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Item Type	Book chapter
Authors	Meilstrup, Per
Publisher	Danish Institute for International Studies DIIS
Rights	With permission of the license/copyright holder
Download date	2026-11-16 07:34:43
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/176048

The Runaway Summit: The Background Story of the Danish Presidency of COP15, the UN Climate Change Conference

Per Meilstrup[1]

When the doors to the giant Bella Center in Copenhagen opened for the so-called COP15 on the morning of 7 December 2009, it was the culmination of more than three years of intense preparations by the Danish government. In an unprecedented political and diplomatic effort since 2006, Denmark had launched an international campaign that was expected not only to deliver a new global treaty on climate change, but also to position Denmark at the centre of international politics as a shining example of how a small nation can a make big difference through outstanding diplomacy. And the cause had not been chosen at random: For decades environmental protection has been a hallmark of Denmark, one of the few countries in the world that has, in practical terms, proved that wealth and welfare can be created without at the same time increasing pressure on ecosystems, as demonstrated through 'The Danish example'[2], a set of data showing how Denmark has seen 78 per cent economic growth since 1980, but no increase in energy consumption.

Expectations were high. Experts, the media, politicians and negotiators, though all professionally cynical, believed on the opening day that COP15 could succeed in bringing the world an important step further towards facing the overriding global challenge of global warming.

In the lead up to December 2009, for the first time ever, stakeholders from

1 Per Meilstrup is the Climate Director of the Danish independent think tank 'Monday Morning'.

2 The Danish Energy Agency, 2009.

most corners of the global society were rallying for an ambitious agreement. Exactly what shape the agreement should take was, of course, still being debated, but it seemed that opposition to a fair, binding and effective deal was very limited, centered around a small, but very visible, group of climate-change sceptics and political figures who had no belief in the UN process. Industry leaders, civil society organisations and leading experts from both the natural and the political and economic sciences were behind the politicians. The best evidence of high expectations was that the largest gathering ever of heads of state outside the UN Headquarters – 122 – had declared that they would take part in the COP. Prime ministers and presidents don't usually attend meetings that risk failing.

That was, however, what happened. Copenhagen failed to live up to even the lowest expectations. What is more, the summit produced diplomatic chaos on a scale the world has seldom seen. When US President Barack Obama arrived at the Bella Center on the last day of the negotiations, Hilary Clinton welcomed him by saying, 'Mr. President, this is the worst meeting I've been to since the eighth-grade student council.'[3] The outcome of the meeting, The Copenhagen Accord, was heavily criticised for being inadequate and only 'a letter of intent'. The conflicts between developed and developing nations were monumental. The US and China were not able to settle well-known, deep disputes, and the Danish Prime Minister was humiliated on the UN podium while the world was watching. The most significant effort ever by a Danish government to position itself as a global, political leader turned into the biggest international, diplomatic defeat for decades.[4]

WINNING THE PRESIDENCY

In early 2006, the Danish Minister for the Environment, Connie Hedegaard, suggested to former Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen that the govern-

3 Marc Landler & Helene Cooper, 'After a Bitter Campaign, Forging an Alliance.' *International Herald Tribune*, 18 March 2010.

4 Meilstrup, 2010. This article is based on the author's book, *Kampen om klimaet*, which includes in-depth interviews with key ministers, negotiators and civil servants in the Danish presidency in 2006-2010. Quotes without references in this text are from the authors interviews for the book.

ment should work to win the prestigious presidency for the UN climate change conference, specifically COP15 in 2009. The expectation was that the 15th session of the parties to the Climate Convention would deliver the next global climate-change treaty, the successor to the Kyoto Protocol. Hedegaard's idea was fostered during COP11 in Montreal, Canada, by the charismatic Danish lead negotiator, Thomas Becker, an experienced, international diplomat, who had worked in the field of environmental conventions for many years. He presented Hedegaard with the idea in a hotel lobby in Montreal, and the Danish minister immediately saw the political potential.

According to the UN tradition of rotating presidencies between continents, the presidency would be held by a Latin American country, most probably Brazil. But during 2006 the Danish government launched an initial campaign to convince parties to the convention that a small northern country with a history of consensus-building and a leading global role as an environmental champion – symbolized by the famous Danish wind turbines – would offer the world a legitimate and neutral platform for a new global treaty.

Anders Fogh Rasmussen, a liberal, was at this time not known to be a green champion – rather the opposite. When he took office in 2002, he cut down heavily on spending in the prominent and influential Ministry of the Environment, which, under the Social Democrats, had grown into a significant political power hub, both domestically and internationally. The former minister, Svend Auken, had developed the ministry into an internationally recognized leader in green politics and had branded Denmark as a global focus for advanced, green legislation, e.g. efficient green taxes, subsidies for renewable energy, a generous donor country for environmental projects in Eastern Europe and the developing world, and state of the art integrated energy systems. The new Prime Minister believed much more in the power of the free market and environmental stewardship through economic instruments. He was known as a strong supporter of the famous self-proclaimed 'sceptical environmentalist', the Danish author and statistician Bjørn Lomborg, who had huge success in arguing for, among other things, cost-benefit-analysis as a tool in directing political decisions on green politics. Since 2004, however, Rasmussen had seen the need to soften his profile, and appointing Connie Hedegaard was an important step in doing so.

Connie Hedegaard was a well known former MP for the Conservative Peo-

ple's Party who was known to appeal to 'the thinking electorate' across political parties, not the least women. She was a successful TV presenter, and was headhunted in 2004 as the new Minister for the Environment in order to green the liberal-conservative government. This she did, in many ways much more radically than expected. She worked with dedication to heighten green standards, driven by a conservative tradition for, yes, conservation. Her main focus was climate politics, which was steadily climbing up the global agenda, among other things very much based on involving Danish corporations who, over decades had built strongholds – and interests – in energy, energy efficiency, renewables, biofuels etc.

At the time of her attempt to persuade Rasmussen, Denmark was in the midst of the worst international political crisis since World War II. The cartoons of the Prophet Muhammed had overnight turned Denmark into the focus of hate in the Muslim world. The Cartoon Crisis therefore became a centrepiece of the strategy to win the presidency of COP15. Both Rasmussen and Hedegaard saw this as a unique opportunity to shift the worlds' focus and repair the Danish brand.

In Nairobi, Kenya, during COP12, Denmark announced its candidacy for COP15, and in March 2007 the UN officially granted the prestigious post to Denmark.

THE ORGANIZATION: AN UNDERLYING DISPUTE

During spring 2007, the permanent secretaries of the relevant ministries were asked to design the strongest possible ministerial organization, the governmental platform that would make the Danish presidency a success, combining the collective skills from the ministries of the environment, industry, finance, foreign affairs, agriculture and transport, all overseen by the Prime Minister's Office.

This started, from the very outset, a long internal dispute over ranks and responsibilities both internally in the civil service and among ministers, a dispute that was never, according to senior civil servants, in effect settled. This weakened the Danish presidency and its diplomatic efforts considerably all the way

from 2007-2009. 'This lack of clarity means that the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of the Environment from the beginning form two, separate mental tracks – and that is very unfortunate', a senior public official says. Even during the COP itself, it played a major role.

A main disagreement was over the role as lead negotiating party on behalf of the government. The Ministry of Environment had traditionally held this position, demonstrating years of experience in COPs and other international conventions, but this time it was different. Global warming was an issue that heads of governments all over the world had begun to see as their field of interest. The issue had climbed the agenda to a degree that it was widely recognized as the main global risk not only to ecosystems, but also to the global economy and international relations.

At the same time, the Danish Prime Minister had invested large amounts of political capital in campaigning for and winning the presidency. Rasmussen was not inclined to sit on the sidelines.

The organization that was agreed upon in May 2007 meant the establishment of an untraditional cross-cutting 'matrix' secretariat in the Prime Minister's Office, headed by permanent undersecretary Bo Lidegaard. Tasks were divided between the different ministries, but the overall decisions were to be taken in agreement in the secretariat. A ministerial task force chaired by the Prime Minister was created, with all the relevant ministers participating. This model proved to present major difficulties. The Ministry of the Environment was given the role of negotiating under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) but the final decisions were, according to the logic of the organization, to be taken in the secretariat, led by the Prime Minister's Office. Bo Lidegaard and Thomas Becker, both prominent people in the Danish civil service, began a series of tough discussions and open rows at meetings, an open conflict that steadily escalated over the following years.

LEADING VERSUS FACILITATING

Early on, Rasmussen and Hedegaard were both eager to draw up an ambitious strategy for the diplomatic efforts related to the incoming 2009 presidency. Setting targets, planning ahead, involving key stakeholders and developing a

strong case for action was how both politicians thought, but much to their dismay, they quickly learned that this is not the nature of a COP presidency.

According to UN procedure, the most important role of a presidency is to facilitate dialogue and create common ground between parties to the convention. A presidency represents the parties, all 193 of them. This does not, at least on the surface, imply a leading role, and most importantly it must not be confused with the national interests of the host country. A presidency does not put forward its own proposals, but loyally supports the formal process in the negotiating working groups.

This dilemma proved to be a challenge for the Danish government all the way through, especially for a politician like Rasmussen, known for his strong strategic focus and carefully scripted plans. Chairing the process but not actually leading it did not go down well with him.

Even though a presidency will normally only begin its work one year prior to the COP it presides over, Denmark chose to play a very visible role as early as 2007, and started what by any standards were the most ambitious and thorough preparatory efforts ever carried out by a COP presidency. At the 2007 general election, the new Ministry of Climate and Energy was created with the main purpose of preparing the COP. Connie Hedegaard was appointed the first Climate Minister in the world. The preparatory efforts included a very strong role during COP13 in Bali, Indonesia, including forming a 'trojka' with the Indonesian presidency and the Polish delegation (for COP14 in Poznan in 2008). In Bali, Denmark was eager to see the parties agree to a roadmap for negotiations in the next few years. This was achieved, though the negotiations were hard. Bali delivered the Bali Roadmap, which legally obliged all parties to work for a new global climate-change treaty, to be decided upon in 2009. This was a major victory for the Danish government, even though the decision included a two-track negotiating process, which many observers feared would lock both developed and developing nations into known positions.

In 2008 the Danish government launched what was dubbed 'climate diplomacy', in which it sought to consult all major countries and country groups during 2008 to sow the seeds for a successful outcome in Copenhagen. Furthermore, the government engaged civil society organizations like Globe International, the global parliamentary group, and Project Syndicate, a global group of journalistic editors, knowledge institutions through the University of Co-

penhagen and IARU, the International Alliance of Research Universities, and the global business community through collaborating with the Copenhagen Climate Council, founded by Monday Morning, a Danish independent think tank. All organizations convened major international events in Copenhagen prior to COP15 aimed at involving key stakeholders from all sectors.

Facilitating, not leading, remained a challenge for Denmark, and below the surface, during 2008 and later, parties were confronted with an incoming presidency that intended more than 'just' providing a platform for dialogue. 'Our decision to equate chairmanship with leadership was more groundbreaking than we knew', as one senior Danish diplomat put it.

Leadership meant that Hedegaard especially, but also Rasmussen, were in a political campaign to 'raise the political price of not acting to a level at which no one is prepared to pay it', as Hedegaard often said. The campaign was more successful than most expected. Steadily the level of ambition for COP15 grew. A growing number of developed world governments declared their support for an ambitious new deal, including the EU. But also more and more developing countries, including the largest emerging economies like China, India, Brazil, Indonesia, Mexico and South Africa, not only responded to demands for action by rich countries, but also indicated the political will to green their economic growth.

International media followed the preparations closely and reported how powerful business organizations like the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, the Climate Group, the World Economic Forum and Combat Climate Change 3C had formed a historic alliance together with Copenhagen Climate Council, representing hundreds of the world's biggest corporations and best-known brands, united in an unprecedented push to create 'a level playing field' for business globally, with strict regulations on emissions, the trading of pollution permits and energy standards.

The scientific community continued to fortify the knowledge platform for political action by describing and predicting the harmful, natural effects of global warming on the planet, as did the social, political and economic sciences, which argued that the global economy would suffer enormously from inaction, while acting in a determined way would offer positive perspectives for growth and prosperity.

'Climate change requires us to act quickly to contain potential risks from

global warming and adapt in ways that are consistent with economic growth and development goals. The problem is solvable – many of the technologies required are available today, the policies needed are relatively clear, and the costs of transition appear manageable, even in the current economic climate', one study stated[5], echoing a number of other reports by leading international think tanks and universities.

The IPCC, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, had provided the basis for the negotiations through their reports, mainly the Fourth Assessment Report (2007), which created a consensus that a realistic political goal would be a maximum increase in average global temperature of 2 degrees Celsius over pre-industrial levels. This again would mean that developed countries would have to reduce emissions by 25-40 per cent by 2020 compared to 1990 levels, and global emissions should be at least halved by mid-century.

THE GREENLAND DIALOGUE

Hedegaard's primary strategy – to build trust with parties – was centred on the Greenland Dialogue, a series of Chatham House Rules roundtables with twenty to thirty environment and climate ministers from the most important countries, both developing and developed. The idea of such meetings had already surfaced in 2005, when, for the first meeting in Greenland, she chose the famous UNESCO Heritage Ilulisat Glacier, which is retreating due to global warming. The concept was aimed at ministers meeting informally, not held down by formal mandates, getting to know each other and discussing options in an open dialogue.

Ministers who participated were happy with this new way of building consensus, and the dialogues – six all in all from 2005-2009 – were very successful. Among other things, they brought about a much closer relationship between Hedegaard and China's lead negotiator, Minister Xie Zhenhua of the National Reform and Development Commission.

5 Climate Works & Copenhagen Climate Council, 2009.

HOPE – AND CRISIS

Two major external events impacted significantly on these preparations during 2008. The US election brought climate change to the top of the political agenda. Both presidential candidates, Republican John McCain and Democrat Barack Obama, campaigned to change the US position on climate change both domestically and globally. The years of the Bush administration had effectively put a hold on action on global warming on the federal level, and the US was only half-heartedly engaged in global discussions. The US, historically the world's biggest polluter, even chose not to show up at formal UN meetings as one of the few countries in the world. McCain and Obama promised to re-engage the US in negotiations, and with the election of Barack Obama the promise was turned into policy, with the US lead negotiator Todd Stern declaring in early 2009 that the US was 'powerfully, fervently engaged' in the negotiations.[6]

However, the newly elected president had to pass some domestic climate change legislation in the US before he could go to Copenhagen with a full mandate to sign a global agreement which would legally bind the US to lower emissions. No president would have dared repeat what Bill Clinton had done in 1997 when he signed the Kyoto protocol but failed to ratify it due to opposition in the House of Representatives. And passing such legislation in less than a year would be extremely difficult, experts agreed.

During 2008, the financial crisis – later to become a crisis of the general economy – also impacted on the negotiations. At first, expectations were that it would lower countries' appetites for action that was thought to be 'expensive' in the short term. Surprisingly, the concern among politicians over short-term and short-sighted recovery efforts made the case for sustainable action on climate change stronger. Through investments in low carbon energy, innovation and effectiveness, combating climate change was beginning to seem a sensible way of creating new jobs, new markets and new growth.

Environmental economic studies, most prominently Lord Nicholas Stern's 'economics of climate change',[7] gained support for the conclusions that inac-

6 Stern, 2009.

7 HM Treasury, 2006.

tion would be far more expensive than action through political frameworks to improve market conditions for low carbon technologies.

TWO TRACKS

At the beginning of 2009, upon the conclusion of a more or less fruitless COP14 in Poznan, Poland, it became clearer still that the UNFCCC negotiations were progressing very slowly, with external expectations building up all the while. More and more countries were displaying a sincere interest in ambitious decisions, with developing economies like Mexico committing themselves for the first time ever to significant emissions reductions, abandoning long-held positions that the developing world would not act before developed nations had done so. At the same time, negotiators were not able to settle even basic disagreements over finance instruments, short-term and long-term targets, emissions verification and technology transfer.

The two-track process agreed upon in Bali meant that negotiators met in two so-called ad hoc working groups, the Ad Hoc Working Group on Long Term Cooperative Action under the Convention (AWG-LCA) and the Ad Hoc Working Group for Further Commitments for Annex 1 Countries under the Kyoto Protocol (AWG-KP). The LCA includes all parties to the Climate Convention, while the KP includes the parties that have ratified the Kyoto Protocol. For developing countries, maintaining this division was essential, as under the Kyoto Protocol developed countries (Annex 1 parties) are legally committed to reducing emissions, while for developing countries reductions are voluntary. A two-track process would therefore be expected to deliver a new climate treaty based on these principles and legal provisions. For a number of developed countries, especially the US, this was not acceptable. A new treaty should be a single treaty committing both developed and developing countries to common, but differentiated reductions, recognizing that the developed world must lead in reductions, but also that developing nations like China, India, Brazil, Indonesia, Mexico, South Africa and others are today among the world's largest emitters of CO_2 and should therefore not have the same levels of obligations as the poorest countries.

Behind the scenes, internal disagreements over the negotiating strategy be-

came stronger, led by Bo Lidegaard and Thomas Becker, with their respective staffs, very often not agreeing. In early 2009 the Prime Minister's Office decided that a new, more politically focused strategy was needed in order to deliver a successful result in December, if necessary, bypassing the UNFCCC process. The Prime Minister's Office, backed by the Ministry of Finance, had little trust in the UNFCCC process or the UNFCCC office in Bonn, Germany, headed by Executive Director Yvo de Boer.

Hedegaard's office, while agreeing that pressure through forums like the G8, the G20 and the Major Economies Forum could be important in pushing forward negotiators, remained focused on building trust with the parties involved in the UNFCCC process. The UNFCCC Secretariat, the Ministry for Climate and Energy and the Foreign Ministry all argued that, without trust between the most important parties from both developing and developed nations, a successful outcome would be extremely difficult. Even political commitments from heads of state, though important, would not by themselves lead to progress in the negotiations.

Rasmussen's strategy was to a large extent based on experiences drawn from the Danish EU presidency of 2002, during which he had enormous success in the negotiations over the enlargement of the EU. At the summit in December 2002, he was widely credited for having made the deal, famously announcing to the media, 'Ladies and gentlemen, we have an agreement'. Experts insisted that the logic of an EU negotiation process does not apply to the UN, since the latter has a much more varied group of member countries, a history of conflicts and complex geopolitical dynamics between rich and poor. In addition, UNFCCC decisions are based on the principle of unanimity.

A HECTIC AUTUMN

In April 2009, Rasmussen left office to become NATO Secretary General, and his logical successor, Lars Løkke Rasmussen, vice chairman of the Liberal Party, took over – the third Rasmussen in a row (Poul Nyrup Rasmussen of the Social Democrats had held office until 2002).

In the same weeks the disagreements over strategy and roles inside the government exploded. The Prime Minister's Office received an invitation by the

US to a first meeting in the important Major Economies Forum, and Bo Lidegaard was given the role of head of delegation – without sharing the invitation with Hedegaard's office, who first heard about it from US colleagues. Hedegaard saw this move as undermining her role in leading the negotiations, but the new Prime Minister refused to change decisions. Hedegaard threatened to resign, but decided against it after being promised that this was a one-off event.

The new Prime Minister, who throughout his career had focused on domestic politics, did not immediately take a strong interest in the negotiations, thus in practice continuing the strategy developed by his predecessor and led by 'Sherpa' Lidegaard.

During the summer of 2009 Lidegaard made a strong push to develop a Danish proposal for the outcome of COP15 on the basis of which the presidency could engage in bilateral negotiations at the level of heads of state. This move, logical in a western context, is controversial in an UN-anchored process. The presidency of the UNFCCC process, not the least if it is a 'rich' western country, run great risks if there is any sign of the formal negotiations being sidetracked, since it can then easily be accused of trying to overrule developing nations and to negotiate an 'illegitimate text' in an 'non-transparent' process between an 'undemocratic' group of primarily western countries.

Despite warnings from the UNFCCC office in Bonn and strong opposition from experts in the Ministry of Climate and Energy, this strategy was pursued. At the G8 summit in L'Aquila, Italy, in July 2009 the Danish Prime Minister was invited as COP president, and for the first time he personally experienced a strong interest in the negotiations on the part of his prominent colleagues. He realized that expectations were high and that heads of state were genuinely concerned that COP15 would fail. Like himself, his colleagues from the US, UK, Italy, Germany, Japan, Canada, France, Russia and the EU were frustrated with the UNFCCC process, and a common understanding emerged that a potential outcome, designed by the presidency, ought to be tested in bilateral meetings on the level of heads of state.

This was the beginning of a busy autumn. While Hedegaard continued to play a strong role in the UNFCCC process, the Prime Minister began testing a compromise proposal with a number of leaders from both developing and developed countries, backed by an informal mandate given to him in September by Ban Ki-moon and a group of leaders at a high-level UN meeting in New York.

Most of the meetings were held with close allies from the EU, the US and countries like Australia and Canada, but leaders from the Maldives, Africa, Mexico, Brazil, China, India and other leading developing nations were also consulted. The proposal, continuously revised on the basis of input from meetings, was for a long time shaped as a one text-agreement, thus replacing the two track process (LCA and the KP). This was not well received by the developing countries, who were working to see the Kyoto commitments being prolonged. For the Prime Minister's Office, getting Barack Obama on board was a high priority.

ONE AGREEMENT, TWO STEPS

In October, the Prime Minister demonstrated for the first time publicly that the Danish presidency would not 'just' facilitate COP15, but lead. At an international parliamentarians' conference, hosted by Globe International, he launched a new and to many surprising concept: 'One agreement, two steps'.[8] He suggested that, though it remained the end goal, it would not be possible to reach a legally binding treaty with less than two months to go to the beginning of the COP. In many ways this was to draw attention to 'the elephant in the room' by stating what everybody was beginning to realize. Instead, he suggested, it would be better for parties to aim at a 'politically binding agreement' in Copenhagen (first step), which could immediately afterwards be turned into legal text (second step). It would be futile, he argued, to pursuit an unrealistic goal in Copenhagen and thus risk a complete deadlock. The presidency would rather see the growing political will to commit to reducing emissions be captured in Copenhagen and the baton then be handed over to COP16.

The concept was strongly criticized by NGOs, who felt that the presidency had lowered the bar too early in the process, thereby exposing developing countries to harm from climate change today down and letting polluting nations 'off the hook'. Hedegaard and her staff were also sceptical, fearing that this would take pressure off, among others, the US, whom they felt should feel the heat until the last moment, since so far they had not been willing to reduce emissions to the same level as, for example, the EU countries and Japan.

8 Statsministeriet, 2009.

The concept was developed for two main reasons – apart from the overall goal of shaping a political success in Copenhagen. First of all, it gave the US an opportunity to actively back an agreement in Copenhagen before having put in place its domestic legislation. Secondly, it created a path to a political solution which meant that heads of state would be taking an active part in the negotiations in Copenhagen. A COP is not normally attended by heads of state, but it was a cornerstone of the Danish strategy to put pressure on the UNFCCC negotiations by engaging the biggest political muscles.

It was, though, a risky course. 'The strategy, we ran during the autumn, was hazardous for two reasons', a senior public official says, 'First of all the fact that we chose a smaller group of countries, primarily developed countries, whom we discussed text with. Secondly, the fact that the text we showed was not closely coordinated with what was on the table in the negotiations. It is of course natural that there are discussions in different settings and on different levels, but the problem is that we did not discuss the same things. The gap between the UNFCCC texts and our compromise text was too big'.

OPEN CONFLICT

October became a dramatic month for the presidency. Thomas Becker and Connie Hedegaard increasingly felt that Denmark was confusing the parties by speaking with two tongues, and frequently they were asked whether it was 'Denmark no. 1 or Denmark no. 2' that was talking, as Yvo de Boer put it. The presidency appeared to have 'two schools', as de Boer wrote after the COP[9]. Becker, by now loosing just about every internal battle, was deeply frustrated – and also threatened from the outside. Anonymous sources in the spring suggested to journalists at DR1, the main public-service TV station in Denmark that they should apply for legal access to ministerial documents about Becker's travel expenses, and at the beginning of October he resigned shortly before media reports emerged that he had breached ministerial procedures regarding expenses on food, drinks, travel etc.

Loosing Becker, by far the most experienced and most well-respected Dan-

9 Meilstrup, 2010 or [www.kampenomklimaet.blogspot.com].

ish negotiator, as lead negotiator in the final phases was a severe blow to the presidency. Becker was renowned as one of the few diplomats from any of the developed countries who had warm relations with colleagues from the developing countries, precisely the competences most needed in intense negotiations with the threat looming of conflicts between rich and poor countries. 'All of this is what Becker masters. We missed it...' as Connie Hedegaard put it afterwards.

Externally, however, the momentum for the COP was building, and the prospects of a successful deal looked more and more positive. One by one, countries announced the goals they would commit to in Copenhagen, including many of the new emerging economies like China, India and Brazil, who all announced 'carbon intensity goals', meaning that their economic growth should become less polluting relative to BNP. At the last Greenland Dialogue in the US in September 2009, the general feeling among nations and ministers was that, although not all hurdles would be overcome, the political will to reach compromises was present.

By November, however, as Hedegaard herself noted during the pre-COP in Copenhagen, the last formal meeting before the COP itself, this had changed somewhat. The bilateral talks between Sherpas about the Danish compromise proposal and the new two-step strategy had left countries nervous, especially developing countries. This feeling grew in the final weeks leading up to December, despite the fact that the heads of state strategy was working, as more and more leaders announced that they would take part in the COP during the final high-level session in the last one or two days, signifying that a successful outcome was within reach. Few cabinets send their leaders to a summit with no prospect of success.

In the first weekend of December, the Prime Minister's Office organized a meeting of a small group of twenty to thirty countries in Copenhagen. The consultations on the Danish proposal had until now only been bilateral, but now was the time to discuss it openly. The US, Russia and China insisted, however, on having the document sent before the meeting, otherwise they refused to attend.

The Prime Minister's Office did so, thereby bypassing a government decision which Hedegaard heavily insisted on: not to let copies of the text 'float around'. Hedegaard and Foreign Minister Per Stig Møller warned that this would give potential spoilers dangerous advantages.

Lidegaard felt that the Sherpa meeting had gone well. Success was within reach. During the meeting, the US announced that Barack Obama would attend the high-level session of the COP, and not, as planned, just touch down in Copenhagen in the first week of the COP on his way to Oslo to accept the Nobel Peace Prize.

THE DANISH TEXT

The Bella Center, a huge conference facility in Copenhagen, opened its doors to delegates on 7 December for the beginning of one of the most unusual and dramatic international political meetings in history. More than a hundred heads of state would take part, the largest gathering of leaders ever outside the UN Headquarters in New York. More than 30,000 delegates – negotiators, NGOs, lobbyists – were expected, but the number grew to more than 40,000. Five thousand journalists from all regions covered the event. All in all, the oldest kingdom in the world was subject to the biggest international attention ever in its more than a thousand years of history.

On the second day of the COP, drama erupted. The British newspaper *The Guardian* published a 'secret' Danish text which had been leaked by the developing countries. It was dated November 27 and was a draft proposal for a treaty decision that developing countries saw as unfair and hugely in favour of the rich world. Among other things, it ignored the Kyoto Protocol.

Spokespersons for the developing countries, most prominently Stanislau Lumumba Di-Aiping of Sudan, who held the chair of the G77 plus China, were outraged by the text, which they denounced as undemocratic, unfair and drafted with a lack of transparency, thereby breaking all the rules of the Convention.

The Danish delegation was taken aback by the reactions. The text was an older version of the Danish proposal, the one send to Russia, US and China in late November, and indeed was only half the proposal (the LCA part, which was why it appeared that the Kyoto Protocol was being ignored), and many of the countries that were outraged, including Sudan, had seen the text at the Sherpa meeting two weeks previously. Even so, the reactions placed huge pressure on Denmark, which was now seen as supporting only the developed coun-

tries, even though developing countries like Mexico, China, Brazil, Ethiopia, the Maldives and others had been consulted also. The dangerous UN dynamics that experts, including Bonn, had warned about were now played out in Bella Center, and the Danish text traumatized negotiations throughout the COP.

After the COP, Yvo de Boer wrote in a confidential letter[10] to his staff: 'The Danish letter presented at an informal meeting a week before the COP destroyed two years of effort in one fell swoop'. Connie Hedegaard used other words, but said more or less the same: 'It takes years to build confidence. It takes hours to destroy it'.

In the first week, very little progress was made in the working groups, with negotiators now polarized by the Danish text even more than they had been before the COP. Negotiators were expected to deliver a set of almost final recommendations to environment and climate ministers after the first week, so that they could overcome the final hurdles and present their leaders with a draft decision in the last few days. The plan did not work. Instead, Saturday and Sunday ministers were left with long texts with many crucial problems unsolved. The process during the first week slowed down to a level where the media starting speculating about a breakdown, and this grew even more evident on the Monday of the last week, when countries openly disagreed on the most basic issues, like the continuation of the Kyoto Protocol, the level of reductions from developed countries, financing, verification etc.

A fundamental opposition between developed and developing countries became evident, and proved to be one of the main reasons for the weak outcome of Copenhagen. Within the G77 plus China group, which includes both some of the worlds' biggest emitters like China and India and some of the worlds' most vulnerable and poor nations in Africa and the Pacific islands, there were varying views on a range of different elements of a potential outcome. Both subgroups had strong 'red lines' that they were not prepared to cross.

Most of the poorest nations were not prepared to support a weak outcome, but preferred Copenhagen to fail, if the rich countries would not legally commit to emissions reductions on the level recommended by science.

The big, developing economies – the BASIC-group (Brazil, South Africa, India and China) – also wanted to see ambitious reductions from developed

10 Meilstrup, 2010 or [www.kampenomklimaet.blogspot.com].

countries, but were at the same time sensitive when it came to agreeing on ambitious, long term global reductions, which would logically lead to reductions on their own behalf in the long run. To them, their current dramatic economic growth was the most important political priority, and anything that was seen to threaten this would not be welcomed.

THE JEWEL IN THE CROWN

The presidency, though surprised by the deadlock, had prepared for a situation like this. The intention was to present the compromise proposal, now consisting of two texts largely reflecting the two tracks, during the second week, and at the same time let the Prime Minister take over Hedegaard's chair as president. The text was now, the delegation felt, 'quite good' and was seen as a realistic way out of the present crisis.[11] Hedegaard would be appointed a special representative and coordinate the two working groups.

After long discussions, including warnings from Hedegaard that the Prime Minister would not be welcomed by the parties because of the feeling that the Danish text was essentially his, Lars Løkke Rasmussen took over as COP president on Wednesday, 16 December. Hedegaard's last act as 'Madam President' was to announce that a proposal from the presidency would be presented later in the day to the parties.

This move derailed the talks further. Rasmussen was harassed during his first session by negotiators, who heavily criticized him for introducing 'text from the sky'. Rasmussen clearly wasn't prepared for this difficult situation and had little luck in chairing the meeting, not realizing the complexities of a UNFCCC session and clearly showing a lack of patience for 'procedure, procedure, procedure'.[12] He was attacked by negotiators from China, Brazil, Sudan and others, many of them among the parties whose leaders had shown him support pre-COP.

In a 'black day' for the presidency, the parties, both close allies like the UK and Australia and developing countries, insisted that the Danish proposal

11 Meilstrup, 2010.

12 All UNFCCC sessions are available via webcast. Online, HTTP: [www.cop15.com].

should not be introduced. The jewel in the crown of the Danish strategy, prepared during years of intense diplomatic efforts, was not to see the light of day. The presidency, largely loosing the support of parties, was not even able to establish the traditional Friends of the Chair group whose role was to assist in overcoming difficulties. Failure loomed as heads of state had started to arrive, expecting a deal to be ready. Formal negotiations still took place in the working groups, which, under Hedegaard, showed little progress. 'We were entering unchartered territory', a Danish diplomat described the coming days.

SHOWDOWN IN ROOM 21

On Thursday nothing changed. More than a hundred of heads of state were now in Copenhagen, witnessing a chaotic process with no result in sight. The Danish Prime Minister, however, decided to use the presence of his peers to push through the best possible deal in order to avoid a complete failure at all costs. His team prepared a new three-page document on a deal covering most items of the negotiations, but only very briefly, and with a limited level of ambition. On Thursday night, during a formal dinner hosted by the Queen of Denmark, Margrethe II, he gathered support to establish an unorthodox Friends of the Chair consisting of national leaders, who would work through the night to carve out a deal.

During that night, they and their Sherpas gathered in a small, dark room in the Bella Center, the 'Arne Jacobsen', named after the famous Danish architect and tried to negotiate the text that was later to become known as the Copenhagen Accord. This proved extremely difficult, with deep divisions between the big emerging economies on the one hand and the US and Europe on the other.

By Friday morning there was still no agreement on core issues, and when Barack Obama arrived, a group of 26 leaders themselves started drafting the text in what Rasmussen later described as 'the strangest political meeting in world history'.

A main obstacle was Chinese/US disputes over two issues: Emissions verification in China, and emissions reductions in the US. China saw demands from the US and others for a global system for measuring, reporting and verifying emissions as a 'red line' raising concerns over national sovereignty. The

US refused to reduce emissions beyond 17 per cent below 2005 levels by 2020, far less than the reductions recommended by the IPCC. China, which was represented in the talks by a senior diplomat, not by Wen Jiabao, even though he was present in Copenhagen, finally also resisted agreeing to specific figures for emissions reductions on a global scale – both scale and year – which meant that the Accord could not include standard wording that 2050 was the reference year for global emissions to be at least halved. Not even figures for developed countries' reductions were included, which infuriated German leader Angela Merkel to exclaim, 'Why can't we even say what we ourselves are prepared to do?'.

Wen Jiabao's absence from negotiations was seen as a diplomatic snub towards Barack Obama, who had asked his staff to set up meetings with Wen during the day, but without luck. Late in the afternoon he lost patience and left the room saying, 'I want to see Wen'. In a curious diplomatic game of hide-and-seek during Friday, Obama's staff had tried to set up meetings with not only China, but also India, South Africa and Brazil, whose delegations were stalling things. Late on Friday night, breaking all protocol, Obama gate-crashed a meeting to see Wen, who turned out to be together with Lula, Zuma and Singh.

The meeting ended with Obama striking a deal with his four colleagues. Immediately afterwards he left the Bella Center, but managed to hold a brief press conference announcing that there was an agreement, much to the dismay of Lars Løkke Rasmussen. This was partly because there could, in fact, be no agreement, since the Accord first had to be discussed and adopted in the plenary hall, and partly because the Danish government naturally expected to be one of the parties making the announcement.

What followed were the initial hours of renewed negotiations with the group of 26 countries, which were now abandoning their previous positions, then a nightmarish plenary session with developing countries furiously refusing to adopt an 'illegal' document that had been negotiated in 'secret'. It took more than seven hours to reach a conclusion, which was merely a decision whereby the parties took note of the Accord and were invited, on a voluntary basis, to report national CO_2 targets to the UNFCCC – by any standards a low-key UNFCCC decision. Adoption of the document as a decision under the Convention proved impossible, as it was being blocked by countries such as Sudan, Bolivia, Cuba and Venezuela, which were apparently being allowed to upset

things by their more powerful but silent supporters in the G77. Again, the Danish Prime Minister was humiliated on the podium, angry, and a number of times very unclear about UN procedure, stating e.g. 'I am not familiar with your procedures'.[13]

On Saturday morning an agreement on the Copenhagen Accord[14] was reached without Rasmussen even being present in the plenary hall, and on Saturday afternoon, 24 hours later than planned, COP15 came to an end.

BELOW OUR MODEST EXPECTATIONS

Disappointment with the outcome and sharp criticism of the Danish presidency dominated media reports upon the conclusion of COP15. What had been a venture aimed at placing Denmark at the very centre of the global green agenda had turned into a diplomatic failure of large proportions. The Copenhagen Accord was seen as a very weak outcome by most commentators. 'This is a very disappointing outcome that is even below our modest expectations', a carbon finance expert from Barclays Capital put it.[15]

Yvo de Boer called the Accord a 'letter of intent'; Connie Hedegaard said it was 'disappointing'. Even so, it was the first ever decision that brought together nations, rich and poor, in a political deal to halt global warming. At the same time, it contained pledges to support the most vulnerable nations with financing for adaptation and mitigation: Short-term financing of 30 billion USD in 2010-2012, growing to 100 billion USD annually by 2020. This was seen as a major breakthrough in international negotiations on climate change.

The most positive reports were those in US media, which celebrated Barack Obama as the person who had salvaged a deal. Reactions from industry leaders, however, were negative, while NGOs like WWF, Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace condemned the whole process as a crime against poor nations, who are already suffering from the impacts of climate change today.

The presidency was held responsible for the chaotic process in major inter-

13 UNFCCC webcast. Online, HTTP: [www.cop15.com].

14 UNFCCC, 2009.

15 Michael Szabo, 'Q&A: What Copenhagen Accord Means for Prices, Markets?', *Reuters*, 21 December 2009. Online, HTTP: [www.reuters.com].

national media outlets, and Lars Løkke Rasmussen in particular was criticized for being 'in too deep' and neither understanding nor even respecting the role of a UNFCCC president. 'The Bungler from Copenhagen' read one of many headlines in the media, above a picture of a very tired Prime Minister on the podium during the last plenary session. The behind-the-scenes story about internal fighting over strategy and process in the government, the clear divisions between Hedegaard's and Rasmussen's statements and the loss of lead negotiator Becker nourished news stories with a not so flattering picture of Denmark.

POST-COPENHAGEN

During the first few months of 2010, the Accord won more positive political plaudits, as countries began to associate themselves with it and report targets. To date, 122 nations have done so, representing 90 per cent of global emissions. The downside, though, is that these commitments are too low and too late. According to a study published in the science magazine *Nature* in April 2010,[16] the Accord sets the world on course to a 3 degrees Celsius scenario, which experts say will have severe negative effects on both ecosystems and the economy.

At the UNFCCC negotiations in Bonn in June 2010, the first formal negotiations after Copenhagen, the limited success of the accord was underlined. Expectations – expressed by e.g. the EU Commissioner on Climate Action, Connie Hedegaard – were that a legally binding agreement would not be reached before 2012 (COP17 in South Africa). Yvo de Boer, in his final remarks as head of the UNFCCC, which he leaves for a new job this year, even said that it could take up to ten years for negotiations to deliver a robust and effective agreement.

Uncertainty around the future of UN climate talks prevails – and history will show whether this will be the legacy of Copenhagen 2009.

16 Rogejl et al., 2010.

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