ON THE ROAD TO PARIS 2015
TOWARDS A NEW GLOBAL CLIMATE DEAL

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Media partner

Europe’s World
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TOWARDS A NEW GLOBAL CLIMATE DEAL

Report of the Policy Spotlight debate with UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon

co-organised by Friends of Europe

and Debating Europe

with media partner Europe’s World

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EU leadership needed

United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon urged the European Union to speed up the adoption of new climate and energy targets in order to boost his campaign for a global climate change deal.

On a tour of Brussels, Prague and Kigali, he was addressing a Friends of Europe Policy Spotlight debate, “On the road to Paris 2015: Towards a new global climate deal”. On the occasion, he was presented with Friends of Europe’s ‘Statesmanship’ award in recognition for his efforts to raise awareness and mobilise action on climate change.

EU leaders are considering a European Commission proposal to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 40% from 1990 levels by 2030, and to increase to at least 27% the share of renewables in the EU energy mix. However, given the focus of the March summit on energy security and the Ukraine crisis, they postponed a decision on new targets until October.

Yet, Ban called for a decision at the European Council meeting scheduled for June in order to boost the UN Climate Summit in September which aims to facilitate a binding agreement in 2015 in Paris.

“The European Union is the only organisation now able to lead by example…I’m counting on your leadership.”

Ban Ki-moon, United Nations Secretary-General

Yesterday I asked President Barroso and President Van Rompuy to do it in the June summit meeting and bring an ambitious target to the UN summit meeting in September,” he said, speaking on 3 April. “The European Union can play a very important role. The European Union is the only organisation now able to lead by example…I’m counting on your leadership.”
The science is clear

The latest report by the Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change – “Impacts, Adaptation and Vulnerability” released on 31 March – points to a range of problems: Ecosystems are being affected; sea levels are rising, threatening hundreds of millions of people in low-lying areas and there is a growing possibility of food and water shortages, which could pose risks for health and security.

“They made it quite clear that it is caused by human behaviour,” Ban said, referring to the IPCC report’s authors. “Now with five successive reports, science has made it plainly clear that there is a climate change phenomenon,” he said.

“It’s coming and it’s coming much, much faster than you expect. Many European countries have been inundated. Africa has had a long spell of drought. Even in Manhattan, the UN building was flooded. This is not normal. Climate change impact is happening.”

A vision of shared efforts

The next two years could be crucial. The September summit will gather leaders from government, business and other areas to catalyse action towards a low-carbon economy. At the Paris meeting, in late 2015, all countries are supposed to conclude a legally-binding global climate agreement. “I am urging leaders to raise the level of ambition,” said Ban. “First and foremost, we have to have this legal framework under which every country will be bound.”

“I am urging leaders to raise the level of ambition. We have to have a legal framework [at COP21 in Paris in 2015] under which every country will be bound.”

Ban Ki-moon, United Nations Secretary-General
Past climate change summits have been hampered by competing interests. Many industrialised countries are prepared – to greater or lesser extents – to commit to reducing carbon emissions, and they want developing countries too to agree to binding targets. While many emerging countries are working at a national level to combat climate change, most resist the adoption of legally-binding international rules.

Giving a European perspective, Jos Delbeke, European Commission Director General for Climate Action, pointed out that Europe was committed to reducing greenhouse gases and was now responsible for only 10% or 12% of global emissions. “The quality of the deal is going to depend more on emerging economies and the United States making real efforts on board with Europe.”

Manjeev Singh Puri, Ambassador of India to the EU, called for collaborative action and joint work towards technologies that would “break the carbon energy nexus”. “When these are done and they allow for large-scale action,” he said,

“I am sure everyone will come on board and it will be the greatest asset we can leave for future generations.”

Ban said both groups of countries had a role to play: They had “common differentiated responsibilities”. On the one hand, climate change was put in motion by the developed world over 200 or so years of industrialisation. But the key countries to make a deal work now are the United States plus big emerging economies such as China, India, Brazil and South Africa, which emit important amounts of greenhouse gases. “Developing countries and OECD countries should work together,” he said.

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Jos Delbeke, European Commission Director General for Climate Action
Four areas for action

Ban Ki-moon urged action on climate change in several specific areas.

First, civil society should continue pressuring governments to be more ambitious. In addition, businesses should see climate change as an opportunity. By investing in energy efficiency, companies could reap considerable returns, Ban said. These could be increased further by working with suppliers and consumers to embed sustainability across supply chains. “I call on business communities to press their governments to reach an agreement on climate change that will send the right signals to the private sector and provide the framework they need for their business activities,” he said.

Second, developing countries needed financial support to adapt to low-carbon technologies. At the 2009 climate summit in Copenhagen, leaders of the OECD countries agreed to mobilise $100 bn a year by 2020 to help. However, he said, the fund has not yet received sufficient contributions. “This Green Climate Fund is an empty shell,” he said. “It’s completely empty.”

“A realistic carbon price was a third area for action. This would spur much needed investment in low-carbon and energy-efficiency technologies, and reflect the real environmental costs of fossil fuels. Cutting the $500 bn a year in fuel subsidies worldwide could prompt a 5% drop in emissions by 2020.

Fourth, Ban said we should take an attitude of “adopt and adapt”: Introduce and scale up the best, fastest solutions. “Europe has much to offer – from renewable energy to energy efficiency; from climate smart agriculture to integrated water resources management; from sustainable transport to cleaner cities.” Cities are a particular opportunity for action, as the world’s 100 largest are responsible for nearly 70% of greenhouse gas emissions. Ban has appointed former New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg as his special envoy on climate change and cities.

“Green Climate Fund is an empty shell.”
Ban Ki-moon, United Nations Secretary-General
On the occasion, Friends of Europe’s “Statesmanship” award was presented to Ban Ki-moon.
Sustainable development and climate change

Ban insisted that sustainable development and climate action go together, and gave several examples. Black carbon is a major cause of climate change and also a threat to health: Some 7 million people a year die from household and ambient air pollution. By reducing black carbon emissions from heavy-duty diesel vehicles and engines, developing countries could cut harmful emissions while creating cleaner air in their cities. And clean-cook stoves would allow people who depend on wood, charcoal and kerosene to breathe more safely at home.

Deforestation and forest degradation are major causes of increased greenhouse gases. Protecting and sustainably managing our forests would mitigate climate change, protect biological diversity and provide development opportunity to some 1.6 billion people.

“Sustainable energy is not only a way to help wean the world from fossil fuels. It will provide opportunities for more than a billion people who lack access to electricity.”

The Sustainable Energy For All initiative that Ban launched in 2011 aims by 2030 to achieve universal access to modern energy services, double energy efficiency worldwide and double the global share of renewables. “Sustainable energy is not only a way to help wean the world from fossil fuels,” he said. “It will provide opportunities for more than a billion people who lack access to electricity.”

Finally, agriculture generates greenhouse gases – but farmers are especially vulnerable to climate change. That made “climate-smart agriculture” critical for food security, good nutrition and economic stability.
Challenging the world leaders

The event featured video questions from Debating Europe’s schools programme. Replying to a question about climate change sceptics, asked by a student from Karedralskolan i Abo Gymnasium, Finland, Ban said that they were becoming increasingly rare. Two or three years ago, even some scientists were sceptics, he said. But the successive IPCC reports had silenced many of them.

A student from Business Academy Aarhus, Denmark, asked Ban to imagine that he were 20 years old again. The younger generation should challenge its leaders, Ban said, both in politics and business, and tell them that current policies were not serving the younger generation.

“Please challenge your ministers. You can choose leaders much more committed to environmental issues or leaders with longer vision,” he said. As for his own generation, he said, “We are the leaders of today, youth are tomorrow’s leaders. We have to hand over this earth in a state that is environmentally sustainable and hospitable. That is our collective responsibility.”

“The problem is global and does not respect national boundaries. You cannot negotiate with nature. Nature does not wait.”

Ban Ki-moon, United Nations Secretary-General

Despite the long-term benefits and business potential for combating climate change, many politicians fret over the immediate costs. These range from investments to new regulations and are often unpopular with voters. Ban said that when tries to persuade world leaders to take action, they sometimes tell him: “Secretary-General, don’t worry, I’m supporting you and I will always do what you say. But if I want to help you I need to be re-elected. So let me be re-elected first. Then I will come back to you.”

Such an attitude could delay action until too late, Ban said. “We must act on what we know and take urgent steps before it is too late, before we regret,” he said. “The problem is global and does not respect national boundaries. You cannot negotiate with nature. Nature does not wait.”
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