

The environmental dimension - politics

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Is the EU an environmental leader?

Explaining the 'leaderless leader' paradox in EU climate governance

- **Decision-making powers are spread** among a relatively **wide range of actors** resulting in 'the European Union deliberately shunning the institution of an overriding leadership' (e.g. Hayward 2008, p. 1);
- **EU as an environmental leader**, albeit sometimes as a one-eyed leader amongst the blind (e.g. Oberthür, Roche Kelly 2010).

EU leadership in climate policy

Explanatory factors:

- **Dynamic process of competitive multi-level reinforcement** among different political poles within a context of **decentralised governance**' (Schreurs and Tiberghien, 2007);
- **Strong subnational governance dimension**

EU climate governance system

- Based on **multilevel governance (MLG)** approach
- Key concepts (drivers) of the EU climate governance system:
 - **Lesson-drawing**
 - **Convergence**
 - **Transnational networks**
 - **Competition**
 - Single European market as a ‘massive transfer platform’ (Radaelli, 2000)

EU climate governance system

Who are climate leaders inside the EU?

- **EU institutional actors** (e.g. the European Parliament, Commission, Council, European Investment Bank)
- **EU member states** (such as Denmark, Germany, etc.)
- **Cities and city networks** (mostly underestimated)

EU member states

- The **role of national leaders and early followers**
 - Sweden and the United States as an early environmental leaders
 - Japan and Germany as an early followers
- Situation in **Council/ European Council**
 - **Permanent environmental leader coalitions** have traditionally **not existed** at EU level!
 - Coalitions between Member States ‘have to be formed on an issue-by-issue basis and remain liable to defection’ (Liefferink and Andersen 1998, p. 262)
 - Easier way how to find a compromise?
 - East-West divide and its impact on alliance building?

Council - Member State alliances

- a **'green trio'** (1973; Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands) and a **'green sextet'** (1995; G3 plus Austria, Finland and Sweden);
- Eastern enlargements in the 2000s **seem to have broken with the long established informal tradition that permanent alliances between Member States should be avoided in the (Environmental) Council** because they can be counter-productive for finding compromise solutions
 - Reaction **Green Growth Group** (GGG; 2016)
 - *'Visegrad [group] is much more institutionalised, that is clear. Why is the Green Growth Group not more institutionalised? Because there is a fine line between leadership by a group of countries ... and getting everybody on board'* (Wurzel, Liefferink, Di Lullo, 2019)

European Parliament

- EP as an ‘environmental champion’
 - an early and progressive actor in the evolution of EU climate change policy (Burns, 2012; Burns & Carter, 2010; Burns, Carter, Davies, & Worsfold, 2013).
- BUT: impact of crises, internal swing to the right....

EP - activity audit

EP operates as:

- a **highly specialized legislator** that uses a sophisticated set of arrangements to conduct a mostly technical legislative bargaining, both between EP party groups and with the Council;
- **mostly symbolic leader** with an ambitious stance in its non-binding declarations on the EU's external climate diplomacy but a much more restrained and pragmatic involvement in internal climate change legislation (Burns, 2017; Biedenkopf, 2015);
- Addressing the goals of climate action at the global level, the **EP appears as much more ambitious and willing to diverge from positions of other EU institutions than in internal climate change legislation**, such as emissions trading or promotion of renewable energy.

Commission

- Commission **can think and act with a more long-range perspective** than is possible for most individual member states.

Effects:

- **Framing and shaping** climate policies for the longer term;
- Commission is to serve EU interests **without being responsible for the financial resources** needed for implementation at the member-state level;
- It is **not directly accountable to the electorate**, in that there is no electoral contest for the basic direction of EU policies.

**Commission Leadership in EU Climate Policy: from the establishing the EU Emissions Trading System
to the 2030 framework and beyond (Skjærseth, 2017)**

Action	Type	Conditions
EU ETS (1997 - 2004)	Entrepreneurial and intellectual: Shaping positions and crafting agreement	Member-state (MS) asymmetry High uncertainty Qualified majority Impatience Internal unity
Climate-and-Energy Package (2005 – 2008)	Entrepreneurial: Crafting agreement by linking policies	MS asymmetry Medium uncertainty Unanimity Impatience Internal diversity initially
Climate-and-Energy Framework (2009 -)	Increasingly strategic behavior: Repackaging policies in line with MS preferences	MS asymmetry Low uncertainty Unanimity Impatience Internal unity

Commission - activity audit

- The Commission has **consistently pushed for more ambitious climate policies and has successfully initiated new**, harmonized EU policies, expanding its competence under challenging conditions.
- The Commission **has gradually acted strategically, wary of launching new proposals that stand little chance of success**, such as CCS and new renewables targets that are binding on member states.

Cities and city networks

'The transition to a low-carbon, energy-efficient and climate-resilient economy, will require a more decentralised, open system with involvement of society' (Commission's Communication Accelerating Clean Energy Innovation, 2016).

- cities are both major greenhouse gas (GHG) **emitters and laboratories** for innovative climate governance measures;
- the EU Commission has pushed its '**better regulation**' agenda of adopting top-down direct regulation only when necessary;
- the **international multilevel climate governance** system has become more polycentric with the 2015 Paris Agreement;
- the EU multilevel climate governance system has also increasingly exhibited **polycentric features** such as EU support for city networks and the Covenant of Mayors.

How does the EU support multilevel climate governance ?

- **Institutionalised mechanisms**

- regional policy as an pioneer of the institutionalised MLG innovations due to the strong financial commitment for the shift towards a low-carbon economy
- 172 regions accounting for 80% of the EU regions participated in the Smart Specialisation Platform on Energy
- Committee of the Regions

- **Funding mechanisms**

- European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF)
- European Green Capital Awards
- Covenant of Mayors
- Eco-social villages
- European Investment Bank (EIB)

European Investment Bank on the way to become EU's Climate Bank?

- at least 25% of the EIB credits must be used to support the transition to a low-carbon and climate-resilient economy;
- by 2020 the EIB will have increased climate action lending outside the EU to 35% of total annual lending;
- The new **Energy lending policy** (2019):
 - The EIB will end financing for fossil fuel energy projects from the end of 2021;
 - Future financing will accelerate clean energy innovation, energy efficiency and renewables;
 - EIB Group financing will unlock EUR 1 trillion of climate action and environmental sustainable investment in the decade to 2030
 - EIB Group will align all financing activities with the goals of the Paris Agreement from the end of 2020.
- **Loopholes?**