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GLOBAL CLIMATE AGENDA: BIG GAMBLE

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Abstract. The article considers one of the most relevant and, at the same time, the most controversial topics of international politics – tackling climate change (global warming). The author attempts to answer a question: is the global climate agenda a natural priority, or is it being promoted intentionally? On the one hand, global warming is a scientifically acknowledged process, encouraged by industrial emissions of greenhouse gases (carbon dioxide, methane, etc.), which may be harmful and dangerous for the environment and for humanity. On the other hand, climate change is one of many serious environmental problems that require urgent solution (such as water and soil pollutions, deforestation and desertification, loss of species, plastic waste and other). The question is: for what reason has the global warming been gaining increased attention for the last decades, primarily from Western states which not only proclaimed it their chief political goal, but have also been consequently promoting this agenda in the international arena? The Framework Convention on Climate Change (UN FCCC) adopted in 1992 at the UN Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, with the additional Kyoto Protocol of 1997 and then the Paris Climate Agreement of 2015, aimed mainly at the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions worldwide, undergo a yearly “stock-taking” and promotion at the UN Climate Conferences. The European Union and its leading states (Germany and France) as well as the United States were the first to declare a “green transition” meaning a full decarbonization of their economies by 2050, expecting the rest of the world to follow this path as well. They have already spent billions of dollars for climate aims, including direct assistance to “fragile states”, and are ready to spend much more in the near future. Regular informal meetings at high level (the World Economic Forum in Davos, the Bled Strategic Forum) have also been mostly devoted to the climate agenda in recent years. Analyzing the results of climate-related events of the last decades and especially the last years, the author comes to a conclusion that the global climate agenda in its current form is being promoted intentionally and is a new form of struggle for world economic and political leadership.

Keywords: climate agenda, environmental policy, green transition, environmental pollution, greenhouse gases, emissions, United Nations, COP26, COP27, World Economic Forum in Davos.

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ГЛОБАЛЬНАЯ КЛИМАТИЧЕСКАЯ ПОВЕСТКА: БОЛЬШАЯ ИГРА

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Аннотация. В статье рассматривается одна из самых актуальных и вместе с тем наиболее противоречивых тем мировой политики – борьба с изменением климата (глобальным потеплением). Предпринимается попытка ответить на вопрос: является ли глобальная климатическая повестка естественным приоритетом или она поддерживается целенаправленно? Анализируя результаты “климатических” мероприятий последних десятилетий на уровне государств, международных организаций (прежде всего ООН) и неформальных встреч (форумов мировых элит), автор приходит

к выводу, что глобальная климатическая повестка в ее существующем виде продвигается заинтересованными силами намеренно и представляет собой форму борьбы за мировое экономическое и политическое лидерство.

Ключевые слова: климатическая повестка, экологическая политика, “зеленый транзит”, загрязнение окружающей среды, парниковые газы, выбросы, ООН, КС-26, КС-27, Всемирный экономический форум в Давосе.

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INTRODUCTION

The global climate agenda, a range of issues related to combating climate change (global warming), is an important component of the broader environmental agenda. Today, due to a culmination of multi-vector political and economic processes, it finds itself at the epicenter of global contradictions. This paper aims to address whether this situation evolved naturally or resulted from deliberate actions.

The COVID-19 pandemic, originating as an epidemic in China at the end of 2019¹, significantly bolstered the green agenda in global politics and economics. This was attributed, on the one hand, to a noticeable decrease in anthropogenic air and water pollution during the enforced economic pause in 2020, a result of quarantine measures implemented by various states and regions worldwide. On the other hand, it stemmed from the exponential increase in plastic pollution due to heightened demand for disposable medical products, plastic items, and packaging. The surge in the green agenda was a reaction to these events and processes: the swift environmental “clean-up” during the economic downturn not only highlighted the scale of human-induced pollution but also showcased the ecosystem’s restorative capabilities. Simultaneously, the escalating volume of plastic waste brought attention to the imperative for systematic efforts toward its disposal.

However, the subsequent large-scale geopolitical crisis, which escalated throughout 2021 and intensified at the end of February 2022 with the onset of the Special Military Operation (SMO) by the Russian Federation in Ukraine, sparked

an “energy war” between the “collective West” and Russia, relegating the green agenda to a secondary position. Western sanctions against Russia, coupled with the policies of these countries – primarily in the European Union – rejecting the import of traditional Russian energy resources, particularly oil and gas, prompted Europe to urgently seek alternative sources. This included the revival of previously mothballed coal power plants and a bolstering of nuclear energy within the EU². These actions starkly contrasted the green trend observed in Western Europe in recent decades, where it had been a global frontrunner.

According to recent statements by European leaders, the abandonment of fossil energy resources³ is accelerating the transition to green (carbon-free) energy and the green economy as a whole⁴. At the 17th International Strategic Forum in the city of Bled (Slovenia)⁵ on August 29–30, 2022, the head of the European Commission (EC) Ursula von der Leyen said: “... ”

² Coal energy is considered the “dirtiest” because it emits a large amount of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere (especially carbon dioxide – CO₂). Nuclear energy, in turn, was recognized as dangerous back in the 1980s, and until recently, a number of European countries (Italy, Germany, Belgium, Switzerland, Spain, etc.) pursued a course toward a gradual abandonment and closure of NPPs.

³ Traditional energy sources – fossil fuels (coal, oil and gas), which take hundreds of millions of years to form – are non-renewable resources. When fossil fuels are burned to produce energy, harmful greenhouse gases are released into the atmosphere, which is why traditional energy sources are considered environmentally “dirty”.

⁴ “Green transition” is a transition to an environmentally friendly economy with zero emissions of greenhouse gases (primarily carbon dioxide and methane) into the Earth’s atmosphere.

⁵ *Bled Strategic Forum*. Available at: <https://bledstrategicforum.org> (accessed 26.01.2023).

¹ The pandemic was declared by WHO on March 11, 2020.

With our *REPowerEU initiative*⁶, we will invest together EUR 300 billion to accelerate the green transition... So, ...the era of Russian fossil fuels in Europe is coming to an end” [1]. However, the facts indicate the opposite: renewable energy sources (RES)⁷ at this stage are not able to cover the energy needs of Europe (and certainly not of the whole world). Recognition by the European Commission in 2021 of nuclear and gas energy as green for the period of “green transition” [sources 1, 2] indicates the absence of a viable alternative at present. In July 2022, the European Parliament rejected a draft resolution demanding that the EC abandon this stance, and also officially recognized nuclear and natural gas as “clean” forms of energy [source 2].

However, it is common knowledge that these so-called transient energy sources⁸, from an environmental point of view, have serious disadvantages and are de facto not clean. Nuclear energy remains potentially dangerous, especially within the context of military operations and international terrorism, and natural gas is a mixture of hydrocarbons, primarily methane – CH_4 , with small admixtures of other gases, and is a fossil fuel. Its combustion results in significant greenhouse gas emissions released into the atmosphere⁹. Moreover, the current supply of natural gas to Europe is inadequate and comes at high prices. This situation adversely affects the economies of European countries and consequently hampers the realization of plans aimed at achieving zero emissions as far as such plans necessitate considerable financial investments.

⁶ EC plan to abandon Russian energy resources by 2030, which came into force in the spring of 2022 in connection with military actions in Ukraine.

⁷ Renewable energy is the energy obtained from natural sources that are replenished at a rate exceeding the rate of their consumption (wind, solar, water, biomass and geothermal energy).

⁸ Approved for use during the “green transition” period.

⁹ Methane is considered one of the most powerful greenhouse gases and one of the most important factors in the current global warming in terms of anthropogenic activities. According to the International Energy Agency (IEA), the greenhouse effect from methane emissions is more than 85 times greater than the effect from carbon dioxide emissions over a time horizon of 20 years. The main emitters of CH_4 are energy, agriculture, and waste dumps [2].

The “*European Green Deal*”¹⁰ envisages expenditures of 1 trillion euros in the next decade, with a total planned investment volume of 2.6 trillion euros [3]. In addition, it involves the launch of the “*Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism*” (*CBAM*)¹¹ – the introduction of an additional (“carbon”) tax on the import of “dirty” goods¹², which should ensure an influx of additional funds into the EU budget, estimated by European experts to range from 5 billion to 14 billion euros per year [3]). These economic measures are designed to influence countries where the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions falls short of European standards, serving to offset the costs of producing “environmentally friendly” goods within the EU. However, the effectiveness of implementing such a tax would be rendered meaningless if European producers fail to meet the established production criteria.

Equally significant is the current political backdrop surrounding the “green transition”. According to the head of the European Commission, the rejection of Russian energy resources aims to eliminate “energy blackmail” by the Russian Federation. Concurrently, green energy necessitates rare earth elements, one-third of which are mined in China. However, the European Union aims to reduce dependency on China as well [1]. At the same time, for example, the German Minister of Economics and Climate Protection Robert Habeck and the Minister of Foreign Affairs Annalena Baerbock represent the “Union 90/Greens” party, who for many years¹³ have strongly opposed the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline. Yet, amid the backdrop of acute gas shortages, now they oppose the embargo on Russian gas due to the impracticality of its quick and complete

¹⁰ The EU strategy for a systemic fight against climate change, aimed at achieving complete climate neutrality of the European continent by 2050 [source 3]. It is a “new strategy for regenerative growth” that does not require the extraction of natural resources.

¹¹ *Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)*. European Commission. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/green-taxation-0/carbon-border-adjustment-mechanism_en (accessed 11.02.2023).

¹² Not meeting EU criteria for carbon dioxide emissions into the atmosphere. “Dirty” industries are located mainly outside the European Union in less developed countries.

¹³ Long before their party won the federal parliamentary elections and entered the government in December 2021.

abandonment in the near future [source 4]. The events of 2022 have, metaphorically speaking, disrupted the established order: amid a significant energy crisis in Europe, accelerated statements about “green transition” appear increasingly paradoxical. While the EU remains committed to the Green Deal, the mounting “energy pressure” casts doubt on its successful execution.

The ongoing “energy war”, seemingly unrelated to the “green transition” (which started long before the current events) and the climate agenda itself, is intricately connected to these issues and intertwines with them in reality. This is less about environmental protection and more about global leadership. Countries facing restricted access to traditional energy resources are relying on new energy generation methods and environmental regulations to solidify their leadership positions and generate additional financial gain. However, the process of “green transition” is gradual and not fast. An immediate and abrupt abandonment of traditional energy resources for political reasons bluntly puts the question of “environmental leadership” and leadership in general. There exists a high probability that the European Union might cede its environmental policy position, with other geopolitical players (such as the USA, China, Russia, India, etc.) assuming the forefront.

Addressing queries concerning the development of the green agenda, particularly the climate theme in politics, economics, and the information sphere, requires a fundamental identification of who stands to benefit most from it.

SHAPING THE INTERNATIONAL CLIMATE AGENDA

It’s important to note that the environmental, especially the climate, discourse has become relevant not just due to objective reasons but also due to the active involvement of interested parties – green parties (primarily European), industry lobbies, and governments (primarily within the Western bloc such as the EU, USA, etc.). The international climate agenda is advancing through official channels within the UN and other international organizations, through initiatives from individual states and state coalitions, and

semi-officially within elite global forums (such as Davos and Bled).

The genesis of the Green Movement in the 1970s and 1980s was a natural reaction to government inaction in the face of the nuclear threat and worsening global environmental conditions. Its significant achievement was elevating environmental concerns to national and international political agendas. However, later, political factions began leveraging this topic for their domestic and foreign policy objectives.

This is evident through the amplified focus on climate issues. While academic debates persist about the actual extent of anthropogenic impact on climate change, there’s no definitive consensus. Some scientists argue that the human contribution to global warming is relatively insignificant and time-limited, attributing warming primarily to natural processes [source 5].

Beyond climate change, numerous other severe environmental issues result definitely from human economic activities: plastic pollution in land and oceans, chemical water contamination, soil degradation leading to desertification and deforestation due to unsustainable agriculture and water management, chemical fertilizers poisoning the soil, GMO cultivation, species extinction, etc. These pressing issues demand urgent solutions. However, political elites, in the West in particular, often fail to prioritize or even acknowledge them. The alarm is mainly sounded by the Green Movement – environmental NGOs and some environmental parties.

Why is this happening? This discrepancy likely arises because the severity of problems is not the primary criterion in modern environmental policy. Instead, other priorities take precedence. For instance, the fight against climate change, although ostensibly targeting an environmental threat, serves as a convenient facade to achieve a more critical goal: bolstering the leadership positions of economically advanced countries amidst a changing global landscape. This leverage is sought through transitioning to green energy and economies, along with environmental regulatory mechanisms. For example, CBAM, if successfully implemented, would economically favor Eurozone states over third countries, especially those

technologically lagging. This compels the latter to keep conforming to the rules set by developed economies. This economic mechanism of “environmental regulation” is not benign: it infringes upon basic norms of international law concerning the national sovereignty of third countries exporting to the EU. It mandates (albeit ostensibly voluntary) scrutiny of production cleanliness in these countries by European inspectors. As V. Varnavsky rightly highlights, attempts at cross-border carbon regulation via CBAM aim to create a new system of international relations and global governance, enabling unauthorized oversight and control of economic activities in sovereign states outside the EU, specifically regarding greenhouse gas emissions. Additionally, it violates WTO norms, international climate pacts and exhibits traits of “discrimination, protectionism, and competition constraints in the environmental and production sphere” [4].

The battle against global warming spans across political, economic, media, and cultural domains. While the consequences of climate change – extreme weather events (the heat, draught, rainfalls, floods, typhoons, etc.), desertification and other irreversible processes – largely afflict the world’s poorest nations, the initiative has been held for decades by the most economically developed states, citing their “special responsibility” for polluting the atmosphere with greenhouse gases. Let us examine how this “special responsibility” works.

PROMOTION OF THE CLIMATE AGENDA AT THE UNITED NATIONS

The primary and principal official platform for discussing the climate agenda at the international level is the UN Climate Change Conference, held annually (since 1995) to implement the provisions of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UN FCCC)¹⁴,

¹⁴ Agreement on common principles for countries to act on climate change, adopted at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992 (entered into force on March 21, 1994) and signed by more than 180 countries around the world. Available at: https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/convention_text_with_annexes_russian_for_posting.pdf (accessed 14.02.2023).

the Kyoto Protocol 1997¹⁵, and the Paris Agreement 2015¹⁶.

The Kyoto Protocol, which proved ineffective, and its successor, the Paris Agreement, practically signify stages in establishing an international framework to regulate greenhouse gas emissions intended to mitigate global warming.

Thus, at the regular *26th Conference of the parties to the UN FCCC in Glasgow (COP26)*¹⁷ from October 31 to November 12, 2021, the Glasgow Climate Pact was adopted¹⁸, which consolidated the various agreements. These included acknowledging the urgency of the situation, reaffirming the Paris Agreement’s objective to limit the global average temperature increase to 1.5°C, intensifying efforts to cut CO₂ emissions in the near term and achieving net-zero emissions by approximately 2050, transitioning away from fossil fuels (coals, oil and natural gas), meeting commitments on climate finance by developed nations, enhancing support for climate adaptation and resilience, finalizing the *Paris Rulebook*¹⁹, and addressing issues related to loss and damage [source 8]. In addition to the Climate Pact, a number of

¹⁵ The international agreement to reduce greenhouse gas emissions into the atmosphere to curb global warming, signed in 1997 in Kyoto (Japan), served as a supplementary document to the 1992 UN FCCC. The Kyoto Protocol set a goal of reducing total anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions “by at least five percent compared to 1990 levels during the commitment period from 2008 to 2012” (Article 3.1) and set individual obligations for 40 developed countries [source 6]. The second commitment period (Doha Amendment 2012) ended in 2020.

¹⁶ The 2015 Paris Climate Agreement was adopted by all 196 parties to the UN FCCC at the 21st Conference of the Parties to the Convention, held in Paris on December 12, 2015 (signed on April 22, 2016, entered into force on November 4, 2016). All its signatory countries undertake to take measures to ensure that the increase in global average annual temperature is significantly less than 2°C per year, and taking into account the seriousness of existing risks, no more than 1.5°C. The Paris Agreement replaced the Kyoto Protocol, the objectives of which were generally not fulfilled [source 7].

¹⁷ *Glasgow Climate Change Conference (COP26)*. October–November 2021. United Nations Climate Change. Available at: <https://unfccc.int/conference/glasgow-climate-change-conference-october-november-2021> (accessed 14.02.2023).

¹⁸ *Glasgow Climate Pact*. Available at: https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cop26_auv_2f_cover_decision.pdf (accessed 13.02.2023).

¹⁹ A set of procedures for the practical implementation of the Paris Agreement 2015.

new projects were announced focusing on forest conservation, methane emissions, decarbonization of road transport, transition to a low-carbon economy, and private financing of “green transition”. On the eve of *COP26*, the European Union and the United States launched *the Global Methane Pledge*²⁰, which provides for the adaptation of mechanisms developed on carbon dioxide emissions to identify the price of methane emissions²¹ [2]. As a result of the Conference, China agreed to take strict measures on methane emissions for the first time [5]. These agreements at *COP26* officially established the green agenda as a priority for global development at least until the mid-21st century, in politics and economics.

The next *27th Conference of the parties to the UN FCCC (COP27)*²², held in Sharm-el-Sheikh (Egypt) on November 6–18, 2022, was dedicated to the transition from negotiations to “planning for implementation” of all the many promises that were made at *COP26* and previous conferences.

On the eve of *COP27*, several expert and analytical reports appeared, indicating that the world had not yet managed to limit global warming even to the 2°C level, the minimum target of the Paris Agreement. Thus, according to UN FCCC estimates, countries’ implementation of their new “(Intended) Nationally Determined Contributions” (NDCs) will lead to an increase in total greenhouse gas emissions by 10.6% (3.6–17.5%) by 2030 compared to 2010 levels. To achieve the goal of limiting the global temperature increase to 1.5°C, as per the Paris Agreement, emissions must be reduced by 43% [source 9, p. 6]. Similar figures were published by the World Resources Institute [source 10] and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) [source 11].

²⁰ *Global Methane Pledge*. Available at: <https://www.global-methanepledge.org> (accessed 14.02.2023).

²¹ Countries supporting the Global Commitment account for 60% of global GDP and 30% of global methane emissions (the 10 largest CH_4 emitters account for more than 70% of global emissions). At the initial stage, more than 20 charitable organizations will support the implementation of the Global Methane Commitment, which have promised to allocate more than USD 200 million for this purpose. The European Union will be the leader in this area [2].

²² *Sharm el-Sheikh Climate Change Conference (COP27)*. United Nations Climate Change. November 2022. Available at: <https://unfccc.int/cop27> (accessed 14.02.2023).

UNEP presented a new report titled “The Closing Window”, which also confirms the thesis that the world is not meeting the goals of the Paris Agreement to contain the increase in average annual temperature. If current trends persist, the average temperature could rise by 2.8°C by 2100, suggesting that the window of opportunity for action is rapidly closing [source 12].

Given these findings, at *COP27*, the fight against global warming was considered a decisive battle for humanity’s survival. UN Secretary-General António Guterres, in his address at the Conference’s opening, emphasized that climate change remains the century’s central challenge, likening the lack of tangible progress to steering along the “highway to climate hell with our foot on the accelerator”. He employed a familiar climate alarmist metaphor of a “ticking clock” and an impending “point of no return”, urging *G20* nations to intensify efforts toward “green transition”. Guterres highlighted the necessity for significant financial investments (requiring USD 40 billion annually by 2025 and over USD 300 billion annually by 2030) from developed countries for “adaptation needs”²³, constituting only half of the required funds. He urged governments worldwide to impose a tax on “golden shower” of fossil fuel companies’ profits. The UN Secretary-General stressed that the current choice is between “cooperation or perishing” [source 13].

During his speech, U.S. President Joseph Biden emphasized the existential significance of global warming for “human security, economic security, environmental security, national security, and the very life of the planet” [6]. As the leader of a nation bearing significant responsibility for ongoing climate processes²⁴, he reiterated commitments to meet previously established targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 and pledged to invest billions of dollars in combating climate change, including providing aid to impoverished countries. Just before the Conference, the Biden administration revealed a plan to reduce methane emis-

²³ This refers to climate change adaptation programs.

²⁴ The U.S. is the world’s second-largest greenhouse gas polluter after China [source 14].

sions from the American oil and gas industry. Following the *2021 Global Methane Pledge*²⁵, the U.S. and EU, along with Japan, Canada, Norway, and Singapore, issued a joint declaration to decrease methane emissions from the oil industry [6].

The Conference launched the *Sharm el-Sheikh Dialogue* to improve understanding of the **financial goals of the Paris Agreement**. For the first time at a UN climate summit, discussions emerged regarding the restructuring of the global financial framework to support climate objectives. The focus centered on altering the roles of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund to stimulate financing for green energy transition projects. According to estimates from climate economist and expert N. Stern, developing countries will require USD 2.4 billion annually for climate objectives by 2030, while the World Bank may only offer about half of that amount [7].

Following the results of *COP27*, the **Loss and Damage fund** was established – the first fund in history²⁶ to compensate for losses from irreversible climate change (payments of “reparations” to “fragile states”²⁷). Wealthier states, major contributors to global warming, agreed to annually allocate funds to mitigate damages in poorer countries that have contributed less to the climate crisis but suffered disproportionately from it²⁸. Meanwhile, China, the world’s largest polluter of greenhouse gases, though supporting the initiative, rejected payment obligations, attributing them to the “historically richer” United States and EU countries [8]. *COP27* acknowledged the failure to meet the goal of increasing climate finance to USD 100 billion by 2020 (which needs to be fixed), and

²⁵ To date, the Pledge has been signed by about 130 countries [6].

²⁶ The already existing *Green Climate Fund* from the UN and *Global Shield* from the G7 countries allocated only 8% of their funds to poor countries. Contributions to the new fund are also voluntary.

²⁷ This formulation was adopted in order to exclude such non-poor developing countries as China and Saudi Arabia from the recipients of assistance.

²⁸ Losses for the most vulnerable countries due to climate change are estimated at USD 116–435 billion in 2020; by 2030 this figure will reach USD 290–580 billion, and by 2050 it will exceed USD 1.1 trillion [8].

agreed on institutional mechanisms to implement the “Santiago Network”²⁹. This network aims to connect vulnerable countries with providers offering technical assistance, knowledge, and resources to address climate risks. A new **insurance system “Global Shield against Climate Risks”** was also created for “fragile states”³⁰, aimed at providing quick access to funds in the event of natural disasters related to global warming.

In addition, a comparison and generalization of the “adaptation priorities” included in the National Adaptation Plans of various countries around the world was carried out. As a result of the Conference, the UN FCCC Adaptation Fund was replenished by USD 230 million. The goal of doubling funding for “climate adaptation” by 2025 remains relevant with an expected report on this topic from the Standing Committee on Finance³¹ slated for consideration at the next 28th Conference in 2023 [9].

A number of initiatives were launched as part of *COP27* including the establishment of two work programs, a package of 25 joint actions in key areas (such as energy, road transport, steel, hydrogen and agriculture) and the implementation of a satellite *Methane Alert and Response System* for methane emissions. Practical guidance was provided for developing net-zero emissions commitments for industry, financial institutions, cities and regions³². Another initiative, the *Forestry and Climate Leadership Partnership (FCLP)* aims to combat forest loss and land degradation by 2030 [9]. Additionally, efforts continued on the inaugural

²⁹ *Santiago Network*. United Nations Climate Change. Available at: <https://unfccc.int/santiago-network> (accessed 14.02.2023).

³⁰ *Global Shield against Climate Risks*. InsuResilience Global Partnership for Climate and Disaster Risk Finance and Insurance Solutions. Available at: https://www.insuresilience.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/2022-Global-Shield-against-Climate-Risks_Concept_FINAL.pdf (accessed 14.02.2023).

³¹ *Standing Committee on Finance (SCF)*. United Nations Climate Change. Available at: <https://unfccc.int/SCF> (accessed 14.02.2023).

³² *Integrity Matters: Net Zero Commitments by Businesses, Financial Institutions, Cities and Regions*. Report from the United Nations’ High-Level Expert Group on the Net Zero Emissions Commitments of Non-State Entities. Available at: https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/high-level_expert_group_n7b.pdf (accessed 12.02.2023).

“Global Inventory” of the Paris Agreement³³ (a mechanism for checking the process of its implementation). Guterres announced a plan to develop early warning systems worth USD 3.1 billion over the next five years, as well as to create a new tool for tracking greenhouse gas emissions around the world³⁴ [source 15].

Following the Conference’s outcomes, a set of decisions was adopted [source 16]. The primary outcome document, **the Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan**³⁵, once again reiterated the aspiration to accomplish the goals of the Paris Agreement, underscoring the importance of developing an environmentally sustainable energy system, and transitioning to renewable energy sources. It emphasizes that to achieve net-zero emissions by 2050, an annual investment of USD 4 trillion in renewable energy until 2030 is necessary. The global transition to a low-carbon economy will require at least USD 4–6 trillion annually. However, notably absent from the document is a provision for the gradual abandonment of all fossil energy resources. Instead, it uses the term “energy with low emissions”, encompassing wind and solar power plants, nuclear reactors, and coal power plants equipped with carbon capture and storage systems. Consequently, in practice, this formulation permits the use of nuclear power, natural gas, and even coal under specific conditions, which environmental experts argue may stimulate “false solutions” further development [8]. Frans Timmermans, the European Commission’s Executive Vice President for the European Green Deal from 2019 to 2023, recognized the demagogic nature of the documents adopted at the Conference, stating that *COP27* failed to bridge the “yawning gap between climate science and climate policy” and did not outline a clear pathway to achieve the primary temperature goal of the Paris Agreement (1.5°C) [10].

³³ *Global Stocktake (GST)*. United Nations Climate Change. Available at: <https://unfccc.int/topics/global-stocktake> (accessed 12.02.2023).

³⁴ Developed by the non-profit coalition *Climate TRACE (Tracking Real-Time Atmospheric Carbon Emissions)* led by former U.S. Vice President Al Gore.

³⁵ *Sharm el-Sheikh Implementation Plan. Decision -/CP.27*. Available at: https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/cop27_auv_2_cover%20decision.pdf (accessed 06.02.2023).

The accomplishments from *COP26* and *COP27* are expected to serve as the foundation for the “Global Stocktaking” in November 2023 during *COP28*. This assessment will gauge the results that states manage to achieve in mitigating consequences, adaptation, and implementing the Paris Agreement [source 17].

The practical inefficiency of the decisions made is primarily due to their focus on the external manifestations of climate change (destruction and damage) rather than addressing the primary cause – the preservation of a significant portion of fossil fuels in the energy sector. Moreover, substantial evidence suggests that UN climate conferences serve as platforms for world leaders and fossil fuel lobbyists to advance their interests under the guise of the climate agenda.

For instance, Swedish schoolgirl Greta Thunberg, the ideologist and founder of the youth movement “*Fridays For Future*” (*FFF*) / “*School Strike for Climate*”³⁶, declined to attend *COP27*, labeling it a venue for greenwashing³⁷, lies and fraud. According to her, the UN climate conferences do not actually set a goal to change the world system, but are only used by world leaders to attract attention [source 18].

Additionally, a report by the NGO “Union of Concerned Scientists” of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology³⁸ points to the fact that the organization of the Conference was carried out by the PR firm *Hill+Knowlton*, which also serves major polluting companies (*Chevron*, *ExxonMobil*, *Saudi Aramco*, *Shell*) and a key group of international lobbyists for the fossil fuel industry – *Oil and Gas Climate Initiative*. *Hill+Knowlton’s* London office also serves as the latter’s headquarters. This creates an unacceptable

³⁶ *Fredagar for famtiden / Skolstrejk for klimatet* (Swedish).

³⁷ The term comes from English *whitewash* (whitening, covering up defects) and denotes a deceitful marketing technique used to convince the public that a product is environmentally friendly.

³⁸ *The Union of Concerned Scientist (UCS)* was founded in 1969 by teachers and students of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Its tasks include a critical analysis of government policy in areas where science and technology are important, scientific assistance in solving pressing environmental and social problems, etc. The Union’s employees are scientists, economists, and engineers dealing with the issues of environment and security.

conflict of interest at the UN-level event, since the goals of the lobbyists in reality are directly opposite to the stated goals of the climate conference. Consequently, the event becomes a platform for promoting the interests of the fossil fuel industry. Moreover, the number of delegates from this industry at *COP27* increased by 25% compared to *COP26*. Representatives from countries exporting traditional energy resources “pushed through” the topic of decarbonization of oil, gas, and coal, purification technologies – instead of a gradual reduction of production of these types of fuels [11]. According to a study recently published in *Nature*, academic centers sponsored by the fuel industry in the USA, Canada, the UK, etc., deliberately underestimated the environmental damage from the use of natural gas, giving it preference over RES in their academic publications. This strategic promotion presents fossil energy resources as environmentally justified and green [12].

Thus, despite the visible progress towards specific measures to fulfill the Paris Agreement’s objectives within the annual UN climate conferences, including increased funding from the most developed countries, doubts linger regarding the effectiveness of these actions. The active involvement of lobbyists from the fossil fuel industry not only impedes progress but renders the entire process meaningless. It raises an open question: why do lobbyists from the dirtiest energy industry have a voice at UN climate platforms, and who benefits from this? In essence, what is the genuine purpose of such forums in this context?

LOBBYING THE CLIMATE AGENDA AT THE STATE LEVEL

In addition to the UN, the “climate” narrative is actively promoted by individual states and groups of states, primarily the European Union and the United States³⁹, intensely competing with each other in this field. It was through their efforts that the fight against global warming turned into a new arena of political, geopolitical, and economic competition.

³⁹ Under Democratic Presidents Obama and Biden.

Since 2005, the European Union has been using an Emissions Trading System (EU ETS), which underlies its energy policy seeking to achieve climate neutrality in the EU by 2050. In 2019, the European Commission adopted the aforementioned European Green Deal. The leaders in the process of greening European politics are Germany and France, with the former being the main beneficiary of the Green Deal. In December 2021, the world’s largest environmental party, “Union 90/Greens”, entered the Bundestag and formed a ruling coalition with the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SDPG) and the Free Democratic Party (FrDP). In the government, the Greens received a number of key ministerial positions, which determines the green vector of Germany’s policy today. France, in turn, acts as a consistent defender of the Paris Agreement. Even before the pandemic, the country’s leadership tried to speed up the energy transition in the economy, which caused violent protests of the “yellow vests” in 2018–2019. French President Macron approved 146 grassroots environmental projects proposed, including a proposal to include climate protection in the national Constitution, which received the support of 75% of the country’s population. Like Germany, France fully supports the European Green Deal [13].

In the USA, also in 2019, members of the Democratic Party Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez⁴⁰ and Ed Markey⁴¹ presented a resolution of the “Green New Deal” – a plan for the transition to a green and “fair” economy. President Biden, immediately after taking office in January 2021, revived the environmental initiatives of the previous Democratic Obama–Biden administration and designated the climate agenda as a priority for American policy in the near future. In accordance with the “Plan for a Clean Energy Revolution and Environmental Justice”⁴² published before the elections, the goal was set to

⁴⁰ Member of the U.S. House of Representatives from New York state.

⁴¹ Senator from Massachusetts.

⁴² *The Biden Plan for a Clean Energy Revolution and Environmental Justice*. Biden Harris. Available at: <https://foreconomicjustice.org/the-biden-plan-for-a-clean-energy-revolution-and-environmental-justice/> (accessed 12.02.2023).

achieve zero emissions (decarbonization of the economy) and the transition to 100% “clean” energy no later than 2050. To achieve these goals, the Biden administration restructured government bodies with the President issuing several executive orders, the main being the “Executive Order on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad”⁴³ [13].

The analysis of recent events reveals that spearheaded by the European Union and the United States, the climate agenda has become the central topic in international political discourse, substantiated by significant political initiatives within their domestic policies and on the global stage.

FORUMS OF THE WORLD’S ELITES AS “CLIMATE” PLATFORMS

It is significant that the topic of increasing the importance of green policy and economics, aimed primarily at preventing climate change, has also been raised at the World Economic Forum (WEF) over the past few years (in 2020, 2021, 2022, and 2023) in Davos – the main forum of the world’s political and economic elites. The aforementioned high-level Forum in Bled (often referred to as the “regional Davos”) also pays close attention to the issues of global warming. In this context, the “Fridays for the Future” movement, well-promoted in the West, led by Greta Thunberg, gained attention at the highest levels, including the UN.

The main theme of *Davos 2020* (January 21–24, 2020), the 50th anniversary forum with a record number of participants, was “Stakeholders for a Cohesive and Sustainable World”. Its main task was the formation of a system of “stakeholder capitalism” in the context of the Paris Agreement and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)⁴⁴. The traditional “Global Risks

Report”⁴⁵ recently published, highlighted three significant challenges for the foreseeable future: consequences of climate change, cyber threats, and economic instability. Climate-related risks were predicted to be the most likely over the next decade, including weather disasters, challenges in mitigating and adapting to climate changes, substantial biodiversity reduction, ecosystem destruction, and human-induced environmental disasters. World leaders, including then-German Chancellor Angela Merkel and EC President U. von der Leyen, addressed climate protection issues. Merkel specifically focused on Germany’s success in this realm. Von der Leyen announced the EU’s intentions to shift from a resource-based economy towards a digital one and introduced plans for a carbon tax on imports. It was the first time Davos participants acknowledged climate protection as a fundamental aspect of national economies and businesses. Major corporations such as *Siemens* and *Microsoft* pledged to transition to carbon-neutral operations by 2030. Simultaneously, *British Petroleum’s* CEO, Bob Dudley, highlighted the challenge of increasing energy demand by 30–40% due to population growth by 2040, despite commitments to reduce carbon emissions by 50%. He suggested a carbon tax could be an effective solution [14]. Hence, economic regulation of carbon emissions, a core aspect of environmental regulation within the climate agenda, was established as the foundation of the new “stakeholder capitalism” system at the WEF 2020.

In May 2020, Great Britain’s Prince Charles⁴⁶ and Davos Forum director Klaus Schwab presented the *Great Reset*⁴⁷ project, a plan for a “sustainable recovery” of the economy after the COVID-19 pandemic, which, in essence, proposed reformatting the global political and economic system according to new rules established by the world elites – leaders of economically developed countries and CEOs of the largest TNCs.

⁴³ *Executive Order on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad*. 27.01.2021. The White House. Available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/presidential-actions/2021/01/27/executive-order-on-tackling-the-climate-crisis-at-home-and-abroad/> (accessed 12.02.2023)

⁴⁴ The 17 Sustainable Development Goals set out in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which was adopted by world leaders at the UN Sustainable Development Summit in September 2015.

⁴⁵ *The Global Risks Report 2019*. Available at: https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Global_Risks_Report_2019.pdf (accessed 12.02.2023).

⁴⁶ Now Charles III, King of Great Britain.

⁴⁷ *The Great Reset*. World Economic Forum. Available at: <https://www.weforum.org/great-reset/> (accessed 12.02.2023).

The authors also promoted the idea of “stakeholder capitalism”, where ideas of sustainability would become more profitable through increased innovation, science, and technology. Carbon pricing was again identified as a way to achieve sustainability [15].

Dedicated to the *Great Reset, Davos 2021* (January 25–29, 2021) outlined three main trends of the new world order: the final consolidation of China as a leader of the world economy⁴⁸; strengthening the importance of green economics and policies aimed at preventing climate change; rethinking the role of international cooperation and international organizations in solving global problems [source 19].

At the Forum, the leaders of the EU countries reaffirmed their commitment to complete the transition to RES, paying special attention to hydrogen as a promising alternative source of energy. However, an important nuance remains behind the scenes: about half of the currently produced hydrogen is obtained by reforming (conversion) of natural gas, 30% by reforming oil and liquid petroleum products, 18% by coal gasification, and only 4% by electrolysis of water [16]. New methods for producing hydrogen⁴⁹ are still under development. Thus, the share of environmentally friendly (green⁵⁰) hydrogen produced without a carbon footprint is currently no more than 4% and directly depends on the degree of using RES. In addition, the cost of green hydrogen is several times higher than other (non-environmentally friendly) types. Thus, the statements of European leaders were, in fact, declarative in nature.

U.S. Special Presidential Envoy for Climate John Kerry announced that Washington will seek to lead the global climate agenda in connection with the resumption of its participation⁵¹ in the

⁴⁸ According to forecasts, China will overtake the United States economically in 2028.

⁴⁹ Biochemical, thermochemical splitting of water by solar energy, high-temperature electrolysis, etc.; from biomass, garbage, ethanol, metallurgical slag, etc.

⁵⁰ The accepted color gradation of hydrogen depends on the method of its production and the “carbon footprint” (the amount of harmful carbon dioxide emissions into the atmosphere): green (produced using renewable energy sources by electrolysis of water) is considered the cleanest – no CO₂ emissions [sources 20, 21].

⁵¹ With Democratic President Joe Biden taking office in 2021.

Paris Agreement of 2015, but this document is no longer sufficient for the world: a new international strategy is necessary for the transition to “clean” energy with an emphasis on a mechanism for monitoring and measuring countries’ progress in achieving NDCs in the fight against emissions (which goes beyond the Paris Agreement and should be the next stage in establishing control over emissions on a global scale). In addition, the American representative called for holding China accountable for its contribution to the development of “dirty” coal energy⁵².

Special attention at the Forum was paid to the role of trade rules in climate policy, in particular, the need to correlate WTO norms and the Paris Agreement, as well as the introduction of the EU “Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism”, which will force other countries to more actively reduce carbon emissions gas (see above) [source 19].

At *Davos 2022* (May 22–26, 2022), the climate issue was raised again. Against the backdrop of events in Ukraine, this time it did not have absolute priority, but the general alarmist tone on the issue of global warming persisted. Renowned American financier and philanthropist George Soros emphasized in his speech that while the war had taken immediate precedence, the evident deterioration in the climate crisis could soon become irreversible, posing a severe threat to civilization [source 22]. U.S. Special Envoy for Climate Kerry also gave a pessimistic forecast, saying that the process of achieving a carbon-free economy was lagging behind, and there was no time left to slow down the rate of global warming. China’s Special Representative for Climate Change Xie Zhenhua stated the need for China and the United States to work together to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement, referring to the formation of a Chinese-American⁵³ working group to reduce greenhouse gas emissions [source 23].

A pivotal issue discussed at Davos 2022, within the framework of energy policy and “green transition”, particularly relevant due to EU countries’ refusal to import fossil energy resources

⁵² China is funding 70 coal-fired power plants as part of the Belt and Road Initiative.

⁵³ China and the U.S. are the world’s two largest emitters of greenhouse gases (see above).

from Russia, revolved around the extent to which oil and gas companies could be involved in this transition. The forum debated a sensitive topic: the Ukrainian conflict should not serve as an excuse for veering away from renewable energy objectives. EC President von der Leyen stated: “The economies of the future will no longer rely on coal and oil, but on lithium for batteries, on silicon metal for chips, on rare earth permanent magnets, for electric vehicles and wind turbines. And it’s for sure – the green and digital transitions will massively increase our need for these materials”. She stressed that the conflict in Ukraine had further bolstered Europe’s determination to swiftly phase out Russian fossil fuels and entirely shift to RES and hydrogen [source 24].

At *Davos 2023* (January 16–20, 2023), the discourse on climate change continued, closely linked to economic matters. Von der Leyen highlighted that global warming entailed substantial economic costs. She suggested that transitioning to zero carbon dioxide emissions would necessitate establishing a new kind of economy based on cutting-edge technologies: “The next decades will see the greatest industrial transformation of our times – maybe of any times. And those who develop and manufacture the technology that will be the foundation of tomorrow’s economy will have the greatest competitive edge... To get ahead of the competition, we need to keep investing in strengthening our industrial base and making Europe more investment- and innovation-friendly” [source 25]. However, this is hindered by high electricity prices (resulting from EU sanctions on Russia) and competition from the United States and China, subsidizing their environmentally oriented industries. In other words, the fight against the climate threat is primarily viewed by world elites through the lens of economic gain and competition.

Similar to the UN climate conferences, the World Economic Forum actively works on restructuring the global economic system to align with climate goals. The ongoing discussions by representatives of the world, primarily Western, elites on issues of “green transition” and the “energy war” in the context of combating global warming demonstrate the close correla-

tion and interdependence between these topics, their paramount importance for establishment figures, lobbyists, and other influential entities from First World countries. The intensive promotion of this specific environmental issue, coupled with a substantial increase in global climate finance via international organizations, various interstate agreements, and private enterprises, implies that the political and economic benefits of “green transition” (alongside accompanying mechanisms) significantly outweigh the real and potential costs. It is evident that there is a maximum bet involved – a battle to sustain political and economic dominance.

CONCLUSION

Summing up the above, the following conclusions can be drawn.

On the one hand, the issue of global warming is indeed real and presents a certain threat to the environment and humanity, substantiated by abundant scientific data (though the precise extent of anthropogenic influence remains inconclusive). Undoubtedly, the climate issue must be addressed not in isolation but concurrently with other equally pressing environmental concerns, the human-induced nature of which is quite evident. Given the bias in numerous academic institutions, it is likely that the scale of the climate problem is somewhat exaggerated, while other environmental issues are deliberately overlooked or relegated to the background of the political, economic, and informational agendas. This duality is also evident in the choice of approaches to solving the climate problem: the shift towards low-carbon energy and economy based on RES, while inherently progressive, faces substantial pressure from fossil fuel industry lobbying. Moreover, it involves the extensive use of non-ecological and environmentally hazardous “transient” energy sources (like natural gas and nuclear energy, respectively), primarily deemed safe for market reasons. All of this distorts the very essence of “green transition”.

On the other hand, the exclusive focus of world elites on climate issues suggests that the exploitation and promotion of this topic in global politics, economics, cultural and informational

spheres cannot be solely explained by environmental concerns but also carries significant political and economic dividends in the present and future. It appears that the persistent dominance of the climate agenda in global and regional political events, elite forums, media, etc., is more likely the result of targeted efforts by interested states and economic lobbies rather than a natural progression driven by actual climate hazards.

The race for dominance in the post-industrial world necessitates new approaches, shifting the emphasis from economic accomplishments to quality of life. The green agenda, especially the climate issue, perfectly fits this paradigm. On one hand, it serves the “noble cause” of shielding nature from harmful anthropogenic effects while preserving a human-friendly environment. On the other hand, it enables the regulation of global economic and political development using environmental policy mechanisms in a certain direction.

Other major geopolitical players such as China, Russia, India, Brazil, etc., have joined the

new competitive struggle initiated by Western states. The outcome of this struggle is unpredictable, and unforeseen scenarios are entirely plausible, such as the initiators of this process losing world leadership. In the context of the “energy war”, it is not solely individual states’ progress towards “green transition” that is crucial, but their energy sustainability and the general economic situation in these states and globally. Nations with access to diverse energy resources possess more flexibility in choosing an energy development strategy, whereas those lacking energy resources rely on new technologies, economic, and political regulatory mechanisms. A global campaign to combat climate change deliberately tied to the urgent need for rapid “green transition” in energy development might become a sort of economic trap, demanding massive financial investments. Additionally, practical experience reveals that climate-related goals are often unfeasible. In this regard, the promotion of the climate agenda increasingly resembles a high-stakes game of chance with unpredictable consequences for the involved parties.

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