

Brazil's INDC momentum

By Alfredo Sirkis

In the end of the day climate policy prevailed over geopolitics in the Brazilian INDC, announced at the UN, last Sunday. The bottom line is a 43% reduction target, for 2030, related do base-year 2005. This roughly gives us 1.3 Gt --including carbon absorption by legally protected forests -- and 1.4 Gt without this. These are emissions slightly bellow the 1990 level.

The ambition is on the lower limit of several proposals by non-government actors. CBC had suggested 1.3 Gt (not considering the protected forests' absorption) in a scenario with no economic mechanisms like the taxation and/or positive pricing of carbon reduction) or 1 Gt, if such mechanisms are adopted. The Joint Commission for Climate Change of the Brazilian Congress had proposed, last year, a 15% reduction with 1990 as the base year. The Climate Observatory suggested 1 Gt, net.

Some government and industry sectors opposed to economy wide aggregate targets preferred a new Business As Usual curve deviation, like in Copenhagen, 2009, or a carbon intensity goal similar to China and India, Brazil's partners at BASIC and G 77 + China. The decision by the president, in the end, came much closer to the more ambitions proposals sectors advocated by civil society mitigation advocacy.

The minister for the environment Izabella Teixeira played an important role in this process by cultivation a quite comprehensive dialog, including a day long brain storming with the CBC directorate under Chatam House rule. A close presidential associate, Mauricio Tomaschin, the chairman of the EPE(Empresa Brasileira de Energia), had recently accepted the more ambitious vision and may have played a decisive role in Dilma's somewhat surprising final decision.

AN INDC IS A PROCLAMATION OF INTENT and the distance between UN paperwork and real life can be torturous with the devil hiding in the details. The goal isn't sufficient to align Brazil with a 2 degree pathway --it would have to be at least 1 Gt-- but it does steer Brazil in this direction more than any other developing country (and most developed as well). This tends to be upgraded in the future with the five years revision cycles to be agreed upon in Paris.

There are some other relevant features included in the Brazilian INDC:

- An intermediate 37% reductions goal for 2025, defined as “contribution” (the 2030 43% reduction is defined as “subsequent indicative contribution”).
- An indication of a nationally “legally binding” status by relating the INDC with actions to be “carried out under the National Policy on Climate Change (Law 12,187/2009)” and other texts of Brazilian legislation.

In the statement announcing the INDC the president also anticipated some of its implicit sectorial goals:

- The end of illegal reforestation by 2025, the reforestation of 15 million acres, the recovery of 15 million acres of degraded pastures and 5 million acres of integrated agriculture, pasture and forestry projects which sums up a potential of 32 million acres of new areas for carbon removals. It is important to note that there is much more potential for all three actions (Brazil has, in fact, 60 million acres of degraded pastures)
- A 23% of wind, solar and biomass in the generation of electricity with 66% for hydroelectricity. In the press conference the president discarded the intensification of the use of coal in the next decade when the hydro potential may stall. No specific goal was announced for the transport sector whose carbon intensity has been growing. The 16% participation of ethanol and other sugar cane derivative in the overall energy mix is stimulating since there has been stagnation in the recent period. There, also, the potential is greater.

THE MOST IMPORTANT aspect of the Brazilian INDC is the signal it sends to the COP 21 Paris process by ratcheting ambition by a developing country that has already reduced quite remarkably its emissions, in recent years, and is willing to do more now establishing aggregate targets and signaling this direction for other large non-annex II countries. It creates the momentum needed at this time to tackle some other decisive features like the taxation carbon and the positive pricing of carbon reduction, for which Brazil is advocating by proposing in the recognition of the “social and economic value of mitigation actions”.