

Check against Delivery

Statement by the Austrian Minister for Environment, Youth and Family Affairs

Martin Bartenstein

at the High-Level Segment of the

Third Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change

Kyoto, 9 December 1997

At the outset I would like to associate myself with the statement made by John Lahure on behalf of the European Union.

The coincidence of the speakers' list gives me the opportunity to take the floor immediately after the IPCC. I could not have wished for a more impressive description of the effects of the anthropogenic interference with the global climate system. This report underlines the need to respond to the reality of climate change with actions.

We have to act now and we can act now.

We have accumulated sufficient analysis and research. We have heard in New York that the evidence is clear. We have heard yesterday that the trend is clear. We know the kind of actions that are required.

Against the background of all the available scientific evidence it is clear that we have to take national and international action.

Austria has proved that it is willing and capable to bear its responsibility as an industrialized country by an early adoption of a national CO₂ reduction target of minus 20 % by 2005 based on the CO₂ emissions of 1988 - the so-called Toronto target. As a first milestone towards this reduction target we have reached stabilization in the period 1990 to 97, although on a high level. Austria has taken on a far above average responsibility within the EU bubble. Austria is aware of the fact that this level of ambition will not be easy to achieve. We need the backing of a successful Kyoto conference and an ambitious Kyoto protocol. Recent studies show that the complete implementation of our national climate action will have no detrimental effect on the national economy. A key design element of this plan is the principle of private-public partnerships and the provision of incentives for market-driven technical progress. Furthermore it will lead to the creation of a substantive number of new jobs.

Great possibilities exist in particular

- in the area of the enhanced use of renewable energy - where Austria can boast a share of 27 % of the total energy consumption; we are furthermore committed to put 200.000 individual households on biomass heating systems and triple the surface of solar roofs by 2005. These two measures alone will result in a CO₂ reduction close to 5 %.

Other important opportunities exist

- in co-generation
- in thermal insulation of buildings, waste incineration and in the modernization of power plants.
- A great challenge is the transport sector which has the fastest growing CO₂ emissions.

Since reference has been made a number of times at this conference to the CO₂ reduction potential of nuclear energy let me emphasize that Austria is committed to

reach ambitious reduction targets without recourse to nuclear energy which we do not consider a sustainable option. Nuclear energy is certainly no technology for climate protection.

The Special Session of the General Assembly last June has recognized the key role that energy questions play in the pursuit of sustainable development. It has tasked the Commission of Sustainable Development to conduct an intergovernmental process with a view of realizing sustainable energy futures for all countries and people. Austria will continue to provide input into these global endeavors, by hosting an expert meeting on renewable energy in Vienna next year and by creating an electronic Global Forum for Sustainable Energy.

Against the urgency of the challenge before us we regret the lack of leadership of major industrialized countries. On our way to Kyoto the EU took the lead within the group of industrialized countries at an early stage. The proposals we have seen from others are insufficient and disappointing. It is misleading rhetoric to label as a 30 % reduction compared to a status quo scenario a commitment which actually is only stabilization until 2012, a stabilization which should have been achieved already by 2000 under the Climate Change Convention.

Contrary to what the arguments of some industrialized countries have been the targets proposed by the EU are realistic; the policies and measures are feasible and economically viable. A recent study by the European Commission points to positive effects of GDP up to 1 %.

Kyoto - and I would like to be very clear on that - is not the place where we agree on binding commitments for developing countries. We look forward however, to listen to the announcements of voluntary commitments by individual developing countries.

Mr. President,

A day and a half before the scheduled end of our Conference of the Parties more than half a dozen major issues - such as the number of gases covered, sinks, trading, voluntary commitments by developing countries, joint implementation,

financial mechanisms, compliance and evaluation and review - remain unresolved. It is obvious that we will not be able to find detailed solutions to all the outstanding issues. It is therefore imperative that we set in motion various follow-up processes with good guidance on how to carry the work forward. Kyoto is not the end, but the beginning of long post Kyoto process. A process we will take the greatest interest in - and not only because we will have the EU presidency in the second half of 1998.

We cannot afford to come out of this Conference with a nicely-worded non-binding declaration only. This conference has to yield concrete, meaningful and legally-binding commitments. To achieve a positive result, it will be necessary to be more flexible in the hours to come than in the months behind us. Let us not stare with single-mindedness on reduction targets not worth the bargain if we leave open loopholes allowing even increases in CO₂ emissions. Let us be realistic about the hard and time-consuming work necessary to establish fair and balanced strategies for trading, sinks and JI.

Furthermore a Kyoto protocol without policies and measures could easily prove to be a paper-tiger - with no teeth at all. Rather than as a paper tiger we would like to see the Kyoto protocol as a window of opportunity very much like the Montreal Protocol. The process of the Montreal Protocol where the important break-through came with the introduction of legally binding targets and screws which have been tightened over time might well show us the way to success also to protect the global climate.

So far Kyoto has been a success, especially because of the world-wide public attention this conference is getting, contributing to creating awareness on climate change. A failure would be all the more disappointing for the people of the world. It is our responsibility: let us live up to it.