Published on *USC Center on Public Diplomacy* (https://uscpublicdiplomacy.org)

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Nov 04, 2016 by Markos Kounalakis

# Beyond Paris, Questionable Efforts to Combat Climate Change

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Germany has long been a leading advocate for confronting and ameliorating climate change. But actions speak louder than words–or signatures on an international accord. The recent Volkswagen scandal is only the latest case of climate policy hypocrisy.

Meeting in Paris last December, countries around the globe finally recognized the generally accepted scientific evidence that climate change is real. They also accepted some responsibility to do something about it.

To much fanfare, 195 countries, including Germany and the United States, signed the Paris Agreement pledging to hit targets to drop emissions, cut carbon and keep our aging Earth from experiencing too many hot flashes and cold extremities.

Developed democratic countries, pushed by their citizens, led the charge for a comprehensive agreement to atone for past polluting and to prevent developing states from repeating their own sins. Canada, England, France – they all chimed in and tried to convince, coerce and cajole those developing countries to be energy ascetics. That was a tough sell. The developing world now wants its turn to crank out the carbon and catch up to the already rich, gas-burning and global-warming recidivists.

Looking beyond the narratives of the industrialized world's planned sacrifice, however, some of the stories seem a little less noble or credible.

***So while the world's leaders are self-congratulating and citizens applaud the historic Paris Agreement, the world must not turn a blind eye to the ways that rules can be broken.***

France, for example, is fine with less fossil fuel because it depends mostly on nuclear power for progress: Up to 78 percent of its electrical needs are met by the near zero-carbon-emitting nuclear plants. Future plans to cut its dependency on nuclear plants while also cutting carbon emissions will certainly be a challenge.

Germany laudably boasts that it is able to reduce the amount of carbon it emits and shut down its nuclear power plants because it has developed enough alternative wind and solar power to provide clean and nearly free energy for all. In fact, German statistics recently peaked when satisfying more than 50 percent of its electricity demand through solar power, and nearly 80 percent through all renewable resources.

In each case of selective carbon curtailment, it is expected that a nation seeks its self-interest while also acting simultaneously to protect its competitive advantages. But Germany recently went one step further by publicly advocating an anti-polluting stance, while at the same time a dominant corporation powering the German economic juggernaut acted surreptitiously to undermine environmental goals.

Volkswagen, Germany's industrial behemoth, figured it could advocate for tougher rules for others, but cheat its way to success by developing a workaround to America's basic EPA auto-

emission requirements. VW crafted an elegant, difficult-to-detect and fraudulent solution to the inconvenient pollution standards. It installed software in 11 million diesel vehicles worldwide that triggered a clean-emissions setting calibrated for a laboratory – not actual road use.

Moreover, there is evidence that in the case of auto emissions the European Union was, if not complicit, suspiciously aware of autos failing emission tests years before the VW scandal, according to European tests done as early as 2007.

Denied military clout to build and project power, modern German governments have forged uniquely strong ties with industry. Business-friendly industrial policies and an export-focused foreign policy support and underwrite the economic powerhouse that is a 21st-century Germany's "Wirtschaftswunder" – economic miracle. Achieving that new modern miracle sometimes seems to take precedence over any other policy, principle, norm, standard or goal.

Economics have trumped global environmental and public health concerns in the past. In the 1980s, when the country was still divided, West Germany tried to export domestically unacceptable radioactively contaminated milk to developing countries, including Egypt. Other European countries were complicit in the practice and caught.

So while the world's leaders are self-congratulating and citizens applaud the historic Paris Agreement, the world must not turn a blind eye to the ways that rules can be broken. When a powerful nation like Germany dominantly projects power and influence by export, consumers and countries need to cry foul when those export goods are not so good for the world.

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***Note from the CPD Blog Manager***: *This piece originally appeared in the Sacramento Bee.*

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