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## **Our Planet's Hot Climate: Reflections About the Paris Agreement, and More**

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IT HAS BEEN over a year since President Donald Trump announced on June 1, 2017 that the United States was withdrawing from the United Nations Paris Agreement on climate change. He thereby put an end to the suspense that had lasted right from the U.S. presidential election and was on a par with a good thriller. Though the Republican election platform included a point to remove the U.S. signature from under the accord and Trump had repeatedly confirmed it, the global environmentalist lobby had constantly kept world public opinion agitated by speculations in the media.

There were stories about a “climate conspiracy” in Trump’s inner circle involving the then secretary of state, Rex Tillerson, the president’s daughter Ivanka Trump, and her husband Jared Kushner.<sup>1</sup> Ivanka Trump even arranged for her father a meeting with the most high-profile U.S. pro-Paris Agreement activist, former U.S. vice president Al Gore. But Gore, the man behind famous horror stories in the media about climate change, failed to frighten Trump. Meanwhile, as a businessman, Trump apparently remembered how much money the global warming theme had raised for Gore himself, who is sometimes referred to as the first climate billionaire in history. So, the president is unlikely to have had any illusions about the true motivation of the would-be savior of the planet. German Chancellor Angela Merkel, who had been trying to teach Trump the ABC of climate change right from his moment of inauguration, didn’t get any further than Gore.

Nevertheless, Trump’s announcement about withdrawal from the Paris Agreement was a bombshell. In a high-flown speech in the White House’s Rose Garden on June 1, 2017, the president described the annul-

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ment of the United States' membership in the accord as his "solemn duty to protect America and its citizens." According to Trump, the main reason for withdrawing from the deal was "the draconian financial and economic burdens the agreement imposes on our country.... Compliance with the terms of the Paris Accord and the onerous energy restrictions it has placed on the United States could cost America as much as 2.7 million lost jobs by 2025 ... the further decimation of vital American industries on which countless communities rely" and "vastly diminished economic production," Trump said.<sup>2</sup> The Paris Agreement "punishes the United States ... while imposing no meaningful obligations on the world's leading polluters," he said. According to Trump, the "leading polluters" include China and India.

Predictably, Trump's announcement drew hurricanes of criticism both within and outside the United States. It seems no one missed a chance to lambaste the U.S. president. Attacks even came from such exotic places as the Vatican and North Korea. Even servile Poland was bold enough to bite the hand of its master, albeit it wasn't any of the country's top leaders that did it. Overtly or covertly, this criticism targeted not the United States but the unpredictable Trump, and the U.S. withdrawal from the accord was presented as one of his excesses as though something had happened that was unprecedented in American and world history.

However, all that is reminiscent of the United States' withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol in 2001.<sup>3</sup> Even the two main political parties of the United States played the same roles in the "entry-withdrawal" scenarios: the Democrats Bill Clinton and Barack Obama took the country into the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreement respectively, and the Republicans George W. Bush and Donald Trump took it out of the two accords. Is the lack of new ideas in the United States so bad that its leaders decided to reuse a pattern of many years before?

### **Obama's Good Plan**

OF COURSE, strictly identical situations don't happen in history, and it was a much harder task for Trump to withdraw the United States from the Paris Agreement than it had been for Bush to take the country out of the Kyoto Protocol. Controversies in the United States over climate change were not nearly as heated during the presidency of Bush as they are today. Bush took about two months after his inauguration to cancel the United States' membership in the Kyoto Protocol. Trump needed four months to

delete his country's signature under the Paris accord. Admittedly, Trump had taken a big step away from the Paris Agreement before that – he scrapped one of Obama's pet projects, the Clean Power Plan, an administration policy of subsidizing the production of all types of alternative energy to the detriment of traditional types. Anyone would have been impressed by the Clean Power Plan's budget of \$5 trillion. Producers of green energy, manufacturers of equipment for it, and all concomitant services were ready to put the plan into practice, and environmentalists had new horror stories ready to warn the nation about consequences of ditching the plan.

But they were wasting their time. Trump made clear there won't be any Klondike for the greens. More than that, before his inauguration, he launched large-scale audits of the budgets of the Department of Energy and Environmental

Protection Agency looking for the channels of financing of the environmentalist lobby, which was advancing the idea that global warming was a manmade phenomenon. It was a substantial sum of money: The Department of Energy alone had an annual budget of \$32 billion. For many years, the environmentalist lobby had used this money to build up strength, control media outlets, and gag opponents. Recently, it has even been compiling black lists, one of which is a Greenpeace list of "climate criminals."

Lately, the global warming theory has become a kind of secular religion, with faith in global warming replacing scientific argumentation. This quasi-religion has a special mission in the shallow materialistic set of values chosen by the West – to shift protest sentiments into an area where they can pose no threat to the establishment. Hence it is no surprise that, during the Senate procedure to confirm his nomination as director of the CIA, Michael Pompeo was tortured with questions about his position on global warming. And that wasn't a senatorial whim – it meant defense of a symbol of liberal faith.

Hence Trump is having a much harder time than Bush did 16 years ago. Bush didn't have to deal with protests so wide and organized when he was withdrawing the United States from the Kyoto Protocol. And that's not hard to fathom either. There weren't such amounts of money behind

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the pro-Kyoto protests. Nobody would have dreamed of sums in the area of trillions. But today the deal of a century is getting thrown away, and so it's easy to understand the motivation of those who organize mass protests, in which activists and just ordinary intimidated philistines take to the streets, – they know what they're after.

### The G20 Minus One

MARKETS didn't react to Trump's move the way alarmists had predicted – shares went up. The Dow Jones Index rose 135 points to 21,144, the Nasdaq Composite Index went up 48 points to a record level 6,246, and the Standard & Poor's 500 index rose 18 points to 2,430.<sup>4</sup>

But there was panic in Europe. European leaders were making feverish efforts to do something about the situation. The Group of 20 (G20) summit in Hamburg on July 7-8, 2017, was chosen as the site for the first battle. A draft strategy called *G20 Hamburg Climate and Energy Plan for Growth* had been expected to receive unanimous approval at the summit. But Trump's policy scuttled the plan. The United States was slowing down work on the text of the document, demanding watering it down point by point.<sup>5</sup> Some countries, for example Turkey and Indonesia, sided with the United States. All this resulted in a rather hazy text.

Various elements were removed from the original draft, including:

- a 2025 deadline for ending fuel subsidies (naturally it was fossil fuels that were meant) and not renewable energy;
- a 2018 deadline for submitting roadmaps for the complete decarbonization of economies by 2050, thereby nullifying emissions of greenhouse gases;
- putting together a climate action plan for international financial institutions;
- statements in favor of carbon taxes;
- all proposed revisions in 2018 of the commitments of Paris Agreement signatory states, naturally to make them stricter.

Nevertheless, the United States refused to sign even this watered-down version of the plan, provoking an unusual situation – a departure from the principle of consensus approval of all documents passed by the G20. As a result, the plan received 19 instead of 20 signatures.<sup>6</sup> But that wasn't the end. After the summit, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan announced that the Turkish parliament was suspending the Paris Agreement ratification procedure. He also said that he would seek better

terms for Turkey under the accord, including revisions of the country's pledges. Erdogan said that Turkey should not have absolute national limits on emissions imposed on it but that it should have limits similar to those adopted by China, in other words there should be relative reductions, for example per unit of GDP without putting any limits on the total volume of GDP, and hence on the country's economic growth. Thus, Trump's idea of renegotiating the Paris Agreement has received support, and we should now wait and see what will come next.

### **Bomb From Macron**

THE LAST YEAR saw one more change in European politics. Initially, it was Angela Merkel who was, without much enthusiasm, Trump's main adversary on climate affairs, but the U.S. leader reacted to her exhortations with polite silence at best. Then Emmanuel Macron, the new French president, decided to try the role of the main champion of global climate conservation. He made loud declarations of plans to try to dissuade Trump from withdrawing his country from the Paris Agreement. But meetings between the two leaders failed to make Trump change his mind, and new moves followed.

Trump was openly defied, and on American soil as well. After learning about his decision to cut funding climate alarmists, Macron announced a plan to invite American scientists supporting the manmade global warming theory to work in France and allocate 30 million euros to fund their research. Macron said that France should become home to such scientists. Their salaries of between 400,000 and 600,000 euros a year wouldn't be bad by European stands.<sup>7</sup>

This was a regal gesture by France, a country not known to be too generous, the land of Gobseck and Harpagon. Whether that will be the perception of American scientists, who are used to other budgets and salaries, is a question mark. And besides, what would be allocated to each scientist would include not only his own salary but also the salaries of two assistants and transportation and other research-related expenditures. How much would be left to the scientists themselves? The 30-million-euro sum would be a four-year allocation equal to about one 4000th of the budget of the U.S. Department of Energy.

But incongruity of this kind is hardly a feature of another initiative of Macron, a proposal for a "Global Pact for the Environment." Macron initiated debates on the proposed pact on the sidelines of the 72nd Session

of the UN General Assembly. An analysis shows that, if adopted, the accord will change the entire system of international environmental agreements and in the long term give serious problems to Russia.

The pact was drafted by the so-called Club des Juristes, a pro-government analytical center headed by former French foreign minister Laurent Fabius, chairman of the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference, the forum in Paris where the Paris Agreement was adopted.<sup>8</sup> The drafting work brought together 150 specialists from 54 countries, which implies the project had a sizable budget. It had sponsors from among major French financial and industrial firms such as BNP Paribas, Engie, Michelin, Saint-Gobain, and L'Oréal.

Macron has confirmed that he is determined to have the international community accept the pact as a new global legal framework for environmental protection. He presents the suggested pact as a revolutionary document, an agreement on "third-generation human rights" after the UN convention on economic, social and cultural rights and the UN convention on civil and political rights. Predictably, Macron's initiative was hailed by the French media and certain environmental nongovernmental organizations, some of which became beneficiaries of the pact project budget.

But what is this project about? Despite the large number of experts involved in its preparation, the draft pact doesn't produce the impression of a consistent, logical document. It is a rather eclectic set of formulae and propaganda clichés some of which are borrowed from other international documents, including the Paris Agreement, a document Fabius is very familiar with. Borrowings from the Paris Agreement even include a point, extraneous to the proposed pact as an environmental document, about "emphasizing the vital role of women in sustainable development matters and the need to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women," whose inclusion in the text was the result of pressure from feminist groups. The draft also borrows a point from climate change negotiations that lack of scientific proof of the existence of an environmental problem is no reason for inaction. Today, there is only one such scientifically unproven problem, i.e., climate change, primarily the hypothesis that it is the result of human activity. So, this point is nothing else than an attempt to get the Paris Agreement in through the back door in the expectation that the United States with its self-perception as the main defender of all human rights won't notice the points that run against its position and will vote for the accord (although the United States would put itself in an ambiguous situation thereby).

What are the human rights that the pact would defend, and in what way would they be defended? Mainly it is “the right to live in an ecologically sound environment adequate for their health, well-being, dignity, culture, and fulfillment.” These are sacred words, but is there at least one country where this right is fully exercised? There isn’t, and so one suspects some dishonesty on the part of the authors of the draft. And apparently somebody’s interests behind the project.

What these interests are becomes clear as soon as it gets clear that the pact would target each state separately. It is they that would bear the main responsibility for the state of the environment. Signatory states would pledge to pursue policies of environmental integration and cooperate in trying to prevent further climate change. They would pledge to “pursue sustainable development” and “to this end ... ensure the promotion of public support policies, patterns of production and consumption both sustainable and respectful of the environment.” Countries would also take action to minimize environmental damage from armed conflicts. As one of its main points, the pact would introduce the “polluter pays” principle into international relations. This means that any individual or entity would be authorized to sue any government to seek compensation for the violation of their environmental rights. Hence a government would be a defendant in an environmental rights court case in any jurisdiction. But the draft pact formulates environmental rights in a way that would prevent any country from providing all such rights. The pact would open a Pandora’s box of endless lawsuits against governments that the latter would have zero chance of winning while greedy lawyers would be the main beneficiaries due to unbelievable incomes these litigations would earn them. The Club des Juristes has apparently taken good care of the adepts of the legal profession.

One more borrowing from the Paris Agreement – in fact something that has been copy-pasted from it – is the mechanism for monitoring the implementation of the pact. Such monitoring would be the job of a committee consisting of independent experts. Despite its declared non-punitive nature, this format would not guarantee impartial assessments and would provide leeway for arbitrary and biased interpretations. It seems that, in a hurry, the authors of the draft overlooked the fact that, in the Paris Agreement, the meaning of this mechanism (if it does have any meaning) is determined by the goal of the accord, namely preventing further global warming. The proposed pact, unlike the Paris Agreement, doesn’t set itself such a goal. This raises the question who needs a mech-

anism for the external assessment of the activities of sovereign states, and by some allegedly objective experts as well. This is a particularly important issue for Russia. With extremely rare exceptions, such “independent experts” have been making only negative assessments of various Russian sectors, from sports to the economy.

Another trick of the authors of the suggested pact is an attempt to represent it as a document addressing human rights for a new generation.

“We already have two international (human rights) pacts.... The idea is to create a third, for a third generation of rights – environmental rights,” said Fabius. Sounds fine if one doesn’t know about fundamental differences between the proposed pact, on the one hand, and the two pacts mentioned by Fabius, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, both of which were adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1966. Neither of these two covenants makes provision for the prosecution of sovereign governments or for the external assessment of their actions by so-called independent experts. Moreover, whereas these two covenants are mere declarations, the pact would be a typical legally binding agreement dealing with specific financial risks, prescribing sanctions and making provisions for an implementation monitoring mechanism. Hence one should hardly be inspired by Fabius’ lofty verbiage.

The proposed pact is designed as a systemic document overriding all other international environmental agreements and largely laying down global environmental rules. It would put all signatories of today’s more than 500 international environmental agreements with their different degrees of compliance in a regime of commitments that they had not anticipated when they were signing those accords. This means that the pact initiative is nothing else than an unprecedented political provocation that exploits real problems but suggests inadequate solutions. The authors of the draft propose their mechanism for the prosecution of governments for supposed environmental offenses but are glossing over opportunities for arbitrary interpretations and open diktat that this mechanism would offer. The monitoring mechanism – a group of “independent experts” – would make it possible to organize selective prosecution of countries, and there apparently already exists a list of targets. In those countries, the pact, if it becomes law, would:

- provoke the prosecution of the government by individual citizens on the lines this is done via the notorious European Court of Human Rights;
- lead to the creation of an infrastructure supporting and escalating

conflicts between individual citizens and their government; this infrastructure would include nongovernmental organizations whose role is specially singled out in the draft pact;

- trigger court actions against the government would result in a negative image of the country in the world media and provoke international sanctions against it;

- inevitably provoke frictions between governments and businesses as a result of suits against governments because the main polluters are companies, which would undermine the country's social stability.

All these are direct threats to Russia. Therefore, our country takes a cautious attitude to the proposed pact. Developments over the past few decades and Russia's participation in attractive formats such as the Montreal Protocol make clear that, despite all the sweet phrases about rescuing the planet, such formats serve the interests of specific groups that lay down the rules, and that others have nothing to gain from them.

### **Paris Zigzags**

THE 2016 UN CLIMATE CHANGE Conference in Marrakech set a 2018 deadline for the final approval of specific procedures for the implementation of the Paris Agreement. Has this deadline been met? Over the past year, it has become obvious that the Marrakech conference delegates were too optimistic and overlooked the diversity of opinions among Paris Agreement signatory states. This was the result of apparent euphoria over the unexpectedly easy approval of base criteria necessary for the accord to come into force and to become a full-scale international document. But this apparent optimism seems to have been fizzling out because of fruitless, and at times deadlocked, negotiations. There have been two rounds of talks this year, both in Bonn.

One excellent example are rather cantankerous negotiations on new market mechanisms that haven't taken developed countries any closer to a deal with developing countries. The key point at these talks is who would benefit from the new mechanisms. Developing countries naturally want themselves to be the only beneficiaries. It doesn't even make them soften their stance that the rule in the Paris Agreement on absolute global reductions of emissions makes an exception for developing countries. Developing nations can't, by definition, reduce emissions, and their commitments under the accord don't include any obligations to that effect. Their right to unlimited emissions is their main victory in negotiating

their participation in the agreement. But it doesn't stop them from demanding incomes to be provided by a mechanism taking part in which is, strictly speaking, impossible without commitments to limit emissions. How to satisfy these demands without departing from common sense and without going back on emission limits is a problem that four rounds of talks have been unable to resolve.

Meanwhile, new moot points were raised, and new proposals were put forward at negotiations. One of the goals that some countries have been fighting for over the past year is to cut the temperature rise limit from 2 to 1.5 degrees. A strange idea from the historical point of view, but it isn't accidental and is very pragmatic. It is a manipulative attempt to instigate urgent action to fend off a supposedly immediate threat. Portraying tiny changes in temperature as omens of imminent catastrophes prevents any balanced analysis and any rational action.

Humankind has already seen this tactic when the anti-global warming movement was discussing its previous objective, a limit on the content of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) in the atmosphere. Until very recently, it had been predicted that exceeding a threshold of 400 parts per million would spell disaster, just as we are warned today that hell would break loose if the temperature is allowed to rise by more than 2 degrees. The actual CO<sub>2</sub> content was nearly as high in those days as the 400-ppm threshold, and there also were strong demands for immediate action. Eventually, the critical threshold was reached in 2014 (today's level is 410 ppm), but nothing terrible happened. Foreseeing a scandal, the authors of climate thrillers came up with a replacement: they set a temperature rise target of 2 degrees to be approved by the Group of Eight (G8) summit in Heiligendamm.<sup>9</sup> This target was hyped on such a wide scale that everyone solidly forgot about CO<sub>2</sub> and focused on the new illusion. Today, about a decade later, yet another change of target is being planned, and a similar case is being made out. One wonders what we will be required to do in another five years' time. To orchestrate climate cooling?

Disputable though all these thresholds are, there are plans to reformat Paris Agreement – its main principle, the voluntary nature of signatories' commitments, may disappear without a trace. As a result of negotiations in Bonn, a global review of the accord that was initially scheduled for 2023 was rescheduled for 2018. It means assessing whether what the signatories are planning to do between 2025 and 2030 would make the target of stabilizing the global temperature at a maximum rise of 2 degrees Celsius attainable by 2100. It has already been announced that what the

signatories are committing themselves to is insufficient: by 2030, the total emissions would reach a minimum of 60 billion tons of CO<sub>2</sub> equivalent, while the 2-degree threshold needs a maximum of between 40 billion and 42 billion tons to be achieved (according to projections whose accuracy is a separate story).<sup>10</sup> This means that all the signatory countries will have to cut their target emissions by 33% – or by an estimated 66% if the threshold is 1.5 degrees.

What would that mean, for example, for Russia, which has pledged to cut its emissions to 70% of the 1990 level but has cut them to 58% by now? If the 2-degree target is confirmed, we'll need to reduce emissions to 46% of the 1990 level. If the target is 1.5 degrees, we'll have to cut them to 23% of that 1990 level. To assess the consequences of such reductions for our country is impossible even hypothetically – they would not only rule out any economic development but could put Russia out of existence.

Even the optimistic scenario of emissions reduction is unfeasible because developing countries, including China, have no pledges of absolute reductions of emissions. Naturally those nations won't make any reductions. But those countries are responsible for about two thirds of global emissions, which means that cutting emissions to meet the 2-degree target would make developed countries, including Russia, to terminate any emissions.

Russia's cautiousness about the Paris Agreement is understandable. It shouldn't let itself be restricted by an unfinished construct that can produce various surprises. It is the only sensible stance on Russia's part to put off ratifying the accord until all its details are definitively approved, and meanwhile defend its interests at UN climate negotiations that obviously won't be easy.

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#### NOTES

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*Key words*: Paris Agreement on climate change, George W. Bush, G20.