

LSE Government Department The HotSeat Videocast

Dr. Stephanie Rickard

Discussion on the UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen

Justin Gest: This month representatives from 192 countries will convene in Copenhagen to address climate change. Hi, I'm Justin Gest. Welcome to the Government Department HotSeat. With us today to discuss the prospects of this conference is Dr. Stephanie Rickard from the Government Department. Thank you for being here.

Dr. Stephanie Rickard: Thank you.

Justin Gest: Alright, well, let's get started. In advance of Christmas, what do you think is on most environmentalists wish list for this conference? What do they want to see produced?

Dr. Stephanie Rickard: Unfortunately, I think they know they're not going to get what is on their wish lists; their expectations have really been dialled back. They know there is not going to be a binding agreement agreed upon at Copenhagen so I think they most they are looking for is some sort of political agreement, some sort of consensus that, although it's not binding, its an agreement to continue the discussion next year.

Justin Gest: Well, it seems like getting developing countries like China and India on board is of paramount importance. What tools do industrialized countries have to persuade their developing partners?

Dr. Stephanie Rickard: Unfortunately, they do not have that many tools. They have already made concessions in terms of trade, they are already investing a lot of capital into these countries. So they don't have a lot of economic chips that they can use to try to extract concessions from them. We have seen some success. We've seen China and India put some agreements on the table and say this is what we're willing to do. Unfortunately, they are not particularly concrete and they don't go as far as we would like. It doesn't seem like the developed countries are able to get concessions from the developing countries. The EU has tried to do it through moral leadership by saying this is what we're committed to doing, will you meet us at least halfway or part of the way but so far that has been unsuccessful.

Justin Gest: Well, in recent years a market for climate-friendly goods and emissions trading has really taken off and it seems to be incentivising corporate and national states awareness of climate issues. Are these tools more powerful than diplomacy?

Dr. Stephanie Rickard: It certainly is true that there has been a market developed for green products and this is particularly true in the EU. The EU is banking on the power of markets. The EU is saying we're going to be at the cutting edge, we're going to promote these green policies, these regulations and they're really hoping that when the rest of the countries sign on to this they're going to be at the forefront, they're

going to already have made these progressive moves, they are already going to have the green tech. So the EU is really banking on these market pressures and saying we're going to have a competitive edge because we're doing it first. Unfortunately, that only works if other countries sign on. Right now, the EU is in a very precarious position. Already, companies like Shell have said they are potentially going to withdraw a little bit of investment or not put as much energy and resources into the EU precisely because they are the really only country out there right now or the only bloc of countries out that have gone as far in environmental agreements and environmental emissions reductions.

Justin Gest: Speaking of other countries, perhaps, President Obama has been hailed as a potential deal-breaker here in the sense that he might have great influence over these talks. How much do you think that he can change the tide of negotiations?

Dr. Stephanie Rickard: Unfortunately, I don't think he can do a lot. I mean I think he is doing something very symbolic by coming and that is an important symbolic step that he is coming, he is saying that this is important but his hands are really tied by the US Congress, by the US Senate. And while he has to speak to the international audience and try to be as persuasive as he can; he also has to be mindful of his domestic audience. Right now, the Cap and Trade Bill is sitting in the Senate, it is not going to be signed before he goes to Copenhagen, it is not even going to be really on the agenda until the spring, it has been bogged down by the healthcare debate. So President Obama's ability to set the agenda or extract concessions is really limited precisely because of the domestic politics at home.

Justin Gest: In the end, what key obstacles are making so many observers pessimistic about Copenhagen?

Dr. Stephanie Rickard: The key obstacle is, of course, the size of the emissions reductions but really it is about cost and money and that has been the key obstacle to date and it is going to continue to be the key obstacle particularly in this era of the financial and economic crisis. So it is really about cost, that is the main barrier, both in terms of the cost to the companies domestically for abiding by these regulations but also the cost to the countries. One of the big stumbling blocks beyond just the level of emissions reductions has been how much money the developed countries are going to pull together to assist the developing countries in meeting emissions targets, in getting clean tech and in coping with the destructive effects of global climate change. So that debate about how much money to pool together and where to get that money from has been a particularly divisive issue.

Justin Gest: Alright, that will do it. Dr. Stephanie Rickard you are off the HotSeat. Thanks very much for being with us.

Dr. Stephanie Rickard: Thank you.

Justin Gest: And thank you for being with us. Stay tuned for next month's edition of the Government Department HotSeat.