

Global Climate Change: Intellectual Response of Civil Environmental Movements

Everyone at least once in his or her life has heard that global climate has been changing. But who can explain what does it mean and what we mean by this phrase. It is easy to find a great amount of essays, articles and scientific researches that represent figures, facts and findings, conforming that the global climate change. Different kind of sources may inform about it in different manner. By the way, it does not really matter, whether you will take it from the Guardian or the IPCC report or from the “Guide to the Cold Calculus of a Hot Planet” (carried out by a non-governmental organization DARA group). What is the most important that all the reports give us the same arguments and proofs.

Usually, speaking about climate change, people imply global warming. Telling the truth, there are more indicators and signs that provide strong evidence of the situation. The first is higher temperatures. Because of GHGs emissions there are more heat in the Earth atmosphere and it is causing average temperatures to rise all over the world. During the past century the global average temperature has already risen by 0.7°C.

The second sign is more droughts. Drought happens when there is no snow or rain for a long period of time. An increase of temperature leads to evaporation of moisture from land and water, leaving less water behind. It is recorded that since 1970's droughts have become longer and more extreme worldwide. In case of often droughts, there is less water for drinking and other people's needs.

The third sign is wilder weather. Taking into account that hurricanes and tropical storms get their energy from warm ocean water on the top layer, it becomes clear why in the last twenty years tropical storms in the Atlantic Ocean became stronger and damaging because of faster winds and heavier rains.

The fourth indicator is less snowpack than it should be. In recent times the total amount of snow and ice on the ground is decreasing. Instead of snow there is more rain in some places or the snowpack is melting earlier. In some mountainous regions in North America, Europe and Asia snow does not stay on the ground as long as in previous decades. Besides that we should mention the problem of glaciers that have been melting faster all over the world for last fifty years. The rate of melting is speeding up. In addition, the ice in the Arctic Ocean is also getting thinner.

The next fact has been already mentioned – the temperature of the water in the world ocean is going up. The changes are more explicit in the top layer of the water. This top layer is now getting warmer at a rate of 0.1°C per decade.

Due to burning fossil fuels, huge amounts of carbon dioxide are added to the atmosphere. Oceans play an important role in keeping the Earth's carbon cycle in balance. Carbonic acid is formed by reaction of carbon dioxide with sea water. The more carbon dioxide is absorbed by the oceans, the more acidic become the ocean.

According to the laws of physics, warmer water takes up more space. Taking into account melting glaciers and ice sheets, the average sea level is rising. So, over the past century the average sea level around the world rose by nearly 0.2 meters.

There are many graphs, charts and tables giving a chance for any desired to analyze the situation. Nobody will deny that climate has changed throughout the whole history of Earth. Some aspects of the climate change are usual and have been repeating from time to time, but

others are not. And unusual aspect of the modern climate change is that this time the process of changes is rapid and fast. It should make humankind worry about.

Nobody will deny that climate change is a global problem that are discussing all over the world at different levels. Scientists were the first who started to speak about this problem, but it took many years to attract attention to the climate change and other environmental problems of the whole world. It's common knowledge that the vast majority of people does not produce the knowledge but just consume theories, ideas and opinions that are already formulated. In this article we will examine how the global intellectual community has responded to climate change and what are the results of this response.

Looking for the information about global climate change, you definitely stumble across articles affirming that data about global climate change is just an exaggeration. The main discussion was about scientists who investigate the problem of climate change. Some people argue that recent facts about climate were changed deliberately in order to support working theory that the climate is changing rapidly and it is required to react to the problem properly (invest more money, create working groups, develop new programs, etc.) However, before take it for reality, we should remember, that any of these accusations were really confirmed. So, it means that in this case we have to deal with speculations.

During the work on the article we have discussed with representatives of some environmental NGOs the impact made by civil environmental movements on the problem of global climate change. One of the interlocutors was A. Kokorin, who has been working in WWF for thirteen years. Before that time he had worked as a scientist in the Moscow State University, then in the state Institute of global climate and ecology. Kokorin has been participation in different projects, was among the members of Russian delegation in the first UN meeting on climate. Moreover, he took part in the creating of the provisions of the Kyoto protocol. So, the interview with this people gave us an opportunity to analyze not only the intellectual response, but also reveal specific relationships of environmental NGOs with governments of the states.

An issue of global climate change was put in the international agenda in 1972, when the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment was held in Stockholm (also known as Stockholm conference). In general, during the conference representatives of 113 countries, 19 inter-governmental agencies, and more than 400 inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations discussed the state of a global environment. Stockholm conference can be regarded as the beginning of modern political and public awareness of global environmental problems. But breaking point in the struggle with climate change was the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development - UNFCCC (informally Earth Summit) in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, where the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change was negotiated. In this year later the Convention was signed in New York and entered into force in 1994 (ratified by 195 Parties). The main objective of the treaty is to stabilize greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system. The main and most famous treaty is the Kyoto protocol (ratified by 192 Parties). Since 1997 the UN conferences of the Parties and meetings are held annually, where various programs and resolutions have been working out.

Initiated by the UN, meetings and negotiations have provoked the activity of the environmental NGOs and formally have bound the states to pay attention to their environmental policies. Moreover, within the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change there are several treaties that should be implemented by those Parties that ratified them. The mechanism of control is also existed. It proposes an economics advantages for the states (parties of the treaties) that

fulfill the commitments and follows the rules and arrangements. So, it means that the UNFCCC presuppose that environmental issues should become a part of a state politics, can influence the image of the state. The party can also renounce its participation in some resolutions, but quite possible there will be economic consequences for them.

Speaking about the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, it is important to notice that the Convention includes some quite vague statements. It means that there are demands can be hardly find in it. Going further, we can compare the provisions of the Convention with the relationships between Russia and any country, e.g. in nuclear-power engineering. First of all the governments of the states signed an intergovernmental agreement. And in this agreement design and construction of some nuclear energy facilities is never mentioned. With regard to this agreement there are some contracts are created, where all plans for construction are included (usually it is technical documents with specific details). Documents, meetings and discussions can be organized in case new questions arise.

Taking into account the comparison giving above, the Kyoto protocol can be regarded as a technical document within the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. It is the only document that includes obligations of the parties. However, every year a conference of the parties is organized under the aegis of the United Nations and takes place in different countries in November-December. Before the conference Parties meet two-three times for the short sessions of the working groups that elaborate new mechanisms, helping to prevent the damage of the ecosystems. The adoption of these mechanisms by the parties is expected. Speaking about the Kyoto Protocol, Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) should be mentioned and Joint Implementation (JI). According to these mechanisms, when two countries are going to realize the project together (e.g. the company of the first country are going to build a factory on the territory of the second country), they should use in their project already developed mechanism of reducing emissions of carbon dioxide. Following the obligations, for instance, company, has to build a factory that will emit less number of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere.

Speaking about reducing the number of carbon dioxide emissions today, the Kyoto protocol is not effective mechanism anymore. When the Kyoto protocol was created, economies in India and China had been developing not so fast. They were far from the first places in emissions to the atmosphere. Today China is a number one among the emitters and polluters. Obviously, the Kyoto protocol does not correspond to the modern situation. On the other hand, the Kyoto protocol suggested a mechanism that worked and helped to reduce some amounts of emissions. On the other hand, the new provisions should be worked out that are corresponding to the current economic development of the world.

Evidently, in case the environmental policy started to draw attention of the governments, the activity of the environmental NGOs is risen. At the UN meetings only official representatives of the states have rights to vote), but environmental NGOs can express their opinions in the discussion rooms. They also can take part in the discussion panels and officially represent their ideas, concerning the problem under discussion. Nevertheless, real work and real task for NGOs is lobbying.

It is interesting fact that not only governments of the states are the objects of lobbying. There are developed, developing and non-developed countries that cooperate in different alliances and blocks in order to vote for some specific provision. For example, there is a block calls "77 developing countries + China"; or the block of island states "AOSIS" (usually they have the most radical position and demand for real actions). There is a number of umbrella organizations that have their own position on climate change issues and tasks for realizing that.

In general, NGOs and civil environmental movements work very hard and respond simultaneously to different changes in questions for negotiations and topics for discussions. A lot of working groups are engaged in every question. The position of the state can be changed from time to time. In general, it is a very complicated and chaotic process. Even for people, who plunge in the process, it can be quite difficult to give a comprehensive explanation about it in details.

Returning to the Intellectual Response of Civil Environmental Movements, the Climate Action Network is the biggest coalition of NGO on environmental problems. Approximately seven hundred NGO's from ninety countries are the members of the CAN. The CAN gets financial support from different sources, e.g. the European Commission gives money for the CAN Europe. Countries can also donate. The organization has horizontal administrative structure, and there are some working groups within the CAN that elaborate some positions on key questions and problems. For example, the CAN works out position. But it is the only the tip of the iceberg. After declaring position, many NGOs go to the government's offices in different countries and lobby the position. Step by step, they will understand what countries will support their position or at least some provisions of the position and NGOs will continue to continue to argue with these countries.

During every the Conference of the parties the CAN also organizes its meetings. Before every meetings NGOs that are smaller, but are the members of the CAN, also meet within their regional CAN groups in order to work out common position and discuss details of the coming conference of the parties.

Evidently, it is not enough to have a voice during negotiations. In order to achieve something, you have to use other methods. Thinking about the UN negotiations on environmental problems, it is not a scientific, but political process of wrangles of the states in order to achieve economic profit. Analyze the annual meetings of the Parties we can see that countries look for economic and political advantages. Environmental issues, all NGOs speak about, have secondary importance for them. The Parties are guided by political reasons in the process of voting for provisions and protocols.

As we have already mentioned, the CAN and other environmental organizations can influence environmental policies in some countries. But it depends on the state, whether NGO will be successful in it or not. NGOs do not always communicate with the governments directly, sometimes they use different resources, and mass media is one of the most effective sources of influence.

Besides that NGOs influence on the government through public actions. It means that NGOs can initiate and organize environmental events, meetings and demonstrations on environmental issues (global warming, ablation, etc.).

In some states it is a common practice in the process of evaluation of environmental issues to consult with environmental specialists. As A. Kokorin mentioned, in some countries like Russia only the position of such figures as Igor Chestin (the head of the WWF Russia), Eugeny Schwarz (the head of a nature conservation policy in WWF) and Sergey Cyplenkov (the executive head of Greenpeace in Russia) can be taken into account by government. In order to be heard, representative of environmental NGO has to have a great experience of communication with the state and to be an outstanding in the environmental sphere (the state should respect him and rely on his opinion). Usually, when the government ignores the opinion of such a person, it will be immediately reflected in mass media. It is true of the state

environmental policy in general and with the issue of climate change as well. It's all about the international image of the state.

As we see, there are some ways to affect the process of environmental policy making process, However A. Kokorin emphasize that using these mechanisms we probably do not achieve our goal, but at least we will be able to prevent some fallacious in the state environmental policy. He provides the example of Russian delegation for the UN meetings on climate change. The delegation consists of a small and specialized audience (usually there are six official representatives from Russia), who are acquainted with process of negotiations and environmental problems very well. They always try to maintain the image of the state, even when they present environment-unfriendly position. Except them there are traditionally many "followers" of the official delegation, who are very harsh in their statements. And their public utterances break the image of the state frequently.

Official delegation of the country (small group of the representatives of the government) takes part in negotiations. Before coming to any of the United Nations climate change conferences, the delegation familiarizes itself with protocols and researches of the local NGOs on environmental problems. A. Kokorin explained that sometimes, Russian delegation does not show that they examine these researches, but in most cases they surely do it. For instance, the World Wide Fund Russia (and it is a common practice) sends its surveys not only to their colleagues all over the world, but also to people from the Russian government. Some politicians reply to such letters with thanks, some not. But people from WWF Russia are absolutely convinced that Russian official delegation read it and take into account, preparing to the UN meeting. It can be hardly call "lobbying", it is more like a provision with education materials for those who really need it.

Returning to the Climate Action Network, the position on global climate change issues of this organization is formulated by working groups and during correspondence. It is required to be a CAN member in order to take part in correspondence and exchange of information. Once the position is formulated and presented officially, all CAN members should support and follow it. The position of the CAN is based on scientific facts, researches and has analytical background. Through the CAN, as more powerful umbrella organization, regional environmental NGOs try to influence on their state policies.

The CAN organizes its work according to the agenda of the UN negotiations on climate change and other environmental problems, taking into account articles of IPCC and UNEP. It is important to notice that the CAN does not strive for political intentions or criticism of the state environmental policies. In spite that an agenda of negotiations of the CAN is formulated according to already formulated political intentions of the states. All countries act in accordance how much they can gain from it and the Climate Action Network has to take into consideration their preferences.

There are some differences in tasks that CAN regional representative offices try to work out. For Example, CAN Europe spend a lot of time during discussions about provisions in the second period of the Kyoto protocol.

The Climate Action Network is not the only influential organization in the sphere of global climate change. In developed countries there are special organizations, institutes, consulting and analytical companies that provide all useful information for delegates who will take part in the UN negotiations (e.g. in Norway and in the USA). These countries do not need CAN "assistance" and consulting. Nevertheless, during negotiations the vast majority of the states are developing countries that are the conductors of global environmental policy. They first

will suffer from the climate change (e.g. the AOSIS alliance). They have few natural resources so they suffer from glaciers dwindling. These countries are the main consumers of the CAN activity.

Summing up, the Climate Action Network is the biggest civil environmental movement that was created in response to the global climate change. This organization has any political intentions, but it has to allow for environmental policies of the states. The only global place for meetings on climate change problems is the United Nations Climate Change Conference where NGOs can participate as well as state Parties. The only distinction between them is that NGOs do not take part in the voting procedures and can not influence on final decisions. That is why the importance of umbrella organizations (the CAN is the brightest example) has been growing steadily. Local NGOs have fewer resources not even to change, but at least to correct the state environmental policies. Through the CAN they can do it more profoundly and successfully, using different methods and mechanisms.

Evaluating the attitude to the global climate change, we can not mention the role of the United Nations as the international organization that was the first officially proclaimed climate change as a global problem and drew attention of the whole world. Since that times environmental policies was put in the political agendas of the states and the number of environmental NGOs has been growing steadily. It became clear that people for many reasons stopped to be indifferent to global climate change and by some days they will be able to solve this problem in case all states, NGOs and nations will work together.