



College of Europe
Collège d'Europe



Department of EU International Relations
and Diplomacy Studies, 2010-2011

Département d'études en Relations internationales
et diplomatiques de l'Union européenne, 2010-2011

As Time Goes By: EU Climate Change Actorness from Rio to Copenhagen

Thomas HEIDENER (DK)

Supervisor: Professor Chad Damro

Abstract

During the past two decades the EU has increasingly come to be recognized as an important international actor in environmental politics. Since the early 1990s it has promoted the self-image of an ambitious actor in international climate agreements, by championing and gaining international support for stringent international commitments. The failure of the EU to instigate an ambitious post-2012 environmental framework agreement at the COP15 in Copenhagen may, however, signal a change in the EU's status as an international climate change actor. This raises the question of which conditions allowed the EU to be an actor in the first place.

This thesis analyses the conditions for EU actorness in the area of climate change in three cases: the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro, the Third Conference of the Parties in Kyoto and the Fifteenth Conference of the Parties in Copenhagen. The analysis will draw on the theoretical concept of actorness introduced by Jupille and Caporaso which is based on the four criteria of recognition, authority, cohesion and autonomy.

It will be argued that for the EU to be an actor all four criteria of actorness need to be present as was the case in Rio and Kyoto as opposed to Copenhagen. Yet, the criteria were not completely absent in Copenhagen. Rather it was the lack of autonomy, and especially cohesion, in Denmark that prevented the EU from being an international actor more recently. These findings will provide the basis for estimating the future role of the EU in combating climate change, as the end of the Kyoto Protocol's first commitment period moves ever closer.