

Towards a ‘transatlantic Green Deal’? How the EU can re-engage the United States on climate change

Simon Schunz

Executive Summary

- > Following the election of Joe Biden as US President on a strong climate and ‘clean energy’ platform, 2021 opens a window of opportunity to make progress towards a successful implementation of the Paris Agreement.
- > The European Union needs to seize this opportunity to re-connect with the US by supporting the Biden Administration in its aspirations of adopting ambitious policies domestically and of co-leading the global fight against climate change.
- > Practically, the EU can re-engage the US through a multi-layered outreach aimed at a dialogue and best-practices exchange centred around the European Green Deal and Biden’s clean energy plan. Even if the differences between the two plans make a ‘transatlantic Green Deal’ currently not realistic, they allow for solid grounds to re-dynamise EU-US cooperation. Capitalising on this bilateral re-engagement, the EU should also deploy its global network of partnerships to facilitate the US re-integration into the global climate regime.
- > To enhance the effectiveness of its climate outreach vis-à-vis the US, the EU must bolster its credibility through a successful implementation of its Green Deal and double down on its capacities for transatlantic climate diplomacy, notably by investing into public diplomacy aimed at fostering cross-Atlantic debates on the carbon-neutral societies of the future.

The election of Joe Biden as 46th President of the United States (US) opens a window of opportunity for renewed transatlantic engagement, notably on the urgent global matter of climate change. In her remarks on the US election

results, European Commission President von der Leyen immediately extended a hand to the new Administration, indicating that the “Commission stands ready to intensify cooperation ... to address pressing challenges ... notably ... tackling climate change”, an issue on which several major global meetings will be organised in 2021 (European Commission 2020a). Her call for cooperation has since been reiterated by many other EU policy-makers, including via Commission and Council policy papers on the future of transatlantic relations (Herszenhorn 2020).

Prior to Trump’s Presidency, the US and the European Union (EU) had been central players in global climate politics, with treaties like the 1992 UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the 2015 Paris Agreement bearing the hallmark of transatlantic bargains. To overcome Trump’s anti-climate legacy, which includes the US withdrawal from the Paris Agreement – jeopardising its successful implementation –, the time seems now ripe to revive transatlantic climate cooperation. On both sides of the Atlantic, large portions of the public demand decisive action: 93% of EU citizens see climate change as a serious problem (European Commission 2019a) compared to ‘only’ 52% in the US (Pew Research Center 2020). Among the Biden voters, however, support is much higher: over 80% of Democrats consider “dealing with climate change” a priority (ibid.). Young voters that helped Biden carry major swing states see their votes as mandates for progressive climate policies (Milman 2020a).

The ‘European Green Deal’ (EGD) (European Commission 2019b) and the ‘Biden Plan for a Clean Energy Revolution and Environmental Justice’ (Biden 2020) respond to these demands. Biden has repeatedly called climate change a top priority. One of his first measures will be to make the US re-join the Paris Agreement – an important symbolic step (ibid.). Yet, the global community has moved on since 2016: its efforts are now about ‘implementing Paris’ in order to reach its 2050 net-zero emissions target. With the EDG, the EU is designing wide-reaching medium-term policies around this goal. Other players – Japan, South Africa, the United Kingdom (UK) – have made similar vows, whereas China committed to attaining the target by 2060.

In the run-up to the November 2021 UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (COP) 26 in Glasgow, major debates will be held bilaterally and in G-x fora on reaching the 2050 target through enhanced medium-term emissions reduction ambitions and green investments, notably as part of Covid-19 relief plans. Re-engaging the US in meaningful ways in these debates will be of the essence. EU-US cooperation can be a cornerstone of these efforts, with the Biden Plan and the EGD providing useful platforms for re-engagement. Concretely, the EU should support the new Administration in its domestic efforts to realise the aims of the Biden Plan, adopt a medium-term reduction target and make relevant investment choices. Simultaneously, it should signal to Biden how the US can return to its previous global (co-)leadership role.

This policy brief presents ways in which the EU can re-engage the US on climate change. It starts with sequential analyses of the contents and prospects of the EGD and the Biden Plan before comparing them to explore the potential for a 'transatlantic Green Deal'. Although the different 'frames' of the two policy proposals imply that such a transatlantic deal is not yet in the cards, there is sufficient commonality to foster EU-US climate cooperation in the short term. The policy brief then proposes how the EU may practically re-engage the US bilaterally and multilaterally before concluding by discussing the success factors of such an EU outreach.

The European Green Deal and EU 'Green Deal Diplomacy'

This section discusses the key features of the EGD and the politics of its implementation, with special attention to its external dimension.

The EDG as a domestic transformation agenda

The EGD embodies the EU's answer to the planetary crises related to climate change and environmental degradation. It "is a new growth strategy that aims to transform the EU into a fair and prosperous society, with a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy" centrally geared towards attaining the Paris Agreement's 2050 net-zero emissions target (European Commission 2019b, 2). Its key characteristics are:

- First, the EGD is *transformative*, aimed at mobilising the EU's "collective ability to transform its economy and society to put it on a more sustainable path" (ibid., 2, 4). This is novel: the EU's earlier focus on a low-carbon energy 'transition' has (at least discursively) been replaced by an ambition for a more profound, comprehensive and durable socioeconomic change;
- Second, closely linked to this and moving from a sectoral to a cross-cutting, society-wide approach to sustainability, the EGD is *holistic* by pursuing the objective of "mainstreaming sustainability in all EU policies", internal and external, most notably via "green finance and investment" (ibid., 15) and in policies

ranging from agriculture and biodiversity protection to energy and transportation. This aspect of the EGD takes earlier implementation deficits of EU environmental policies seriously. It seeks to address the many contradictions that hinder sustainability in the EU, e.g., between progressive EU-level climate target-setting and national-level investments into fossil fuels;

- Third, the EGD is "*just and inclusive*": inspired by Roosevelt's 'New Deal', the EGD insists that the transformation should "leave no one behind" by alleviating transformation-induced socio-economic hardships through a "Just Transition Mechanism" while "putting people first" in the sense of involving "the public and ... all stakeholders" in its implementation (ibid., 2, 16, 22). This should notably be achieved via a 'Climate Pact' aiming "to inform, inspire and foster cooperation between people and organisations ranging from national, regional and local authorities to businesses, unions, civil society organisations, educational institutions, research and innovation organisations, consumer groups and individuals" (European Commission 2020b). This co-creation offer represents the EU's answer to the 'gilets jaunes' and other anti-climate measures protests.
- Fourth, the EGD involves a *comprehensive, phased policy plan* with medium- and long-term targets and steps. On climate change, the Commission has proposed to enhance the EU's 2030 target – its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) under the Paris Agreement – from 40% to 55% compared to 1990 levels.

Central for the prospects of implementing this transformation agenda is the continuous political and public support in the EU's member states, which is currently lacking in a few countries, most notably Poland. Mobilising such support will be challenging and requires major communicative and negotiation efforts. More than anything, the EGD – with the Climate Pact at its heart – constitutes a narrative frame about an environmentally sustainable future of European economies and societies, which will have to be achieved through behavioural changes. These structural changes must above all be incentivised by financial instruments stipulating green investments. The debate about 'NextGenerationEU', the EU's Covid-19 recovery plan, is indicative of the significance of such incentives. At the July 2020 European Council, the Commission and several heads of state and government fought hard to ultimately convince other member states' governments that 37% of NextGenerationEU should be spent on EDG objectives.

For this narrative to catch on, it is important that the EU demonstrates that third countries are also sustainably transforming their economic model. To that end, the EGD comprises an external dimension.

The EU's 'Green Deal Diplomacy'

To encourage “comparable action and increased efforts by other regions”, the EU wishes to lead by example while proposing to “develop a stronger ‘green deal diplomacy’” (GDD) (European Commission 2019b, 20).

Although the notion of GDD has to be further specified, the EGD offers pointers on what it will comprise: the EU should use “its diplomatic and financial tools to ensure that green alliances are part of its relations with ... partner countries and regions”, including its neighbours and Africa, but also China (ibid., 21). With its Green Diplomacy network, the EU wishes to advance EGD objectives across multilateral (UNFCCC), plurilateral (G-20) and unilateral (G-7) fora, but also in its bilateral relations. These latter should serve to provide steps towards achieving global political advances. Such advances are expected primarily in areas like standard-setting via its single market and trade policies, the large-scale mobilisation of green finance and the design of a “financial system that supports global sustainable growth” (ibid., 22).

On climate change, the EU's relations with major emitters are critical. Whereas it has fostered solid climate-specific relations with the world's key emitter China, the relationship with the historically most significant emitter, the US, has been all but dormant during the Trump Presidency. For the EGD – and the Paris Agreement – to succeed, the EU must attempt to rectify this. To understand how it can re-engage the US, it is useful to scrutinise the climate policies and diplomacy expected of the next US Administration.

The prospects of US (federal-level) climate policies and diplomacy under President Biden

Climate change is a top priority of the US President-elect, as evidenced by his strategy to campaign on the basis of the 2 trillion USD Biden Plan. This section first discusses the Plan's key features and the politics surrounding its implementation. It then sheds light on its external dimensions.

The Biden Plan and US domestic politics

The Biden Plan shares with the 2019 ‘Green New Deal’ proposal embraced by his intra-party rival Bernie Sanders the assumption that there “is no greater challenge facing our country and our world” than climate change; meeting it requires “greater ambition on an epic scale” (Biden 2020).

Biden's Plan carries its main objectives in the title: the envisaged ‘clean energy revolution’ is about achieving “a 100% clean energy economy and net-zero emissions no later than 2050”, including a decarbonisation of the electric sector by 2035, and ‘environmental justice’ involving particular attention for vulnerable groups (ibid.). Unlike the ‘Green New Deal’, which merely stipulated broad long-term goals, the Biden Plan contains a series of specific action points. Its main characteristics are:

- First, the Plan provides the *blueprint for a clean energy transition*: in terms of framing and policies proposed, it represents ultimately – unlike the more holistic EGD – an energy-focussed roadmap. Climate change receives significantly more mention than it did when Obama took office in 2009, when the focus was primarily on ‘energy security’. Other environmental challenges are equally referred to. However, what transpires centrally from Biden's proposals is the concentration on large-scale investments into research and “the rapid deployment of clean energy innovations across the economy” (ibid.). The Biden Plan's lead narrative is thus one of a technological fix to the climate crisis that is beneficial in economic terms, creating green, ‘clean energy’ jobs.
- Second, central to the Plan is environmental *justice*. Similar to the EGD's ‘just transition’ focus, this is about both attenuating the socio-economic shocks experienced by “workers impacted by the energy transition”, which is ultimately about completely halting fossil fuel subsidies, and caring for “People of Color and Low-Income Communities ... at Especially High Risk” from environmental degradation (ibid.).
- Third, like the EGD, the Biden Plan contains a plethora of *concrete policy proposals*. A first priority is the setting of a mid-term emissions reduction target that would ramp up the US NDC of 26-28% reductions from 2005 levels by 2025 submitted to the UNFCCC by the Obama Administration in 2016 (ibid.). This goes hand-in-hand with a reversal of Trump's fossil-fuel promotion agenda in areas such as fuel standards. Another major field of activity pertains to large-scale sustainable infrastructure investments. This also involves discussions about green Covid relief measures.

The domestic politics that will determine the implementation of the Biden Plan are considerably more complex than in the EU. On the one hand, there seems to be strong support. Biden received many votes from a progressive and young Democratic electorate that would in large parts have preferred to see Bernie Sanders run against Trump on a strong ‘Green New Deal’ platform. During his campaign, in efforts to woo more moderate Democrats, Biden tried to distance himself from this more radical position, arguing that he was campaigning on the basis of his own Plan. Simultaneously, he attempted to send the message that he takes climate change very seriously, going as far as arguing that he “would transition from the oil industry” to fully embrace clean energy (Milman 2020b).

On the other hand, as demonstrated by Trump's 2020 vote gains coming from an electorate that is fundamentally opposed to climate regulation, the US remains deeply polarised. This is clearly visible in Congress, where the projected Democratic majority in both chambers now seems unlikely, as it would require two Democrat victories in the

runoff Senate elections in Georgia in January 2021. Without this majority, far-reaching federal climate legislation appears out of reach. Although Biden, with his decades-long Senate experience, may be uniquely placed to negotiate bipartisan deals, the Republican establishment's appetite for cooperation on climate matters seems limited. Even a moderate Republican like Mitt Romney, who welcomes the leadership change in the White House, has argued against "a sharp left turn", including on climate change (Coleman 2020).

Still, some commentators remain hopeful that Biden could forge limited bipartisan progress, for instance on a green Covid-19 relief package, much-needed US-wide infrastructure renovation and renewable energy support (Lavelle 2020). In the absence of solid congressional majorities, however, more far-reaching climate measures will in all likelihood have to come from presidential executive orders. This was a strategy already embraced by Obama – with some success, but also major weaknesses: such executive action can be more easily attacked, delayed and halted by judicial action than federal legislation. It is also prone to being reversed by a subsequent Administration.

Other options for Biden to enlarge his room for manoeuvre in a polarised context involve domestic coalition-building beyond Congress, for instance by reaching out to country-wide movements that had formed in opposition to Trump's anti-climate policies, such as "We Are Still In" (the Paris Agreement) and "America's Pledge", led by figures like former New York City Mayor Bloomberg and former California Governor Brown. Such domestic alliances might help adopt meaningful measures across a series of states as well as in major urban centres, although these may ultimately still be insufficient in scale to support a more ambitious US NDC in the absence of federal measures.

Just like in the case of the EGD, the implementation of the Biden Plan would be eased if his Administration can demonstrate at home that others – primarily China, but also key emitters like the EU and India – are doing their share.

US climate diplomacy under Biden

The Biden Plan explicitly foresees "rally[ing] the rest of the world to address the grave climate threat" (Biden 2020). This translates into an ambition to "lead an effort to get every major country to ramp up the ambition of their domestic climate targets", which have to be "transparent and enforceable", preventing other countries from "cheating" (ibid.). To this end, Biden intends to deploy "America's economic leverage and power of example" (ibid.). Though much more elaborate, the Biden Plan's external dimensions exhibit clear parallels with the EU's GDD, but include bolder leadership claims, such as that of "conven[ing] a climate world summit to directly engage the leaders of the major carbon-emitting nations ... to persuade them to join the

United States in making more ambitious national pledges" (ibid). It is also decidedly more confrontational: Biden wishes to "name and shame global climate outlaws" and wants among others to hold China "accountable to high environmental standards in its Belt and Road Initiative infrastructure projects" and export subsidies (ibid.).

Putting these projects into practice will require a major change of approach. During Trump's Presidency, the US remained present, but largely passive in multilateral climate fora. Bilateral climate relations were virtually inexistent. Sub-national and civil society actors – around the "We Are Still In" and "America's Pledge" coalitions and involving many Democrats – had stepped in through forms of para-diplomacy. Their efforts constitute a foundation from which to re-build trust with third parties. An important step Biden envisages is to reverse Trump's appointments of climate deniers to key positions (e.g. Energy Secretary) by bringing in credible experts with international networks, particularly in the State Department. A major initial signal in this respect is the appointment of Obama's former Secretary of State and long-term Senator John Kerry as 'Special Presidential Envoy for Climate' who will also be a member of the National Security Council. As a decades-long champion of the climate cause, Kerry was instrumental to the successful negotiation of the Paris Agreement. He has an international standing and network that will facilitate the US re-integration into the global climate community. Another step to take for Biden must involve living up to earlier US promises to financially support third countries' low-carbon transitions.

Altogether, by re-joining the Paris Agreement and adopting a fundamentally different tone, Biden's Administration will contribute to isolating 'climate outlaws' like Bolsonaro's Brazil on the global diplomatic scene. Yet, despite its ambitions, the domestic constraints that the Biden Plan faces may impede the US from instantly re-emerging as a global climate leader. Whether it will be able to leave its mark on the talks about enhanced ambitions in the run-up to COP 26 therefore remains an open question.

Towards a 'transatlantic Green Deal'?

The EGD and the Biden Plan display a number of similarities and potential for mutual reinforcement, but also significant differences. Striking parallels include the problem analysis: both recognise climate change as an existential threat. Also, the envisaged policies (e.g. related to 'clean energy' and mobility) and tools (including regulation and large-scale investments) are similar. So is the emphasis on 'justice' to rally European and US citizens as well as on diplomacy.

At the same time, the two projects differ in framing and scope: where the EGD offers a transformative narrative that stipulates debates about the EU's current socio-economic model and how to redefine humanity's relationship with

nature, the Biden Plan employs the term ‘revolution’ strictly in relation to ‘clean energy’. Biden’s proposed policy is thus ultimately about a steered move away from ‘dirty’ energy sources and towards greater efficiency.

Moreover, the politics surrounding the two proposals are quite distinct. Making the EGD a success will be difficult enough, as it requires aligning the 27 EU member states to common targets and policies. Yet, European societies are not nearly as polarised as the US, where the political institutions exacerbate partisanship and can easily lead to gridlock.

Considering these similarities while taking due account of the differences implies that a ‘transatlantic Green Deal’ is currently not readily graspable. If desired, it needs to be actively forged as a medium-term project. The similarities provide numerous opportunities for stimulating exchanges and mutual learning for the common goal of a decarbonised future. The shared understanding that any decarbonisation has to be socially just equally offers a strong fundament to build on. However, this aspect is not accompanied by comparable efforts at associating citizens to the co-creation of policies determining their destiny. In the EU, the Green Deal is set to benefit from wide-reaching efforts to obtain the public’s input and buy-in, not just by providing financial support; in the US, vulnerable populations are promised attention mostly in the form of job creation and/or financial compensation. For a ‘transatlantic Green Deal’ to emerge in the medium term, greater convergence has to be fostered by investing jointly into socio-cultural change that anchors the envisaged energy and ecological transitions in continuous and unyielding public support so as to guard sustainable change from short-term political whims.

Against this backdrop, there are multiple opportunities for the EU to re-engage the US in the short and medium term.

How the EU can revive transatlantic climate relations

Leading EU policy-makers must – and do – understand the importance of a reinforced transatlantic partnership for effective global climate action, but also that they must not overly focus on EU-US relations. While there is no time to lose to re-engage the US, the EU’s transatlantic climate diplomacy has to be aligned with its own domestic and external policy patterns. It should reflect the EGD’s holistic, multi-sectorial and multi-level approach as well as its existing bilateral and regional climate relationships (e.g. with China, Canada, the UK and many developing nations) while taking the US realities seriously. This implies a multi-layered bilateral and a multi-fora multilateral engagement.

Bilateral re-engagement

In an effort to support the Biden Administration in implementing its Plan, the EU’s outreach should be targeted at the different layers of the US political system (federal, state, local), while engaging with various types of

stakeholders, including business and civil society communities as well as individual citizens. Central to these exchanges should not just be the practical steps towards an energy transition, but also more fundamental questions related to what kind of society citizens in the transatlantic space would like to live in. Such questions can be broken down to the sectoral policies at the heart of the EGD, from agriculture and food (how do we want to produce what we eat?) to mobility and urban space (how do we want to move around and live?).

At the federal level, bilateral dialogues need to be held at the highest – presidential and ministerial – levels and with the US Administration’s key climate appointees across various ministries, importantly including a re-staffed State Department. For example, the US-EU Energy Council launched in 2009 may be revived or a wholly new institutional consultation mechanism created. In parallel, dialogues between parliamentarians from the European and national parliaments and members of Congress should be reinforced in existing fora like the ‘Transatlantic Legislators’ Dialogue’. In the process of developing and negotiating legislative acts and policies, the potential for transatlantic information and best-practices exchange and mutual learning, for instance on common metrics to assess the ‘energy transition’, seems immense. Fuelling a transatlantic competition for ideas on how to best transition can moreover help spur further and faster innovation. In its outreach efforts, the EU should not just ‘preach to the converted’, but also address those, especially among Congressional Republicans, who are sceptical of clean energy policies for ideological reasons or because they hail from ‘coal states’ (De Botselier 2018). Issue-linkages between climate/energy and socio-economic policies in the framework of the EU’s ‘just transition’ efforts might provide useful starting points for such discussions.

In the same vein, the EU should engage with states’ executives and legislators across the US. Both the EU and its members have long entertained climate-specific relations – for instance on matters related to emissions trading – with California, reaching new peaks under Trump. Relations with other, also Republican-governed states are equally important, however, to support the Biden Administration in making the case that a clean energy transition can actually be “good for business” (ibid.: 2). Moreover, the EU should not shy away from mobilising the full potential of its member states and their existing ties when creatively developing new contacts also by tying in third parties (e.g. Canada).

The same openness should also guide the EU’s outreach at the local level: through its support to the European Covenant of Mayors, the EU has managed to become the backbone of the ‘Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy’, which provides an excellent platform for dialogue between European and American local politicians and administrators

who have to implement the EGD and comparable American policies on the ground.

Importantly, and especially to develop a joint medium-term vision on the carbon-neutral societies of the future, a key component of transatlantic climate engagement should be public diplomacy. This implies developing an external dimension to the 'European Climate Pact'. Culture can be an important vehicle to engage US urban and rural audiences, civil society and businesses in conversations about the future. Although the EU Delegation in the US already has this on its agenda, the margin for mobilising the EU member states' vast diplomatic network remains enormous. It includes the possibility to share and debate local experiences of rolling out the European Green Deal beyond its technical-administrative dimensions, emphasising how businesses and people live the transition, which hopes and expectations they have, which anxieties and problems they encounter, what solutions are available, how fair and just policies could and do look like etc. Successfully engaging publics across the Atlantic in such debates, and ensuring their durable support for change, will be a make-it-or-breaking issue for the successful implementation of the EGD, the Biden Plan and the Paris Agreement.

While transatlantic bilateral climate engagement along these lines is crucial, the EU-27 (7% of global emissions) and the US (14%) can neither individually nor jointly successfully tackle the climate challenge without meaningful multilateral engagement involving other key emitters.

Multilateral re-engagement

In relation to multilateral outreach, expectations management is key: the US cannot be expected to immediately carry the burden of leadership after four years of disengagement from global climate politics. It will therefore be important to gradually re-engage the country, allow for time to domestically attempt to implement major aspects of the Biden Plan – notably shaping up a new medium-term NDC – and to refine its climate foreign policy strategy. A key reason why the 2009 Copenhagen summit failed was that the incoming Obama Administration had not been able to build momentum domestically, nor to sufficiently reach out to key emitters to achieve the level of mutual understanding necessary to come to a more meaningful global agreement. Replaying this scenario can be avoided if other key emitters continue to co-lead during a transition phase while engaging with the US about mutual expectations. Given the strained Sino-American relationship, the EU would be uniquely placed to play this mediating role, signalling what space there is for the Americans to co-lead.

More concretely, besides the revival of transatlantic relations, the US will be trying to re-invigorate its bilateral relations with other major emitters. This 'multiple

bilateralism'-based strategy, involving numerous bilateral talks that allow for multilateral progress, worked well in the run-up to the Paris summit (Belis et al. 2018). It can again become the nucleus of multilateral advances. To book a success at COP 26, which would imply major emitters' enhanced medium-term ambitions, credible plans towards the 2050 target and commitments to climate finance and greening the global financial system, the EU should encourage such multiple bilateralism and harness it in various fora that have successfully served as preparatory arenas for climate summits in the past. Among them are the G-7 and G-20 summits, which in 2021 will be chaired by the COP 26 host UK and Italy respectively, allowing two European countries to steer the discussions among major emitters. The summits provide opportunities to not only better understand the United States' positions, its true ambitions and domestic constraints, but also to clarify what the US is willing to invest into – and what others are ready to cede to allow for – potential American global climate leadership. Discussions should focus on the level of ambition parties can bring to the table individually and collectively, both in terms of emissions reductions and financial support to developing countries. Moreover, and to contrast the epic images of Trump's opposition to the nineteen/six partners around climate change at past G-20 (e.g. Hamburg 2017) and G-7 (La Malbaie, Québec 2018) summits, the 2021 meetings provide an opportunity to publicly re-welcome the US to the club. Letting Biden shine as a global leader on clean energy would give him a visibility that might facilitate the domestic implementation of his Plan.

Conclusion: making EU transatlantic climate diplomacy a success

2021 opens a window of opportunity for progress towards the Paris Agreement's objectives: decisions are expected on medium- to long-term country actions that will lock in policy choices paired to financial investments. Central to making the right choices during this period will be an effective re-engagement of the world's no. 2 emitter, the US. Given past cooperation experience and the parallels between the EGD and Biden's clean energy plan, the EU is well-placed to play a key role in re-engaging the US via multi-layered and multi-faceted bilateral engagement and multilateral mediation.

Yet, the success of the Paris Agreement and the EGD does not solely depend on what happens in 2021. The EU must guard against falling into the 'presentism' trap: while it should help ensure that short-term policy choices (e.g. Covid recovery plans) are green, it should also be reminded that the history of global climate politics provides many warnings that durable change cannot rely on short-termism. The Trump Presidency represented the most telling example of how comparatively simple it is to unravel policies that were based on global accords and domestic executive action relying on

limited public support. The EU is therefore well-advised to invest into outreach activities that can contribute to fostering continuous and sustainable public support so as to enhance the medium-term prospects of a ‘transatlantic Green Deal’.

Whether or not the EU’s climate diplomacy vis-à-vis the US bears fruit in the short and medium term will depend on several factors. First, it will rely on EU domestic policies and its ability to present itself as a credible partner. This credibility hinges on demonstrable progress regarding the implementation of the European Green Deal.

Second, it will depend on the EU’s diplomatic capacity and whether it is capable of reviving the pre-Paris Agreement spirit, mobilising its networks of partnerships to help re-integrate the US into global climate politics. The Union’s role could be that of a chief mediator in this regard, facilitating

multiple bilateral contacts between the US and third parties. The G-x summits are just the tip of the ice-berg when it comes to opportunities for exchange between transatlantic policy-makers and their third-country counterparts. Efforts could feed into the preparation for COP 26, but also provide the foundations for much-needed open channels of conversation and mutual learning in the medium term.

Finally, the EU must make more use of its public diplomacy to reach out to US society beyond the elite level. Citizens will have to locally commit to addressing ecological crises and to supporting the envisaged transitions as well as measures aimed at attenuating possible negative effect on vulnerable communities. The EU’s evolving experience with ‘just transition’ may serve as a useful experience in this regard.

Further Reading

Belis, D., S. Schunz, D. Jayaram and T. Wang. 2018. “Climate Diplomacy and the Rise of ‘Multiple Bilateralism’ between China, India and the EU”. *Carbon and Climate Law Review* 12 (2): 85-97.

Biden, J. 2020. “Biden Plan for a Clean Energy Revolution and Environmental Justice”, <https://joebiden.com/climate-plan/#> (last accessed on 20/11/2020).

Coleman, J. 2020. “Romney: Americans apparently want a Change in Leadership, but not ‘Sharp Left Turn’ on Policy”. *The Hill*, 8 November 2020.

De Botselier, B. 2018. “US Climate Politics in the Trump Era: Options for EU Engagement”. *College of Europe Policy Brief (CEPOB)* 1.2018, Bruges.

European Commission. 2019a. “Climate Change Report”. Special Eurobarometer 490, Brussels, April 2019.

European Commission. 2019b. “The European Green Deal”. COM(2019) 640, Brussels, 11 December 2019.

European Commission. 2020a. *Statement of European Commission President von der Leyen on the Result of the US Presidential Election*. Brussels, 7 November 2020.

European Commission. 2020b. *European Climate Pact*. Website, https://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/eu-climate-action/pact_en (last accessed on 20/11/2020).

Herszenhorn, D.M. 2020. “EU extends a hand (or two) to Joe Biden”. *Politico*, 1 Dec. 2020.

Lavelle, M. 2020. “A Bipartisan Climate Policy? It Could Happen Under a Biden Administration, Washington Veterans Say”. *Inside Climate News*, 6 Nov. 2020.

Milman, O. 2020a. “A Youth Group helped Biden Win. Now They Want Him to Fix Climate Crisis”. *The Guardian*, 16 November 2020.

Milman, O. 2020b. “Biden’s Pledge to ‘Transition’ from Oil Draws Praise – and Republicans’ Anger”, *The Guardian*, 23 October 2020.

Pew Research Center. 2020. *How Americans see Climate Change and the Environment*. 21 April 2020, <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2020/04/21/how-americans-see-climate-change-and-the-environment-in-7-charts/> (last accessed on 20/11/2020).

About the Author

Simon Schunz is Professor in the EU International Relations and Diplomacy Studies Department at the College of Europe, Bruges, and the College’s Academic Coordinator of the joint College of Europe-Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy Master of Arts in Transatlantic Affairs (MATA). His research focuses on EU external action and relations with major powers, notably in the climate and environmental domains. His recent publications include *The Evolving Relationship Between China, the EU and the USA – Towards A New Global Order?* (Routledge, 2020, with Jing Men and Duncan Freeman). He holds a Ph.D. from the University of Leuven and an M.A. from the College of Europe.

Views expressed in the College of Europe Policy Briefs are those of the authors only and do not necessarily reflect positions of either the series editors or the College of Europe. Free online subscription at: www.coleurope.eu/CEPOB.

