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Protocol good step in dealing with global warming

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Russia did some good public relations work for itself recently when Prime Minister Vladimir Putin agreed to ratify the Kyoto Protocol, the world's most wide-reaching environmental treaty that aims at reducing global greenhouse emissions that are widely believed to contribute to global warming.

With Russia being in news of late mostly because of its controversial governmental reforms aimed at centralizing power under the leader, Putin needed something to get the European Union to smile about. Analysts say Putin's change in attitude towards the protocol and his decision to ratify it might be part of Russia's efforts to get EU support to help the country in its bid to join the World Trade Organization.

Regardless of the underlying motivations this is very good news for environmentalists and nations that have supported the international environmental treaty, most notably the European Union nations and Japan.

In order for the protocol to become international law, nations that account for 55 percent of global emissions must ratify the treaty. The UN says that United States accounts for 36 percent of the global total and that Russia accounts for 17 percent.

With the United States' indicating it has no intent of signing, the only way to keep the protocol alive is with Russian support.

If the bill ratifying the treaty is passed, as is expected by the Russian lower parliament, the Duma, according to the terms of the protocol it will become international law 90 days later.



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Kremlin critics of Putin's decision say there is no way Russia will be able to keep in line with the terms of the agreement because of the heavy process of industrialization the nation is undertaking in hopes of creating an economic revival. The critics say that environmental regulation ultimately gets in the way of economic growth.

However, even with the possibility that rapid industrialization will cause Russia to fall short of emission reduction quotas, any effort is still better than the flat-out rejection of the treaty by the United States.

In 2001 the Bush administration chose to pull out of the protocol, which was signed but not ratified by former President Clinton in November 1998.

Knowing what we know about Bush, his lack of support for the protocol should not be surprising. For one, he is not the biggest fan of the United Nations and international law.

With the Kyoto Protocol being part of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and binding as international law once ratified, it does not pass Bush's counter to Sen. John Kerry's "global test," the unilateral, sovereignty test.

Also important to note is that Bush likes oil - a lot. It has made him and his family copious amounts of money. He supported a bill that would have allowed for drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Reserve.

In July 2001, Time magazine reported after Bush's pull-out of the protocol suggested his big problem with the treaty is that reducing emissions does not exactly support the United States' oil-dependent and gas-guzzling economy. There probably is not much benefit for Bush and his cronies in moving towards alternative and cleaner energy sources. Many say we went to war because of oil. I don't think it's much of a stretch to say that oil interests shape Bush's environmental policies.

Environmentalists seem to back Kerry because Bush's disregard for the environment is pretty blatant. Kerry, though, is not an über-environmentalist like Al Gore, who some say would have stepped up and ratified the Kyoto Protocol if he had been elected, but Democrats tend to be more accepting of the fact that economic growth and environmental responsibility can go hand in hand.

Republicans, like the critics in the Kremlin, tend to prescribe a doomsday scenario for the economy every time someone suggests cleaning up the air.

I personally am not too concerned about major corporations having to delve into their multimillion-dollar profits in order to upgrade to environmentally friendly technologies and practices. Some things are more important than corporate profits. I wish the environment and human health could be embraced by politicians and corporations in the United States as two of those things.

Though many Americans such as Bush like to shy away from any sort of international agreement, it must be acknowledged that the degradation of our environment and global warming are problems without borders and require an international effort to be tackled correctly. The Kyoto Protocol certainly is not perfect, but it is a step in the right direction. Russia, regardless of its possible ulterior motives and the fact that the protocol's standards might not be entirely reachable, should be commended for showing commitment to the international effort to combat global warming.

For us here in Los Angeles, it doesn't take more than an attempted glance at the horizon to see that greenhouse gas emissions are a real environmental health

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- Sometimes, but sometimes I go home or to a friend's place.
- Yes, I'm stuck here.
- Yes, I like being on campus on weekends.

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problem. If the United States does not get serious about cleaning up its air, I'm not sure any of us will want to subject our lungs to the City of Angels a few decades from now.

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Jacqueline Deelstra's column "Thinking Outside the Box" runs every Tuesday. To comment on the column, e-mail dtrojan@usc.edu or call (213) 740-5665.

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