

Top European Diplomat Addresses Conference Crowd

Naming climate change "probably the most important global challenge that humanity is facing," the European Union's second-top envoy to the United States told the conference crowd (see article on pages 1-3) that, unless countries around the world stick together and to a strict set of rules, the consequences can be impossible to even foresee.

"We will need an unprecedented level of multilateralism to respond to this challenge" said Angelos Pangratis, the Deputy Head of the European Union Delegation to the United States.

Apart from urging cooperation, Pangratis tackled economic concerns, described the currently still divergent EU and U.S. approaches, and painted a grim picture of the earth's present state.

The threshold that humanity must guard against crossing is a temperature rise of over 2 degrees celsius – if this happens, the consequences will be hard not only to address, but even to foresee.

A crucial step is the reduction of CO₂ emissions by at least 50 percent by 2050, compared to 1990 levels.

"That's the best available science. It's not abstract or otherwise motivated political will," said Pangratis, who addressed the conference participants during their lunch break.

A big part of the distance of emissions reductions, close to 20 or 30 percent, must be reached by 2020, he said. The European Union will do at least 20% even on its own, but others must also join.

"That's what we want the others to commit themselves to," he said. In order to reach such levels of emission reductions, "profound changes in our societies are required."

How? An important part of the answer is adopting national cap-and-trade emissions systems, he said.

"In fact, we believe that a global cap-and-trade system is indispensable for the longer term."

The new U.S. administration displays a much more positive attitude toward such a course of action, Pangratis said.

"We have seen an administration that wants to commit very seriously to developing a green economy," he said.

But the commitment displayed so far by the U.S. is not ambitious enough to allow us to stay below the 2 degrees threshold of temperature increase.

"Furthermore, there's some resistance in this country, even among intellectuals, to international compulsory targets," he said. But "those in the United States who see compliance with international rules as a loss of sovereignty, they have offered no other operational solution at global level either", he said.

The European Union, started incorporating climate change as an important component of the European Security Strategy already in 2003. Other EU policies, such as regional development and migration take into consideration the effects of climate change.

"It is a dimension [the security related consequences of climate change] that we have not managed to integrate sufficiently yet in our interaction with the United States," Pangratis said.

There will be no results of the global fight against global warming, unless all major countries participate in a multilateral discipline and all major sectors of the economy are included.

It is a huge mistake to view efforts against climate change only as an economic burden.

"From the economic point of view, this effort does not have to be seen as an additional cost," he said, "but also as an opportunity. For example, the expansion of renewable energy stands to create 700,000 jobs in the EU".

Closing, Pangratis expressed the hope that, by the time countries meet again to address the issue at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in December 2009, mindsets will have shifted.

"We want to see in Copenhagen a global projection of our approach and of the discipline that we're imposing on ourselves,"

By Cynthia Malakasis