



The EU at the UNFCCC: A New Paradigm? An Interdisciplinary Analysis of Climate Negotiations since Copenhagen

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Abstract

Has the experience of the fifteenth Conference of the Parties in Copenhagen created a new paradigm in the European Union's approach to climate negotiations? This is a question that has been increasingly central to academic discussions of the European Union (EU) as an international climate actor. This study brings that question into the realm of climate negotiations, and seeks to challenge some of the approaches within studies of the EU's role of climate negotiations from Copenhagen onward by introducing an interdisciplinary perspective, through the use of literature in regime theory by authors such as Arild Underdal, Scott Barrett and Frank Grundig. The study further contextualises its observations with information from interviews with EU officials, in an effort to shed more light on the less researched informal arrangements for EU negotiations within the global climate diplomacy infrastructure. The main conclusion of the study is that while the post-Copenhagen climate process undergone changes that can qualify as a paradigm shift, the EU's own approach remains rooted in the same principal objectives as in the past, albeit with new instruments and approaches being applied. The study also finds that EU performance in climate negotiations is often erroneously evaluated according to the organisation's own objectives, rather than the general potential for the conclusion of an effective regime. An additional conclusion is that research in the field of EU studies fails to take into account a growing range of forums and actors making up the climate negotiation process, both inside and outside the conventional negotiation process of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Based on these findings, it is recommended that analyses originating in the field of EU studies would benefit from using a broader scope of perspectives, and that interdisciplinary approaches to the EU's role in climate negotiations would be able to produce added value for future research in the field.