

POLICY BRIEF

Assessing the European Union's Global Climate Change Leadership: From Copenhagen to the Paris Agreement

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On 12 December 2015, at the climate summit in Paris, 196 countries adopted a landmark climate accord, the Paris Agreement. This contribution examines the role EU leadership played in this outcome. The EU's attempts to realize its self-proclaimed bid for climate change leadership were scrutinized by investigating to what extent the EU is actually recognized as a leader by potential followers and to what extent the EU has succeeded in achieving its negotiation objectives. To address these issues we utilized unique survey data collected at eight UN climate summits from 2008 to 2015 and evaluated the results of the UN climate negotiations particularly with respect to the Union's goal attainment in Copenhagen and Paris.

Based on our survey data we can see that the EU's high self-conception of itself as a climate leader is not matched to the same degree by potential followers. The recognition of the EU declined from a height of 62% at the 2008 Poznan summit to 46% at the 2009 Copenhagen summit. After the disappointment in Copenhagen, EU diplomatic efforts to get a new negotiation mandate were recognized by the other participants and the EU returned as the most recognized leader in Durban 2011 (50%). However, in 2014 at Lima and in 2015 at Paris it was replaced by the US as the most recognized climate leader.

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 and means the EU must adjust its leadership strategies in relation to other powerful actors, such as the US and China.

Six years after the debacle in Copenhagen, in which the EU's leadership strategies 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 in Paris. A number of strategic changes by the EU contributed to this outcome. The EU became more flexible and realistic to how a deal could be designed, agreeing to a hybrid design, which could be supported by the US and China, that had bottom-up, nationally determined reduction pledges combined with a top-down international review of performance.

The EU also played a key part in the adoption of the Paris agreement through its role in creating and building a High Ambition Coalition that pressured the major emitting countries to support an ambitious deal with concrete goals and a dynamic review process. This helped the EU to isolate potential veto actors, such as India, and allowed it to help gather the support needed for the approval of the Paris Agreement.

More broadly our findings suggest 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 show that the EU's positive role perception of itself as a world leader was not shared to the same extent outside of the EU.

A longer version of this policy brief is forthcoming in *Journal of European Integration* 39(2) February 2017.