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Where to go from Paris? The European Union in climate geopolitics

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The EU’s strategic re-orientation to coalition and bridge building after the failed Copenhagen Climate Summit in 2009 paved the way for its success in securing the Paris Agreement on climate change in December 2015. This orientation will largely remain relevant in climate geopolitics characterized by multipolarity and a diversification of interests away from a North–South divide, both headed towards growing support for decarbonization. Various fora beyond the multilateral UN negotiations deserve systematic attention as climate governance has become “polycentric”, requiring careful prioritization as well as further enhanced coordination of climate diplomacy across the EU. The EU’s position in climate geopolitics will not least depend on the development of its internal climate and energy policy framework for 2030 and beyond. Advancing decarbonization and fostering low-carbon innovation towards the new climate economy in the EU will help enhance the EU’s power base and role in future climate geopolitics.

Keywords: climate change; climate policy; EU strategy; low-carbon economy; Paris Agreement

Introduction

In the twenty-first century, international climate politics has become what I refer to in the following as “climate geopolitics”. While “geopolitics” is a loaded term and concept in itself, I use the term “climate geopolitics” to denote three prominent features of contemporary international climate politics. First, international climate politics has become firmly established as “high politics” and great power politics (Terhalle & Depledge, 2013). As climate change and climate policy are understood to significantly affect the future world order, they will remain an integral element of world politics for the years and decades to come. The second feature is closely connected to the first: while traditionally the “common-good/bad” characteristics have dominated thinking about international climate governance, a zero-sum logic has grown more prominent as climate change has become part of countries’ broader economic, technological and ideological competition, the geopolitical “struggles for political dominance” (Dalby, 2013, p. 38). Finally, climate geopolitics draws attention to a number of more structural factors – prominently including the international constellation of power and interests – that condition and drive international climate politics and the position of individual actors in it. As countries’ domestic climate and energy policies have direct relevance, significant conditions are to be found at both the international and domestic levels. While relatively stable, these conditions can and do

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change as a result of scientific, technological, socio-economic and political developments.

This article argues that the Paris Agreement adopted at the Paris Climate Summit in December 2015 significantly affects the position of the European Union (EU) in climate geopolitics. This position has shifted significantly: whereas the EU has traditionally been considered an international leader on climate change (e.g. Oberthür & Roche Kelly, 2008; Wurzel & Connelly, 2011), changes in international conditions (US re-engagement, the rise of China and other emerging powers) and domestic circumstances (post-2008 crises, opposition to climate policy by Poland and other central and eastern European member states) have led to adaptations of EU strategy over the past decade (e.g. Bäckstrand & Elgström, 2013; Groen & Niemann, 2013; Skovgaard, 2014). In adopting the Paris Agreement, the Paris Climate Summit in December 2015 advanced and re-framed the political space for future global climate policy, especially by providing directions towards worldwide decarbonization. Future EU strategy on climate policy needs to grasp the emerging opportunities and, to this end, integrate the international with the domestic.

In the following I pursue the overall argument and attempt to shed light on the implications of Paris for the EU’s role in climate geopolitics by investigating key internal and external factors and their dynamics. In the next section, I first place the Paris Agreement in the broader context of the evolving polycentric framework of global climate governance and discuss the EU’s performance towards the Paris Summit. I then investigate the underlying international constellation of power and interests, before exploring the EU’s evolving climate and energy policy framework and domestic EU politics. The concluding section derives elements of a future EU strategy in international climate politics therefrom. To remain an influential driving force in international climate policy the EU must take proper account of evolving internal and external conditions. In doing so, the EU faces important choices in developing its interlinked internal and external strategies on climate change post Paris.

Evolving international climate policy: polycentric governance, the Paris Agreement and the EU

From centralized to polycentric governance

Traditionally, many considered the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) of 1992 and its Kyoto Protocol of 1997 as the centre of climate governance. While multilateral consensus decision-making precludes imposition of unwanted obligations, the multilateral UN framework was considered as the place where the grand bargain should emerge that would enable and unlock climate action at the other governance levels. While the Kyoto Protocol of 1997 had such an effect in a part of the world, notably in the EU (see below), it did not lead to the broadened and deepened climate action required. During much of the 2000s, the multilateral process was characterized by stalemate culminating in the failed Copenhagen Summit in 2009 (Groen & Niemann, 2013; Terhalle & Depledge, 2013).

In the 2000s, the traditional centralized conceptualization has hence made room for a more polycentric, decentralized framing of climate governance. A wealth of governance levels (local, regional, national, supranational, international), public and private actors and fora have become driving forces of climate action in their own right. National climate legislation has expanded tremendously and countries have pushed forward with various bilateral initiatives. Transnational climate governance has flourished, including various initiatives involving cooperation by public and private actors, cities and regions. Companies and other private actors have increasingly engaged in climate measures. Grassroots movements have raised awareness and provided impetus for a growing movement to divest from fossil fuels. As to intergovernmental cooperation, fora beyond the UNFCCC
have received increased attention, including the Montreal Protocol for the protection of the ozone layer, the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), the International Maritime Organization (IMO), the G20 and others. Overall, global climate governance has increasingly become recognized for its multi-level, multi-actor and multi-forum characteristics, providing for a dense “polycentric” framework (e.g. Bulkeley et al., 2014; Jordan et al., 2015; Keohane & Victor, 2011; Ostrom, 2010).

**The Paris Agreement**

Widely heralded as historic, the Paris Agreement under the UNFCCC adopted on 12 December 2015 constitutes an attempt to recalibrate the role of the multilateral climate regime within the evolving polycentric governance framework that enabled it. The function of the international regime may increasingly consist of aggregating lower-level developments and providing direction to and orchestrating the overall governance framework (e.g. Hermwille et al., 2015). Hence, the Paris Agreement establishes (1) the global temperature goal of “holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels” (Article 2) and (2) the goal of phasing out net greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions “in the second half of this century” (Article 4.1). To achieve these goals, emissions would need to be phased out early in the second half of this century (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change [IPCC], 2014a). The Paris Agreement thus points to worldwide decarbonization within the next few decades as the major direction of travel for the overall governance framework.

In addition, the Paris Agreement creates a renewed dynamic framework of international cooperation on climate change. For the first time, all countries, including developed and developing countries, undertake “nationally determined” climate action plans. More than 180 countries covering around 98% of worldwide GHG emissions submitted such plans prior to the Paris Summit. Regular reports by countries on implementation will be subject to expert review. Developed countries commit to providing financial resources to assist developing countries. Since the existing climate action plans are insufficient for achieving the global temperature goal of 2/1.5°C (United Nations Environment Programme [UNEP], 2015), progress is to be reviewed and strengthened commitments to be submitted every five years. Most of the elements of the Paris Agreement will require further elaboration in the years to come, at least until it enters into force upon ratification by 55 countries representing 55% of global GHG emissions. Overall, the Paris Agreement exceeded expectations and constitutes an important achievement for multilateralism as well as for climate governance (for fuller accounts, see Clémençon, 2016; Obergassel et al., 2016).

**The EU’s new role model as a “leadator”**

The Paris Agreement reflects the EU’s policy objectives to a great extent. The EU in particular was successful in securing an international treaty, a five-year review cycle, mitigation commitments for all countries and a rules-based system ensuring “transparency and accountability” through reporting on and review of countries’ climate action. Although the EU had to lower its ambitions in some respects – including guidelines for countries’ mitigation and reporting commitments and a broadening of the group of countries contributing to climate finance – especially the GHG mitigation package exceeded expectations and constituted a significant success for the EU. In addition, the EU can claim credit for enabling the progress made in the process leading up to the Paris Summit. Thus, the EU was a central driving force behind the Durban mandate of 2011, the growing support for the agreement taking the form of an international treaty and the preparation and submission of climate action plans by
nearly 190 countries prior to the Paris Summit (Oberthür & Groen, forthcoming; Obergassel et al., 2016).

The main thrust of the EU’s strategy was proactive coalition and bridge building at the multilateral negotiations and beyond. On the basis of policy objectives which it had significantly scaled down after Copenhagen (e.g. Bäckstrand & Elgström, 2013), the EU consistently pushed towards an ambitious Paris outcome, including by submitting its own relatively high GHG emission reduction target of at least 40% by 2030 from 1990 levels early on in the process. It invested in building a coalition for a progressive middle ground, while also building bridges between parties with more extreme positions, including by making numerous textual bridging proposals to the French Conference Presidency during the conference. To this end, the EU worked with partners from North and South in the Cartagena Dialogue for Progressive Action established in 2010 throughout the negotiating process. In 2015, the European External Action Service (EEAS) elaborated and, upon approval by the Council, implemented a climate diplomacy action plan streamlining the external messages and coordinating climate diplomacy by the EU and its member states. Throughout 2015, EU member states and the Commission actively engaged in bilateral climate diplomacy, with declarations of Brazil and Germany as well as of France and China marking important achievements. The EU also helped galvanize the move towards national climate action plans on the way towards Paris and reached out to the US to explore common ground (for more details, see Oberthür & Groen, forthcoming).

These efforts culminated in the forming of a “high-ambition coalition” at the Paris Summit that proved influential in assuring the Paris Agreement’s relatively high level of ambition. This revival of the “Durban coalition” that had been instrumental in securing the Durban mandate in 2011 had been prepared with the Marshall Islands in 2015. Like the Durban coalition, the Paris high-ambition coalition especially included poorer and more vulnerable developing countries. It was eventually also joined by Brazil and the USA at the Paris Conference. It significantly widened the room for manoeuvre of the French Presidency of the Paris Summit in erring towards ambition in its final compromise proposal (Oberthür & Groen, forthcoming; Obergassel et al., 2016, pp. 9–10).

Overall, the EU thus appears to have found a new role model as a “leadator” (i.e. leader and mediator) in international climate policy characterized by growing multipolarity with the USA and China as particular heavyweights. The ingredients of this leadator role have remained in place throughout the multilateral negotiations after Copenhagen in 2009 and became first clearly visible in Durban in 2011 (Bäckstrand & Elgström 2013). In adapting to the evolving international context, taking a moderately progressive stance enabled coalition and bridge building, both in Durban and in Paris. While power politics between the USA and China shaped some of the underlying grand bargains (Obergassel et al., 2016, p. 10), the EU thereby managed to avert marginalization à la Copenhagen and to shape important aspects of the Paris Agreement.

The evolving international constellation of power and interests

Shifts of power

Several key power indicators of relevance to climate geopolitics point to an EU in decline over the past decades. The EU’s shares in world population, GDP and GHG emissions show a solid downward trend (Figure 1). In climate politics, the declining emission share has received particular attention since it indicates how much other actors need the EU for addressing the climate problem. Expected to decline further, EU GHG emissions accounted for about 10% of the global total in 2012, clearly behind China (around 25%) and the USA (around 15%). As a result, the EU has, with the move from the Kyoto Protocol’s focus on industrialized countries toward a global approach and
framing, turned from one of the two biggest industrialized country emitters to a second-row player (e.g. Oberthür, 2011).

Another key element of an actor’s weight in climate geopolitics has, however, so far received scant attention: the capacity to contribute to solving the problem in terms of expertise, knowledge, policies and technology. Not only are the biggest emitters needed for international cooperation, but also actors that have the means to address the problem. In this perspective, the track record of the EU having reduced its GHG emissions by more than 20% since 1990 (see Figure 2) may not indicate decline, but signal – against the backdrop of an elaborate policy framework (see below) – a leading “low-emission capacity”. With the world aiming for decarbonization under the Paris Agreement and competition for a low-carbon economy intensifying, this capacity is set to grow in importance for players’ power, attractiveness and influence in climate geopolitics.

The EU seems to be in a relatively good position regarding “low-emission capacity”. There is no established lead indicator for this capacity. The EU has acquired a world-leading position in terms of GHG/CO₂ emissions intensity (World Resources Institute [WRI], 2016). One possible lead indicator concerns shares in high-value climate change mitigation technologies inventions (European Patent Office and United Nations Environment Programme [EPO/UNEP], 2015). In this field, the EU has taken a leading role and maintained a share of 30–40% throughout 1995–2011 (see Figure 1). Two considerations suggest that the rosier picture in this field is precarious and possibly deceptive. First, the field is developing dynamically, with global decarbonization efforts still at an early stage, providing ample room for growth and competition. Second, investment in a key field, renewable energy, has dramatically declined in Europe in recent years, so that the EU’s share in the global total has plummeted from close to 50% in 2010 to less than 20% in 2015 (REN21, 2015).

Overall, climate geopolitics is thus likely to move further towards multipolarity. Over the past years, the USA and China have been the two strong poles, with a number of

Figure 1. The EU’s power position in climate geopolitics: key indicators.
Note: High-value CCMT means “high-value climate change mitigation technologies”; all data given as shares of global total; CCMT data for Europe as a whole. Sources: High-value CCMT data from European Patent Office (EPO/UNEP 2015); all other data from WRI (2016).
second-row players behind them, among which is the EU (but also other members of the G20). Changing economic dynamics could result in a further strengthening of the position of emerging powers such as India. The African continent also has considerable potential both in terms of economic development and GHG emissions (WRI, 2016). The field of low-emission capacity is also evolving, with players such as Japan, Korea and China holding significant shares already (EPO/UNEP, 2015). Mapping these indicators onto each other provides for a multi-faceted picture, with dynamic multipolarity as the most likely structure for the foreseeable future.

**Evolving interests**

Climate interests are on the rise worldwide, both as a result of an increasing manifestation of climate change impacts and due to growing socioeconomic interest in decarbonization. As regards impacts, extreme weather events have further increased in intensity and frequency and have led to increasing economic losses both in developed and developing countries. Glaciers have continued to melt, exacerbating problems with freshwater supply. Increasing numbers of people have experienced new records in temperatures, precipitation and/or drought. Internationally, discussions on “loss and damage” have raised awareness of the irreversible impacts of climate change that cannot be adapted to (IPCC, 2014b). These climate change impacts do not only strengthen interest by those affected, but also create incentives for countries to behave as “responsible” powers by not advancing the destruction of others.

In parallel, socioeconomic interest in decarbonization has grown markedly, especially in the 2000s. By 2015, renewables dominated investment in new power generation capacity, also due to drastic cost reductions that far exceeded expectations. Energy efficiency technologies in appliances, buildings and transport and related policies have also advanced significantly, with considerable further potential. Reinforced by the aforementioned spread of climate initiatives in polycentric governance, increasing numbers of business actors have come out in support of strong climate policies.

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Figure 2. EU progress towards 2020 climate and energy targets.
Note: The EU’s target of improving energy efficiency by 20% by 2020 corresponds to an absolute reduction of energy consumption by 13% from 2005 levels. Source: Data from Eurostat and European Environment Agency.
and have engaged in developing, and reaping the benefits of, the “low-carbon” or “new climate economy” (see also above). The low-carbon economy is dynamically growing, as also indicated by an increasing number of inventions/patents granted for relevant low-emission products (EPO/UNEP, 2015). Overall, a positive narrative stressing the opportunities of the transition towards the new climate economy has thus gained strength (Goldman Sachs, 2015; The New Climate Economy, 2014; 2015).

At the same time, significant barriers remain, especially as regards fossil fuels and energy politics. Economic activity around the world continues to depend to a large extent on fossil fuel use, supported by established infrastructure. Coal, oil and gas remain abundantly available, especially after the shale gas revolution in the USA and elsewhere, as also indicated by falling prices in the 2010s. Accordingly, fossil fuel production and consumption has continued to grow and related status-quo interests have continued to carry significant weight in policy discussions. In some areas of economic activity (for example, in energy-intensive industry), the market alone will not deliver alternatives to fossil fuels. The decarbonized economy thus does not yet sell itself, but meets sizeable resistance (Dupont & Oberthür, 2015a; International Energy Agency [IEA], 2015).

The strength and development of relevant interests is not uniform across the globe. Interest in the “old” economy remains stronger in countries with abundant fossil-fuel resources, like Russia and the USA, than with energy importers like the EU. Interest in the low-carbon economy, by contrast, grows more easily where it can build on significant innovative capacity, as exists in the USA, the EU and other countries. In some developing countries, particular opportunities exist, as energy systems are evolving dynamically. In many developing countries, however, particular barriers related to technology, finance and general capacity remain. Combined with a widespread desire to prioritize economic development and ensure climate justice, these barriers create formidable challenges that require targeted policy intervention.

The Paris Agreement can be expected to provide a further impetus for the growth of socioeconomic climate interests. While depending on implementation for its full effect, it sends a powerful signal to investors and societies that the world community is headed toward decarbonization and that related socioeconomic interests will be privileged. It also strengthens the means available for addressing barriers related to limited capacity in developing countries in need.

**Implications: coalition-building across the North–South divide**

Three implications in particular arise from this analysis of the international constellation of power and interests in climate geopolitics. First, the North–South divide will further lose framing power. This process is already underway, not least as a result of the economic diversification of “the” South. Developing country groupings with diverse interests have blossomed, including progressive Latin-American countries, small-island developing states, least developed countries, oil-exporting countries, BASIC countries, like-minded developing countries and others. And the Paris Agreement weakens the traditional distinction between developed and developing countries. Although the persistence of the traditional North–South narrative must not be underestimated, current trends suggest that interest diversification will further deepen.

Second, the rationale and drive for coalition building will remain intact for the foreseeable future. Coalitions cutting across developing and developed countries have already become more common, as visible in the Durban coalition in 2011 and the Paris high-ambition coalition. Multipolarity will remain a powerful motivation for countries to align in order to shape international climate policy and counterbalance greater powers. At the same time, the growth of common climate interests should further enhance the basis for coalition building among countries.
Third, climate protection will continue to require targeted political action and careful strategic nurturing. While the Paris Agreement has provided an impetus for moving to the new climate economy, important barriers and weighty status-quo interests remain, with significant variance across countries. The key in the political contest over making the momentum toward climate protection unstoppable will likely be the main players with “mixed motivations” (i.e. growing climate interests but also weighty fossil-fuel interests), including the USA, BASIC countries, Central and Eastern Europe and others. In much of the developing world, effective support for transitioning to the new climate economy will also be crucial.

The EU’s policy framework
The EU and its member states have arguably established the most advanced climate policy framework worldwide. Starting with the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol in the early 2000s, they have developed an increasingly tight and comprehensive web of regulations and measures, including the EU emissions trading scheme, the promotion of renewable energy and energy efficiency, CO₂ emission standards for new passenger cars, and others (for a brief overview, see Dupont & Oberthür, 2015b). Overall, a relatively elaborate policy framework spanning the EU, national and subnational levels has emerged in Europe.

EU climate policy has also increasingly become “climate and energy” policy – climate policy objectives have become progressively integrated with energy policy (Dupont, 2016). In 2007, the European Council established three related 20% targets for 2020: for reducing GHG emissions from 1990 levels, for increasing the share of renewable energies and for improving energy efficiency. In October 2014, it agreed a “2030 Climate and Energy Policy Framework” with again three headline targets of, “at least”, a binding 40% emission reduction, a 27% share of renewable energy and a 27% energy efficiency improvement by 2030 (European Council, 2014).

The established policies have driven significant reductions of GHG emissions, but also important structural improvements especially regarding the power sector and the growth of renewable energies. With the EU’s climate policy framework maturing, GHG emissions in the EU have entered a sustained downward trend in the 2000s. The EU’s 2020 targets for renewable energy and energy efficiency are within reach – and its GHG emission reduction target will be significantly exceeded (Figure 2). As mentioned above, climate change mitigation technology in general has seen a dynamic development (EPO/UNEP, 2015).

Despite the progress made, there is still a long way to go towards decarbonization in line with the EU’s objective of reducing GHG emissions by 80–95% by 2050 and, as implied by the Paris Agreement, achieving net zero emissions as soon as possible thereafter. Although the EU’s policy framework contains the major elements, it will need further development to achieve full decarbonization in the relevant key sectors (including power, industry, transport, buildings) and consistently across the Union. Decarbonization will also require further progress in climate policy integration, for example in grid and energy market development. The majority of the technological, economic and societal transformation is still ahead – the global race towards the new climate economy and society is underway, but still in an early phase (Dupont & Oberthür, 2015a).

EU policy development is at a critical moment as the EU designs its concrete climate and energy policies to 2030. By the end of 2016, the European Commission will table a raft of legislative proposals to this end addressing, among other things, the EU emissions trading scheme, the promotion of renewable energy and energy efficiency, energy market design and overarching EU climate and energy governance. This creates the unique opportunity to make a quantum leap in European decarbonization by advancing
climate policy integration in the energy sector and beyond, enabling and fostering low-carbon innovation across key sectors (industry, transport/mobility, power, buildings) including by ensuring stable conditions of support for key technological fields such as renewable energy and energy efficiency. As argued above, the decision taken in the legislative process over the next years will also have a profound impact on the place of the EU in climate geopolitics.

EU politics: ambivalent

Current EU politics provides for a mixed prospect for the decarbonization agenda. It neither categorically excludes further advances of climate policy nor makes such advances an obvious or even inevitable choice. Progress in EU climate policy toward decarbonization remains a strong possibility, especially if building on a robust positive agenda synergizing with other key policy concerns (energy security, economic recovery, innovation, etc.). Eventually, however, it will be up to policymakers in the EU to make that choice.

On the one hand, the advances so far have fostered support for climate (and energy) policy. Economic and societal interest in innovative renewable energy and energy efficiency technologies has been growing and climate policy can now rely on a stable basis of support by local and regional initiatives that have flourished over the years. Also, policymakers and societies at large have learned that effective climate protection is possible and generates important positive side effects. Overall, public support for climate policy has remained remarkably strong in the EU (Eurobarometer, 2015).

On the other hand, important political barriers to effective climate policy remain. Coal and gas have remained prominent energy carriers in many EU member states. Interest in coal has especially persisted in Poland and other central and eastern European member states. Growing right-wing Euro-scepticism that frequently comes hand in hand with climate scepticism has reinforced opposition to effective climate policies. Regarding the promotion of renewable energy, indispensable for the required energy transition, nuclear interests have constituted additional impediments, including in the UK and France. The scope for the EU to address national-level impediments is limited since energy policy is politically seen as crucial by EU member states. Hence, EU policy legally requires unanimity in core areas in accordance with Articles 192.2(c) and 194.2 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and significant divergence of national policies across the EU persists (European Environment Agency [EEA], 2015).

Broader European politics are also undetermined. Climate and energy policy have competed for attention with a crowded list of political crises in Europe (Euro-crisis/Greece, migration, terrorism, European integration) and its external environment (Ebola in Western Africa, Syria, Iraq). Partially fed by these crises, the growing EU identity crisis, as evident from the growth of Euro-scepticism in many member states and the “Brexit” discussions, does not bode well for further integration, including of climate and energy policy. In contrast, energy security and the related Energy Union project support the climate agenda. High dependence on energy imports continues to provide a strong rationale for the promotion of renewable energies and energy efficiency. The escalating conflict with Russia over Ukraine from 2014 has reinforced this rationale.

Synchronizing internal and external EU strategy

An effective future international strategy on climate change requires the EU to have a clear understanding of the evolving international context and internal conditions (and their links). Internationally, the EU is set to remain a medium-sized power in dynamic multipolar climate geopolitics. Given the sustained trend toward decarbonization as bolstered by the 2015 Paris Agreement, the capacity of actors for low-emission solutions
and innovation acquires increasing prominence as a source of competitiveness and political influence. Given its potential in this area, the EU has the opportunity to balance its relative decline in other respects (emissions, GDP) and possibly strengthen its international position by developing its low-emission capacity.

To grasp this opportunity, the EU needs to further develop its domestic climate policies. With an undetermined balance of interests in the new climate economy versus the “fossil” economy, policymakers face a choice in the upcoming discussions on the EU’s climate and energy policy framework for 2030 and beyond. The EU’s domestic policy agenda thus provides them with a unique opportunity: EU policy can orchestrate Europe’s multi-level governance system to further develop climate and energy policies so as to maximize first-mover advantages and foster low-emission innovation in the global competition for opportunities. Advancing this agenda systematically and consistently will enhance the EU’s power base and role in future climate geopolitics – giving way to status quo interests would mean that Europe shoots itself in the foot.

As to the EU’s future international strategy on climate change, the EU’s strategic re-orientation towards coalition building and “leading” after the failed Copenhagen Summit of 2009 is likely to remain valid also for the years to come. This revised strategy paved the way to the EU’s success in Paris and remains valid in a world of continuing but evolving multipolarity. The direction of travel provided by the Paris Agreement may in the future facilitate this task by promoting common climate interests globally. Enhanced capacity of coordinated climate diplomacy across the EU has a continuing role to play in supporting the implementation of this strategy.

Furthermore, the development of climate policy in other fora and at other levels of governance deserves systematic attention, reflecting the polycentric nature of global climate governance. This includes: (1) the targeted fostering of “international cooperative initiatives” involving various public and private actors and possibly of other climate-protection “clubs” (Hermwille et al., 2015); (2) active engagement in other multilateral fora and organizations such as the G7, the G20, ICAO, IMO and others; and (3) active shaping of inter-regional and bilateral relations in a strategic long-term perspective, including a further integration of climate policy objectives in EU development cooperation. A strong initial focus logically falls on the effective implementation of climate plans under the Paris Agreement with key partners. Given the wealth of fora and relations, strategic prioritization of initiatives with the highest potential will be required (including with a view to developing future technologies and markets).

Since climate change has grown to become high politics, the future international climate strategy of the EU and its member states will have an important bearing on Europe’s general standing in world politics. The ongoing process to elaborate an EU Global Strategy by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, due in June 2016, may hence provide an opportunity to create a solid basis for integrating the elements of an international EU climate strategy and engaging in the strategic prioritization required. In this context, it deserves repeating that basing international climate strategy on sound and consistent domestic policy is crucial, requiring close integration between the internal and external policy domains. Apart from that, the dynamics of the relevant economic, technological, social and political developments call for regular re-assessments of domestic and international conditions so as to flexibly adapt the EU’s strategy over the years and decades to come.

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Note
1. For reasons of simplicity, in the following, unless indicated otherwise, I use the term “EU” as referring to the EU and its member states.

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