

Leaders issue G7 declaration with U.S. a holdout on climate change

Trump posted on Twitter that he'll make a final decision next week, after he returns to Washington.

By David Herszenhorn and Tara Palmeri

TAORMINA, Sicily — Leaders of the G7, the world's most exclusive geopolitical club, issued their 2017 declaration Saturday, with U.S. President Donald Trump refusing to join his counterparts in pledging commitment to the 195-nation Paris accord on climate change.

The statement also included language on trade, which appeared to be a compromise between the new U.S. administration's skepticism about some current trade deals and the more pro-free trade views of other G7 members. On Russia, Trump went along with the group, maintaining a hard line on the conflict in Ukraine.

Trump, posting on Twitter, said he would make a decision on whether the U.S. would remain in the climate change accord next week, after he returns to Washington. The other six members of the G7 — Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and the U.K. — reaffirmed "strong commitment" to the agreement, which Barack Obama signed in 2015.

While the declaration included remarkable language highlighting that the U.S. stood apart, the other G7 members expressed some relief that Trump had not outright rejected the accord and said they remained hopeful he would come around

"The United States of America is in the process of reviewing its policies on climate change and on the Paris Agreement and thus is not in a position to join the consensus on these topics," the leaders wrote. "Understanding this process, the Heads of State and of Government of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, and the United Kingdom and the Presidents of the European Council and of the European Commission reaffirm their strong commitment to swiftly implement the Paris Agreement, as previously stated at the Ise-Shima Summit."

Trump economic adviser Gary Cohn told reporters on Saturday that the president "continues to study" the Paris agreement. Cohn said Friday that the U.S. president had told his fellow G7 leaders that "the environment is very, very important to me, Donald Trump"—but reiterated his concerns that the U.S. was falling behind India and China in manufacturing. "He didn't want to do anything to put the U.S. at a disadvantage," Cohn said.

One senior EU official said that leaders recognized that Trump was at the center of an impassioned debate in the U.S., and even within his own administration, over whether the U.S. should stick with the Paris agreement, that they appreciated the chance to make their case, and wanted to give him space to come to a decision. The senior official said that Trump's fellow leaders had stressed their view that the Paris accord was not only about protecting the environment, but also served the business interests of the U.S. and its G7 partners.

Some supporters of the agreement have suggested that a withdrawal by the U.S. would help position China as a leader of global environmental policy, and new green technologies.

The declaration also included what appeared to be some softening of resistance by the U.S. on multilateral trade. Earlier this year, the U.S. had blocked traditional language in the G20 declaration about fighting "all forms" of protectionism. While the "all forms" construction, which appeared in last year's G7 statement, was not revived, the new communique stated: "We reiterate our commitment to keep our markets open and to fight protectionism, while standing firm against all unfair trade practices."

The declaration, however, also included new language that acknowledged some drawbacks to trade. "At the same time, we acknowledge that trade has not always worked to the benefit of everyone. For this reason, we commit to adopting appropriate policies so that all firms and citizens can make the most of opportunities offered by the global economy."

On another crucial topic, the declaration retained language previously adopted by the G7 warning Russia that it could face additional punishment if the situation worsens in Ukraine. While calling for Russia and Ukraine to work to implement the Minsk 2 peace agreement, the G7 leaders declared, "We also stand ready to take further restrictive measures in order to increase costs on Russia should its actions so require."

Earlier, Trump posted two other tweets about policy priorities raised at his overseas meetings.

First, he wrote, "Many NATO countries have agreed to step up payments considerably, as they should. Money is beginning to pour in – NATO will be much stronger." In fact, the agreed commitments are for NATO allies to spend more on defense overall, mainly on their own militaries – so the increases would not necessarily be seen at NATO headquarters but in the military budgets of individual countries.

Shortly after, Trump wrote: "Big G7 meetings today. Lots of very important matters under discussion. First on the list, of course, is terrorism." Terrorism has been a major topic of the G7 summit, given the backdrop of last week's bombing in Manchester, England.

The G7 leaders approved and published a two-and-a-half page joint statement on terrorism on Friday, before U.K. Prime Minister Theresa May flew home to London.