

Committee: Economic and Financial Committee (GA2)

Issue: Addressing the Phenomenon of Green-Washing in Private and State-Owned Corporations

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PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

Dear Delegates,

It is my honour to welcome you all to the 6th Deutsche Schule of Thessaloniki Model United Nations. My name is Emmanouil Kareklas, I am currently an IB2 student at Pinewood American International School of Thessaloniki and I will be serving as one of your Co-Chairs in the Economic and Financial Committee (GA2).

First and foremost, I would like to thank you for your interest in the 6th Deutsche Schule of Thessaloniki Model United Nations. During these 3 days we, the Student Officers, hope to construct a memorable conference through which you will meet delegates who are intrigued with contemporary issues that affect the world and seek to provide feasible and beneficial solutions.

The GA2 offers veterans and rookie delegates an opportunity to acquire new skills that will be essential whatever your desired career path is. As the GA2 aims at providing Resolutions that consider international and local economies while incorporating advanced vocabulary that will prove largely useful. This study guide includes useful information that will serve as a starting point for further research in the second topic of this year's GA2 agenda, namely *"Addressing the Phenomenon of Green-Washing in Private and State-Owned Corporations"*.

Lastly, I encourage you to explore the issue further to get an in-depth understanding that will enable a fruitful debate with conducive participation. If you are unable to figure out your country's policy or are not aware of the preparation process please do not hesitate to contact me at ekareklas@pinewood-school.gr.

I am looking forward to meeting you in the fall,

Emmanouil Kareklas

TOPIC INTRODUCTION

In the late 20th century organizations such as Greenpeace took action in informing the public of environmental issues that would impair the earth. In particular, a clear focus was given to the immense industrialization of states as a result of making the public environmentally aware of threats posed by unsustainable operations of private and state-owned corporations. Following such events, the ecological sustainability of corporations became critical for vast amounts of consumers. Nevertheless, actions that needed to be taken in order for corporations to adopt a sustainable fashion of operations were deemed costly and revenue-reducing.

Consequently, forging an environmentally sustainable image became a common occurrence and thus in 1986 it was named Greenwashing. Greenwashing is frequently practiced by corporations to exaggerate their environmentally friendly policies and mislead consumers in an effort to attract environmentally friendly consumers while averting the costly drawbacks of ecologically sustainable policies. However, the approach to the Greenwashing strategy is different between private and state-owned corporations. For instance, private corporations are more often driven by financial goals that seek to generate revenue for their shareholders; whereas, state-owned corporations are governmentally run, as a result having social responsibility goals. Ultimately, the differing objectives of these entities and their intentions from such practices define their approach to Greenwashing strategies and the consequences they stand to face.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Greenwashing

“Greenwashing is the process of conveying a false impression or misleading information about how a company's products are environmentally sound.”¹

Private Corporation

“A corporation organized for the profit of its members or in which the entire interest is not held by the state”²

¹Hayes, Adam. “What Is Greenwashing? How It Works, Examples, and Statistics.” *Investopedia*, 31 Mar. 2023, www.investopedia.com/terms/g/greenwashing.asp. Accessed 7 Aug. 2023.

²“Merriam-Webster Dictionary.” *Merriam-Webster.com*, 2023, www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/private%20corporation. Accessed 7 Aug. 2023.

State-owned corporations

“A body corporate owned, or of which all or a majority of the shares of the body are owned, by the Government or by a Minister on behalf of the State.”³

Shareholder

“Shareholders are owners of the company, technically part-owners if there's more than one, but they aren't always involved in the day-to-day running of the business”⁴

Stakeholder

“A stakeholder is a person, group or organization with a vested interest, or stake, in the decision-making and activities of a business, organization or project.”⁵

Cherry picking

“The selective use of data to support one's position while ignoring other data that tends to counter one's opinion”⁶

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

“A management concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and interactions with their stakeholders.”⁷

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The different strategies of Greenwashing

Cherry picking

It is often that corporations will seek to advertise their handful of ecologically ethical actions in order to refrain from acknowledging other non-ecologically ethical ones. This is referred to as the cherry-picking strategy. For example, a corporation can promote its sustainable packaging method

³ “State Owned Corporation Definition.” *Law Insider*, www.lawinsider.com/dictionary/state-owned-corporation. Accessed 7 Aug. 2023.

⁴ “What Is a Shareholder? | Square Business Glossary.” *Square*, squareup.com/gb/en/glossary/shareholder. Accessed 7 Aug. 2023.

⁵ Barney, Nick. “What Is Stakeholder? - Definition from WhatIs.com.” *SearchCIO*, Jan. 2023, www.techtarget.com/searchcio/definition/stakeholder. Accessed 7 Aug. 2023.

⁶ “What Is Cherry-Picking? - Data Analytics for Business Professionals Video Tutorial | LinkedIn Learning, Formerly Lynda.com.” *LinkedIn*, www.linkedin.com/learning/data-analytics-for-business-professionals-14936642/what-is-cherry-picking. Accessed 7 Aug. 2023.

⁷ United Nations Industrial Development Organization. “What Is CSR?” *United Nations Industrial Development Organization*, 2023, www.unido.org/our-focus/advancing-economic-competitiveness/competitive-trade-capacities-and-corporate-responsibility/corporate-social-responsibility-market-integration/what-csr. Accessed 7 Aug. 2023.

while, simultaneously, it has a carbon-intensive production method. As a result, the environmental benefit gained from one aspect of the corporation is negated and thus becomes meaningless.

Vague claim

In itself, environmental consciousness is a relatively modern idea that has only been troubling humans for the past few decades, as a result, terms that are associated with this topic can be vague. Consequently, green taxonomy regulations have not yet adapted to the use of new, vague, terms. This allows corporations to utilize terms such as “eco-friendly” or “green” in promotions without needing to legally abide by any regulations in many cases. As a result, corporations are able to gain a competitive advantage and furthermore evade legal sanctions since the terms are vague and undefinable.

False claims

Moreover, corporations also take advantage of the naivety of everyday consumers by making false claims both on their products but also on marketing campaigns. For example, a corporation may claim to have an organic product or zero-carbon emission operations which is usually overlooked by the everyday consumer even though it is normally regulated by governmental organizations.

Exaggerations

Exaggerations are similar to false claims but unlike false claims, they usually have a certain level of validity. For example, a product can indeed be organic but its environmental benefits may be exaggerated in order to account for potential environmental damages caused in the production or any other sector of operations.

Greenwashing in private corporations

Private Corporations may practice Greenwashing both intentionally and unintentionally. The act of practicing Greenwashing unintentionally is mainly due to the lack of regulations that do not define the practice thoroughly to the public. The more frequent phenomenon is that of intentional Greenwashing that is put forth for a series of reasons. These reasons are usually identified and grouped into the four different categories analyzed below.

Appearing Compliant with Regulations and Earn Consumer Trust

First and foremost private corporations may practice Greenwashing in order to distort the entity's actual environmental impact and furthermore to

attract the growing ecologically conscious consumer base. This can be explicitly seen in IKEA's sustainability initiative launched in 2020. The international conglomerate sought to phase out and eliminate single-use plastic from consumer packaging by 2028.⁸ Despite IKEA's alleged efforts the private corporation was accused of Greenwashing as a report published by Earthlight ("a non-profit organization that uses in-depth investigations to expose environmental and social crime, injustice and the links to global consumption"⁹) discovered that IKEA was involved in illegal wood purchasing. The scandal demonstrated the hypocrisy of IKEA's initiative which was evidently desultory to ecological benefits.

Misinforming Investors About Growth

Environmental sustainability has become a staple element of a corporation's public image and an essential criterion for investors. Consequently, corporations may seek to alter their environmental track record in an effort to attract investors. In addition to investors, the use of deception or false data is a Greenwashing technique used to mislead authorities. One example of this is the 2015 U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) investigation into the German motor vehicle manufacturer Volkswagen.¹⁰ The EPA found that Volkswagen had cheated on federal emissions tests using software that decreased engine emissions during the tests. Subsequently, a three-year scandal followed as the EPA declared that the corporation was breaching the Clean Air Act and forced emission modification for more than a dozen Volkswagen group vehicles.

Lack of Mandatory Requirements

The requirements for sustainable operations are more often than not voluntary, meaning that a corporation is not obligated to abide by the aforementioned requirements and thus practice Greenwashing freely without facing any legal consequences. This is a major issue as it demonstrates the point of inability for local and global authorities to enforce criteria for sustainable operations. However, due to this issue environmentally unethical operations are prone to the public backlash that has been seen capable of pressuring authorities to implement mandatory requirements. Even so, the lack of mandatory requirements is still a relevant issue that allows private corporations to Greenwash freely.

⁸ Murphy, Tim. "5 Examples of Greenwashing Claims | TechTarget." *Sustainability and ESG*, 16 Mar. 2023, www.techtarget.com/sustainability/feature/Examples-of-greenwashing-claims. Accessed 7 Aug. 2023.

⁹ "About." www.earthsight.org.uk, www.earthsight.org.uk/about. Accessed 7 Aug. 2023.

¹⁰ U.S. Environmental Protection Agency | US EPA, www.epa.gov/sites/default/files/2015-10/documents/vw-nov-caa-09-18-15.pdf. Accessed 7 Aug. 2023.

Lack of Regulations

Following along with the previous impetus for Greenwashing in private corporations is the lack of regulations which are also a result of the current voluntary requirements. The United Nations published the Integrity Matters report outlining the need for regulators to develop regulations about Greenwashing to prevent its unintentional practice and establish legal consequences.¹¹ Moreover, the report touches upon the necessity for corporations to commit to sustainable operations.

Greenwashing in state-owned corporations

Motives to practice Greenwashing

Reasons motivating state-owned corporations to Greenwash can be similar to privately owned corporations, for example appearing compliant with regulations, but will also differ due to the politically rooted orientation of such entities. Furthermore, the devotion of member states of the UN to sustainable practices is of utmost importance thus governments are largely motivated to demonstrate support to treaties and conventions and implementation of them. The underlying principle of complying with international environmental policies is based on acceptance by the international community and stage. This can have both a positive and negative impact as it can fuel countries to properly or falsely implement such policies.

For instance, the Brazilian state-owned oil and gas company Petrobras was accused of Greenwashing for its advertising campaigns concerning the Amazon rainforest. Consequently, following findings that demonstrated a 22% increase in deforestation by Brazil's National Institute for Space Research (INPE) the President of Brazil at the time, Jair Bolsonaro was placed under fire during the climate change Conference of the Parties (COP) in Glasgow. Organizations such as Greenpeace commented on these actions by saying that [t]here is no amount of greenwashing that can hide what [President Jair] Bolsonaro is doing to destroy the Amazon".¹² The government of Brazil faced enormous international backlash as well as difficulties and challenges from the international community. The consequences that can form from the practice of greenwashing by state-owned corporations revolve around

¹¹ Integrity Matters: Net Zero Commitments by Businesses, Financial Institutions, Cities and Regions," www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/high-level_expert_group_n7b.pdf. Accessed 8 Aug. 2023.

¹² Welle (www.dw.com), Deutsche. "Brazil Accused of "Greenwashing" the Amazon's Deforestation | DW | 20.11.2021." [DW.COM](https://www.dw.com/en/brazil-accused-of-greenwashing-the-amazons-deforestation/a-59883309), www.dw.com/en/brazil-accused-of-greenwashing-the-amazons-deforestation/a-59883309. Accessed 7 Aug. 2023.

international relations and can therefore have an immense impact on a country's bilateral and multilateral agreements causing it to spiral into isolation from the international community or be subject to sanctions.

Conclusion

In addition to the different reasons and strategies that result in greenwashing for both state-owned and private corporations, it is important to look at the economic threats posed by the practice of greenwashing. Greenwashing will have the effect of creating unfair competition as it allows corporations to have fewer expenses in order to maintain environmentally sustainable operations. Furthermore, the false ecological allegations appear in advertisements but are not in fact sustained in products or production operations, as a result, a larger consumer base can be garnered thus creating further imbalances in markets. At its core greenwashing is a method through which state-owned and private corporations can cut expenses and create a positive image to the public on a local and global level while damaging competition in markets and economies. In the initial stages, loss of competition will lead to the establishment of monopolies and thus cause fluctuations in prices. Moreover, in the long term, the economy could spiral into crisis or inflation but these are extreme scenarios that are unlikely to result solely by greenwashing.

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

United Kingdom (UK)

The government of the UK as well as NGOs operating in the country have become deeply involved in anti-Greenwashing campaigns. Following the country's exit from the European Union (EU) new Greenwashing legislation has been implemented. Specifically, the UK has begun a crackdown on false environmental assertions led by the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA). The recent actions and the new legislation has seen much success in punishing private corporations as the ASA has controverted the alleged sustainable operations and products of oil companies and, namely, the Hyundai vehicle manufacturer.¹³

United States of America (USA)

The United States of America has been the largest economy for several decades leading the global technological industrialisation that began in the late 20th century as a result of having an incremental focus on environmental sustainability. Consequently, hundreds of conglomerates based in the US have embarked on

¹³ Ungoed-Thomas, Jon. "Greenwashing" Firms Face Steep New UK Fines for Misleading Claims." *The Guardian*, 19 Feb. 2023, www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/feb/19/greenwashing-firms-face-steep-new-uk-fines-for-misleading-claims. Accessed 7 Aug. 2023.

environmentally friendly campaigns. However, due to this Greenwashing has become a frequent occurrence in the country's free markets. In order to tackle this issue the US legislation has been implementing a series of laws to comply with the growing practice of Greenwashing within its economy. For example, the creation of the Federal Trade Commission in the 20th century is a major body combating the rapid expansion of Greenwashing

China

The People's Republic of China is a rapidly developing economy that is expanding its presence and influence in the global market. Even so, the country has recently been solidifying its position as a supporter of environmental sustainability; it has had a rather unsustainable and scandalous ecological history. Concerning the country's policies, it is important to look at the Five-Year Plan of the current government that discusses the focus of the leading party. The current ecological plan is to set out "eco-friendly work and lifestyle [that] will be advanced to cover all areas of society", translating the broad position of the Chinese government on environmental issues and subsequently Greenwashing.¹⁴

Germany

Germany has been at the forefront of the fight against greenwashing in both state-owned and privately held businesses. Germany, which places a high priority on sustainability and environmental responsibility, has put strict rules and regulations in place to make sure that corporate claims are consistent with actual efforts to create a greener future. The nation's proactive approach to tackling misleading environmental marketing has strengthened accountability and transparency in company practices. Germany is actively attempting to combat greenwashing and promote reliable sustainability measures through cooperative efforts between regulatory organizations, industry players, and advocacy groups, offering a notable example for others to follow.

European Union (EU)

The European Union is an economic and political alliance which seeks to maintain economic competitiveness in its markets. Therefore, the legislative actions taken against corporations are collective and widely enforced by the EU membership requirements. The EU's Greenwashing campaigns are in coordination with the body's Consumer Rights Directive and Sustainable Finance Disclosure Regulation (SFDR) as they aim to preserve consumer protection and environmental sustainability within the corporations operating in member states.

¹⁴ "Sustainability Claims and Greenwashing in China." *CMS Green Globe*, <https://cms.law/en/int/publication/cms-green-globe/china>. Accessed 7 Aug. 2023.

Changing Markets Foundation (CMF)

The Changing Markets Foundation is an NGO which seeks to integrate a sustainable operation of corporations in different markets. The NGO has been cooperating with other NGOs to accomplish its objectives. The CMF takes a look into the ability of different markets to integrate sustainability in order to aid in their ecologically-minded operations. A particular case is that of “Trashion”. The CMF identified that over 900 million items of second-hand clothing are being dumped in Kenya. The NGO has produced informative documentaries and articles to raise awareness about this issue and the possibilities for sustainable use of discarded textiles.

Competition and Markets Authority (CMA)

The UK government subsidy, CMA, is purposed to help businesses and individuals in their ventures in order to create competitive markets. The body aims to tackle unfair advantages that certain corporations can create for themselves through multiple ways such as Greenwashing. The position of the CMA in the UK’s economy explains its objective to eliminate the practice of Greenwashing within all markets in order to provide fair chances for all corporations operating inside the country.

Authority for Consumer and Markets (ACM)

Similarly to the UK the Netherlands has established the ACM as the country itself is facing major challenges in its market as a result of Greenwashing. The organization works to combat the unfair advantages that some businesses can develop for themselves using a variety of strategies, such as Greenwashing. The CMA's role in the Dutch economy explains why it wants to end the practice of Greenwashing in all markets and give any company doing business there an equal shot at success.

BLOCS EXPECTED

Bloc 1

The first Bloc should consist of less environmentally concerned countries in terms of corporate operations. Countries in this Bloc will seek to minimize definitive Greenwashing legislation as they profit greatly by being an environmentally incautious haven for corporations aiming to decrease operation costs resulting from ecologically-conscious expenses.

Bloc 2

The second Bloc should be an alliance between capitalist countries that value the presence of a competitive free market economy promoted by numerous

corporations within their borders. Countries in this Bloc should seek to provide incentives and benefits to corporations to become environmentally sustainable rather than simply Greenwashing; furthermore, penalties for Greenwashing should also be endorsed in this Bloc’s resolution.

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date	Description of event
January 12th, 1990	The term "greenwashing" was coined by environmentalist Jay Westerveld, highlighting the deceptive practice of making false or exaggerated environmental claims for corporate image.
November 9th, 2002	The U.S. Federal Trade Commission (FTC) releases updated Green Guides, providing guidelines for truthful and accurate environmental marketing to prevent greenwashing.
March 20th, 2010	Walmart announces its sustainability goals, including a plan to be 100% powered by renewable energy. Some stakeholders remain skeptical due to the company's history of labor and environmental controversies.
September 12th, 2015	Volkswagen is exposed for using software to cheat emissions tests, showcasing a high-profile case of a corporation engaging in significant environmental deception.
July 2018	The European Union introduces the Non-Financial Reporting Directive, requiring large companies to disclose environmental and social information in their reports to combat greenwashing.
April 2020	The Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) releases new guidelines for corporate climate change disclosures, impacting both private and state-owned companies.

March 2nd, 2021	The U.S. SEC announces intentions to revise disclosure requirements, aiming to provide investors with accurate climate-related information to prevent greenwashing.
October 2022	State-owned oil companies face heightened pressure to align with global climate goals, prompting some to diversify into renewable energy and commit to carbon neutrality.
March 21st, 2021	The U.S. SEC announces plans to enhance climate-related disclosure requirements, aiming to provide investors with more accurate information on companies' environmental practices.
February 14th, 2022	State-owned oil companies face heightened pressure to align with global climate goals, prompting some to diversify into renewable energy and commit to carbon neutrality.
2023-Present	Major institutional investors collaborate to demand transparent reporting and verifiable sustainability efforts, signaling a shift in investor expectations.

RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

Greenwashing as a term¹⁵

Identifying the existence of Greenwashing practices and defining them by this term is a significant milestone that should not be overlooked. Through the identification and definition of the term, regulators and authorities are able to construct and implement specific measures that are able to better tackle the issue at its core rather than focusing on collateral effects. Thus, this is an important event as per the topic of this guide.

¹⁵ "What Is Greenwashing? Why Should Large Enterprises Care?" www.terrascope.com, www.terrascope.com/blog/what-is-greenwashing-why-should-large-enterprises-care. Accessed 7 Aug. 2023.

UN Integrity Matters Report¹⁶

The UNs' High-Level Expert Group was tasked with addressing the net zero pledges of private and state-owned corporations. In its efforts, the Expert Group discovered several discrepancies within the aforementioned pledges made by such corporations. Subsequently, the Expert Group produced a report, namely the Integrity Matters Report, which outlines and describes the necessary steps that should be taken in order for corporations, both private and state held, to achieve their net zero emission objectives. The steps were unanimously agreed upon by the Expert Group and are thoroughly analysed and discussed within the report by its members.

Climate and Resilience Law¹⁷

The EU body is also aiming to tackle the issue of Greenwashing, although indirectly, through the creation of the Climate and Resilience Law. The Climate and Resilience Law, adopted on the 20th of July 2020, demonstrates the EU's commitment to the preservation of sustainable living by making its objective to reduce Greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030. The EU's pledge will stand to have a large impact on the uncovering of Greenwashing practices as it will seek to impact "the entire scope of the economy: "consuming", "producing and working", "moving", "living", "feeding" and "strengthening the judicial protection of the environment".¹⁸ The law highlights the dedication of a major party, the EU, to address the issues which the environment faces from multiple factors, thus also that of Greenwashing.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)

The United Nations, as the largest international body, has utilized its UNIDO subsidiary in an effort to address Greenwashing. The UNIDO is a branch of the UN that specializes in the Green Industry and its Development as a result it is directly related to tackling Greenwashing within private and state-owned corporations. A particular attempt of the UNIDO is the "Policies for Supporting Green Industry" document which was published on the 11th of May 2011. The document illustrates the certain steps that need to be taken and furthermore to establish green industries in both Less Economically Developed Countries (LEDCs) and More Economically Developed Countries (MEDCs).

¹⁶ Integrity Matters: Net Zero Commitments by Businesses, Financial Institutions, Cities and Regions," www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/high-level_expert_group_n7b.pdf. Accessed 8 Aug. 2023.

¹⁷ "Climate and Resilience Law." [Commission.europa.eu, commission.europa.eu/projects/climate-and-resilience-law_en](http://commission.europa.eu/commission.europa.eu/projects/climate-and-resilience-law_en). Accessed 7 Aug. 2023.

¹⁸ "Climate and Resilience Law." [Commission.europa.eu, commission.europa.eu/projects/climate-and-resilience-law_en](http://commission.europa.eu/commission.europa.eu/projects/climate-and-resilience-law_en). Accessed 7 Aug. 2023.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Mandatory Regulations

Greenwashing is often used in the production of a product but also to advertise the product itself, as a result, it is largely used in the manufacturing process to avert allegations of environmental unsustainability. Furthermore, corporations which do not practice this strategy are often accused in spite of their truthful claims. Subsequently, a possible solution for the issue of Greenwashing could be the mandatory measurement of carbon emissions throughout the manufacturing process in order to concretely identify Greenwashing.

Financial Incentives for Environmental Cautiousness

It is often difficult for corporations to truly abide by the environmental sustainability laws of their host countries due to the expense of actually employing such green methods. For this reason, it could be beneficial for the state to establish programs and agreements with suppliers of such technology in order to make it more affordable and appealing to corporations. Furthermore, in a financial aspect, governments could also increase penalties for the practice of Greenwashing, although this is largely done already and not quite effective.

Strengthening Reporting Mechanisms

Lastly, in order to make the previous solution more effective, it is of immense importance to strengthen the reporting mechanisms currently in place. In order for the regulations to improve it is vital that regulators are educated on the subject thus making the identification of Greenwashing easier. This can be done by establishing institutions and training that will enrich the capabilities of regulators.

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