

Laurent Fabius

THE YEAR 2015 is a “climate year” for France, which has the two-fold mission of hosting and presiding over the 21st session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP21). It will take place from November 30th to December 11th this year.

Hosting COP21 is no small challenge, this being the largest international conference ever held in France—with 20,000 delegates, 20,000 guests, and 3,000 journalists. As host country, France has to organize a welcome equal to the importance of the event. Firstly, we need to make the Paris-Le Bourget Exhibition Centre an appropriate setting for the negotiations: in these conferences, talks are long and often difficult, and we need to ensure that the material conditions are favorable. We need to involve civil

society to a great extent, which is the aim of the “village” we will be creating near the conference center, dedicated to showcasing non-governmental initiatives, such as those of businesses, cities, regions, and associations. We need to make COP21 irreplicable in environmental terms and ensure that its carbon footprint is offset. In other words, we need to be exemplary hosts.

We also need to preside over COP21. That is a delicate task, as it involves getting 195 countries—196 parties, counting the European Union—to agree on extremely complex subjects. The aim is well-known: reaching a universal agreement to limit the increase of global average temperature by the end of the century to less than 1.5 degrees Celsius—or two degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. We urgently need to act.

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PRESERVING OUR PLANET

The latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report, published in November 2014 following seven years of scientific work, produced a very worrying observation: if the current rate of growth in greenhouse gas emissions continues, the temperature rise could be not of two or three degrees Celsius, as hitherto discussed, but rather of almost five degrees by 2100.

In these conditions, humanity would be forced to live on a “climate-disrupted” planet, with frightening consequences. These include increasing extreme climate phenomena, such

as droughts and typhoons, particularly affecting the countries that are already the most vulnerable; the disappearance of certain inhabited territories because of rising sea levels, like the island countries of the Pacific and many coastal areas; dramatic effects on public health and food security; considerable costs for our economies; and threats to peace, with increased risks of conflicts for scarce resources and massive population displacements, which are sources of security tensions.

It is, quite simply, our ability to inhabit ourselves a planet that remains viable and leave it to future genera-

tions that is at risk. We have a great responsibility as the first generation to fully take on board the seriousness of the problem, and the last to still be able to act effectively.

**THE “DECARBONIZATION”
IMPERATIVE FOR OUR ECONOMIES**

Since 1988, the work of the IPCC has provided a solid scientific basis for international climate negotiations. Its latest report is a warning, and also a call for action: the scientists are telling us that it is still possible to achieve the goal of limiting global warming to less than two degrees Celsius by the end of the century, so long as we ensure we have the means to do so.

To achieve that, the IPCC has determined the trajectory we need to follow: we need to reach a peak in greenhouse gas emissions by 2020, reduce them by 40 to 70 percent between now and 2050, and tend towards negative net emissions by the end of the century. We have already used more than half of our “carbon budget,” i.e. the greenhouse gases we can emit before breaching the two degrees Celsius threshold. On current trends, we will use the rest of it in less than 30 years. The conclusion is clear:

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to avoid climate disaster, we need to change our modes of production and consumption quickly, by limiting the use of fossil fuels such as coal, oil and gas. We need to start “decarbonizing” our economies now.

**FRANCE IS UNDERTAKING
THE ECOLOGICAL TRANSITION**

Climate action is a priority for the French Government. Firstly, at the national level, through a low-carbon energy mix and significant sectoral efforts enabling France to fulfill its climate commitments. Next, at the European level, where we worked with the institutions of the European Union and the other member states to ensure the EU adopted ambitious emissions reduction targets. Lastly, at the international level, by fundraising

to help developing countries tackle climate change and ensure access to sustainable energy for all. About half the funding mobilized by the *Agence française de développement* has climate “co-benefits.”

France accounts for only one percent of global greenhouse gas emissions, whereas it contributes up to four percent of global production. It ranks

among the industrial countries with the lowest greenhouse gas emissions, in terms of both emissions per capita and emissions per GDP unit. This is the result of not only an electricity mix based primarily on nuclear energy, but also proactive greenhouse gas emission reduction policies. Between 1990 and 2013, our greenhouse gas emissions covered by the Kyoto Protocol fell by 13 percent, and we are doing our utmost to meet the target of the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol—i.e., a reduction of 20 percent in emissions by 2020, compared to 1990 levels.

An Act on the energy transition for green growth is being adopted in France and sets out the path towards transforming our energy mix. It provides for a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions of at least 40 percent by 2030, while the consumption of fossil fuels should fall by 30 percent and the proportion of renewable energy sources in our energy mix should rise to 32 percent. The law provides that our total consumption of energy should be halved by 2050, while greenhouse gas emissions should be reduced by 75 percent compared to 1990 levels.

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**REAL HOPE OF AN
AGREEMENT AT COP21**

While certain past COPs have failed—everyone remembers Copenhagen in 2009—why, objectively, should COP21 be a success? There are four main reasons.

Firstly, and unfortunately, the situation has worsened, and so the need to reach an agreement to combat climate change is even greater than before.

Scientific denial of the reality of the phenomenon and its human origin is much less widespread than it was just five years ago, except perhaps in the United States, for essentially ideological reasons. In the ongoing climate negotiations, nobody questions any longer the reality of the phenomenon or its origin, which is an important development.

Moreover, businesses and economic spheres are now aware, and many of them are now in favor of climate action. Also, technological and financial developments have taken place, such as the capitalization of the Green Climate Fund (\$10.2 billion for the moment, which, with leverage, represents an even greater amount), making progress credible.

The last development is that of political determination. President Obama is committed to this fight, as are China's leaders and many others. The United States and China are the two greatest emitters of greenhouse gas in the world. The agreement between China and the U.S. in November last year was clearly an important step forward.

A "PARIS CLIMATE ALLIANCE"

How will we recognize the success of COP21? What the French Presidency is seeking to build—and this vision is increasingly shared—is what we call the "Paris Climate Alliance," based on four complementary pillars.

The first, and most important pillar is a universal, legally binding intergovernmental agreement, differentiated on the basis of levels of development. I would like to add that it also needs to be a sustainable agreement, meaning that it must include a mechanism to ensure things do not come to an end in 2030, so that we do not need to recommence talks then. There are very sensitive issues that need to be resolved by December, such as whether the commitments to reduce greenhouse gas emissions made by developing countries should be as binding as those of developed countries, and the legal form of the agreement. A balance needs to be found between the level of binding commitments and the level of ambition, as, on the one hand, binding mechanisms tend

to make leaders very prudent as to what they promise. Yet, on the other hand, we are determined to reach a highly ambitious agreement.

The second pillar is that of the national contributions, meaning the provisional commitments of each country, as regards both reduction of their greenhouse gas emissions and adaptation to the effects of climate change. This is the first time in the history of climate negotiations that each country agrees to set itself targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 2025 or 2030, and even 2050 for certain parties.

The third pillar is a financial and technological component, which is essential to guarantee that the agreement is effective and fair. In the run-up to the Paris Climate Conference, the developed countries will have to indicate how they intend to meet their commitment of \$100 billion of public and private funds per year by 2020, which they promised to the developing countries in Copenhagen. It will also involve determining the basis for long term financing of a low-carbon economy, particularly beyond 2020. This last point is crucial and concerns the very structure of our economies, redirecting longterm investment, renewal of infrastructure, and all our development strategies.

The last pillar is an innovation compared to previous negotiations. It

involves additional commitments by non-governmental stakeholders including cities, regions, businesses, associations, and civil society. This is what we call the "Agenda of Solutions." These commitments will follow on from the initiatives resulting from the Climate Summit organized in September 2014 by the United Nations Secretary-General, which were brought together in December in Peru, in the "Lima-Paris Action Agenda." These efforts will not, of course, replace the vital measures that will have to be made by governments, but they will support them. The central, fair idea behind this is that governments should not be the only ones combating climate change.

Those are the four pillars of the "Paris Climate Alliance." As for our method, I can sum it up in three watchwords. First, attentiveness, as one of the keys to success is taking into account the different situations of each country. The second is compromise, as achieving a universal agreement implies ensuring the convergence of views of 196 parties on important subjects, making commitments for decades to come. The third is ambition because, failing an ambitious agreement, we will not be able to address the challenge of limiting warming to below 1.5 or two degrees Celsius compared to pre-industrial temperatures; the task is difficult, but it is a matter of survival for many world regions, and of a livable environment

for others, while for tens of millions of our planet, it is a matter of life or disappearance.

PREPARATIONS ARE POSITIVE, MUCH REMAINS TO BE DONE

Another session of so-called "ADP" negotiations has been organized in Bonn this June, following the session in Geneva in early 2015. The aim is to produce a draft text to serve as a basis for an agreement at COP21 in Paris. The Geneva session produced a mitigated result. A consensus did emerge on a text, but it was long and complex, with more than 80 pages and a long list of options that were not decided upon, meaning much bracketing. The aim, during the negotiations in Bonn, is to reduce the size of the text and eliminate as many brackets as possible. That is essential: the more problems we solve before December, the greater the chances of the Paris Climate Conference being a success.

A draft agreement needs to be produced by October following several meetings, the first in August, and then another in October.

There is a consensus on many important subjects: the need to obtain a universal, differentiated and legally binding agreement; to reduce fossil fuel subsidies to a minimum; to make not only mitigation, but also adaptation to the effects of climate

change, central to the agreement. It is also universally understood that we need to produce a sustainable agreement that will not stop abruptly in 2030—as it is set to take effect in 2020 and run until 2030. That is why great attention is being paid to the review and revision mechanisms.

There are, however, many points that are still controversial, in particular those concerning financing, which are regularly raised in talks. How can we reach the \$100 billion per year by 2020? How will the available billions of the Green Climate Fund be shared out?

As future President of COP21, I am also very attentive to the national contributions that all countries should submit prior to the Conference. As of this writing, almost 40 countries representing about one third of global greenhouse gas emissions have submitted their contributions, including the 28 member states of the European Union as well as the United States, Canada, Mexico, Gabon and Morocco. Three G20 countries—Australia, China, and Japan—and about 35 non-G20 countries are, it

would seem, planning to send theirs by the end of June. More than 70 other countries are preparing theirs, but are more likely to submit in the third quarter. More than 90 percent of emissions should be covered ahead of COP21. These contributions will present various objectives depending on the countries, as they take into account “national circumstances” including the

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level of development, per capita emissions, and financial and technological capacities. It is essential that every country should submit its contribution as soon as possible, to allow the work of compiling and harmonizing them to be carried out by the UNFCCC secretariat far enough in advance of COP21 in Paris.

A number of specialists consider that it is possible that the total of the commitments by

all countries goes beyond the two degrees Celsius target. We will see. In any case, that would in no way undermine the importance of the Paris agreement, far from it. The national contributions are the spontaneous trajectory determined by governments but, on the one hand, the time frame is not always the same and, on the other, considerable

technological improvements will take place over time to support efforts. Lastly, COP21 in Paris will ensure additional awareness and new actions.

SERBIA AND COP21

As a candidate for EU membership, Serbia should gradually converge with European climate targets. I am delighted to see the progress made in recent months. I particularly welcome the creation of the National Interministerial Committee, which includes civil society representatives, and the creation of the Republic of Serbia’s “green fund.” These, and other decisions, show the turning point reached on this issue by the Serbian authorities.

I welcome the announcement by Serbia, the first in the region to do so, of its national contribution on June 11th. Serbia is particularly concerned by climate change, having suffered an exceptional drought in 2013 and devastating floods in 2014. France is committed to standing beside Serbia to support it in drawing up and implementing adaptation measures, and more generally in the ecological transition and the process of adopting European standards.

Like many countries, Serbia is concerned about the costs of the measures to be taken. That is a legitimate question, but we must never

forget that the cost of inaction would be far greater. It is better to begin the transition early than to go backwards after decades of carbon-intensive development and negative consequences. As a country in the process of modernization, Serbia can adopt the right reflexes today in terms of responsible use of resources. We also need to bear in mind that green growth means technological innovations and the creation of businesses and jobs. The cost of the ecological transition is thus an investment in the future.

In Serbia, the Center for International Relations and Sustainable Development (CIRSD) fosters debate in support of the transition. I welcome the partnership forged with the French Embassy in Belgrade, for example for the participation of Serbian civil society in the “Global Citizen’s Debate” organized by CIRSD: our Embassy opened its doors to host the event on June 9th. The discussions were an opportunity to raise everyone’s awareness of the importance of individual actions—such as how we consume and how we travel—in action for the environment.

The climate issue concerns us all, and we all need to take action. It is no doubt the greatest challenge our generation has to take up. We need to act, and fast. There is no plan B, as there is no planet B. ●