

Does the European Union Lead in the Combat of Climate Change?

Written by anon

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ANON, SEP 4 2012

To what extent, and why, is it accurate to consider the European Union as the world's leading actor in the combat of climate change?

By establishing, to some extent, a leadership role in the international discourse regarding environmentalism, the EU has become globally acknowledged as a prominent actor in the combat of climate change. Although, the extent to which the EU has chosen to fulfil, or indeed been capable of fulfilling, the role of world leader is a contentious issue. Notable issues arise when the chronological development of the EU's leadership role is analysed, as for example how the United States has, in the past, been noted as being quicker than the EU to respond to the problem of climate change (Kramer, 2002). Similarly, since becoming a prominent issue amongst the international community in the 1990s, with the notable inception of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change in June 1992, the EU's role as a 'leading actor in the combat of climate change' appears to have vacillated. This essay will evaluate the extent to which the apparent fluctuations have undermined the EU's leadership, whilst concurrently utilising a historical analysis that seeks to explain them (Brommann, 2009). Accordingly, the essay will seek to assess the types of leadership that the EU has engaged in and the extent to which the types have been successful, using instrumental, directional and structural leadership as the framework (Gupta and Grubb, 2000).

The three types of leadership attributed to the European Union with regards to the combat on climate change are, as developed by Gupta and Grubb, structural, instrumental and directional (2000). Structural leadership implies a reliance on political and economic power to lead. Increased regionalisation and increasing interconnectedness of the European Union allows a stance on climate change to be developed that is more influential than that of individual member states. Naturally, however, unity amongst member states is important for the Union to progress and develop policies effectively. Directional leadership exemplifies leading by example. The EU has developed three key environmental policy norms, the precautionary principle focussing on preventing degradation, a mainstreaming of sustainability, and making the polluter pay. Successful distribution of these policy norms through the EU's role as a directional leader is similarly linked to the aforementioned interconnectedness that has developed. The diversity within a 'large economic market could enable greater innovation in policy and technology than would be possible in either more centralised or in smaller systems' (Gupta and Grubb, 2000, p. 14). Instrumental leadership focuses on the EU's ability to utilise diplomacy and multilateralism to develop progressive structures and coalitions. Despite the universal pooling of some sovereignty by all member states, the lack of a centralised leadership hinders the EU's capacity to exert instrumental leadership.

All three intrinsically linked dimensions of leadership are important for successful leadership. Indeed, the ability of the EU to utilise all three ultimately determine whether it is accurate to consider the European Union as the world's leading actor in the combat of climate change (Brommann, 2009). There is, however, a fourth dimension of leadership that notes the distinction between leaders and pushers, which are entities that engage in actions that are more symbolic than physically consequential (Andresen and Agrawala, 2002). This essay will address the historical extent to which the EU has been able to utilise these element effectively and note whether the actions of the Union can be categorised as the actions of 'leaders' or whether EU policy is primarily based on loose rhetoric, which would render it as a 'pusher'.

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Although initially following in the footsteps of the United States, with the introduction of the Clean Air act in 1970 and the centralisation of environmental policy under the Nixon administration, the EU began to perceive itself as a leader in the combat of climate change in the 1990s (Kramer, 2002). In 1990, the European Council noted that the responsibility of the Union was to utilise their capacity to provide leadership in the combating of global environmental problems. With the Japanese and United States, two of the world's major polluters, displaying a reluctance to assume a leadership role within the aforementioned UNFCCC, the opportunity for the EU to take a leading role became apparent (Andresen and Agrawala, 2002). Noting the environmental discourse in the US, the EU established a paradigm in the early 1990s based on burden sharing. With that, the Union was engaged in achieving 1990-levels of emissions by the year 2000. This formed the basis of attempted 'directional leadership' by the EU at the 1992 'Earth Summit' in Rio de Janeiro. The EU asserted at the summit that binding commitments should be established; there was, however, large opposition from the US. The EU attempted to utilise instrumental leadership, pursuing diplomacy to achieve its desired goals, but the United States resisted. Consequently, although there were calls for developed states to develop increasingly environmentally conscious policies, nothing legally binding was achieved (Jordan and Voisey, 1998).

This apparent inability of the EU to effectively utilise directional leadership following the 'Earth Summit' was due to it being undermined by an inability to utilise the other two dimensions. By not achieving a concrete consensus amongst member states before the conference, with regards to policy development on climate change, instrumental leadership was lacking (Yamin, 2000). The deal was ultimately undermined when the UK pursued environmental policies bilaterally and began policy development in line with policies outlined by the United States (Cohen and Murphy, 2001). Arguably, without all three elements of Gupta and Grubb's leadership model efficiently utilised, it would not be accurate to assert that the EU was a leader in combating climate change during the early 1990s. Despite this, the EU did begin to establish itself as an actor who had engaged in climate change discourse. Indeed, the policies and targets that the EU wanted, as included in the UNFCCC, shows that although the Union did not develop a leadership role or note the aforementioned differentiation between 'leadership' and 'pusher', the rhetoric used allowed it to fulfil a 'pusher' role (Brommann, 2009).

The absence of a universal consensus amongst member states at the Rio summit highlights the EU's inability to maintain a successful leadership role. The COP 2 Geneva conference in 1996 was the first example of the EU engaging actively in addressing environmental concerns, having finally established a common voice. Furthermore, despite assuming an initially proactive role in the conference, US had limited engagement. This allowed the EU to assume a leadership role. The Union initially proposed a 15% flat rate reduction of green house gas emissions by all industrialised states. Following discussions and by committing itself to an 8% reduction, the EU exemplified directional leadership by leading through example (Yamin, 2000). Despite the directional leadership that the EU utilised in the initial proposals and the self imposed reduction, when the Protocol was developed, a large proportion of the policies was attributed to US involvement, as the EU failed at instrumental leadership (Yamin, 2000). The lacking instrumental leadership and inability to succeed in influencing the United States is primarily due to a lack of internal agreement. The 1996 COP 2 ultimately showed that although the EU displayed examples of directional leadership and potential ideology distribution, internal disputes undermined the ability to engage in effective instrumental leadership, conceding its overall leadership role. Indeed, the Protocol reflected a statement presented by US State Department's Under Secretary for Global Affairs, Timothy Wirth, as the US had, conversely, been the one to witness the development of legally binding midterm targets and flexibility in favour of harmonised policies (Vogler and Bretherton, 2006). This is further evidence that the inability to develop effective instrumental leadership has undermined the EU's role as a leader in the combating of climate change.

Chronologically, the COP 3 Kyoto Protocol of 1997 was the result of the next notable international conference on combating climate change. The Protocol established defined targets for greenhouse gas emissions between 2008 and 2012. 'The EU and many other European countries took the biggest cut at -8%, with a -7% commitment for the USA, and a -6% commitment for Japan, Canada, Poland and Hungary' (Gupta and Grubb, 2000, p. 7). Some of the states engaged in the conference believed the EU was acting in a hypocritical fashion that prevented effective instrumental and structural leadership. For example, the EU established an emissions cut that was notably lower than the initial -15% that it had proposed 6 months earlier. Similarly, the EU opposed the high emissions allowances that some states secured, such as Ukraine and Russia, while, at the same time, benefitting from 'wind-fall gains that have

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brought down its emissions, and the EU opposed target differentiation for all but EU countries' (Gupta and Ringius, 2001, p. 288). Despite this, however, the EU is acknowledged to have pressured, albeit with evident concessions, the US to go beyond stabilisation. Accordingly, the ambitious level of greenhouse gas cuts that were adopted by the Protocol can be attributed to the directional leadership of the EU, with the proposed -15% cuts at the COP 2 summit, and its instrumental leadership in getting previously reluctant states to engage in the Protocol (Gupta and Ringius, 2001). Although the concessions indicate, to some extent, that the EU is a pusher, successfully advocating the concept of enforced reductions has allowed the Union claim to have effectively used directional leadership.

Towards the late 1990s, the EU focussed, to an extent, on developing uniform policies that allowed it to engage in directional leadership and, as a result of the unification, have an increased ability to utilise structural and instrumental leadership. One notable example was the agreement with European Car manufacturers to collectively limit the emissions of new cars in 1998 (Brommann, 2009). In 2000, the EU developed the European Climate Change Programme. It was established to identify and address the elements of the Kyoto Protocol in Europe. At the 2001 COP 6, the EU used this established level of unity to stand up to the United States. The UK, as had happened at the Earth Summit, attempted to pursue bilateral deals with the United States, but the EU denied the negotiations and COP 6 ultimately broke down. The establishment of the ECCP and standing up to the United States allowed the EU to increase its ability to utilise directional leadership.

The breakdown of COP 6, combined with increasing scepticism by the US, led to the US withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol in 2001 under the Bush administration (Gupta and Grubb, 2000). Following the withdrawal, there was a real risk of the process being undermined. It has been asserted that this is a pivotal point for EU leadership, in that it had ultimately enabled the Protocol to survive (Brommann, 2009). Following the US withdrawal, the EU engaged in diplomatic missions, securing support from a wider range of states. During this period of diplomacy and instrumental leadership, concessions were made. This is a clear example of the EU utilising both instrumental and structural power.

In 2001's COP 7 in Morocco, a filtered down version of the original was developed. Whilst maintaining an engagement in structural and instrumental leadership, the EU concurrently focussed on implementing the Protocol internally, developing policies that can be perceived as exhibiting directional leadership (Hovi et al, 2003). The period immediately following the US withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol witnessed an increase in the EU's role as the world's leading actor in the combat of climate change. The EU's instrumental and structural leadership culminated in the successful Protocol ratification by Russia in 2004, which allowed the protocol to enter into force in 2005 (Brommann, 2009). The EU's ability to utilise directional leadership also increased during this period. The most notable development was the establishment of the Emissions Trading System in 2005, which countered claims that the EU's policy was entirely based in rhetoric.

Having established itself as a leader in the period leading up to the Kyoto Protocol entering into force, the EU continued to have expectations of maintaining the role (Vogler and Bretherton, 2006). Indeed, the EU continued to pursue leadership through instrumental means. At 2006's Kenyan COP 12, the EU attempted to introduce policy that required the temperature raising no more than 2 ° C during the period of the Protocol. The EU met strong opposition from rapidly industrialising states, most specifically China, and its leadership was, consequently, undermined. This exemplifies the importance of the EU's instrumental leadership in achieving their goals, whilst it also shows how the absence of it can undermine the leadership entirely.

The COP 13 in Bali in 2007 was more successful in cementing the EU as a world leader in the combating of climate change. Notably, the US engaged in the conference that enabled the EU to utilise their instrumental leadership in developing channels for discourse and negotiations. Also in 2007, the EU was able to further develop their directional leadership by committing to a 20% reduction target by 2020 and 30% if developing states would adopt relative reductions. Combining this development of the targets with the aforementioned ETS in 2005, the EU was able to increase their directional leadership and, indeed, increase its credibility. However, following this, the economic crash of 2008 and the lack of political leadership created a 'tug of war' over the EU climate and Energy package (Parker and Karlssen, 2010). Therefore, in spite of the developments of the targets that had provided a foundation for directional leadership, these developments were undermined to an extent.

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Since the Kyoto Protocol came into effect in 2008, the EU has maintained a strong focus on directional leadership. Having officially outlined in 2008 their commitment to reducing green house gases, emissions in 2009 were more than 17% below the 1990 level (Oberthur, 2011). As mentioned above, the EU is committing to establishing plans for the future. 'The Union has called for the EU and other developed countries to enter into a new international agreement requiring collective emission cuts of at least 30 per cent below the 1990 level by 2020. According to the EU, the developed countries should aim for cuts of 60 to 80 per cent by 2050' (Parker and Karlsson, 2010, p. 933). This clearly indicates the importance that the EU has placed on utilising directional leadership as a key proponent of maintaining their position as the world's leader in the combating of climate change. Similarly, developing internal structures and negotiating commitments has also served to increase the EU's structural and instrumental leadership.

In conclusion, the extent to which the EU can be accurately labelled as the world leader in combating climate change has increased, despite elements still appearing relatively fragile. Realistically, the absence of the US as the world leader in the combating of climate change has allowed the EU to fill the position. The EU's most successful dimension of leadership has been established in the realm of directional leadership. The directional leadership was particularly notable following the ratification of the Kyoto Protocol with the establishment of the ETS in 2005. The instrumental and structural leadership roles have been limited, and, instrumentally, the EU has struggled most with getting developing or rapidly industrialising states to adhere to climate change measures. In addition, the EU's ability to utilise structural leadership has often been undermined by the disagreements between member states. This problem will become worse in the economic crisis, where states will want to develop protectionist policies.

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Sustainable Role for Europe? (Kluwer Academic Publishers)

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Date written: 02/2012

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