Why the EU could and should adopt higher greenhouse gas reduction targets[1]

Greens/EFA political summary

The EU continues to claim that it is a leader in global climate policy, with its 20% target for emissions reductions by 2020 offered in support of this claim. This paper by independent research organisation CE Delft, which reviews the recent research in this field, highlights that the EU's current emissions target falls short of its responsibility, is inconsistent with its stated goal of limiting the increase in global temperatures to below 2˚C and falls behind the emissions pledges of other countries.

It also underlines how, as a result of the recession, not only is it cheaper and easier to meet the EU's 20% target, achieving the target would be not much more than a business as usual scenario (i.e. will be achieved with little domestic effort). In fact, sticking with a 20% target is undermining the EU's core climate policies. The paper also shows that higher emissions reduction targets (up to 40% by 2020) are not only possible but would benefit the EU economy.

EU responsibility as part of collective global emissions reductions
The EU has called for developed countries to agree to a collective emissions reduction target of 30% below 1990 levels by 2020. While this within the range recommended by the IPCC to limit the increase in global temperatures to less than 2˚C above pre-industrial levels, this is not overly ambitious. Analysis of different effort sharing models shows that **with a collective target of 30% for developed countries, the EU would be expected to reduce its emissions up to 40% by 2020** compared to 1990 levels.

Comparability of EU target with pledges from other countries
The EU's 20% target is unambitious when compared with the emissions targets outlined by other countries. It is more or less comparable to what the USA, Canada and Russia have pledged. However, **many countries have already pledged more ambitious reduction targets than the EU**, notably Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Norway, Switzerland and most emerging countries.

EU emissions target is little more than business as usual
The economic crisis will have a larger impact on the EU than on other Annex-I countries. The reduction in economic output reduces CO_2 emissions compared to business as usual. It will also undermine the EU's emissions trading scheme, creating a surplus of unused emissions allowances that can be 'banked' for use in the 3rd Phase (2013-20). Thus, **the total impact of EU climate policies would only reduce domestic emissions around 4% compared with the expected business as usual scenario**.

Increasing the EU's target will be less costly than expected
The economic downturn has significantly reduced the costs of achieving emissions reductions. **Achieving an increased emissions reduction target of 30% would now be much less costly** than was suggested by estimates at the time the EU drafted its climate and energy package of legislation.

[1] Greens/EFA political summary of the study by CE Delft