

Federal Council for Sustainable Development (FRDO-CFDD)

Opinion on a strategy for the prevention of climate change after 2012

- requested by the Minister for Consumption, the Environment and Sustainable Development, Freya Van den Bossche, in a letter dated 14 June 2004, and transmitted to her successor, Bruno Tobback
- drafted by the *Energy and Climate* working group
- approved by the General Meeting on 26 November 2004 (see Annex 1)
- original language: French

Summary:

Context and diagnosis

- [a] The Kyoto Protocol, which will enter into force on 16 February 2005, sets out targets, in its Annex B, for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by the industrialised nations. These targets must be attained by 2008-2012. Debates over what should be decided after 2012 will begin in December 2004. In that context, the FRDO-CFDD received in June a request for an opinion from the Minister for the Environment on the practical arrangements that should be taken into consideration in the negotiations on commitment periods beyond 2012. This opinion deals only with the international aspect of the question. The Federal Council will issue a subsequent opinion on the Belgian and European aspects. Members of the FRDO-CFDD (namely the Employers Group) considered it premature to address the national and European levels in this opinion.
- [b] To back up its analysis, the FRDO-CFDD considers that the work of the IPCC¹ constitutes the main scientific basis for the adoption of political decisions on climate policy, whether to prevent climate change² or to lessen its consequences³.
- [c] Based on the conclusions of the IPCC, the FRDO-CFDD explains why climate change constitutes a serious threat to both ecosystems and socio-economic systems. The likelihood of risks and the seriousness of potential damage increase with the rise in the global average temperature.
- [d] The Federal Council accordingly points out that the European institutions have estimated that the average global temperature must not rise more than 2°C over its pre-industrial level. The FRDO-CFDD takes the European position of a limit of two degrees as a frame of reference. Keeping the temperature rise below this limit makes dangerous disruptions to the climatic system less likely, but does not exclude them completely.
- [e] To succeed in keeping the temperature rise within that limit, the concentration of greenhouse gases must be maintained below 550 ppm (or 450 ppm for CO₂ alone). It can be concluded that global greenhouse gas emissions resulting from human activity should decrease by around 30% by the year 2050 compared to 1990 levels and three to fourfold by 2100.

¹ IPCC: Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, whose publications are available on the site <http://www.ipcc.ch/>

² This aspect of climate policy concerns "mitigation measures".

³ This aspect of climate policy is often referred to as "adaptation measures" (adaptation to present and future climate change).

- [f] A climate policy must take account of both its costs and benefits. The FRDO-CFDD makes several cost estimates in terms of GDP. These costs should cover measures implemented to prevent climate change and those to manage its consequences. The benefits cover both the costs of damage avoided by a prevention policy and "collateral" gains, because a policy to reduce greenhouse gas emissions will also have positive effects on problems other than climate change, such as air pollution.
- [g] The FRDO-CFDD wishes to see a climate change policy create an opportunity for sustainable development, namely it should support social and economic development, create quality jobs, protect ecosystems and respect the right of every individual to better access to basic resources, particularly energy resources. Climate change cannot prevent people from improving or safeguarding their living conditions. Particular attention must be paid to reducing to a minimum the burden that past and current generations will pass on to future generations.

Commitments and targets

- [h] The overall quantity of emissions at planetary level must be reduced. For measures to be effective without giving rise to distortions of competition, the FRDO-CFDD considers that all Parties must be involved in the process of reducing emissions. In particular, the FRDO-CFDD considers it vital for the United States to be involved. It is also essential to involve rapidly but gradually those developing countries whose emissions are on the rise, such as China, Brazil and Mexico.
- [i] The Federal Council also notes that to increase the chances of success of the international process, several types of inequalities must be taken into account, in terms of:
- responsibility for the climate change problem,
 - capacity (notably technological) to prevent or mitigate the consequences
 - vulnerability to the impact and damages of climate change.

These inequalities occur first and foremost between the industrialised nations and the developing world. Those who will suffer the most from the consequences of climate change are not those with the highest levels of greenhouse gas emissions.

- [j] To succeed at widening participation in the international negotiations that will culminate in commitments, there is a need to establish differentiated obligations for the different Parties, which inter alia remind the industrialised nations that they must provide an example, particularly by accepting greater reductions and by facilitating technology transfers to the South.
- [k] Several countries have announced voluntary targets for reduction of greenhouse gas emissions or means enabling them to reduce their emissions. The FRDO-CFDD considers that such announcements can provide a clearer political framework, which can encourage technological development in particular. Such voluntary commitments must nonetheless be backed up by a credible strategy and all the other Parties must be involved.
- [l] The FRDO-CFDD also considers that there is a need to guarantee the financing of funds set up to enable the most vulnerable countries to adapt to the consequences of climate change, but also to pursue their development by having access to energy sources compatible with sustainable development.
- [m] The Federal Council assesses possible different arrangements for sharing the global target for reduction of greenhouse gases and the different principles that could underpin such arrangements, for example the system of contraction or convergence or the system assigning targets at global level according to the place of consumption. The FRDO-CFDD also recommends study of alternative approaches to sharing emissions rights by sector of activity, which would create a level playing field and reduce risks of distortion of competition.

- [n] The FRDO-CFDD particularly considers that it is unfair that the countries making efforts to reduce their emissions to the benefit of every country on the planet may see their socio-economic development threatened as a result. The FRDO-CFDD recommends that Belgium argue in the appropriate international bodies for the need to analyse the conditions (feasibility, advantages and disadvantages) for possible introduction of countervailing economic measures.
- [o] The FRDO-CFDD considers that a growing commitment structure, comprising targets of varying nature (multi-phase approach) for the different Parties, could have a greater chance of success at international level. A system of differentiated and phased-in commitments could lead to more equitable sharing of emissions rights. The FRDO-CFDD draws attention to the fact that every inhabitant of the planet must be guaranteed the same right of access to the natural resources needed to satisfy basic human needs and that the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions must move in the direction of fair sharing of emissions rights at global level.

Tools and instruments

- [p] The FRDO-CFDD considers that there is a need to keep our global system for energy generation and use from being trapped in a non-sustainable perspective for decades to come. To attain targets for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions defined at global level, the FRDO-CFDD considers that all appropriate instruments must be used.
- [q] The feasibility, advantages and disadvantages of the following economic instruments should be analysed: a global tax on greenhouse gas emissions, a global emissions trading market, a global green certificates market or a mechanism to develop renewable energy and quality combined heat and power generation and a global system of sectoral energy efficiency agreements.
- [r] Other aspects to be considered include the improvement of energy efficiency, transport and spatial planning, changes in consumption patterns, information campaigns and research and development. The feasibility, advantages and disadvantages of a number of technological options should also be studied: renewable energy, combined heat and power generation, nuclear energy, the improvement of non-renewable energy generation sectors, and techniques for carbon capture and sequestration. The FRDO-CFDD intends to develop each of these points in an opinion to be drawn up at the earliest opportunity.