

## **The Role of the G-8/G-20 in International Climate Change Negotiations**

**Stavros Afionis, PhD.**

*This article looks at G-8 Summit outcomes and analyses their impact on international climate change negotiations under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). In particular, the article evaluates whether the UNFCCC negotiations have benefited from G-8 input and, if yes, to what extent. Even though issues relating to energy or energy security have been frequent G8 Summit top agenda topics, only recently has climate change featured prominently in G-8 talks. This paper argues that even though world leaders have been increasingly viewing G-8 meetings as an opportunity to discuss climate change-related developments at the highest level, seldom have they succeeded in achieving major breakthroughs. Nevertheless, Tony Blair's decision in 2005 to make climate change a core theme of the UK G-8 Presidency, has resulted in significantly advancing international climate change negotiations over the past few years. With the G-20 replacing the G-8 as of 2011, as well as with President Obama in power in the US, future G-20 summits are expected to be far more eventful and productive in terms of promoting climate change mitigation and adaptation.*

### **Abbreviations**

<b>COP</b>	Conference of the Parties
<b>COP/MOP</b>	Conference of the Parties serving as the Meeting of the Parties
<b>UNFCCC</b>	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

### **Introduction**

The Group of Eight (G-8) is one of the most important international forums for dealing with global issues. The current G-8 members include Germany, France, the United Kingdom, Italy, Japan, the United States, Canada (since 1976) and Russia (since 1998). The European Commission is also represented at all the meetings, but cannot host or chair. The G-8 Presidency plays a very important role due to the organisation's loose structure. The G-8, and formerly the G-6 and G-7, was created by France in 1975, at the initiative of President Giscard d'Estaing, who believed that a "small and select" group of heads of governments could prove far more productive in dealing with major global events than could the plethora of unproductive and bureaucratic international meetings and institutions (Bayne, 2005: 19).

Admittedly, given that the G-8 is not an ordinary international institution or organisation, it is not easy to identify suitable International Relations theoretical approaches in order to describe its place in the global political economy. Doing so is also outside the scope of the present article, but if one was to make such an effort, it could be plausibly argued that neoliberalism seems to represent the most appropriate such theory. As argued by adherents to this tradition, cooperation between states takes place in international organisations such as the EU or the UN, but also "in forums like the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) which were not international organisations with all the formalized rules and procedures implied by that term, but more basic international economic agreements that helped shape and regulate state behaviour" (Daddow, 2009: 97). The G-8 is of course neither an agreement nor does it regulate state behaviour in the strict sense of the term. It is, however, a vitally important forum which is meant to advance cooperation between some of the strongest industrialised nations and, if not regulate, at least coordinate their policies in an array of globally important issues.

Turning back to the origins of the G-8, of leading importance in the decision to establish the (at the time) Group of Six (G-6), were the cataclysmic changes witnessed during the 1970s, referring here in particular to a succession of major economic shocks of the magnitude of:

- The collapse of the Bretton Woods monetary system and the inability of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank to adopt effective remedial measures (Hajnal, 2007: 11).

- The first oil crisis which resulted from the decision of the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) to place an embargo on oil supplies following the 1973 Yom Kippur War (Hajnal, 2007: 11).
- The 1974 economic recession in industrialized countries, during which inflation and unemployment rates rose sharply (Hajnal, 2007: 11).

These developments necessitated the establishment of this new flexible forum. However, even though the G-8 started out as a coordinated approach to economic and monetary policy, annual G-8 meetings have increasingly focused their attention on issues covering the whole spectrum of global politics (Peichert and Meyer-Ohlendorf, 2007: 2). Apart from trade and economic matters, G-8 leaders can be now seen discussing matters relating *inter alia* to foreign and security policy, development aid, human rights, unemployment, ecological concerns and social security. As Held *et al* (1999: 52) note, G-8 summits “have focused their attention increasingly on issues which might previously have been regarded as primarily domestic or welfare issues.”

As already noted, the G-8 is not an international organisation, but is instead intended to be an informal forum of Heads of State and Government. It does not have its own administrative structure with a permanent secretariat or office for its individual members. The organisation and agenda for the annual G-8 summits is traditionally a matter for the relevant presidency. G-8 ministers also meet throughout the year, such as the G-7/8 finance ministers (who meet four times a year), G-8 foreign ministers, or G-8 environment ministers. The G-8 operates mainly “through political communiqués based on consensus, responding action plans and partnership initiatives” (Peichert and Meyer-Ohlendorf, 2007: 2). These communiqués tend to be of a declaratory character without any binding legal targets or frameworks, deploying largely soft political instruments. However, given the economic and political weight of its members, the G-8 “can provide strong political signals to other ongoing processes” (Peichert and Meyer-Ohlendorf, 2007: 2). This is certainly the case when it comes to financial issues, debt relief, international trade or development aid (Bayne, 2005: 213).

The purpose of this article is to examine whether this also holds true when it comes to combating the greatest environmental threat known to humankind – climate change. Especially during the past few years, G-8 summits have been eagerly anticipated and increasingly viewed as offering an opportunity for meaningfully advancing international climate change policy. A wide range of actors, such as states, policymakers, academics and intergovernmental or non-governmental organisations (NGOs) produce every year recommendations upon recommendations as to what G-8 leaders should commit (see e.g. Byers, 2009; Greenpeace, 2008). Agreeing on binding emission reduction targets, increasing adaptation aid to developing countries or investing more on renewable energy sources are but some of the myriad proposals circulated annually during the run-up to G-8 summits. A look, however, at the track record of G-8 summits, seems not to justify the holding of such high expectations on the part of the above actors. This article will examine G-8 climate change-related developments and make an effort at measuring the actual influence of G-8 Summit outcomes on UNFCCC climate change policy developments. Finally, given that the G-8 will be effectively replaced by the G-20 as of 2011, this article will discuss the future prospects this development entails for future climate negotiations.

### **The G-8 and climate change policy up to 2005**

Characteristic of this period (1993-2005), is that despite the increasing worldwide salience of climate change, no G-8 Presidency ever made this issue one of its priorities. Paradoxically enough, even though this was to be expected of countries notorious for their laggardness in UNFCCC negotiations, such the US, Japan, or Russia, the same could not be said of the four EU Member States, for whom climate change represented from the very outset an area in which the EU strived for leadership. Accounting for this perplexity may seem problematic at first, but a look at the geography of G-8 summits and internal EU realities clears the overall picture considerably.

In the context of climate policy, Ringius (1997: 36) divides EU Member States into three categories:

- The “green and rich” countries (Germany, the Netherlands, Austria, Denmark, Finland and Sweden);
- The “not so green, but rich” countries (Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg, and the UK), and;
- The “less rich” countries (cohesion countries).

We therefore see that three out of the four EU Member States that participate in the G-8 belong to the second category, meaning in other words that climate change was not at the time within their immediate priorities. It should come as no surprise therefore that the bulk of G-8 summits that were

presided over by these EU Member States were rather uneventful as far as climate change policymaking is concerned. Apart from this, notable is the coincidence that both the G-8 summits that were held prior to the two landmark UNFCCC conferences of that period (the 1997 Kyoto and 2000 The Hague) were presided over by the US and Japan respectively. Following the 2005 Gleneagles G-8 summit, this picture regarding climate change was to be completely reversed.

#### From Rio to Kyoto (1992-1997)

As Peichert and Meyer-Ohlendorf (2007: 2) note, energy - framed as an energy security theme - has been frequently discussed in G-8 summits – given that one of the original triggers of the G-8 summits was the 1970/80s oil crisis. However, before the UK decided to take up climate issues for the first time in 2005, environment topics had hardly ever featured on G-8 summit agendas, with very few exceptions (i.e. in the 1998 Birmingham and 2003 Evian G-8 Summits). Indeed, scrutiny of G-8 communiqués reveals that prior to the adoption of the Kyoto Protocol during COP-3 in Kyoto, Japan, climate change was hardly mentioned. The 1992 G-8 Summit in Munich, Germany, simply urged other countries to ratify the Climate Change Convention by the end of 1993, while those held between 1993 and 1996 (Tokyo, Naples, Halifax and Lyon) only welcomed the progress made towards implementation of the UNFCCC or expressed the need for reviewing and possibly strengthening the latter agreement.

The only G-8 communiqué to devote more than a couple of lines on climate change policy was that of the 1997 Denver Summit. There, G-8 leaders agreed that the agreement to be reached in Kyoto should contain quantified and legally-binding emission targets, while also expressing the view that action by developed countries alone would not be sufficient to combat climate change and therefore developing countries should “also take measurable steps, recognizing that their obligations will increase as their economies grow” (Denver, 1997). The latter statement was met with vehement hostility from developing countries, as a result of which – and despite intense US efforts to the contrary – the Kyoto Protocol contains no commitments for them.

#### G-8 climate change policy in the aftermath of Kyoto

For a short period following the exhaustive talks at Kyoto, negotiations entered a phase of low activity, as most countries needed a sufficient period of time to evaluate what had been agreed in Japan. After all, the final text of the Protocol was essentially a framework which for the most part needed to be filled out and clarified in the course of the three years to follow (up to COP-6 in The Hague in 2000). The latter was also the conclusion reached at the G-8 Summit held in Birmingham in May 1998. In particular, the final communiqué states:

As the Kyoto protocol says, to supplement domestic actions, we will work further on flexible mechanisms such as international market-based emissions trading, joint implementation and the clean development mechanism, and on sinks. We aim to draw up rules and principles that will ensure an enforceable, accountable, verifiable, open and transparent trading system and an effective compliance regime (Birmingham, 1998).

Far more interesting, however, was the fact that G-8 nations – including the four European Union Member States – agreed in Birmingham to a US-led proposal that COP-4 in Buenos Aires in late 1998 should consider voluntary adoption of legally binding targets for countries that did not already have them (Birmingham, 1998). In other words, the EU, mainly as a result of the Byrd-Hagel Resolution<sup>1</sup>, was now in support of a similar US proposal made shortly prior to COP-3. It should be noted that until the last minute, the negotiating text at Kyoto did contain a provision allowing a developing nation to adopt at any time a voluntary target of its own choice (Jacoby *et al*, 1998: 63). This provision was removed due to the strong opposition on the part of key G-77 countries – mainly China and India. The EU, having taken their side, had argued that under the terms of the Berlin Mandate<sup>2</sup>, only developed countries would be bound by binding commitments. In a reversal of position, European G-8 leaders at the Birmingham Summit, compelled by the realisation that without increasing global participation the US would never ratify Kyoto, formally agreed to the text of the communiqué. Next year, the 1999

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<sup>1</sup> Unanimous decision in June 1997 by the US Senate not to ratify the Kyoto Protocol unless it involved “meaningful” participation by developing countries.

<sup>2</sup> The Berlin Mandate was adopted during COP-1 in Berlin in 1995 and explicitly precluded any new commitments by developing countries to go alongside the binding targets to be adopted by developed countries.

Cologne G-8 Summit repeated the intention of its members to “promote increasing global participation of developing countries in limiting greenhouse gas emissions” (Cologne, 1999).

Despite the apparent need to resolve as soon as possible all major outstanding issues and finalise the details of the Kyoto Protocol during the 2000 COP-6 in The Hague, progress had been painfully slow since 1997, but – as if this was not enough – a distinct lack of urgency was noticeable from the conference halls themselves to the apex of the political pyramids of most Parties. As Ott (2001: 280) notes, whereas, for example, climate change should have been well high on the agenda of the UN Millennium Summit of World Leaders in New York (September 2000), it was instead confined to “a few speeches and footnotes”. Even more interestingly, climate change was hardly even mentioned in the final communiqué of the G-8 Summit held in Okinawa, Japan, in July 2000.

Most observers at the time were actually beginning to question whether COP-6 would succeed at all. Indeed, COP-6 did end in failure<sup>3</sup>, with the subsequent decision of US President George Bush to withdraw the US from the Kyoto Protocol complicating matters even more and prompting several observers to actually predict the end of the Kyoto Protocol and a “descent into environmental anarchy” (Earth Negotiations Bulletin, 2001: 13).

#### The G-8 stance following the US exit

The decision of the Bush administration to declare the Kyoto Protocol “fatally flawed” and publicly renounce the signature of the United States resulted in climate change policy essentially falling off the agenda of G-8 Summits. Due to the unwillingness of the US to discuss climate change policy, G-8 communiqués during President Bush’s first term in office (2000 - 2004) are rather scarce on climate change-related information and full of trivialities and subtleties. Moreover, climate change issues during this period are visibly relegated to discussion in G-8 Environment Ministers Meetings. Nevertheless, it is explicitly acknowledged that there exists a difference in opinion between G-8 members concerning what should be regarded as the most appropriate measures for mitigating global climate change. For example, the communiqué of the June 2002 G-8 Summit in Kananaskis, Canada only states that G-8 governments recognise that “climate change is a pressing issue that requires a global solution” (Kananaskis, 2002). At the same time, at that year’s G-8 Environment Ministers’ Meeting in Banff, Canada, the final ministerial statement notes that while all G-8 nations are determined to take strong actions in order to fulfil their UNFCCC<sup>4</sup> commitments, there is a disagreement on the selection of the appropriate means for doing so: “For most countries, this means timely entry into force of the Kyoto Protocol [while] ... for other countries, it means taking strong, realistic domestic actions” (Banff, 2002).

In a similar vein, the 2003 Evian, France, G-8 Summit, while adopting a package of measures on water and sanitation issues, remained rather silent on climate change, simply stressing in very general terms the need for “enhanced technology and knowledge transfer with regard to cleaner, sustainable and more efficient energy use” (Peichert and Meyer-Ohlendorf, 2007: 3). Even more interestingly, climate change was completely absent from the documents of the 2004 G-8 Summit presided over by the US in Sea Island, Georgia. As a matter of fact, that year not even the G-8’s Environment Ministers’ Meeting was held, despite the US hosting a G-8 Spouses Roundtable.

#### **Climate change enters the agenda**

The year 2005 marks a historic milestone for G-8 climate change policymaking. Owing much to Tony Blair’s inspired initiatives climate change became, for the first time ever, a central issue in G-8 negotiations. We can clearly witness during this period a coordinated effort by the G-8 members belonging to the EU to treat climate change as a priority at all the G-8 summits that they organise. Therefore, while climate change is largely absent from the agenda of the summits organised by Russia and Japan in 2006 and 2008 respectively, the exact opposite holds true when reference is made to the summits presided over by the UK, Germany and Italy.

#### The 2005 Gleneagles G-8 Summit

Following the US withdrawal from the Kyoto negotiations in 2001, neither the European Union nor any other international actor had been particularly active in formulating a strategy for reengaging the

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<sup>3</sup> For an account of the failed COP-6 in The Hague see: Dessai (2001).

<sup>4</sup> Note that reference is made to the 1992 UNFCCC and not to the Kyoto Protocol. While President Bush renounced the latter, the US remains to this day a Party to the UNFCCC, which – unlike the Kyoto Protocol – it ratified in October 1992.

US. “Saving” the Protocol in COP-6bis (Bonn) and COP-7 (Marrakech), setting a good example by heading for swift ratification by 2002, and, finally, ensuring Japanese, Canadian, Australian but, above all, Russian ratification<sup>5</sup>, had comprised the top priorities of the EU during most of the 2001-2004 period.

After more than 3 years of strenuous diplomacy, the EU finally succeeded in getting all the above priorities accomplished (only Australia<sup>6</sup> did not ratify). The early months of 2005, therefore, saw the entry into force of the Kyoto Protocol and, additionally, the launching of the EU’s Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS). Well aware that only little time should be devoted to celebrating the above developments, UK Prime Minister Tony Blair – his country holding both the EU and G-8 Presidencies – immediately moved on to the next challenge: how to bring the US back to the negotiating table. He was to unveil his strategy at the G-8 Summit in Gleneagles, UK.

Marked by the terrorist attacks in London on the second day of the conference, the G-8 Gleneagles Summit in July 2005 had at the time been portrayed as either an outright failure (mainly by environmental NGOs<sup>7</sup>) or a heartening success (by several scholars and politicians<sup>8</sup>). The truth of course, as is often the case with diametrically opposed opinions, lies somewhere in the middle. True enough, neither did world leaders agree to any firm new targets, nor did the US embrace Kyoto. True, however, was also that key world leaders agreed for the first time, albeit obliquely, that human action was a contributing factor to climate change. “We know enough”, further states the Communiqué, ‘to act now to put ourselves on a path to slow and, as science justifies, stop and then reverse the growth of greenhouse gases’ (Gleneagles, 2005).

Of notable political significance was also the G-8 agreement “to take forward a Dialogue on Climate Change, Clean Energy and Sustainable Development, [tasked to] address the strategic challenge of transforming our energy systems, ... monitor implementation of the commitments made in the Gleneagles Plan of action ... [and] share best practice between participating governments” (Gleneagles, 2005). Participants in this dialogue would include not only the G-8 members, but also the five key developing countries (China, India, Brazil, Mexico and South Africa). The backbone of the Gleneagles commitments was the Gleneagles Plan of Action (GPOA) with a pledge to:

- (a) Promote innovation, energy efficiency, conservation, improve policy, regulatory and financing frameworks; and accelerate deployment of cleaner technologies, particularly lower-emitting technologies.
- (b) Work with developing countries to enhance private investment and transfer of technologies, taking into account their own energy needs and priorities.
- (c) Raise awareness of climate change ... and make available the information which businesses and consumers need to make better use of energy and reduce emissions.

Of course, as Grubb notes, all this is wishful thinking without a process “to monitor and report back on whether and how the myriad options are being pursued” (Grubb, 2005: 233). This Dialogue or, put differently, this “structured series of meetings”, is intended to perform this function (Grubb, 2005: 233). The aim of the UK had been for this G-8+5 Climate Change Dialogue to facilitate international cooperation on climate change and clean energy technologies between the developed and developing world. Four Working Groups were even established to develop specific policy proposals: (1) Development and Transfer of Technology; (2) Market Mechanisms and Economics; (3) Adaptation; and (4) Efficiency.

It should be noted that the UK had no intention of bypassing the UN’s formal climate-negotiations process. Blair went to great lengths to make this abundantly clear in the final communiqué. The Dialogue, which was to run through to the Japanese G-8 Presidency in 2008<sup>9</sup>, was intended as a parallel process that would hopefully play a major role in furthering action and cooperation between key countries. The participation of the five developing nations was of key importance, as it was well

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<sup>5</sup> The rules for entry into force of the Kyoto Protocol required 55 Parties to the Convention to ratify the Protocol, including Annex I (industrialised) Parties accounting for 55% of that group’s carbon dioxide emissions in 1990. As a result, Japan’s 8.5%, Russia’s 17.4%, Canada’s 3.3% and Australia’s 2.2%, meant that if Kyoto was to stand a chance of ratification, the interests of the “Gang of Four” had to be accommodated. For a detailed analysis of the EU’s struggle to ensure Russian ratification of the Kyoto Protocol see: Afionis and Chatzopoulos, 2009.

<sup>6</sup> Australia did eventually ratify the Kyoto Protocol in December 2007.

<sup>7</sup> See e.g. Greenpeace, 2005.

<sup>8</sup> See e.g. Schifferes, 2005; Grubb, 2005.

<sup>9</sup> The four ministerial meetings of the Gleneagles Dialogue were held in: London (July 2005); Monterey, Mexico (October 2006); Berlin (September 2007); and Chiba, Japan (March 2008). The results of the four-year Gleneagles Dialogue sessions were reported at the 2008 G-8 Hokkaido Summit.

understood that the South would need to take a low-carbon path in order for climate change to be effectively addressed.

At the time, despite their energetic campaigns for improvements to the climate change text, several NGOs expressed their disappointment that Gleneagles did not produce concrete actions in terms of clear commitments to emission reduction targets. Prospects for such a development, however, had been rather bleak from the outset, as Bush had clearly stated in a pre-summit interview that, "If you're trying to make me say I support Kyoto, the answer is no" (qtd. in Peichert and Meyer-Ohlendorf, 2007: 6). In place, he said he preferred to "focus on the development of new technologies and called for a worldwide effort to invest in oil and gas alternatives" (Peichert and Meyer-Ohlendorf, 2007: 6).

On the other hand, the fact that the US was again participating in a climate change forum could only be seen as a positive development. Now, as to why it won US approval, it should be noted that the GPOA contained nothing the US has not agreed to in the past (e.g. technology transfer). To those disappointed by the outcome of the Gleneagles Summit, Blair's response was that he thought it unwise to "push an unwilling partner into a corner" (qtd. In O'Riordan, 2005: 3). As we shall later see, even though unseen at the time, the long-term implications of Blair's strategy were to be especially beneficial for the future of the Kyoto Protocol.

A few months later, during the December 2005 Montreal COP/MOP-1, the UK – along with Stéphane Dion, Canada's Environment Minister – were instrumental in convincing the US to participate in yet another "Dialogue", this time under the umbrella of the UNFCCC. To accommodate US concerns, it was agreed that this "dialogue on long-term cooperative action" was to be "an open and non-binding exchange of views" and would "not open any negotiations leading to new commitments" (Müller, 2006: 12). This dialogue, which focused primarily on adaptation, technology transfer and market-based opportunities, took place in four workshops – the last being held during COP-13 in 2007. At the time, the dialogue was seen as providing a valuable forum for exchanging views and information, which could somehow play a role in constructively reengaging the US in the UNFCCC in the long-term. Given that Parties had been at a loss since 2001 on how exactly to reengage the US, the dialogue was probably the best possible agreement given the circumstances.

#### The 2007 Heiligendamm G-8 Summit

The year 2005 was a challenging year for international climate change policy, but one which benefited from UK's highly successful Presidency of the EU and the G-8. The G-8+5 Climate Change Dialogue was initiated, while the UNFCCC negotiations were reinvigorated in 2005 by the agreement in principle to extend the terms of the Protocol beyond 2012 and launch a dialogue with the USA (primarily) on long-term co-operation to tackle climate change. As is often the case with ensuing years of important milestones, negotiations entered a phase of low activity. The fact that the 2006 G-8 presidency was being held by Russia – a country in which climate change is of low domestic salience – contributed to the St. Petersburg July 2006 G-8 Summit being rather uneventful in terms of advancing climate negotiations. Russia's first ever G8 presidency in 2006 identified three priority topics: global energy security, fight against infectious diseases and development of modern education systems. Climate change did not feature highly on the agenda, with the statements of the world's leaders being either restatements of positions or trivial generalizations on the need for climate change mitigation and adaptation.

The same, however, was not the case with the next year's G-8 summit. Given that Germany was holding the dual Presidency of the G-8 and the EU in 2007, Chancellor Merkel was planning to treat that year's G-8 Summit – to be hosted in the seaside resort of Heiligendamm on the Baltic Sea coast – as offering a window of opportunity for finally extracting some tangible concessions from the US President. In the run-up to the summit, Merkel was, according to the press, exerting pressure on the US to accept the mention in the summit declaration of either a commitment to stabilise global average temperature rise to 2 degrees Celsius by the end of the century, or a target of halving GHG emissions by 2050 relative to 1990 levels (ENDS Daily, 2007a). Acceptance of at least one of the two alternatives was deemed essential by Merkel's top scientific advisor on climate change, Hans Joachim Schellnhuber, if climate policy was to be provided with "a long-term orientation" (ENDS Daily, 2007a).

Prospects for success, however, appeared rather slim. Not only was the US categorically against any discussion of the EU objective of limiting temperature rises to 2 degrees, but was also opposed to Germany's proposals of (1) creating a global carbon trading system and (2) agreeing to a target of reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 50% by 2050 (ENDS Daily, 2007b). Following three days of exhaustive negotiations, world leaders were unable to bridge their differences, with the final summit communiqué containing none of the EU's original objectives. The final declaration merely read:

Taking into account the scientific knowledge as represented in the recent IPCC reports, global greenhouse gas emissions must stop rising, followed by substantial global emission reductions. In setting a global goal for emissions reductions in the process we have agreed today involving all major emitters, we will **consider seriously** the decisions made by the European Union, Canada and Japan which include at least a halving of global emissions by 2050 [emphasis added] (Heiligendamm, 2007).

Even though Barroso, Merkel, Sarkozy and Blair all expressed their full satisfaction on the “significant progress” achieved at Heiligendamm, the truth of the matter was that the wording of the final text was extremely weak. Bush only agreed to “seriously consider” the EU proposals, which of course cannot be argued to qualify for a strong agreement of any sorts. At least, it was acknowledged that post-2012 negotiations should be concluded by 2009, and that the UNFCCC represented the only appropriate forum for conducting such negotiations (Aguilar, 2007: 357).

#### The 2008 Hokkaido and 2009 L’Aquila G-8 summits

The Heiligendamm G-8 Summit was arguably a big disappointment as far as climate change policy is concerned. The 2008 Hokkaido G-8 Summit was to share the same fate. This time G-8 leaders vowed to “consider and adopt” cutting greenhouse emissions by at least half by 2050. As the *Economist* (2008: 69) notes: “Ms Merkel hailed this tighter language; the hosts called it the summit’s biggest victory, coming just 18 months before 180 countries meet in Copenhagen to hammer out a successor to the Kyoto protocol”. Close scrutiny, however, of both the Heiligendamm and Hokkaido G-8 summits reveals – as the *Economist* (2008: 69) correctly notes – the absurdness of witnessing today’s politicians taking “responsibility for meeting goals four decades from now”. The truth of the matter simply is that the G-8 could not come up even with nearer-term goals to cut emissions (e.g. by 2020).

The year 2009 marked a significant milestone for international climate change policy, as President Bush was succeeded by Barack Obama who – unlike his predecessor – has exhibited, both before and after taking over the White House, his determination to cooperate with the international community in order to control greenhouse gas emissions. Early in his term in office President Obama did actually propose that the US cuts its emissions by 17% by 2020 compared to 2005 levels. As Rankin (2009a) notes:

The EU has promised to cut emissions by 20% by 2020 and by 30% if other rich countries join in, measured against 1990 levels. Against the same 1990 benchmark, the US proposals amount to a 4% cut.

President Obama has even put in front of Congress a landmark bill, establishing an emissions cap-and-trade system in the US. The House of Representatives narrowly passed it in June 2009, while the Senate is expected to take up the measure in early 2010.

Unlike Bush, who was against the Kyoto Protocol and did all in his power to undermine it, President Obama – despite holding some reservations – is generally considered to be supportive of an agreement in Copenhagen and willing to negotiate constructively with his counterparts for reaching a mutually beneficial deal in the Danish capital. Obama’s disposition to cooperate on issues like climate change was clearly visible during the 2009 L’Aquila G-8 Summit. During his stay in Italy, for example, Obama stated that:

Developed countries, like my own, have a historic responsibility to take the lead...and I know that in the past the United States has sometimes fallen short of meeting our responsibilities, so let me be clear, those days are over (qtd. in Rankin, 2009b).

President Obama agreed *inter alia* in upholding a long-standing EU demand in that global temperature rise should be no more than 2°C by 2050. On the other hand, other mid-term or long-term targets and timetables were conspicuous by their absence, with Rankin (2009b) partly attributing the lack of progress on these issues to the fact that with Copenhagen only months away, G-8 leaders would rather keep their cards to their chests, as well as the fact that Hu Jintao, Prime Minister of China, had to leave Italy due to the outbreak of severe violence in China’s Xinjiang province. In any case, the prevailing optimistic atmosphere was hailed by EU officials, who – following eight fruitless G-8 summits while Bush held office – commented for the first time ever that the scene was now set for the global deal that had to be reached in Copenhagen in December 2009 (Rankin, 2009b).

#### **The future of the G-8/G-20**

On September 25<sup>th</sup>, 2009, world leaders attending the Pittsburgh G-20 Summit announced that the G-20 would effectively replace the G-8 group of developed economies. This development made official a growing consensus that the G-20's broader membership better represents a new global economy. According to the Summit's Leaders' Statement: "We designated the G-20 to be the premier forum for our international economic cooperation" (Pittsburgh, 2009). This new arrangement will become effective as of 2011, as the Canadian government – designated to chair the 2010 G-8 summit – exerted strong pressure upon the other G-8 members to allow it to host the last G-8 summit. As a result, "there will now be a G-20 meeting on the sidelines of Canada's G-8 Summit next June, where most of the economic business of the day will be discussed" (BBC News, 2009).

Originally, the Group of Twenty<sup>10</sup> (G-20) Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors was established in 1999 as a forum for important industrialized and developing economies to discuss key issues in the global economy, following the financial crises (e.g. the Asian crisis) of the late 1990s. In a similar fashion, the G-20 Summits of Heads of State were initiated in 2008 as a response to the current economic crisis, with world leaders having already met in Washington D. C. (November 2008), London (April 2009) and Pittsburgh, USA (September 2009).<sup>11</sup> According to the website of the G-20:

Unlike international institutions such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), IMF or World Bank, the G-20 (like the G-7) has no permanent staff of its own. The G-20 chair rotates between members, and is selected from a different regional grouping of countries each year. The chair is part of a revolving three-member management Troika of past, present and future chairs. The incumbent chair establishes a temporary secretariat for the duration of its term, which coordinates the group's work and organises its meetings. The role of the Troika is to ensure continuity in the G-20's work and management across host years (G-20, undated).

Whether this informal organisational structure is to be retained or replaced by another will probably be seen following the 2010 G-8 Summit in Canada. In any case, what does all this actually entail for international climate change policy?

During the first two G-20 summits in Washington and London, climate change – mainly due to the urgency of confronting the effects of the global economic crisis – was hardly even mentioned once in the final communiqués (see Washington, 2008 and London, 2009 respectively). In Pittsburgh, the final declaration rather trivially stressed *inter alia* the need for the World Bank, other regional banks and international organisations to contribute to the financing of "the transition to a green economy through investment in sustainable clean energy generation and use, energy efficiency and climate resilience" (Pittsburgh, 2009). With the global economic crisis gradually retreating, future G-20 summits will surely become more engaged in discussing climate change issues, with the overall benefits hopefully being rather substantial.

#### Climate policy in the context of the G-20

The current members of the G-20 include not only the former G-8 countries, but also the most important – in terms of greenhouse gas emissions – developing nations (China, India, Brazil, etc.). All together, these G-20 members account for some 80 percent of global emissions. As a result, the fact that the G-20 will provide a forum for discussing climate policy developments that will involve only 20 countries (instead of some 190 in Kyoto Protocol negotiations) is quite important in itself. Over the years, a large number of authors<sup>12</sup>, especially on the other side of the Atlantic, have criticised the Kyoto Protocol for a multiplicity of reasons, revolving mainly around its perceived environmental ineffectiveness and flawed architecture. Actually, there is a considerable scholarly literature on the factors that promote effective international environmental governance. Vogel (1997: 567) and Kellow (2006: 287), for instance, note that the most effective to-date Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) are those that are either regional or involve a small number of Parties. Vogel (1997: 567) argues that even the most significant exception, the ozone agreement (Montreal Protocol, 1987), does resemble in a number of ways "a regional agreement among rich countries".

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<sup>10</sup> G-20 members are: Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, the U.K. and the U.S. In addition, the European Union, which is represented by the rotating council presidency and the European Central Bank, is the 20<sup>th</sup> member of the G-20.

<sup>11</sup> Note at this point that these Head of State G-20 summits were held in addition to the G-20 Meetings of Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors, who continued to meet in various locations to prepare the Heads of State summits and implement their decisions.

<sup>12</sup> See: Victor, 2001. For a list of related arguments refer to: McKibbin and Wilcoxon, 2002; Böhringer, 2003.

Commenting on one of former US President Bush's climate change-related initiatives, the Asia-Pacific Partnership on Clean Development and Climate (AP6)<sup>13</sup>, Kellow (2006) argues that it provides a new model for negotiating multilateral environmental agreements (MEAs). With only 6 members involved (instead of 186 in the KP), this new partnership, Kellow claims, has the potential of overcoming the pitfalls that have limited the effectiveness of past MEAs. AP6, he notes, will have no need for the 'devices' utilised in past MEAs to overcome the problem of the slow pace of negotiations, such as lowest common denominator measures, creative ambiguity, iterative functionalism, and double standards provisions (Kellow 2006: 287). With the Kyoto Protocol being both unrealistic and unimplementable, Kellow (2006: 302) concludes, AP6, mainly as a result of its modest scope and limited number of parties, could prove a more "effective policy instrument than Kyoto".

Along this line of thinking, one could argue that the fact that the G-20 will involve only the most important representatives from both camps (industrialised vs. developing countries), could allow climate change policy to be discussed in a more constructive and fruitful manner. Collier (2009) even goes as far as to argue that in the years to come, it will actually come down to a G-5 of countries (composed of the US, the EU, China, India and Japan) that – being too big themselves to free-ride – will take on the responsibility of supervising the rest of the world. These five, he says, will be the G-5, the group that will run the world (Collier, 2009). Of course, he goes on to add that this G-5 will "be united only on issues where there is an unmistakable global interest, as with climate change" (Collier, 2009). He concludes by envisaging a world in which the G-5, in order to protect the global interest, will make "use of trade restrictions to induce compliance with low carbon emissions" (Collier, 2009).

Whether Collier turns out to be right remains to be seen. For the time being, however, dismantling the current Kyoto process is deemed an unlikely prospect and also a hugely unnecessary and unjust one. Given the current G-20 political realities, this informal arrangement could well be used in the future by its members as a yearly opportunity for them to discuss – in small numbers – climate change issues, proposals and possible agreements, which could then be taken forward to the appropriate fora for international discussion and approval (e.g. the UNFCCC).

## **Conclusion**

The impact of G-8 Summit outcomes on UNFCCC negotiations is difficult to measure. Prior to 2005, climate change was clearly low in the agenda, with no major breakthroughs being achieved. References were limited to a few lines at best, containing for the most part mere trivialities and wishful thinking. Following 2005, the picture is indeed quite different, with the two G-8 Summit presidencies (UK 2005 and Germany 2007) having exerted strong political leadership by pushing the US for concessions and intelligently initiating G-8 follow-up processes (Gleneagles Dialogue) with implications for UNFCCC discussions. The Gleneagles summit, including its follow-up process, created a political momentum that was supported and prolonged through the repetitive treatment by subsequent G8 Summits. Turning to the 2007 Heiligendamm and 2009 L'Aquila summits, the insistence of Germany and Italy to treat climate change as a priority issue maintained the political pressure on the US for reaching an agreement during the Copenhagen COP/MOP. Furthermore, they resulted in both the Bush and Obama administrations agreeing to the inclusion in the final communiqués of wording – albeit weak – on the need to consider more ambitious emission reduction targets. As far as the G-20 summits are concerned, the gravity of the global financial crisis has unfortunately not yet allowed world leaders to seriously discuss climate policy and exhibit the determination needed for the Copenhagen COP/MOP to be a success.

Turning back to the evaluation of G-8/G-20 summits, special reference should be made at this point to Blair's instrumental role in the decisions back in 2005 to establish both the Gleneagles and UNFCCC Dialogues. Even though these Dialogues were criticised at the time as being unimportant and lacking momentum, history has proven Blair's claim that the Dialogues could somehow constructively reengage the US in climate negotiations to be right, justified and rather far-sighted (Afionis, 2008: 11). As a matter of fact, one of the most tangible results of the 2007 Bali COP/MOP-3 was the establishment of the "Ad Hoc Working Group on Long-Term Cooperative Action under the Convention" (AWG-LCA), in which both the USA and developing countries would participate. The purpose of the AWG-LCA, according to the final decision, would be to "to enable the full, effective and sustained implementation of the Convention through long-term cooperative action, now, up to and beyond 2012, in order to adopt a decision at COP-15" (Earth Negotiations Bulletin, 2007: 16). In other

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<sup>13</sup> AP6 members are: the US, Australia, Japan, China, India and South Korea. It seeks to advance cooperation between its members in developing and sharing a wide range of clean-energy and energy-efficient technologies (liquefied natural gas, methane capture and use, clean coal, nuclear power, and others). For more information see the AP6's website: <http://www.asiapacificpartnership.org/default.htm> [Accessed 10 December 2009].

words, as Ott *et al* (2008: 92) note, the Convention Dialogue, initiated in Montreal in 2005, has “thus been transformed into fully fledged negotiations”, with the end result to be seen at the end of the December 2009 Copenhagen COP/MOP-5.

Looking at the history of G-8 summits, their influence on UNFCCC climate change policy developments can be identified as follows:

1. Maintaining strong political pressure – especially following 2005 – on the US regarding the need for a future climate regime based on emission reduction targets for UNFCCC Annex I Parties.
2. Strengthening confidence-building (through e.g. the G-8+5 Dialogue) between G-8 members and the most important developing country emitters, by engaging them in direct, yet informal and, therefore more open and less tense talks on a wide range of issues, such as technology transfer or adaptation funding (Peichert and Meyer-Ohlendorf, 2007: 13).

During the past years climate change has been driven up the political agenda, owing much to the G-8 presidencies of the UK and Germany. Even though no major breakthroughs have been achieved during the course of G-8/G-20 summits, it should always be kept in mind that – given its composition and informal nature – the final decisions reflect by necessity the lowest common denominator within it. In any case, though positive, more ambitious action needs to be taken in the future by the G-20 in order to combat the threat posed by climate change. Signs are at least positive for the first time in years. The new US President Obama seems to have understood the gravity of the situation, while Japan's new 2009 Yukio Hatoyama government has remarkably reversed the climate policy of its predecessor by announcing a 25% cut in emissions by 2020 compared with 1990 levels – a target arguably more ambitious than even that of the EU. In any case, with President Obama in office, future G-20 summits are likely to be far more eventful in terms of advancing international climate change policy.

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