Europe Divided over How to Reach Climate Goals

European Union leaders are gathered in Brussels on Thursday and Friday to talk about the future of the climate. But not all are looking into the same crystal ball.

Agreeing on what to say was the easy part. Leaders from the 27 European Union nations are set to back a 20-percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2020 as compared to 1990 levels at a summit meeting beginning in Brussels on Thursday. Coming to consensus on what steps to take to actually reach those targets, however, promises to be much more difficult.

Germany, which holds the rotating EU presidency for the first six months of 2007, has a clear position: It wants biofuels to make up at least 10 percent of vehicle fuels by 2020 and, more controversially, seeks to require members to get 20 percent of their energy from renewable resources by 2020.

For German Chancellor Angela Merkel, the urgency is clear. "It is not five minutes to midnight," she said on German television on Wednesday night. "It's five past midnight." Speaking to reporters on Wednesday, she also said: "I believe Europe can be a role model. Europe has to commit itself, but then Europe has good prospects for entering into dialogue with other countries to do their share, and the German G8 presidency will be lobbying for that."

She followed that up with warnings Thursday that Europe must adopt tough measures to fight global warming. "We have got to go for a sensible solution, for the right policy mix, which will ultimately deliver results for our grandchildren," Merkel said after pre-summit talks with business and labor leaders.

She said the EU should pressure other leading countries such as the United States and Russia to take action. "Europe only produces 15 percent of global CO2," she said. "The real climate problem will not be solved by Europe alone."

European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso called for Europe to take a leading role on climate change. "We are now trying to ask the leaders of Europe to rise to the occasion," he said Thursday. Europe has to "show others we are serious about the issue," he said.

Business leaders Thursday were skeptical about Merkel's proposals, however. "In terms of binding obligations on renewables, no one has the foggiest idea of what the costs can be," Ernest-Antoine Seilliere, the head of business lobby group BusinessEurope, told Merkel.

John Monks from the European Trade Union Confederation was more upbeat. "Obviously jobs are at stake, but we do believe that there is a scenario for European leadership," he commented Thursday.

While countries like Germany, Spain and Denmark have invested heavily in wind farms and are already making considerable headway toward generating significant quantities of renewables, countries in Eastern Europe have a long way to go and are concerned that a major shift in their energy mix could harm their growing economies. And to make matters worse, the bloc can't even seem to agree on what renewable energy is.

Germany, which has pledged to shut down its nuclear reactors gradually in coming years, argues that the focus should be on such sources as wind, solar, water and...
biomass. France, though, would like to label the target as "non-carbon," allowing nuclear energy to be included. The Czech Republic and Slovakia also hope to promote nuclear energy at the summit. And according to German daily *Die Welt*, European Parliament President Hans-Gert Pöttering, who advocates even deeper emission-cut goals, said on Thursday that nuclear energy should for now be included in the EU's carbon reduction plan.

In addition, renewable energies are for the moment more expensive than sources such as coal. Many countries, especially in Eastern Europe, shy away from the initial investment necessary and argue they can hardly afford to shift away from the cheap, coal-fired plants they currently use.

But perhaps they don't need to? European Commissioner for the Environment Stavros Dimas spent much of last month criticizing Merkel for not being ambitious enough and called into question Germany's self-proclaimed front-runner status when it comes to climate control.

A report in Thursday's *Süddeutsche Zeitung* appears to back up that critique. According to a study by the Wuppertal Institute for Climate, Environment and Energy, the targets being discussed by the EU are "not overly ambitious." The study found that, partially due to the dramatic decline in Eastern European industry in the wake of communism's collapse, the EU will have reached 75 percent of its emissions reduction goals by 2010.

Yet despite the focus on climate, the EU is also addressing other issues during the two-day meeting. The latest from Iraq promises to be an issue as will be possible sanctions on Iran for its ongoing nuclear program. How to stabilize Lebanon and Somalia will also be discussed.

But potentially the most controversial of all is what the EU wants to say on the occasion of its 50th birthday, coming up at a March 24-25 anniversary summit in Berlin.

It was supposed to be a chance for the EU to pat itself on the back for its major accomplishments -- getting rid of borders through much of Europe, introducing a single currency, ending centuries of war. Indeed, Merkel had been hoping for a simple three-page declaration that could make an appearance in school books across Europe in the near future.

It has become more complicated than that, however. Britain doesn't want any mention of the EU constitution which it opposes. Any discussion of religious values is likewise extremely touchy, though some countries want to mention Europe's Christian values. Poland wants a reference to Eastern Europe's suffering under communism. And the list goes on.

"If there is a single or very narrow set of authors then it might be possible to come up with a far clearer document," said Ian Manners of the Danish Institute for International Studies in Copenhagen. "But when you have 27 hands scribbling away, like 27 different chefs ... guess what you wind up with? Europe's worst goulash."

*cg/af/reuters*

URL:

http://www.spiegel.de/international/eu-summit-in-brussels-europe-divided-over-how-to-reach-climate-goals-a-470612.html