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# Russia and Climate Change : Bipolar Near the North Pole

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## Russia and Climate Change: Bipolar Near the North Pole

Andrew Sabintsev

### Introduction

With climate change threatening the geographic and economic stability of the world, the governments of the world face the gargantuan and controversial task of providing solutions before the onset of irreparable harm.<sup>1</sup> Russia<sup>2</sup> in particular, as “the world’s largest producer of crude oil . . . and the [world’s] second-largest producer of dry natural gas,” finds itself in a particularly influential position to help curb the effects of global warming.<sup>3</sup>

On the surface, Russia supports the mitigation of climate change. The country ratified the Kyoto Protocol<sup>4</sup> and signed the recent Paris Climate Agreement,<sup>5</sup> and President Vladimir Putin has spoken of Russia’s efforts to combat the burgeoning crisis; “Russia not only prevented the growth of

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<sup>1</sup> EarthTalk. “Have We Passed the Point of No Return on Climate Change?” *Scientific American*, Scientific American, 13 Apr. 2015, [www.scientificamerican.com/article/have-we-passed-the-point-of-no-return-on-climate-change/](http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/have-we-passed-the-point-of-no-return-on-climate-change/). Accessed 22 Apr. 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout this paper I will use the term “Russia” to refer interchangeably to the country and the country’s federal government.

<sup>3</sup> “Country Analysis Brief: Russia.” *Eia Beta*, p. 1., [www.eia.gov/beta/international/analysis\\_includes/countries\\_long/Russia/russia.pdf](http://www.eia.gov/beta/international/analysis_includes/countries_long/Russia/russia.pdf). Accessed 22 Apr. 2017.

<sup>4</sup> Walsh, Nick Paton. “Russian Vote Saves Kyoto Protocol.” *The Guardian*, Guardian News and Media, 22 Oct. 2004, [www.theguardian.com/world/2004/oct/23/society.russia](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/oct/23/society.russia). Accessed 22 Apr. 2017.

<sup>5</sup> “List of Parties That Signed the Paris Agreement on 22 April.” *Un.org*, United Nations, Apr. 2016, [www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2016/04/parisagreementsignatures/](http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2016/04/parisagreementsignatures/). Accessed 22 Apr. 2017.

greenhouse gas emission[s], b[ut] also significantly reduced it” between 1991 and 2012, he claimed at the Paris Climate Conference.<sup>6</sup>

But does Russia actually wish to mitigate the effects of climate change?

The country is economically dependent on its energy sector with approximately half of the federal government budget coming from energy exports<sup>7</sup> and over 60% of GDP being influenced by oil and natural gas.<sup>8</sup> Certainly any commitment to reduce greenhouse gas emissions would impact the country’s crucial energy industry. Beyond the detriments to its economy from attempting to halt the effects of climate change, Russia may actually lose economic opportunity that would otherwise be afforded by the continued warming of the planet. The country’s vast amounts of permafrost-covered land is expected to become arable as temperatures rise, which would very likely lead to an agricultural boom, as the enormous width of the country supports large sections of land heating up with even minor latitudinal gains in average temperature.<sup>9,10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> “Russia’s Efforts Slowed down Global Warming for Year – Putin.” *Rt.com*, RT, 30 Nov. 2015, [www.rt.com/news/324037-putin-paris-climate-cop21/](http://www.rt.com/news/324037-putin-paris-climate-cop21/). Accessed 22 Apr. 2017.

<sup>7</sup> Nartova, Olga. “Russia’s Energy Policy.” Jan. 2017, Chicago, University of Chicago | The Law School.

<sup>8</sup> Movchan, Andrey. “Just an Oil Company? The True Extent of Russia’s Dependency on Oil and Gas.” *Carnegie.ru*, Carnegie Moscow Center, 14 Sept. 2015, [carnegie.ru/commentary/?fa=61272](http://carnegie.ru/commentary/?fa=61272). Accessed 22 Apr. 2017.

<sup>9</sup> University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. “Large Regional Changes in Farmland Area Predicted.” *Sciencedaily.com*, ScienceDaily, 28 Mar. 2011, [www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/03/110325151645.htm](http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/03/110325151645.htm). Accessed 22 Apr. 2017.

<sup>10</sup> But pipeline infrastructure could suffer damage from melting permafrost. Litvak, Vladimir. 26 Jan. 2017. Expert on Russian energy and environmental policy.

Similarly, rising temperatures are expected to further open up the arctic region<sup>11</sup> for oil and natural gas extraction and commercial shipping.<sup>12,13</sup> On a more superficial level, warmer weather would probably be welcome in the historically cold nation, as Putin once quipped that global warming would allow Russians to “spend less money on fur coats.”<sup>14</sup>

Given this dichotomy between public claims and future consequences, the question presents itself: what’s Russia’s real goal when it comes to climate change? Following the principle that actions speak louder than words, this paper seeks to determine Russia’s true intent with respect to climate change, by analyzing the country’s involvement in the international community and energy policies.

### **Russia on the International Stage**

Since the time of Peter the Great, Russia has sought to westernize. From introducing new sartorial standards to establishing advanced schools and reforming the Church, the country adopted much from its avant-garde

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<sup>11</sup> For official Russia policy regarding the Arctic see: “Basics of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic for the Period till 202 and for a Further Perspective.” *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 30 Mar. 2009, [www.arctis-search.com/Russian Federation Policy for the Arctic to 2020](http://www.arctis-search.com/Russian_Federation_Policy_for_the_Arctic_to_2020). Accessed 23 Apr. 2017.

<sup>12</sup> Page, Samantha. “Putin Defends Climate Deniers and Looks Forward to the Arctic Melting.” *Think Progress.org*, ThinkProgress, 31 Mar. 2017, [thinkprogress.org/putin-thinks-russia-will-benefit-from-climate-change-and-communities-will-adjust-35a2014c28b5](http://thinkprogress.org/putin-thinks-russia-will-benefit-from-climate-change-and-communities-will-adjust-35a2014c28b5). Accessed 22 Apr. 2017.

<sup>13</sup> The economic value of an arctic commercial route is up for debate. Litvak, Vladimir.

<sup>14</sup> Novak, Robert. “The Russian Didn’t Bark.” *Cnn.com*, CNN, 16 Oct. 2003, [www.cnn.com/2003/ALLPOLITICS/10/16/column.novak.opinion.russian/](http://www.cnn.com/2003/ALLPOLITICS/10/16/column.novak.opinion.russian/). Accessed 22 Apr. 2017.

neighbors. But beyond modernizing its cultural, educational, and religious institutions as a means of *establishing* itself among the great European powers, Russia saw westernization as an opportunity to be *seen* as one of the great European powers.<sup>15</sup> This sentiment still holds today, albeit expanded from just Europe to the whole world, as Putin explained at an international economic forum in 2015 that Russia wants to be respected as a “participant[] of the international community.”<sup>16</sup>

With this backdrop in mind, we turn to Russia’s participation in the international fight against climate change. Over the past 30 years, the country has joined several major international agreements related to environmental protection. Consequently, Russia regulates potentially harmful industries by requiring permits to use natural resources and pollute, and by imposing both civil and criminal liability in the event of regulatory breach.<sup>17</sup> Most prominently among its international environmental agreements are the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Climate Agreement. Under Kyoto, Russia pledged to not exceed its

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<sup>15</sup> "Russia." *Russia Country Review*, July 2017, pp. 11-12. EBSCOhost, proxy.uchicago.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bth&AN=121481487&site=eds-live&scope=site. Accessed 22 Apr. 2017.

<sup>16</sup> "Putin: Russia Is Not Aspiring to Superpower Status, Just Wants to Be Respected." *Rt.com*, RT, 21 June 2015, www.rt.com/news/268387-putin-russia-petersburg-forum/?utm\_source=rss&utm\_medium=rss&utm\_campaign=RSS. Accessed 22 Apr. 2017.

<sup>17</sup> Josefson, Jennifer A. "Overview Russian Environmental Regulation." pp. 3–8., www.kslaw.com/imageserver/KSPublic/library/publication/RussianEnvironmental.pdf. Accessed 22 Apr. 2017.

1990 level of greenhouse gas emissions for the target period<sup>18</sup> and under Paris, Russia pledged to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions to between 25% and 30% below its 1990 level.<sup>19</sup>

However, while such commitments seem to indicate a genuine interest in curbing the effects of climate change, especially for a country so dependent on pollutive oil and natural gas, a historical convenience renders the commitments hollow. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russian industry, and by extension greenhouse gas emissions, shrank. Consequently, with 1990 as the base year (when the Soviet Union still existed) for the country's greenhouse gas emissions targets, Russia was already in compliance under Kyoto by the time it ratified the treaty; greenhouse gas emissions could actually increase without Russia reneging on its commitment.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, with respect to its commitments under Paris, Russia's greenhouse gas emissions were already 30% below 1990 levels in 2014.<sup>21</sup>

So what's Russia's objective here? The country has voluntarily committed itself to greenhouse gas emissions targets, which supports the contention that it is interested in combating climate change. But an alternative motive exists.

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<sup>18</sup> "Kyoto Protocol: Targets for the First Commitment Period." *Unfccc.int*, United Nations, 2014, unfccc.int/kyoto\_protocol/items/3145.php. Accessed 22 Apr. 2017.

<sup>19</sup> Nartova, Olga. "Russia's Energy Policy."

<sup>20</sup> Lisa McIntosh, Sundstrom and Henry Laura A. "Russia and the Kyoto Protocol: Ratification and Post-Ratification Politics." 2015, p. 2. *EBSCOhost*, proxy.uchicago.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsbas&AN=edsbas.ftciteserx.oai.CiteSeerX.psu.10.1.1.527.7459&site=eds-live&scope=site. Accessed 23 Apr. 2017.

<sup>21</sup> Nartova, Olga. "Russia's Energy Policy."

Following the United States' refusal to ratify the Kyoto Protocol, it became very difficult to reach the "55/55"<sup>22</sup> target required for the treaty to come into effect.<sup>23</sup> A Russian ratification, therefore, would "save" the treaty from collapse.<sup>24</sup> And in doing so, Russia "elevat[ed its] image as a cooperative partner in international affairs."<sup>25</sup> The same sentiment applies to Russia's signing of the Paris Climate Agreement, even without the country playing the role of savior. As Grigory Vaypan, head of litigation at the Institute for Law and Public Policy in Moscow explained, Russia joins international institutions to appear legitimate and show consensus with the international community.<sup>26</sup>

Regardless, the mere existence of alternative motives is not dispositive. What is dispositive though, is how Russia acted following its respective ratification and signing of the Kyoto Protocol and Paris Climate Agreement. With respect to Kyoto, if Russia's greenhouse gas emissions increased while still remaining below target levels, then that suggests Russia wasn't actually concerned with addressing climate change. As it turns out though, between 2008 and 2012, the first commitment period under Kyoto,<sup>27</sup> Russia's total greenhouse

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<sup>22</sup> At least 55 industrial nations comprising at least 55% of the world's 1990 greenhouse gas emissions needed to ratify the treaty for it to come into effect.

<sup>23</sup> Bond, Eric. "The Kyoto Protocol." *Climatechange.sea.ca*, [climatechange.sea.ca/kyoto\\_protocol.html](http://climatechange.sea.ca/kyoto_protocol.html). Accessed 23 Apr. 2017.

<sup>24</sup> Walsh, Nick Paton. "Russian Vote Saves Kyoto Protocol."

<sup>25</sup> Lisa McIntosh, Sundstrom and Henry Laura A. "Russia and the Kyoto Protocol: Ratification and Post-Ratification Politics."

<sup>26</sup> Vaypan, Grigory. 15 Mar. 2017.

<sup>27</sup> Russia did not sign on to the second commitment period. See: Erbach, Gregor. "Doha Amendment to the Kyoto Protocol." *Europarl.europa.eu*, European Parliament, 2015,

gas emissions decreased by 6.4%.<sup>28,29</sup> Regarding Paris, Russia is the only country among the world's top five greenhouse gas emitters<sup>30</sup> that has yet to ratify the agreement.<sup>31,32</sup> Opposition from those in the energy industry and economic constraints seem to be what's slowing things down.<sup>33</sup> But even if Russia were to ratify the agreement tomorrow, its commitment to the cause would be dubious. As previously explained, Russia's greenhouse gas emissions target level under Paris was already achieved by 2014. And under the agreement, each country has discretion in setting its own non-binding target.<sup>34</sup> Considering Russia's position as one of the world's top greenhouse gas emitters, such discretion was almost certainly abused; not a single new policy would need to be implemented to

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[www.europarl.europa.eu/EPRS/EPRS-AaG-559475-Doha-Agreement-Kyoto-Protocol-FINAL.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/EPRS/EPRS-AaG-559475-Doha-Agreement-Kyoto-Protocol-FINAL.pdf). Accessed 23 Apr. 2017.

<sup>28</sup> See: Appendix A

<sup>29</sup> The world recession was a factor in many industrialized countries' reduction of greenhouse gas emissions during this period. See: Doyle, Alister. "Recession Cuts U.S. and Russia 2009 Greenhouse Emissions." *Reuters.com*, Reuters, 15 Apr. 2011, [www.reuters.com/article/us-climate-emissions-idUSTRE73E6XZ20110415](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-climate-emissions-idUSTRE73E6XZ20110415). Accessed 23 Apr. 2017.

<sup>30</sup> "Russia." *Russia Country Review*, p. 671.

<sup>31</sup> "Paris Agreement - Status of Ratification." *Unfccc.int*, United Nations, [unfccc.int/paris\\_agreement/items/9444.php](http://unfccc.int/paris_agreement/items/9444.php). Accessed 23 Apr. 2017.

<sup>32</sup> It took Russia five years to ratify the Kyoto Protocol. See: "Status of Ratification of the Kyoto Protocol." *Unfccc.int*, United Nations, [unfccc.int/kyoto\\_protocol/status\\_of\\_ratification/items/2613.php](http://unfccc.int/kyoto_protocol/status_of_ratification/items/2613.php). Accessed 23 Apr. 2017.

<sup>33</sup> Davydova, Angelina. "What's Holding Russia Back from Ratifying Paris Climate Agreement?" *Upi.com*, United Press International, 27 Sept. 2016, [www.upi.com/Top\\_News/Opinion/2016/09/27/Whats-holding-Russia-back-from-ratifying-Paris-climate-agreement/3991475000366/](http://www.upi.com/Top_News/Opinion/2016/09/27/Whats-holding-Russia-back-from-ratifying-Paris-climate-agreement/3991475000366/). Accessed 23 Apr. 2017.

<sup>34</sup> "Russia." *Russia Country Review*, pp. 719-720.



reach the target.<sup>35</sup> In other words, as with Kyoto, Russia could simultaneously comply with the agreement and increase its greenhouse gas emissions.

This wouldn't be the first time that Russia has said one thing for international posturing and done another for its own convenience. As a member of the European Court of Human Rights,<sup>36</sup> Russia is bound to adhere to the European Convention on Human Rights.<sup>37</sup> In fact, the Russian constitution states that international treaties to which Russia is a party supersede domestic law.<sup>38,39</sup> Regardless, Russia has effectively ignored multiple unfavorable rulings of the court. In *Fadeyeva v. Russia*, the court found that the government had breached the convention by not regulating the pollution around the petitioner's home. But rather than relocating the petitioner or improving the environmental conditions in the area in question, the government updated its zoning laws so that the petitioner's home was no longer within the area considered safe for residential property, and was therefore no longer entitled to environmental protection.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> "Russian Federation - Climate Action Tracker." *Climateactiontracker.org*, Climate Action Tracker, 3 Nov. 2016, [climateactiontracker.org/countries/russianfederation.html](http://climateactiontracker.org/countries/russianfederation.html). Accessed 23 Apr. 2017.

<sup>36</sup> "47 Member States." [www.echr.coe.int/Documents/2010\\_Expo\\_50years\\_02\\_ENG.pdf](http://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/2010_Expo_50years_02_ENG.pdf). Accessed 23 Apr. 2017.

<sup>37</sup> "The ECHR in 50 Questions." pp. 3–4., [www.echr.coe.int/Documents/50Questions\\_ENG.pdf](http://www.echr.coe.int/Documents/50Questions_ENG.pdf). Accessed 23 Apr. 2017.

<sup>38</sup> "The Constitution of the Russian Federation (with the Amendments and Additions of December 30, 2008)." p. 4., [www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/en/ru/ru003en.pdf](http://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/en/ru/ru003en.pdf). Accessed 23 Apr. 2017.

<sup>39</sup> It is unclear whether the Russian constitution itself is subservient to international treaties. Vaypan, Grigory. 15 Mar. 2017.

<sup>40</sup> "Fadeyeva v Russia (Re Severstal Smelter)." *Business-Humanrights.org*, Business & Human Rights Resource Centre, 18 Feb. 2014, [business-humanrights.org/en/fadeyeva-v-russia-re-severstal-smelter](http://business-humanrights.org/en/fadeyeva-v-russia-re-severstal-smelter). Accessed 23 Apr. 2017.

Similarly, in *Yukos Shareholders v. Russia*, the court found that the government had breached the convention by inappropriately taxing the petitioners, and ordered the government to compensate the petitioners. However, rather than appealing the decision or paying the petitioners, the government sought relief from its own constitutional court, which held the ruling of the European Court of Human Rights unconstitutional and therefore unenforceable.<sup>41</sup> With this interaction with the European Court of Human Rights in mind, it doesn't seem farfetched at all that Russia would agree to international agreements like the Kyoto Protocol and Paris Climate Agreement to obtain the appearance of international cooperation without actually having to cooperate. Peter the Great's desire for Russia to "fit in" with the rest of the world is ostensibly alive and well.

### **Russia's Energy Future**

Given Russia's dependence on oil and natural gas, the country's economic future hinges on the viability of its energy industry. Unfortunately for Russia though, if it doesn't diversify its energy offerings, it will be on the "losing side" of the energy future.<sup>42</sup> Developing a renewable energy industry, therefore, is key, and as it turns out, coincides with an environmentally conscious agenda, as renewable energies have less of a harmful impact on climate than do fossil

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<sup>41</sup> Philippov, Ivan. "Russian Constitutional Court Denies Enforcement of ECHR Decision on Yukos." *Cisarbitration.com*, CIS Arbitration Forum, 25 Jan. 2017, [www.cisarbitration.com/2017/01/25/russian-constitutional-court-denies-enforcement-of-echr-decision-on-yukos/](http://www.cisarbitration.com/2017/01/25/russian-constitutional-court-denies-enforcement-of-echr-decision-on-yukos/). Accessed 23 Apr. 2017.

<sup>42</sup> Litvak, Vladimir.

fuels.<sup>43</sup> The challenge then is to determine the motivating factor for Russia's prospective energy policies; is the country worried about economic stability or environmental health?<sup>44</sup>

On the heels of the crisis in Ukraine, falling oil prices, and American sanctions, the Russian ruble lost nearly half of its value in the second half of 2014.<sup>45,46</sup> A recession followed as Russia's economy contracted in both 2015 and 2016.<sup>47</sup> Add to that the plight of the millions of Russians living far east of Moscow and St. Petersburg and it seems only natural that the government would focus on economic conditions above all else.<sup>48</sup> As Artem Zhavoronkov, a partner at the Dentons' St. Petersburg office explained, most Russians don't have the luxury to think about climate change, because they're too concerned

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<sup>43</sup> "Environmental Impacts of Renewable Energy Technologies." *Ucsusa.org*, Union of Concerned Scientists, [www.ucsusa.org/clean-energy/renewable-energy/environmental-impacts#.WP07ybHMw\\_U](http://www.ucsusa.org/clean-energy/renewable-energy/environmental-impacts#.WP07ybHMw_U). Accessed 23 Apr. 2017.

<sup>44</sup> It's certainly possible that both motivations (and perhaps even other ones) are considered by the government in crafting energy policy. However, just as the government could use both the Kyoto Protocol and Paris Climate Agreement to focus on economic development under the guise of environmental concern, the fear that the country's energy policy could be primarily centered on economic prosperity while claiming to be environmentally focused is not unfounded.

<sup>45</sup> "Russia." *Russia Country Review*, p. 489.

<sup>46</sup> See: Appendix B

<sup>47</sup> Tanas, Olga. "Russia Nears End of Recession as GDP Shrinks Less Than Forecast." *Bloomberg.com*, Bloomberg, 1 Feb. 2017, [www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-02-01/russia-nears-end-of-recession-as-gdp-shrinks-less-than-forecast](http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2017-02-01/russia-nears-end-of-recession-as-gdp-shrinks-less-than-forecast). Accessed 23 Apr. 2017.

<sup>48</sup> Rodriguez, Alex. "The Forgotten Cities of Eastern Russia." *Articles.chicagotribune.com*, Chicago Tribune, 26 Feb. 2008, [articles.chicagotribune.com/2008-02-26/news/0802250967\\_1\\_vladimir-putin-russian-cities-amur-river](http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2008-02-26/news/0802250967_1_vladimir-putin-russian-cities-amur-river). Accessed 23 Apr. 2017.

with their personal finances.<sup>49,50</sup> Such sentiments are, at least in part, fostered by the government itself. After all, “the Kremlin has unprecedented control over what Russians see, hear[,] and think,” with its domination of media, and is certain to shape public opinion as it sees fit.<sup>51</sup> In other words, if the government wanted its people to care about climate change, they would.<sup>52</sup>

Keeping this economic motivation in mind, we turn to official energy policy. Russia’s Energy Strategy to 2030 (“the Strategy”) outlines the country’s energy goals for the relevant period<sup>53</sup>, including maintaining a stable energy supply, developing economic efficiencies in the energy sector, and minimizing the country’s environmental impact.<sup>54</sup> In particular, the Strategy seeks to increase natural gas and oil production, develop production and exportation of

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<sup>49</sup> Artem also noted the indifference towards environmentalism in general; “If you told a Russian they have different trash cans for different kinds of trash in America, they’d laugh at you,” he told me. Zhavoronkov, Artem. 23 Mar. 2017.

<sup>50</sup> Dr. Olga Khazova explained that the same attitudes towards environmentalism are shared by the more affluent in Russian society as well; “You’ve been in Moscow. You’ve seen how many cars we have,” she told me. Khazova, Olga. 14 Mar. 2017.

<sup>51</sup> Matthews, Owen. “Putin’s Secret Weapon.” *Newsweek Global*, vol. 166, no. 24, 24 June 2016, pp. 34-41. EBSCOhost, proxy.uchicago.edu/login?url=http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bth&AN=116138739&site=eds-live&scope=site. Accessed 23 Apr. 2017.

<sup>52</sup> A 2015 survey by the Pew Research Center found that only 22% of Russians are very concerned about global climate change, compared to 43% being very concerned about global economic stability. See: Carle, Jill. “Climate Change Seen as Top Global Threat.” *Pewglobal.org*, Pew Research Center, 14 July 2015, www.pewglobal.org/2015/07/14/climate-change-seen-as-top-global-threat/. Accessed 24 Apr. 2017.

<sup>53</sup> The plan was approved in 2009. “Energy Strategy of Russia for the Period up to 2030.” 2010, p. 8., www.energystrategy.ru/projects/docs/ES-2030\_(Eng).pdf. Accessed 24 Apr. 2017.

<sup>54</sup> Ellinas, Charles. “Russia’s Energy Strategy to 2030: Interview.” *Naturalgasworld.com*, Natural Gas World, 16 Mar. 2016, www.naturalgasworld.com/russias-energy-strategy-to-2030-interview-28637. Accessed 24 Apr. 2017.

coal, and decrease emissions of greenhouse gases.<sup>55</sup> On the surface, this seems to support the theory that both economic *and* environmental considerations are motivating the country's energy policy; increased energy production will grow the economy while reduced greenhouse gas emissions will protect the environment. However, a brief reflection on this duality seems to reveal a contradiction. How can Russia simultaneously increase energy production and decrease greenhouse gas emissions?

Two answers present themselves. First, as we've already seen with respect to international institutions, Russia has no problem saying one thing and doing another. It's not unreasonable to think that the government would project a goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions to appear concerned with the environment without actually planning on achieving that goal. In fact, given the importance of economics to the Russian government, it seems suspect that any official policy would establish initiatives at the expense of economic growth. Regardless, the posturing afforded by a national economic policy is dubious (as compared to that afforded by an international agreement like the Kyoto Protocol or the Paris Climate Agreement), so this possibility seems to lack an explanation of motive. The more likely resolution of the apparent contradiction requires looking to the Strategy itself. As already mentioned, one of the goals of the Strategy is to increase efficiency in the energy sector. In particular, the Strategy

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<sup>55</sup> Nartova, Olga. "Russia's Energy Policy."

calls for reducing the energy intensity of the economy.<sup>56</sup> Consequently, the per unit energy requirement of GDP will decrease, allowing for a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions from energy production while maintaining the same level (if not higher) of economic activity. And because of the international demand for fossil fuels by developing nations, the energy industry won't suffer from reduced domestic demand.<sup>57</sup> The government would therefore be able to balance economic and environmental interests.

Similarly, Russia's renewable energy initiatives suggest concurrent economic and environmental concerns. The Strategy targets 4.5% as the portion of energy to be generated from renewable sources by 2020.<sup>58,59</sup> Mechanisms such as transfers of long-term capacity agreements and renewable energy project auctions intended to support the goal by growing the industry.<sup>60</sup> This implies an environmental focus, as renewables are less harmful to the environment than are fossil fuels. However, financing restrictions from international sanctions and the devaluation of the ruble reduced funding for

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<sup>56</sup> "Energy Strategy of Russia for the Period up to 2030." 2010, p. 14.

<sup>57</sup> Litvak, Vladimir.

<sup>58</sup> Nartova, Olga. "Russia's Energy Policy."

<sup>59</sup> This is a particularly optimistic goal; BP predicts renewables will comprise less than 2% of Russia's energy mix by 2035. See: "BP Energy Outlook Country and Regional Insights - Russia." *Bp.com*, British Petroleum, 2016, [www.bp.com/content/dam/bp/pdf/energy-economics/energy-outlook-2016/bp-energy-outlook-2016-country-insights-russia.pdf](http://www.bp.com/content/dam/bp/pdf/energy-economics/energy-outlook-2016/bp-energy-outlook-2016-country-insights-russia.pdf). Accessed 24 Apr. 2017.

<sup>60</sup> Josefson, Jennifer, and Alexandra Rotar. "Renewable Energy In Russia: Recent Developments." *Energylawexchange.com*, King & Spalding, 6 Apr. 2016, [www.energylawexchange.com/renewable-energy-in-russia-recent-developments/](http://www.energylawexchange.com/renewable-energy-in-russia-recent-developments/). Accessed 24 Apr. 2017.

investment into renewable energy, casting doubt over the future of the industry's expansion.<sup>61,62</sup> Once again we see that everything ultimately boils down to economics.

### **Conclusion**

It seems that Russia might not care about climate change as much as it lets on. Its international presence seems focused on image and its renewable energy policies rise and fall with the value of the ruble. Appearances and economics rule the day.

And yet, such a conclusion shouldn't automatically cast Russia in a negative light. To reiterate Artem Zhavoronkov's point, Russians simply don't have the luxury of caring about climate change. After all, it's hard to focus on such seemingly distant issues when poverty is rising,<sup>63</sup> public health is declining,<sup>64</sup> and overall satisfaction with life is dismal.<sup>65</sup> Even if money can't buy happiness, it does make life easier, so can we blame the government for stressing economics?

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<sup>61</sup> Davydova, Angelina. "What's Holding Russia Back from Ratifying Paris Climate Agreement?"

<sup>62</sup> Litvak, Vladimir.

<sup>63</sup> France-Presse, Agence. "Millions More Russians Living in Poverty as Economic Crisis Bites." *Theguardian.com*, The Guardian, 21 Mar. 2016, [www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/22/millions-more-russians-living-in-poverty-as-economic-crisis-bites](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/22/millions-more-russians-living-in-poverty-as-economic-crisis-bites). Accessed 24 Apr. 2017.

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<sup>65</sup> "Russian Federation." *Oecdbetterlifeindex.org*, Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, 2015, [www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/countries/russian-federation/](http://www.oecdbetterlifeindex.org/countries/russian-federation/). Accessed 24 Apr. 2017.

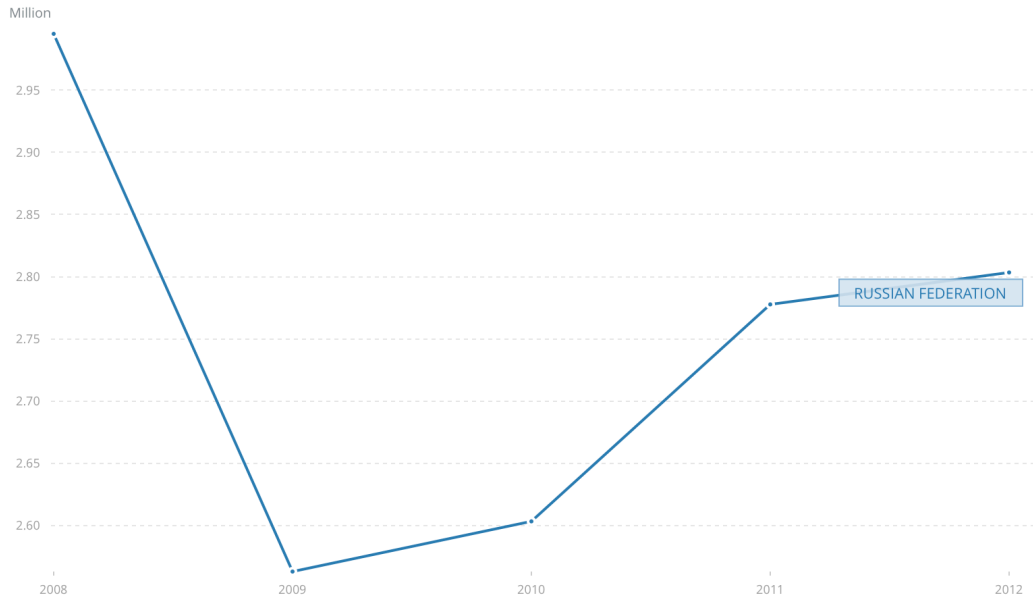
Ultimately, any government policy requires a balancing of competing interests. More money for one initiative means another gets less. More attention for one issue means another gets less. More research for one policy means another gets less. And as things currently stand in Russia, climate change consistently gets less.



## Appendix

**A**

Total greenhouse gas emissions (kt of CO2 equivalent)



2008

2012

2,995,287

2,803,398

“Total Greenhouse Gas Emissions (Kt of CO2 Equivalent).” *Data.worldbank.org*, Worldbank, [data.worldbank.org/indicator/EN.ATM.GHGT.KT.CE?end=2012&locations=RU&start=2008&view=chart](http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EN.ATM.GHGT.KT.CE?end=2012&locations=RU&start=2008&view=chart). Accessed 23 Apr. 2017.

**B**

		Jul 01, 2014 16:00 UTC
<b>Russian Ruble</b>	<b>1.00 RUB</b>	<b>inv. 1.00 RUB</b>
US Dollar	0.029137	34.320332
		Dec 31, 2014 17:00 UTC
<b>Russian Ruble</b>	<b>1.00 RUB</b>	<b>inv. 1.00 RUB</b>
US Dollar	0.017073	58.573021

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