

## **'Europe Cannot Allow Itself to Fall Behind'**

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**German Environment Minister Sigmar Gabriel discusses the rift among EU member states over a current proposal to slash carbon dioxide emissions. He says a deal will likely be reached, but that flexibility is needed to prevent companies from leaving Europe and taking jobs with them.**

**SPIEGEL:** Mr. Gabriel, the European Union heads of state and government are at a loggerheads over climate protection. Is this the end of Europe's role as the leader in climate change issues?

**Gabriel:** No. At the EU summit there was a tough discussion, but what counts are the results. No one questions the fundamental architecture of the climate package, and there should be a deal on the EU climate package by December. I am convinced that the EU will continue to set a good example.

**SPIEGEL:** Given the current financial crisis, will there be any room left for climate protection expenditures?

**Gabriel:** Climate protection creates sustainability and jobs in the real economy -- in construction, in the production of heavy machinery and in systems engineering. Even if there weren't climate change, that would still be necessary, especially in light of current fears of a recession on the markets. If we can't demonstrate to the world that that can function, then who can?

**SPIEGEL:** Why, then, is the German government demanding exclusions to the greenhouse gas emissions limits for certain industries and, by doing so, motivating other countries to push for the same?

**Gabriel:** These industries are energy intensive and are at the same time under the pressures of international competition. It would be foolish to allow these companies to migrate to regions where they aren't required to fulfil any climate protection obligations. If that were to happen, then CO2 emissions would just be relocated and jobs would also be lost.

**SPIEGEL:** How do you intend to convince countries like Poland and Italy who have fundamentally attacked the climate package

**Gabriel:** There are two trends that these countries can't avoid, either: For one, the climate crisis is intensifying. Temperatures at the North Pole this autumn are a full 5 degrees above their normal values and higher than they have ever been since we started measuring them. At the same time, Europe cannot allow itself to fall behind. I am certain that the United States next year, under a new president -- regardless whether it's Obama or McCain -- will present an ambitious program promoting renewable energies and energy efficiency. Europe could quickly fall behind.

**SPIEGEL:** There's not much time left. If the EU is unable to make progress on its climate package, is there any chance left of a global climate treaty in 2009?

**Gabriel:** If we cannot reach an agreement by December, there is a threat, given the elections for the European Parliament and the naming of a new European Commission, that the climate package could be postponed until 2010. The motor would stutter just as we are heading in to the United Nations climate summit in Copenhagen.

*Interview conducted by Christian Schwägerl*

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