

Discourses of Russia's Policies Within the UNFCCC Conference of the Parties¹

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Abstract

Climate change is increasingly affecting the politics and economies of the world's nations: its physical manifestations pose numerous threats to human and national security, while its mitigation requires significant investments and regulatory measures which are increasingly transforming socioeconomic systems. Russia's climate policy, still in its formative stage, is also developing in this context. Contemporary research concerning it focuses primarily on national climate change regulation and its individual aspects, while its international dimension remains under-researched. We use the example of Russia's discourses within the framework of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP to the UNFCCC) after the adoption of the Paris Agreement to trace the evolution of the external dimension of Russia's climate policy. Several leading narratives are identified within the discourse: the "forest" narrative, related to Russia's promotion of the international recognition of the importance of carbon sinks; the "sanctions"-related one, within which Russia maintains that foreign restrictive measures impede its capacities to contribute to global climate change mitigation efforts; the narrative on the creation of a universal compliance mechanism for the Paris Agreement; as well as the narrative that concerns developing states and the need to build up support for their green transition. We find that each narrative, as well as the application of such discursive categories as "global", "universal" and "international" are closely interconnected with the state's overall foreign policy directions. We demonstrate that as the role of climate change in international politics is augmenting, Russia increasingly seeks to position itself more confidently within its framework despite the altered geopolitical conditions that have significantly diminished the impact of some of the most important drivers of the country's climate policy development. We conclude that Russia's policy within the COP to the UNFCCC has evolved towards, on the one hand, increased promotion of an alternative decarbonization agenda and, on the other hand, providing greater support, including climate finance, for developing states. Both follow the logic of Russia's foreign policy orientation towards the establishment of a polycentric world order with increased role of the non-West in decision-making on the key issues related to the international system.

Keywords: external climate policy, Paris agreement, climate policy ambition, factors of climate policy evolution, ecosystems' absorption capacity, climate finance, sanctions

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Introduction

In the past decade, the climate crisis has become a highly important consideration for both national and international politics. With the global average temperatures already having risen by 1,1°C compared to preindustrial era and extreme weather events increasingly affecting most of the world regions, states are starting to engage in efforts of both mitigation and adaptation [Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2022]. These efforts, in turn, affect the world economy, social and political systems [Garanina, et al., 2023], as well as security complexes. A growing number of states transition to green economy in attempts to improve the recourse and energy efficiency of their economic processes [Caprotti and Bailey, 2014]. World energy systems are transforming due to accelerating application of lower-carbon energy sources from fossil fuels, the need to transition away from which is generally recognized by all countries irrespective of whether they are importers or exporters [United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), 2023]. Carbon pricing has been adopted by 89 jurisdictions and covered 24% of world emissions in 2024, with some also considering or having already established carbon border adjustments [World Bank, n. d.]. Climate change is gaining traction as a threat multiplier for the emergence of intra- and interstate conflicts [Buhaug, et al., 2023] as well as carries the potential to exacerbate migration flows from the territories which can become unsuitable or extremely difficult for humans to inhabit [International Organization for Migration, 2019]. Globally, the urgency of climate action creates new contradictions between developed and developing states on such issues as just transition, climate finance, technology transfer, historical responsibility for climate change, etc. [Makarov and Shuranova, 2023].

Climate action also has an international dimension apart from the national one. The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), signed in 1992, has become a basis for the international climate change regime, and its governing body (Conference of the Parties, COPs) – a key global platform for discussing the ways humanity can tackle the climate crisis [Wirth, 2017]. The UNFCCC lays out the fundamental principles of international climate politics as well as coordinates its developments, while states promote their positions and interests within it on the annual COPs [Kuyper, Schroeder and Linnér, 2018]. According to the UNFCCC, its Parties regularly submit their national inventory reports of anthropogenic emissions, which detail states' emissions from 5 key sectors, accounted by a unified methodology. Other reporting formats are national communications and biennial reports. The UNFCCC also requires the Parties to formulate and regularly update “national ... programmes containing measures to mitigate climate change” and “measures to facilitate adequate adaptation to climate change” [United Nations, 1992, art. 4]. Thus, the UNFCCC de facto obliges states to formulate national (or regional) climate policies.

Russia's climate policy, formulated and implemented within the framework of the UNFCCC, is in its formative stage. The country has adopted several key doctrinal and conceptual documents, including a long-term low-emission development strategy; it has also launched or is developing basic regulatory instruments such as carbon offsets and a carbon credits trading system, a regional experiment on compulsory carbon pricing with plans to put a price on carbon nationwide, government renewables financing, energy efficiency promotion systems, green certificates, green finance, non-financial reporting for businesses, etc. Nevertheless, Russia's main pillar on the way to net zero are carbon sinks [Government of the Russian Federation, 2021], while the country's economy is world's third by energy intensity [Enerdata, 2024].

Russia's climate policy and the way it develops its climate and energy transition strategies have received wide attention in academic literature. Russia is viewed primarily as a traditional fossil fuel exporter, for which the global green transformation poses economic and energy security

risks and which develops its climate policy accordingly – that is, adopts decarbonization trends only in the amount and manner that correspond to its national interests [Sharples, 2013; Korppoo, 2015; Sharmina, 2017; Makarov, Chen and Paltsev, 2018; Mitrova and Melnikov, 2019; Henderson and Mitrova, 2020; Kodaneva, 2020; Porfiryev, et al., 2020; Tynkkynen, 2020; Yushkov and Perov, 2021; Stepanov and Makarov, 2022; Seregina, 2023; Shuranova and Chistikov, 2023]. This has also produced a widely acknowledged opinion that Russia's climate policy activation in 2021 was driven in a large part by the announcement of a carbon border adjustment mechanism (CBAM) in the European Union (EU), which posed a direct threat to the country's exports of energy and energy-intensive goods, as well as by the general tendency of its foreign counterparts to strengthen regulatory frameworks and consumer demands to imported products' carbon footprint [Ananykina, 2021; Kanishchev, 2021; Murashko, 2021; Porfiriev, Shirov and Kolpakov, 2021; Telegina, Studenikina and Chapaikin, 2021; Ptichnikov and Krenke, 2022; Sevostianov and Matiukhin, 2022; Golub and Shenin, 2023]. In contrast to these external drivers, internal factors cannot be marked by a similar degree of coherence in their impact on Russia's climate policy formation: some, among which are increasing negative physical effects of climate change on economy and infrastructure, high resource potential and quality advances in a number of low-carbon technologies, stimulate the country to enter the global green transition, while other factors act as counterweights [Kokorin, 2014; 2016; Koshkina, 2020; Makarov, 2022; Rudanets, 2023].

Factors of Russia's climate policy evolution, as well as aspects of its development have also been studied in terms of their discursive framing in official documents, political leaders' statements, media, public and business life, with most authors attempting to discern the grounds for its insufficient ambition relying on arguments such as the country's cultural characteristics, the climate change skepticism found among its academic community, elites and population, as well as the government's and large businesses' unwillingness to conduct green reforms given the significant advantages of continuing to rely on fossil fuels, etc. [Wilson Rowe, 2013; Korppoo, Tynkkynen and Hønneland, 2015; Poberezhskaya, 2018; Tynkkynen and Tynkkynen, 2018; Poberezhskaya and Ashe, 2019; Yagodin, 2021; Ashe and Poberezhskaya, 2022; Godzimirski, 2022; Kochtcheeva, 2022; Korppoo, 2020; 2022; Martus and Fortescue, 2022; Beuerle, 2023; Stepanov, 2023]. It should be noted, however, that such studies' research design might lead to their results being prone to subjectivity, which, among other reasons, can often be explained by the specifics of research goals formulation as well as empirical basis selection. The latter might not always be formed in accordance with strict logic and, while sufficient to illustrate the authors' messages, might not represent a comprehensive picture of all key characteristics and narratives of the discourses which exist in the time period under research.

In light of the outlined characteristics of the contemporary *state of the art*, our research attempts to take an alternative approach to discursive aspects of Russia's climate policy basing on its external dimension, namely, its reflection within the UNFCCC framework. We suggest that, with climate change gaining salience in world politics, Russia aspires to position itself more confidently within it due to global political and economic transformations directly affecting its key national interests – and the tendency persists despite significant changes in the country's international environment. Thus, unlike the majority of existing studies of Russia's climate policy, which focus on national regulatory framework, factors of its formation and evolution as well as recommendations for its future development, we aim at concentrating on its external dimension. Therefore, while national climate policy as such is exhaustively examined in [Baburina, Kuznetsova and Podbiralina, 2023; Popova and Kolmar, 2023] as well as the majority of abovementioned studies, our goal is to discern the main elements of Russia's positioning within international climate politics, namely, its key international platform – COP to the UNFCCC.

Russia's discourses within the COP to the UNFCCC after Paris Agreement

In order to trace the evolution of Russia's policy within the COP to the UNFCCC, we have conducted discourse analysis of annual official statements presented at COPs between 2015 and 2023. The statements in question are usually presented at two levels. Special Presidential

Representatives on Climate Issues have taken part in the High-Level Segment of all COPs during the whole analyzed period except for COP 21, where Russia was represented by the President. For this reason, we have selected texts containing Russia's COP High-Level Segment statements for 2016-2023, as well as speeches for the COPs by the President of the Russian Federation V. V. Putin for 2015 and 2021 (the latter year is an address not to the COP as such, but to the World Leaders Summit on Action on Forests and Land Use, which resulted in the Glasgow Declaration on Forests and Land Use, supported by Russia) [President of Russia, 2015; 2021; Russian Federation, 2016; 2017; 2018; 2019; 2021; 2022; 2023]. The selection does not include texts for 2020, since no COP was held that year due to the COVID-19 pandemic. All speeches except for the President's 2021 statement are constructed in a similar way and are comprised primarily of the following meaningful parts: the global context of climate politics, the description of Russia's latest climate targets and regulatory measures, as well as the country's position on such key topics as the international recognition of carbon sinks as part of states' mitigation efforts, the support of developing countries, sanctions, etc. Accordingly, we were able to single out several narratives in Russia's discourses within the COP after the Paris agreement and follow their evolution.

The "forest" narrative

The 2015 statement by V. V. Putin for COP 21, made directly before the elaboration of the Paris Agreement, can be seen as the clearest indicator of Russia's position towards this document and its vision on the way it should have looked like. One of the key points for Russia was the international recognition of the importance of carbon sinks (primarily forests and their GHG absorption capacity), which would later become one of the key pillars of the country's climate policy. According to Russia's position, forests and other natural ecosystems are "a key component of international efforts to address global warming and reduce emissions of greenhouse gases" [President of Russia, 2021b].

The "forest" narrative is among the leading ones in Russia's discourses within the COP to the UNFCCC. Of the selected texts, it was completely absent only in 2022, and weakly represented in 2016 and 2018. The 2016 text does not include forests as one of its main topics likely because it takes a far more conservative turn – it is the only year when Russia clearly states its intention not to reject fossil fuels for decarbonization purposes and emphasizes that this path is unacceptable, suggesting instead that the international community should recognize its efforts in enhancing energy efficiency, using low-carbon fossil fuels and developing relevant technologies and materials, etc. (all of this has remained a *leitmotif* during the formulation of Russia's climate policy afterwards). Here, forests are one among many other points, which is the reason why they do not receive special attention.

It should be noted that it was 2016 when Russia signed the Paris Agreement [Government of the Russian Federation, 2019], and the High-Level Segment statement for COP22 was designed with this fact in consideration – that is, it was Russia's first official COP statement after it became part of the Agreement. This is the reason it also contains an idea that would later be present in the majority of Russia's defining climate policy documents – namely, the need to consider states' socioeconomic circumstances while assessing their climate policy ambition and the opposition to the possibility that decarbonization can impede development (by diverting finance that could be used to satisfy people's basic needs, industrialize, etc.). This idea is prominent in Russia's Strategy of low-emission socioeconomic development till 2050 [Government of the Russian Federation, 2021], while its direct extension - statements that international green development can, in one form or another, pose a threat to the country's security, is embedded in National Security Strategy, the Energy Security Doctrine, the Economic Security Strategy, as well as the latest Foreign Policy Concept of 2023 [President of Russia, 2017; 2019; 2021; 2023a]. The absorption capacity of forest ecosystems – Russia's "unique resource" [President of Russia, 2021b] – is one of the central integral parts of this idea and, more broadly, of the agenda that decarbonization should take an alternative path, actively promoted by Russia in international climate politics and reflected both through the mentioned documents and the COP statements. This agenda effectively opposes the

developed economies' linear decarbonization logic which is restricted to a number of specific regulatory instruments (such as carbon pricing, etc.) regardless of national circumstances and often – disregarding alternative low-carbon development models, which affects overall relations and especially trade with the countries that adopt them. In contrast to this, Russia's discourses are aimed at promoting greater equality of states' approaches to achieve net zero, taking into account their socioeconomic development.

Other cases in which the “forest” narrative is underrepresented include the text of 2018, which does not single it out as a separate element of discourse that Russia wishes to promote within the COP, but vastly refers to carbon sinks among the country's mitigation targets. Finally, 2022 was the only year forests were not mentioned at all – in striking contrast to this very year seeing Russia's climate policy fully formed both in regulatory and ideational senses, with forests playing a crucial role in it. It can be suggested that in 2022, with Russia starting to reconsider its role in world politics and its way forward as a great power, the country might have prioritized emphasizing its great power positions and cementing them in a transforming political environment over another attempt at gaining recognition in international bodies whose agenda was not fully consistent with its national interests and was dominated by what Russia perceived as a “green menace” [Smeets, 2018; Makarov, 2022].

Nevertheless, 2023 saw the return of the “forest” narrative, although in a manner distinctive from the previous texts. On the one hand, Russia maintained its intentions to fully use and increase the absorption potential of natural ecosystems. On the other hand, it was the first time nature-based solutions were mentioned as a formalized climate policy instrument [Russian Federation, 2023], a consequence of the launch of a full-fledged system of “climate projects” (carbon offsets), which had not been marked by a lot of prominent cases and plans at the time of previous statements. COP 28, in turn, witnessed Russia's statement with a presentation of the Pleistocene Park as its centerpiece – a decades-long project in North-East Yakutia aimed at restoring a highly productive pasture ecosystem which will resemble the one of the Arctic area in late Pleistocene. For the country, it was a way to demonstrate the attractiveness of nature-based solutions as part of its alternative decarbonization path. It is in this sense that the 2023 statement diverts from the direction set in the previous year: Russia's external climate policy became oriented primarily at achieving international recognition of its methods and efforts in climate change mitigation. Moreover, these international attempts are also different in context from those conducted between 2015 and 2021. Before, Russia had prioritized the promotion of a general approach to low-carbon development as such, while the transformed geopolitical environment has led it to focus on the recognition of national regulatory mitigation instruments to reduce risks for its exporters after international validation and verification bodies had ceased their activities in the country. Moreover, initially these instruments had been designated mainly for the European market, while in 2022 international climate politics came to be viewed as West-centric and no longer necessary to continue given the sharp downfall of trade with the EU; however, in 2023 both the government and businesses became increasingly aware of the significance of emerging decarbonization trends in Asia, a key destination for the reoriented trade flows. Therefore, while the promotion of an alternative decarbonization path as a wide political agenda is still important for Russia, its latest positions have taken a more “technical” and economy-oriented turn, within which the “forest” narrative occupies a central place.

Russia and developing countries in international climate politics

Another narrative, present in all texts from our sample except for V. V. Putin's address to the World Leaders Summit on Action on Forests and Land Use, concerns assistance to developing countries in green transformation and climate change adaptation. In 2015, 2016, 2018 and 2019 statements on the topic are almost identical: Russia maintained that, despite not being an Annex II country and thus officially not having to provide climate finance, it was adopting plans to do it voluntarily and was already undertaking certain steps in this direction. The 2017 statement included, apart from this, Russia's position that climate finance was one of the key instruments for

achieving the targets set in the Paris Agreement – that is, implicit calls for other states to also intensify action on the issue. However, it is the statements of 2021-2023 where the narrative on developing countries is the most remarkable.

The only text of the whole sample which completely leaves out climate finance is the High-Level Segment statement of 2021; instead, it mentions that global climate change mitigation efforts can lead to significant changes in world economy. In Russia's view, it is crucial not to let global poverty rate rise as a result of these transformations – both in developing and developed countries.

In contrast, climate finance occupies one of the central places in the 2022 statement, which is primarily explained by this issue being central to the whole COP 27 agenda. The text refers to “justice”, a category that appears for the first time in Russia's discourses. Apart from this, it prominently develops the normative approach that first appeared in 2017: “Developed countries must demonstrate real leadership and scale up financial resources and technology to developing countries” [Russian Federation, 2022]. At the same time, in contrast to all the other years (except for 2021), it omits references to Russia's own actions on the issue. Due to not being included into Annex II of the UNFCCC, which lists countries that should provide assistance to developing ones in their climate change mitigation and adaptation efforts, Russia does not relate itself to the said “developed” countries in its COP discourses. Despite also not being a recipient of international aid, however, Russia expresses solidarity with developing countries with respect to the necessity of building up climate finance, which falls in line with its general foreign policy rhetoric and supports its non-West orientation.

Finally, the 2023 narrative on developing countries is marked by a particular vividness of expression and meanings transmitted through text. It is emphasized that the UNFCCC was undergoing a “crisis of confidence fuelled by previously broken promises”, while the international situation “when some demand enormous efforts to be made for the common cause, while trying at every opportunity to slander others and make money off them” was called “utmost hypocrisy”. This was finalized by Russia's representative in a similarly expressive manner – stating that “it does not work that way” [Russian Federation, 2023]. The text also places a major focus on the connection of climate change and sustainable development goals (SDGs): it is stressed that the vision of the future of international climate change regime cannot exist separately from humanity's other urgent challenges. Thus, in 2023 Russia continued to strengthen the narrative in question and presented it as central to its discourse during the “global stocktake” of the Paris Agreement, accentuating that it is this direction that international climate politics should primarily follow in its development.

The narrative is sufficiently instrumental in tracing the evolution of the abovementioned alternative decarbonization path advocated by Russia in international climate politics, which is inextricable from its relations with developed economies, primarily Western ones and, accordingly – from its intentions to support developing countries. The latter support is mostly of political rather than economic nature, centering around the promotion of non-Western world order and the trends that can lead to developing countries having a greater voice in decision-making on the architecture of a new world order.

From this point of view, we can consider the evolution of Russia's COP narrative on developing countries in the following way. From 2015 to 2019, it hardly underwent any development: it was during this period that Russia experienced ever-strengthening foreign restrictive measures, and its relations with the majority of developed economies were on a low level. However, even here it can be observed that the 2019 text represents climate finance in a different way compared to 2015-2018: the earlier statements dedicated a separate paragraph to the topic, while in the 2019 text it is preceded by a sentence that stresses the priority of “the deepening of countries' cooperation on the issue” (meaning all countries of the world) to achieve the Paris Agreement targets [Russian Federation, 2019]. Therefore, Russia's support of developing countries ceases to be intentionally autonomous and isolated from the actions taken by the rest of

the world (including the West). In 2021, this tendency reached its ultimate point, with developing countries' support completely left out of Russia's statement. Although it cannot be said that the country's international environment underwent serious changes, its interactions with Western countries nevertheless overcame active political confrontation phase, while trade and economic cooperation continued to recover (e. g., Russia-EU trade continued a growth trend that started in 2017 and was only interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, having almost reached 2014 levels in 2021 [Eurostat, 2022]). Moreover, 2021 saw the activation of Russia's climate policy in terms of the adoption of both a carbon neutrality target and a low-emission development strategy, with these measures partly driven by the threat of CBAM. Consequently, although not fully relying on the Western decarbonization patterns and methods, Russia required recognition of its own policy direction from its key importers to avoid future economic damages. Accordingly, the 2021 text applied all means possible in order not to position Russia's climate change agenda as opposite to the Western one, as well as to demonstrate how far the country had progressed in climate policy development. In contrast, the geopolitical crisis and the sharp deterioration of Russia-West relations conditioned the 2022-2023 texts to contain the brightest examples of the narrative on developing countries. For this reason, analyzing this narrative allows us to trace certain clear changes in Russia's discourses, which correspond to the key international political trends during the respective time periods.

The "sanctions" narrative

A number of Russia's COP statements include a narrative on foreign restrictive measures, which prevent it from fulfilling obligations pursuant to the Paris Agreement. Although sanctions against Russia as such are not referred to directly, they are clearly implied under such expressions as "barriers", "sanctions", etc., as well as inferred from the general context. The ways this narrative appears in texts varies from one year to another. In 2017, Russia's text does not go further than marking the existence of such measures in the world and criticizing it in the context of the Paris Agreement. In 2019 the country already points out that "the elimination of numerous barriers, included unilateral sanctions" is one of its policy "priorities" [Russian Federation, 2019]. The 2021 statement, in turn, does not mention the existence of such barriers as such, but stresses that they should not exist – although the exact meaning of this expression can be interpreted differently since it is placed in the context of restricted access to green technologies and finance, which can also be related to the narrative on developing countries. Finally, in the text of 2022, already influenced by the crisis, the "sanctions" narrative is far more expressive – the restrictive measures are termed as "unnecessary restrictions that are degrading the quality and dramatically increasing the cost of living in many countries" [Russian Federation, 2022] – that is, for the first time the narrative transits from purely climate change context to more basic categories such as socioeconomic development, hunger, poverty, etc.

Nevertheless, despite the importance of the issue for Russia, the "sanctions" narrative is not among the leading ones in Russia's COP discourses and is often completely overshadowed by other narratives. Even in 2022, which saw Russia become the most sanctioned country in the world, the country's statement focused on the general fragmentation in world politics (including the possibility of some countries and itself refraining from certain climate targets) as well as climate finance. The 2023 text wholly omits it despite the persistence of sanctions regimes, while their criticism is replaced by no less vivid messages within the narrative on developing countries, where the topic of restrictive measures is only implicit but not referred to directly. This year is also marked by a curious move which connects these two narratives, with Russia suggesting to direct its frozen gold and foreign exchange reserves to the Loss and Damage Fund for developing countries. While the initiative's implementation in practice remains questionable, the suggestion itself emphasizes Russia's aspiration to act in accord with the developing world in international climate politics. This action, in turn, is aimed at formulating their own decarbonization path and political agenda rather than falling in line with the policies promoted by Western nations.

Compliance with the Paris Agreement

In 2015, Russia deemed it “fundamentally important” [President of Russia, 2015] that the Paris Agreement should become legally binding despite not being active in climate policy on national level at the time. Russia’s COP statements from 2016 to 2018 contain a follow-up of the President’s speech – a narrative that points at the necessity to work out a “uniform legal format” [Russian Federation, 2018] of compliance with the Paris Agreement. Such a mechanism, among other things, should have included ways to ensure the transparency of Nationally determined contributions (NDCs) and inclusivity in the instruments of its implementation. The narrative points out the need to unify various approaches to climate change mitigation to overcome the current fragmentary and sometimes – contradictory character of global efforts. In this narrative, Russia addresses the absence of formal criteria of non-compliance with the international regime established by the UNFCCC, as well as sanctions or other punitive mechanisms that could force states to cease violation of its conditions. Such a regime architecture produces the “free-rider problem” [Nordhaus, 2015], which, in turn, causes some states to doubt whether their own mitigation policies and financial amounts directed to climate purposes are justified given that others might not contribute their fair share to the global efforts. Although an international climate agreement on such a wide scale would have been impossible if it had contained specific targets, clear wording and sanctions for non-compliance, some states might have been more inclined to include at least some of these while already part of the agreement – which was possibly Russia’s logic transmitted through its statements. Despite the country having been uncertain that it could itself comply with the agreement at the time of its elaboration, the narrative in question reflects Russia’s foreign political culture in its desire to promote universal rules of conduct on the international arena equal for all nations and its non-acceptance of “double standards” and discriminatory approaches.

However, the narrative on compliance with the Paris Agreement is no longer present in texts after 2018, which corresponds with COP 24 decision on Modalities and procedures for the effective operation of the Committee to facilitate implementation and promote compliance with the Paris Agreement (the final decision for the Committee to start functioning) [UNFCCC, 2019]. However, the Committee’s responsibilities are restricted to monitoring whether states follow the deadlines of regular reporting within the UNFCCC framework and undertaking such non-punitive measures as dialogue, recommendations, financial and organizational assistance, etc., in case of their violation. It is also not authorized to comment the contents of the said reporting and de facto cannot review the states’ compliance with the Paris Agreement. Therefore, states’ setting of meaningful climate targets and their regular updating is not regulated on the international level. Nevertheless, the decision on the Committee must have been satisfactory enough for Russia to stop mentioning the necessity to work out procedures for monitoring the implementation of the Paris Agreement or any other legal mechanisms since 2019.

The narrative’s disappearance from Russia’s discourses may also have several other explanations. On the one hand, in 2019 Russia seemed to have once again disappointed in the prospects of international cooperation within the framework of a West-centric world order: it was this year that saw the country’s suspension of its compliance with the INF Treaty and V. V. Putin’s last meeting with US President D. Trump, which did not end in Russia-US relationship becoming any better. While the UNFCCC itself is not a Western institution, the West’s dominance in relation to climate change was evident due to their active role in promoting the topic to be part of international political debate. Apart from this, even before COP 19 – in November 2019 – the EU had already begun discussing its Green Deal [European Commission, 2019] and announced it on the Conference itself [European Union, 2019]. It was this context that convinced Russia that international climate politics’ fragmentation was imminent and, therefore, that it should abandon any hope of the international community uniting to work out uniform rules of compliance with the Paris Agreement. On the other hand, it was also 2019 when Russia formalized its participation in the Agreement. In this situation, the absence of compliance mechanisms came to answer more to its interests since it remained unclear which countries or bodies would influence their elaboration

and oversee their implementation and which role Russia itself would have in these mechanisms given its state of relations with countries that dominated international climate politics at the time.

Despite the fact that the narrative on compliance with the Paris Agreement no longer appeared in Russia's COP discourses, it found its reflection in the Foreign Policy Concept of 2023, which points out that one of the country's priorities in environmental policy lies in "the elaboration of uniform, understandable and global rules of environmental climate regulation taking into account the Paris Climate Agreement ... adopted within" the UNFCCC [President of Russia, 2023b]. This provision indicates the continuity between Russia's position in the first years after the Paris Agreement and in the transformed geopolitical environment; however, the later text is deprived of any mentions of legal bindingness which constituted a key premise of the earlier COP narrative.

The "global" and "international" in discourses

Russia's discourses within the COP of the UNFCCC can be represented in more ways than several dominant narratives. For instance, it is curious to observe such categories as "global" and "universal" in texts, as well as the general openness to international cooperation expressed in them. The 2015 statement by V. V. Putin is one of Russia's richest in these categories: climate change is recognized as a challenge for the whole "humanity"; references are found to "everyone on this planet", all "countries and peoples" [President of Russia, 2015], as well as to the global character of temperature rise and the commonality of combat against it. Russia is therefore presented as a country fully open to international cooperation to battle the climate crisis which transcends borders, nations and political regimes. However, the 2016 and 2017 statements are far more restrained: references to unity are made only in the context of working out compliance mechanisms for the Paris Agreement, while the "global" category is found only once in the 2017 text (with regard to adaptation) and the "common" one – once in 2016. Here, Russia's position appears to discursively detach it from international climate politics; moreover, both texts accentuate the latter's uncoordinated character and the need to improve its coherence.

The "global" and "international" starts to appear more frequently in Russia's COP discourses since 2018. Such terms as "joint efforts", "global participation of all countries", etc. reappear in the country's statements [Russian Federation, 2018]. The 2019 text is of an alarmist nature, filled with calls to undertake "joint and coordinated action of the whole world community" to "preserve the climate": it is emphasized that Russia "shares" common "goals and responsibility" with the rest of the world and "prioritizes" the "deepening of cooperation" on the issue [Russian Federation, 2019]. In 2021, the trend continued: the text started by stating that that "addressing global warming and prevention of climate change depends on the ability of all nations to set aside differences and join together in resolving these challenges" [Russian Federation, 2021]. For the first time since 2015, Russia's text contained the term "humanity". Other significant discursive categories included building "a better future", ramping up cooperation, exchanging knowledge and experience, etc.

The 2022 text, affected by the general geopolitical context, is replete with narratives concerning the deepening international controversies, among which climate politics is not an exception. In spite of this, the "global" is still present in the discourse to a certain degree, in contrast to 2016 and 2017; moreover, similarly to 2021, the text refers to "future generations". The "cooperation" narratives do not vanish completely; on the contrary, the statement appeals to the international community to "respond together to the global challenges of our time", even though these calls are rarer. However, climate change is not marked as "global" anymore, while the text as a whole represents a divided world, a shattered vision of humanity's unity that had been constructed a year before. It voices "serious concern" at "certain states' and regional associations" plans to revise their climate policy due to the shifts in political environment: these are denounced as a consequence of the "race to climate ambition", with high climate targets having been set without either due strategic planning or sufficient economic and resource capabilities. Finally,

Russia stresses that “parties to the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement have the right to choose their own means of achieving climate goals” [Russian Federation, 2022]. This is a reference both to the discursive pressure (which sometimes also took an economic form such as the case of CBAM) exerted by developed economies on the rest of the world’s nations to raise their climate ambitions and to the “forest” narrative and the alternative decarbonization agenda promoted by Russia with increasing activity.

Similarly to 2022, the “global” is overshadowed by narratives on geopolitical challenges to international climate politics in Russia’s 2023 text. However, while the year of crisis’ beginning was dominated by emphases of challenges and disagreements, the later statement demonstrates a more positive outreach. Optimistically stating that “the climate agenda has proven itself to be a uniting factor for all” [Russian Federation, 2023], Russia’s representative on COP 28 built his speech around incorporating current challenges into the vision of the principles that should guide the world to net zero. This vision, in Russia’s view, should be centered around the interests and needs of developing countries. Accordingly, the categories of “global” and “international” in this statement are concentrated around adaptation, climate finance and cooperation mechanisms under Article 6 of the Paris Agreement rather than mitigation. Among these, Article 6 implies the possibility states’ cooperation in implementation and mutual recognition of carbon offsets, which has been of particular importance to Russia in the new environment; this subject also indirectly reflects the abovementioned narrative on compliance with the Paris Agreement, although it has become more specific and technical in character. On the whole, although Russia’s 2023 discourses have demonstrated continuity from 2022 by again referring to fragmentation in international climate politics, they became softer in rhetoric and contained a number of calls for dialogue on climate change.

With respect to the categories of “global”, “universal” and “international”, we can discern several stages in Russia’s COP discourses between 2015 and 2023. First, they appear to have shifted from a “global-oriented” mode to an “isolated” one during 2015-2017; between 2018 and 2021, the direction of changes was reversed and discourses became increasingly “global” and “universal” in character; while since 2022 they have been again incorporating considerably more “isolated” categories. At the same time, it would be incorrect to interpret the first stage as a sharp downturn in Russia’s orientation on the categories of “global” and “universal”: it should be taken into account that in 2015, the analyzed statement was made by the President, which implies its far greater outreach among both national and international audience and its intention to transmit a broader image of the country’s foreign policy as a whole. The later texts - High-Level Segment statements (excluding the 2021 President’s speech which, however, was supplementary to the High-Level Segment statement instead of substituting it) – were, in turn, specifically designed for COP and thus fully indicative of Russia’s policy within its framework *per se*. That is, in 2015 Russia could have been attempting to discursively present itself as a great power open to cooperation and sharing the spirit of the historical COP 21, which was of particular significance in the context of the 2014 crisis: the country could not stay away from such a major international event. At the same time, it did not have an active international position in climate politics as such. The crisis of 2022, in turn, created the context that determined the last stage of the discourses’ evolution. Within it, the “global” is significantly less present than in 2022; meanwhile, however, the country increasingly indicates its openness to international cooperation, primarily with developing countries, and appears to reject a complete return to “isolation” despite the deepening fragmentation in international climate politics.

Other characteristics of Russia’s discourses

Finally, we can discern a number of features of Russia’s discourses within the COP to the UNFCCC, which do not form separate narratives, but are nevertheless characteristic of the country’s policy and its evolution.

It is worth noting how different years' statements apply the terms "restriction" (*ogranichenie*) and "cutting" (*sokrashchenie*) of greenhouse gas emissions while referring to Russia's climate policy achievements and targets. The former is evidently less stringent than the latter and implies lesser inclination to adopt ambitious decarbonization policies. Russia's 2015 and 2016 texts include the terms "*sokrashchenie*" and "reduction" (*umen'shenie*), which is probably explained by the country's attempts to discursively emphasize its readiness to be an active part of the international climate change regime in the years of the Paris Agreement's adoption and its signing by the country itself. The later discourses of 2017 and 2018 shift towards "*ogranichenie*", which coincides with the period when the country did not yet have ambitious regulatory instruments. The 2019 text appears to be transitional since both terms are applied interchangeably: here, the circumstances appear similar to the years 2015 and 2016, with the country expressing its aspiration to move towards more ambitious climate action (particularly in light of its formal "acceptance" of the Paris Agreement) but not yet having adopted specific instruments to substantiate it. The latter's eventual elaboration and enforcement was marked by the statements of 2021 and 2021 using only the term "*sokrashchenie*" and the 2023 text mentioning the country's carbon neutrality goal and the necessity to achieve all national climate targets.

Referring to its own climate policy achievements, Russia often notably applies strong expressions aimed at demonstrating its full commitment to the international efforts of combating climate change. These appear in its COP discourses throughout all the years of the analyzed period: "unconditional achievement" [Russian Federation, 2017], "we have more than fulfilled our obligations" [President of Russia, 2015], "methodically and consistently fulfils its obligations in full" [Russian Federation, 2018], "we take the strongest and most vigorous measures" [President of Russia, 2021], "to achieve these ambitious objectives" [Russian Federation, 2021b], "the Russian Federation pursues a consistent and active policy" [Russian Federation, 2022], etc.

Finally, an important feature of Russia's COP discourses is the almost complete absence of references to fossil fuels and the country's intentions to continue their use despite the global energy transition, especially in the latest years of the analyzed period. It is undoubted that fossil fuel dependence is one of the key drivers that determine national climate policy formulation and evolution, with the topic ever-present in official and public discourses; apart from this, the continued use of fossils corresponds with the interests of many developing countries which require a lot of cheap energy at least for the start of the energy transition to maintain the needs set by their high growth rates. In spite of this, Russia's COP discourses consistently avoid the topic, which is highly likely reflects the country's desire not to present itself as a state that dismisses the energy transition and is unwilling to enter a dialogue on the issue during international climate negotiations. However, Russia's official position, cemented in its 2023 version of the Climate Doctrine, is centered around the principle of "technological neutrality", i. e., non-discrimination of any means of carbon emissions reduction and removal [President of Russia, 2023a]. This is closely connected to the government's discourses on international forums, including the COP, on the necessity to rely on transitional technologies (which, for Russia, imply primarily natural gas and nuclear energy) on the way to net zero. In this respect, the decisions of COP 28 answer to Russia's interests, having *de facto* recognized the principle of "technological neutrality" and the importance of nature-based solutions, as well as acknowledged the significance of nuclear energy as a low-carbon energy source and the inevitability of transitional fuels playing a major role during the "transitioning away" from fossil-based energy systems [UNFCCC, 2023].

Conclusions

Russia's discourses within the COP to the UNFCCC are a direct reflection of national climate policy; their more notable feature is a high level of integration of the latter with the country's general foreign policy direction. Through these discourses, Russia transmits both its current climate policy and the state of its affairs with different actors of international politics.

While Russia's COP statements are not large in volume and mostly addressed to the High-Level Segment (i. e., often do not reach a wider audience than the COP itself), they are nevertheless an significant indicator of how the country's policy evolves within the international climate change regime. In this respect, we can summarize several important trends identified during the discourse analysis which can be discerned during the period between 2015 and 2013.

Firstly, Russia is transitioning to a more ambitious national climate policy and, accordingly, shifting from a relatively isolationist position directly after the adoption of the Paris Agreement towards orientation on the model of decarbonization adopted by the West and, lastly, to the aspiration to play a more active role in international climate politics. This transformation can be explained primarily by economic motives, with developed economies' climate change regulation increasingly posing a threat to Russia's exports. Therefore, while the country could initially have afforded to "sit on the fence" and adopt climate-related discourses primarily for prestige purposes, the new environment induced it to voice its concerns more actively on the COP level. Russia's apprehensions, recurrent in all its later discourses, became centered around some states using the green transition as an ideological basis to conduct protectionist economic policies and to force third nations to alter their own (i. e., increase their ambition), which might lead to the latter becoming less competitive on global markets. Apart from this, on a more general scale, with the climate crisis becoming an integral part of international politics as such, Russia cannot anymore afford to ignore the topic, considering its intentions to pertain to the leaders of the global Non-West. On the contrary, it became crucial for the country to develop its own, alternative view, corresponding to its own interests and at the same time attractive to developing countries.

Secondly, the latter point is closely connected to Russia consistently promoting climate finance in its COP discourses, with the latter's evolution correspondent to the country's relations with the West throughout the reviewed period. Russia's interests in this respect are in line with the latest trends of international climate politics, which opens up new opportunities for the country to take a proactive part in it. At the same time, climate finance by Russia itself also contributes to its image within the UNFCCC as well as to the spread of its soft power. This is supported by the fact that Russia allocates finance for sustainability purposes either to international organizations and funds of the UN system or to states with which it is politically close (such states of the former Soviet Union; or Syria, where Russia successfully increased its influence while helping combat terrorism; or Zimbabwe, which later expressed support to Russia upon the crisis of 2022).

Thirdly, Russia's aspiration to strengthen its positions in international climate politics reflects in the way its discourses integrate the categories of "global", "universal" and "international". These do not vanish in 2022, in contrast to the previous period (2016-2017) when the country did not have active national climate policy and had not yet formalized its participation in the Paris Agreement. Despite the crisis, the discourses accentuate the "cooperation" categories, simultaneously activating the narrative on sanctions which hinder it. Therefore, Russia does not aim to isolate from international climate politics even despite its fragmentation: on the contrary, the country's position is framed in the way that shows its intentions to create its own center within this system.

Russia's discourses also comprise a number of clearly value-oriented points transmitted within the COP to the UNFCCC. The key values and interests contained, in one form or another, in all of the COP texts are those of polycentric world order, sustainable socioeconomic development and the necessity to recognize that all states have divergent development models and priorities, which cannot be unified into a singular "race to climate ambition" with a standardized set of regulatory instruments. To sum up, Russia's stance in international climate politics, in full alignment with realist logic, is centered around commitment to national sovereignty and the value of non-interference into states' internal political affairs.

The trends observable in Russia's discourses after the beginning of the crisis in 2022 allow us to suggest the directions which the country's external climate policy, particularly within the

COP to the UNFCCC, might develop in the near- and mid-term. It is highly likely that Russia will continue its efforts to intensify its action and strengthen its positions in international climate politics. Its leading narratives are still going to be the “forest” narrative and the narrative on developing countries. Nevertheless, Russia’s deepening cooperation with many of the latter indicates that these two narratives will be increasingly less independent from each other, unlike the discourses of previous years. The international recognition of the importance of carbon sinks is progressively integrated into a wider narrative on technological neutrality, the latter being cemented as one of the indispensable principles promoted by Russia in international climate politics. This also closely relates to supporting developing economies, for whom the increase of climate finance is as important as the guarantees of non-discrimination of the technologies and methods of decarbonization they adopt. All of the above, in turn, can be united into just transition, a concept fundamental for international climate politics and increasingly popular in Russia’s official and public discourses. Russia is likely going to widely adopt the just transition narratives due to their paramount significance to its allies and partner countries.

Discursive rapprochement with key political partners on climate change issues appears to be a significant direction for the development of Russia’s external climate policy. Developing economies are gaining an increasing role within the international processes related to climate change; they are rapidly transitioning away from earlier attempts to slow down developed countries’ decarbonization ambitions towards aspirations to “seize” the initiative, recognizing both the objective observable negative effects of climate change and the opportunities for growth which the green transition can offer. At the same time, their discourses in international climate politics are dominated by narratives on just transition, which in many respects aligns with Russia’s national interests. In this regard, the demonstration of support for their discourses within key international fora on climate change, particularly the COP to the UNFCCC, is becoming of high importance for Russia’s climate diplomacy for the nearest future.

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