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## European states plead poverty as credit crisis threatens 'son of Kyoto' agreement

*Brussels summit fails to achieve breakthrough on crucial climate-change deal*

The global downturn could scupper plans for a landmark "son of Kyoto" deal to combat climate change, green campaigners have warned.

The warning came after the European Union's ambitious plans to combat climate change were left in disarray at the close of its summit in Brussels yesterday. Some member states are calling for the programme to be watered down on the grounds that it cannot be afforded in a downturn.

Sharp divisions over whether or not the EU's flagship goal to cut carbon emissions by 20 per cent by 2020 can be afforded in a downturn forced the Brussels summit to put off a decision on a route map for achieving it.

Environmentalists fear the deadlock in the EU could cast a shadow over crucial United Nations-led talks in Copenhagen next year on a new agreement to combat global warming. Until now, the EU has been at the forefront of efforts to tackle the problem. But if it cannot implement its own policy, it would ease the pressure on other countries to act. It would also reduce the EU's voice in the talks, leaving the main players as America, under a new president, and China.

"The whole world is looking to Europe for leadership on the issue," said Joris Den Blanken, a spokesman for Greenpeace's European unit. "It is very important that Europe is at the table." He accused some EU nations of using the downturn as an "excuse" to reopen its decision to cut emissions.

Robin Webster, Friends of the Earth's climate campaigner, said: "The EU must continue to resist short-sighted efforts to wreck its plans for tackling climate change – urgent action is essential to safeguard our economy and our environment. Even ambitious climate change plans are likely to cost less than 1 per cent of member states' GDP. Delaying action will increase the devastation caused by climate change and the costs associated with this will make this figure seem like small change."

And Caroline Lucas, a British Green Party MEP, said: "This à la carte approach to the various demands of the member states will rip all substance out of the climate package, leaving the EU with an empty shell of legislation which makes a mockery of its supposed 'global leadership' going into the international negotiations."

Although EU leaders reaffirmed their 2020 goal, diplomats said it would be a huge struggle to reach agreement by the EU's December deadline on how the target would be hit. Poland and six other eastern European nations who depend heavily on coal are demanding more of the burden be taken on by richer member states such as Britain, France and Germany. Some want the 20 per cent cut to be based on emissions in 1999, rather than 2005 as planned, to ease pressure on industry.

The Poles threatened to veto an EU-wide agreement unless they win major concessions by the next EU summit in December. "We want a package that will be tolerable for the poorer member states," said Donald Tusk, the Polish Prime Minister. Jacek Rostowski, the Polish Finance Minister, said: "The climate change [policy] has to be accepted by unanimity, and the implications of that should be clear to all."

Hungary, Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania and Slovakia also called for a rethink. In a joint statement with Poland, they said that at a time of "serious economic and financial uncertainties", the package had to be reconciled with economic growth. For less affluent EU nations, reducing greenhouse gases has been achieved at "a very high social and economic cost", they said.

Silvio Berlusconi, the Italian Prime Minister, also voiced concern, saying the EU plan would put Europe at a disadvantage to China and the United States. "Our businesses are in absolutely no position at the moment to absorb the costs of the regulations that have been proposed," he said.

The difficult task of avoiding failure in December now falls to Nicolas Sarkozy, the French President, whose country holds the EU presidency. Yesterday, he insisted: "The objectives remain unchanged, the calendar remains the same. The deadline on climate change is so important that we cannot use the financial and economic crisis as a pretext for dropping it."

Britain is standing by the original plans agreed by the EU last year. David Miliband, the Foreign Secretary, admitted some member states were having "buyer's remorse", but insisted: "There has been no step back. There will be no going back. We will ensure that Europe hits its 20 per cent target."

In a concession to the doubters, the summit agreed that the talks on the route map would have "regard to each member state's specific situation" and produce a package that is "cost effective". Jose Manuel Barroso, the president of the European Commission, said: "We are not going to let up on the battle against climate change."



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