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The Paris Agreement on climate: while Washington ponders withdrawal, the rest of the world remains committed to action

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Since 1995, the climate negotiations have followed a set pattern: one round of talks follows another, with diplomats going back to work every session in their attempts to define, strengthen and coordinate international climate change action. Amidst uncertainty over the United States' potential withdrawal from the Agreement and as all the latest statistics point towards ever-faster rates of global warming, the main

objective of the recently-concluded intersessional in Bonn (May 8-18, 2017) was to work out the modalities for implementing the Paris Agreement following the COP22 summit in Marrakesh.

In November 2016, the election of Donald Trump as President after the American election sent shockwaves through the climate negotiations then underway at the [COP22 in Marrakesh](#), leading to concerns over the role that the United States would now play in the global effort to combat climate change. Six months on, the preliminary measures taken by the Trump administration—such as the executive orders restricting the EPA's power or aimed at dismantling Obama's Clean Power Plan—coupled with the President's threats to withdraw from the Paris Agreement intensified concerns in Bonn. Nevertheless, negotiators and the international community used the occasion to clearly stress the importance of America's commitment in the global fight against climate change while underlining the robustness of the Paris Agreement and the durability of its objectives. The potential US withdrawal did make its way to hallway discussions in Bonn but did not, in fact, derail negotiations, that remained on track and were motivated by the constructive "spirit of Paris" that has reigned since the COP21 in 2015.

The climate negotiators in Bonn had a specific roadmap regarding the technical provisions of the Paris Agreement, the definition of which is necessary for the Agreement's implementation: to draw up a "rule book", or an operating manual, which will have to be adopted in 2018. Negotiations moved forward on all tracks in Bonn without any major hiccups, including on issues such as transparency in the measurement of each country's greenhouse gas emissions (with respect to the data chosen, methodologies used, alignment and flexibility in different reporting obligations), or the collective assessment of progress towards reaching goals: both issues will structure the Facilitative Dialogue to be held in 2018, and above all the global stocktake on strengthening ambition to be held every five years from 2023 onwards. The conversation also focussed on financing climate policies, especially for the poorest countries. Although some disagreements between developing and developed countries did resurface, the delegations expressed satisfaction with the overall progress made. Negotiations will continue at the COP23 in November this year; the task remains enormous.

Beyond these technical discussions, which show changing power relations, sometimes, and some divergence in interests, another issue was at stake in Bonn: the question of international leadership in climate change action. While the looming cloud of America's potential withdrawal did not dampen the proceedings, it did reshuffle the world order in the climate space. Therefore China and Europe insisted on their individual and joint roles in ensuring continued action on climate change, stances which are likely to be confirmed during the [19th bilateral summit](#) to be held on the June 1-2 in Brussels between these two powers, with climate issues high on the agenda. The G7 and G20 summits, both taking place in Europe on May 29 and July 7-8 respectively, should further give them a chance to confirm this strategic partnership and remind the United States of its multilateral responsibilities. In the same vein, Canada, China and the EU announced a trilateral ministerial dialogue in September, thus taking on the mantle of the now-defunct Major Economies Forum (MEF) launched by Obama in 2009 and led by the US since then.

Finally, as another dimension of the climate leadership issue, the most vulnerable countries reiterated their unwavering commitment to combat climate change by sharing initiatives and policies already in place on the ground, while also requesting further support from the international community. The incoming Fijian presidency of the COP23, also to be held in Bonn, placed the most vulnerable countries at the very heart of the discussions. The Climate Vulnerable Forum, a partnership of 48 countries and over a billion people, released a statement for enhanced ambition and increased funding for climate change action. For these countries, the urgency and importance of the issues go far beyond technical prevarications and geopolitical dithering, and their message is a timely reminder to act, and to act now. Let's hope somebody's listening on the other side of the Pacific...