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Schunz, Simon (2012): 'Explaining the evolution of European Union foreign climate policy: A case of bounded adaptiveness', *European Integration online Papers (EIoP)*, Vol. 16, Article 6, <http://eiop.or.at/eiop/texte/2012-006a.htm>.

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DOI: 10.1695/2012006

**Explaining the evolution of European Union foreign climate policy:  
A case of bounded adaptiveness\***

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**Abstract:** Ever since the inception of the United Nations climate regime in the early 1990s, the European Union has aspired to play a leading part in the global combat against climate change. Based on an analysis of how the Union has developed its foreign climate policy to fulfil this role over the past two decades, the paper sets out to identify the reasons for this evolution. It demonstrates that the EU's development in this area was co-determined by adaptations to shifting international dynamics strongly bounded by purely domestic concerns. Providing a concise understanding and explanation of how the Union designs its foreign policy with regard to one emblematic issue of its international activity, the contribution provides insights into the remarkably rapid, but not always effective maturation of this unique actor's involvement in (non-Common Foreign and Security Policy) global politics.

**Keywords:** Council of Ministers; environmental policy; European Commission; foreign policy; Institutionalism; integration theory; leadership; path dependence; political science.

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## Introduction

For two decades since the onset of the first official negotiations, in 1991, on what would later become the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the global community has attempted to design stringent political solutions to the problem of climate change. During this entire period, the European Union (EU)<sup>1</sup> has been among the most active players in the negotiations, constantly seeking to provide leadership to the process (Oberthür 2009). Despite this dedication, the modalities of its activities in global climate politics evolved considerably across time.

While the Union's historical evolution as a foreign policy player has been the subject of scholarly debate in general - descriptive-analytical and theoretical - terms (Carlsnaes 2007), the analysis of its foreign policy activities in specific domains, notably also in the area of climate change, has remained more limited. This is a regrettable research gap because much can be learned about the nature of EU integration from examining its foreign policy in various Common Foreign and Security (CFSP) and non-CFSP domains, which are traditionally among the hardest policy areas to integrate. When it comes to the issue of climate change, one would assume that there is a strong rationale for greater integration, however. There is no point whatsoever in "going it alone" when tackling this collective action problem. Internally, the EU member states' climate change policies have therefore already been harmonized substantially. With regard to the EU's external activities on climate change, by contrast, the jury is still out. For that reason, and as climate change poses a policy challenge that can be regarded as an example of a whole set of similar EU external policies, especially in the environmental area, investigating into this case will help to fill the above-mentioned research gap. To this end, the present contribution addresses two closely linked research questions – one with an empirical objective and a second one aimed at explaining trends in EU foreign policy development.

In empirical terms, the study of the EU's external climate policy has most notably suffered from a "presentism bias" (Jørgensen 2007: 510). Although the Union's implication in the evolution of the climate regime has been examined for different phases (e.g. 1995-1997), particularly with the help of the concept of "leadership" (e.g. Gupta/Grubb 2000), a longitudinal perspective on its development as a foreign climate policy player has hardly been adopted (see, however, Jordan/Rayner 2010, with their discussion of the EU's *internal* climate policy evolution). Moreover, studies have tended to concentrate very much on the Union's climate foreign policy *making*, i.e. the internal preparation of its negotiation positions in specific contexts, in an effort to understand EU leadership ambitions (Oberthür 2009; Costa

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<sup>1</sup> In the early 1990s, today's EU was still the European Community (EC). To be consistent, current custom is followed by continuously referring to the European Union in this contribution, unless legal accuracy demands otherwise.

2009a). Its foreign policy *implementation*<sup>2</sup> - the activities it actually undertakes to get its positions adopted internationally (cf. Brighi/Hill 2008) - has, by contrast, received very little attention. A two-fold empirical research gap therefore exists, which is characteristic of much of the literature on EU foreign policy more widely. Its closing demands the adoption of a *longitudinal approach* that traces the development of the Union's foreign policy by focussing not only on the making, but explicitly also on the *implementation* of this latter. The article intends to fill this void by first replying to the following question: *how has the EU's foreign climate policy developed over the past 20 years?*

The purpose of this contribution goes, however, beyond the - in itself already interesting and novel - empirical exercise of mapping the evolution of EU foreign climate policy over time. The better understanding gained by adopting a longitudinal perspective and zooming in on the EU's actual behaviour in foreign climate policy provides the necessary basis for an explanatory exercise of this evolution that transcends the state of the art. To attain this objective, the article addresses a second question: *why has the EU's foreign climate policy developed the way it did?* To date, efforts to account for EU external policy in the climate domain have been largely in line with general explanations of European foreign policy, focussing on single levels of analysis (the international, the EU) and/or the sole explanandum foreign policy making. The general EU foreign policy literature recurrently operates with two types of explanations for the development of the Union's foreign policy: (i) those drawing on variables related to the global context, notably economic interdependencies, and (ii) others operating with domestic variables (Hix/Hoyland 2011: 323-330). With regard to the domestic variables, two alternative accounts are regularly distinguished: rational choice and liberal intergovernmentalist theorists argue that member states' geopolitical and economic interests decisively determine the shape of EU foreign policy (Hix/Hoyland 2011: 325-328; Moravcsik 1998: 3-10), while scholars of supranationalism invoke internal institutional constellations and especially the role of supranational players as determinants of the Union's foreign policy choices (Hix/Hoyland 2011: 328-330).

This general debate, which tends to be held at quite a high level of aggregation, has also strongly influenced the search for explanations of EU external environmental and - notably - climate policy. Some authors explain the Union's foreign environmental and climate policy making from predominantly a rational choice perspective, at times combining variables at two levels of analysis (Kelemen/Vogel 2010, Schreurs/Tiberghien 2007). Kelemen and Vogel (2010: 437), for instance, argue "that an account rooted in political economy - focusing on the interaction between domestic politics and international regulatory competition - provides" a powerful explanation for EU environmental (including climate) leadership. Others have focussed on purely domestic factors, and here most notably on the EU's institutional capacity

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<sup>2</sup> The term "implementation" often has a purely technical connotation (e.g. the implementation of an aid programme) and can therefore be slightly misleading. Although other terms like "foreign policy behaviour" would be preferable, the notion of implementation is retained in this paper because it represents an established analytical concept in foreign policy analysis.

and internal policies as bases for providing leadership to global environmental processes (Oberthür 2009; Wurzel/Connelly 2010; Costa 2009a, 2009b). In the debate on EU external climate policy, this latter approach, which tries to understand “who exercises what kind of leadership, how and when” has become the mainstream of sorts (Wurzel/Connelly 2010: 15; Oberthür 2009; Lindenthal 2009; Gupta/Grubb 2000). While this strand in the literature strives to untangle the complex internal factors leading the EU to adopt a leadership position, it represents a conceptual rather than an explanatory account of EU foreign policy making. Moreover, it tends to neglect the importance of the external context the Union is embedded into. Both approaches remain strongly rooted in rational choice-inspired explanations focussing on the EU’s policy making.

While acknowledging the important explanatory attempts undertaken through the prisms of these two general, theoretical and conceptual approaches, this article aims to go a step further in two respects: first, by broadening the explanandum to the EU’s foreign policy behaviour in the climate change domain, as it considers that there is a difference between adopting a foreign policy position and acting it out (Brighi/Hill 2008); and, second, by focussing on the interplay between internal and external factors in their multiplicity. By extending the explanatory effort to its actual foreign policy *implementation*, the resulting explanation represents a promising variation of typical foreign policy analyses. If the formulation of common foreign policy positions regularly represents a significant challenge for the EU, their joint implementation necessitates the even more intricate coordination of member states’ often long-standing foreign policy strategies, constituting thus a very complex and sensitive matter - and potential boundary - of European integration. Insights may therefore be gained from this case into the limits of EU integration in the domain of (non-CFSP) foreign policy more generally. Any explanation of the institutionalization processes regarding the Union’s foreign policy making and implementation calls for a combination of theoretical approaches to EU integration that descends from the high level of aggregation at which the broad macro-theories - which dominate both EU integration studies and the explanation of EU foreign policy developments - are held (Wiener/Diez 2009). At the same time, it needs to remain open for possible impacts of developments in global politics, which can be significant external determinants of the EU’s foreign policy activities. To this end, the contribution operates with middle-range, neo-institutionalist theories of EU integration, which it combines with variables derived from the external context.

The main intention pursued with this contribution lies thus in advancing scholarly thinking on the dynamics of European integration in the field of a major (non-CFSP) foreign policy issue more generally (theoretical gap), while shedding light on the Union’s historical evolution as a foreign policy player in the important field of global climate politics (empirical gap). Where the longitudinal case approach provides novel insights into the topic, it also paves the way for designing a tentative explanation of long-term trends, which challenges the view that the EU continuously adopts a leadership approach because it considers that it best suits its strategic interests in the face of an intricate external context. The findings have important implications for the design of future policies in the climate change as in other domains of EU foreign policy.

The analysis proceeds in four main steps. Following a brief presentation of the conceptual and theoretical bases for understanding and explaining EU foreign policy, a narrative form of process-tracing focuses on the historical evolution of the Union's foreign climate policy from 1991 to 2009 and the Copenhagen summit. Distinguishing between four time phases, it examines the EU's foreign policy making and implementation, as well as the context provided by global climate politics. This descriptive analysis allows for the identification of cross-time patterns in the Union's foreign climate policy, which are subsequently explained through a combination of considerations derived from middle-range EU integration theories. The contribution closes with an appreciation of what the findings mean for the study and practical effectiveness of the EU's foreign policy in the analysed and similar domains of non-CFSP foreign policy.

## **1. Conceptual and theoretical bases: EU foreign policy and the logic of its evolution**

The empirical analysis of the evolution of EU foreign policy firstly requires a clear conceptual vision of what this foreign policy precisely entails and how it can be analysed. When embedded into theoretical considerations, the advanced concepts also provide the ground for an explanation of the evolutionary paths of the Union's foreign policy making and implementation.

### **1.1. EU foreign policy: What it is and how to analyse it**

EU *foreign policy* is not fundamentally different from foreign policy as conducted by a state. It is "that area of politics which is directed at the external environment with the objective of influencing that environment and the behaviour of other actors within it, in order to pursue interests, values and goals" (Keukeleire/MacNaughtan 2008: 19). The key difference between the two concerns the actors who define and conduct such a foreign policy. *European Union* foreign policy is at play whenever EU actors (the European Commission, the Council Presidency) or EU member states act explicitly on behalf of or in line with EU values, interests and goals (Smith 2003: 2).

When it comes to analysing foreign policy, be it of a state or the EU, a useful distinction can be made between foreign policy making and foreign policy implementation. Foreign policy making has classically been defined as "the process which results in the selection from a (...) number of (...) projects of one project intended to bring about the (...) state of affairs envisaged by the decision-makers" (Snyder et al. 1962: 90). Analysts of foreign policy have typically concentrated on understanding and explaining how this "one project" was chosen, implicitly assuming that the foreign policy "outputs" - in the form of positions adopted - would then be "self-executing" (Garrison 2003: 155; Hudson/Vore 1995; Brighi/Hill 2008: 127, 134; Smith/Clarke 1985). Comparatively little attention has therefore been paid to

foreign policy implementation, which depicts actors' activities when they "confront their environment and (...) the environment confronts them" and marks the step in the foreign policy process "in which decisions are translated into actions" (Brighi/Hill 2008: 117, 118). Although the two are obviously closely linked, focusing on this latter dimension of an actor's foreign policy acknowledges that discrepancies between *what an actor intends to do* in its relations with the external world (foreign policy making) and *what it actually does and how* (foreign policy implementation) must be considered the rule rather than the exception (Brighi/Hill 2008). The notion of foreign policy implementation underscores therefore an actor's strategic agency potential in global politics (Clarke/Smith 1985: 166).

By consequence, any comprehensive mapping of an actor's foreign policy over time needs to pay attention to both these analytical dimensions and their interplay. As foreign policy is never made or implemented in a vacuum, it is, moreover, important to give consideration to the external context, i.e. the institutional structures and actor constellations it is geared toward and embedded into (Brighi/Hill 2008). Consequently, while focussing on the understudied dimension of implementation, the study explores the following key analytical units of foreign policy analysis:

1. EU foreign policy making and global climate politics: *how does EU foreign climate policy decision-making function? Which actors are involved, what is the overarching rationale? Which central positions does the EU defend? Who are the key actors, what are their positions and what are the central issues and cleavages in global climate politics?*
2. EU foreign policy implementation: *who represents the EU and how does this representation function? How does the Union defend its positions strategically? Which instruments (diplomatic, economic)<sup>3</sup> does it employ vis-à-vis external actors?*

Results will be presented in the form of a longitudinal case study providing a narrative process-trace that covers these components. Process-tracing is nowadays ubiquitous in social science methodology, but hardly ever operationalized (see, however, Bennett/George 2005; Gerring 2007: chapt. 7). In a positivist understanding, it involves the attempt "to identify the intervening causal process - the causal chain and causal mechanism - between (...) independent (...) variables and the outcome of the dependent variable" (Bennett/George 2005: 206-207). While the overarching logic of uncovering the causal chain remains the same in the interpretive variant of the method privileged here, process-tracing is essentially regarded as narration in search for patterns (Gysen et al. 2006). The narrative process-trace provided in this article gives an account of events as they unfolded, while being causal in nature because "any explanation resides in its accounting for temporality and sequence" (Somers 1998: 771). This

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<sup>3</sup> K. Smith developed a useful catalogue of EU foreign policy instruments, which distinguishes between economic and diplomatic tools (2003: 52-68). *Diplomatic* instruments include issuing demarches or declarations, visiting other countries, opening dialogues etc. In the *economic* sphere, the EU can inter alia suspend/conclude trade or association agreements, reduce/increase its tariffs or provide/withdraw aid.

allows for extracting patterns over time, and for subsequent "pattern-matching", as explained in the next section.

## **1.2. How to explain the evolution of EU foreign climate policy**

Describing the evolution of the EU's foreign climate policy represents one valuable portion of this contribution, but its intention lies furthermore in extracting cross-time patterns and explaining the development of its foreign policy making and, notably, implementation, as a currently under-studied dimension of its external climate activities.

Generally, and expanding upon the brief overview of the academic debate on EU environmental and climate leadership provided in the introduction to this contribution, one can assume that this evolution is co-determined by factors operating at three levels: the international, the European and the national (Brighi/Hill 2008). Recently, scholars have begun to apply "second image reversed" arguments to explain external influences on the EU's climate policy (Costa 2009b), granting the international policy level an incentivizing or constraining role. International institutions can empower certain "change agents" or lead to preference modifications of some actors at the EU level, but EU policies are then adjusted to the external environment via a collective internal reaction (Costa 2009b: 74-78). In similar vein, the national level does not by itself determine the choice for a specific EU foreign policy behaviour. While certain member states might play a stronger role than others in shaping EU policies, states' preferences only take effect at the aggregate, European level. This level must therefore be considered as central to understanding the evolutionary dynamics of EU foreign policy, while an eye needs to be kept out to the input of member states as well as to institutions, actors and their interests and power at the global level, which may prompt/prevent change in the Union.

If one focuses on this central level of analysis, the evolution of EU foreign policy may best be explained by having recourse to theories of EU integration, which attempt to uncover and explain the processes and outcomes of the Union's development as an entity. Several different strands of EU integration theory come into consideration. To begin with, the broad meta-theories embodied in (neo)functionalism and liberal intergovernmentalism could provide first ideas on how to explain the development of EU foreign policy in the climate domain. Where liberal intergovernmentalists regard state interactions based on the rational defence of national interests as the key determinants of the Union's evolution as an entity, neo-functionalists highlight the role of supranational institutions and spill-over effects in this development (see, e.g., Moravcsik 1998; Sandholtz and Stone Sweet 1998). Both are, however, rightly considered to represent "grand theory" about what Peterson and Bomberg have called "super-systemic decisions", i.e. "history-making" choices on the shape of the EU and its constitutional/institutional nature as such (1999: 9). Their performance in explaining evolutions in specific policy fields can therefore be contested (Risse 1996: 59). For that reason, and since the purpose of this study is to explain the development of foreign policy behaviour in one domain of EU external policies over time, middle-range integration theories

seem to provide more promising starting points for the intended analysis (Aspinwall/Schneider 2000). These theories, again according to Peterson and Bomberg (1999: 9), focus on “systemic decisions”, i.e. policy content in particular areas, and are thus also able to help understanding and explaining evolutions in this content over time. Given the complexity of EU integration processes, it has been suggested to combine these theoretical approaches so as to compose a “mosaic” of complementary theoretical perspectives (Diez/Wiener 2009). Essentially, change over time in EU foreign climate policy can be explained via any (or a combination of) three key approaches to processes of institutionalization within Europe (Pollack 2009; Aspinwall/Schneider 2000: 7). Such a policy area can develop

1. as the result of repeated rounds of bargaining among member states, which decide whether a policy should be maintained or altered (*rational choice institutionalism*) (Pollack 2009: 126),
2. in the form of “bounded change” in line with a logic of path-dependency: existing institutions, i.e. “formal and informal structures that influence human behaviour” within the EU, set policies on certain, not necessarily efficient tracks, which restrain member states’ choices and can only be left at high cost or at “critical junctures” (*historical institutionalism*) (Aspinwall/Schneider 2000: 4; Pierson 2000: 265), or
3. as a result of cognitive processes of adaptation to certain norms: the preferences and behaviour of actors in the EU are shaped “through interaction with broader institutional contexts (norms and discursive structures)” and the internalization of the latter in line with the “logic of appropriateness” (*sociological institutionalism*) (Checkel 1999: 6; Risse 2009).<sup>4</sup>

Each of these theoretical approaches holds a distinct conception of the role the external environment can play in the Union’s development as a (foreign) policy actor. In the rationalist view, this environment can be a source of member states’ preference change, but it is nonetheless through internal bargaining processes that policies are developed. In the historical institutionalist view, the external environment plays a rather limited role during periods of path-dependent policy evolution, but can provide for external shocks that can trigger a “critical juncture”, at which policies are reformed and set on new tracks (Pierson 2000). Finally, sociological institutionalists attribute a fairly significant role to the external context a foreign policy actor operates in, as international norms can - over time - come to determine the EU’s collective identity, preferences and, ultimately, behaviour.

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<sup>4</sup> Note that the notion of socialisation processes is also inherent in many neo-functional accounts of EU integration. Yet, as neo-functionalism represents a rather complex theoretical edifice with a set of assumptions that, as argued above, are more suited for explaining history-making decisions in the EU, preference is given to operating with mid-range integration theories here. When explaining the evolution of policy content over time, these latter can more convincingly be combined inter se.

The intention pursued with this contribution is not to formally test any of these well-established theoretical strands, but to interpret the data gathered in the narrative process-trace in light of these approaches in order to tentatively explain the evolutionary dynamics of EU foreign climate policy. In case study research, this technique is frequently referred to as “pattern-matching”: systematically produced empirical observations are compared to the expectations formulated on the basis of theories (Yin 2003). The resulting explanation regularly involves a combination of different logics, as “it is not obvious that any one approach is superior to the others in capturing the complexities of change” (March/Olsen 1998: 21). It is to be regarded as a *plausible* account of the evolutionary logic of EU foreign climate policy, and thus a contribution to an ongoing debate, derived from a novel approach to studying the subject.

## **2. Empirical analysis:**

### **The evolution of the EU’s foreign climate policy (1991-2009)**

The longitudinal analysis of the EU’s foreign climate policy is dissected into four time periods, selected on the basis of the different stages of UN climate regime development. The research for the different periods presented here is based on a larger study which involved a triangulation of research techniques and sources including 32 semi-structured interviews, the analysis of selected EU, EU member state and UN documents and the non-participatory observation of the Union’s activities at UN climate negotiation sessions during the year 2009. The research interviews were conducted between January 2008 and March 2010 with former and current climate negotiators from the European Commission, from several EU member states (including Belgium, France, Germany, Portugal and the UK) and from non-EU countries (e.g. USA, South Africa) as well as with observers of EU and global climate politics. Interviewees were asked about their perceptions of the activities, role and impact of the EU in global climate politics and its evolution over time. Their answers were coded and used to develop the narrative process-trace. Interview research was complementary to wide-reaching document analysis of primary sources including UN, EU and EU member states official (negotiation texts, compilations of party positions etc.) and unofficial negotiation documents (position papers, negotiation syntheses etc.) as well as academic and other reports of key global climate negotiations sessions. Sources were selected on the basis of their salience for the understanding of the EU's foreign policy behaviour. For the final round of negotiations analyzed in this paper, the author could also benefit from direct, non-participatory observation of preparatory UN negotiation sessions in Bonn (8-12 June 2009) and Barcelona (2-6 November 2009) as well as during the 15<sup>th</sup> conference of the parties (COP) in Copenhagen (8-19 December 2009). As a party delegate, the author had access to all major formal and numerous informal negotiation settings, allowing for a close monitoring of EU activities and interactions with other players in global climate politics.

## **2.1. Creating the UN climate regime: EU ad hoc coordination on the way to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (1991-1992)**

In 1990, climate change made a decisive leap from scientific circles onto political agendas when the UN General Assembly created the Intergovernmental Negotiation Committee (INC) to finalize deliberations on a climate treaty by the June 1992 Rio Earth summit (Pallemaerts 2004) (for an overview of major UN climate negotiation sessions between 1991 and 2011, see Table 1).

### *EU foreign policy making and global climate politics*

EU foreign policy making on climate change concentrated on the coordination of member state positions during this period. As early as June 1990, a European Council summit in Dublin had called upon the Union to accept “a wider responsibility (...) to play a leading role in promoting concerted and effective action at global level” regarding environmental problems (European Council 1990: Annex II). This call would set the tone for the Union’s position for the years to come. It was translated into a specific commitment later that year when the Council decided that the EU should stabilize its greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions at 1990 levels by 2000 (Brambilla 2004: 247).

In the global arena, the EU formed part of the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which acted as a loose negotiation block vis-à-vis the Group of 77 and China (G-77/China) coalition of developing countries. While key parties within both coalitions agreed on the necessity to negotiate a treaty, they diverged on whether it should incorporate legally binding emission reduction obligations and which magnitude the relevant targets should take (Bodansky 1993). The large majority of OECD parties and the developing world favoured a legally binding approach, which was, however, refuted by the US. Many industrialized countries, including EU members and Canada, but not the US, had moreover openly pledged a stabilization of emissions by the year 2000 (Paterson/Grubb 1992: 301). In this context, developing countries called on the developed world to substantially reduce emissions and provide technological and financial aid to help the poor in their combat against climate change (Bodansky 1993: 479-480). Compromises between these groups of parties led to the following, not legally binding key provisions: the objective of the regime as such was “to achieve (...) stabilization of greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system” (Art. 2 UNFCCC), while industrialized parties were strongly incited to return “individually or jointly to their 1990 levels these anthropogenic emissions” (Art. 4.2(b) UNFCCC) in the future.

**Table 1: Major UN climate negotiation sessions between 1991 and 2011**

Period	Meeting	Dates	Places
1991-1992	INC 1 - 5.2	February, June, Sept., Dec. 1991; February, May 1992	Chantilly (USA), Geneva, Nairobi, New York
1993-1997	INC 6-11	Dec. 1992, March, August 1993; Feb., Sept. 1994; February 1995	Geneva New York
	COP 1	28 March-7 April 1995	Berlin
	COP 2	8-19 July 1996	Geneva
	COP 3	1-11 Dec. 1997	Kyoto
1998-2004	COP 4	2-13 Nov. 1998	Buenos Aires
	COP 5	25 Oct.-5 Nov. 1999	Bonn
	COP 6	13-25 Nov. 2000	The Hague
	COP 6bis	16-27 July 2001	Bonn
	COP 7	29 Oct.-10 Nov. 2001	Marrakech
	COP 8	23 Oct.-1 Nov. 2002	New Delhi
	COP 9	1-12 Dec. 2003	Milan
2005-2011	COP 10	6-18 Dec. 2004	Buenos Aires
	COP 11/MOP 1	28 Nov.-10 Dec. 2005	Montreal
	COP 12/MOP 2	5-17 Nov. 2006	Nairobi
	COP 13/MOP 3	3-15 Dec. 2007	Bali
	COP 14/MOP 4	2-13 Dec. 2008	Poznan
	COP 15/MOP 5	7-19 Dec. 2009	Copenhagen
	COP 16/MOP 6	29 Nov.-10 Dec. 2010	Cancun, Mexico
COP 17/MOP 7	28 Nov.-9 Dec. 2011	Durban, South Africa	

### *EU foreign policy implementation*

As the European Community had no formal status in the INC, it would become de facto represented by the Council Presidency, which also made efforts to coordinate activities among all member states, arguably achieving a certain degree of uniform representation of the Union's positions (Brambilla 2004: 165). Despite these coordination efforts, each member state also had its own representations in the INC process, however. In the absence of a common negotiation strategy, the EU's joint actions would thus often be of an ad hoc nature, and individual member states assumed significant responsibilities. Following a period during which the EU attempted to convince the US of changing course by arguing for its own position, it finally engaged in bargaining when, in April 1992, the UK Environment Secretary negotiated bilaterally with US State Department officials on key compromise text concerning the objectives of the future regime, which later made it virtually unchanged into Article 4.2 UNFCCC, cited above (Bodansky 1993, 491). This British initiative had enjoyed the support from some EU members, but had not been based on any formal EC mandate to compromise on its target objectives (Lescher 2000, 61). Yet, "without the machinery provided by the EC

for discussion between ministers [the UK-US deal] may not have happened” (Haigh 1996, 181-182).

In synthesis, the EU can thus be characterized as an ad hoc negotiation participant in the early days of global climate politics: based on a general common position and basic coordination mechanisms, it assured a minimum degree of common, albeit often improvised representation through its most active members.

## **2.2. Consolidating the UN climate regime: Coordinated EU bargaining for ambitious reduction targets (1993-1997)**

In the period between the adoption of the Convention and its entry into force in 1994, parties identified the need for reinforcing the soft legal framework provided by the UNFCCC. To negotiate a new legal instrument, the 1995 first conference of the parties created the Ad Hoc Group on the Berlin Mandate (AGBM), whose work would result in the Kyoto Protocol in late 1997.

### *EU foreign policy making and global climate politics*

The internal institutional context for EU foreign climate policy was modified in October 1994 when the Environment Council created an ad hoc working group of national climate experts and charged it with the task of mediating between EU members in order to prepare the Union’s negotiation position for COP 1 (Lescher 2000: 72). Early EU proposals in the AGBM process drafted in this group concentrated on the regulatory approach of the regime, for which the Union favoured a command-and-control framework based on “policies and measures” (AGBM 1995: 37-53). Gradually, the EU also introduced the aim of limiting global temperature rise to 2°C into its policy proposals (Council 1996). Finally, in the spring of 1997, the Dutch EU Presidency managed to forge a deal on the main component of the Union’s position: the objective of jointly reducing emissions by 15% until 2010 (Kanie 2003). Although member states were only able to share the burden for reductions of about two thirds of these 15%, this proactive proposal would become the cornerstone of the Union’s negotiation position during the final phases of the talks.

The external political context in which the EU defended these positions had slightly altered since the negotiations on the Convention. While the G-77/China continued its activities as a block, a major novel negotiating coalition of non-EU industrialized countries had formed: JUS(S)CA(N)NZ (Japan, United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, later with Switzerland, Norway and Iceland) (Grubb et al. 2001). Key issues in the global negotiations concerned the magnitude of reduction targets for industrialized countries and the regulatory approach of the reformed regime. While the US would, as of 1996, become more open toward concluding a legally binding agreement, it coupled its acceptance of this to clear-cut demands regarding market-based, flexible mechanisms as prime instruments for reducing emissions (Yamin 2000). This position, mostly supported by other JUSSCANNZ members, but also the

much less ambitious emission reduction target proposals advanced by the US (stabilization at 1990 levels over the period 2008-2012) and Japan (5% reductions by 2010) would stand in stark contrast to the preferences of the EU and the G-77/China, both advocating 15% reductions by developed countries by 2010 as well as command-and-control measures (Grubb et al. 2001). In the decisive stages of the talks, the three major industrialized emitters, COP 3 host Japan, the US and the EU bargained for a compromise that foresaw reductions from 1990 levels of 6, 7 and 8% respectively over the period 2008-2012 and the introduction of a range of flexible mechanisms (Oberthür/Ott 1999).

### *EU foreign policy implementation*

As a regional economic integration organisation (REIO), the EC was endowed with all the rights of a full member during the UNFCCC COPs (Lescher 2000: 73). In practice, the Council Presidency would exercise these rights on the EC's behalf, assisted by other members of the Troika (including the former and future presidencies). It represented the Union's positions in the first place by submitting a series of formal policy proposals to the UNFCCC secretariat, all of them aimed at setting the agenda of the global talks. In early 1997, the Union would shift from such a content- and arguing-based defence of its proposed regulatory approach to focus on joint bargaining on the basis of its 15% target proposal. With this, it managed to rally the developing country block behind its target proposal. Yet, its exclusive focus on the magnitude of the emission reduction objectives and a high degree of inflexibility of its positions - necessitating substantial coordination meetings to the detriment of foreign policy activity - meant that it would lose out on almost all items besides the target during the final deal-making in Kyoto (Yamin 2000: 61). Although the strong defence of its target proposal arguably pulled the US and Japan toward higher reduction pledges, the Union had to sacrifice other previously defended positions, notably regarding its preferences for the regulatory approach of the future regime.

In sum, the EU developed into - and was recognized as - a more uniform foreign policy player during this period, based on its desire to lead the negotiation process and its early positioning around "policies and measures" as well as its target proposal. Its foreign policy implementation, by contrast, remained fairly limited: it relied almost exclusively on the tools of conference diplomacy, and thus essentially on the appeal of its proposals. In the decisive talks, the inflexibility of its positions implied, however, a substantive need to coordinate internally, which hampered common EU outreach.

### **2.3. Maintaining the UN climate regime: Reinforced EU diplomatic activity to assure the ratification of the Kyoto Protocol (1998-2004)**

The ratification of the Kyoto Protocol was not obtained until 2004, and the EU would come to play a special role in the processes leading up to it.

#### *EU foreign policy making and global climate politics*

Soon after the Kyoto COP, the EU began to engage in the construction of a regional climate regime, centred on the creation of a European Emissions Trading System (ETS), which was intended to prepare the Union for a swift ratification of the Protocol, setting the example for other industrialized parties (Pallemaerts 2004: 44-48). In the global negotiations, it defended above all an environmentally sound operationalization of the flexible mechanisms (including a demand for “supplementarity”, i.e. the definition of a cap on non-domestic measures counting towards the fulfilment of a party’s Kyoto target) and a strong compliance system (Grubb/Yamin 2001).

The need to operationalize many of the provisions in the Kyoto Protocol, notably those regarding the flexible mechanisms, in order to prepare for the ratification of the treaty dominated the negotiation agenda until 2000 and COP 6 in The Hague, which broke down over EU-US differences regarding precisely the question of flexibility (Grubb/Yamin 2001). In March 2001, the George W. Bush administration then completely withdrew from the ratification process, considerably empowering the remaining key members of the Umbrella group (former JUSSCANNZ+Russia, Ukraine), as each one of them was now needed to obtain the ratification of the Protocol.<sup>5</sup> Intensified exchanges between the EU and these other key players in the immediate aftermath of US disengagement resulted in a joint commitment to continue with the operationalization process. This process was concluded with the “Marrakech Accords” adopted in late 2001. In the negotiations leading to these Accords, countries like Japan or Russia managed to exploit their new bargaining power to obtain numerous concessions from the EU, mostly with regard to the use of flexibility provisions. It took another three years to convince Russia to ratify the treaty (Douma 2006).

#### *EU foreign policy implementation*

Following from the perception that the EU had under-performed at the summit in The Hague, its foreign policy implementation set-up was reformed. As of late 2000, a novel Troika, consisting of the present and future Council Presidencies and the Commission represented the Union externally on climate change (Grubb 2001: 10). In 2004, after further episodes of

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<sup>5</sup> For the Protocol to take force, its Article 25.1 foresaw the approval of 55 parties to the UNFCCC, including industrialized country parties representing 55% of the total emissions of all industrialized parties.

unsatisfactory outreach activity, a completely new system of representation was then put into place. Individuals from any member state or the Commission would be designated as EU “lead negotiators” on specific topics and for longer periods of time (Oberthür/Roche Kelly 2008: 38). Further, “issue leaders” were nominated, who formed small groups that would join the lead negotiators in designing and promoting EU positions. This was done in close cooperation with the expert groups that had developed within the working group structure under the Environment Council, which had in the meantime evolved into the Working Party on International Environmental Issues - Climate Change (WPIEI-CC) (Oberthür/Roche Kelly 2008: 38).

In the global negotiations, these EU representatives initially strongly advocated the Union’s ideal vision of the environmental integrity of the Protocol. An intra-EU quarrel between the French EU presidency and the UK contributed, however, to the abovementioned open confrontation with the US at COP 6. Following the failure of this summit, the Union’s approach would completely change: in an effort to save the Protocol, the EU started a tour to the capitals of key industrialized and developing countries, engaging - for the first time since the inception of the climate regime - in very active diplomatic lobbying for the continued ratification of the treaty (Grubb 2001). Where other parties were quickly convinced to pursue the ratification procedure, this came at the high price of considerable EU concessions regarding the environmental integrity of the Protocol at Marrakech. Moreover, Russia continued to exploit the bargaining leverage provided by its pending ratification. To assure ratification in the Duma, the EU negotiated an extension of the 1997 EU-Russia Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, which was to clear the path for the country’s membership bid to the World Trade Organization, a quest the Union equally promised to support (Douma 2006: 61).

Altogether, the EU consolidated its decision-making and representation system through a reform that - formally - enabled constant coordination and consistent outreach through the same experts during this period. At the same time, its foreign policy implementation remained the expression of its overarching desire to lead the global negotiation process.

#### **2.4. Post-2012 reform efforts in the UN climate regime: The EU on its way to becoming a fully-fledged diplomatic actor (2005-2009)**

Following the ratification of the Kyoto Protocol, the climate regime underwent renewed reform efforts.

##### *EU foreign policy making and global climate politics*

To prepare for the post-2012 negotiations, the EU would formulate a position on the basis of its long-standing 2°C target very early in the global negotiation process. In January 2007, the European Commission proposed that industrialized parties, including the Union, should reduce their emissions by 30% from 1990 levels until 2020 and that “the EU should already

now take on a firm independent commitment to achieve at least a 20% reduction of GHG emissions by 2020 (...) This approach will allow the EU to demonstrate international leadership on climate issues” (European Commission 2007b, 2). Driven by exactly this desire of leading the international negotiations, the European Council endorsed the 20%/30% target proposal in March 2007 and invited the Commission to suggest comprehensive climate legislation, including a reform of the ETS (European Council 2007; Vogler 2008). The climate and energy package it proposed in 2008 was then negotiated within a year’s time to prepare the Union for what it hoped to be the decisive round of negotiations for a new, legally binding global climate treaty in 2009 (Oberthür 2009).

As global climate politics moved up on the agendas of leaders across the globe in the late 2000s, it also diversified considerably. Efforts to (re-)engage the US and/or the major emerging countries were undertaken via the G-8(+5), the Major Economies Meeting/Forum (MEF) and the G-20. In 2007, the COP finally also adopted the “Bali Roadmap”, which foresaw reform debates under two tracks within the UN climate regime: an Ad Hoc Working Group on Further Commitments of Annex I Parties (AWG-KP) and another one on long-term cooperative action under the Convention (AWG-LCA), also involving the US (ENB 2007). Key cleavages in the unfolding post-2012 debates, opposing essentially the US and the developing countries, would revolve around the questions of *who* (industrialized countries only, as the majority of the G-77/China wished, or also emerging economies) *was to do what* and *how much in terms of emission cuts* (commitments to emission reduction targets, as desired and stipulated by the industrialized world, vs. to actions, as proposed by developing countries) and *who would pay* for these reductions. Moreover, disagreements arose on the legal form of the outcome (an “Implementing Agreement”, as the US wanted, one treaty, as the EU preferred, or a new treaty plus a second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol, which was the suggestion many developing countries supported). Despite a proliferation of arenas and encounters, parties were incapable of meeting their self-set deadline: COP 15 in Copenhagen delivered no comprehensive regime reform, but only a loose political agreement, into which all parties could inscribe pledges for emission reduction targets (industrialized countries) or actions (developing countries) (UNFCCC 2009). The provisions of the “Copenhagen Accord” were formalized a year later at COP 16 in the “Cancun Agreements” (UNFCCC 2010).

### *EU foreign policy implementation*

The Union’s foreign policy implementation during this period consisted essentially of a pursuit of the previously employed “leading-by-example” approach, which was enhanced in several respects. First, the Union employed a novel set of foreign policy tools to invite the emerging economies to the negotiation table, notably by concluding climate and energy partnerships with China and India, which it hoped would forge political dialogue on the post-2012 regime reform. Second, the EU also began to operate increasingly through its diplomatic network of Commission delegations and diplomatic missions in key capitals to spread its climate policy messages more widely.

Once the new negotiation process was almost set on rails, the Union sought to make a mark as the first major party to table substantial proposals on various components of the future regime. The key element of its approach was the 20/30% target proposal. In contrast to the Kyoto Protocol negotiations, the EU would bolster its 20% reduction proposal by internal legislation during 2007/2008, outlining how it was to achieve these cuts.

With its substantive proposals oriented at problem-solving, the Union was unable to react flexibly to the continued reluctance of other players to decisively engage on global climate policies in the final stages of the talks. Given the increased importance of the emerging economies, the negligence of forging a joint strategic approach beyond the mere diplomatic defence of long-standing positions arguably cost the EU greater leverage over the 2009 Copenhagen Accord and its follow-up process. Both were dominated by the strategic interactions of the US and the newly formed BASIC group (Brazil, South Africa, India, China) (Müller 2010).

In synthesis, while the EU may institutionally have been on the way toward a fully-fledged diplomatic player in the post-2012 negotiations, its foreign policy implementation continued to suffer from severe flexibility constraints.

### **3. Explaining the evolution of EU foreign climate policy: A case of bounded adaptiveness**

After briefly extracting patterns of continuity and change from the narrative process-trace, the evolution of the EU's foreign climate policy making and implementation since the early 1990s - as the key dependent variable of this undertaking - is explained with the help of the middle-range theoretical approaches to EU integration processes outlined earlier.

#### **3.1. Extracting patterns**

The historical evolution of the Union's foreign climate policy is characterized by significant changes in its capacity to be a foreign policy actor and, given the major transformations in the global context, remarkable long-term continuities regarding its foreign policy making and implementation.

The empirical analysis suggests that the Union developed considerably as a foreign policy player on climate change in institutional terms: in the early 1990s, it had been an ad hoc negotiation participant in global climate talks, which was very much dependent on the willingness of its member states to represent EU positions. Following the Maastricht Treaty, it developed into a more uniform diplomatic actor, which could rely on a sophisticated decision-making machinery in the working party system under the Environment Council as well as on more elaborate representation mechanisms. In the 2000s then, the EU's foreign climate policy capacity was further consolidated through an arrangement involving lead negotiators and

issue leaders, which assured the continuity of its internal decision-making and improved that of its external representation by regularizing exchanges with third parties.

Yet, these integration efforts, resulting in expanded capacities as a foreign policy player, did not coincide with substantial changes in its foreign policy making. Once the working party structure under the Environment Council had been put into place in 1994, the aspiration to lead global climate policy making by setting the example via ambitious policy and emission reduction proposals became the Union's uncontested leitmotif. Ever since, this position has been consolidated and selectively complemented, but remained overall unaltered and unchallenged.

It was this position that also strongly co-determined the Union's foreign climate policy implementation over (at least) the past 15 years. Rather than forging foreign policy positions and subsequently considering how to best attain the underlying objectives in the face of the evolving, concrete institutional and political parameters of the global context, including other players' preferences, the EU proactively tabled an endless stream of policy proposals. These regularly emanated from its regional climate regime and were primarily based on internal policy considerations. Foreign policy *positioning* thus became synonymous with foreign policy *implementation*. Selective extensions of this approach concerned the Union's expanded outreach activities, e.g. to the emerging economies, and a broader use of its foreign policy tools in the mid-2000s, but remained overall limited.

### **3.2. Explaining the evolution of the EU's foreign climate policy**

This asymmetrical development pattern - with an almost linear evolution of the Union's formal foreign policy capacity, long-term positional stability and a fairly embryonic foreign policy implementation - requires a two-step explanation. The findings strongly suggest that the EU's foreign policy implementation is not just intertwined with, but represents a direct function of its position. Explaining its foreign climate policy evolution therefore firstly necessitates a concise account of how its position was brought about. Subsequently, the fact that its foreign policy implementation remained rather limited despite the Union's capacity to repeatedly adopt (the same type of) ambitious common positions needs to be accounted for. The explanation draws on the three strands of neo-institutionalist EU integration theory presented earlier, while taking into account the impact of external factors on the Union's foreign policy behaviour.

To explain the genesis and development of its long-standing leading-by-example *position*, one can firstly draw on the existing literature on EU external climate policy. From the early 1990s on, the Union's position-building was strongly informed by the normative desire to lead in global environmental politics, formulated in the 1990 Dublin European Council conclusions (Vogler 2008; Costa 2009a; Van Schaik/Schunz 2012). Following the loose intra-EU coordination during the first global climate negotiations, a body for canalizing its climate policy aspirations was created in 1994 with the working group of climate experts, which later

developed into the WPIEI-CC as it exists today. In this body, socialization processes resulted over time in the emergence of a small group of policy-makers from the member states' Environment Ministries and the Commission's DG Environment (Costa 2009a). Over the years, this "highly specialized alliance" not only demonstrated that it was capable of preparing common EU positions, but also reinforced its keen desire of "making the EU the leader in international climate negotiations" (Costa 2009a: 139-140). When the Union's proposals on "policies and measures" had not delivered any major advances during the global talks in 1995/6, early 1997 provided the window of opportunity for this group to help forge decisions that could leave a mark on the UN negotiations, as "there was clearly both a requirement and a major opportunity for EU leadership" in the AGBM debates at that stage (Vogler 2008: 10). Together with other progressive member states and the Commission's DG Environment - and supported by environmental NGOs -, the Dutch EU Presidency took the initiative to forge the discussed agreement on the Union's 15% emission reduction target, which responded perfectly to the desire to lead through ambitious proposals (Vogler 2008; Kanie 2003).

From an integration theory perspective, the original rationale behind the Union's decision to adopt this particular joint position in the Kyoto Protocol talks can thus essentially be explained with sociological institutionalist arguments (Risse 2009). The position was strongly influenced by a small group of policy entrepreneurs within the EU that had gradually socialized and developed into a powerful alliance in favour of strong EU external climate performance. This group took its decisions on the basis of shared values: a "real overall reduction was accepted as the necessary basis for climate leadership" (Vogler 2008: 14), which, in turn, was regarded as an opportunity to solve the problem of climate change in line with the precautionary principle, while boosting the Union's role as a global player (Van Schaik/Schunz 2012). Where the target proposal became the key component of the Union's position, the logic of front-running it embodied extended also to many other of its policy proposals, such as those on policies and measures.

Once the leading-by-example position had been adopted, a form of "norm entrapment" set in: resulting from agency by the WPIEI-CC as a collective "norm entrepreneur" of sorts, this position became an "uncontested normative frame" in the relevant policy circles and civil society (Vogler 2008: 25; Schreurs/Tiberghien 2007;).<sup>6</sup> By consequence, the relative failure of

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<sup>6</sup> A similar argument about green entrepreneurs is made by Kelemen and Vogel (2010: 438-444) in their explanation of why the US and the EU "traded places" in leading international environmental politics in the recent past. Green domestic groups pushing for leadership represent one important component of their explanation for the EU case, the other aspect relates to "how such [international] agreements affect the competitive position of domestic producers" (Kelemen/Vogel 2010: 444). In short, Kelemen/Vogel argue that there is a strong incentive for the EU to externalize its high standards resulting from internal political pressures from green actors (2010). By fully embracing a rational choice approach, this explanation fails to understand why the EU adopts the specific approach of leading by example, which has proven to be durably unsuccessful. If the Union desperately needed to export its standards, other foreign policy strategies, such as those expanded upon in the conclusion of this article, could have been pursued.

the EU's foreign policy at the Kyoto COP - where it had sacrificed its regulatory approach for the adoption of (prima facie) comparatively ambitious emission reduction targets which were subsequently watered down through the many derogations foreseen in the Marrakech Accords - did not lead to a change of position. Quite to the contrary, leading by example was even reinforced in the early to mid-2000s, as the EU began to use its external climate policies

explicitly to construct its identity as a global player, notably vis-à-vis the reluctant US government (Scheipers/Sicarelli 2007: 447-448). Sociological and historical institutionalist reasoning can thus explain the pursuit of this position, which did not lead to a very effective foreign policy implementation during the period 1998 to 2005: while the EU arguably contributed strongly to the maintenance of the multilateral regime via the operationalization and ratification of the Kyoto Protocol, it had to sacrifice its environmental integrity concerns in the process, as illustrated by the negotiations on the Marrakech Accords.

The further adherence to this position in the post-2012 debate can then best be captured by the notion of path-dependency (Pierson 2000): by the mid-2000s, the leading-by-example approach to global climate politics had become "locked in" as the central point of reference within the EU. Actors in the WPIEI-CC, but also at higher political levels - right to the top of member state governments - had embraced the leadership discourse so strongly, believing the majority of civil society and the public behind them (Eurobarometer 2008), that they could only have sacrificed this position and the corresponding approach at a very high cost. At the height of the global climate debates during the period 2007 to 2009, key EU leaders did not collectively consider modifying an approach that was not delivering results, as none of them wanted to risk a loss of credibility vis-à-vis international negotiation partners, among EU civil society or with national constituencies. As a result - and despite initially critical voices from the Commission's DG Trade and some member states in the mid-2000s -, the Union adopted in 2007 a position that was very similar to the one it had defended during the Kyoto talks. At its heart lay the target proposal, embedded into a package of proactive policy proposals, now centered on the instrument of emissions trading (Vogler 2008: 22, 25).

It was this long-standing position, in turn, that strongly co-determined the Union's foreign policy *implementation* of the past 15 years. The gradual institutionalization of external climate policy making in a group of climate experts in the WPIEI-CC, which resulted from the desire to give the Union's leadership ambition the necessary institutional underpinning, brought with it a default preference for proactively suggesting technical solutions to the problems associated with climate change to the wider world. Adopting such ambitious positions and positing these as a model for others became thus *the* uncontested EU foreign policy strategy. Pursuing such an approach testifies to a high confidence in the attractiveness of one's model. It results from a foreign policy making process in which strategic considerations taking into account the external context play a much less significant role than internal, technical concerns. As the EU regularly defines its positions very early in the global negotiation process, they comprise an ideal-typical, often science-based view of how it envisages the future of the global climate regime. In the further course of global talks, the negotiation context is then primarily regarded through the prism of this position, which

frequently results in high degrees of inflexibility of the EU's foreign policy implementation. Just like the perpetuation of its leading-by-example positions, the EU's strategy can thus in the first instance be explained by a form of "norm entrapment": internal restraints resulting from the normative desire to lead left a narrow margin of manoeuvre.

How then, can we explain the few, but significant instances in which the Union's foreign policy implementation deviated from well-trodden paths? The two key examples of this could be detected in the first half of the 2000s. Following the US withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol ratification process, subsequent attempts to create alternative governance fora and Russia's ratification delay, the EU momentarily stepped up its diplomatic efforts and employed a wider range of - also economic - foreign policy instruments to protect its core objective (the maintenance of the multilateral regime). In similar vein, it reacted to the more complex climate governance structures and trends by widening the scope of its foreign policy activities and forging bilateral energy partnerships during the post-2012 negotiations.

If the EU did display signs of a limited reactive capacity to the evolving external context in its foreign policy implementation, the form its reactions took was determined by the overarching logic of its leadership approach. Reactions were either - defensively - meant to safeguard this approach or - aggressively - to disperse key EU messages more widely. In both cases, modifications of its foreign climate policy implementation represented adaptations to the external environment that were restrained by internal considerations. Path-dependency arguments invoking a strongly "bounded" adaptiveness on the part of the EU (Pierson 2001: 415), already used to explain the continuity of its foreign climate policy decision-making, seem therefore best suited to also capture the evolutionary logic of its foreign climate policy implementation from the mid-1990s to at least the 2009 Copenhagen summit and its aftermath.

## **Conclusion**

This contribution explored how the European Union's foreign policy on climate change developed over the past two decades, and explained this development with the help of a combination of mid-range theories of EU integration.

A longitudinal case study embodying a narrative process-trace of the EU's foreign climate policy evolution since the early 1990s revealed three key trends: an incremental improvement of its formal foreign policy capacity stood in stark contrast to a largely unaltered leading-by-example position coupled to limited and inflexible foreign policy implementation. This pattern can plausibly be explained through a combination of sociological and historical institutionalist arguments. At the outset stood the Union's strong normative desire to lead global climate politics, which can be traced back to the 1990 Dublin European Council conclusions. This desire and the relative failure to act coherently during the talks on the UNFCCC led to the creation of a Working Party under the Environment Council, which would quickly turn into the power house for the continuous and proactive design of ambitious

EU climate policy positions. As a “norm entrepreneur” of sorts, its main self-set objective was to prepare the Union for “leadership by example”, an approach which would become “locked in” de facto and in the EU’s discourse ever since the mid-1990s. As a result, the Union’s external behaviour habitually limited itself to explaining its model, to the point that foreign policy positioning would gradually become synonymous of foreign policy implementation, which is a first finding of this analysis meriting special emphasis. Only on rare occasions did the EU adapt its foreign policy activities to react to the external environment. These limited adjustments remained however largely bounded by internal considerations and the desire to safeguard its overarching approach. At no point did the EU endow itself with a real foreign climate policy implementation strategy including fall-back positions.

These findings generated through a longitudinal case study and based on pattern-matching involving a combination of EU integration theories coincide, as demonstrated, to some extent with the insights provided in the literature for specific time periods of EU engagement in global climate politics, notably when it comes to understanding its foreign policy making. The unravelling of the long-term logic and the extension of the analysis to foreign policy implementation provides however for a novel perspective that challenges (i) the customary understanding of EU climate leadership in the academic literature and (ii), importantly, the policy rationale of the Union’s approach to global climate policy-making *tout court*.

First, in the academic debate on EU climate leadership, the dominant idea is that the Union represents an almost natural “green leader”, with a vested interest in exporting its high internal standards. While this interpretation may account for the motivation of some of those involved in forging EU positions in this area at certain moments in time, it falls, for several reasons, short of explaining the real evolution of EU external climate policy. To begin with, it is unable to explain the exact shape of EU leadership, its leading-by-example approach. Why did the EU not adopt a more active approach that transcends the simple positing and explaining of its own model? What is more, studies based on the leadership concept are not suited for understanding why the EU clung to its leadership-by-example approach despite the ineffectiveness of the latter, which was apparent at least since the aftermath of the Kyoto Protocol negotiations in the late 1990s. Again, if exporting its model was so important to the EU, why did it content itself with the ineffective explanation of this approach for such a long time? If one follows the arguments presented in this contribution, the concept of leadership employed in the academic debate on the Union’s foreign climate policy underestimates the role of norms, ideas and institutions in the design of this latter. Based on a set of ideas and values related to precautionary action and the EU’s self-image as a benign, civilian power in the world, the Union’s foreign climate policy was set on certain paths that it was unable to leave, even in the face of growing ineffectiveness. These institutional factors, and notably the notion of path-dependency, also hold explanatory power for the Union’s suboptimal performance during most of the past global climate negotiations.

This brings us to the second point and the rationale of adopting a leadership-by-example approach from the perspectives of EU and member state policy-makers. In the eyes of many of its advocates, leading by example was the best possible option the EU possessed. Even

after its underperformance at the Copenhagen summit, many policy-makers, scholars and civil society representatives continued to argue that this approach would remain valid and be successful, if only the EU was given more time (Wurzel/Connelly 2010: 286-287). Yet, time is, if recent findings of climate scientists summarized in reports by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change are taken at face value, a scarce resource in global climate politics. Against this backdrop, an approach that does not advance the state of the global climate (negotiations), but also hinders progress in the EU, besides damaging its image as a foreign policy player, is problematic. While the findings presented in this contribution explain why policy-makers perpetuated the Union's leadership approach, it can also account for why this approach has been ineffective. On the one hand, it largely ignores evolutions in the global context, limiting itself to an exercise of introspection and externalization of internal policy choices. On the other hand, the one path consistently pursued by EU policy-makers rendered a serious engagement with alternative strategies rather difficult, if not impossible. Yet, the empirical evidence presented in this paper, which is in large parts based on interviews with EU negotiators, suggests that the Union did have, at different points in time, alternative behavioural paths at its disposal. In the mid-2000s, for instance, some member states proposed to take a more cautious, wait-and-see attitude to global climate talks, but key policy entrepreneurs pushed for the front-running leadership-by-example approach in the post-2012 negotiations until the Copenhagen summit. In these talks, strong coalition-building, e.g. with developing countries or the relatively progressive Annex I countries (Japan, Australia) and Russia, but also a more assertive defence of its objectives (see the ongoing debate about climate-related border measures: Gros/Egenhofer 2010) would have been (and still are) alternatives. Yet, the technical-managerial approach dominated over a more political and strategic one based on foreign policy considerations, which the EU may however not be able to avoid in the future, if it still wants to count in the global debates on this topic (Geden 2011: 22).

In sum, the longitudinal approach taken in this analysis reveals thus that, even after 20 years of participation in the field, the Union has not yet developed into a fully mature foreign policy actor on climate change. Foreign policy implementation indeed appears to represent a boundary of European integration, at least in this field. Yet, in contrast to what rationalists would assume, namely that states' desire for preserving their prerogatives hinders integration, the Union's norm-driven behaviour and its overall neglect for "the strategic" stands in the way of greater integration efforts. As "strategy is ultimately about effectively exercising power" (Foster, cited in Baylis et al. 2007: 5), the EU's maturation as an actor seems to hinge on its capacity to overcome this strategic reluctance. If it wants to compensate for the overall loss of clout it suffers due to relatively decreasing emissions in the global climate arena, it needs to empower itself to act more strategically in the future. While it chose to keep a low profile at COP 16 in Cancun in 2010, COP 17 in 2011 witnessed an EU that "drafted the script for the central plot in Durban by setting out [its] stall early in the process and offering to do the heavy lifting to save the Kyoto Protocol within the context of a roadmap that put up a challenge to other parties" (ENB 2011: 29). The Union defended thus essentially a position aimed at preserving its leadership: instead of 2009, its original deadline for concluding an

agreement (to take effect in 2013), it now argued for the conclusion of a new, encompassing agreement by 2015 (to take effect in 2020), and for filling the policy gap until then through a second commitment period for the Kyoto Protocol. In implementing this foreign policy position, it employed at least some more wide-reaching foreign policy tools transcending the leadership-by-example approach, however, notably by fostering a coalition with the small-island states and the LDCs to put pressure on the emerging economies (Morales 2011). While this was certainly a more pragmatic stance than during past global climate talks, it is too early to tell if this represented first signs of a durable modification of its overall approach to global climate politics. In any case, if the Copenhagen summit may have represented a critical juncture for its foreign climate policy, the inertia of the leadership approach - in addition to struggles about the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty - are apparently so strong that any adaptation takes a longer time than the EU and the global climate can afford.

Although any attempt at generalizing from a single case study needs to be undertaken with a great degree of caution, the climate domain is often cited - not the least by policy-makers themselves - as a potential precedent for other cases of EU foreign policy outside the realm of the CFSP. It represents a policy area in which the EU has invested ample resources, which is of great importance to it, and which can be regarded as a prototypical case of an issue in which the boundary between internal and external policies is blurred. As such, it qualifies as a pronounced example of a whole set of similar EU external policies, especially in the environmental area. By way of analogical reasoning, one can assume that also in these domains the maturation of the EU as a foreign policy player will be limited by its focus on introspective foreign policy making and reluctance for strategic implementation of its positions, rooted in historically grown institutional dynamics within the Union (Van Schaik 2011). Mid-range EU integration theories can thus help us to understand the limits of European integration in the domain of EU foreign policy beyond the classical CFSP core.

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### **\*Acknowledgments**

Research for this contribution was conducted under the KU Leuven Impuls project "The EU and multilateral governance" (2006-2010), and the author acknowledges the generous funding by the University of Leuven. The author would also like to thank the three anonymous reviewers for their very useful comments on earlier versions of this article.