

Science and Diplomacy at SAIS Europe

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Conflicts of interests vs values in fighting climate change

Thanking the Foundation for World Wide Cooperation for having invited me to this event, I would like to start addressing the climate change/science diplomacy subject from my experience of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), of which I am the EU delegate. The IPCC certainly represents a unique and very successful example of "science-to-policy" mechanism, by which the scientific consensus reached among scientists is endorsed – through the unanimous approval of the language of the "Summaries for policy-makers" of IPCC Reports – by all Governments, who are the IPCC Members. Is this an example of science diplomacy as such? Maybe not directly, but its outcomes – the IPCC Assessment Reports, with its "policy-relevant but not policy-prescriptive statements" – have had exceptionally high political influence on climate negotiations (Schleussner et al, 2016ⁱ). The 5th Assessment Report of 2014 was very important for framing the Paris Agreement, when it said in a very authoritative way that warming was unequivocal, and essentially due to anthropogenic emissions, that we have to stay within a given greenhouse gas budget if we wish to remain within the 2°C global warming limit – beyond which the risks are perceived to be excessive – and that more than 60% of this budget has already been consumed. At the current pace it will be fully expired well before 2050, and the earlier the emissions will peak and start decreasing, the lower the transition costs will be. In summary, the 5th IPCC Assessment Report told all governments that there is a window of opportunity to act, and that there is a choice to be made to make good use of it – a message to which they have subscribedⁱⁱ.

However, the success of IPCC Reports will only persist so long as science continues to be valued, but it will be questioned if science is openly denied or discredited - as it is presently happening with the changes in the US administration.

The announced 180° reverse of the climate policies of the Obama administration have been brought forward by the new Trump administration through the nomination of climate-sceptics to key government positions, the deletion from government's web sites of mentions of climate change, the systematic repeal of climate policies of the previous administration, the budget cuts proposals related to climate and clean energy budget posts, the voices of abandoning of the Paris Agreement [that unfortunately have been later confirmed], and a general wave of denial and discredit of climate science.

We can most certainly be offended by what the greatest part of us arguably value as an irresponsible position in front of a planetary problem.

However, we have to ask ourselves where do science denial and discredit come from. It looks quite evident that such ideological positions hide vested interests – such as those of the oil lobbies – when they are expressed by top administration leaders. However, these positions easily find popular support. Why? The common feature of populist movements is their anti-elites narrativeⁱⁱⁱ, and scientists represent a paradigmatic elite, with their language, frequently difficult and not accessible to the "ordinary people". This frequently produces in populists' narratives a loud voice declaration of a "pride of ignorance", accompanied by the rejection of science *tout-court* as a means of providing advice to policy-making.

What can we do in order to create the conditions for climate change science to be respected and considered - as it should - an indispensable source of information for policy-making? A plan of 5 points is hereby proposed:

1. Start by listening carefully to climate-sceptics, in particular those sitting in the highest positions of responsibility, in order to analyse and fully understand the underlying drivers, the vested interests and the political objectives of such "irresponsible" positions. And listen carefully to those who at lower level support climate scepticism, sometimes even in the scientific communities, in order to understand and to be able to contrast the underlying narratives;
2. Make science become more accessible and friendly to all. We have to make further efforts towards the popularisation of knowledge, also through launching a broad programme of science – and climate change science – literacy, in particular through the younger generations at early school level that frequently act as transmitters of knowledge. Media cooperation is essential (including social media), and all scientists have to go through specific training on how to synthesize scientific knowledge with non-specialised language. It is a difficult task. As Sigmund Freud said, "...it's not always easy to tell the truth, in particular when you have to be brief".
3. Create new alliances: climate change scientists have to create new alliances with a different kind of societal groups/sectors who may share some common interest. First of all, the business community that is interested in new markets and in the technological revolution that will accompany decarbonisation. But many other societal actors can be approached, in particular those who are better capable to perceive the risks, such as those representing the financial sector (who know how much carbon rich investments may tomorrow be stranded) or the militaries (who think in terms of security and know that climate security is already today a major factor of risk), and the new generations (it is for them and for their children that we have to act now). Moreover, a crucial alliance has to be established with all forms of art and the media, which are so important for widespread communication.
4. Boost scientific cooperation with a science diplomacy perspective. Here, I see several strands of action that are not only possible but necessary. First, to support the upcoming IPCC set of reports with new advanced science, further reducing the uncertainty on causes, impacts, projections and solutions to the climate change challenge. In order to do so, and considering the new US administration intention to dramatically cut any financial support to

climate science and to low-carbon technologies, the EU has to step-up investments in research and innovation in this field, and to establish international cooperation priorities with other major emitters, in particular China. Leaving thousands of excellent US scientists without research funding will create a major problem. The EU could offer the possibility to key US climate scientists to get funded from EU programmes, under the proviso that the exceptional and unique knowledge that some scientists can provide join European consortia. And finally the EU has to promote research programmes – with a science diplomacy perspective - that put together key EU scientific institutions with others from major emitting countries, knowing that those institutions will also be called at national level to help design future Nationally Determined Contributions to the Paris Agreement.

5. Show leadership. The stepping-out of the US from climate agreements has to be taken by the EU as an opportunity to build leadership, creating a strong alliance with other major emitters, in particular with China [as it was done in the recent EU-China summit]. This new leadership must however offer the world a new narrative, that has to contain the economic convenience to act now, but that should also draw on simple and firm ethical boundaries. As Pope Francis has loudly said^{iv}, it is a matter of dignity for humankind to show that we are able to use our tremendous technological and non-technological power and capacity to solve the problems we have created, to act for the greater good, while moving together towards a new era of prosperity in balance with planetary boundaries.

In conclusion, I wish to summarise that we have to defend the Paris Agreement with its science-based objectives. Going beyond the 2°C would be very risky, in particular in relation to runaway warming. Humankind has an enormous opportunity, as Pope Francis also said, to become better, by showing its capability and its willingness to act together and to stop emissions at the lowest possible level, not just by responding to an economic convenience of acting. We have to move on with ambition, and it will be our collective move to cause renewable energies, electrified transports or other zero-carbon solutions to become cheaper, and market forces to act.

ⁱ See "Science and policy characteristics of the Paris Agreement temperature goal" at http://www.pik-potsdam.de/~anders/publications/schleussner_rogelj16.pdf

ⁱⁱ IPCC, 2014: Climate Change 2014: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II and III to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [Core Writing Team, R.K. Pachauri and L.A. Meyer (eds.)]. IPCC, Geneva, Switzerland, 151 pp., at <https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar5/syr/>

ⁱⁱⁱ An interesting analysis of new populism is proposed by Marco Revelli (2017) *Populismo 2.0* (in Italian), Einaudi, 168 pp., ISBN 9788806233365

^{iv} Pope Francis (2015), Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'* on care for our common home, at http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html