Europe's Strategic Choices

Rethinking EU leadership in fighting climate change

Some points raised by Hans von Storch

I am not really addressing the issue of "leadership" but instead mostly the issue of "implementing efficient measures dealing with anthropogenic climate change". Most of the points raised here were discussed on the weblog "Klimazwiebel"; I am thankful for comments and advice in that discussion, which helped me hopefully using a language less prone to misunderstanding.

In the following, the first two points are made with the authority of the scientist Hans von Storch; the other 3 points are political assessments of the citizen Hans von Storch, who voices his opinions and suggestions as everybody else.

1) Climate is changing, mostly due to anthropogenic causes; this process is underway; we can detect such changes (of the statistics of weather) mainly in increasing temperature and related variables (detection); we cannot explain these changes without considering elevated greenhouse gas concentrations (attribution).
   The issue that climate is changing and that elevated CO2 levels play a significant role, is no longer controversial among climate scientists (as documented by surveys).
   Many other issues are still not consensually clarified, such as: the sensitivity of the climate system; the expected increase in sea level (the fate of Greenland and Antarctica), the role of climate change on storminess in tropics and extra-tropics, the role of aerosols on changing regional climate; options of adaptation and more.

2) Since the main climate change mechanism is known, namely the accumulation of greenhouses gases from human emissions, also possible societal reactions to the change are known, namely reduction of emissions (mitigation), modifications of the composition or of radiative properties mainly of the atmosphere (geoengineering), and making societies less vulnerable to climate change (adaptation). While geoengineering is mostly considered inacceptable, both adaptation and mitigation are considered as mandatory.
   The more efficient global mitigation becomes, the less regional adaptation efforts are required. Achieving a level of mitigation so that no adaptation is needed is impossible.

3) The climate policy of the EU as well its member states has mostly dealt with the issue of mitigation and with building a world-wide coalition to limit greenhouse gas emissions. This effort is enshrined in the 2-degree goal. Little has been invested into the question of what to do if the 2 degree goal is passed (a probable development), and which options are available if really

catastrophic developments would emerge.
The issue of adaptation has hardly been dealt at the political level for a long time, and has been taken up only recently.

4) The EU policy has failed to reach its goals – it has failed to mobilize a world-wide sufficient reduction of emissions through top-down regulation and legislation. Instead its representatives have contributed to the catastrophe-rhetoric, which has given significant public backlash for taking climate change seriously. Instead, “fighting climate change” has become a synonym for empty talk and preaching to the converted, without significant effects.

5) For regaining momentum, and efficiency for dealing with climate change (limiting it to the extent achievable; dealing with the un-avoided consequences; preparing for emergency measures), possible avenues are:
- supporting modernization of products and organizational matters, which make “climate friendly” efforts not only “morally” attractive but first of all economically attractive. Such modernization will cause people to employ “climate-friendly” products independently of their climate concerns. The EU is particularly well suited for such progress because of the high technological human capital in its member countries. To some extent this has happened already in some industries in the recent past.
- making “efficiency in limiting emissions of greenhouse gases” the key quality of climate protection efforts; clarification that symbolic acts alone are not efficient, which will hardly have an effect on, say, East Asian emissions.
- employing a sustainable rhetoric about climate change and climate policy, which is not permanently pointing to imminent or future catastrophe, which is not trying to relate *all* natural catastrophes to man-made climate change.
- supporting adaptation efforts according to (regional) climate/landscapes (such as North Sea low-lands, the Baltic Sea catchment …) and not according to national borders. So far, efforts were formulated mostly for member states of the EU.
– encouraging science which is not mainly trying to confirm the dominance of detrimental greenhouse gas effects, but which follows an open research agenda with attempts of falsification, consideration of other drivers, examination of skill of climate models, development of time-dependent adaptation and decision paths etc.

9. August 2014