



The United States are acting unfairly, a number of developing countries feel betrayed, according to a climate change analyst

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Poor countries are not naïve. They know that the money needed for adapting to climate change is going to come mainly from their own pockets. They see the international funds that are part of the Paris climate agreement as a tool for wealthy countries to signal that they will not leave them alone in this. “Wealthy countries are only paying a fraction of it all. If we followed the principle that the perpetrator pays for all damages, there would be no international agreement,” says Benito Müller, Managing Director of Oxford Climate Policy, a non-profit organization, which helps prepare development country negotiators for climate change conferences.

When US president Donald Trump announced the withdrawal from the Paris climate agreement earlier this year, he said that he is going to stop American contributions to international climate funds as well. These funds pay for measures taken in poor countries, which are supposed to prepare them for the consequences of climate change. What impact will America’s withdrawal have on the developing countries?

During Barack Obama's presidency, around one billion dollars went into climate help every year. Trump stopped this money and it is going to be missing. If this hole is not covered, many developing countries are going to feel betrayed. A billion dollars is nothing for as big an economy as the American one. This is unfair by the American government. They simply don't want to cooperate with others and take their responsibilities seriously.

But even with the American contribution there wouldn't be enough money in the climate funds.

The Green Climate Fund definitely needs some changes. Decision-making has to shift in the direction of individual countries. Instead of financing small projects, it should support programmes. However, in the case of the American contributions we are talking about the perception of the wealthy countries by the rest of the world. Europe has been bearing its part for many years now. But the current American administration is denying their responsibility.

How will it affect poorer countries' willingness to lower their greenhouse gas emissions, which is what they have agreed to in the Paris Agreement?

Developing countries know very well that the money which they need to fight climate change will have to come out of their own pockets. Including those states which bear no or very little responsibility for the changes. Climate change is not an act of God. It is a harm inflicted by people onto other people. This is perceived as unfair. And that is the reason why it is so important to maintain some degree of trust that everyone is aware of their share of responsibility and wants to change the situation together. Otherwise, the developing countries can easily say: "When you don't care about us, why should we care about you."

Isn't it only their tactics towards the wealthy states in a sense that "we are going to deal with the emissions if you pay it for us"?

But the wealthy states are only supposed to pay a fraction. If we should adhere to the principle that damages are paid by the polluter, there would be no international agreement. Financial transfers have a very symbolic value. Developing countries often have two categories of measures in their national plans for curbing emissions – supported and unsupported ones. They are willing to do more if they get a financial support from wealthy countries. But if we cancel this kind of financial support and we start pointing fingers at them claiming they aren't really doing anything, we will not help anyone. We need an atmosphere where everyone is aware that at home there are many obstacles but where they nonetheless try to do their best.

They won't be willing to do that without the American money?

We need to distinguish between America and Washington. There are still many people in the US who want to follow the Paris Agreement and to act accordingly. They are also willing to continue to heed the Paris Agreement in terms of financial support. Various coalitions of cities, states, and companies which stand behind the Paris Agreement are emerging. However, they need to acknowledge that taking part in the Paris Agreement does not only mean fulfilling its goals at home but also on the international level.

Will their activity have enough weight when the official partner to the developing countries is the American federal government?

I work closely with the group of the least developing countries. The state of Massachusetts is considering its own climate fund for them. While the size of it will be very small, around one hundred thousand dollars a year, you have no idea how positively this is being received by them. The symbolism that they are not forgotten and left to their own destiny is of importance for them. That is the interconnectedness of politics and psychology, which often revolves around considerations of justice. Those who lead the international negotiations don't always think that everything has to be absolutely fair for everyone. But none of them wants to be treated unfairly.

That is exactly what Trump was talking about when he declared Paris Agreement to be extremely unfair for the United States.

Of course we can argue about what is fair and what is not. The perception is often very subjective. But it is clear that some countries have historically greater responsibility for the emergence of the climate problem than others.

Is that Europe and the US?

Obviously. These are industrial countries whose industrialization happened thanks to coal. Steam engines originated in the UK and we have become rich thanks to that. It is very unfortunate to ask other countries not to develop. Luckily, renewable sources of energy will allow them to do so. As soon as these sources become fully competitive, it will make no sense for anyone to build new coal power plants.

There has been a lot of talk about China becoming the new climate leader. The USA is now perceived as a country that is not interested in common welfare. Do you think that China is concerned about the planet?

China has very serious problems at home that are caused by climate change. The country is split into two different worlds. The coast is industrialized, while the western regions resemble poor developing countries. China is trying to develop these regions, but they are mainly agricultural regions and as we know agriculture is the sector that is affected the most by climate change. China already has a [significantly lower amount of available water per capita than the global average](#).

So the Chinese are realizing that if they cannot control the impacts of climate change, they have a very serious development problem. And the way to reduce the impact is first and foremost to reduce greenhouse emissions. But even if China would reduce its emissions to zero, the problem of climate change wouldn't just disappear.

Does it make sense trying to make China reduce its emissions more dramatically?

Half a billion of poor Chinese don't see China as a developed country and therefore China still wants to be among the developing countries. Thus we cannot force China to do something against its own will. An example can be the Green Climate Fund. Under Obama's

administration, the US promised to give three billion dollars to the fund. The Chinese created their own southern solidarity fund for developing countries with the same amount. They claim that it is only an obligation for developed countries to contribute to the Green Climate Fund, which they are not, but they still want to show their solidarity. It has a significant symbolic value.

Won't China use its fund only to promote Chinese business and to increase its influence in the developing countries?

We certainly cannot be naive. Everyone wants to gain some additional benefits from mutual cooperation. What is important, however, is the goal, not a few million dollars that this cooperation can bring to someone. The benefits of global emissions reduction are far greater. It's not a zero sum game where one gains something at the expense of another.

Can China become a model for other major developing countries when it comes to fighting climate change?

I'm just putting together a team that will deal with the possibilities of such strategic cooperation. We also want to focus on India, because we shouldn't just stick to China. I will give an example. We can concentrate on reducing the greenhouse gas emissions of Chinese electricity producers by x percent. One of the ideas may be to involve European companies producing wind farm systems. It might require Chinese lawmakers to change laws to facilitate the entry of foreign industrial firms into China.

I think that through this cooperation we can make changes in national regulations much more easily than through some global proclamations that we want to be friends and work together.

Is the European Union still the world leader in the fight against climate change?

Europe has always wanted to be a leader. But its real role has always depended on the internal relations among the member states. Europe is not some happy family. When there is inner resistance, it is hard to be a leader on the outside. Imagine that you are standing in front of a decision and you know that if you do this, you can expect ten years of negotiations among the individual members. Thus you end up having certain fixed boundaries that you are not willing to cross. But for negotiations you need to be flexible. The EU is also not very good at presenting what it actually does.

It will probably be difficult to explain this in the Czech Republic or Poland, which are reserved to say the least when it comes to climate.

It has always been a European weakness. We are not able to properly explain the benefits of the EU, let alone explaining the benefits of intra-EU cooperation in the fight against climate change. We can form strategic alliances between member states. In any case, making the necessary changes will be cheaper if we work together than if we each go our separate ways.

The EU will have to come up with a more ambitious emission reduction target in 2025. Isn't this internal dynamic going to jeopardize an agreement?

Europe has already determined that in 2025 it will look back and evaluate what should be done until 2030. It will create a permanent mechanism that will force us to think ahead every five years. This way it will be easier for us to agree on a more ambitious goal without having the feeling that it is going to kill us. In the meantime, the states will look at each other and will have the chance to informally agree on more ambitious targets. We already have a regular cycle of communication and goal setting. Now we need to create a regular cycle of evaluation and updating of our efforts. Then everything will be much easier.