

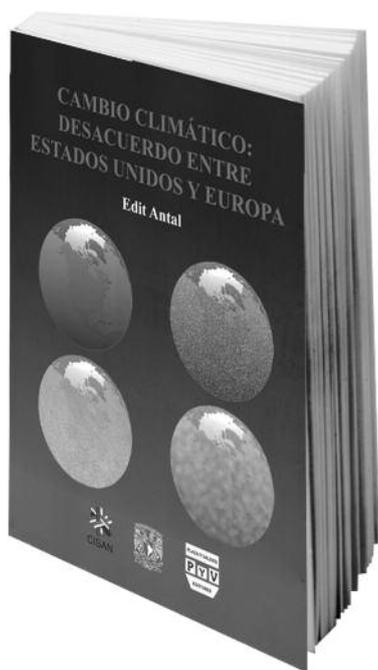
Reviews

Cambio climático: desacuerdo entre Estados Unidos y Europa

(Climate Change: Disagreement between the United States and Europe)

Edit Antal

CISAN-UNAM/Plaza y Valdés Editores
Mexico City, 2004, 243 pp.



The international community is facing a big challenge in the shape of the struggle against global climate change. For the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (FCCC) and the Kyoto Protocol to be successful, all the actors involved will have to opt for the global good and disregard their own specific interests. This is probably the greatest challenge, since behind the interests of

every country are a series of political, cultural and economic priorities that explain the difficulty of achieving international cooperation.

There have been indications of climate change since the nineteenth century. In 1896, Swedish scientist Svante Arrhenius had already calculated that as a result of fossil fuel emissions, the duplication of atmospheric levels of carbon dioxide could increase the average global temperature from 4 to 6 degrees Centigrade. However, it was not until the 1992 Rio Summit that 180 governments decided to do something about it and signed the FCCC in order to, as it states in Article 2, “achieve...stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system.” The FCCC includes fundamental principles of international law like that of common but differentiated responsibilities and the precautionary principle. It recognizes the responsibility of industrialized countries as well as the need that they exercise leadership in adopting mitigating measures and in supporting developing countries to deal with the negative effects of climate change.

The negotiations for the Kyoto Protocol concluded in 1997, and, in contrast with the FCCC, it includes quantitative commitments for developed countries and the economies in transition, known as Annex I. Kyoto established an average reduction of 5.2 percent for 2008-2012, using 1990 as the reference point. Since Kyoto, international negotiations about climate change have concentrated on the definition of the protocol's operating details and the strengthening of FCCC implementation.

For the Kyoto Protocol to come into effect, 55 parties to the convention must ratify it, including the Annex I countries, responsible for at least 55

percent of this group's emissions, using 1990 as the reference point. Until now, 124 countries have ratified it, but only part of Annex I countries (including the European Union, Japan and Canada), which together generate 44.2 percent of emissions. By contrast, two of the world's greatest producers of greenhouse gases, the United States and Russia, responsible for 36.1 percent and 17.4 percent respectively, have not yet ratified the protocol.

The reasons behind the European Union's and the United States' positions are linked to a series of economic, political, cultural and scientific factors that have influenced their decision making. In *Cambio climático: desacuerdo entre Estados Unidos y Europa*, Edit Antal analyzes these complex processes that explain the different countries' positions on the international climate change regimen. She concentrates on two of the most important actors in this negotiation process and explains what is behind the U.S. position, detailing the different phases in its decision-making process, the interest groups with the most influence and the specific weight of each of them in making environmental foreign policy. She also looks carefully at why the European Union has played more of a leadership role with the aim of diminishing the adverse effects of climate change.

Antal points to the complexity but flexibility of the European Union's decision-making process, the product of different bodies set up for dialogue among all the actors involved. This allows it to come to international negotiations with a defined position that facilitates agreements. In contrast, in the United States, while government agencies come to agreements in the preparation stages of international negotiations, the legislature does not participate in developing the proposals, relieving it of commitments and leaving a great deal to its discretion. This dynamic was clear in summer 1997 when, even though the Clinton administration had signed the Kyoto Protocol, the Senate voted it down 95 to zero.

Legal and political processes are not the only elements that explain these two actors' divergent positions. As Antal points out, the U.S. position

is based on its abundant supply of cheap fossil fuels and on a very specific culture rooted in that. This country is the world's main producer, consumer and importer of energy. Therefore, its weight in the world balance of energy supply and demand is very important. In contrast, Europe's relatively scant supply of fossil fuels has led it to take measures to diminish its dependency on them. Thus, in recent decades, the E.U. has fostered the use of alternative energy sources like hydroelectricity, nuclear power and natural gas.

For the United States, a country that has based its development on the extensive use of coal and oil, considered a strategic resource, policies to reduce the use of fossil fuels will have a considerably greater impact on the economy. Another obstacle to ratification is that developing countries have not signed any commitment to reduce emissions. The U.S. argument is that countries like China, India, Brazil and even Mexico release considerable quantities of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere and that the international effort will not be complete without everyone's participation. In comparison, by ratifying the agreement and taking on the commitments, the European Union has been able to design a strategy for climate change based on integrating national and regional environmental policy with energy and other relevant policies such as transportation, research on renewable energy sources and regulation of the economy.

Perhaps the greatest contribution to research on this issue is the methodology for comparing U.S. and European Union environmental policies. Applying economic, political and cultural variables that take into account both the economic sectors affected by climate change and the perception and conception of nature and these actors' political style, including the relationship between science and policy and the importance of the institutions and actors involved, the author created comparative tables that will be highly useful for scholars.

Edit Antal's book is very timely, a valuable contribution to the still limited literature on the issue of climate change in Mexico. This work will be of great interest to the general public because,

in addition to her analysis of E.U. and U.S. positions, she explains simply and in great detail the general outlines of the international regimen for climate change, including existing legal instruments, the science behind the words, the history of the negotiations and the positions of other

actors, all indispensable to understanding the current stage of negotiations.

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