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Foreign Editor's Briefing

## **Why Kyoto will vanish into hot air**

By Bronwen Maddox

THE United Nations conference that began yesterday in Montreal and will stretch on for nearly two weeks will fail in its aim: to devise a successor to the Kyoto Protocol on global warming.

That does not matter; in fact, it is the best outcome. Kyoto has been an extraordinary piece of work. A treaty that its most important signatories have found impossible to meet, and which has changed behaviour very little, has still become a resonant global symbol.

The best way forward now is not a "successor" to Kyoto, which covers the years until 2012. Another treaty that attempted to set fixed targets for cutting emissions could be economically very damaging — in the unlikely event that countries ever reached agreement.

The better answer is in the plethora of bargains between a handful of rich and poor countries, which some are already exploring. It is also in the development of new technology to combat global warming, and in deals to spread these quickly to poorer countries.

Some of these new suggestions for life after Kyoto have come from the US, China and India, which all found Kyoto unpalatable. For just that reason, they are more valuable than son-of-Kyoto would be. It is no surprise that European Union countries became so enamoured of the Kyoto Protocol, which finally came into force in February this year.

They have found its targets fortuitously easy to meet. For them, the treaty coincided with a revolution in energy supply.

Kyoto set the EU a target of cutting "greenhouse gases" by 8 per cent from 1990 levels by the period 2008 to 2012. Members divided up the reductions between themselves; some could see that they

would find big cuts easier than others. They are slightly off course, but not by so much that they think they have surrendered the moral high ground.

The figures tell the political story. In 2003 Britain's emission of greenhouse gases was 13 per cent down on 1990 levels, slightly ahead of its EU-appointed target of 12.5 per cent.

Of course, emissions are likely to rise between now and 2008. Britain is also missing the Government's own target of cutting emissions of carbon dioxide by 20 per cent on 1990 levels by 2010. All the same, these drops have been made possible by the shift from coal-fired power stations to gas in the early 1990s.

Germany, similarly, is almost in line with its Kyoto targets, with an 18 per cent drop in 2003, on its target of 21 per cent. France is down by nearly 2 per cent, ahead of its target of no change. True, many smaller EU countries are not doing so well. But many of the new eastern members show sharp drops well ahead of target, because of the closure of old industries.

Those "achievements" of the EU have made Kyoto an irresistible tool with which to berate others, notably the US. But extending Kyoto would be difficult for the EU too.

The EU would be well advised to look more sympathetically on the new proposals coming out of the US, Britain and the conference hosts, Canada.

These include "intensity targets" — cuts in emissions per dollar of economic output. They are more attractive than Kyoto to poor countries as well as to the US. So are proposals for rich countries to invest in technology to filter out emissions and to share it with developing countries. Other suggestions include sector targets, which would set emissions standards for some of the biggest industries, such as steel and cars.

Under most of these systems of new, flexible targets, it might still be possible to set up markets in pollution, in which countries or industries could trade the right to release emissions.

Any agreement to curb greenhouse gases is worth little if the US, China and India do not sign up. Kyoto failed in that basic requirement.

For all the rhetorical mileage which some European countries have found in Kyoto, at the US's expense, their own "success" — such as it is — is due to a quirk of history rather than to selfdiscipline or the powers of their leaders.

That gloating is no basis on which to move forward.

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