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International climate process

Renewed efforts or further stalemate?

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International climate process: renewed efforts or further stalemate?

Bonn, 10 September 2018. International climate policy continues to search for a set of rules to effectively implement the Paris Agreement of 2015. The purpose of the last round of international climate negotiations held in Bonn in May 2018 was to agree on such rules. Yet this goal was not achieved. Delegates therefore had to continue their series of meetings. An additional round of negotiations concluding last Sunday in Bangkok represented the latest attempt to find compromises and solutions. 2,000 delegates from over 190 countries negotiated the rulebook that will be used to implement the Paris Agreement from 2020 onwards. Its purpose is to make countries' climate policy commitments verifiable and comparable, and it aims to ensure that all parties honour their responsibilities and cannot cheat. Unlike the noble intentions of the Paris Agreement, which were enthusiastically welcomed worldwide as a breakthrough in attempts to combat global climate change, this is where things get really serious. Politics comes into play as widely divergent interests clash.

So what progress has been achieved in Bangkok? Some workable compromises appear to have been achieved that will hopefully enable the rulebook to be adopted – as planned – at this year's climate summit in Katowice, Poland, in December. At least the building blocks of a sound decision-making basis are now in place. That is the good news. But the rulebook is not an end in itself. It only makes sense if its rules ensure that climate policy measures are efficiently, consistently and increasingly ambitiously implemented. This, in turn, requires that compliance with these rules can be verifiably monitored and considered as binding. In the absence of an authority with the powers to oversee and impose sanctions on the parties, this can only be achieved by means of strong institutions, comparable efforts and creative compromises. There are many devils in the detail here. So what key points need to be considered when the compromise texts drafted in Bonn and Bangkok are translated into a comprehensive rulebook in Katowice? The standards under which countries verifiably measure and report their CO₂ emissions are one of the remaining controversial issues. This is an extremely sensitive aspect of the negotiations because arguments about the definitions of rich and poor countries' individual responsibilities, which were supposed to have been settled in Paris, re-emerged front and centre in Bangkok. Money remains a further major bone of contention. The industrialised nations have promised to provide the

developing countries most severely affected by the consequences of climate change with 100 billion US dollars per year from 2020 onwards in order to finance climate measures and to address the impacts of climate change. At the same time, they are reluctant in the negotiations and rather seeking to increase the private sector's involvement in attempts to mobilise the necessary funds. The developing countries view this with scepticism and expect tangible commitments.

The slow pace of progress is therefore deeply worrying. Germany is a case in point here as it struggles with issues such as phasing out coal production and modernising its transport sector. If Germany wants to regain its former pioneering role in climate policy, as federal environment minister Svenja Schulze called for in her maiden speech to the Bundestag, the country must honour its climate commitments and boost its efforts to significantly raise the level of ambition in German and European climate policy. First and foremost this is a matter of climate justice – both globally and domestically. Climate policy must be configured in a socially responsible way so that it puts in place sustainable economic structures – in Germany and Europe as well – if it is to remain effective in the long term. The European Union should therefore target its structural funding at precisely these areas. At an international level it should be possible for those affected by climate change to hold liable those who cause it – such as large energy companies. In this way climate policy as a whole could be organised more equitably and thereby remove a key obstacle in international climate negotiation, namely the issue of differentiation.

Even after the additional round of negotiations in Bangkok, however, international climate policy still appears to be some way from achieving such progress. We can only hope that worldwide protests and demonstrations – such as those held last Saturday under the heading 'Rise for Climate' – will increase the pressure on the negotiators. The Global Climate Action Summit this week in San Francisco also gives cause for hope. It focuses on the contributions that cities and non-state actors can make towards climate protection. The intergovernmental climate process is lagging behind this dynamic. In the absence of renewed efforts, the successful legacy of the much celebrated Paris Agreement will remain in serious jeopardy at the climate summit in Katowice.