

GLOBAL WARMING DEBATE HOTS UP

by Dominic Standish

(ANSA) p Milan, December 1 p A conference on climate change hopes to bring Russia in from the cold for the Kyoto Protocol.

Delegates from 188 countries are gathering in Milan today to debate global warming.

From 1-12 December, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change is holding its ninth conference of the Convention of Parties (COP 9).

At stake is the Kyoto Protocol, agreed in 1997. The Kyoto Protocol aims to reduce greenhouse gases (GHGs) in the atmosphere. But the USA and Australia have not ratified it.

Russia recently indicated it has gone cold on the Protocol and Russians seem more preoccupied with upcoming parliamentary and presidential elections.

If Russia also fails to ratify the Protocol, it will not be enforced because too few major countries would be participating.

The validity of the Kyoto Protocol was questioned at the conference 'From Greenhouse Effect to Climate Control' on 29 November in Milan. Political activists, scientists and economists gave presentations at this conference organised by the new think tank, Istituto Bruno Leoni.

Representatives from Italian political parties offered different positions on the Kyoto Protocol. Mario Mauro, a member of Premier Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia party, spoke in favour, while Benedetto Della Vedova of the opposition Radicals was sceptical.

The reasons for the increases in global temperatures over the last century were debated.

S. Fred Singer from the University of Virginia (USA), suggested that natural factors - such as the sun's cycle - have been overlooked by those promoting the Kyoto Protocol.

Environmentalists have tended to emphasise global warming due to human activities, especially increases in GHGs from energy production, transport and agriculture.

Supporters of this view therefore want to limit various human activities because they believe this will reduce future warming.

This is why countries that ratify the Kyoto Protocol would be required to curtail activities that produce GHGs. However, several economists described how this could have a negative impact on economic growth.

Margo Thorning of the International Council for Capital Formation (Belgium) presented economic models showing that Italy's gross domestic product could be severely affected if the Kyoto Protocol is implemented.

Fred Smith of the Competitive Enterprise Institute (USA) questioned the environmental benefits of reducing GHGs. The Protocol "is an all pain, no gain diet," according to Smith.

Professor Girelli (University of Pavia) said that it is difficult to question global warming because its advocates "want to believe in catastrophe."

During the next eleven days of the COP 9 conference, we

will see whether Russia follows the scepticism of the USA and Australia about the Kyoto Protocol as a response to climate change.

Progress on the ratification of the Kyoto Protocol is the key question hanging over the COP 9 conference.

Despite serious doubts about whether the Protocol will be enforced, delegates at COP 9 are continuing to work on many of its details.

The latest reports on climate change emissions, policy and technology are being studied. Much of the conference is focusing on how forests can be planted to soak up GHGs, especially carbon dioxide.

COP 9 will finish with ministerial discussions from 10-12 December when a concluding document will be produced.

RED

01-DIC-03 15:34 NNNN