

Hear, understand, negotiate

The world around us is changing rapidly. The reason for this is not so much the natural processes related to the action of the forces of Nature and shaped over millions of years of Earth's evolution, but the intense efforts of Man. This concerns both the degradation of the natural environment and climate change, and the relationships within the human community – between countries, peoples and different cultural and ethnic groups of our planet's inhabitants. The destructive influence on Nature is exerted not so much by an individual Man (a generalized individual with his aspirations to satisfy his growing needs and egocentric ambitions), as by “the huge tectonic plates of human mass¹ (in the words of the outstanding French philosopher of our time Michel Serre).

M. Serre deplors that “the sum total of the damage done to the world so far corresponds to the devastating calamities of the last world war. Our peaceful economic relations are slowly but surely achieving the same results as a short but global conflict, as if war were not only a matter for the military, especially since they use the same advances in knowledge that they use in science and production. There is some threshold effect in that the growth of our technical capabilities leads to the same results”².

The damage inflicted on Nature by the “human mass” is approaching a dangerous line beyond which the possibilities for the development of modern civilization on Earth become more than problematic. This is why the scientist proposes a radical reformatting of society's relationship with Nature on the basis of the Treaty. “So, a return to Nature! This means that to the exclusive social contract (generally attributed to J.-J. Rousseau) a treaty with Nature on cohabitation and interaction should be added... A treaty of truce in this object war, a treaty of cohabitation: the symbiont allows the host to have a right, while the parasite – and now we are in this status – condemns to death those whom it robs and through whom it lives,

¹ Serre Michel. *The Treaty with Nature* / Translated from the French. St. Petersburg: Publishing house of the European University in St. Petersburg, 2022. P. 51.

² *Ibid.* P. 75.

without realizing that in the end it condemns to death itself.”³ In a sense, the UN’s 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) can be seen as a first step toward this Treaty⁴. As stated in the official communiqué, these goals are addressed to each country on the condition of protecting (preserving) the planet, and their package is based on the fact that economic growth should be oriented to meet a wide range of social priorities, including education, health, social protection and employment, and take into account climate change and environmental issues. Alas, the current situation clearly demonstrates the mismatch between well-intentioned wishes and real action. While intellectuals, of whom M. Serre is the most visible representative, are discussing the Treaty with Nature, politicians are invariably guarding the interests of particular countries and their ruling elites.

Under pressure from developed countries, especially Europe, one of the 17 SDGs has been selected as the top priority – No. 13, Climate Action. The fundamental approach to its achievement is closely tied to the need to reduce carbon dioxide emissions into the atmosphere, primarily from fossil fuel combustion in electricity generation. However, the proposed EU approach to reducing these emissions has little in common with the discussed paradigm of enhanced interaction between countries on the basis of mutual understanding and a common desire to reformat the relationship with Nature (see the papers by V. S. Arutyunov, A. I. Pyzhev, as well as L. M. Korytny and V. N. Veselova).

The EU approach is based on self-centeredness and outright economic selfishness: “Since we raise our own climate goals, and less stringent environmental and climate policies prevail in non-EU countries, there is a high risk of so-called carbon leakage. It occurs when EU-based companies move carbon-intensive production abroad to take advantage of softer standards there, or when EU-produced goods are displaced by more carbon-intensive imports⁵. In this case, we are talking about discrimination against countries that produce raw materials and primary energy resources through the introduction

³ Serre Michel. *The Treaty with Nature* / Translated from the French. St. Petersburg: Publishing house of the European University in St. Petersburg, 2022. P. 84.

⁴ 17 Goals to Transform Our World. URL: <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/>

⁵ The mechanism of transboundary carbon regulation in questions and answers. URL: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/механизм-трансграничного-углеродного-регулирования-в-вопросах-и-ответах_ru

of procedures for transboundary carbon regulation. At the same time “behind the trees one cannot see the forest” – the role of many of them in maintaining the climatic balance of the planet (for example, through the absorption capacity of forests) is not duly taken into account. This is particularly painfully perceived in Russia, whose vast tracts of forests the EU “regulators” do not seem to notice. Moreover, a unilateral approach to carbon regulation will inevitably lead to higher prices for exports from these countries and, as a consequence, to a reduction in output. For example, according to calculations by Severstal, a radical reduction of CO₂ emissions during steel production could lead to a doubling of production costs⁶.

Does this mean that the goal of reducing global carbon emissions, for example, is useless? Not at all. On the contrary, the acuteness of the problem of the relationship between mankind and nature urgently requires both the adoption of a new social contract and the implementation of a scrupulous and balanced policy to achieve the entire set of SDGs, which must take into account the specificities – geographical, cultural, socio-economic – that predetermine the individual characteristics of different countries. The way to achieve this is through the coordination of interests and the ability to interact with partners and participants in a wide range of economic and social processes.

Thus, the current practice of various business structures to reduce harmful emissions has brought to life “symbiotic exchanges” (the paper by I.Y. Blam and S.Y. Kovalev), the distinctive feature of which is the reliance on economic incentive mechanisms. It is important that the latter are not limited to tax preferences (as it is often understood in domestic practice), but involve a wide range of levers and incentives, including access to infrastructure, new technologies, etc.

Russia, like most countries around the world, is searching for its place and its way to achieve sustainable development goals. It is inappropriate to separate the implementation of SDG 13 from

⁶ Belousov: big business should “integrate” into cross-border carbon regulation. URL: <https://oilcapital.ru/news/regulation/14-02-2022/belousovkrupnyy-biznes-dolzhen-vpisatsya-v-transgranichnoe-uglerodnoe-regulirovanie>

the entire set of targets. It is just as wrong to turn a blind eye to the role of forests in the achievement of all 17 goals (not only in maintaining the carbon balance). In this aspect, the word “Forest” in the achievement of the SDGs is a kind of symbol of the multiplicity and multifaceted problems of the movement of the countries of the world in a single direction. Each country has its own “Forest”, while the common goal and concern is the integrity and sustainability of Nature.

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