

**An outside-in assessment of the EU's role in global environmental negotiations:
Is the EU an ambitious, active leader?**

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1. Introduction

Many environmental problems are global in nature and are addressed in multilateral negotiations. The European Union (EU) – to be understood as the Union and its member states – is an important actor in these negotiations, presenting itself as a promoter of environmental protection by means of global environmental governance and multilateral environmental agreements (European Commission, 2015b). Also in the academic literature, the EU is mostly described as a “frontrunner” (Damro, 2006, p. 175) or “an important actor in global environmental governance” (Torney, Biedenkopf, & Adelle, 2018, p. 2). However, our current assessment of the EU's role in contemporary global environmental negotiations is based on empirical studies that do not necessary sketch an up-to-date – and therefore accurate – picture of the EU as an international environmental actor. The literature suffers from four limitations

that this paper aims to address. By doing so, the paper sheds light on the role of the EU in contemporary global environmental politics.

First, many scholarly assessments of the EU's role in international environmental negotiations are based on empirical evidence on negotiations that took place in the 1990s and 2000s. Even more recent work largely relies on assessments and evidence from that period. However, recent socio-economic and political developments, such as the economic crisis, calls for deregulation and the repositioning of the United States and China on environmental matters, are likely to have an effect on the EU's role in environmental politics. Hence, this paper will assess the EU's role from 2010 onwards, taking into account contemporary developments.

Second, the more recent literature on the EU in global environmental politics focuses to a large extent on climate negotiations. Whereas other environmental issues, such as the production and use of chemicals, the loss of biodiversity or air pollution are also important issues to tackle globally, they have received much less attention. The climate-bias in the literature on the EU as an international environmental actor leaves the other, less politicized, yet important domains of environmental policy comparatively understudied (Torney et al., 2018). Countering the climate bias in the literature, this paper examines the role of the EU in three environmental, but non-climate regimes: the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the United Nations Environment Assembly (formerly UNEP Governing Council) (UNEA/UNEP GC) and the treaty regimes on chemicals governance (i.e. the Basel, Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions completed by the 'Synergies' process). The selection of these regimes allows us to assess the EU's role in global environmental negotiations more comprehensively than the current state of the art in the literature which focuses on the special, politicized case of climate change.

Third, our current understanding of the EU's role is based on inside-out assessments of the EU, which rely on empirical observations originating in the EU itself, such as the analysis of EU documents or interviews with EU policy-makers. This implies that the literature is strongly EU-centred, risks to emphasize the EU perspective too strongly and could produce biased results. This paper aims to counter these EU-centric assessments by examining the EU's role in international environmental negotiations from an outside-in perspective. It relies on observations of neutral witnesses, namely reporters of the Earth Negotiation Bulletin (ENB), an independent reporting service on global negotiations. The outside-in approach follows the recommendations of scholars such as Keukeleire and Lecocq (2018) to use non-European sources to achieve a better understanding of the EU's international role. Studying the EU as an international actor by means of non-EU resources indeed allows for a detailed, multifaceted assessment of the international role of the EU (Kilian & Elgström, 2010).

Fourth, the assessment of the EU's role by many scholars exclusively focuses on the concept of leadership (see for example Bäckstrand & Elgström, 2013; Liefferink & Wurzel, 2017; Parker & Karlsson, 2018; Parker, Karlsson, & Hjerpe, 2017). Leadership captures however only a part of the role definition of the EU at the international level. Our paper thus examines three dimensions of the EU's role in international environmental negotiations – *ambition*, *diplomatic activity* and *leadership* – to provide a more comprehensive picture of the EU's role.

Assessing the ambition, diplomatic activities and leadership of the EU in contemporary international environmental negotiations through the eyes of neutral witnesses, this paper aims to answer the following research question: *Which role does the EU play in contemporary global environmental negotiations according to neutral observers?* The paper is structured as follows: the next section discusses the relevance and the added value of studying the EU's role from an outside-in perspective, section 3 presents the triangle of the EU's role with its three dimensions; section 4 explains the methodology of the outside-in assessment; section 5 maps the role of the EU in the three environmental regimes and presents our findings; and section 6 concludes the paper.

2. The importance of an outside-in perspective

In the academic literature, roles are approached from different angles. One separation is drawn along the lines of the self-conception of the role, the so-called 'ego' part, and the role conception by others, the so-called 'alter' part (Kilian & Elgström, 2010). As the 'ego' part is largely covered in the academic literature on the EU's role in international environmental negotiations, our paper aims to counter this dominance by focusing on the 'alter' part. Keuleers, Fonck, and Keukeleire (2016) identify a typology to study EU foreign policy along three approaches: the inward-oriented, the inside-out and the outside-in approach. They argue that scholars should focus more on an outside-in approach when assessing the EU's foreign policy, as currently most publications study the EU's foreign policy from one of the other two perspectives (Keuleers et al., 2016). Introducing the decentring agenda, Onar and Nicolaïdis (2013) also propose to overcome Eurocentrism by relying on external, non-European resources. Keukeleire and Lecocq (2018) apply this approach more concretely to the EU's foreign policy, arguing that an outside-in approach provides an unbiased perspective on the European Union. In addition, Romanyshyn (2015) has argued that an outside-in perspective is lacking for most academic literature analysing multilateral negotiations. An earlier study by Elgström (2007b) argues that studying the perceptions of the EU through other actors, might lead to different conclusions than the EU's self-assessment would suggest. He concludes that the inside and outside perceptions of the EU's role would only to a limited extent lead to the same results (Elgström, 2007b).

Although the idea of applying an outside-in approach is not completely new to EU foreign policy studies, it has not been applied in a consistent manner to the study of the EU's role in international negotiations. In addition, scholars apply the outside-in approach through different data collection methods. Mostly, researchers rely on "the perceptions and expectations of government representatives from outside the Union itself" (Kilian & Elgström, 2010, p. 256). An early study identifying the missing focus on how outsiders perceive the EU, was conducted by Chaban, Elgström, and Holland (2006). The paper uses elite perspectives of the EU and concludes that the EU is described as an influential actor who benefits from its economic power, as well as political ties with other actors (Chaban et al., 2006). Analysing non-European sources, Lucarelli and Fioramonti (2009) identify the perceptions of the EU by other countries and international organizations to understand how the European political identity is shaped. In a similar approach, Torney (2014) studies the external perception of the EU through the eyes of China and India. He concludes rather surprisingly that positive perceptions of the EU as a leader in climate negotiations might limit the EU's effectiveness (Torney, 2014). Elgström (2007b) conducted interviews with members of the permanent representations of different members of the World Trade Organisation. Likewise, Karlsson, Hjerpe, Parker, and Linnér (2012) conducted survey research with "members of party delegations, such as negotiators and representatives of government agencies, and [...] NGO representatives and researchers" in order to identify the leaders at climate conferences (Karlsson et al., 2012, p. 47). In a follow-up study, they also distributed "questionnaires to conference delegates at eight consecutive COP meetings" (Parker et al., 2017, p. 243).

Contrary to those studies using non-European country delegations, or a random sample of conference participants as observers from the outside, this paper relies on more neutral witnesses, who are neither the EU's negotiation partners nor opponents and who have no proper interests in the negotiations. Thereby, our approach provides two advantages compared to previous studies. First, the outside-in approach produces neutral, less biased results, by maximising the observational distance between the source of information, i.e. the neutral witnesses, and the object to study, i.e. the European Union. Second, relying on neutral witnesses, instead of third-country delegates, ensures that the results are non-biased vis-à-vis other countries. When the EU is compared with other negotiating parties, those parties need to be observed neutrally as well, i.e. not by their own country delegations. Nevertheless, the approach has its limits: the outside-in approach does not allow for in-depth explanations of intra-EU dynamics.

3. The EU's three dimensional role: environmental ambition, diplomatic activity and leadership

This paper conceptualizes the EU's role through three dimensions that are specific to international environmental negotiations. Next to the most often studied dimension of *leadership*, the EU's environmental *ambition* as well as its *diplomatic activity* in international environmental negotiations are assessed (see Figure 1). Thus, our findings provide a more comprehensive view of the EU in international environmental fora than most current studies do. Environmental *ambition* refers to *what* the EU wants to achieve in international environmental negotiations. The two other dimensions explain *how* the EU attempts to achieve its goals. Whereas the EU's *diplomatic activity* is the set of actions undertaken by the EU in its interactions with other parties, *leadership* refers to the nature of the relation the EU has with other parties, and more particularly to the question whether the EU is able to influence them or not.

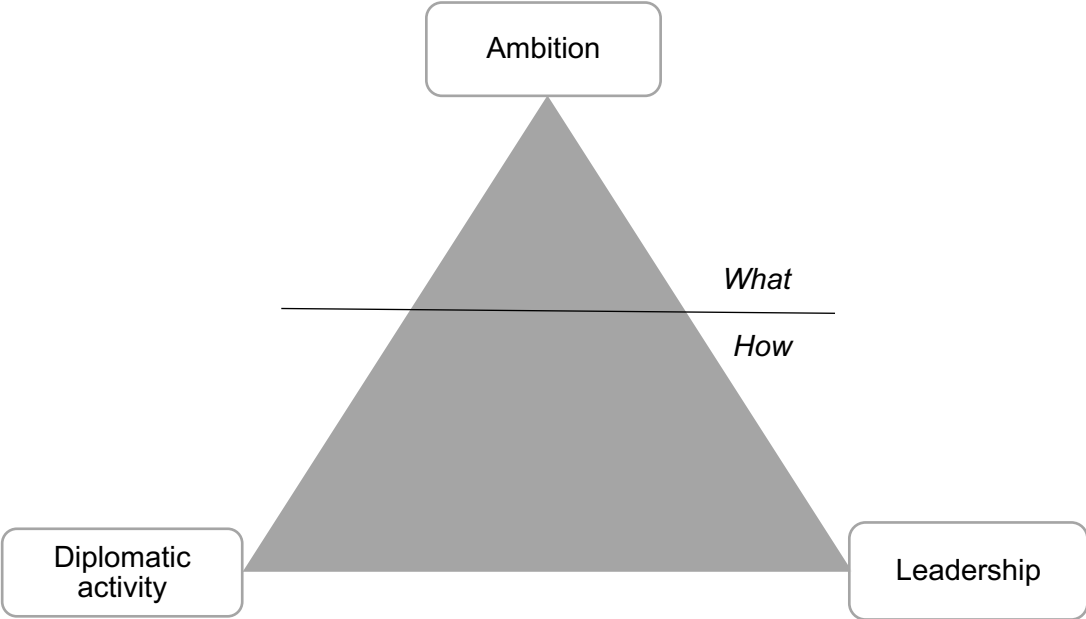


Figure 1 The triangle of the EU's role

3.1 Environmental ambition

An actor in international environmental negotiations with a high degree of ambition prefers a negotiation outcome that will lead to a high level of environmental protection. In other words, an *environmentally ambitious actor* aims at achieving stringent measures that are effective in for instance combatting air pollution, protecting biodiversity or neutralizing the hazardous effects of chemicals for the environment. Studies analysing the EU's environmental ambition a rare and ambition is seldom the main focus of a paper.

The EU has developed worldwide the most ambitious internal framework to regulate environmental issues and the EU wants to expand this level of environmental protection to other countries in the world (Delreux and Happaerts (2016). However, since the financial and Eurozone crisis, the EU shows a lower appetite for ambitious environmental policies (Burns & Tobin, 2018). What represents a high level of environmental protection is depending on the issue at stake. Defining which policies are ambitious, is however not always a straight-forward exercise. Liefferink and Wurzel (2017) show that it is difficult to draw the difference between high and low levels of environmental ambition, illustrating their argument with the example that biofuels were initially perceived as ambitious environmental policies, but they are nowadays no longer considered to contribute to environmental protection. Moreover, the observation that the EU is an ambitious environmental actor does neither automatically mean that its policies are sufficiently ambitious to address the environmental problems effectively nor that its position allows to achieve the goals of the respective international agreement (Biedenkopf, Torney, & Adelle, 2018).

Another aspect analysed by scholars is the variation over time of the EU's environmental ambition. Mostly focusing on climate change negotiations, scholars argue that the EU's ambition has decreased after the EU's failure at the Copenhagen Conference (Liefferink & Wurzel, 2017). Previously, the EU was a highly ambitious actor, compared to other major negotiation parties such as the US or China (Oberthür & Groen, 2015). But after the EU's failure in Copenhagen, where it has been side-lined in the process, the EU moderated its ambitions for the subsequent conferences (Oberthür & Groen, 2015). This paper will shed light on whether similar trends have occurred in other environmental negotiations.

3.2. Environmental diplomatic activity

Diplomacy is generally understood as a means to promote the interests of a state or region in the world (Bátora, 2005). Following this line, the EU's environmental diplomatic activities are the actions employed by the EU to promote its positions in international environmental negotiations and to reach out to third parties. An activity is '*diplomatic*' when it promotes the interest of an actor and is aimed at realizing its preference. If an actor aspires to reach an international agreement – or, in other words, if the cost of no agreement is high for an actor – its diplomatic activities not only serve the purpose of promoting its preferences – a *value-claiming* strategy –, but also of building bridges between the positions of other negotiating parties in order to find a widely acceptable compromise, a so called *value-creation* strategy (Woolcock, 2012). The range of diplomatic activities during international environmental negotiations is rather broad. To assess the differences in the EU's activities, we created an inventory of possible activities an actor can use during negotiations (see Table 1).

Table 1 Possible diplomatic activities in international environmental negotiations

Participating in informal consultations organised by the chair or the presidency
Participating in informal drafting groups (<i>only UNEA/UNEP GC</i>)
Participating in working groups
Tabling draft submissions (i.e. resolutions, decisions or proposals)
Submitting conference room papers
Making statements in plenary
Reaching out to other negotiating parties (to discuss proposals and/or build a coalition)
Participating in huddles
Reacting on draft submissions of other parties (i.e. tabling written counterproposals, making plenary statements clearly in favour or against the draft of the party)

A small number of studies has examined the diplomatic activities of the EU in international negotiations. Woolcock (2012) studies the EU's economic diplomacy and diplomatic activities by dividing the negotiation process in several stages: preparation, framing, agenda setting, the choice of a negotiating forum and the actual negotiations. Other scholars who examine a diverse set of activities argue that the EU uses capacity building as a part of its diplomatic strategy "to support and enable non-EU countries to engage in environmental policy" (Biedenkopf et al., 2018). Groen (2018) identifies the diplomatic activities of the EU during the establishment of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the Cartagena and the Nagoya Protocols. She finds that the EU successfully acted as a mediator and bridge builder in the negotiations on the Cartagena and Nagoya Protocols, but largely failed to convince third parties in the negotiations leading to the CBD (Groen, 2018, p. 80). She also shows that diplomatic activity and ambition are closely connected, as the EU's diplomatic activities are mainly successful when the EU finds itself in a middle position between the least and the most ambitious actors (Groen, 2018). Studies on the EU's diplomatic activities in climate change negotiations show that since the failure in Copenhagen, the EU has changed its strategy on international climate conferences and nowadays combines "unilateral concessions with careful coalition-building and bridge-building activities" (Bäckstrand & Elgström, 2013, p. 1370).

3.3. Environmental leadership

An environmental leader is an international actor who has the power to orient, to influence and to mobilize followers for a purpose (see for example Nye, 2008; Underdal, 1994). The relation between this actor and its follower(s) is asymmetrical, as only the leader possesses those powers. A leader has the capacity to influence and direct the behaviour of followers on a

particular issue (Malnes, 1995; Parker & Karlsson, 2010). To be a leader, it is essential to be recognized by the most important countries and delegates (Parker & Karlsson, 2018).

The literature mostly distinguishes three types of environmental leadership: *structural*, *directional* and *idea-based* leadership. A leader can potentially exercise several leadership types at different moments of a negotiation process, depending on its capacities and goals (Gupta & Ringius, 2001). A *structural* leader has either the possibility to take actions or to constructively use its economic power resources to lead the negotiation process (Gupta & Ringius, 2001; Parker & Karlsson, 2010). In contrast, *directional* leadership is defined as taking 'unilateral action' and 'leading by example' (Parker & Karlsson, 2010). A leader will try to adopt domestic policies to show that a goal is achievable and thereby shape the perception of the feasibility of proposed solutions and the credibility of domestic policy (Gupta & Ringius, 2001; Parker, Karlsson, Hjerpe, & Linnér, 2012). This type of leadership can be "exercised by influencing other parties' incentives by making the first move and [...] by demonstrating the pre-eminence of particular solution alternatives" (Skodvin & Andresen, 2006, p. 14). *Idea-based* leadership is about the creation of joint solutions that are new and have not yet been implemented at the domestic level (Parker et al., 2012). They should include the wishes of as many actors as possible and solve a collective problem (Parker & Karlsson, 2010).

Of the three role dimensions, leadership is the most widely discussed in the literature. Young (1991) argues that several leadership types are necessary to produce international agreements. Gupta and Ringius (2001) suggest that the EU should develop a strategy to combine structural, directional and instrumental leadership to achieve its goals in international environmental negotiations. More recently, Parker et al. (2017) conducted a survey with party delegations and observers in international climate negotiations in which they asked them to identify the countries, party groupings and organizations that they see as leaders, albeit without distinguishing between the three types of leadership. Their findings show that "the EU, the US, China, and G-77 [are] the actors most frequently recognised as leaders" (Parker et al., 2017, p. 243) and conclude that in climate change negotiations several actors are perceived to lead the process (Parker & Karlsson, 2018). In other studies on climate change negotiations, the EU is identified as deploying all three types of leadership, but mainly relying on the directional mode and employing leading-by-example strategies (Parker & Karlsson, 2010). One of the reasons is that it is difficult for the EU to use structural leadership, as it has not enough political and economic power to force other actors to follow its positions (Oberthür & Roche Kelly, 2008).

Another approach, which is located between the definitions of leadership and diplomatic activity, is the idea of the EU being a 'leadiator' – a 'leader-cum-mediator' (Bäckstrand &

Elgström, 2013). Combining the role dimensions of leadership and ambition, Liefferink and Wurzel argue that “even an actor with low environmental ambitions may use structural leadership” (2017, p. 958). In some situations, also the leadership of individual EU member states can be an important driver in establishing EU leadership, as for example in the context of the ratification of the Kyoto Protocol, where the EU’s leadership was the result of the power relations created mutually by the EU and several of its member states (Schreurs & Tiberghien, 2007).

Studies focusing on the follower perspective of leadership are rare. Karlsson, Parker, Hjerpe, and Linnér (2011) study how potential leaders are perceived by potential followers during the COP 14 to the UNFCCC. They find that the EU is mostly recognized for its leadership through the directional or idea-based type (Karlsson et al., 2011). In a different study, Parker, Karlsson, and Hjerpe (2015) measure leadership along six hypothesis to allow respondents to attribute different leadership types. They argue that the most likely reason to support a leader in climate change negotiations was the leader’s overall commitment to find solutions for the climate change issue (Parker et al., 2015). Elgström (2007a) finds that the EU is perceived differently in different fora, as for example in the United Nation’s Forum on Forests (UNFF), the EU is described as a very influential leader, in the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) ‘only’ as a very important actor (Elgström, 2007a).

4. Data and Methodology

We analyse the EU’s role in international negotiations in three environmental regimes: the chemicals conventions, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the UN Environment Assembly/UNEP Governing Council (UNEA/UNEP GC). They are UN-wide environmental treaty regimes with quasi-universal membership where the EU is a fully-fledged actor speaking with one voice. This holds true even for UNEA/UNEP GC, where the EU participates only as an observer, but in practice, the Commission or the Presidency speak on the behalf of the EU and its member states. Moreover, major negotiations took place in the last years in all three environmental regimes. We examine the EU’s role in these negotiations in a period of nine years, from 2010 until 2019, mainly for two reasons. First, prompted by the developments in Copenhagen, the climate bias in the literature started in the early 2010s, and, second, since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty the institutional and legal context of the EU’s participation in international negotiations has been unchanged.

To achieve an outside-in perspective of the EU in international environmental negotiations, we sent a targeted online survey to reporters of the Earth Negotiation Bulletin (ENB) who attended international negotiations in one of the treaty regimes. Our choice to base the outside-in assessment on the views of ENB reporters is motivated by our wish to rely on neutral witnesses

of the EU's role. ENB reporters are such neutral witnesses as the main purpose of their attendance of international meetings is to write daily, publicly available reports about the negotiations. The reporters are neutral in the sense that they are neither negotiation partners nor opponents of the EU nor defending any own interest at the international level. We selected ENB reporters who attended several Conferences of the Parties (COPs) or meetings of UNEA/UNEP GC. However, to achieve a sufficiently wide sample, we also included a few reporters who only reported on one conference. For each of the three regimes, 3 to 6 ENB reporters replied to the survey, leading to a total of 14 responses with a response rate of 63.6 per cent. Reporters were only surveyed for one environmental regime, even if they also reported on another one.

The three dimensions of the EU's role were measured in the survey along a series of questions structured in three parts. For each dimension, we asked questions on the reporters' assessment of the EU, but also on their assessment of the EU compared to other major actors in the negotiations. In all three environmental regimes, next to the European Union, we defined the United States, China, the Group of 77 and China, the African Group and the Latin American and Caribbean Group as being major actors. We decided to include the US in CBD as a negotiating party, even so it is not a party to the convention. This was motivated by the US attendance as an observer, trying to influence other actors, as well as by the comparability among the three cases. A few additional groups, for example the Like-Minded Megadiverse Countries (LMMC), were of interest in the Convention on Biological Diversity (Buck & Hamilton, 2011).

To measure environmental ambition, we selected 8 to 10 main themes per regime and asked reporters to indicate how ambitious the EU's position was – and how the EU's ambition was in comparison to the ambition of the other major actors. In the chemicals conventions, we identified three priorities per convention. These priorities correspond to the aims and objectives of the conventions. Those are for example the reduction of hazardous waste (for the Basel Convention), the protection of human health from potential harm created by hazardous chemicals (for the Rotterdam Convention) or the protection of human health and the environment from persistent organic pollutants (for the Stockholm Convention). Likewise, for CBD, the themes are related to the CBD goals and focal areas, complemented with the most important themes discussed in the last years, according to the summaries of the ENB. CBD focuses for example on pushing for the sustainable use of biodiversity components or the fair share of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources. The ENB summaries also helped us to complement the main themes of the Environment Assembly and to identify all important topics in UNEA/UNEP GC. Issues are more diverse compared to the other

regimes as they include the fight against illegal trade in wildlife, promoting measures to reduce air pollution and strengthening international environmental governance.

We also asked respondents to indicate if the EU is fulfilling or even overachieving its ambition in the respective regime. As environmental ambition can best be measured by comparing the EU with other important actors, we asked respondents to assess different parties according to their view on ambitious international environmental policy. Then we built a scale, showing an actor at the top of the ranking as the actor with the highest environmental ambition in a negotiation context. In addition, we have added open questions for comments, as well as a question on developments since 2010 to assess changes over time.

To measure diplomatic activity, we asked respondents to rate the EU on a five-point scale from the EU being the less active to being the most active actor in comparison to other major parties. This rating was done for the various diplomatic activities identified in section 3 (see Table 1). In addition, we asked respondents to order the main negotiating parties according to their level of activity during international negotiations. The ranking forced respondents to make clear distinctions between the different major actors. This should avoid that all parties are described as active just because of their participation in the negotiation process. Finally, we added a number of questions on which EU actors (member states, Commission, Presidency) are mainly conducting diplomatic activities. Similarly to the ambition part, we added open questions to allow for a comments and a question on changes over time.

To measure leadership, we included questions in the survey on the general leadership of the EU, but also statements that are exclusively attributed to the definition of a structural, directional or idea-based leader. For instance, we asked respondents to identify how often the EU used its economic power to put pressure on other negotiating parties (structural leadership), how often the EU acted as a role model (directional leadership) or tried to include the interests of as many parties as possible when proposing solutions to collective problems (idea-based leadership). We then asked questions to assess the EU's leadership in comparative terms. The survey indeed included a question to rank the major actors according to their influence in the international negotiations as well as their power to mobilize followers for a purpose. Once more, we added open questions for any additional comments and one question for developments since 2010.

5. Results: the EU's role in global environmental negotiations

5.1. The EU as an ambitious environmental actor

Our results show that the EU is the most ambitious actor in environmental negotiations and has a preference for international environmental policies aiming to protect the environment.

The EU is evaluated by outsiders as '(strongly) in favour of ambitious international environmental policy' (value 4 or higher on a scale of 5). This is a consistent finding in the three regimes, with a slightly higher ambition for UNEA/UNEP GC. Other actors, such as the Group of 77 and China, the African Group and GRULAC are ambitious as well, albeit at a lower level (see Figure 2). The US is not pushing for ambitious environmental policies and is thus often an opponent of the EU.

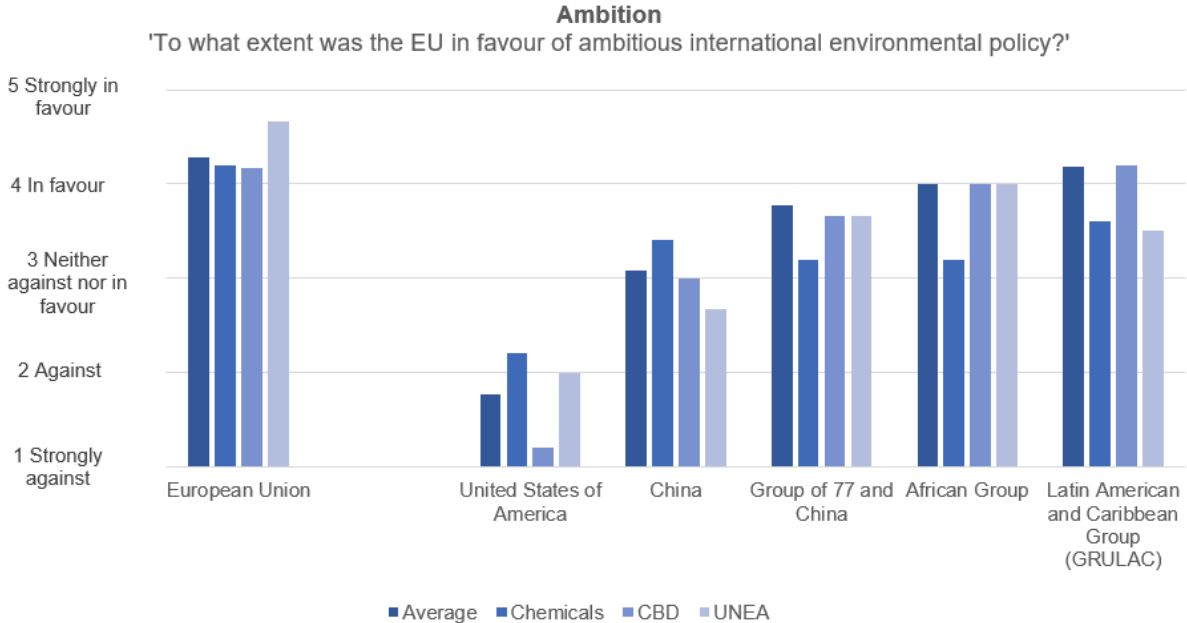


Figure 2 Levels of ambition of the most important negotiating parties

Although the overall results indicate a high level of environmental ambition of the EU, there are some exceptions in the chemicals conventions and in CBD. In the Basel Convention, the EU shows a lower appetite for ambitious policies than for the Rotterdam and Stockholm Conventions, especially concerning treating and disposing hazardous waste as close as possible to the source of generation and protecting developing countries from transboundary movements of e-waste. On both issues, the EU was assessed as being only a moderately committed actor. In CBD, the EU was located between a less and a moderately committed actor regarding the fair share of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources and regarding the establishment of a global multilateral benefit-sharing mechanism. Also concerning the support for strong financial resources in the context of the post-2020 framework on biodiversity, the EU is only a moderately committed actor. Hence, even though the EU in general supports the ideas and objectives of the Convention on Biological Diversity, it is less willing to share the benefits and its financial resources with other parties.

Overall, the EU usually implements international agreements, but not to the full extent. ENB reporters only partly agreed with the statement that the EU fully implements the goals of the

agreements (see Figure 3). Only for UNEA/UNEP GC, respondents strongly agreed with this statement. Consequently, it is not because the EU promotes ambitious positions at the international level that it complies with the international policies domestically. The EU does not always walk the talk it promotes internationally. This is particularly the case in the CBD regime (see Figure 3). The EU itself admits that it is not on track with implementing its 2020 strategy to “halt the loss of biodiversity and the degradation of ecosystem services in the EU” (European Commission, 2015a).

As the EU is a high ambitious actor, we expected to see a high level of implementation, or even the overachievement of the regime goals, which is however not supported by empirical data. We can thus conclude that the EU is a highly ambitious actor, who implements the goals of the environmental regimes to a large extent, but only exceptionally overachieves those goals.

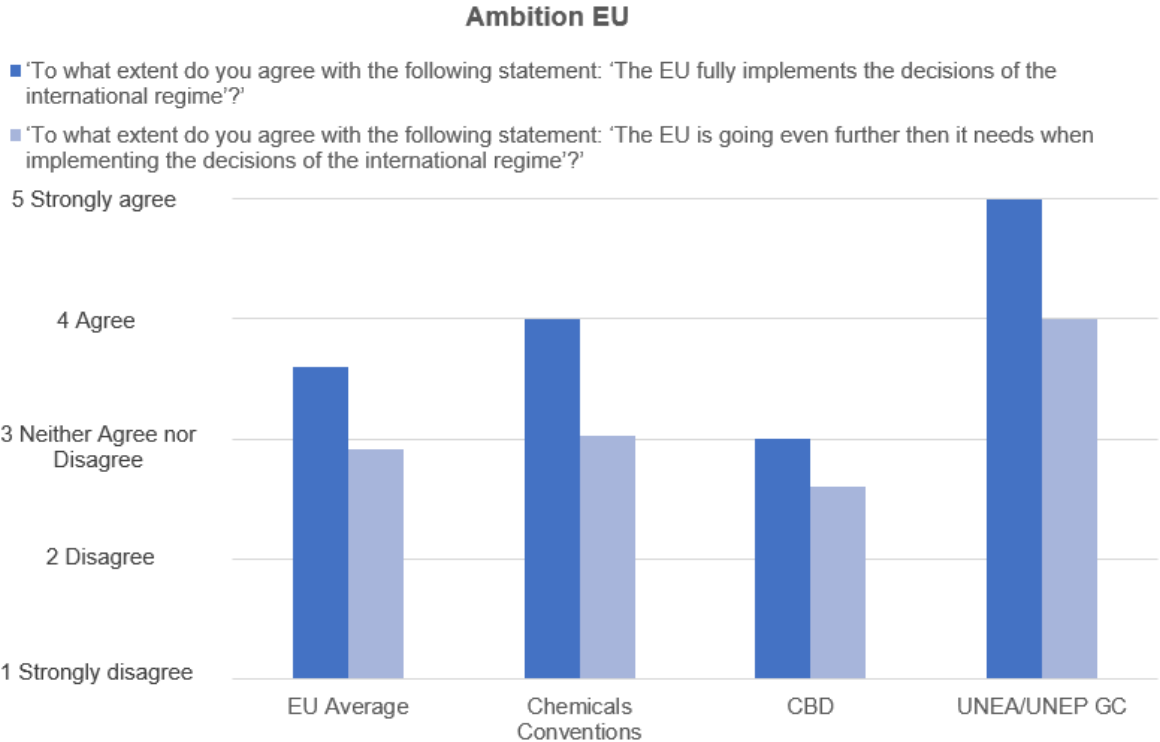


Figure 3 Implementation and overachievement of regime goals

5.2. The EU as an environmentally diplomatic active actor

The EU is not only the most ambitious, but also the most active player in international environmental negotiations. In all three regimes, the level of activity is relatively similar. Comparing the EU’s activities with the activities of the other main players, the ENB reporters assessed the EU as the most active negotiation party. When assessing which parties are the most actives ones in the chemicals conventions, one ENB reporter ranked the US first and the

EU second and in CBD the EU was once ranked third after the G77 and the African Group. In all other cases, the EU has been identified as the most active actor. Moreover, the overall results for the other actors are more diverse, and thus it is difficult to identify a clear second player behind the EU (see Figure 4). There is also more variation between the cases. What is clear is that the EU is with large distance the most active player during international environmental negotiations.

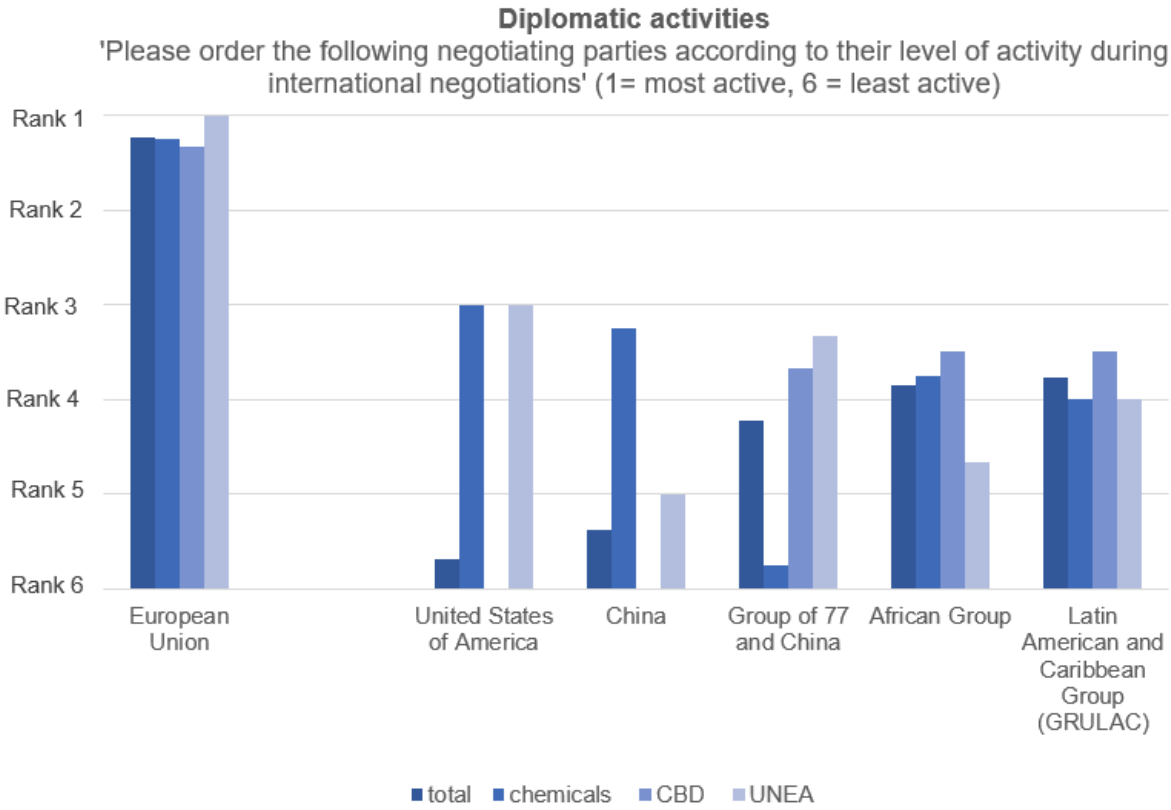


Figure 4 Levels of diplomatic activity of the most important negotiating parties¹

We were further interested in understanding which activities the EU usually uses during international conferences. For all previously identified diplomatic activities (see Table 1, section 3), ENB reporters rated the EU as being among the more active, or even as being the most active party. The differences between the average scores are only marginal, which is why we do not further elaborate on them. The EU is a very active player that uses the whole range of diplomatic activities to achieve its results.

Zooming in on *who* conducts these diplomatic activities on behalf of the EU, we find that most of the ENB reporters argue that the European Commission and the rotating Presidency are more active than the EU member states, and that EU member states do not negotiate as

¹ Participants have ranked the diplomatic activities of the parties on a level from 1 to 6. The graph displays the average ranking of the parties. The higher the bar in the graph, the more that party has been assessed as being diplomatically active.

separate actors. Surprisingly, they however disagree with our expectation that the EU would be too much focused on internal coordination. However, the EU might focus on such coordination activities a lot prior to conferences, as the ENB reporters did neither agree nor disagree with our statement that the EU would discuss its positions with a large number of negotiating parties prior to international meetings.

5.3. The EU as an environmental leader

The European Union is identified as an environmental leader in all three regimes. As an environmental leader both influences the other negotiating parties and creates followers, we based our assessment of the main negotiating parties also on those two criteria.

For influence, on a scale from 1 to 4, all ENB reporters attributed the EU the score 4, meaning that the EU is influential. Figure 5 shows that other parties are influential as well, however to a lower extent and with variation for the three regimes.

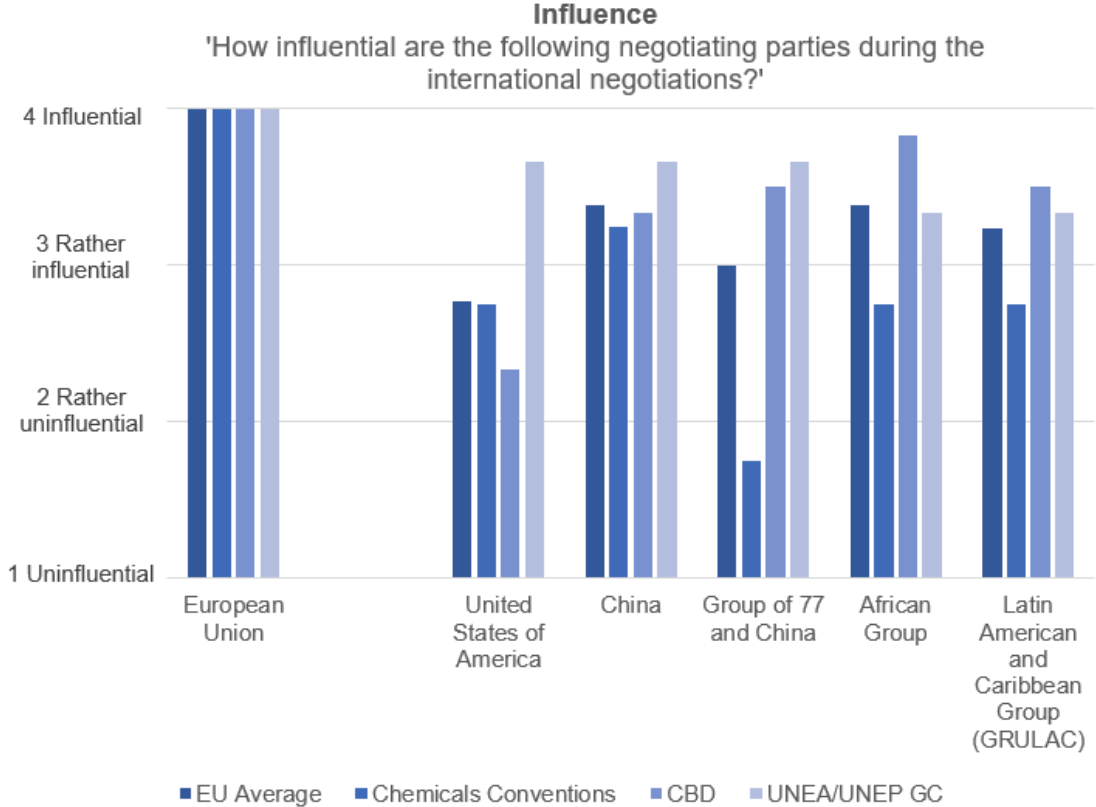


Figure 5 Influence of the most important negotiating parties

We observe some more variation for the question regarding the creation of followers. The EU is still identified as the actor creating most followers in international environmental negotiations. However, it does not achieve the maximum score anymore. In UNEA/UNEP GC, the US and the EU were attributed the same scores by ENB reporters. In sum however, as leadership is about being influential and about creating followers at the same time, the EU clearly is the

number one leader in international environmental treaty regimes. Similarly, to the findings in the literature on climate change, it is not alone, as other actors achieve weaker, but still high results for leadership.

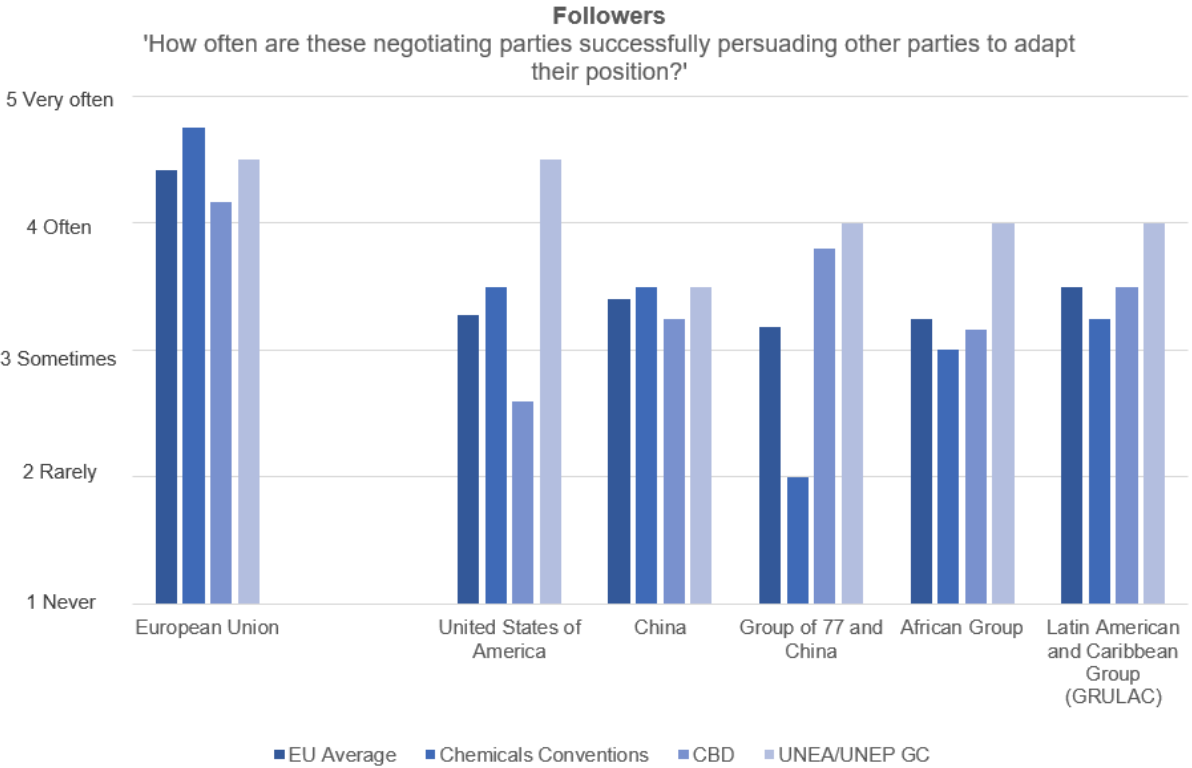


Figure 6 Creation of followers of the most important negotiating parties

In addition, we tried to identify what kind of leader the EU is. Based on the literature on climate change, we expected higher scores for directional and idea-based than for structural leadership. However, results did not confirm this, as they were very similar for all leadership types, with even slightly higher scores for structural leadership. The differences should however not be over interpreted as they range for the EU average between 3.72 and 4, meaning that the EU uses all leadership types rather often (see Figure 7).

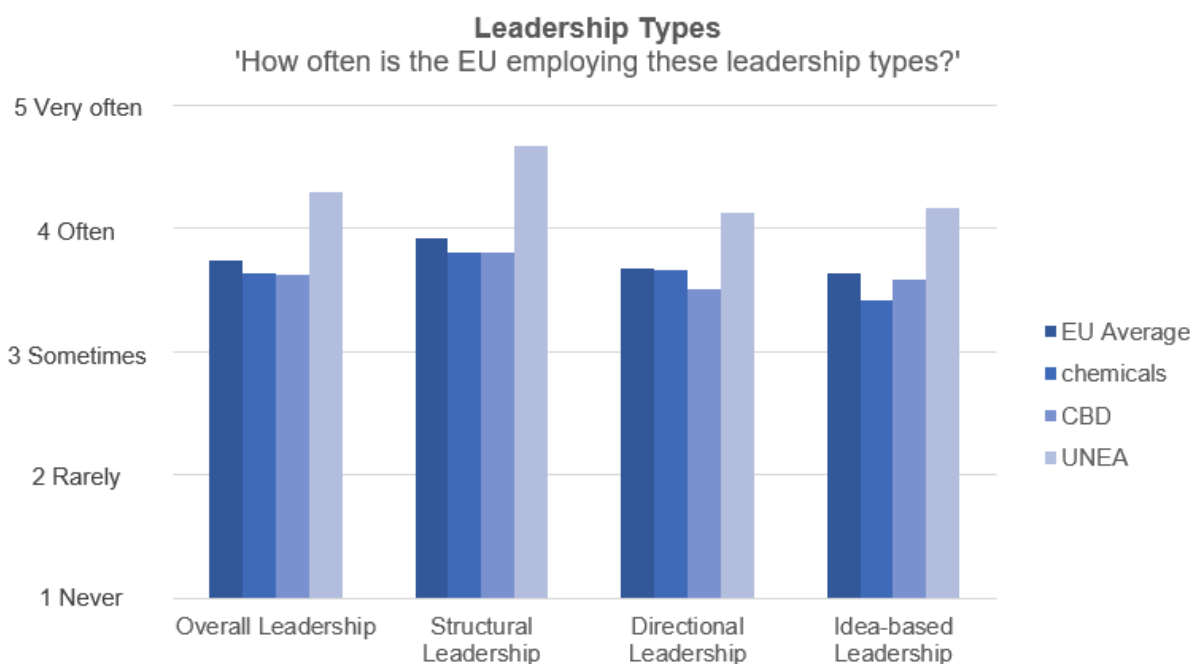


Figure 7 Structural, directional and idea-based leadership of the EU

6. Conclusion

This paper assessed the role of the European Union in contemporary global environmental negotiations. Countering the literature's dominant focus on climate change and leadership, we selected three less politicized environmental treaty regimes compared to climate and focused on two additional aspects of the EU's role next to leadership – ambition and diplomatic activity. The results of our outside-in assessment indicate clearly that the EU is an ambitious, diplomatic active leader. Overall, our conclusions, based upon the outside-in assessment of neutral witnesses of the EU's role, do not fundamentally differ from the findings that are based on EU-centric inside-out assessments.

For all three dimensions of the environmental role, the EU achieved the highest results of all actors. This was especially visible for the EU's diplomatic activities and leadership. With very few exceptions, the ENB reporters rated the EU as the most active player that uses all kinds of diplomatic activities during international negotiations. Similar results were shown for the EU's influence, where the reporters rated the EU as influential without any exception, which was not the case for any other negotiating party. In terms of the creation of followers, the EU was on average able to create followers during international negotiations, however, at least for UNEA/UNEP GC, the US achieved similar results. We identified some more variation regarding the EU's ambition. While the EU is overall the actor with the highest ambition, thus with the highest preference for a high level of environmental protection, scores were on

average slightly lower than for the other two dimensions. In addition, for a few specific issues in the chemicals conventions and in CBD, the EU was only a moderately committed party.

In conclusion, we find that the EU is the most diplomatic active leader, who usually favours ambitious environmental policies. However, for some situations, for example financial support or benefit sharing the EU is less ambitious. Our data does not clearly explain in what way the EU's role, for all three dimensions, changed over time. To study this question, it might be necessary to consult other witnesses that attended international negotiations in the respective cases for a longer period.

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