

Kyoto Protocol

The Kyoto Protocol was ratified on February 2005 by 141 countries but the USA refused. Indeed, the ratification of such a protocol compelled the countries to make many efforts to reduce their gas emissions and the USA do not seem to be ready because they are afraid that they could lose their leading industrial position.

Can we accept their refusal or do we have to consider that this giant have to set the example??

1. Kyoto Protocol and United States Position on greenhouse gases.

1 1 Kyoto Protocol History

On February 2005, the world's nations came together in Kyoto in Japan to discuss about Global Warming. The Kyoto Protocol is borne. It is the ultimate stage of a process begun on September 1987 with the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer. It continued on May 1992 through the convention of New York on climate change.

This Kyoto protocol is an amendment of previous conventions. It recognizes that the climate system is a common system and resource whose stability can be affected by industry, deforestation, exhaust pipe...etc.

The convention of New York sets an overall framework for intergovernmental efforts to tackle the challenge posed by climate change. Countries which ratified this agreement commit themselves to reduce their collective emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases as methane, nitrous oxide, sulphur hexafluoride, Hydrofluorocarbons and Perfluorocarbons, or to trade emissions if they maintain or increase emissions of these gases. A total of 141 countries have ratified this protocol, but not the United States or Australia.

The Kyoto protocol is a wish to reduce the level temperature about 0,2°C by the year 2050. For those States which ratified, accepted or approved it, the convention shall come into force on the ninetieth day after. But it could only enter into force after two conditions:

- It had been ratified by at least 55 countries
- It had been ratified by nations accounting for at least 55% of carbon emissions include in Annex A.

1 2 United States Position

The United States, the largest emitter of greenhouse gases, does not intend to ratify the protocol. The U. S. Senate on June 25, 1997, decide not to be a signatory to any protocol "that did not include binding targets and timetables for developing as well as industrialized nations "would result in serious harm to the economy of the United states"".

But on November 12th, 1998, Vice President Al Gore symbolically signed the protocol despite the Senate resolution. For that the Clinton Administration never submitted the protocol for ratification.

George W. Bush does not want to ratify because "of the strain he believes the treaty would put on the economy", it would gravely damage the U.S. economy. The emissions reductions through voluntary action.

The position of the U.S. staying outside The Kyoto Protocol influenced other countries as Japan, Canada to discuss the prospect to ratify the agreement. For them without U.S. support the agreement is virtually obsolete.

2. Stakes and consequences for the USA

2 1 Economic reason of the American refusal

The reasons of the American refusal to ratify the Kyoto Protocol are numerous, but the economic reasons are the Bush administration principal arguments.

One of the economic reasons is that Bush says that the protocol would harm the USA growth, because the cost of the Kyoto Protocol would be enormous to apply for the United States, and would

be likely to lower the productivity of American industries. That will contribute to unemployment and create a lack of competitiveness compared to foreign competition. According to an American economist, the economic cost of the protocol in term of GDP will be about 2% of the global GDP, which is completely out of proportion, compared to the degrees reductions earned.

Bush is very related to the oil, coal and steel sectors. These industrial circles financed a part of the Bush presidential campaign.

These sectors form industrial lobbies, which have a strong influence on the Bush administration and the American parliament. These industrial lobbies are very afraid the Kyoto protocol lower the American growth, if it is adopted.

For Washington, it is impossible to impose a deadline and emissions reductions, which are likely to weaken the competitiveness of an energy sector very pollutant, largely depending on oil and coal.

The fact that the Americans, including in the groups known as environmentalists, are convinced that the fight against global warming will be done less by decisions like laws than by massive investments in new technologies: clean energies (including the nuclear power and hydrogen) but also technicals of depollution, for example nanotechnologies and genetic engineering. Well, they are decided to control absolutely everything of these technologies, both the scientist and commercial aspect (full spectrum predominance). This justifies for example their recent interest for the Iiter program, become priority n°1 for the department of energy. But so that these markets do not escape to them, they must be on their toes, which obliges them to push back the signature of any global Protocol, like the Kyoto one, of a few months or years.

2 2 Conscious carelessness of the environment by the USA

The Bush administration always minimized the existence of climate changes. All the nation scientist communities are against them. A scientific document recognizes that it is the carbon dioxide emissions and other greenhouse gases which are the principal causes of global warming. Up to now, the Bush government had always denied that a relation of cause and effect could exist between the two phenomena.

As The Guardian reminds us : "this same administration had deliberately been unaware of, two years ago, the scientific studies on global warning". Showing us an economic growth defender position, Mr. Bush had even denounced the bureaucratic origins of such documents. The refusal to ratify the Kyoto protocol, whose objective is to reduce 5% global emissions until 2012, has been one of the first shock on the international scene.

The United States rejected in 2 001 the Kyoto protocol, which would have compelled them to decrease 7% their emissions heating our planet until 2012 compared to the level of 1990. Then, American NASA researchers (thus researchers of the public sector), published a study which says that the global climate will increase in the next fifty years, greenhouse gas emissions diminished or not.

NASA researchers carried out a computer-assisted simulation of the global climate which made it possible to arrive to the following conclusion: if all the states of the World stop their emissions, global warming will be certainly less catastrophic, but the climate will be inevitably even hotter than today. Is this study serious and sincere? Or, was it handle by Washington to be able to give Bush an argument for his refusal?

Then, the American government finally admitted, in a report on the climate sent to the United Nations, the global warming harmful effects on the environment, but without deviating president Bush position about his refusal to ratify the protocol.

In this ratio of 268 pages, the United States recognize for the first time that global warming is largely due to the human action, and more specifically to the combustion of fossil energies. They only recommend people to adapt themselves to these harmful effects but unavoidable.

3 Our position about consequences of American refusal

3 1 The United States position: an indication of its hegemonic place in the world.

Since the end of the first world war, American have emerged from their isolationism . They started to want to export their model to the world. It's the birth of American messianism. In Bretton Woods, the dollars is the only currency convertible into gold (system abandoned in 1971). But since then, American have been consolidating their bad temper. We can see it through the Cold War and OTAN.

This American hegemony started to be powerful with the fall of communism and lead to the giving up of the General Agreement on Tariffs on Trade to create the WTO on 1995 where the less developed countries felt disappointed in front of the disparity in the Uruguay Round. They have the feeling that they have signed a blank cheque.

The United States are the only power who can declare war on the other side of the planet as we can see it after New York attacks. So, the fact that the United States refuse to sign is an indication of their hegemonic position in the world. The United States declared war on Iraq against UNO decision. Why would it sign an agreement as the Kyoto protocol?

United States the largest emitter of greenhouse gases is the current world decision maker. It has been trying for more than fifty year to impose its politics and its vision of the world to rest of the world, so why would it want to sign an agreement who can have an influence on its liberal politic. Indeed, the efforts that should make Americans to reduce gases could have a financial cost. They are afraid of economic consequences, above all, on their industry development.

The non-ratification of the Kyoto Protocol is the indication of the US general politics in order to keep its leadership in the world letting the other countries commit it selves to take advantage as far as companies competitively is concerned. Besides, in front of China potential climbing and the American debt the USA fell threaten. Accepting the Kyoto Protocol would be a disadvantage in front of China which does not ratify it either.

3 2 Developing countries : victims of the US refusal

Opponents of U.S. participation in the Kyoto Protocol frequently single out China for special attention. They point out that China is the world's second-largest emitter of greenhouse gases, and that it is not one of the countries subject to an emissions target under the Protocol. They argue it would be unfair for the United States to agree to reduce its emissions while China does nothing to curb its emissions. But they ignore the fact that per capita emissions of global warming pollutants in China are just a fraction -- 15 percent -- of U.S. levels. Further, China actually has reduced its global warming emissions over the past four years, even as its economy grew rapidly. Thus, while it is true that only developed countries would be subject to binding emission targets in the Kyoto Protocol's first emission control period (2008 to 2012), it is wrong to say that China is doing nothing to reduce its emissions.

China's carbon dioxide emissions fell 6 percent to 14 percent between 1996 and 1999 at the same time as the country's economy grew 22 percent to 27 percent. By contrast, U.S. emissions over the same period grew by approximately 70 million metric tons per year, approximately 5 percent. ^[2] These newer, more reliable figures still provide enough evidence to argue that China has done more than the United States to combat climate change over the past decade.

It's true that all the countries have to make many efforts to reduce their gas emissions but historically the burden of the responsibility first lays on the Northern countries. Scientific evidence are more and more numerous to show that developing countries inhabitants are the first victims of climate changes : dryness in Africa, floods in India and in China and many other natural disasters on Earth (for 20 years) are crisis that hit the most vulnerable.

The "big American business" has just started : with or without the Kyoto Protocol, companies know that they can't escape to the measures against climate changes. These latter want to position themselves for future climate negotiations , take market shares and improve their brand image towards consumers.

What is better than to participate to reforestation projects in the third world?? They only have to hide the depraved effects : industrial trees plantations speed up the rural exodus and the collapse of food crops, emphasize ,on the one hand, their dependence on exportation and on the other hand the " re-colonisation" and , to finish, these industrial plantation damage ecosystems and biodiversity?

Indeed, we can assume that developing countries will be victims of a sort of climate “neo-colonialism” : if they want to increase their emission quotas, they will be blamed for irresponsibility, to develop themselves, they will be compelled to buy clean technologies to western companies, particularly to American ones. In addition, they will have to face the fact that these same companies had bought the right to pollute more, thanks to the possibility to exchange gas emissions quotas and thanks to other means less expensive to compensate their emissions, as for instance, industrial trees plantations (explained higher).

Thus, we can strongly level criticism at the developed countries, particularly at the USA. Indeed, who is going to pave way for renewable energies? The American behaviour, as far as their non-ratification is concerned, demonstrates that the dominated countries have to pay for climate changes when they should be heavily helped for the consequences that occurred after 200 years of a northern capitalist development at the expense of an almost non existent development in the rest of the world.

3₃The US refusal : a slow down for further measures

The American refusal has climate and economic consequences in the world. This unfair decision on February 16th towards developing countries has also consequences on the countries which ratified the Kyoto Protocol. It can slow down the decision-making process and refrain the signatory countries from going further in ecological agreements.

With 25% of the emissions in the world for less than 5% of global population, but having a big power in implementing the protocol, the US refusal, for economic reasons is going to weaken and discredit its efficiency.

Even if it is undeniable that the cost for its economy will be important, The European Union gas reductions are the “sine qua non” condition to keep pressuring on the USA but also on emerging countries in order to act at an international level against climate changes.

To carry out this international fight lays more than ever on Europe determination, which is highly claimed by President Chirac in France, but in practice, it is different. Indeed, The Kyoto Protocol survived but at what price?

It is weakened because of Russia’s fears and US refusal. The requirements have been reduced and we can question the future of this protocol : the first objectives were already insufficient and Europe could surrender in front of the US pressure and its industrial big shots and finally not reach its first outlooks.

In France Roselyne Bachelot, minister of Sustainable Development said that believing in Sustainable development without a drastic greenhouse gas slump from part of the biggest emitter is an illusion. Finally, the Declaration in New Delhi did not mention any obligation for developing countries such as China , India or OPEC countries to commit itself to reduce their gas emissions. This shows that one more time, Europe had to submit itself to US will and according to officials, the European Union accepted that conditions not to close negotiations with the USA and the others.

It’s true that The Kyoto Protocol does not go far enough but it is mainly due to the multinationals and American interventions. The European Union , Japan and the rest of the world can not wait for a better political climate with the USA or a miraculous American proposal. The present Bush administration is not ready to concede any agreement. The international community has to fulfil its promises and go ahead. Emissions have to be reduced from today and signatory countries to be on their toes. Waiting for Bush is not the solution, our planet is suffering from global warming.

The USA were considered as abandoning their moral, legal and political responsibility to work at an international level against the most urgent environmental issue of our century : climate changes.

3₄ Climate and environmental consequences for our planet

The United States by withdrawing itself from the Kyoto protocol, scorned the future of our planet. The USA, first pollutant of the world, are responsible for 25% of the discharge of greenhouse gases, whereas they only account for 5% of the global population. Climate changes related to global warming and greenhouse effects, will involve negative effects on the environment, health and on the world economy.

On the level of the environment:

The global warming noticed one century ago, would be at the origin of the thermal dilation of the sea water masses and the cast iron of the polar icecaps.

On some places, the glaciers of Greenland lost 10 meters thickness. The level of the oceans rose from 10 to 25 centimetres during the last 100 years.

The sea level should go up from 30 to 50 centimetres in the next 50 years.

Then according to a group of experts which advises UNO, temperatures could rise from 1,4 to 5,8 degrees Celsius until 2100, which would generate more storms and floods, the disappearance of several thousands of species. In a world scale, the less developed countries and the most vulnerable ecosystems are those which will be the first victims of the climate change.

on the level of health:

The extreme climate situations, like the heat waves in summer, are likely to provoke a stress for the urban zones inhabitants who do not have the means of leaving the city. Then, the increase in the temperature could also provoke a deterioration of the quality of the air, which would involve the proliferation of pollens, dust and other particles which could cause or worsen problems of allergies and asthma.

But at present, approximately 160 000 deaths per year are due to global warming and one of the fear is that this figure double until 2020. Lastly, a long-term exposure to the air pollution can increase the risks of death due to lung cancers and heart diseases. Global warming could also lead to the increase or appearance of infectious diseases.

at the economic level:

An intergovernmental expert group on climate evolution (IEGC) estimates that the cost of the damage due to climate change could be equal to 1 to 2% of the GDP in developed countries, and 4 to 8% in developing countries. This cost will have consequences on the productivity, in the fields of agriculture, the forestry and fishing's, as well as reduction of the contributions of water.

Besides, governments will have to invest more significant amounts of money in the protection of the littoral, protection against the floods, the infrastructure and the healthcare. Then the sector of insurances is particularly anxious of climate change consequences. At the world scale, it is estimated that the annual losses due to natural disasters went from approximately a billion dollar in the 1960's to more than 40 billion in the 1990's.

Conclusion

On the one hand, we can understand the American refusal because they want to protect their productivity but on the other hand, their behaviour is risky for our future. They are threatening our vital resources and as a consequence, violate our most essential right : the right to live.

Besides, we can think about an other problem : the privatisation of the air. By giving money in exchange of being able to pollute abroad, the USA strengthen this idea that only wealthy countries can develop their industries at the expense of destitute countries...

What about abandoning this right to exchange money in return of "pollution quotas" in the third world....?