Preamble

The ICEI Madrid Workshop on Climate Change Policies was held at an exciting moment, when climate change concentrated most of the actions, efforts and thoughts both at the international level and with governments, the scientific community, business and social agents. Climate change constitutes one of the challenges which forces us to think about and plan objectives not just in the short term, but also in the medium and long terms in a different way, so we have to make use of lessons learnt and facilitate a transition that considers the most vulnerable countries. Climate change policies create opportunities for business, for modernising the economy, for labour, for a better quality of life, for technological improvements, and for guaranteeing energy security.

We were in a moment when, some months after the Copenhagen Summit held in December 2009, we still found ourselves in the stages when people begin to recover and when there is a risk that different actors might guide their actions and goals, with the best of intentions, in different directions that might lead us to lose our basic objective: to construct something of real value at a global level which would allow us to tackle the challenge we are facing.

We have to learn from Copenhagen and analyse the results. There may have been quite a few misunderstandings, as a result of an extraordinarily ambitious agenda that tried to find complete solutions to every topic, instead of dealing step by step, in an ongoing process, with different elements such as mitigation, adaptation, solidarity with the very poor, the change to a global-scale model or the incorporation into the international scene of the big emerging countries, and the need for answers to different international or financial governance.

In my opinion it would have been possible to establish bases for the main elements in Copenhagen, but simply we did not manage to do so, probably because it was a complex and stressful agenda with a feeling of distrust, which probably is the toughest element and one needing special attention at this stage. It is necessary to recover trust and understand that the solution will not come about from anyone imposing his/her will on the others. The climate change battle cannot be won by looking for winners and losers or seeking to impose certain options on others. What is needed is to go beyond private interests and find solutions in which everyone feels they are forming part of the global solution.
Though there exists a certain feeling that Copenhagen was a failure, it must be kept in mind that the Agreement reached is an important step and contains significant elements. Copenhagen raised climate change to the highest level of interest among governments and public opinion. Never before had 100 Heads of State and government been seen taking a direct part in a discussion of this nature, one which managed to be summarised and which took the form of an Agreement of scarcely 12 paragraphs, but containing three key elements.

The first is the political will, at the highest level, of the countries accounting for the major part (over 80%) of global emissions and of those representing the most vulnerable to climate change. Secondly, it is an agreement that sets some of the milestones that can guide action in the medium and long terms, and perhaps what has the greatest feedback capacity is the connection to the admissible risk level (2°C), which can be modified in accordance with scientific knowledge. And, thirdly, it incorporates key references for immediate action, with the solidarity and equity components being particularly noteworthy.

Therefore, efforts must be focused now on implementing actions agreed in Copenhagen within an inclusive, constructive, process which will enable us to succeed in the next COP in Cancun, where a long list of key topics needs to be defined and solved.

It is equally important to bear in mind that in Copenhagen we have been able to reach further than we would have expected a year or six months ago, so we must avoid entering into a process of mutual accusation and blame. To continue our advance, the process cannot be converted into a “blame game”.

Also we have to take action and avoid any fear of so doing, a fear which does exist in some way as a result of the complexities and difficulties involved in action against climate change and the need to set in motion very different actions to those we have been taking during the last 200 years. We need a global context which fits in with the institutional normality of the United Nations (UN) and also the creation of the necessary conditions for stimulating private investment through proper regulations that send out a signal of value or lack of value through market prices. A more strategic step-by-step way must be thought of, in the medium and long terms, as well as the elements that can be tackled and solved on the way to consolidating the final phase.

In my opinion the recommendations, or action lines, for the coming months can basically be summarized in three axes of action. The first is to gain credibility on the common capacity to address global problems by complying with all the commitments made for the short term. Some are relatively simple, since they are quite well identified and precise, such as the commitment to short-term funding for the most vulnerable countries. However, others still require considerable skill, clarification and subsequent development. Thus, for technological cooperation, we need to agree on complex common
methodological requirements, which will have to be developed in questions such as transparency or the avoidance of emissions from deforestation.

Secondly, it is a major goal to achieve the institutional fit of the Copenhagen Agreement in the context in which the UN operates. We cannot reject the greatest legacy of the 20th century: the United Nations. We cannot nor should we act outside the UN process but, rather, we must make intelligent use of the United Nations. This could be done by supporting the process and achieving a large-scale political agreement which could find its space, through a merger with what is still the normal process of the UN, in an institutional context which would allow us to know who manages what is done, how it is done and one in which everyone can agree with the result.

And thirdly, everyone must assume commitments for specific actions. In this context the European Union has a special responsibility, since it is in the lead with its commitments and has the chance to build on the elements of the Agreement and channel them towards action. We know that some of our key partners, such as the USA, are not going to have an easy year despite their commitments. We also know that large emerging economies will keep strongly in line with what has been said by their presidents and prime ministers. Nonetheless, in spite of this, it is time for the EU to act and invite others to do so. It is important that the EU should go further in its commitments, building bridges in those areas where it has much to offer in terms of creating and reinforcing planning capacities and carrying out actions in another way. This is the case with developing technological initiatives, particularly in the energy field, which could offer general global solutions that provide incentives to improve performance much more quickly, and lead to cheaper unit costs.

These, mainly, are the three great axes around which it will be vital to work and to engage in dialogue, not just with those who have expressed their explicit support to what occurred in Copenhagen, but also with those who have rejected it, to overcome differences and attempt to find shared solutions.

_Teresa Ribera_

_Secretary of State of Spain for Climate Change_