

**l'express dimanche**

- L'événement
- Politique
- Interview
- Économie
- Société
- Édito
- Opinion
- Faits et gestes
- Faits divers
- On en parle
- Dossier
- International
- L'oeil sur ...
- Culture
- Jeunes
- Job
- Santé
- Beauté
- Déco
- Sport

**International**

DYER'S POINT

**Kyoto is back**

Why did Russian President Vladimir Putin decide to ratify the Kyoto protocol on climate change last week, only six months after his top adviser, Andrei Illarionov, called it a "death treaty"? One reason is that the European Union offered Russians visa-free travel within the 25-country bloc plus EU support for Russia's membership in the World Trade Organisation. The other reason is that Russians aren't stupid. Illarionov seemed to be in a different world from senior EU officials like Sir David King, the British government's chief scientific adviser, who said in July that "We are moving from a warm period into the first hot period that man has ever experienced since he walked on the planet." While carbon dioxide concentrations in the atmosphere over the last several million years have varied from 200 parts per million at the depth of the ice ages to 270 ppm during the warming periods between them, he warned, we have now reached 379 ppm – and that figure is going up by 3 ppm per year.

If the current trend continues, Professor King predicted, by the end of this century the earth will be entirely ice-free for the first time since 55 million years ago, when "Antarctica was the best place for mammals to live, and the rest of the world would not sustain human life." The positions seemed utterly irreconcilable — and now, suddenly, Russia is going to ratify Kyoto. The treaty that the Bush administration thought it had killed is alive again. Why?

The Kyoto protocol had to be ratified by countries that together accounted for 55 percent of the industrialised world's output of carbon dioxide in 1990, so with the United States and its Australian sidekick opposed (the US alone accounts for 25 percent of the industrialised world's emissions), the assent of Russia (17 percent) was absolutely indispensable. Once Russia does ratify, however, the Kyoto rules will be up and running in ninety days.

Traders on the new London carbon exchange, where the price of CO<sub>2</sub> jumped 20 percent to over \$11 per ton on the news of Moscow's forthcoming ratification, estimate that Russia will be able to earn around \$10 billion a year by selling the unused part of its carbon quota to countries that cannot meet their own quotas. The only real reason that Moscow delayed ratification was that the Bush administration had given Russia what amounted to a veto on the treaty, which it then used to extort major concessions from the European Union. That game is over, so what happens now? The United States will not rejoin Kyoto in the near future, but in the long run the treaty imposes a discipline on energy use in America's industrial rivals that will make them more efficient and push them into whole new technologies. Concerns about economic competitiveness may drive the United States back to the Kyoto table even before the tangible evidence of climate change convinces American public opinion of the need to return.

And what of the charge that the cuts in emissions demanded by Kyoto don't even begin to solve the problem? This accusation is usually made by people who don't actually want limits on carbon emissions at all, and is based on the (deliberately misleading) assumption that the current Kyoto quotas are the final ones. They are not, of course.

The most urgent task after the signature of the climate change treaty in 1992 was to nail down the principle that countries have a duty to limit greenhouse gas emissions that change everybody's climate, and to stop the steady rise in emissions. The Kyoto protocol of 1997 went beyond mere stabilisation and imposed a 5 percent cut on industrial countries' emissions in the period to 2010. However, it exempted developing countries like China and India from quotas until the next bargaining round, on the grounds that the current problem was mostly caused by the developed countries.

Talks on the next round of targets, running out to 2020, will start in 2008. They are bound to include much deeper cuts in carbon dioxide emissions by the industrial countries, and this time the developing countries will have to be included in the limits, too. Ultimately, scientists estimate that cuts of around 60 percent are needed globally to avoid runaway climate change, mass extinctions, and catastrophic sea-level rise. But at least the principle that every country has a responsibility for the global climate has been accepted, and stabilisation of industrial country emissions (apart from the US and Australia) is on the way.

[envoyer l'article](#) [imprimer l'article](#)**Nos Partenaires**

- ▶ ÉTATS-UNIS: [Les procédures de vote font craindre de nouveaux litiges](#)
- ▶ CONQUÊTE COSMIQUE: [« SpaceShipOne » inaugure le tourisme spatial](#)
- ▶ SOUDAN: [Aucun progrès enregistré au Darfour selon l'Onu](#)
- ▶ EN BREF: [« Oui » conditionnel de Bruxelles à Ankara](#)

[Nous contacter](#) | [Publicité](#) | [Abonnez-vous](#) | [Webmaster](#)  
© Copyright La Sentinelle  
Designed and Hosted by [Telecom Plus Ltd](#)