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PRESS RELEASE

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EU offers to cut 20% of CO₂ by 2020 –NGO network says much more is needed

Budapest, HUNGARY – Following the conclusion of the climate change talks in Copenhagen, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has received submissions of national pledges to cut and limit greenhouse gases by 2020 from 55 countries. The European Commission had nothing new to say: aims for cutting 20% of its greenhouse gas emissions compared to the 1990 levels, while keeping its previous offer of scaling up its efforts to 30%, if other industrialized countries also do so. However, it is clear from the submissions that this latter possibility remains merely theoretical.

Why is 20% too few?

According to the European Environmental Agency (EEA), “the EU-27 is estimated to have reduced domestic greenhouse gas emissions by approximately 10.7% between 1990 and 2008.” [1] This means that if we adopt the 20% target and include a high share of Clean Development Mechanisms in achieving it (which means sponsoring investments in developing countries), there is not much left to do in the EU in the coming decade. At the same time, the most recent scientific findings suggest that in order to prevent global warming from reaching dangerous levels (2 degrees Celsius in average or more), emissions cuts as deep as 40% would be necessary by 2020.

Bearing in mind that the world is rapidly facing a resource-constrained and volatile future, **CEEweb suggests the EU to go even beyond its 30% option and go for a mid-term target of 40% in the next Climate Change Conference in December 2010, Mexico. In the EU this target should be achieved by entirely domestic efforts. For long-term target we think that 80% emissions cut should be targeted by 2050, which practically means that our fossil fuel use should fall near zero.** To advance this process, revision of current support for fossil energy is necessary, and quotas on fossil energy use should be introduced and traded in the international market (the current CO₂ emission quotas could serve as a model for this).

Understand the complex system behind climate change

In CEEweb’s understanding, **greenhouse gas emissions, excessive use of natural resources and degradation of natural ecosystems are equivalently important causes of climate change**, which means that decreasing our use of energy and natural resources as well as restoring a significant part of our degraded ecosystems should get the same priority in climate change mitigation as cutting our emissions of greenhouse gases. Only in this way of system-thinking we can assure the proper operation of the Earth’s complex and interrelated ecological and climate systems, and avoid the trap of end-of-pipe solutions: doing no more than shifting the pressures from one element of the environment to the other.

Instead of the outputs (emissions), focus on the input side (energy use)

General problem with the reductions targets is that if we focus only on emission cuts, the savings due to the various technological solutions can easily be overgrown by the fast increase of needs, and on the other hand, some of these solutions seriously endanger biodiversity and eventually result in even higher emissions (this is now clear in the case of biofuels, which were meant to save CO₂, but their excessive use result in large-scale land conversion and agricultural intensification, and, consequently, an amount of carbon released primarily from the soil which is orders of magnitude larger than the supposed savings).

Therefore, **CEEweb asks for a new EU energy policy making it legally binding for the Member States to limit and gradually decrease their total demand for energy by 2% annually, until we reach the carrying capacity of Europe.**

Ecosystem approach in mitigation and adaptation

Every well-functioning ecosystem captures and stores huge amounts of carbon, and it is inevitable to keep this function of them in Europe as well as in any part of the world. CEEweb welcomes that the Copenhagen Accord forms a basis for negotiations during 2010 on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD), which is an important achievement of ecosystem-approach in mitigation. However, as REDD focuses only on tropical forests, it would be important to **recognize the value of a range of further ecosystems for capturing and storing carbon, and include them in any future carbon credit or carbon tax system.**

Ecosystem approach should be applied as a guiding principle in all adaptation measures, too. While the mitigation function of ecosystems can be expected on the long term, and happens on the global scale, their adaptation capacity is already performed on the short term and primarily on local and regional levels. Ensuring the best possible operation of ecosystems will protect human populations against climate change to some extent even if the limitation of global CO₂ level is failed. However, legally protected areas and ecological networks alone are not likely to be sufficient for the adaptation of biodiversity to climate change. For that more is needed: to **re-frame the EU's agricultural and cohesion policy so that our landscapes as a whole would remain or become climate-friendly.**

Do we really grab the roots of the problem?

Ildikó Arany, climate change programme coordinator of CEEweb said, "An effective climate policy should try to understand and deal with the underlying drivers behind climate change and, at the same time, behind other global crises such as biodiversity loss too. It should clearly aim to modify the wider policy framework by assigning the realistic price of energy and natural resources and internalizing the ecosystem services involved, which could help the transition to a more sustainable economy and seek for new parameters for growth. **Eventually both adaptation and mitigation need the same measurements, a new economic macro-structure with lower demand for natural resources and space.**"

About CEEweb for Biodiversity

CEEweb for Biodiversity is a network of non-governmental organizations in Central and Eastern Europe working together to protect the biological heritage of the region. Our mission is the conservation of biodiversity through the promotion of sustainable development.

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References

1 EEA Report 9/2009: Greenhouse gas emission trends and projections in Europe 2009