

After the Paris Agreement – Putting an end to climate inconsistency

By [Eloi Laurent](#)

If the contents of the 32-page Paris Agreement (and the related decisions) adopted on 12 December 2015 by COP 21 had to be summarized in a single phrase, we could say that never have the ambitions been so high but the constraints so low. This is the basic trade-off in the text, and this was undoubtedly the condition for its adoption by all the world's countries. The expectation had been that the aim in Paris was to extend to the emerging markets, starting with China and India, the binding commitments agreed in Kyoto eighteen years ago by the developed countries. What took place was exactly the opposite: under the leadership of the US government, which dominated this round of negotiations from start to finish right to the last minute (and where the EU was sorely absent), every country is now effectively out of Annex 1 of the Kyoto Protocol. They are released from any legal constraints on the nature of their commitments in the fight against climate change, which now amount to voluntary contributions that countries determine on their own and without reference to a common goal.

In doing this, the Paris Agreement gives rise to a new global variable, which we can accurately track over the coming years: the factor of inconsistency, which compares objectives and resources. At the end of COP 21, this ratio was in the range of 1.35 to 2 (the climate objective chosen, specified in Article 2, lies between 1.5 and 2 degrees, whereas the sum of national voluntary contributions declared to reach this would lead to warming of 2.7 to 3 degrees). The question facing us now is thus the following: how to deal with this climate

inconsistency by bringing the resources deployed into line with the ambitions declared (bringing the climate inconsistency factor to 1)?

The answers to this question were actually set out during the two weeks of COP 21, but they did not survive the negotiations between states and therefore were not included in the final text in an operational form. They are three in number: climate justice, the carbon price and the mobilization of territories.

Climate justice, whose decisive importance was rightly highlighted in particular in the opening speech of the French President ("It is in the name of climate justice that I speak to you today") is actually contradicted in the text of the Agreement: while the text mentions the term "justice" only a single time, it provides that the parties recognize "the importance for some of the concept of 'climate justice'". The whole point of climate justice is precisely that its importance is not confined to only a few nations but concerns all the world's countries. So there is still a huge amount to be done in this field, particularly on the question of the distribution of efforts at mitigation and adaptation.

The need to put a price on carbon (and thus give it social value), which has been gaining in support, as was highlighted from the opening of COP 21 under the aegis of Angela Merkel and the new Canadian government, still appeared in the penultimate version of the text. It disappeared from the final version (under the combined pressure of Saudi Arabia and Venezuela). Yet there is no doubt that it is by internalizing the price of carbon that we will put the economy at the service of the climate transition. But it seems at this point that the world's governments have decided to outsource this internalization function to the private sector. It is necessary to quickly take this in hand, both internally and globally.

Finally, the way the Agreement deals with the crucial role of

decentralized territories, both to compensate for the shortcomings of the nation states and to be laboratories for a low-carbon economy, is too brief and too vague. The summit organized by the Mayor of Paris on December 4 nevertheless showed clearly that towns, cities and regions have become full participants in the fight against climate change, reviving the spirit of the 1992 Rio Summit. It is essential to set up as quickly as possible an organization for genuine cooperation between the territories and the nation states, in France and elsewhere, to breathe life into the Paris Agreement.

It can be seen clearly in the light of these three decisive issues, that the most severe criticism that can be levelled at an architectural agreement, which is a programme of intentions rather than an actual plan for action, is not to be progressive and dynamic enough and not to anticipate sufficiently its own shortcomings and its coming outdatedness by opening the way for new principles, new instruments and new players. Moreover, what are we to make of the fact that we have to wait until 2020 for its implementation, while the signs of climate change are visible all around us?

The easing of this time constraint may well come from the big country that proved to be the most constructive before and during COP 21: China. It was China that, five days before the conclusion of the Agreement, was the source of the best climate news since the announcement of the slowing of Amazon deforestation in the 2000s: global CO₂ emissions, after almost stabilizing in 2014, should decrease slightly in 2015. This decrease is due to their reduction in China under the combined impact of the economic slowdown (the decision to end hyper-growth) and the de-carbonization of growth (related to lower consumption of coal). This is in turn due to the increasingly strong pressure being placed by the Chinese people on their government, because they have understood that the economic development of their country is destroying the human development of their children. It can thus be hoped that China

will contain global emissions over the five years between now and 2020 and thereby make the Paris Agreement more acceptable... on the condition of using this to put an end to climate inconsistency.