

Offene Akademie: Statement

22 December 2020

To the German representatives at EU level

To the German Federal Government



Objection: There is no residual budget left!

We refer to the "Statement of Scientists for Future on the 'Demands of Fridays for Future Germany to the German Representatives at EU Level'" of 2 October 2020.¹ Some of us are active for „Scientists for Future“. We agree that the development of the world climate is dramatic, but consider the changes called for in this statement to be insufficient because they leave much room for inaction.

1. The statement consistently makes the inadequate Paris climate agreement the basis. It speaks of the "climate agreement of Paris that is binding under international law". The agreement is a legally binding agreement for the signatory states, but the non-binding formulations are of little legal value when one looks at the text:² „This Agreement [...] aims to [...] holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels“ (Article 2).

One has a goal that „all parties are to undertake [...] ambitious efforts [...] to achieving the purpose of this Agreement“ (Article 3), and the „parties aim to reach global peaking of greenhouse gas emissions as soon as possible [...] and to undertake rapid reductions thereafter in accordance with best available science, so as to achieve a balance between anthropogenic emissions by sources and removals by sinks of greenhouse gases in the second half of this century“ (Article 4).

To declare a goal, to promise efforts, to strive - relatively non-binding formulations, mere targets and declarations of intent etc. ultimately without consequence for governments not fulfilling them - how is that supposed to be legally testable? It is important to read the text and interpret it correctly and not to wish something into it that is not there. The Offene Akademie assessed it on 14 March 2019 stating that "The Paris Climate Agreement is based on voluntary commitments by countries, as they already failed after the Kyoto Protocol of 1997 [...] We want to support this rebellious spirit [of the youth] rather than invoking non-binding minimum consensus of the rulers."³

Since then, the German government has used this non-binding nature to take no effective action. And in this agreement, nuclear energy is also left open, it is even passed off as climate protection by some governments that blatantly rely on nuclear energy. CO₂ storage is mentioned as a solution (Preamble), but underground CO₂ storage is a dangerous technique.

2. The temperature increase is already 1.2°C with a noticeably accelerated rise. The average temperature rise for the 12 months to April 2020 was even 1.3°C. Only little remains and if continued, the 1.5° will already be ripped in a few years.⁴

CO₂ remains in the atmosphere for a long time. On land masses, the temperature rise is higher. Self-reinforcing effects of global warming have already set in, further accelerating the temperature rise. For example, the melting of the polar ice caps is progressing and the thawing of the permafrost in Siberia has begun dramatically in 2020. But since the 2015 agreement, CO₂ emissions have increased. To limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C, global fossil fuel production would have to be reduced by six percent per year between 2020 and 2030. Instead, the producing countries are planning an annual increase in production of two per cent, which is more than twice as much as is compatible with the 1.5°C target

1 <https://www.scientists4future.org/stellungnahme-fff-forderungen-an-eu/>

2 https://unfccc.int/sites/default/files/english_paris_agreement.pdf

3 <http://www.offene-akademie.org/?p=835>

4 "The average global temperature in 2020 is set to be about 1.2 °C above the pre-industrial (1850-1900) level. There is at least a one in five chance of it temporarily exceeding 1.5 °C by 2024," said WMO Secretary-General Prof. Petteri Taalas (World Meteorological Organization, "2020 on track to be one of three warmest years on record," Press Release Number: 02122020, Wednesday, 2 December 2020; <https://public.wmo.int/en/media/press-release/2020-track-be-one-of-three-warmest-years-record>)

by 2030.⁵ But even a temperature increase to 1.5°C cannot be accepted.

3. There is no more residual budget. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) is running scenarios in 2018; but its main conclusion is that the national pledges of all governments are only about half of what it thinks is needed to have a chance of limiting the temperature increase to 1.5°C.⁶ And even if these were made, the uncertainty is great. As the National Center for Climate Restoration demonstrates⁷, the residual budget calculations are based on projections that significantly underestimate global warming.

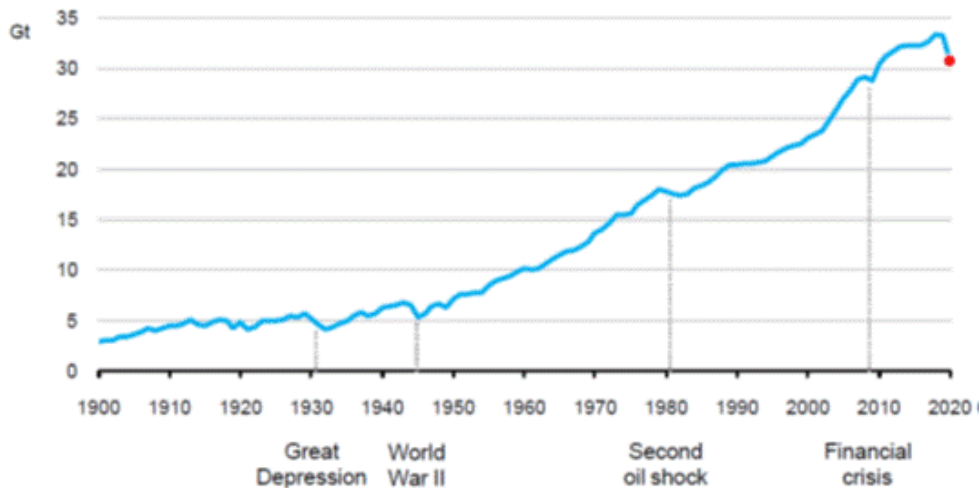


Fig. 1: Global energy-related CO₂ emissions, 1900-2020 (updated 30 Apr 2020)⁸

Even the too-small national pledges made are not kept by governments, including the German government. Europe's largest hard coal-fired power plant went into operation in Datteln. Even since the Paris Agreement, the increase in emissions worldwide has continued unabated.

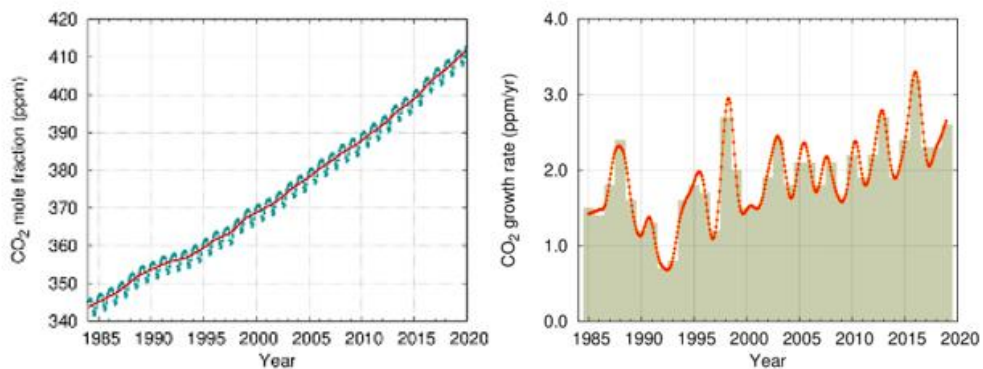


Fig. 2: Global average CO₂ content in the atmosphere (left) and the growth rate (right) from 1984 to 2019⁹

⁵ SEI, IISD, ODI, E3G, and UNEP. *The Production Gap Report: 2020 Special Report*. November 2020; <http://productiongap.org/2020report>

⁶ „Available pathways that aim for no or limited (less than 0.1°C) overshoot of 1.5°C keep GHG emissions in 2030 to 25–30 GtCO₂e yr⁻¹ in 2030... This contrasts with median estimates for current unconditional NDCs (Nationally Determined Contributions) of 52–58 GtCO₂e yr⁻¹ in 2030.“ IPCC, Special Report Global Warming of 1.5 °C; Mitigation pathways compatible with 1.5°C in the context of sustainable development; Chapter 2, Executive Summary; <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/chapter/chapter-2/>

⁷ What lies beneath, The understatement of existential climate risk, National Center for Climate Restoration, Melbourne, Australia, 2018; https://www.academia.edu/37620051/What_Lies_Beneath_The_understatement_of_existential_climate_risk?auto=download

⁸ International Energy Agency (IEA), *Global Energy Review 2020: The impacts of the Covid-19 crisis on global energy demand and CO₂ emissions* April 2020; <https://www.iea.org/reports/global-energy-review-2020/global-energy-and-co2-emissions-in-2020>

⁹ World Meteorological Organization, “Carbon dioxide levels continue at record levels, despite COVID-19 lockdown,” Press Release Number: 3112020, Monday, 23 November 2020; <https://public.wmo.int/en/media/press-release/carbon-dioxide-levels-continue-record-levels-despite-covid-19-lockdown>

Allowing a residual budget is interpreted as being idle until it is used up. The wording "objectively there is not much time left" does not specify whether this can be 10 years. The demand to allow a maximum budget of 20 gigatonnes, for which "the EU budget would last for a little more than seven years", also does not do justice to the situation, as it could again be interpreted as seven years of inactivity.

4. We need immediate action.

The criterion mentioned at the beginning, "politically and economically within the realm of what is necessary and feasible", on the other hand, is actually used to prevent immediate measures because they are "economically" incompatible with the energy industry, which operates according to the profit principle. In agricultural policy, hardly any progress has been made because the German minister in charge makes the cheapest compromises with the agro-industrial lobby. A few dozen international corporations and state monopolies are responsible for two-thirds of global greenhouse gas emissions.¹⁰ But it is precisely these actors who should be held accountable for the environmental damage. A statement from the scientific community must not include what is "feasible" but what is objectively necessary based on scientific findings. Greenhouse gas emissions must be drastically reduced immediately and brought to below 10% of current levels within 10 years. This requires a comprehensive catalogue of immediate measures in industry, transport, the energy sector, agriculture, consumption that reduces greenhouse gas emissions worldwide by 90% in 10 years. For developed countries it must be more than for countries with lower standards of living.

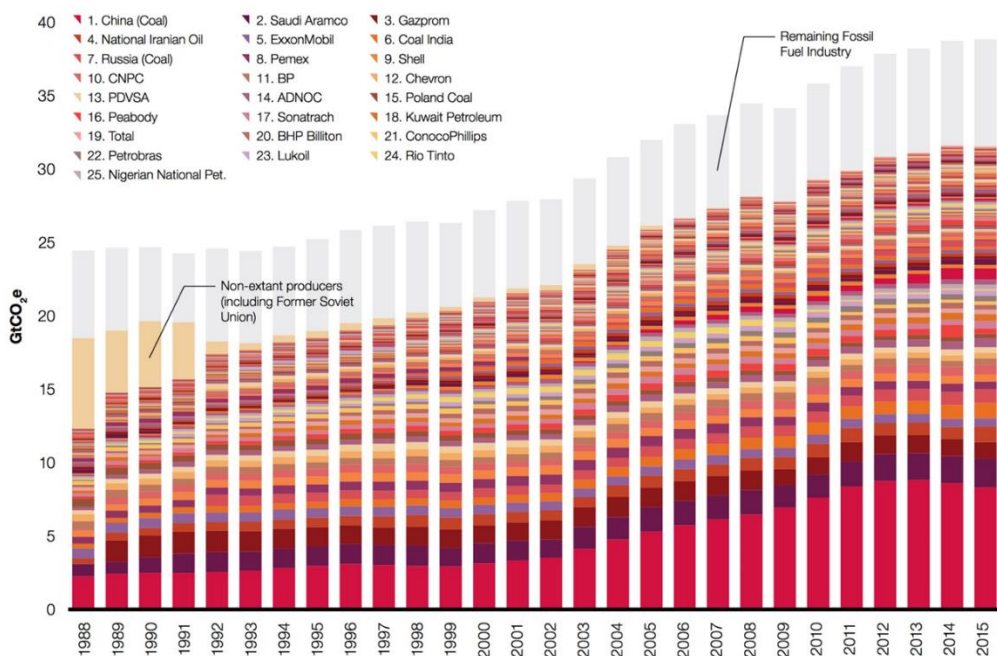


Fig. 3.: Amount of greenhouse gas emissions of the largest energy and commodity corporations: In 2015, 25 / 100 international corporations caused 51% / 71% of global industrial CO₂ emissions.¹¹

Other factors that interact with the climate crisis, such as the extinction of species, pandemics, deforestation, marine pollution, the scarcity of drinking water and food resources, wars as a result of the climate catastrophe, must also be taken into account.¹² A statement from science must formulate what is scientifically required. The yardstick cannot be alleged political and economic constraints. These must be scientifically questioned instead of relying solely on the above-mentioned agreement with a non-binding minimum consensus of the ruling class. Furthermore, it does not serve the cause to narrow down the increasing tendency of young people to be critical of capitalism by exhorting them to do

¹⁰ Climate Accountability Institute; <https://climateaccountability.org/carbonmajors.html>

"63 percent of the carbon dioxide and methane emitted between 1751 and 2010 [is attributable] to just 90 entities. Fifty are investor-owned companies such as Chevron, Peabody, Shell, and BHP Billiton. Thirty-one are state-owned companies such as Saudi Aramco and Statoil, and nine are government-run industries in countries such as China, Poland, and the former Soviet Union."

¹¹ P. Griffin, The Carbon Majors Database CDP Carbon Majors Report, 2017

¹² Franz Baumann, *Erderhitzung und Politikversagen: Die Natur ist in höchster Gefahr, die Demokratie ebenso*, April 2020; <http://www.offene-akademie.org/?p=1022>

what is supposedly possible within a framework that conforms to the system. If "economic" conditions such as the current economic order do not allow for the survival of human civilisation, it must be changed. A scientific study shows that in 2017 71% of global CO₂ emissions were caused by the 100 largest corporations in the energy and raw materials sector.¹¹ The climate catastrophe cannot be stopped without questioning the capitalist property relations that cause it. Therefore, we explicitly share the critique of capitalism.

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