

**CLIMATE CHANGE****Durban: EU ambitions held in check under Warsaw's influence**

By Jakub Iwaniuk in Warsaw

To what extent will Warsaw's position on climate issues influence the EU's common position at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Durban, South Africa, on 28 November-9 December? The Polish EU Presidency has been orchestrating since July the drafting of this common position, which has to be approved by the Environment Council, on 10 October, and by the European Council, on 17 October. The country, whose energy supply is 94% coal-based, is historically opposed to any further European ambition on CO<sub>2</sub> reduction. Many analysts note that it will be hard for Europe to defend an ambitious policy at the Durban conference. As early as last May, an opinion piece signed by Polish experts in the progressive daily *Gazeta Wyborcza* appealed to the government headed by Donald Tusk: "Were Poland to take the role of a country which neglects the issue or indeed treats it as a threat to its well-being and consequently acts as a brake on the proceedings then our position in the EU will suffer. Our Presidency's achievements in other fields will be dimmed."

It is a fact that preparation of the Durban conference was not one of the top priorities of the Polish EU Presidency. On the environment, Poland's strategy is to sideline the sensitive issue of emissions reduction from the debate in order to focus on problems that rally broad support, such as energy efficiency. It has adopted a similar method for

the climate talks. "Rather than raising an issue where a compromise will be difficult, the Polish Presidency has chosen to focus on the technical aspects of the debate, on which everyone is willing to advance, such as the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM)," explains Agata Hinc, head of the Low-Emission Economy project at the think tank Demos Europa. "The Environment Ministry has hired a number of competent experts for this purpose and is actively preparing the conference on these technical aspects." Since Poland has drawn up the negotiation agenda and set its priorities, the Polish position has an obvious influence on the sidelining of emissions reduction from the debate. "On this point, the international context of economic crisis works in favour of the Polish position, because no one expects spectacular progress on this aspect at the Durban conference," adds Hinc.

Poland is also campaigning for a prolongation of the Kyoto Protocol, but under existing conditions, ie without renegotiating the sensitive point of binding targets for reduction of greenhouse gas emissions for the industrialised countries (listed in Annex I, which determines the commitments for each country). According to Hinc, "there is a chance of being able to work out a European compromise on this question in line with the Polish position," a position that takes forward the debate on many technical aspects, but that keeps to the status quo in terms of ambitions. ■

**Background**

A report published in April by the Warsaw School of Economics (SGH) analyses the economic consequences in Poland of the '3x20 energy-climate change package' and is critical of EU climate policy.

- The European targets will cost Poland an average of one to 2.2 points of growth yearly until 2030. This impact on GDP will be far greater in Poland than in the EU on average

- Polish households will see their energy bill rise by more than 15%

- The EU's climate and energy policy is objectively in contradiction with Poland's economic interests. It is perceived as unfair and a hindrance to the country's development

- Coal will remain for a long time to come the main source of electricity and heat production in Poland because it represents the basis of its energy security

- The error of EU climate policy is to set targets first and then to examine ways of implementing them and their economic consequences

- If the 3x20 package is not global in nature, it will have a counter-productive impact on the climate because it will lead to the relocation of high-emission industries to countries that do not implement an emissions reduction policy.

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