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Environmental Security Seen from the European Union. The Case of EU Climate Policy as a Preventive Security Policy

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Abstract

Climate change is the inconvenient reality of our days. Neither environmental extremism calling for the return to nature nor environmental scepticism preaching the status quo are viable and constructive attitudes. Rather, most policy-makers have embraced a reticent but cautious position. As a result, a global climate change regime has been forming in the last two decades, the most fervent supporter of which is embodied by the European Union. This paper aims to demonstrate that the EU legitimately qualifies as an environmental leader. Furthermore, it inquires into the operational utility and analytical appropriateness of the emerging environmental security concept. Finally, the paper goes on to identify a policy area which would enable the EU to secure extensive influence in world politics: climate policy as a preventive security policy.

1. Introduction

Climate change denotes a concept of many contrasts. Some view it as the deserved punishment for humans' reckless and inconsiderate behaviour towards the natural environment; some reprobate its existence, denouncing scientific manipulation in the name of pure political and economic interest. Some press for urgent and extreme measures to abate the causes of global warming, and hence of climate change. Some consider global warming as a fate that cannot be diverted from its course, preaching for 'carpe diem' at all costs. Between environmental extremism calling for the return to nature and environmental scepticism preaching the status quo, a realist observer would acknowledge climate change as the inconvenient challenge of our days.

Essentially a multi-cause and multi-effect phenomenon, climate change is severe, transnational, and evolving. This statement has been proven by scientific insight, such as the research of the 2007 Nobel peace prize co-laureate United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, which largely attributes climate change to human activity (in addition to

natural variability). Principally due to inefficient production processes, high levels of consumption, population growth and movement, economic development, urbanization, and environmentally-unfriendly technological use, the negative impacts of anthropogenic environmental degradation on natural and human systems are already visible. Sea level rise threatening life on coasts and islands, glacier and ice cap melting pressuring water availability, extreme weather events like storms, floods, draughts and heatwaves are all signs that climate change is not a mere environmental issue, but one with serious human security implications.

For this reason, an 'environmental security' agenda seems to be emerging in world politics. Insofar as security can be broadly defined as freedom from danger, concerns about the negative impacts of climatic changes on human security have been increasingly acknowledged as legitimate. The polarisation of security considerations around climate change has been allowed by two major factors: the increasing scientific certainty of the causes and potential impacts of anthropogenic global warming on livelihoods, and the widening of security agenda beyond strictly military threats. For its part, the European Union has displayed a firm commitment to climate change mitigation, both by taking the lead in international negotiations for a global climate regime and by implementing a comprehensive domestic policy. Furthermore, it has recently addressed climate change as a 'part of preventive security policy' (Council 2008, 2). By integrating environmental considerations into its foreign policy, is the EU in search of a success formula to gain extensive influence internationally? Is the EU's proclaimed climate leadership a strategic asset aimed at strengthening its role in world politics?

In an attempt to provide answers to these questions, I proceed in two steps. First, I inquire into EU's presumed leadership in global climate governance. This examination is underpinned by three elements: first, I overview the environmental leadership thesis; second, I establish a multi-factor framework of analysis for EU's climate leadership; and third, I evaluate the pertinence of conceptualising the EU as a climate leader. The second step of this study will take into account the theoretical debate over the operational utility and analytical appropriateness of the term environmental security. Finally, I

demonstrate that the integration of climate change into foreign policy is likely to yield extensive influence of the EU in world politics. This statement will be supported by two complementary observations: first, climate change is a policy issue that has travelled from 'low' to 'high' politics, and second, climate change can be accurately comprehended as a preventive security policy adopting an extended conceptualisation of security. It is therefore reasonable to assume that the observance of its climate mitigation commitments and the integration of climate change into its security strategy will provide the EU with invaluable momentum in international affairs.

2. EU's climate change policy: What are its prospects for global environmental leadership?

2.1. A conceptual clarification

Environmental leadership is a multi-faceted concept that has been pinned down by a growing body of literature in International Relations. Authors have attempted to encapsulate the plurality of dimensions within various typologies. Five categories emerge: *structural* leadership, *directional* leadership, *instrumental* leadership, *entrepreneurial* leadership and *intellectual* leadership¹. Arguably, what these dimensions have in common is their relative and positive connotation. Therefore, leadership in climate change exists insofar as an actor's action 'leads into the direction of strengthened climate protection, which is increasingly accepted as a commonly shared objective of humankind' (Oberthür 2007, 78).

Structural (or power-based) leadership 'relies on the ability to deploy threats and promises, affecting the incentives of others to accept one's own terms' (Andresen and Agrawala 2002, 42). Insofar as a structural leader follows its own interest, it 'has to go together with some notion of common interest to qualify as leadership' (idem).

The *directional* leader uses the 'teach by example' strategy. In so doing, this type of leader 'demonstrates through domestic implementation that

¹ The typology I sketch here is inspired from: Young (1994); Underdal (1991) cited in Andresen and Agrawala (2002); Gupta and Ringius (2001) and Oberthür (2007).

a goal is achievable and attempts to shape how negotiators perceive the issues under consideration and think about solutions' (Gupta and Ringius 2001, 282). However, symbolic action cannot be taken as a sign of directional leadership, as 'some sacrifice has to be made to make it credible' (Underdal 1991, cited in Andresen and Agrawala 2002, 42).

An *instrumental* leader seeks to find solutions to common problems and tries to convince the others about the merits of a particular choice (Underdal 1991, idem). The instrumental leader 'uses issue-linkage and coalition-building and puts emphasis on integrative rather than distributive bargaining' (Gupta and Ringius 2001, 282). *Entrepreneurial* leadership can be understood as a variant of instrumental leadership. The entrepreneurial leader employs 'negotiating skills to cast issues in ways that facilitate integrative bargaining and to broker interests so as to build consensus around the choice of a preferred institutional arrangement' (Young 1994, 45; Oberthür 2007, 78).

Intellectual leaders 'provide systems of thought that offer a coherent analytic framework within which to think about the formation of regimes to deal with international problems' (Young 1994, 45). Intellectual leadership is reserved to members of the scientific community, such as the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change or the European Environment Agency. The EU does not qualify as an intellectual leader per se, but its role as an instrumental leader is enhanced by its reliance on scientific expert groups.

2.2. Factors behind the EU's proclaimed environmental leadership

In this section I intend to test the presupposition that 'EU leadership in international climate policy over the past 15 years or so has remained largely unrivalled' (Oberthür 2007, 79). In so doing, I have selected the most relevant variables that indicate to which extent the EU can be labelled 'the world's greenest diplomat': (a) formal policy commitments and responses; (b) key actors (institutions, member states and other participants); (c) multi-level governance; (d) the external context; and (e) rhetoric.

2.2.1. *Formal policy commitments and responses*

The EU accounts for 15% of the world's greenhouse gases (GHG) emissions, which are largely responsible for global warming and implicitly for climatic changes, for a population of only 5% (Commission 2002, 8). In other words, Europeans contribute three times more to the global GHG emissions than the average individual. In discourse and practice, the EU has engaged itself with ambition in the project of tackling climate change, through mitigation and adaptation strategies. Adaptation measures are designed to reduce the natural and human vulnerability to present and potential negative effects of climate change. Mitigation refers to 'technological change and substitution that reduce source inputs and emissions per unit of output' (IPCC 2007a, Appendices, 2 and 20). At the domestic level, EU's attention has been principally drawn to mitigation strategies and to integrating climate change measures into related policies, such as energy and sustainable development. Adaptation-focused initiatives began to be pursued lately, but they are still in their early years. Internationally, the EU has enthusiastically subscribed to the global climate regime, which is regulated by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and its Kyoto Protocol.

The UNFCCC is the first international agreement to address climate change. Adopted in May 1992 and entered into force in March 1994, the Convention achieved 'near universal ratification' (IPCC 2007a, 31): 191 out of the 194 UN members plus the EU². It establishes the basic framework for the climate regime underpinned by a broad ultimate objective to stabilise 'greenhouse gas concentrations in the atmosphere at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system' (Article 2). Designating climate change as 'a common concern of humankind', the Convention establishes the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities that calls upon industrialised countries, by far the largest contributors to the global concentration of GHG, to take action in order to cut their respective share and to assist

² According to the UNFCCC Status of Ratification Report of 22 August 2007, http://unfccc.int/files/essential_background/convention/status_of_ratification/application/pdf/unfccc_conv_rat.pdf.

developing countries in achieving sustainable development (Article 3). Building on the UNFCCC framework, the Kyoto Protocol sets specific obligations for developed countries to limit GHG emissions, and introduces innovative market-based implementation mechanisms (known as the 'flexible' mechanisms). Adopted in 1997 and entered into force on 16 February 2005, the Protocol has been ratified by 181 countries and the EU³. The UNFCCC and the Kyoto Protocol have been ratified both by the European Community⁴ (the first 15 member states) and by all member states individually.

The evolution of the EU climate change policy is divided into two phases: before and after the signing of the 1997 Kyoto Protocol. While the first is marked by 'the construction of a common understanding' (Usui 2005, 14) of the phenomenon of climate change and of how it should be addressed, the second phase sees intensified efforts to curb GHGs through internal legislative acts and programmes. Contrary to the non-binding, informative measures that characterise the first period, EU climate policy begins to gain momentum with the 2001 Bonn and Marrakesh Accords that open the way to the Protocol ratification.

Under the Kyoto Protocol, the EU-15 is bound to reduce emissions by 8% in the first commitment period of 2008–2012 from base year (1990) levels. It has agreed to do so in accordance with the UNFCCC principle of common but differentiated responsibility that takes the form of 'burden-sharing'. The 1998 Burden-Sharing Agreement aimed to share the costs of implementing the Kyoto Protocol among EU-15 member states ('EU bubble'). According to the burden-sharing commitment, there is a common 8% reduction target for EU-15, but each of the members of this group has an individual target as well. In their turn, the new member states have only individual targets and therefore do not participate in the burden-sharing commitment. They are nevertheless

³ According to the Kyoto Protocol Status of Ratification Report of 13 May 2008, http://unfccc.int/files/kyoto_protocol/status_of_ratification/application/pdf/kp_ratification.pdf.

⁴ The environmental policy falls under the shared competence of the European Community and the member states, and not under the competence of the European Union, as it belongs to the first pillar (in the current Treaty architecture). However, for reasons of overall coherence, I will be referring to the 'EU' climate change policy.

obliged to implement EU climate change policies, programmes and measures (Gipperth 2007, 121), which can be rightfully seen as indirect burden-sharing. Cyprus and Malta are the only EU member states with no Kyoto targets.

Between 1990 and 2005, EU-27 per capita emissions were reduced by 11.7 % (mainly in the 1990s and less between 2000 and 2005). With the exception of Cyprus, Malta and Slovenia, the new member states decreased their per capita emissions to a notable extent. Based on the past trend recorded between 1990 and 2005, eight member states of EU-15 are considered on track to meet their burden-sharing target (Sweden, UK, Germany, Finland, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Belgium), and all ten new member states that have a Kyoto target are on track to meet it (EEA 2007, 9). In 2005, the total emissions of the 12 new member states were 28% below 1990 levels. Nevertheless, a potential increase in GHG emissions to a level of 20% below that of 1990 is expected unless additional measures are implemented (*ibidem*, 10). Emissions reductions achieved through a number of instruments, of which existing domestic policies and measures already implemented by EU-15 member states are expected to deliver a reduction of 4% by 2010. The additional domestic policies and measures are likely to bring a 3.9% reduction. Furthermore, the use of Kyoto mechanisms could help to reduce emissions by 2.5%. For its part, the EU Emission Trading Scheme is expected to bring a further reduction of 1-2% (*ibidem*, 6-7).

The EU climate policy has developed within the European Climate Change Programme (ECCP), 'a multi-stakeholder consultative process' designed to 'identify and develop all those elements of a European Climate Change Strategy that are necessary for the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol' (Commission 2000, Annex 2, 8). The EU mitigation strategy is a fine example of policy mix that illustrates the shift from traditional command and control regulation to soft governance modes, incarnated by new environmental policy instruments (NEPI). The NEPI portfolio comprises a diversity of alternative modes of governance, such as market-based instruments (environmental taxes and subsidies, liability and compensatory schemes), voluntary agreements, informational tools (eco-labels, environmental management systems).

However, the increasing preference for these types of soft instruments does not render regulation through legislation obsolete. Rather, elements of regulation form the backbone of several environmental policy tools. The prototype of this hybrid architecture is the EU Emissions Trading System (EU ETS) which, relying on a binding legal foundation, is essentially a market-based initiative, where targeting and competition are the fuel that keeps it in motion (Herodes et al 2007, 10).

For their part, adaptation strategies are aimed at ‘reducing vulnerability of people and infrastructure, providing information on risks for private and public investments and decision-making, and protecting public goods such as habitats, species and culturally important resources’ (IPCC 2007b, 731). They are evaluated as win-win policies, with enduring benefits, such as: robust infrastructure design and long-term investments; increased flexibility of vulnerable managed systems; enhanced natural systems adaptability; reversed trends that increase vulnerability to climate; public awareness and preparedness (EEA 2004, 80).

2.2.2. Key actors

A. Institutional actors

In contrast with domestic climate policy decision-making, where the Community method applies, in multilateral climate negotiations the institutional setup is organised along intergovernmental lines (Groenleer and van Schaik 2007, 971; van Schaik and Egenhofer 2005, 2). Specifically, the EU⁵ is represented by the current six-month rotating Presidency, which negotiates on behalf of the EC and the EU member states (Yamin and Depledge 2004, 43). Together with the incoming Presidency and the Commission (DG Environment), it forms a ‘troika’,

⁵ In discussing the international representation of the EU, it is necessary to make the legal distinction between the European Community (represented by the Commission) and the member states that coordinate their activity as members of the EU (Vogler and Stephan 2007, 394, 6). From 1979 onwards, the Community has been conferred a special and unique status of Regional Economic Integration Organisation (REIO), which allows it to sign and participate in multilateral environmental agreements alongside with the EU member states (Vogler 2005, 839, 15). Within the UN framework, however, the Community enjoys the status of observer – inherently ‘incomplete and ambivalent’ (Bretherton and Vogler 2005, 91), although it has succeeded to negotiate its representation at Earth Summits (Vogler 2005, 845).

which plays an ambassadorial role, representing the EU at meetings not only within the climate regime, but also for bilateral agreements⁶ (Yamin and Depledge 2004, 43).

This specific institutional configuration for the negotiation of the climate regime is different from the setup of multilateral negotiations in other environmental areas. Most multilateral environmental agreements are based on the principle of division of competence between the Commission and the member states. However, for climate change negotiations the EU Council of Ministers has not authorised the Commission to conduct negotiations in the name of the member states (van Schaik and Egenhofer 2005, 2). The common position that the EU stands for in climate negotiations begins to be shaped within the EU Council Working Party on International Environmental Issues - Climate Change (WPIEI-CC)⁷ which is comprised of experts from all member states plus the Commission and receives input from informal Expert Groups whose number and topics are established according to the issues addressed by the regime (Yamin and Depledge 2004, 44). Before any round of international negotiations the common position is established by the Council of Environmental Ministers through formal conclusions⁸ decided by consensus (*idem*). During negotiations the troika meets in daily coordination sessions to agree statements and proposals and to decide on EU's strategies in accordance with other parties' positions, also by consensus (*idem*; van Schaik and Egenhofer 2005, 3).

What implications does this specific architecture have on EU's performance as a global actor? First of all, the complexity of the institutional setup in climate negotiations has often triggered coordination difficulties between the members of the delegation. There

⁶ However, current practice in international negotiations has seen individual member states appointed as spokespersons for the EU in bilaterals (Yamin and Depledge 2004, 43).

⁷ The WPIEI has different configurations according to several policy areas: climate change, biodiversity, biosafety, chemical products and the global section within the UNEP (UN Environment Programme) and UNCSD (UN Commission on Sustainable Development). The WPIEI-CC has been formerly named 'The Ad-hoc Group on Climate Change' (up to the year 2000).

⁸ The WPIEI-CC is in charge of drafting the climate change section of the Council conclusions.

are two levels of negotiation within the EU group: the first is between the member states, headed by the Presidency, who need to agree on a common position before attending negotiations with third parties. Agreeing on a common position has been biased by conflicting interests, spelling an intricate, time-consuming and inflexible style of negotiation (Elgström and Strömvik 2005, 119). More often than not, internal bargaining has yielded a lowest common denominator position, meaning that the EU has been 'a convoy moving at the speed of the slowest vessel' (Vogler 1999, 40, cited in Elgström and Strömvik 2005, 119). Second, negotiations between the EU troika and third parties have not been always smooth. Despite its common position agreed, there have been 'temptations for individual member states to indulge in unofficial bilateral contacts with negotiating partners'⁹ (Vogler 2005, 841). Furthermore, as the bargaining process is extremely dynamic and to a certain extent unpredictable, the EU has to adjust its position quickly according to the positions adopted by other parties, which has impacted upon the sometimes fragile equilibrium of the delegation.

A key factor in the success of international climate negotiations is the Presidency which represents both the Community and the member states. History has shown that small member states are more efficient in reaching consensus with the EU delegation; such was the case with the Swedish and Belgian Presidencies in the 2001 round of negotiations (Lacasta et al 2007, 216). On the contrary, bigger states are inclined to prioritise their own national interests and display an inflexible attitude towards the other member states' interests and positions. This was the case of France in 2000, which not only pushed for its own agenda, but it also 'reluctantly watched the UK unilaterally enter into tentative negotiations with the US' (ibidem, 217). Another impediment for the efficiency of EU's position as a negotiating partner is the system of rotating Presidency. The six-month rotating configuration of the delegation has a negative impact on the internal dimension of EU's position in terms of coherence and stability (Ott and Oberthür 1999; Lacasta et al 2007).

⁹ Such was the case of the British representatives that attempted to use their affinities with the United States to obtain the latter's acceptance to join the climate regime (Vogler 2005, 841; Grubb and Yamin 2001, cited in Lacasta et al 2007, 217).

Last but not least, the domestic climate policy setup is a driving force of the EU's international standing. As agenda-setter, the Commission (DG Environment) has been the engine of the internal development of the climate policy. With the exception of climate change, it is the Commission that leads international negotiations on behalf of the Community and member states in environmental agreements. In climate change, it has an auxiliary role, but being part of the troika, it is able to pursue its proactive agenda and assure the coherence of the climate policy. The European Parliament has also been active in supporting the climate regime. In January 2005, it passed a resolution translating the goal of keeping global warming above 2°C into concrete targets. The EU Council adopted these goals in March 2005. The Parliament's proactive role has been a direct result of the growing representation of green parties in all member states over the last decades.

B. Member states

The national dimension is the key that deciphers not only the heterogeneity of individual positions with the EU, but it also accounts for the latter's overall performance. Analysing the EU position on climate change through a magnifying glass reveals a dissonant image rather than uniform paintwork. The sheer size and composition of the EU obviously translates into a variety of economic settings that are equal to disparities in emissions characteristics and reduction capabilities and costs; a variety of natural characteristics and infrastructure configurations that spells differences in climate impacts, vulnerability and adaptive capacities; and a variety of political interests that bias agreements on a common goal. Furthermore, in terms of external representation, the EU does not stand for an entirely unitary block as several EU member states belong to other groups and coalitions under the UN framework¹⁰. The historical record of EU's performance in international climate negotiations allows for a behavioural typology of its member states: 'lead states', 'support states', 'swing states' and 'veto

¹⁰ To be precise, Cyprus and Malta are non-Annex I parties, whereas the rest of the EU members are all Annex I countries; Cyprus also belong to the Asian Group; furthermore, Annex I group includes the EIT (economies in transition) subgroup that roughly corresponds to the new entrants.

states' (Manners 2000, cited in Lacasta et al 2007, 219). These categories are by no means static: countries have altered their behaviour over time, from veto positions to leadership behaviour. Such was the case of the UK, whose behaviour shifted from convinced Eurosceptic under Major to a lead state under Blair (Lacasta et al 2007, 219).

C. The scientific community

Science forms the backbone of the climate change regime, as it has provided elements of understanding on the phenomenon of global warming, on its causes and impacts. Haas famously conceded that 'Knowledge can speak volumes to power' (2004, 587, cited in Richardson 2006, 20), and the climate change policy is the foremost illustration of how policy is built, political discourse is shaped, consensus is created and divergences are perpetuated in an issue area that relies heavily on scientific insight. More often than not, in the climate change debate truth seems to be in the eye of the beholder. In other words, scientific discourse can become 'a strategic tool for policy-makers, both informing and justifying positions' (Paterson 1996, 154). However, over the last three decades, the science of climate change has gone through tremendous change: explanations of past and current phenomena and predictions of potential impacts are increasingly accurate mainly due to improvements in technological devices that produce data collection, measurements, estimations and scenarios. The international scientific community has therefore reduced uncertainty about global warming considerably; nevertheless, 'grey' areas persist.

The epistemic community that activates in the climate regime has not only an informative role, but also a formative function: by providing scientific explanations and predictions, scientists are able to offer accurate and realistic guidance to decision-makers and facilitate consensus on the most appropriate policy options. However, as science does not emerge in a vacuum, epistemic communities are politically motivated and goal-seeking (Paterson 1996, 136). Against a blue-eyed view that scientists are apolitical and neutral, it is realistic to presume that once they become part of the policy-making process they tend to develop a self-interest in maintaining their power position: 'Since transnational contacts enhance the professional status of participants,

they create strong incentives for continuing and expanding international agreements' (Sand 1990, cited in Paterson 1996, 136).

D. Environmental NGOs and lobby groups

ENGOS have traditionally been supportive of concrete action in the climate change policy, but their real contribution to its development may sometimes be overstated. Although they have been formally acknowledged as interlocutors in policy-making, as they have been accepted as observers in climate negotiating sessions, ENGOS participate in the regime rather through informal channels. ENGOS contribute to the formation of policy issues, generating political pressure and providing technical expertise; they monitor, assess and report on commitment compliance of national governments; they inform other participants and the general public about the regime development. Consequently, ENGO networks qualify as the watchdogs of the climate regime. In a nutshell, their most important contribution resides in their ability to function as middle-ground transmitters of information. On the climate change agenda, this role is bidirectional: (a) from science to politics – ENGOS are able to politicise an issue not previously considered for political action or that received little political attention; and (b) from science/politics to the public – ENGOS serve as translators of scientific insight and political discourse and assist in informing the public. But is their action effective or are they rather barking at the wrong tree? Although ENGO activity has been at times essential for the development of the climate regime and their constant lobbying has kept key issues on the negotiation table, their effectiveness must not be overstated. Due to the relative uncertainty that floats around the climate change debate, governments have shown resilience towards taking concrete action and the powerful opposition of industrial lobbies contribute to a low impact of NGO pro-climate activism.

The sceptical policy networks that activate in the climate regime are dominated by industrial and business lobby groups. It is evident that the mitigation measures designed to limit or abate GHG emissions have direct impacts on their activities. For this reason, industrial lobbies focus their discourse on the scientific uncertainties that characterise the climate change agenda and on the negative effects that mitigation

policies may have on existing economic practices. The positions that characterise industrial lobbies are not uniform, as they vary along a continuum from the most conservative attitudes that seek to preserve the status quo (the 'grey' lobbies) to the more liberal approaches focusing on alternative energy technologies (the 'green' lobbies). The 'grey' groups have benefited from a 'comparative advantage' over other climate regime participants that allowed for their preferences to be better integrated in negotiation outputs. Among the factors that provided the industrial lobbies with a privileged position one author mentions (Newell 2000, 98-100): the ability to apply political pressure in every area where their interests are threatened; the relative dominance of the industry perspective by fossil fuel lobbies; the considerable experience and networking at international level facilitated by their activism in multilateral organisations; the traditional cooperative relationships between fossil fuel lobbies that are able to subscribe easily to and support full-heartedly a common agenda; the channels of access to the highest decision-making levels; the ability to influence political decisions structurally, as 'national governments recognise their structural dependence on the economic health of key sectors' (Levy 1997, cited in Newell 2000, 100); the greater facility to stall the advancement of the climate regime in contrast with seeking an agreement under conditions of conflict of interest; the financial resources that endow lobbies with even more power.

2.2.3. Multi-level governance

The EU is a multi-level system which implies a wide range of actors (public and private, institutional and non-institutional, national and transnational, political, social and economic) interacting on various levels (regional, national and transnational). The interactions and relationships that are established are in a state of flux rather than stable, interest-based rather than constant, issue-focused and sectoral. Another essential feature of the EU is that it provides a unique instance of network governance. A key attribute of networking is informality, defined as 'the operation of networks of individual and collective, public and private actors pursuing common goals [...] through regular though non-codified and not publicly sanctioned exchanges in the institutional context of the European Union' (Christiansen et al. 2003, 7).

Transcending institutional boundaries and formal codes, networks are the glue that links the levels of interaction and assures constant exchanges between participants. Therefore, negotiation is a constant feature of the EU system of governance, which can be pictured as 'multilateral inter-bureaucratic negotiation marathon' (Kohler-Koch 1995, 181).

The multi-level governance configuration of the EU allows for a number of advantages for its Euro-representatives in international climate negotiations: their skills are formed within a culture of bargaining, networking and informality. As one author explains, 'All the skills of coalition-building, of balancing and shifting alliances, of bartering, of persuasion and of manipulation are essential in the postmodern diplomatic garden-party of the EU' (Janning 2005, 822). Furthermore, the multi-level character of EU governance allows for competitive leadership and mutual reinforcement insofar as multiple leaders work to reinforce each other's goals and actions (Schreurs and Tiberghien 2007, 21). The shared competence in the domestic climate policy breeds competitive governance, where actors seek multiple points to exercise their power.

2.2.4. External factors

The external environment has been determinant of EU's actions in the climate regime. Although the external factors that shaped EU's position in multilateral negotiations are numerous, there is one major condition that allowed the EU to take the lead: the reluctant position of the United States that culminated with its withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol in 2001. The reservations of the US with regard to the global climate agreement provided the EU with a 'window of opportunity' for EU leadership (Bang et al 2005a, 5). The exit of the US has prompted the EU to seek further support for the ratification Kyoto agreement, especially from the hesitant 'Gang of Four': Australia, Canada, Japan and Russia.

The declared reasons for the rejection of Kyoto polarized along two lines: concerns that mitigation policies would have a negative economic impact for the largely fossil fuel-based industry and the US requirement that developing countries (G77 and China) should also take

commitments under the Protocol. Therefore, US approaches to climate change rely on research and development policies, dynamic targets (as opposed to Kyoto's absolute targets) and safety valves (an unlimited number of emissions permits are offered by the government when the market price for permits reaches a predetermined level, at the same price) (Bang et al 2005b). The transatlantic climate divide represents a major challenge to the EU leadership ambitions. Insofar as EU's domestic performance on the Kyoto Protocol will have symbolic effects in terms of credibility, its diplomatic effort to bring the US into the climate deal will provide the test case of its actual leadership qualities.

2.2.5. Discourse

The EU has always made use of a strong green rhetoric with respect to climate change action. A recent Commission Communication proposes that the EU should pursue the objective of 30% emissions reduction by developed countries by 2020. Furthermore, it states that the EU should take on a firm independent commitment to achieve at least a 20% reduction of GHG emissions by 2020. (Commission 2007, 2). The Commission is convinced that 'this approach will allow the EU to demonstrate international leadership on climate issues' (idem) and 'will allow the EU to show the way in the international negotiations' (ibidem, 5). Commissioner Dimas, responsible for the environment policy area, also pleads for European leadership in climate talks: 'We have clear political commitments from Europe's leaders to make the fight against climate change a top priority' (Dimas 2007, 3). Rhetoric may prove a valuable diplomatic asset for the EU, but the gap between discourse and reality, however, may turn against EU's noble aspirations, revealing nothing but 'self-congratulatory talk' over its climate leadership (The Economist, March 19 2008).

2.3. The EU's environmental leadership: reality or wishful thinking?

All things considered, is the EU's environmental leadership an accurate description of its role as a global player, or is it rather an empty rhetorical device? The EU can be understood as a *structural* leader due to its economic and political weight in international affairs. Being recognised as an autonomous actor that is able to use incentives – 'carrots and sticks' – to induce compliance, the EU's structurally based

power is translated into perceived influence. The EU can also qualify as a *directional* leader insofar as it is willing to set an example by adopting a clear climate change strategy. The EU's directional leadership is supported by the fact that it employs the most advanced domestic climate policy in the world, in accordance with the international agreement. However, the accomplishment of this role can be adequately assessed against the EU's actual performance in observing its commitments. The EU fits the *instrumental* leadership category as it has successfully employed environmental diplomacy to drive the climate agreement forward. According to an author, 'It was important that the EU took the lead. Otherwise, the fate of the Protocol would have been far more uncertain' (Hovi et al 2003, 19). Two points of doubt overshadow its performance as an instrumental leader: one, its manifest difficulty to forge consensus quickly within its own courtyard due to institutional complexity and interest diversity; and two, its failure to persuade the US, the single greatest emitter, to join the climate club.

The EU has undoubtedly been the keenest supporter of the climate regime and managed to transmit a coherent message about its willingness to transpose its commitments into policy action. Nevertheless, there is a 'capability-expectations gap' (Hill, 1993) that indicates a mismatch between EU's willingness and aspiration as an environmental leader and its actual performance. According to optimistic estimations, the EU is on track to meet its commitments provided it implements existing and additional measures fully and quickly (EEA 2007, 6), but the past trend indicates the contrary. EU aspirations to lead by example constitute a serious incentive to carry on with strict policy implementation and advancement. The EU's delivery or failure will be of symbolic importance for its position in world politics.

The most obvious implication of the EU's environmental leadership on its climate policy is the interdependence of the domestic and international dimensions. Particularly, not only has the internal climate policy developed as a response to the EU's international commitments, but also the international standing of the EU depends to a great extent on its domestic performance. In this respect, climate policy is a hybrid

policy issue, where the classical division of 'high' and 'low' politics no longer operates with precision. Environmental policy is a classical example of 'low' politics, where the competence belongs to the European Community, the Commission being in charge both of the initiation of domestic legislation and of international representation. The climate change policy represents a special case, where internal competences are shared and external representation is intergovernmental, and the domestic performance is causally linked to the external dimension.

3. Environmental security, a contested concept

In its conventional International Relations acceptance, the term 'security' refers to the defence of sovereign states against violent attack. Realist and neorealist assumptions that security studies represent 'cumulative knowledge about the role of military force' (Walt 1991, 222), echoed the militarised and ideologically polarised geopolitics of the Cold War (Buzan 1991), thus facilitating an enduring military-centred perception of danger and aggression. The end of the Cold War brought in a change of the topography of power - from bipolarity to balanced multipolarity (Hyde-Price 2007, 54) - that urged a reconceptualisation of security. Against the background of globalisation, the dawn of the bipolar world saw a conceptual shift in the traditional meaning of security. Although it preserved its fundamental conceptual core - freedom from danger, fear, war and deprivation (Matthew 2002, 7) - non-military threats called for different response strategies and new conceptual instruments.

Building on Buzan's estimation that 'The bottom line of security is survival, but it also reasonably includes a substantial range of concerns about the conditions of existence' (Buzan 1991, 432-33), this paper argues that the expansion of the security agenda towards environmental considerations is a necessary and welcome endeavour. Not only does a broadened security concept account for emerging threats posed by accelerating environmental degradation, but it is also receptive of the current world architecture dominated by turbulent globalisation and fragmentation, the multiplication and strengthening of non-state actors, and the devolution of state power.

Security is indeed an 'essentially contested concept' (Buzan 1991). The emerging environmental security agenda does no service to rendering it more intelligible, but its advantage is that it provides a clear-eyed view of the impact of environmental degradation on human security. An inclusive term (Robins 1996), environmental security stands for the recognition of serious environmental dependencies as emerging security issues. Briefly defined, environmental security 'concerns the maintenance of the local and the planetary biosphere as the essential support system on which all other human enterprises depend' (Buzan 1991, 19-20; Buzan et al 1998, 76).

The ongoing environmental security debate is shaped by two competing arguments: whereas the first one considers that environmental threats should imperatively be treated as security issues within an extended definition of security, the latter doubts that the term 'environmental security' has any relevance at all, since security should stand for intentional aggression only. The opponents of the environmental security thesis argue that environmental problems cannot be viewed as security problems simply because 'Traditionally, the concept of national security, as opposed to national interest or well-being, has centred upon organised violence' (Deudney 1991, cited by Soroos 1994, 320). Fearful of a broad conceptualisation of security, critics have put forth five concerns: (1) the clarity and specificity of the security concept is endangered by too broad a reference that goes beyond military threats; (2) environmental insecurities are highly different from military threats, and thus should be dealt with differently; (3) security as a human value aims to preserve the status quo, in contrast to the question of global change, which implies revolutionary social changes; (4) environmental security measures inherently perpetuate economic and social injustices, between and within states; finally, (5) environmental threats have the vocation to encourage nationalistic sentiments and the state system, and to legitimise undemocratic tendencies, such as secrecy, the centralization of power and even armed attack (Soroos 1994, 319-320 and Lonergan 2000, 72).

The advocates of environmental security depart from the conviction that, 'just because these particular challenges are not being issued and

controlled by a national leader does not mean that they should be ignored. Indeed, the fact that they are beyond such control makes them all more threatening and ominous' (Rowlands, 1991, cited in German Advisory Council on Global Change 2007). The proponents of environmental security make the case for environmental degradation as a plausible cause of environmentally-based political instability (Maltais 2003, 4), in combination with existing social and economic fragility. In other words, environmental considerations go through a process of 'securitisation', meaning that environmental stress is presented as an 'existential threat, requiring emergency measures and justifying actions outside the normal bound of political procedure' (Buzan et al 1998, 23-24). In this respect, the securitisation of environmental issues is a self-referential practice: environmental degradation becomes a security issue not only because it constitutes a considerable threat to human safety, but because it is presented as such (ibidem, 24). Furthermore, securitisation is achieved once the issue at stake is accepted by the public as such.

How exactly can environmental degradation impact upon human security? First, climate change-related phenomena may exacerbate existing environmental crises: drought, water scarcity and soil degradation may lead to intensified conflicts, seriously endangering people's livelihoods and increasing vulnerability to poverty and social deprivation. It may also trigger environmental migration, which, in turn, breeds conflicting situations (Graeger 1996, 110). Second, such phenomena may lead to violent conflict 'over the distribution of resources, especially water and land, over the management of migration, or over compensation payments between the countries mainly responsible for climate change and those countries most affected by its destructive effects' (German Advisory Council on Global Change 2007, 1). Furthermore, new conflict constellations may appear in addition to existing conflict-prone areas (idem). Ice melting, violent storms, floods and other heavy precipitation-related manifestations endanger vast areas, such as low coastal areas and islands. The most probable candidates for 'ecowars' are 'fragile states with poorly performing institutions and systems of government, [where] climate change is also likely to overwhelm local capacities to adapt to changing environmental conditions and will thus reinforce the trend towards general instability

that already exists in many societies and regions' (ibidem, 2). Military non-warfare preparations represent a further potential threat to the environment: nuclear testing, accidents in nuclear-powered submarines or ice-breakers, and radioactive material dumping in the oceans are some of the most common polluting activities related to the military (Graeger 1996, 113).

The principal shortcoming of the counter-arguments is that, opting for a restricted, traditional, state-centric and militarised understanding of security, one is implicitly blind to emerging challenges characteristic of our contemporary world from a security standpoint. The negative impacts of climate change, linked to a wider context of intertwined social vulnerability, economic fragility and political discontent can be addressed properly within a reconceptualised security framework that comprehensively addresses actual and potential factors of human insecurity.

Upon the previous considerations, it seems reasonable to concede that environmental degradation does constitute a serious threat to human security and wellbeing. Insofar as environmental degradation is taken as a complement to various social, economic and political sources of instability such as poverty, inequality and inequity, ethnic and regional tensions, frail state institutions, availability of weapons and resource capture, corruption and organised crime, environmental security stands on a solid argumentation. The conflict-oriented approach to environmental security, however, makes a less convincing case. In fact, there is little empirical evidence that the negative impacts of environmental change alone trigger violent conflict and migration. Again, the evaluation of the likelihood of environmentally-driven conflict and migration should rely on a multidimensional approach that takes into account socio-economic and political settings. However, this type of arguments should not simply dismiss environmental degradation as a notable security risk. Rather, they should foster further integrated inquiry into potential vulnerabilities where environmental conditions are significant for human security.

4. EU climate policy as a preventive security policy

In order to summarise the preceding analysis, three pivotal considerations emerge:

(1) The EU can be rightfully acknowledged as a leading actor in the development of the international climate regime. This conclusion is supported by the preponderantly positive evaluation of a range of variables relevant for its international climate action: first, the EU has ratified all major multilateral climate agreements and employed its specific diplomatic assets to convince other countries to join; second, the EU transposed its international commitments into domestic policies; third, the EU's proactive attitude has been supported by a wide range of actors that operate within its multi-level governance architecture. At the other end of the spectrum, the effectiveness and credibility of the Union's actorness has been hindered by a complex, multi-level, multi-actor and multi-interest institutional setting where internal consensus on a common position is time-consuming and inflexible.

(2) Given its international action in the climate regime, the EU's climate change policy has developed less as a classical 'low' politics issue like the other environmental sectors; rather, climate change belongs to the 'high' politics realm.

(3) Environmental security is increasingly acknowledged as a legitimate policy area. Insofar as environmental degradation produced by climate change is taken as a complement to various social, economic and political sources of instability, it is beyond doubt that it constitutes a serious threat to human security and wellbeing.

Against this background, by integrating environmental considerations into its foreign policy, is the EU in search of a success formula to gain extensive influence internationally?

First, EU climate leadership already qualifies as a foreign policy instrument. The EU's representation in multilateral climate negotiations is intergovernmental, with member states seeking consensus on a common position. Although the EU often appears as a paradoxical actor – due to its

internal complexity and disunity – it has, more often than not, yielded notable advances on the international agreement. As one author notes, ‘It was important that the EU took the lead. Otherwise, the fate of the Protocol would have been far more uncertain’ (Hovi et al 2003, 19). For this reason, the EU’s perceived leadership in climate fora may spillover on EU’s generic presence in world affairs. The proclaimed EU climate leadership must nevertheless not be taken for granted, as it largely depends on its actual performance. While at present it is difficult to assess the effectiveness of its climate policy (the first Kyoto commitment period being 2008-2012), estimations show that the EU should press for further measures in order to meet its Kyoto targets.

Second, while climate leadership is an important element of the EU’s international presence, the latter can by no means be confined to the former. Arguably, it is critically difficult for the EU to impose itself as a global actor with overarching capabilities. Militarily, the EU hardly counts as a credible partner. Politically, it has rarely found a single voice, the most facile example having been provided by the insurmountable divisions in the cases of the Kosovo independence or the Iraq war. Economically, it is an influential player, as it is the world’s largest exporter and second largest importer of merchandise goods, but this status is seriously challenged by emerging economic powers, such as China. As one author notes, ‘The EU has for some time entertained the desire to assume a bigger role as a global actor. Given its limited ‘hard’, military capabilities as well as economic power resources, it is not in a position to realise its global aspirations in all political fields alike. In this context, assuming a leadership position on climate change may be particularly suitable and strategically beneficial’ (Oberthür 2007).

A recent Report from the High Representative and the European Commission estimates that, ‘The EU is in a unique position to respond to the impacts of climate change on international security, given its leading role in development, global climate policy and the wide array of tools and instruments at its disposal. Moreover, the security challenge plays to Europe’s strengths, with its comprehensive approach to conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict reconstruction, and as a key proponent of effective multilateralism’ (Council 2008, 3). Given the

aforementioned considerations, it seems reasonable to argue that the environmental security agenda may provide the EU with an additional issue area to exert influence internationally. Taking advantage of its current 'climate authority', the EU might be holding its next big idea: climate policy as a preventive security strategy.

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