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## Assessing the European Union's global climate change leadership: from Copenhagen to the Paris Agreement

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### ABSTRACT

This contribution examines the role European Union (EU) leadership played in the outcome of the 2015 COP21 climate summit in Paris. The EU's attempts to realise its bid for climate change leadership are scrutinised by investigating to what extent the EU is actually recognised as a leader by potential followers and to what extent the EU has succeeded in achieving its negotiation objectives. To address these issues we utilize survey data collected at eight UN climate summits from 2008 to 2015 and evaluate the results of the climate negotiations particularly with respect to the Union's goal attainment in Copenhagen and Paris. Our findings, which reveal a fragmented leadership landscape in which the EU must adjust its leadership strategies in relation to other powerful actors, such as the United States and China, provide insights into leadership theory and the EU's prospects for exerting influence as an external actor on the world stage.

### KEYWORDS

Climate change negotiations; Copenhagen summit; COP 21 Paris summit; European Union (EU); leadership; Paris Agreement

### Introduction

On 12 December 2015, in Paris, 196 parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) adopted a landmark climate accord, the Paris Agreement. When the French foreign minister, Laurent Fabius, who chaired COP21, brought down the gavel officially sealing the deal, the delegates in the hall erupted with jubilation. The European Union (EU) responded by hailing the agreement, which seeks to hold global warming to 'well below' 2 °C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue 'efforts to limit' it to 1.5 °C (UNFCCC 2016, 2), as the 'first-ever truly global climate deal' (Cañete 2015).

According to the European Commission (2016, 2), the 'EU's negotiation strategy was decisive in reaching the Agreement' and in the words of Cañete (2016), the European commissioner for climate action and energy, the Paris Agreement was 'a great success for the EU's climate diplomacy'. The positive outcome in Paris stands in stark contrast to the EU's disappointment in Copenhagen at COP15 in December 2009, which despite the EU's high hopes for reaching a new binding global agreement, ended in disillusionment and acrimony.

So why did Paris succeed while Copenhagen did not? This piece analyses recent outcomes and developments in the UN climate change negotiating process by examining the EU's bid for leadership in this issue area.

Two principal issues need to be investigated in order to evaluate the EU's attempts to realise its self-proclaimed bid for climate change leadership. Our first query concerns the fact that anyone who aspires to be leader needs to attract followers (Underdal 1994; Nye 2008; see also the introduction of this volume Tömmel and Verdun 2017). Leadership is a relational concept and any bid for leadership will be seriously undermined if an actor who aspires to be a leader fails to be recognised as such (Parker, Karlsson, and Hjerpe 2015). We thus ask: to what extent is the EU actually recognised as a leader and how does it fare in this respect when compared to other leadership candidates such as China and the United States (US)? Our second query concerns the role the EU played in the Copenhagen and Paris outcomes. Here we depart from the fact that leadership essentially is about an actor's attempt to guide or direct the behaviour of others in pursuit of a common goal (Underdal 1994; Malnes 1995). Furthermore, to grasp fully the leadership role played by the EU in recent UNFCCC negotiations we must accordingly connect the EU's goals with the strategies – the different forms or modes of leadership – used to pursue them. We thus ask, which modes of leadership has the EU used to exercise climate change leadership? And, to what extent did the Union succeed in achieving its objectives in the deals reached in Copenhagen and Paris?

To answer our first question we utilize unique survey data collected at eight consecutive UN climate summits from 2008 to 2015 and to answer our second we evaluate the outcomes of UNFCCC climate negotiations, particularly in Copenhagen and Paris, concerning the Union's aims, concomitant strategies for pursuing those aims, and actual goal attainment.

The study proceeds in the following steps: in the next two sections we turn our attention to the EU's climate change aspirations and the leadership strategies pursued to fulfil them. Next, we confront the EU's ambition to be recognised as leader with evidence regarding potential followers' views of the EU as a leading climate change actor. In the penultimate section we provide an overall assessment of the EU's climate change leadership, and the final section offers our main conclusions.

## **The EU as climate change leader**

The EU adopted a climate change strategy as early as 1992 and four years later it endorsed the goal of limiting global warming to no more than 2 °C above the pre-industrial level. The EU's ambition to play a key role in tackling the climate change threat was firmly established in 2001 when the EU, in the aftermath of a US decision not to participate, managed to round up enough followers for the Kyoto Protocol to enter into force. In 2007, the EU, in pursuit of a comprehensive treaty to succeed the Kyoto Protocol in 2013, explicitly announced its aspiration of '[l]eading global action' against climate change 'to 2020 and beyond' (Council of the European Union 2007, 10–11). The following year, in December 2008, the EU proved it was able to back its bid for leadership with concrete policy measures as it passed the world's most ambitious climate legislative package which included the '20–20–20' targets.

In the run-up to the COP15 summit in Copenhagen the EU was working hard towards the goal of concluding an international climate agreement with binding emission reduction goals that would be applicable to all parties. From an EU perspective, the Copenhagen summit was a major disappointment but this setback did not mean the end to the EU's

leadership aspirations. To the contrary, the EU's ambition to lead was reaffirmed by then EU Commission president Barroso, who argued that the world needs an EU that 'leads the fight against climate change' (European Commission 2012, 11). More concretely, the EU stated that the voluntary mitigation pledges under the Copenhagen Accord were inadequate and announced the goal of working towards a new agreement that should include pledges for both developed and developing countries – pledges sufficiently ambitious to meet the objective of keeping any global temperature increase below 2 °C (Council of the European Union 2011, 2012).

The EU continued to work hard to provide leadership in the run-up to the COP21 Paris summit with the explicit goal of reaching an ambitious, durable, internationally legally-binding agreement under the UNFCCC that would be applicable to all, and that would contain quantifiable mitigation commitments compatible with the below 2 °C objective (Council of the European Union 2015). Moreover, of particular importance to the EU, the deal should include a dynamic five-yearly mitigation ambition mechanism and procedures for the upward adjustment of pledged mitigation commitments (Council of the European Union 2015).

This hard work was rewarded as the parties of the UNFCCC approved the Paris Agreement. This agreement establishes a long term ambitious mitigation goal, it has a novel architecture of nationally determined pledges to start reducing GHG emissions, it has robust transparency system to track progress towards the long term goal, it has a cycle of stocktaking that will take place every 5 years, and it ratchets up ambition over time by requiring countries to update their national climate plans to reduce emissions two years after the performance review and then to do so again every five years (UNFCCC 2016). The transparency, review, and ratcheting provisions as well as the deal's long-term goal were all very much in line with EU preferences (European Commission 2016, 3).

However, from an EU point of view, the agreement also has shortcomings (cf. Council of the European Union 2015; European Commission 2015a, 2016). Although 185 countries have made commitments to reduce their GHGs (Intended National Contributions), the caps on emissions are not binding and even if fully implemented will still result in warming of at least 2.7 °C or more. Text on decarbonisation was removed and no date was given for fossil fuel use to peak and be phased out. Finally, not all of the agreement is legally binding, so future governments of the participating countries could try to wriggle out of the deal down the road.

The Paris Agreement raises a number of questions with respect to the EU. What role did EU leadership play in the COP21 negotiation outcome? To what extent did the final deal reflect EU preferences? And, to what extent was the EU actually recognised as leader in Paris? In short, did the EU provide crucial leadership during the climate negotiations in Paris and, if so, how?

### **How has the EU exercised leadership?**

Leadership has been defined as 'the power to orient and mobilize others for a purpose' (Nye 2008, 19) and a leader can be seen as an actor 'who guides or is in charge of others' (Nye 2008, 18). Past research has emphasised the importance of leadership as a crucial determinant in overcoming the vexing collective action problems associated with confronting complex global problems (Young 1991, 302), such as climate change. The leadership literature has identified different modes of leadership which an aspiring leader can utilize when

seeking to guide or direct the behaviour of others (Young 1991; Underdal 1994; Malnes 1995). The terminology used to describe the various leadership forms may vary but previous research is fundamentally in agreement in identifying four main modes of leadership: structural, idea-based, directional, and instrumental (Parker and Karlsson 2014).

The first mode is *structural leadership*, which relies on the capacity to take actions or deploy power-resources that create incentives, costs and benefits that may sway other actors to change their behaviour. The second mode is *idea-based leadership*, which is characterised by problem naming and framing, agenda setting efforts and the discovering and proposing of joint solutions to collective problems. The third mode is *directional leadership*, which means leading by example and demonstrating the feasibility, value, and supremacy of specific policy prescriptions. The fourth and final mode is *instrumental leadership*, which refers to an actor's ability to promote the forming of coalitions, solve negotiation problems, and build bridges necessary to broker deals.

In its attempt to establish itself as a climate change leader the EU has in fact been utilizing all four modes of leadership. The EU – as it did when Russia was persuaded to ratify Kyoto or when it agreed to bankroll clean technology in poor countries at the Bali summit – has at times successfully exercised structural leadership. The EU less successfully tried to employ structural leadership prior to Copenhagen by offering incentives to developing countries in the form of funding for actions to mitigate and adapt to climate change in exchange for supporting a binding climate agreement (Council of the European Union 2009, 6–7). After the COP15 negotiations, where the EU was side-lined while the US and the BASIC countries agreed on the blueprint for the Copenhagen Accord, the EU has come to rely more on instrumental leadership. The Union has thus been working hard to form coalitions and build bridges both with the least developed countries and with the US and China (Bäckstrand and Elgström 2013, 1382–1383; Oberthür and Groen 2015). As we shall discuss, in Paris, instrumental leadership was key to the EU's climate diplomacy and negotiation strategy at COP21.

Through the COP15 negotiations in Copenhagen it is clear that the EU mainly relied on idea-based and directional leadership to further its climate change agenda. A good example of its idea-based leadership is the Union's promotion of the science-based goal that global warming must be limited to no more than 2 °C and that a comprehensive binding global agreement is needed that explicitly acknowledges this objective (European Commission 2007; see for Commission Agenda Setting leadership also Müller 2017 this volume). For a long time the EU was also keen to promote its preferred institutional design principles for a global climate treaty. In the face of stern opposition the EU tried its very best to convince other actors that top-down, binding targets and timetables were superior to a bottom-up, voluntary, pledge-and-review structure.

Notwithstanding its reliance on idea-based leadership, the EU's bid for climate change leadership in the run-up to Copenhagen mainly rested on leading by example. The Union has wanted to show the world that it is indeed possible to combine economic growth, sustainability, and the dramatic reduction of GHG emissions. In December 2008 the EU accordingly attempted to bolster its idea-based leadership with unilateral directional leadership by passing its energy and climate package, which required the EU to decrease emissions by at least 20% by 2020. The then EU energy commissioner hailed the deal and said it sent 'a clear signal to our international partners about our determination to address climate change and should convince them to follow our example' (European Commission 2008).

Before turning to a thorough analysis of the strategies the EU has used and the role it has played at recent COP summits, we shall first examine the extent to which the EU has been *recognized as leader* by prospective followers. Previous research has noted that the EU has sought to utilize climate change as a platform to establish itself as a major force on the global political scene by seeking to be recognised as a leader (Bretherton and Vogler 2006). To shed some empirical light on the extent to which the EU is in reality recognised as a climate change leader, we distributed questionnaires to conference delegates at eight consecutive COP meetings – in Poznań 2008, Copenhagen 2009, Cancún 2010, Durban 2011, Doha 2012, Warsaw 2013, Lima 2014, and Paris 2015 – asking them to identify which actors they saw as leaders in the climate change negotiations. This data-set, which now consists of a total of 3557 completed surveys, provides unique insights into the matter of leadership recognition in the field of climate change.

### **Is the EU recognised as a climate leader?**

In order to tap respondents' views on leadership we used a straightforward approach and simply asked an open-ended question to find out which actors they recognised as playing a leading role in the climate negotiations: 'Which countries, party groupings and/or organizations have, in your view, a leading role in climate negotiations?' Respondents could thus answer by putting down none, one, two or as many leaders as they perceived to be present in the climate change negotiations.<sup>1</sup> Due to the operating environment, random sampling was not a viable option and therefore we elected to utilize quota sampling to select respondents. The survey was principally focused on obtaining a strategic sample of the two largest and most important categories of COP participants, namely members of party delegations, such as negotiators and representatives of government agencies, and NGO representatives and researchers. Roughly 42% of the respondents in the final sample were delegates (negotiators or government representatives) whereas some 58% were observers (NGO representatives, UN/IGO representatives, researchers or media), which corresponds well with the composition of the frame population where the percentage of delegates in the eight COPs surveyed has varied between 39 and 48. The overall response rate has been around 65%.

What, then, does the data tell us about leadership recognition in the field of climate change? According to our results, the EU, the US, China, and G-77 were the actors most frequently recognised as leaders in the field of climate change. Other party groupings (e.g. the BASIC and the BRIC countries and the Alliance of Small Island States) as well as individual countries, such as India and Brazil, were mentioned as leaders by roughly 10% of respondents. However, with the exception of India at COP21, which was recognised as a leading actor by nearly 20% of respondents, no other actor came close to the levels of recognition as the four actors included in Table 1.

Before looking more closely at the data on leadership recognition, we think it is important to reflect on how to interpret the survey results in terms of when it is justified to conclude that an actor should be deemed to be a leader. In multilateral settings achieving universal leadership recognition is difficult (Parker and Karlsson 2014, 583); therefore, to demand that an actor gain unanimous recognition from prospective followers in order to qualify as a leader is surely to set the bar too high. It seems more reasonable to argue that an actor aspiring to be a leader should in fact be recognised as such by a majority or at least a very substantial proportion of the potential followers. From this understanding on how to

interpret the data, it also follows that there may be more than one leader. Against this backdrop, the first conclusion to be drawn from Table 1 is that over the time period of the study there has been no single, undisputed leader on climate change. What we see is a situation best described as a 'fragmented leadership landscape' (Parker et al. 2012) with three leadership candidates being recognised as leaders by roughly half of the respondents.

If we look back at how the situation has changed since COP14 we can register some fairly dramatic changes. The recognition of the EU declined from a height of 62% at COP14 to 46% at the COP15 meeting. After the disappointment in Copenhagen, EU diplomatic efforts to get a new negotiation mandate were recognised by the other participants and the EU made a slight, but clear, comeback returning as the most recognised leader in Durban 2011 (50%), Doha 2012 (51%), and Warsaw 2013 (48%). However, in 2014, at COP20 in Lima, while the EU held steady with 48% of participants recognising the EU as a leader, it was replaced by the US as the most recognised leader. In Paris, at COP21, the EU's leadership recognition dropped significantly to 41%, while the leadership recognition of the US soared and the EU was even eclipsed by China.

The opposite trend is noticeable for the US with figures increasing from 27 to 53% and 50% for COP15 and 16. The numbers dipped to 42% in Durban and 39% in Doha, but has since increased fairly dramatically and in Paris the US was clearly seen as the most influential of the leadership candidates with 59% recognising it as a leader. China's recognition as a leading actor, on the other hand, has been remarkably stable for the entire period. With the exception of COP20 in Warsaw 2013 where we recorded a decline for China as a climate leader we, for the most part, find only small changes from one COP to the next. We did, however, see China's leadership recognition increase to 54%, the highest level we have ever recorded, at COP21. The recognition of the G77 as leader has fluctuated during the period from 27% at COP14 to a low of 19% at COP16 in Cancún, to a high of 33% at COP17 in Durban, and a return to 27% in Paris.

To what degree are the leadership contenders on climate change acknowledged as leaders outside their borders? When we break down the data by the respondents' geographical belonging, we do find some interesting differences as reported in Table 2.

As Table 2 shows geographical belonging matters for which actor prospective followers recognise as leaders. The evidence clearly suggests that actors aspiring to leadership typically find it much easier to become recognised as leader by prospective followers from their 'home constituency'. For example, the data show that a clear majority of respondents from Europe consistently and disproportionately recognise the EU as the leading actor, whereas, rarely more than a third of all respondents from Africa report seeing the EU as leader. This data, which shows that the EU's conception of itself as a climate leader is not matched to the same degree by potential followers outside of Europe, mirrors the findings of the how the Union is perceived in related areas such as the energy domain (Chaban, Knodt, and Verdun 2016). The data also reveal that the decline in leadership recognition for the EU has been unevenly distributed among respondents from different geographical regions. Whereas leadership recognition of the EU among North Americans has been declining only marginally, the EU has experienced a dramatic decrease in leadership support from respondents from Asia, Africa and Oceania. Likewise, we find that the US tends to be recognised as a climate change leader by a large proportion of respondents from North America and Europe but has struggled to find support from African respondents. Also, while the US has strengthened its position across the board we still find huge differences between respondents from different

**Table 1.** Leadership recognition 2008–2015, general trend for main actors (percentages).

	COP 14	COP 15	COP 16	COP 17	COP 18	COP 19	COP 20	COP 21	Trend
	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2008–2015
EU as leader	62	46	45	50	51	48	48	41	-21
China as leader	47	48	52	50	48	42	48	54	+7
G-77 as leader	27	22	19	33	24	25	22	27	±0
US as leader	27	53	50	42	39	42	52	59	+32

Note: Total number of respondents = 3557.

**Table 2.** Leadership recognition 2008–2015, by geographical region (percentages).

	EU as leader												US as leader												China as leader												Trend 2008–2015							
	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	EU	US
Africa	38	36	48	35	37	44	25	17	24	47	49	32	26	24	28	35	62	36	48	42	41	35	37	42	41	35	37	42	-21	+11	-20													
Asia	63	31	40	42	40	35	44	33	14	35	39	38	35	27	43	49	35	39	48	52	49	42	43	44	44	42	43	44	-30	+29	+9													
Europe	75	65	63	72	77	65	69	61	42	68	59	55	56	58	71	74	52	54	64	60	57	43	57	62	62	60	57	62	-14	+32	+10													
North America	54	53	35	70	50	58	53	51	38	63	50	70	45	63	72	81	46	47	48	75	39	53	59	63	59	63	59	63	-3	+43	+17													
S&L America	57	47	44	43	44	29	37	46	14	29	48	22	28	37	42	63	64	47	49	39	47	59	40	54	40	54	40	-11	+49	-10														
Oceania	50	16	14	26	57	19	38	31	17	40	57	37	43	27	63	54	17	36	50	26	43	34	59	54	54	54	54	-19	+37	+37														
All	62	46	45	50	51	48	48	41	27	53	50	42	39	42	52	59	47	48	52	50	48	44	48	54	48	54	48	-21	+32	+7														

Note: Total number of respondents = 3263.



regions. The leadership recognition for the US between 2008 and 2015 has, for example, increased 49 percentage points among respondents from South and Latin America, but only 11 percentage points among African respondents.

The EU, which has made it its mission to brand itself as *the* leader on climate change, was indeed the actor most commonly recognised as leader in Poznań. This finding makes sense in light of the EU success in setting the negotiating agenda within the UNFCCC process, its high profile success in saving the Kyoto Protocol and securing its entrance into force, and the attention garnished by the 2008 passage of EU legislation to achieve dramatic unilateral GHG cuts (Parker and Karlsson 2010; Karlsson et al. 2011).

However, a big decline in leadership recognition for the EU, from 62 to 46%, occurred between Poznań and Copenhagen. Why? The simple answer is that the EU by and large failed to influence the COP15 proceedings as well as the outcome in Copenhagen. What COP15 produced was a political agreement known as the Copenhagen Accord that reflected the negotiating preferences of the US and China – bottom-up, voluntary, and with a pledge and review design – rather than those of the EU (Parker et al. 2012).

After Copenhagen, recognition for the EU as a leader rose and in Doha the EU was once again the most recognised leadership contender. At COP17 the EU played a pivotal role in setting the agenda for Durban Platform which established a new negotiating process to develop a ‘protocol, another legal instrument, or agreed outcome with legal force ... applicable to all Parties’ (UNFCCC 2012). At COP18 the EU endorsed the adoption of a second commitment period for Kyoto Protocol (2013–2020) in exchange for all old negotiating tracks being shut down and for a work plan for the negotiation round that was designed to result in a new deal at COP21 in 2015. These EU negotiating successes are reflected in survey data.

In many ways, after being side-lined and thwarted in Copenhagen, the EU quietly made a comeback into a major role of influence again and achieved an agenda setting victory in being a driving force in launching the process that led to the deal in Paris. However, as happened in Copenhagen, once again the US and China were the most recognised leaders when it came to shaping and closing the final deal in Paris. Nonetheless, the EU learned important lessons from the COP15 outcome and shifted its leadership strategies in way that contributed to a Paris Agreement that did indeed bear the stamp of the EU and reflect a number of important EU preferences.

### **The EU’s climate leadership from Copenhagen to Paris: an assessment**

In light of the UNFCCC negotiation outcomes and the survey results, how should we evaluate the effectiveness of the EU’s leadership strategies? A balance sheet assessing the success of the EU’s deployment of the various modes of leadership in the period from 2007 to 2015 shows a mixed record of results. However, what we do see is that after the disappointment in Copenhagen, the EU made adjustments, particularly the increased emphasis on instrumental leadership, based on the lessons learned after COP15 that led to a much more successful outcome in Paris. We now turn our attention to evaluating which leadership strategies have borne fruit in the UNFCCC negotiations with a particular emphasis on the diverging outcomes in Copenhagen and Paris.

The EU’s structural leadership proved unsuccessful in garnering support for the ambitious binding agreement the EU was seeking at COP15. For example, attempts to offer inducements in the form of financing, such as promising funding to developing countries for actions

to mitigate and adapt to climate change in exchange for supporting the EU's vision for a deal in Copenhagen, were not effective in gaining followers to support the kind of deal the EU was seeking.

The EU has been very successful with using its idea based leadership to set the content and schedule of the UNFCCC's negotiating agenda. This was reflected in the Bali Action plan agreed to at COP13 and in the negotiation agenda and work plan, the Durban Platform, which emerged from COP17 in Durban that was designed to culminate with a new agreement emerging out of Paris. The EU's agenda setting successes are reflected in our survey data which shows that it was the most recognised leader in 2008 and then, after the agreement on the Durban Platform, regained its status as the single most recognised leader in 2012.

The EU was not successful in getting its ideas accepted regarding institutional design for the deal in Copenhagen, nor was the EU's directional leadership successful. The EU's unilateral '20–20–20' commitments did not succeed as an incentive to get others to accept binding targets and timetables. At COP15 the three most recognised leaders had different goals and competing leadership visions (Parker et al. 2012). The EU wanted a top-down binding deal that required drastic emission reductions to be achieved according specific timelines and unrealistically refused to consider alternatives. The US wanted nationally determined emission reduction pledges that would be made by all countries including the emerging economies like China and India. China wanted the wealthy developed countries to solve the problem and refused to make any commitments itself. Unable to work together, they failed to produce a binding successor deal to the Kyoto Protocol and instead produced the voluntary Copenhagen Accord with a bottom-up, pledge and review structure. The fact that the deal explicitly acknowledged the 2 °C goal for the first time was a small solace for the EU.

The outcome in Copenhagen was a serious disappointment for the EU and a substantial blow to its leadership aspirations and goals. Because the EU was not even in the room when the final details on the Copenhagen Accord were hammered out, as one EU official put it, a 'sentiment of frustration, and even political humiliation, was present in many European delegates' (Cañete 2015).

Our results on leadership recognition and the COP15 outcome indicate that the ideational leadership of China and the US, backed by the centrality of their structural positions, were more influential than the ideational leadership and leading by example strategies pursued by the EU. The distance between what was achieved at COP15 compared to what the EU was seeking (Dimitrov 2010), demonstrated that the EU needed to do a better job of amalgamating the other leadership modes with instrumental leadership as well as partnering more effectively with other structurally significant actors in order to achieve a new comprehensive climate deal.

Examples of how the EU did a better job of melding its instrumental leadership together with other forms of leadership can be seen in how the Union leveraged its willingness to enter into a second commitment period for the Kyoto Protocol (Council of the European Union, 2011) into support from developing countries for the new negotiating mandate that was part of the Durban Platform and the decision to compromise on its insistence that a new deal must have a top-down institutional design. Instead, the EU accepted that targets would be nationally determined but pushed for top-down provisions that the commitments and eventual performance would be subjected to regular and rigorous international review. The EU reasoned that an agreement with such a hybrid character would be much more likely

to find support from the US, China, India, and the other major developing country emitters, such as Brazil, South Africa, and Indonesia (Cañete 2015).

A big part of the EU's success at COP21 can be attributed to its instrumental leadership in building what became the 'High Ambition Coalition' in Paris. After the success in achieving the Durban Platform, the EU went about building a coalition of countries, 'developed and developing', 'rich and poor', 'big and small' to pursue the common goal of applying pressure on the large emitters and to advocate for a deal with the highest level of ambition (Cañete 2015). The first meeting of a group of countries, which called themselves the 'progressives', took place on 17 May 2015 in Berlin and was co-chaired by EU Climate Action Commissioner Cañete and the Norwegian environmental minister. The group, which consisted of 12 other members (Angola, Marshall Islands, Germany, Grenada, Peru, Santa Lucia, UK, Gambia, Colombia, Chili, Mexico and Switzerland), eventually became the 'High Ambition Coalition' and pushed for an agreement in Paris with an ambitious long-term goal, 5-year reviews, a common and robust set of transparency and accountability rules, and a fair deal on climate finance and support (Cañete 2015).

In advance of Paris, the coalition, led by the Foreign Minister of the Marshall Islands, Tony De Brum, and supported financially and diplomatically by the EU, travelled around the world gathering support. For example, on behalf of the EU, Cañete travelled to Papua New Guinea, Morocco, Brazil, and Ecuador, where he met with representatives from Guatemala, Peru, Chili, Colombia, and Costa Rica, to discuss a joint strategy for Paris and to recruit for the coalition.

By the start of the Paris summit, the group, now called the 'Ambition Coalition', had grown to 80 members and at the summit, on 8 December, the EU announced that it and 79 African, Caribbean and Pacific countries jointly supported an ambitious Paris accord and that they were in agreement on the deal's long-term goal, legal form, review process, and climate finance commitments (European Commission 2015b). The next day, John Kerry announced that the US was joining the group (McGrath 2015). The support of the coalition played a key role in the EU's efforts to prevent China and India from watering down the transparency and reporting elements of the deal and for winning the case that the stocktaking and ratcheting requirements should happen every 5 years and not every 10 years such as countries like India wanted.

## Conclusions

In this contribution we have attempted to shed light on the extent to which the EU is actually recognised as a leader, especially in comparison to other leadership candidates such as China and the US, and explored the role that EU leadership played in the Copenhagen and Paris negotiation outcomes.

Based on our survey data we can see that while the EU's high self-conception of itself as a climate leader is not matched to the same degree by potential followers, nonetheless, in every year of our survey the EU has been perceived to be one of the top three most influential leaders. However, the fact that no leader consistently was able to register over 50% support from potential followers, demonstrates that the world has lacked a single undisputed leader in the field of climate change. This is a situation that can be described as a 'fragmented leadership landscape' (Parker et al. 2012).

We also analysed and evaluated the EU's leadership aims, strategies, and actual goal attainment with regard to outcomes of UNFCCC climate negotiations, particularly COP15 in Copenhagen and COP21 in Paris. Looking at what happened prior to COP15 and the failure to get a deal in Copenhagen that matched EU preferences, suggests, as others have found (Gupta and Grijp 2000), that the EU tends to have more influence over the negotiation agenda than the actual outcome of the final deal. Our recognition data corresponds well with this insight and the EU's highest scores came after its agenda-setting successes in Bali and in Durban, while at the summits when it was time to close the deal, the EU was eclipsed by the US both in Copenhagen and in Paris.

Six years after the debacle in Copenhagen in which the EU's strategies of leading by example and ideational leadership failed to convince the world to support a binding treaty for top-down targets and timetables, the EU managed to forge enough of a leadership alliance with China and the US to achieve a universal deal designed to limit warming to below 2 °C. What changed to allow this to happen? As we showed, the EU became more flexible and realistic to how a deal could be designed, agreeing to sign on to a hybrid set up with bottom-up reduction pledges combined with a top-down review of performance. In the run-up to the meeting, the EU and China agreed to enhance cooperation on carbon trading and released a joint statement calling for a legally binding deal in Paris. The US and the EU teamed up to support a strong reporting and transparency measures as well as a regular review process. Finally, the EU played a key role by bringing the High Ambition Coalition together to pressure the major emitting countries for a far-reaching deal with concrete goals and a robust and dynamic review process.

The mixed and varied record of the EU various leadership strategies suggests that the EU must rely on multiple leadership modes, mainly because, as past research has found, different leadership functions are important and are performed in different stages of the negotiation process (Underdal 1994, 192). In Paris, the EU managed to transcend its agenda-setting success by better combining its ideational leadership with the instrumental leadership of a support state, which helped the Union isolate potential veto actors such as India and allowed it to help gather the needed support that led to the adoption of the Paris Agreement. The final deal was, from the Union's point of view, 'very ambitious in its scope' and included 'most of the EU's demands' (Cañete 2016).

Another element in the successful outcome in Paris compared to Copenhagen, was the excellent organizational and diplomatic performance of the French hosts. COP21 President Laurent Fabius skilfully managed to create a transparent and inclusive process for parties, which helped produce a substantive agreement with maximum buy-in from the participants. In fact, the prominence of France, may be somewhat responsible for the dip in EU recognition in Paris, as the French were recognised as a leader by 8.1% of respondents compared to just 1.9% who named France as a leader the year before at COP20 in Lima (the hosts that year, Peru, scored 2.2%). In contrast, Denmark, the host of COP15, in Copenhagen, was seen as a leader by just 3.7% of respondents. The rise in leadership recognition for France from 2014 to 2015 nearly corresponds with the drop for the EU from 48 to 42%. For the EU this is one of the costs of being a complex actor that represents 28 states in this issue area.

Despite being a complex actor, the EU's performance at the UNFCCC negotiations in general and in Paris in particular indicates that it has been remarkably successful in speaking and acting with one voice on the climate issue. This accomplishment can be contrasted with the divisiveness that sometime accompanies other issues within the realm of the Common

Foreign and Security Policy, such as the rancour over the Iraq invasion of 2003 or other issues such as the on-going migrant crisis. The EU's climate policy has served to strengthen a common identity among member states and to establish the EU as a credible unified actor in the eyes of the world. In fact, our survey results are strong evidence that others do in fact see the EU as a unified and influential actor, at least in this issue area, which is an interesting finding with regards to the longstanding debate over the EU's 'actorness' (cf. Groen and Niemann 2013).

What do our findings mean more broadly for the EU's ability to exert leadership as a global actor? On the positive side, it suggests that while the EU may not be as influential as more structurally significant countries, the EU is far from a crippled actor and that collective EU action in global affairs can be consequential in ways that could not be matched by the diplomatic engagement of any individual member state. However, our findings also provide additional support to past studies that found that the EU's positive role perception of itself as a world leader, for example in policy areas such as trade, forestry, endangered species, and energy, were not shared to the same extent outside of the EU (Elgstrom 2007; Chaban, Knodt, and Verdun 2016). Clearly more comparative research assessing EU leadership is needed in issue areas such as trade, security, human rights, and other environmental areas to systematically study the EU's leadership objectives, strategies for exercising influence, goal attainment, and external perceptions of EU (Oberthür and Groen 2015).

It will take time to judge whether the Paris Agreement is working or not, but it will soon face some early tests. The first facilitative dialogue to assess and review the progress of the national pledges will take place in 2018 and the new national plans for increasing ambition will be due in 2020, followed by an official stocktaking review in 2023 and another round of national plans in 2025 (and every 5 years thereafter) (UNFCCC 2016). Achieving a climate deal in Paris is a major milestone, but the hard work to fully implement it begins now. It will not be easy and leadership from the EU, the US, and China will be required if the Paris Agreement is to truly help the world avert dangerous climate change. The EU recognises this and the Council of the European Union (2016) has pledged that EU will continue in its efforts to supply international leadership and climate diplomacy. Time will tell whether the EU is able to round up enough followers to make its vision for a 'climate resilient, climate neutral' future that is achieved in a socially just manner a reality.

## Note

1. The response rate to this question was 80%.

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