

EUROPEAN CLIMATE DIPLOMACY

141

BUILDING CAPACITY FOR EXTERNAL ACTION

Diarmuid Torney

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Diarmuid Torney
Visiting researcher / TAPIR Transatlantic Postdoctoral Fellow
The Finnish Institute of International Affairs

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- Climate change policy-making has traditionally been the remit of environment ministries, but foreign ministries can play a valuable role in climate diplomacy by signalling high-level political commitment, contributing a better understanding of the interests and domestic drivers of climate policy in partner countries, and adding a more significant strategic dimension to climate diplomacy.
- The creation of the European External Action Service (EEAS) in 2010 provided the European Union with an opportunity to build a European diplomacy that could place greater emphasis on climate change and other contemporary global issues.
- In its current form, however, the EEAS has limited capacity for climate diplomacy, and the external capacity of the European Commission's Directorate-General for Climate Action is similarly constrained. The current division of responsibilities between the EEAS and the Commission is a delicate compromise that is unlikely to be reopened in the short term, and both institutions face tight budgetary constraints.
- Against this backdrop, EU climate diplomacy could be strengthened by mainstreaming climate change within the work of the EEAS, and strengthening cohesion between the EEAS and the Commission. This could be aided by greater strategic guidance for climate diplomacy from the Foreign Affairs Council and the European Council.

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Introduction

The EU has long played an important role in international climate governance, but changing relations of global power and governance are leading some to question the continued centrality of the EU in this area. For some, these changes were crystallized in the European experience at the Copenhagen climate change summit in 2009. The shifting sands of contemporary climate politics make it all the more important for the EU to make the most of its diplomatic resources and capacities.

The entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty provided an opportunity to refashion some of the instruments of EU external relations, including with respect to climate change and related global issues. Lisbon created the post of High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy as well as the European External Action Service (EEAS). At the same time, a new Directorate-General for Climate Action (DG CLIMA) was created in February 2010 within the European Commission. These new bodies could provide an opening for strengthening the effectiveness of EU external engagement on climate change and related issues such as resource security. However, while the EEAS and DG CLIMA have grown in stature since their creation, much remains to be done.

The broader question concerns the involvement of foreign ministries in climate change as well as other sectoral areas that are often seen as growing areas of diplomacy and global politics. Foreign ministries can play an important role by integrating climate change into the broader framework of external relations and building a deeper understanding of partner countries' preferences and domestic politics.

This briefing paper elaborates on the contribution foreign ministries can make to climate diplomacy in this process and traces the evolution of the EU's capacity for climate diplomacy. In order to continue shaping global climate governance, European leaders and policy-makers need to invest more in climate diplomacy. This briefing paper identifies pathways for doing so, particularly through strengthening the role of the EEAS.

The European contribution to global climate governance

European activism has had a lasting impact on the rules and institutions of the global climate regime. Indeed, without such European activism, it is questionable whether the two current international climate treaties, the 1992 United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, would have come about at all. While the European experience at the Copenhagen climate summit in 2009 led many to question the EU's role in contemporary global climate governance, the Durban conference two years later saw the EU play a more active role, and was central to launching the "Durban Platform", the current negotiating mandate aimed at reaching a global climate agreement by 2015.

The Durban Platform negotiations aim at agreeing on "a protocol, another legal instrument or an agreed outcome with legal force under the Convention applicable to all Parties". In these negotiations, the EU is pushing for an ambitious global target as well as commensurate action at the national level consistent with current scientific assessments of what measures are required to avoid dangerous climate change. In terms of legal architecture, the EU preference is for a robust, legally-binding agreement with strong monitoring and compliance mechanisms.

However, the onset of the eurozone crisis has led to a dilution of political commitment for action on climate change over recent years among some member states. The arguments of those who regard climate action as an expensive luxury were strengthened further by an increasing divergence of energy prices between the EU and the United States, driven by the US "shale gas revolution". A small number of member states, among the most prominent of which is Poland, have been particularly vocal in their opposition to strengthening European climate action in the period up to and beyond 2020.

The landscape of global climate governance has also changed significantly over recent years. The EU accounts for a smaller share of global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions today than it did in 1990. GHG emissions in emerging economies are rising rapidly, particularly in China, which overtook the United States to become the world's largest aggregate emitter in 2006 and, by 2012, accounted for 28.6 per

cent of global emissions.¹ These changes in emissions profiles are a reflection of broader shifts in global economics and geopolitics, which have seen shifts in power from West to East. Also changed are patterns of national climate governance and policy. All major economies have introduced significant climate change measures over the past 5 years, and Europe can no longer claim to be acting alone on climate change.

Notwithstanding these changed circumstances, the EU still has an important role to play in shaping global climate governance. However, in order to do so the EU needs to strengthen its capacity to reach out to key partner countries with a view to gaining a better understanding of the interests and domestic political economy of climate and energy in those countries. Doing so will give the EU better opportunities to influence the domestic conditions of climate action beyond its borders. Moreover, the EU needs to learn to do more with less, and to make the most of its diplomatic resources and capacities. In this regard, the recently established EEAS offers the potential to enhance European capacity for climate diplomacy, working closely with the Commission and member states.

Climate change and foreign policy

Responsibility for climate change policy and governance resides, in most national administrations, with environment ministries or their equivalent. The increasingly complex nature of climate policy places a high premium on detailed, technical expertise, and environmental ministries have built up significant levels of expertise and skill. Foreign ministries, by contrast, often play a relatively small role in the formulation of international climate strategies, though there are some exceptions to this generalization. For example, the UK has invested heavily in climate diplomacy, with many of its embassies around the world staffed with teams of “climate diplomats”. The UK Foreign Secretary recently appointed Sir David King as Special Envoy for Climate Change, a post previously held by Ambassador John Ashton.

In the case of the United States, Todd Stern, the US Special Envoy for Climate Change, is based at the State Department, with a significant proportion of US delegations to the UN climate change negotiations coming from the State Department. US Secretaries of State John Kerry and Hilary Clinton have also elevated the status of climate change in US relations with key partner countries such as China and India.

Yet, in many cases foreign ministries as well as other “core” ministries such as chancelleries and finance and economics ministries are not central to either domestic climate policy-making or international climate change negotiations, but often wield more power in national administrations than their environment ministry counterparts.

Although energy and natural resource concerns have long featured on foreign ministries’ agendas, they have traditionally been cast in terms of the need to secure access to scarce resources. Such approaches will not suffice in the face of climate insecurity, and new foreign policy frames are required that incorporate the need to limit access to environmentally destructive resources such as fossil fuels. While foreign ministries have a limited role to play with respect to domestic climate policy, they can play an important role with respect to the international dimension of a country’s climate policies. Involving foreign ministries in a country’s international climate diplomacy is important for three principal reasons.

First, it strengthens political commitment and engagement. The “mainstreaming” of climate policy concerns beyond the remit of the environment ministry serves to raise its profile across government. The active engagement of foreign ministries in particular, including buy-in from senior diplomats, signals that climate change has moved towards the centre of a government’s agenda. One way of signalling such commitment is by appointing an ambassador or special envoy for climate change in the foreign ministry.

Second, the active involvement of foreign ministries deepens understanding of the interests and underlying domestic politics of climate change in other countries. Foreign ministries, through their extensive networks of diplomats abroad, have far greater numbers of personnel “on the ground” in third

1 Olivier, Jos G.J., Greet Janssens-Maenhout, and Jeroen A.H.W. Peters. 2012. *Long-Term Trend in Global CO₂ Emissions: 2012 Report*. The Hague: PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency & EU Joint Research Centre.

countries than other ministries, and thus have the capacity to deliver ongoing and sustained climate diplomacy. Importantly, this includes reaching out to an extended range of stakeholders in third countries beyond environment ministry counterparts, including other government ministries but also non-governmental actors such as businesses and civil society groups.

Information gained from such engagement can be fed back into national policy-making in order to shape narratives of climate action towards resonance with interests of influential stakeholders in partner countries. By doing so, foreign ministry diplomats can help their environment ministry counterparts to influence the political conditions for climate action in third countries. Gathering information and intelligence on these processes can lead to more effective practical cooperation by, for example, identifying stakeholders in other countries most open to cooperation on climate change.

Third and related, foreign ministries help to place a country's climate diplomacy in broader strategic terms, going beyond a specialized, technocratic understanding of the issues. By building a broader picture of the strategic landscape, foreign ministries can contribute to more effective negotiation strategies by better understanding the room for manoeuvre and also the red lines of negotiating partners. This can help to identify political trade-offs and to strike political bargains by joining the dots between climate and other aspects of a country's foreign relations. Involving seasoned diplomats in international negotiations can also help to generate better negotiating strategies.

In the case of the EU, many of the roles foreign ministries can play in climate diplomacy are likely to increase in importance over time. As Europe's position in the world declines in relative—if not absolute—terms, its ability to influence the world outside its borders declines, too. This calls for smarter, more targeted diplomacy and better use of human and financial resources. Although in principle staff in environment ministries can undertake some climate diplomacy tasks, in practice they often do not have sufficient staff “on the ground” abroad to be able to perform these tasks. This is where foreign ministries can add real value.

Development of EU capacity for climate diplomacy

For much of the period since climate change emerged as a global issue in the late 1980s, EU climate diplomacy has focused primarily on the UN climate negotiations. The EU's role—as distinct from that of individual member states—was limited in the early years of the UN negotiations. For example, during the final negotiations on the UNFCCC in New York in April–May 1992, there was little unity among EU member states, and the UK played a key role in achieving compromise in the negotiations with the United States. As time passed, EU involvement in the UN negotiations became more unified, but this often came at the expense of flexibility. The EU was frequently accused of a “bunker mentality” at the international negotiations—spending too much time during international negotiating sessions consulting internally, particularly during the final Kyoto Protocol negotiations in 1997.

As climate change climbed up the European policy agenda over the course of the 2000s, the EU began to develop more extensive capabilities for climate and environmental diplomacy. A “Green Diplomacy Network” was created in 2002, aimed at integrating environmental priorities into EU external relations and bringing together the environmental diplomacy of member states and the Commission. In 2004, the EU significantly streamlined its participation in the UN climate negotiations by instituting a system of “lead negotiators” supported by “issue leaders” for the climate negotiations. Drawn from the Commission and member states, these officials hold those positions for periods longer than the six-month EU Presidency term, which has led to greater continuity and expertise in the EU's negotiating capacity at official level.

Recent years have seen significant institutional innovation within the EU. The Lisbon Treaty created a High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy who is also a Vice President of the Commission (HR/VP) and the European External Action Service (EEAS), while in February 2010 the European Commission created a dedicated Directorate-General (DG) for Climate Action, as well as a new DG for Energy. However, the creation of these new bodies did not substantially alter the status quo with respect to EU representation in UN climate negotiations. The rotating Presidency and the Commission represent the EU, speaking behind

a “European Union” nameplate, and the previous practice of lead negotiators and issue leaders has continued. The EEAS plays no significant role at the UN negotiations. At the political level, Climate Commissioner Connie Hedegaard has assumed a prominent role representing the EU at UNFCCC Conferences of the Parties (COPs), most notably at COP-17 in Durban in 2011.

Outside of the UN climate negotiations, these institutional innovations have had a limited impact on EU climate diplomacy. Although the creation of DG CLIMA increased Brussels-based staff working on climate change, it remains small compared with many other DGs and has limited staff working on relations with key partner countries. The EEAS also has limited resources for climate diplomacy. In fact, the Commission relocated staff dealing with international dimensions of sectoral policy areas from the old DG RELEX to the relevant sectoral DGs in the period leading up to the creation of the EEAS, in an attempt to retain policy expertise. This left the EEAS facing an uphill battle to establish expertise in horizontal policy areas. Indeed, a cursory glance at the organisational chart of the EEAS gives the impression that it was modelled very much along the lines of a classic foreign ministry, with a heavy emphasis on geographical rather than issue-based diplomacy.

With respect to “on the ground” representation of the EU in third countries, EU Delegations—run by the EEAS—have assumed both representational and coordination roles among EU and member state missions abroad. However, for the most part these Delegations have very limited climate diplomacy capabilities. DG CLIMA (in conjunction with DG Environment) has dedicated staff in just two EU Delegations abroad: Beijing and Washington. In EU Delegations that lack dedicated climate staff, the issue is often dealt with by staff in the political, trade, or development sections.

Capacity is further limited by a lack of financial resources at the disposal of the EEAS and DG CLIMA, with both significantly dependent on funds from DG Development and Cooperation (DEVCO). In this context, Commissioner Hedegaard’s achievement of a commitment to earmark 20 per cent of the Commission’s development funding for climate activities in the 2014–2020 period is significant.

In some respects, the relatively limited impact of recent institutional innovations on EU climate diplomacy is hardly surprising. The role of the Commission in representing the EU at the international level in “shared competence” areas has long been a bone of contention across a variety of issue areas, with the Council loath to grant a negotiating mandate to the Commission in areas outside of its strict legal remit.

In the climate sphere, the Commission requested a negotiating mandate from the Council in 1996, but this was flatly rejected. Against this background, the high-profile role played by Commissioner Hedegaard in recent COPs was somewhat surprising, though this may owe more to her particular expertise and skill than to any broader political reconfiguration between the Council and the Commission. The role of the emergent EEAS has also been constrained by political tensions, with the new body facing resistance from both the Commission and the Parliament, as well as some member states. Interestingly, however, member states have generally encouraged the EEAS to play a more active role in climate diplomacy, though the Commission has been wary of such a move.

Building momentum for EU climate diplomacy towards 2015

Despite these tensions and the limited resources of the EEAS and DG CLIMA for climate diplomacy, there have been a number of promising developments over the past two years. First, the Green Diplomacy Network (GDN) has been re-launched. Previously under the direction of the rotating Presidency, the GDN is now coordinated by the EEAS in Brussels and involves participation by relevant Commission DGs including CLIMA, Environment, and DEVCO, as well as representatives from member state governments. In third countries, Heads of EU Delegations were asked to nominate a focal point for local GDNs, though the effectiveness of these on-the-ground networks presumably varies depending on the level of engagement of individual officers in third countries.

Second, the Foreign Affairs Council—chaired by HR/VP Ashton since Lisbon—has twice over the past two years held discussions on climate diplomacy. In response to a request from a number of member

states that the EEAS devote more attention to climate change, the EEAS and DG CLIMA prepared a joint paper in July 2011 identifying opportunities for stepping up EU climate diplomacy, which was endorsed by EU foreign ministers.² This was followed by a second DG CLIMA/EEAS climate diplomacy paper in June 2013 which focused more explicitly on the path to the 2015 climate summit in Paris.³ The paper tasked the EEAS and Commission, in collaboration with member states, with developing a “climate diplomacy toolbox”.

Collectively, these two papers as well as the related Foreign Affairs Council conclusions indicate a growing appetite among European foreign ministers for incorporating climate change more solidly into EU external relations, and providing high-level political support to the involvement of foreign ministries in climate diplomacy. Nonetheless, they are conspicuously quiet on the specific involvement of the EEAS in EU climate diplomacy.

Mainstreaming climate diplomacy in the work of the EEAS

Any proposals for enhancing the role of the EEAS in EU climate diplomacy must take into account prevailing constraints. First, the EEAS is operating under significant financial constraints, with restrictions placed on foreign travel by EEAS personnel. Similarly, in the case of DG CLIMA, the position of climate and energy counsellor at the EU Delegation in New Delhi was not renewed due to funding constraints. Against this background, suggestions that an extensive new team of climate diplomats should be hired will not fly. However, there is a need to make better use of existing resources, to do more

with less, and to build more effective EU capacity for climate diplomacy.

Second, the hard-fought institutional bargain among the EU institutions and member states concerning the role of the EEAS is unlikely to be unpicked any time soon. Although the working relationship between the EEAS and DG CLIMA is generally positive, any working proposal must recognize that the current division of competences will not change in the short term at least. HR/VP Ashton’s mid-term review of the EEAS, published in July 2013, while calling for greater EEAS capacity to deal with global issues, was careful not to explicitly call into question the lead role of the Commission on such sectoral policy areas.⁴

There is nonetheless significant scope for the role of the EEAS to step up its climate diplomacy activities while respecting the primary responsibility of the Commission within the EU institutions for climate change. Since DG CLIMA does not have additional resources to build a network of climate officers across key EU Delegations, and because the EEAS also does not have additional resources at its disposal, climate change and related global issues need to become a more central part of the work of existing EEAS diplomats. This could support the elaboration of a “Comprehensive Approach” to conflict prevention, crisis management and stabilization which has been put forward by HR/VP Ashton, and which is to be developed in a forthcoming joint communication by the EEAS and the Commission.

By doing so, EU Delegations could bring significant added value by helping to build better understandings of the interests and domestic politics of climate and related issues in key third countries. In the process, the EEAS could contribute a strategic understanding of the EU’s climate relations with key third countries. In order for this to happen, greater buy-in for climate diplomacy and related global issues is needed at both political and senior management level in the EEAS, as well as at head of delegation level in EU Delegations abroad.

2 EEAS and European Commission. 2011. Joint Reflection Paper “Towards a Renewed and Strengthened EU Climate Diplomacy”. Brussels: European External Action Service and European Commission, available at: http://eeas.europa.eu/environment/docs/2011_joint_paper_euclimate_diplomacy_en.pdf.

3 EEAS and European Commission. 2013. “EU Climate Diplomacy for 2015 and Beyond: Reflection Paper”. Brussels: European External Action Service and European Commission, available at http://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/international/negotiations/docs/eeas_26062013_en.pdf.

4 EEAS. 2013. EEAS Review. Brussels: European External Action Service, p. 8, available at: http://eeas.europa.eu/library/publications/2013/3/2013_eeas_review_en.pdf.

The appointment of a climate ambassador or special envoy would not be appropriate in the case of the EEAS, since this would encroach on, and most likely duplicate, the role of the Climate Commissioner. However, other ways could be found to signal high-level political buy-in. A declaration recognizing climate change as a priority in the work of the EEAS by the High Representative or the Corporate Board of the EEAS could serve this purpose. Climate diplomacy could also be written into the mandates of all EU heads of mission. Such high-level signaling would also aid the on-the-ground coordinating role of EU Delegations, by helping to give priority to climate and related issues in the day-to-day work of EU Delegations. None of this need encroach on the role of DG CLIMA, which would retain responsibility for EU institutional involvement in the UN climate negotiations and related high-level forums such as the Major Economies Forum and the Cartagena Dialogue.

Such processes would be further significantly enhanced by political guidance and endorsement from both the Foreign Affairs Council and the European Council. The Foreign Affairs Council conclusions on climate diplomacy in 2011 and 2013 are a welcome start, as is the commitment to review EU climate diplomacy on an annual basis in the future. However, the Foreign Affairs Council could give more explicit endorsement to the role of the EEAS in particular. The European Council could also play an enabling role by providing greater strategic guidance to EU climate diplomacy, and by endorsing a greater role for the EEAS. Indeed, while the European Council regularly discussed climate change policy during the second half of the 2000s, since 2010 climate change has featured significantly less in the discussions of EU heads of state and government, largely as a result of their preoccupation with the eurozone crisis.

Climate diplomacy is not just a question of institutions and resources, but also of political priorities at political and senior management level. The challenge is to move climate change from the realm of technical discussions to the centre of EU external relations. In this respect, the creation of the EEAS represents a missed opportunity. By taking steps to signal new high-level commitment to climate diplomacy, the EEAS has the potential to make a valuable contribution to European and global efforts to avoid dangerous climate change.

The Finnish Institute of International Affairs
tel. +358 9 432 7000
fax. +358 9 432 7799
www.fiia.fi

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