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Climate leadership in a historical perspective and lessons for the implementation of the Paris Agreement: Reflections of a former negotiator

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In the climate negotiations, the issue of leadership has been of central importance from the very beginning. It has mainly been raised in terms of national (or EU) efforts to influence other countries (or groups of countries) with the aim of moving the negotiations forward and creating conditions for a satisfactory outcome. Of course, in all negotiations Parties try to defend their own interests; but negotiations on sustainable development have a special character: in many ways, and particularly in the long term, all parties are in the same boat.

As far as the EU is concerned, there is no doubt that the Union's long-time commitment to support the Climate Convention has given it a leading position, particularly after the US 2001 decision not to ratify the Kyoto Protocol. In fact, the EU stance on climate change has been an important part of its display of "soft power" in international affairs. However, the present tensions within the EU and the Brexit negotiations limit the authority of the Union and reduce its capacity to act as a leader.

This is particularly unfortunate in view of the need for leadership on the Paris Agreement Work Programme. I recall that in March 2017 Benito Müller and myself published a [Strategy Note](#) dealing with the need for EU leadership through strategic collaboration with China and with other countries like India or Argentina. We also suggested two additions to the EU "tool kit" in the form of joint targets and option of coordination through a special envoy.

EU has tried to strengthen cooperation with China and Canada, and a couple of meetings have been held with these countries over the last years. Furthermore G 77 countries have met in various settings, the most recent one being the Johannesburg Declaration of the BRICS which underlines their countries' commitment to implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris Agreement. The Talanoa Dialogue is another element in the preparation for Katowice, and there will of course be other preparatory meetings. But the crucial question of decisive leadership like the one of France in preparing the Paris COP 2015, and the China/US strong cooperation at the time, all that remains very uncertain. I do hope that the [ecbi Oxford meetings](#) will promote positive ideas on the work to be undertaken over the next few months.

In addition, and based on my own experience, I believe that we need to underline that climate

leadership is not only linked to positions of nations. Over the years, negotiations on sustainable development have benefited from the leadership of another character, namely the important actions of Secretariats and Chairpersons, beginning with the strong leadership in Rio 1992 of Maurice Strong as Secretary-General and Tommy Koh as Chairman of the UNCED Conference; and that of Jean Ripert as Chairman of the Negotiating Committee on Climate change, and the strong support of Michael Zammit Cutajar as Executive Secretary.

Looking back at the twenty-eight years I have been involved in the climate negotiations, beginning in 1990 as Chief Negotiator of Sweden in the decade up to 2001, then as an adviser to the Swedish delegation for a number of years, and finally as a retired but active observer of events. I feel there is a structural pattern which links science with politics, nations with individuals, failure with success; and ultimately a common feeling of responsibility for the real long term – 2100 and beyond.

The links between science and politics were established at the very beginning with the First Assessment Report of IPCC appearing four months ahead of the beginning of the negotiations of the Convention in early 1991. The presentation of the report by IPCC Chairman Bert Bolin of Sweden had a deep impact on the negotiators, and Bolin's regular appearances over his ten years as IPCC Chairman made him one of the leaders in the process. Nevertheless, the negotiation of UNFCCC was several times on the brink of collapse, most seriously a few weeks before the Rio Conference: pessimism was deep, as we were facing a draft full of brackets; but Chairman Ripert was finally given a mandate to present a completely new text without brackets: he did so and also led the negotiation to a successful conclusion.

This was the first of a series of cycles of pessimism, followed by progress and success through strong leadership. The first came at COP 1 in Berlin in 1995: I chaired the negotiations for the Berlin Mandate, designed to set the stage for the Kyoto Protocol. At the level of officials, we managed reasonably well, but some crucial and decisive issues were beyond our reach and pessimism was growing. But in a final night of negotiations at ministerial level the Chair, a then rather unknown young German Minister of Environment showed her skills and turned the Conference into success. Her name was Angela Merkel. And two years later the resourceful Chair, Raoul Estrada of Argentina through strong leadership managed to reach agreement on the Kyoto Protocol.

However, the struggle for entry into force of the Protocol opened a new cycle of pessimism when the US in 2001 decided not to ratify the protocol, only a couple of months after a disastrous COP in the Hague, when Dutch Chairman, Environment Minister Jan Pronk, failed to get agreement on anything. However, the incoming EU Presidencies of Sweden and Belgium managed to solve the immediate crisis, and Pronk successfully chaired a resumed COP in Geneva in the summer of 2001, confirmed in the regular COP in Marrakech in late 2001.

The Kyoto Protocol was now "ratifiable", but the rules for entry into force were compromised by the US exit. A new cycle of pessimism opened, but in 2004, Russia finally decided to ratify, and the Protocol entered into force in February 2005. However, the delay in entry into force would have repercussions that played a role in the next cycle of pessimism connected with the Copenhagen COP in 2009.

Expectations were high that autumn for a decision on a Second Commitment period for the Kyoto Protocol, especially since a summit at the very highest level would be held in connection with the COP with all the top leaders of the world invited. But the detailed preparations failed and pessimism grew as the Copenhagen COP unfolded. The bad organization of the summit at the end of the Conference seemed to confirm the failure, and the political document agreed – known as the Copenhagen Accord – was not well received. However, as we all know, Mexican and South African engagement and leadership in preparing the COPs in Cancún (2010) and Durban (2011) together

with a growing understanding of the potential of the Copenhagen Accord changed the atmosphere and paved the way for the adoption of the Paris Agreement in 2015. A new cycle of optimism was then established by an efficient French Chairmanship with Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius and Ambassador Laurence Tubiana in the lead. The rapid ratification process and the early entry into force of the Agreement were then welcomed by all.

The optimism is still there but worries exist in the preparation of the entry into force of the new regime in 2020, in particular the Paris Agreement Work Programme. The next few months will be crucial, and therefore the discussions in Oxford this month are so important. As noted in the beginning of this paper the overall global prospects are not favourable, and the APA meeting in May left many questions open. The resumed meeting of subsidiary bodies in Bangkok September 3-8 and the continued Talanoa Dialogue will show whether the Paris enthusiasm is still there to enable constructive results in Katowice in December. No doubt the IPCC report on the 1,5 degree target will also have an impact in this connection.

My conclusion is that the implementation of the Paris Agreement may still be part of a positive cycle. However, the relative weakness of leadership on the side of the traditional big actors has to be compensated by strong support from business, finance and climate NGO's. No doubt this year's extreme weather conditions and all the disasters linked to them have had an impact on public opinion globally. But how much will this influence the negotiations? The Bangkok meeting is also an opportunity for the skillful and hard-working APA Co-chairs Jo Tyndall and Sarah Baasha to provide strong and constructive leadership and open the way for success at the moment of truth in Katowice in December. If this would happen it could open the way for a positive preparatory process for the Paris Agreement by 2020.

Let me return to a more long-term aspect of leadership, as the crucial implementation of the PA will develop in the period up to 2030 and beyond. It is a question of great political significance as the pattern of leadership and commitment will be facing and operating the new concept of NDC:s, which will bring national and international policymaking closer to each other. The management of a system of internationally binding procedural rules with commitments for action which are not binding internationally will require new thinking, new practices, and new flexibility. Perhaps the experience of OECD, which has been operating a system of this kind, could be helpful.

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