

Response to the statement by the Executive Board

Hereby we would like to provide an extensive response to the statement the Executive Board has made on Thursday morning. This is an in-depth follow-up to our previous reaction.

Reaction to our demands

Declaring the climate emergency

We would like to start by saying that we are pleased to hear that the Executive Board is acknowledging the urgency of the climate and ecological crisis and the severity of its consequences. By stating their awareness of the unjust nature of this crisis in a later email, we feel that our demand for a declaration of climate emergency with a call for climate and social justice has been granted. We will be celebrating this, while remaining attentive to make sure this message is continuously being spread in the future.

Transparency

Naturally, we are pleased to hear the board is dedicated to greater transparency. As students and staff of this university we deserve to know how private funding is influencing education and research practices, and we feel heard that the board is willing to meet our demand. To ensure that full transparency will be achieved, we will need the board to confirm that they will communicate the amount of money that comes in from which companies as well as to which projects it is attributed and what the specific descriptions of these projects are. In addition we want to ensure this information is easily accessible to the public. We would also like to know the publication date of the annual report in which this will be communicated and we want to receive this information from the last five years as to understand the trends in financing. Without this data we do not see the possibility for a fully informed discussion on the influence of the private sector on our education (Almond, Du, & Papp, 2022).

Cutting ties with the fossil fuel industry

As has become clear from the statement, the TU/e has no intention to cut ties with the fossil fuel industry. Their argument is that we need the fossil fuel industry for the renewable energy transition. However, by working together with these companies the TU/e is granting them the social licence to operate. The fossil fuel industry is famous for its human rights violations. These include displacement of native peoples, torture and murder (Amnesty International, 2021). Additionally, the fossil fuel industry has known about the climate crisis for decades, but instead of changing their direction they misled the public and continued with destroying lives and livelihoods (Hasemyer, Chushman, Banerjee, & Song, 2016). The fossil fuel industry keeps capitalising on the exploitation of people and the planet (Human Rights Council, 2019). Shell invests less than 5% in renewable energy compared to 95% in fossil fuels and other fossil fuel companies have similar statistics (ClientEarth, n.d.). Their financial model is dependent on fossil fuels and they can therefore not be trusted to structurally change direction. These companies are destroying the Earth much faster than they are contributing to the solutions. Although we can see the increase of discourse and strategies related to transition, concrete actions are severely lacking. These companies are not green; they are greenwashing. From an ethical standpoint, further collaboration cannot be justified.

We understand that cutting ties with the fossil fuel industry will not happen overnight, but we believe the possibility should be more seriously considered. We also acknowledge that in order to make this possible, public funding will have to increase. Once again, we would like to reaffirm that constructive conversation cannot take place without everyone having access

to all the information. Additionally, we think decision making should be democratised by establishing an executive and binding student and staff assembly. As students and staff of this institution it should be our decision whether cooperation with the fossil fuel industry can continue once we know all the facts.

To provide more context to the cooperation with the fossil fuel industry, we would like to give a theoretical framework to what this means. As we have mentioned before in Cursor, the complex global issue of climate emergency is much bigger than the energy transition alone. One of the main theories of transition science is multi level perspective (MLP), which was developed by Frank Geels, a former TU/e employee (Geels, 2011). The MLP views transitions as non-linear processes that result from the interplay of developments at three analytical levels: niches (the locus for radical innovations), socio-technical regimes (a set of established practices and associated rules that stabilise existing systems), and an exogenous socio-technical landscape (Geels, 2002). In the context of energy transition, the landscape includes everything from outside the system that has an influence on what happens within the system (depletion of raw materials, increased extraction prices, or climate change), but cannot be changed directly. The regime describes the current logic of the system, so how things are done currently (burning fossil fuels for energy), and finally the niches are the alternatives to the regime (renewable energy systems).

The societal transition occurs when two things align: an internal conflict in the regime (i.e. climate emergency and pressure from the landscape) and a readily available niche alternative. The regime will attempt to fix the problem itself using innovation to further lock in and stabilise the regime (for example trying to use the inefficient carbon capture to offset the emissions from the industry (Von Hirschhausen, Herold, & Oei, 2012)). However, it is important to note, that the regime does not want to change. The goal is to remain in power. Regime actors (people benefiting from the regime), like fossil fuel companies, will rather patchwork the flaws in the current system than invest in radical innovation that will push towards transition, because it would remove them from the power positions.

With this theoretical frame, the role of the fossil fuel industry can be discussed. What type of actor is the fossil fuel industry? Is it a regime actor or a niche actor? Do fossil fuel companies benefit from a system change? Will the innovation from fossil fuel led research result in the energy transition the Executive Board is convinced we need or will it stabilise and lock-in the current system even further?

The question is thus whether the TU/e will dedicate itself to the energy transition and only collaborate with niche actors within the energy system. If not, does that make them regime actors, worried about staying in power? How can they reconcile the regime position and their alleged 'commitment to sustainability'? Will they be compliant in the stabilisation of fossil dependent energy system, so that they can receive the blood stained fossil fuel money? In addition fossil fuel companies are known to lobby against policies mitigating climate change and have actively taken part in climate change denial (Lamb et al., 2020). Once again, how can the Executive Board reconcile this knowledge with 'commitment to sustainability'?

Reaction to other points of their statement

Education, research and operations

Furthermore we would like to react to other points that the board touched upon in their statement, although they do not directly link to our demands. We would like to express gratitude to the steps that have already been taken by the University and the Executive Board in improving their education, research and operations to work towards mitigating the effects of global warming.

Discussion

We are very displeased with the statement that the board made in their paragraph about Discussion. To quote the following sentence of their statement: 'In our history, we have always given ample space to manifestations on the TU/e campus, within the limits of safety and respect for goods and persons, and will continue to do so in the future'. We are extremely indignant with this comment, looking back at the violent arrests of three students that took place on the 15th of March here at the TU/e during a protest at the Career Expo of Wervingsdagen. Three arrests on which the court stated that the requisition and its execution was disproportionate (Spoor, 2022). Two arrestees were discharged for all legal proceedings, the other one was not prosecuted. These arrests are a blatantly clear example that the TU/e in fact has not given ample space to manifestations on the TU/e campus. Knowing the arrestees spent from 6 to 72 hours in police custody for an unlawful case, by executing their right to protest and expressing a critical voice towards the TU/e, the Executive Board's statement on this is very disrespectful to those students. We are grateful that this manifestation has been facilitated this far by the university, and that we have been given the room for our protest. We hope that future protests will continue to be facilitated by the university, and that the manifestation protocol can guide these actions.

Conclusion

To conclude, in this statement we have attempted to both acknowledge our appreciation for the changes the board is willing to make as well as make clear that there is still a lot that needs to be achieved. At the moment, we need to ensure that transparency includes all the numbers we need to know. This established a meaningful ground to further discuss cutting ties with the fossil fuel industry and creation of an executive and binding student and staff assembly.

We are willing to discuss these points further with the Executive Board.

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