



GLASGOW FOLLOW-UPS: ROCKY ROAD TO CLIMATE REALPOLITIK

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The eagerly awaited Glasgow Climate Change Conference (COP26) has successfully ended in a set of initiatives and declarations, varying by topic and the number of participants. As well, a final political statement was adopted, confirming the commitment of all states to the UN climate action, embodied in the global framework conventions.

Still, these outcomes look mostly modest in the eyes of Western countries – they have not, they say, led to a consensus among participating nations on the ways and phasing of primary challenges on the climate agenda.

Despite US President Joe Biden's lashing out at Russia, along with China too, our representatives refrained from retaliatory rhetorical blows, displaying diplomatic restraint. And given the White House's plummeting approval ratings and the Republicans' well-known scepticism on the climate issue, many are wondering whether the Americans will still be "in the game" in a few years' time.

On the other hand, Russia is quietly and self-promptly moving towards fulfilling the goals set in the Paris Agreement and other UN documents. Clear and, most importantly, realistic, scientifically based deadlines have been put for our country to achieve carbon neutrality. The most important, although largely unnoticed by the world mass media, a 2050 Strategy of Social and Economic Development with Low Greenhouse Gas Emission was adopted. Unique, innovative technologies, which took many years to develop, are introduced into production to accelerate the green transition.

Finally, today 86% of our electricity is already generated by the green energy sector (including natural gas). We are far ahead of many other



countries in this aspect, including those that take a moralistic tone in their 'climate rhetoric'. Most importantly, the Russian leadership has managed to balance out the fight against global warming and its attendant factors and the preservation of production and jobs, the loss of which could affect the lives of ordinary Russians no less than fires and floods. And it is this radical divergence over prioritisation that is provoking political storms in the US and European countries.

Back to the Glasgow summit, the climate agenda at the event was, alas, partially drowned in media noise and a stream of propaganda clichés. And now, as the UN begins preparations for the next conference on this topic and reflects on the significance of the agreements reached, one has to wonder why a breakthrough comparable to the Paris Agreement or the Kyoto Protocol has not happened.

Admittedly, the issue of climate change itself is much broader and more ambitious than the approaches and issues raised in Glasgow. Yes, it is a critical aspect of sustainable development of humanity. And, at the same time, it is an issue of national security for most of the world's powers, which, according to our American colleagues, are in a stage of "competition". Under these conditions, the principle "one for all, and all for one" will inevitably "limp".

Let us take the notorious carbon tax and other decarbonisation measures as an example. UN experts spoke of the need to move in this direction as a fundamental truth. At the same time, the concerns and dissent of the global energy community are blatantly ignored. A logical question arises – where is the line between the collective West's sincere interest in combating global warming and the attempts by some



countries/corporations to ride this issue in unfair competition with unfriendly nations and companies?

We have seen similar designs recently in the EU's new Arctic Strategy. Its authors propose banning oil and gas exploration and production in the region under the pretext of combating climate change. Another issue concerns the Northern Sea Route. It is no secret that the prospects for the development of this artery in the context of melting Arctic ice appear to be strategically crucial for Russia's energy, trade and, in no small measure, military security. We would not like to see these issues become the subject of geopolitical games under climate pretexts.

Overall, the Glasgow outcome confirms that a sober attitude to climate change is needed from Russian leaders. The fact remains that global warming is real and does threaten the well-being and health of millions of people, including in Russia. And it is today that the rules of the game in combating climate change are being worked out in the objective fashion, by which the global community will live for the foreseeable future.

The Climate Pact adopted following the conference, whilst being too much of a compromise and somewhat vague, can still be seen as a milestone in the struggle to build new coordinates in this area. In addition, the declaration on the preservation of forests was, in fact, a show of support for the position long promoted by Moscow, according to which the absorption of greenhouse gases by forests and other ecosystems is one of the most effective measures – in practice rather than in words – to prevent a climate catastrophe. Equally important, Glasgow finally announced the finalisation of the rules for the implementation of the Paris Agreement, including overall timeframes for nationally determined contributions, as well as market and non-market mechanisms for Article Six.



All these small but significant breakthroughs should not be underestimated. But they are not the sole focus of climate diplomacy. After all, aside from the UN platforms, which are necessary, amongst other things, to maintain the commitment of all players to the principle of international solidarity, other formats should be developed. These can utilise resources of already existing organisations, such as the Arctic Council, OPEC+, BRICS, SCO, others, or new institutions, not to mention about bilateral channels. By the way, it is only through such channels that constructive discussion on the inadmissibility of sanctions against climate projects is possible.

As the conference showed, it is vital to show firmness and dilute the stream of declarative statements and the eco-activist pathos that poisoned the COP26 summit, with a concentrated portion of Realpolitik, in which we are traditionally strong. The latter should be balanced, thoughtful and serve Russia's national needs.

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