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Kyoto Protocol Helps Russia Modernize



The Kyoto Protocol gives Russia the incentive to modernize its energy market.

Deutsche Welle's John Hay spoke with Joke-Waller Hunter, executive secretary of the UNFCCC about how Russia could profit from adopting the Kyoto Protocol and the impact of global warming.

Here in Europe and in the Northern hemisphere in general people have seen an extremely hot summer. It's been billed as the hottest summer in 2000 years by some. Does this mean that more people now accept the fact that climate change is happening and that it is being caused by human kind?

The scientists have already predicted in their models that we will have more extreme weather events in the years to come. We had the floods in 2002, the heat wave in Europe this year -- these are the type of extreme weather events that climate scientists are predicting. So it certainly raises awareness for the issues. It draws the attention of politicians to the issue. I don't think you would find a scientist who would really say that this is all due to the human impact on the climate, but it certainly helps to get it high on the agenda.

But hasn't it been a sort of wake-up call? Haven't people been coming to you now and saying "We've doubted the science up to now but now it's quite obvious that climate change is taking place"?

People do make those remarks and also many politicians are now aware that this is a very serious issue. The impacts are not only felt in the developing countries, which are the most vulnerable to climate change -- given that their food production is under threat if the climate changes -- but they also feel in European countries that something is happening to the climate and that it has huge economic impacts as well as impacts on daily life.

Now, there are people in Russia who actually welcome climate change, since they say that Russia, as a cold country, can do with a little more warmth, that it can't do any harm if the temperature rises and that it could



actually help increase agricultural output. What do you say to this?

Well, I think the Russians are really going through a very elaborate process of cost - benefit analysis, of which agricultural productivity is one element. Others being what it means for energy exports of Russia and energy use in Russia.

Generally speaking, the expectation of scientists with regard to the impact of climate change on agricultural productivity is that it will decrease agricultural productivity. And then our colleagues at the bio-diversity convention argue that if a number of the very valuable ecosystems, including some of the ecosystems in the Soviet Union, were turned into agricultural land -- a possibility due to the change in temperature -- then it would be a very significant loss to the world's bio-diversity.

We are most concerned about the agricultural productivity of developing countries because those economies are really dependant on the export of agricultural products to provide the necessary food for their own population. Climate change, combined with and resulting in less water availability, will really have a huge impact on agricultural productivity in many African and Asian countries. I think that's where we really see a growing concern which can only lead to the farmers and the agricultural research adapting to climate change.

Some climate change will be inevitable. We have come so far that we cannot avoid it. The carbon stays so long in the atmosphere that whatever we do now we will face some climate change because the damage has already been done. Countries do have to adapt and look at other crops that may have a higher productivity with higher concentrations of carbon in the air.

Russia is the third biggest polluter in the world, but in many ways it's a developing country, an emerging economy, especially with regards to the implementation of technology. At the same time, the Russian economy is booming, so there's a large scope for modernizing industries. To what extent could this mean that climate friendly technologies are likely to be installed in the future?

That's again one of the incentives for the Russians to ratify the Kyoto protocol because the Kyoto protocol would allow joint implementation of projects within the "Annex 1" countries- the industrialized countries - including the economies in transition, like Russia and some of the other Eastern European countries. The Kyoto protocol would allow much more joint implementation, which would then mean a transfer of technology.

Generally speaking, if you would like to reduce your emissions, you benefit if you make your production less energy intensive, which is "win-win" because you have to spend less on the costs for energy and, at the same time, you reduce your emissions. That's quite an important element in the overall implementation of climate change measures. Quite a few of them are "win-wins" and not measures that would really harm the economy. Energy intensity of Russian production at the moment is high, compared to other countries, Japan being an example which has taken very early measures to reduce the energy

intensity of the industrial production. There is huge scope for the Russian economy to modernize in such a way that it is both economically attractive and, at the same time, climate friendly.

Should the Russians fail to ratify before the Milan summit, what would that mean for the Kyoto process?

Well, the Kyoto protocol would enter into force 90 days after the Russians have ratified it and have made it clear to the United Nations in New York. So, if we count the 90 days, it's unlikely because they should have made their move in New York before the 13th of September. It's unlikely that when we have our conference of the parties in Milan in early December that the protocol will have entered into force. It would be quite important that we know at the time of the Milan meeting when it will enter into force. We are still quite confident that the Russians will move at such a pace that at Milan we will know when the protocol will come into force. That would give an enormously positive signal to the conference, to the parties and to the meeting and would really make people even more aware of the need to implement, what they have agreed in an international context.

And if the Russians fail to ratify altogether, what would that mean?

That's what is normally referred to as the Plan B, which we don't want to think about, but if the Kyoto protocol does not enter into force in the very near future, I think the risk of climate fatigue may kick in.

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AUDIO 

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