

The Miracle of Paris: Roadmap to a Post-Fossil Social Contract

Rarely had a convention of the United Nations been expected with so many hopes and apprehensions as were the negotiations in Paris (November 30 to December 11, 2015) on the world climate. The run-up saw a round of tedious or failing meetings - the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 21st Conference of the Parties, in short: COP21 coupled with the 11th Meeting of the Parties to the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, in short CMP11. The improbable has come true: all 196 nations concerned have come to the agreement that renunciation of a fossil world economy be anchored as the irreversible aim of the world community. The French foreign minister Laurent Fabius in long-term preparation throughout innumerable bilateral talks with rulers of the world as well as through cautious communication on critical topics and positions has proved himself a brilliant diplomat. Pope Francis, too, played an active role in making this climate agreement of Paris possible – not only by his encyclical “Laudato Si” of June 2015 as well through intensive travelling, speeches and talks connecting to it but in the immediate background of the Convention. Thus there is talk that he, in the run-up to the final round, had a talk with the President of Nicaragua who did not want to agree to the settlement.¹

Rather compact with its 31 pages, the Climate Agreement of Paris² contains three central results:

1. Climate warming is to be limited “considerably below 2°C”. The background of the 2-degree-goal is the generally accepted finding of the international climate research group that from this threshold a tipping-point has been reached that is considered to lead to an uncontrollable change of the ecological dynamics of the earth system (e.g. melting of the summer ice sheet in the Arctic and the Greenland ice sheet, or the Arctic’s ice turning unstable with enormous consequences for a rising sea level). Climate diplomacy’s new terms “considerably below” take into account the vote of the Pacific Islands to limit the climate change to 1.5°C. Further negotiations hereto have been postponed to a Post-Paris-Process.
2. CO₂ emission is to be stopped completely in the second half of the 21st century. To reach this Zero-Emission-Aim technical means such as Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) as well as compensation of emission by reforestation will be allowed. The contribution to be made by individual nations for this will not be laid down in a treaty but left to their commitment. Thereby transparent and comparable methods of measurement should be used which are inspected every five years in a convention by the nations. The first conference to set the mechanism of measurement is scheduled for 2016 in Marrakech. The first meeting for inspection is planned for 2018.
3. The assent to far-reaching financial and technical support for the so-called developing countries is the third great success of the Paris Climate Agreement though quantification of the aid is not mentioned in the text of the treaty itself but rather in the so-called “decision-making text”. This defines a plan of action to 2020, the date on which the Paris Agreement is to come into effect. The “decision-making text” mentions the 100 billion US-Dollars per year for disaster control and measures

¹ Cf. Christoph Seidler: Pope said to have interfered in the last minute of the Climate Convention, Spiegel online of 13.12.2015

² <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2015/cop21/eng/109.pdf>

for adaptation already discussed in Copenhagen in 2009. The principle of liability on the part of the industrialized countries for damages caused by them underlies this concept even though this is not stated openly.

You could compare these central results of the negotiations with a “roadmap” of peace treaty negotiations: it is a timetable to set in motion a process of interdependent commitments and concrete implementation. Aims and platforms for negotiations are defined. If, how and when these aims can be achieved in detail is to be put in question. Yet, a certain reversal of dynamics has been reached: whereas in the past twenty years the states played poker to safeguard national interests and to evade commitments for the protection of the climate a collective commitment has now sprung into existence which no nation can leave without risking being shunned by the world community. This has led to a new epoch in the protection of the climate which one might label as a “World Treaty” for a “Great Transformation” on the way to a post-fossil model of economics.³ Special emphasis is laid on the treaty by the assent of **all nations** (with the Kyoto-Protocol below 15% -measured by CO₂ emission) as well as the obligatory mechanism for regular inspections and improvement of national aims for climate melioration.

Of course, a sober view of the limits of the Paris Climate Agreement is also on the agenda here: if one defines with Kant as a feature of the law the authorization to coercion, the agreement is not of a legal kind, but rather of a moral nature. The quantitative commitment of the states to the CO₂ reduction has not been incorporated into the agreement but rather into an appendix in which the states voluntarily set their respective aims. Whereas at the beginning of October only a small number of states had officially reported their aims, almost all of them have done so in the meantime. However, the endeavours to carry out reduction are by far not enough to achieve limiting the change of climate to a “considerably below 2°C warming” (even if promises are kept, a global rise of temperature of 2.7 to 3.2 degrees must be reckoned with).⁴ It remains to be seen if the pluralistically conceived process of reduction in the sense of a procedural adaptation will succeed in meeting the challenges. National interests and ideologies of maintaining affluence were effective as before and will show even more in the process of implementation. Especially in the USA must one reckon with stiff opposition on the side of the Republicans who regard Obama’s promises an “uncovered cheque”.

Additionally, the successes of the climate convention in Paris are currently accompanied by an economic “message” which speaks a different language: for many years have the prices for fuel at the filling stations been so cheap. In view of the high supply due to fracking, prices have fallen dramatically in the competition for consumer markets. It is a complete mystery how the ambitious aims of Paris can actually be pushed through against the widening of the construction of coal power plants, especially in China and India. Many critical action fields have hardly been given attention, for example agriculture and food for the world, air traffic

³ Cf on usage of language: Scientific Advisory Board of the Federal Government Global Changes of the Environment (WBGU): World under Change. Social Contract for a Great Transformation, Berlin 2011.

⁴ For a more detailed analysis of the processes of negotiation and their backgrounds and open questions cf. Susanne Dröge: The Paris Agreement 2015: At the Crossroads of the Climate Regime, Berlin: Deutsches Institut für Internationale Politik und Sicherheit, November 2015

and shipping as well as questions on the coherence of politics in the fields of climate, energy and development.

It is quite astonishing that China, too, has been committed. Even though with a few loopholes, the financially powerful and the world's largest emitter of carbon has signalled to join not only in turning away from fossil energies but also to have a hand in financing disaster control and fostering post-fossil development in countries of the Global South. India was moved to agree with the treaty for the protection of the climate by promises of technology transfer in the area of sustainable energies.

The danger of the global community to fail in striving for the high aim formulated in Paris cannot be denied. Many critical action fields are hardly given due attention for example agriculture and food for the world, air traffic and shipping as well as questions on the coherence of politics in issues of climate, energy and development. The procedural approach in dealing with restructuring an established order of the economy with its regimens of trade, global players and socio-economic imbalances remains vague. The aims and self-commitments of Paris cannot be achieved without a fundamental transformation of lifestyles and patterns of consumption. Thereby every individual is being committed.

It will be of importance that the EU steps forward as a good role model and takes measures to implement the achievement of the aims to lower emission. This necessitates a swift and goal-oriented reform of the EU system of trading emissions. Above all, in the sector of traffic, in agriculture and area of buildings emissions must be reduced. As a test of the seriousness of the Paris Agreement arises the question if a swift exit from the use of coal will be resolved and pushed through against all opposition. These points must play a central role in the Federal Government's plan 2050 for the Protection of the Climate presently under preparation.⁵ With the change of energy resolved in the aftermath of Fukushima, Germany has taken up a leading role continually connected with varied conflicts. Before Paris the big energy companies EON and RWE have in time adapted to the change by splitting the scope of business into renewable and fossil and nuclear energies. Looked at in bright light, this entrepreneurial strategy boils down to burdening the tax payers with the costs of transformation. On the other hand, it is just Germany with good chances of exporting innovative technologies and developing holistic models of a "organic economy".⁶

In economic terms, this path makes sense as is proven by the fact that this year's investments for renewable energy surpass those for fossil energy resources for the first time. At the same time, the divestment movement is gaining momentum. Besides the Norwegian Pension Fund and many wholesale and small investors, recently the Allianz-Concern und numerous businesses e.g. Ceres' Investor Network on Climate Risk representing 381 investors at a value of 25 billion US-Dollars, announced their withdrawal from the business with fossil energy resources. These examples give hope that a positive spiral of decarbonisation of the economy has been set in motion. Beyond, the EU and Germany also have to play an important role in supporting developing and threshold countries to make possible a synthesis of climate protection with fighting poverty. In national and international

⁵ Cf ZdK-statement (<http://www.zk.de/veroeffentlichungen/pressemeldungen/detail/ZdK-begruesst-Klimaabkommen-als-Meilenstein-in-der-Geschichte-der-Klimadiplomatie-1003f/>).

⁶ Cf. on this the websites of the Bioökonomieräte set up on EU and Federal levels as well as in several Federal States, e.g. <http://www.biooekonomierat-bayern.de/>

terms, cities and social networks are rendered a growing importance in accelerating the process of transformation into a post-fossil economy.

On the view of Christian social ethics, the question arises, among others, about the role of the churches and the tasks of reflections on ethics in the process of transformation that has begun. The conflict of aims between fighting poverty and the protection of our climate as well as the allocation of responsibilities and the transformation of the model of affluence require a deep-going reflection, even after Paris. Especially in the USA the encyclical on the environment has set off an on-going and fundamental debate on climate change. No other text has been given such a worldwide high acclaim in the past 20 years. For the informed public it was not primarily news what was said but rather the moral urgency in respect to the connectedness of ecological and social issues as well as the broad perception of their cultural and religious in-depth dimension. An essential feat was and still is the delegitimization of Christian motivated climate sceptics. Up to then, the Papal epistles had not even mentioned the term “climate change” thereby indirectly giving credence to the denial of the problem.⁷

Even though there were Papal announcements since the end of the 1960’s with eye-opening appeals highlighting humankind’s responsibility for the creation. But they lacked political poignancy and societal theoretical grounding in the same way as urgent appeals in the first half of the 20th century for the dignity of Man but no engagement for human rights. The transformation of the teachings of Catholic social ethics through the integration of the ecological dimension is still fragile and just at the beginning. There is need of a broad institutional anchoring also on the level of research in social ethics as well as ecumenical and inter-religious cooperation for stabilization. The special task and competences of the churches lie in contributing ethically grounded and at the same time clad in everyday communication to a change of culture. By its own efforts, for example in facility management or shaping demand in an eco-social way it could support the necessary change considerably and achieve the needed credibility. The publication “Investing ethically and sustainably”, published by the German bishops and the Central Committee of Catholics in July, is a good step in the direction of self-commitment serving as a role-model. As is the economic process “Returning to Life – Shaping the Change” for the protection of the climate and sustainable development.

The Paris Convention on the World Climate has defined aims and a political framework; implementing the postulates by concrete actions still lies ahead. Only if this process turns dynamic, will the Climate Agreement of Paris truly become an historic turning-point.

The fact that this diplomacy of multilateral negotiations, pronounced dead by many, has succeeded against all the odds appears as a small wonder at least a reason for deep gratitude and joy.

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Text translated from the German by York R. Buttler, December 2015

⁷ For an analysis in more detail cf. Markus Vogt, *The Principle of Sustainability. A Draft from a Theological - Ethical Perspective*, 3rd ed. Munich 2013.