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Abstract

Since the early 2010s, the climate diplomacy of the European Union (EU) has undergone considerable changes. Traditionally relying on a 'leadership-by-example' approach primarily concerned with the external projection of its domestic policies, the EU profoundly adapted its climate diplomacy strategy between the 2009 conference of the parties (COP) 15 in Copenhagen and the 2015 Paris COP 21. This redefined strategy was further consolidated in the aftermath of the Paris COP. Key features of the EU's redesigned climate diplomacy are its focus on stronger – cooperative and/or confrontational – bilateral relations with major emitters and a greater flexibility in its positions and actions. To better understand and explain this strategic turn, the paper provides a comparative analysis of the EU's climate diplomacy vis-à-vis the three major emitters China, the United States and India during the negotiations on the Copenhagen Accord (2005-2009), on the Paris Agreement (2010-2015) and on the implementation of the Paris Agreement (2016-2020). It argues that the EU has embraced a strategy of 'multiple bilateralism', which aims to develop parallel bilateral relationships within the broader context of a multilateral negotiation setting. The Union's strategic turn can be explained by the opening of a policy window resulting from the interplay between the changing geopolitics of climate change and conducive institutional developments within the EU, which was exploited by EU policy entrepreneurs. This turn enabled the EU to co-create a negotiation environment that facilitated the convergence of major emitters' positions in the global climate negotiations at Paris. Sustaining such an enabling environment thus represents a fundamental prerequisite for the successful implementation of the Paris Agreement.

Introduction: EU climate diplomacy as a site of foreign policy strategizing[1]

Since the early 2010s, the climate diplomacy of the European Union (EU) has undergone considerable changes. Traditionally, the Union's external climate action had relied on a 'leadership-by-example' approach primarily concerned with the global projection of its internal climate and energy policies, paired with often highly ambitious calls for top-down global climate governance under United Nations (UN) auspices (Van Schaik & Schunz, 2012; Oberthür & Roche-Kelly, 2008). After the failure of the 2009 Copenhagen climate summit, this approach was fundamentally reconsidered. As a result, the EU profoundly adapted its climate diplomacy strategy between the conference of the parties (COP) 15 in Copenhagen and the 2015 Paris COP 21. Its redefined strategy was further consolidated in the aftermath of the Paris summit, notably in reaction to the United States (US) government's 2017 announcement of withdrawing from the Paris Agreement (PA).

When the EU re-designed its external climate strategy, adaptations were made especially to the ways it selected its main interlocutors and practically interacted with them. The Union clearly moved away from a singular focus on the multilateral arena and leadership-by-example to what can be termed 'multiple bilateralism' (MB), defined as a foreign policy "strategy that entails the maintenance of several bilateral relationships in parallel as a subset of a multilateral negotiation setting" (Belis et al., 2018: 86). With this shift, the EU abandoned its attempts to create a global climate regime mirroring its own regional regime and adopted a more pragmatic approach acknowledging that it forms part of a broader and malleable global context, in which the – cooperative and/or confrontational – relations between major emitters are decisively shaping multilateral climate policies (Schunz, 2019). Key features of this re-designed EU climate diplomacy are greater flexibility and a stronger investment into its multiple bilateral relations with other major emitters in parallel to the ongoing UN climate regime negotiations.

This paper offers a better understanding and explanation of the observed transformation of the EU's climate diplomacy. To do so, it first analyses how the EU's climate diplomacy strategy vis-à-vis the key emitters China, the US and India has – in the broader context of the UN climate regime – evolved from (i) the negotiations on the Copenhagen Accord (2005-2009) to (ii) the negotiations on the Paris Agreement (2010-215) and (iii) those on the Paris Agreement's implementation (2016-2020). Second, it offers an explanation of the EU's strategic turn, exposing why the Union modified its strategy in the way it did.

[1] The author would like to thank David Belis for allowing him to pursue the work on this paper, which started out as a joint endeavour.

By addressing these two questions, the paper contributes to the ongoing academic and political debates about the EU's role in global climate politics. The academic debate (see, e.g., von Lucke et al., 2021; Oberthür & Groen, 2018; Parker et al., 2017) has for two decades overly focused on the EU-centric question of whether the Union is a 'leader' in multilateral climate politics (Afionis, 2017; Wurzel et al., 2017; Oberthür & Roche Kelly, 2008; Gupta & Grubb, 2000). The post-Copenhagen context had seen a few novel perspectives emerge, which emphasized the EU's alleged role as a 'leadiator', that is, 'leader-cum-mediator' (Bäckstrand & Elgström, 2013) and paid some attention to its bilateral relations with emerging economies (Torney, 2015a). However, the multipolar dynamics of the negotiations on the Paris Agreement and its implementation further prompt a thorough rethink of scholarly analyses of the EU's climate diplomacy. Importantly, these should involve a Foreign Policy Analysis perspective that transcends the focus on its alleged default 'multilateral preference'.

This is particularly relevant in the context of the EU's overall 'strategic turn' emanating from its 2016 Global Strategy, which called for more flexible ways of engaging with the world, including the possibility for the EU to "partner selectively with players whose cooperation is necessary to ... address common challenges" (High Representative, 2016: 12). Since 2019, this prospect has been even more forcefully articulated when the incoming European Commission under President von der Leyen expressed the desire for a 'geopolitical Europe'. This ambition is promoted by the current EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR) Borrell (2020) under the guise of pursuing EU 'strategic autonomy' through its external action, in areas ranging from defence and security matters to health and climate policies. In the words of Nathalie Tocci (2021: 8, 9), who was instrumental to drafting the EU Global Strategy and continues to advise the HR, such strategic autonomy entails that "in living by its laws, the EU aims to pursue its strategic interests" while "being a partner to an international order based upon rules it has contributed to shaping".

The conceptual debate about the EU's strategic approach to pressing global matters is where the academic discussions meet the political debate. Politically, the Union's revised climate diplomacy is not only a major test case for its desire and capacity to act strategically, but the precise way in which the EU strategically approaches global climate negotiations is also bound to play a major role in determining the effectiveness of its contribution to the PA implementation. This implementation is happening at a time when the EU has – with its new flagship initiative, the 2019 'European Green Deal' – centred its policies on the PA goal of net-zero emissions by mid-century and vowed to "develop a stronger 'green deal diplomacy' focused on convincing and supporting others to take on their share" to achieve that aim (European Commission, 2019: 20). As this target can only be reached when all major emitters act in sync, the Union's

strategy is likely to be of particular significance when it comes to re-engaging the United States under its new pro-climate action President Biden (Schunz, 2020). Better understanding and explaining this strategy allows then also for assessing its prospects in the newly unfolding global climate politics context, in the run-up to the November 2021 COP 26 in Glasgow and beyond.

The paper proceeds as follows: after outlining the analytical framework, it engages in a comparative analysis of the EU's climate diplomacy vis-à-vis China, the US and India during the periods 2005-2009, 2010-2015 and 2016-2020 to answer the first research question. It subsequently answers the second question by explaining the observed trends regarding the multiple bilateral dynamics with major emitters. The paper argues that the EU changed its strategy in reaction to a policy window opened by a change in the external 'opportunity' regarding global climate politics and its own reinforced domestic 'presence' following the Lisbon Treaty. This policy window was exploited by a coalition of long-standing EU climate diplomacy advocates and new policy entrepreneurs bringing in a foreign policy perspective. The paper concludes with a reflection on the research and policy implications of its findings. The EU's turn to MB enabled it to co-create a negotiation environment that facilitated the convergence of major emitters' positions in Paris. Sustaining such an enabling environment represents a fundamental prerequisite for the successful implementation of the Paris Agreement.

Analytical framework

This section draws on insights from International Relations (IR) theories on the nature of the global climate regime and of Strategic Studies and Foreign Policy Analysis on the foreign policy strategies of actors in complex global political contexts to introduce the key concepts of the analytical framework guiding this study: global climate politics and 'multiple bilateralism' as one of several external engagement strategies at the EU's disposal in its climate diplomacy. MB is then set into relation to the notion of 'strategic hedging'.

At the heart of the broader 'regime complex for climate change' lies the UN climate regime (Keohane & Victor, 2011). While this multilateral arena has remained the chief site of global climate negotiations since the regime's inception in the early 1990s, it has been common for major emitters to use 'minilateral' bodies, such as the G-7, G-8(+5), G-20 or the Major Economies Forum/Meeting of the top 17 emitters, alongside bilateral exchanges to prepare multilateral negotiation rounds. The endgame of the 1997 COP 3 in Kyoto, for instance, involved last-minute 'telephone diplomacy', that is, bilateral exchanges between the leaders of key countries (Oberthür & Ott, 1999). Yet, for at

least two decades, such bilateral exchanges between individual parties had remained significantly less central to the overarching 'regime complex' than relations between the various negotiation coalitions in the UN regime, such as the 'Umbrella Group' around the US and the G-77/China of about 130 developing countries.

Since the mid-2000s, this has markedly changed. The rise of the BASIC countries (Brazil, South Africa, India, China) and of their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions introduced multipolar tendencies into global climate politics, which resulted in diversified, often bilateral negotiating strategies by key players such as China and the US (Belis et al., 2015). This trend of a stronger resorting to bilateral exchanges in the climate context reflects the generally rising importance of bilateralism in global politics. It has been particularly pronounced in global trade politics, where a plethora of regional and bilateral agreements were forged despite the multilateral negotiations in the World Trade Organization (see, e.g., Heydon & Woolcock, 2009). In the climate realm, the reliance on bilateralism is however not only more recent, but also serves – together with the abovementioned minilateral fora – an openly acknowledged preparatory purpose for forging progress at the multilateral level.

This phenomenon is captured by the notion of 'multiple bilateralism', a strategy of 'two-way' bilateralism characterized by: (i) one actor engaging with another actor in a genuine exchange on a matter; and, in this exchange, giving due attention to (ii) the bilateral relations each of the two entertain with one or more other players on that same matter, and to (iii) the broader multilateral context within which that matter is negotiated. This engagement, and the exchange that it involves, can take two forms: it can be cooperative and thus "aimed at building trust and identifying common landing zones in multilateral negotiations on a given issue", or it can be confrontational when an actor directly challenges its interlocutor, for instance to overcome this latter's obstructionist behaviour in multilateral negotiations (Belis et al., 2018: 86).

Cooperative and confrontational MB are not mutually exclusive. When combining them, MB takes the form of 'strategic hedging'. Strategic hedging represents a "risk management strategy" in complex international negotiation settings that allows for more effectively dealing with "risks associated with particular alignment choices vis-à-vis one or more major powers" (Haacke, 2019: 381, 378). Relying on a mix of "cooperative" engagement and "confrontational elements" (Ciorciari & Haacke, 2019: 367), strategic hedging is motivated by uncertainty about a negotiation (or crisis) context and other actors' behaviour in it as well as by the general "structural incentives associated with the current [multi]polarity of the international system" (Tessman, 2012: 192). In unclear contexts, hedging limits risks by offering an actor the "strategic flexibility" it needs to effectively pursue its objectives (Liff, 2019: 460).

As a foreign policy strategy, MB stands in stark contrast to the alternative strategies of unilateralism, 'one-way' bilateralism or multilateralism (Belis et al., 2018, 2015). The distinction between these four forms of strategic foreign policy action can be made along three axes (see Table 1). First, they can be distinguished in function of their *targets*: an actor's strategy can be targeted at no other actor in particular (unilateralism), one other at a time (bilateralism), several others in parallel (MB), or many others simultaneously (multilateralism as "an institutional form which coordinates relations among three or more states on the basis of 'generalized' principles of conduct" (Ruggie, 1993: 11)).

Second, the four forms can be differentiated further by drawing on the definition of a foreign policy strategy as being about "applying ends, ways and means in the strategic environment" (Yarger, 2006: 65). Ends refer to objectives, relying on interests and values; ways to the 'how' of attaining these objectives.[2] An actor has thus attained its *objectives* when it realizes its own policies, interests and values...

- ... as such, without having to convince or compromise with any other actor (unilateralism);
- ... by having another actor take them over (one-way bilateralism);
- ... by having them reflected in a multilateral outcome even if they diverge from key bilateral interlocutors' objectives, interests and values (confrontational MB);
- ... by having them reflected in a multilateral outcome as a result of bilateral exchanges establishing common ground with key interlocutors' objectives, interests and values (cooperative MB); or
- ... by having them reflected in a multilateral outcome through compromise-seeking with many others' objectives, interests and values at the same time (multilateralism).

Third, the *ways* of attaining these objectives can then be:

- acting one-sidedly and without consideration for others (unilateralism);
- acting vis-à-vis another player based on one's own objectives only ('talking at' one's interlocutor, one-way bilateralism);
- acting vis-à-vis multiple others in parallel while assertively pursuing one's own objectives (confrontational MB);
- acting vis-à-vis multiple others in parallel in search of common grounds that take account of these others' objectives (cooperative MB); or
- cooperating with many others based on one's own and others' objectives (multilateralism).

[2] Means refer to the resources that the 'ways' are based on. Since these resources are largely similar for the different strategic forms of interaction, they are not further considered here.

Table 1: Forms of strategic action in international negotiation contexts

	Unilateralism	**One-way bilateralism**	**Two-way bilateralism: confrontational MB**	**Two-way bilateralism: cooperative MB**	**Multi-lateralism**
Targets	Unspecified	One other actor	Multiple other actors individually and in parallel	Multiple other actors indivi-dually and in parallel	Multiple other actors simultaneously
Objectives To attain one's one's own policies, interests and values ...	... one-sidedly	... by having another actor adopt them	... by having them reflected in a multilateral outcome even if they diverge from key bilateral interlocutors' objectives, interests and values	... by having them reflected in a multilateral outcome as a result of bilateral exchanges establishing common ground with key interlocutors' objectives, interests and values	...by having them reflected in a multilateral outcome through compromise-seeking with many others' objectives, interests and values at the same time
Ways	Acting without consideration for others	'Talking at' one interlocutor	Confronting one (or more) inter-locutor(s) bilaterally to pursue own policies, interests and values while taking account of others' objectives, interests and values	Cooperating with one (or more) inter-locutor(s) bilaterally while seeking common ground with their objectives, interests and values	Cooperating with many others at the same time

Source: author's compilation

Based on this classification, the paper traces the EU's engagement – as the third largest global emitter – with the three major powers and contemporary no. 1, 2 and 4 global emitters – China, the US, and India – for each of the periods 2005-2009, 2010-2015 and 2016-2020. This is done by discussing how the EU interacts with them in terms of its objectives and ways. Given the main interest of this paper in the assumed reinforcement of bilateral relationships between key emitters, it focuses on the three forms of action located in the table's shaded area in the middle of the spectrum, excluding unilateralism and multilateralism. This will allow for "flexible pattern-matching", that is, the comparison between the predicted patterns embodied in the different forms of bilateralism and the observed empirical patterns (Bouncken et al., 2021: 259). Such pattern-matching requires establishing the degree of match between the three theorized form(s) of strategic action and the EU's activities in each period and vis-à-vis each of the selected actors. The findings are presented in a "narrative" fashion, presenting plausible accounts of the correspondence between the "ideal types" of EU strategic engagement and the empirical evidence (ibid.). Subsequently, the results for each period and 'target actor' are compared.

The detected pattern of a strategic turn in the first half of the 2010s can be explained with the help of a framework that pays attention to "the interplay between structural features at two levels of analysis – the global and the EU level – and relevant [intra-EU] agency" (Schunz & Damro, 2020: 125). Originally developed for explaining why EU external action emerges in the first place, the framework can usefully be applied to explaining why this external action changes over time (Gerards et al., 2021: 15). It combines a widely used conceptualization of EU 'actorness' (relying on 'opportunity', 'presence' and 'capability', see Bretherton & Vogler, 2006) with a focus on agents' 'entrepreneurship' derived from public policy analysis (Kingdon, 1995) to operate with three key concepts: opportunity, presence and EU policy entrepreneurs. Opportunity "denotes factors in the external environment of ideas and events" including "constellations of ideas and interests held by relevant actors in the global arena as well as singular events" (Bretherton & Vogler, 2006: 24; Schunz et al., 2018: 17). Presence refers to the EU's identity, expressed in its legal and policy *acquis* (Bretherton & Vogler, 2006: 24; Schunz & Damro, 2020: 130). It is assumed here that a window for policy change opens when either the opportunity or the EU's presence change significantly, or if both change in ways that lead to a considerable discrepancy between the global context and the EU's identity, necessitating an adaptation of its external policy in the eyes of EU policy entrepreneurs. This could, for instance, be the case when a major health crisis like Covid-19 corresponds to a sudden nationalization trend in EU health policies. The window is likely to result in policy change if it is successfully exploited by relevant EU policy entrepreneurs. These are 'advocates who are willing to invest their resource – time, energy, reputation, money – to promote a position in return for future gain in the form of material…or solidary benefits' (Kingdon, 1995: 179), that is, driven by ideational or interest-related motivations (Schunz & Damro, 2020: 130). For the health crisis example, this might imply agents mobilising to reinforce the EU's external health policy in order to react to the global crisis more adequately.

The narrative analysis draws on the available secondary literature, particularly for the first two time periods, and a triangulation of three research techniques: document analysis of primary sources especially from the EU, China, the US and India, several semi-structured interviews and numerous informal exchanges with EU and non-EU climate diplomats and observers of global climate negotiations during the three time periods, as well as participant observation of global climate negotiations during the 2005-2009 and 2010-2015 periods.

The EU's engagement with major emitters in the run-up to and at COP 15 (2005-2009): one-way bilateralism on the way to the Copenhagen Accord

In the run-up to the 2009 Copenhagen summit, the EU's overarching aim was primarily to promote its own, ideal vision of the global climate regime, limiting global temperature increase to no more than 2°C (Schunz, 2014: 168-169). This vision entailed sealing an international package deal setting emissions reduction targets – also for major emerging countries like China and India, from which the EU expected a deviation from business-as-usual emission trajectories of 15-30 percent – embedded into an enforceable, multilateral rule-based structure ('top-down governance') (ibid.). For this, the EU's domestic climate regime, with its emissions trading system (ETS) and an effort-sharing agreement among member states, was to serve as a model.

The EU's approach vis-à-vis China: one-way bilateralism

The EU had started to engage with China bilaterally as of the early 2000s, in reaction to rapid Chinese economic growth and rising GHG emissions (Belis & Schunz, 2013). A first bilateral agreement was reached with the 2005 'China-EU Partnership on Climate Change'. It mostly concentrated on practical-technical cooperation projects, including the creation of a 'Europe-China Clean Energy Centre' in Beijing and an 'EU-China CDM Facilitation Project', both financially supported by the EU (ibid.; Interview 1). The Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) quickly became a rather significant bilateral cooperation focus, too, with China turning into the largest source of supply of tradeable emission credits, and the EU's ETS the largest source of demand during much of the Kyoto Protocol's first commitment period (2008-2012).[3]

With this focus on hands-on, incentives-based cooperation with China during the pre-COP 15 period, the EU managed to establish project-focused climate relations in areas it had identified as important. Although it tried, the EU was less successful, however, when it came to linking this to discussions about global climate negotiations and thus convincing China of the merits of its above positions regarding the future climate regime (Belis & Schunz, 2013: 194). Despite continuous dialogues in the context of the annual EU-China summits and under the 2005 Partnership framework, China was not willing to commit to binding emission reduction targets. In 2009, it announced a voluntary national target of a 40-45 percent reduction of carbon intensity by 2020 compared to 2005 levels. At COP 15, China closely aligned with India's confrontational stance, discussed below, and insisted on a differentiation between developed and developing country targets. This and the converging positions between the BASIC

[3] Due to environmental integrity and over-allocation concerns, the EU largely banned credit imports into the ETS after 2013.

countries and the US regarding the 'bottom-up' nature of the future climate regime, also discussed below, strongly contributed to the failure of reaching agreement in 2009 (Van Schaik & Schunz, 2012).

The Union's emphasis on practical bilateral cooperation with China, with only limited consideration for the overall multilateral negotiation context and other key emitters' positions, provide strong indications of a strategy through which it predominantly 'talked at' its Chinese interlocutors, leading to a relationship that had not yet "reached a sufficient level of maturity" for cooperation in the UN regime (Belis & Schunz, 2013: 195). During the period 2005-2009, the pattern of EU climate diplomacy vis-à-vis China comes thus closest to 'one-way bilateralism'.

The EU's approach vis-à-vis the United States: one-way bilateralism

Whereas the US – as the long-standing no. 1 global emitter – had traditionally been the main target of EU external climate action, during George W. Bush's first presidency (2001-2005) EU-US climate relations had largely been characterized by mutual neglect. It was only during his second term and following the release of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change's rather alarming 2006/2007 Fourth Assessment Report that EU-US climate and – especially – energy relations were gradually re-established. In 2005 and 2007, EU-led attempts at re-engaging the US in global climate negotiations were made in the framework of the G-7 (Afionis, 2011). In 2005, the UK held the G-7 and the EU Council Presidencies and used the G-7 summit in Gleneagles to commit the Bush administration to discussions on climate change. Two years later, when Germany held the G-7 and the EU Council Presidencies, Chancellor Merkel convinced Bush at the G-7 summit at Heiligendamm to acknowledge climate change as 'one of the major challenges for mankind' (G-7, 2007). While EU leaders thus successfully pushed the US in minilateral fora to re-engage in multilateral discussions on a reform of the UN climate regime kicked off at the Bali COP 13 in late 2007, the bilateral relations per se remained embryonic during the remainder of the Bush Presidency.

This changed considerably once the Obama administration took office in early 2009. Hopes were high in the EU that US climate policies would become more aligned with the EU's model. In 2009, the EU's transatlantic climate diplomacy was therefore also considerably stepped up. Numerous climate advisors were dispatched into the Commission Delegation and EU member state embassies in Washington, D.C., resulting in diverse outreach activities to the US executive and legislative branches, but also to US states and civil society (Interviews 2, 3). Moreover, a plethora of exchanges at both negotiator and highest political levels ensued. Exchanges were institutionalized in the

US-EU Energy Council, created in 2009 and meeting annually to discuss issues of joint interest related to energy security and climate change (Schunz, 2014: 177).

In all these contexts, the EU attempted to influence a US debate that was volatile after eight years of federal-level inactivity under Bush. While the Obama administration and Congress were still debating ways of regulating climate change domestically, including the possibility of introducing cap-and-trade legislation, and defining the US climate diplomacy strategy, the EU tried to convey its key messages in favour of more ambitious climate policies based on its 2008/2009 climate and energy package. In particular, EU representatives tried to convince their US interlocutors of the merits of the Union's ETS, which they portrayed as an example for the US to follow and as the nucleus of a future global carbon market (Interviews 2, 3).

Altogether, EU activities vis-à-vis the US in the run-up to COP 15 can best be characterized as a form of 'one-way bilateralism', that is, a strategy that was centered on its own climate regime and objectives. Given the yet uncertain US positions, the Union was essentially 'talking at' the Americans, trying to convince them to follow *its* model. This attempt at persuasion could, unlike in the cases of China and India, not rely on positive incentives in the form of projects aimed at capacity-building, for instance, but involved offers of sharing EU know-how. The period was also characterized by little attention for, and indeed an insufficient understanding of, US concerns regarding, for instance, the legal form of the outcome of COP 15. The Union went into the endgame of the post-2012 negotiations with the unfounded hope that the Obama administration would have a larger margin of maneuver, both in terms of the legal outcome and of the US emissions reduction target. Both assumptions proved faulty when the US sided with the BASIC at COP 15, sidelining the EU (Van Schaik & Schunz, 2012).

The EU's approach vis-à-vis India: one-way bilateralism

The EU's climate diplomacy regarding India was very similar to the engagement strategy it adopted vis-à-vis China during the period 2005-2009, albeit even less successful. In 2005, the EU attempted to launch an initiative with India based on the same draft text it had used for the 2005 'China-EU Programme on Climate Change'. The final version of the 'India-EU Initiative on Clean Development and Climate Change', however, "was significantly less substantive, because of significant resistance by the Indian government" (Torney, 2015b: 115).

The results of operating with such a 'one-size-fits-all' approach in its climate diplomacy vis-à-vis the major emerging countries remained, also in the case of India, very limited

during this period despite both bilateral collaboration and cooperation in the multilateral climate regime (Schunz, 2014). Many of the EU's specific objectives were diametrically opposed to those of India. India framed climate change strongly in terms of equity and the relevance of per capita emissions, historical responsibilities, differentiation, climate finance, technology transfer to developing countries and the continuation of the Kyoto Protocol, including the 'firewall' between developed (or Annex I) and developing (or non-Annex I) countries. The EU, by contrast, based on its abovementioned positions, aimed at removing the firewall and bringing the emerging economies under a common UN-based framework, paying much less attention to equity concerns or per capita emissions. This led to a strong disconnect throughout this period between the two parties, culminating in the opposition between the BASIC group and the EU at COP 15, with some observers branding India as a key "spoiler" of that conference (Belis et al, 2018: 89).

In sum, in the run-up to the Copenhagen summit, the EU largely failed to engage India in any meaningful way, either at a practical level (as it managed to do with China) or at the foreign policy level to advance the multilateral negotiations. There is little evidence that the EU took India's objectives, or its own parallel relations with other key players, into account when engaging with the Indians. Like for China and the US, the form of the EU's interaction with India can therefore most adequately be characterized as 'one-way bilateralism'.

The EU's engagement with major emitters in the run-up to and at COP 21 (2010-2015): strategic hedging and co-leadership on the way to the Paris Agreement

COP 15 considerably changed global climate politics and brought to the fore that China and the US now constituted the two dominant actors, in terms of both GHG emissions and geopolitical clout. It also demonstrated that a top-down governance approach, as desired by the EU, was not a viable option in global climate politics. No other major emitter was prepared to allow a sovereignty transgression by committing to internationally legally binding targets. As a result, the EU adapted its positions for the multilateral context (Schunz, 2019): while still pursuing the ambition of a legally binding outcome, it adopted a less ambitious target and became more flexible in is expectations of other parties, from whom it expected "fair and ambitious" "intended nationally determined contributions" (Council of the EU, 2015: point 7).

The EU's approach vis-à-vis China: primarily cooperative multiple bilateralism

The EU's approach towards China represents the most telling example of how the Union's diplomatic approach changed during the negotiations on the Paris

Agreement. Rather than pursuing its previous 'leadership-by-example' approach, the Union acted upon a better understanding of China's historical sensitivities regarding national sovereignty, resulting from closer diplomatic ties (Interview 4). While the likelihood that the country would accept GHG reduction targets set internationally was considered very low, its willingness to adhere to a trust-based, bottom-up regime was judged to be high by the Union's negotiators. This realization contributed to a loosening of the EU's earlier rigid demands, resulting in the abovementioned, more flexible objectives regarding the global climate regime (ibid.).

The better understanding of China's position implied an insight into the main causes of the country's increasingly more cooperative stance on climate change. They were both domestic and international. As argued by Hilton & Kerr (2016), China's domestic economic restructuring, with lower levels of growth and a gradual turn from heavy industry to a service- and consumption-led economy, provided room for the Chinese leadership to commit to more significant targets. At the same time, the leadership transition also represented a significant cause of change, with the new President Xi Jinping showing much greater ambition to play a leading role in global climate politics than his predecessors (Belis et al., 2018). There was also a strong desire to correct the image created of China as one of the actors (together with India) that had prevented a meaningful outcome at COP 15.

In line with its greater willingness to engage globally on climate change, China sought to reinforce its ties with the other big emitter, the US, before COP 21. Following months of diplomatic exchanges, Xi and Obama revealed, in November 2014, a high-level agreement that saw China pledge "to achieve the peaking of CO_2 emissions around 2030 and … to increase the share of non-fossil fuels in primary energy consumption to around 20% by 2030" in return for US GHG emissions cuts of 26-28 percent below their 2005 level by 2025 (White House, 2014). The two leaders also confirmed their interest in a bottom-up regime with reinforced ambition over time.

The increasing centrality of the China-US relationship in global negotiations also illustrated China's embrace of a strategy of MB in the climate context. Besides the US, China also approached other countries, especially India, in the run-up to the Paris summit. Regarding the EU, the engagement was mutual, based on a joint interest in reinforced bilateral ties. Building on the 2005 China-EU Partnership on Climate Change, bilateral talks were bolstered during the period 2010-2015, culminating in several substantial cooperation projects, notably regarding capacity-building on emissions trading and green urbanization, both officially launched in 2012 (Schunz & Belis, 2015). All these projects were more closely linked to dialogues aimed at developing a common understanding of the options for forging a global climate deal at COP 21.

The EU's understanding of China's position and of how it could engage the country in a meaningful way in the climate regime was immensely helped by the US-China deal. When China issued its intended nationally determined contribution during Xi's visit to Europe in June 2015, it also outlined details of its domestic targets and its view of a possible Paris outcome. The country aimed at a "legally binding agreement", with the "nationally determined contributions by developed and developing countries … listed respectively and separately in the Paris outcome" (NDRC, 2015). It simultaneously emphasized that transparency for developing countries should be enforced in a way that is "non-intrusive, non-punitive and respecting national sovereignty" (ibid.). This text signaled to the EU the existence of a workable landing zone: while developing countries could continue to be treated 'with more flexibility' compared to developed countries, the EU would be able to obtain China's (and other emerging/developing countries') commitment to a solid, albeit self-set target.

In sum, the EU's climate diplomacy vis-à-vis China was characterized to a much larger extent than before by pursuing not just its own objectives, but rather seeking to find possible ways of reconciling its positions with those of China. Incentives-based measures and dialogues were employed to this end, and the EU took greater account of the positions of other BASIC countries and the US in its relations with China. The EU thus employed primarily a strategy of 'cooperative multiple bilateralism', with a slight confrontational edge when it opposed – together with its High Ambition Coalition partners – the BASIC group's position on differentiation at COP 21, as discussed below.

The EU's approach vis-à-vis the United States: cooperative multiple bilateralism

Immediately after COP 15, the climate relations between the EU and the US cooled down considerably. In 2010, the US initially intended to dislocate global climate talks from the UN regime into smaller fora, a strategy already pursued by the Bush administration and revived by Obama with the sponsoring of the Major Economies Forum on Energy and Climate Change (MEF).[4] This attempt was successfully resisted by a large group of parties attached to multilateralism, including the EU alongside the emerging and developing countries. The US then employed the MEF to pre-discuss deals that were later formalized in the UN negotiations. Domestically, the 'American Clean Energy and Security Act', which had been approved by the House of Representatives in June 2009, was – due to Republican resistance – never discussed in the Senate. This marked the ultimate failure of Obama's plans for a comprehensive national climate legislation (Schunz, 2016).

[4] This Forum, which met each year between 2009 and 2015, brought together 17 major economies: Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, the EU, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Korea, Mexico, Russia, South Africa, the UK, and the US.

Given the domestic policy stalemates in the US, the EU partially turned its attention away from the United States and towards a stronger – bilateral – engagement with the emerging economies. It also invested into coalition-building with vulnerable and developing countries in the so-called "progressive alliance" (Van Schaik, 2013), later turned into the 'High Ambition Coalition'[5] at Paris. An effort at engaging in unilateralism with the inclusion of non-EU air carriers into the Union's emissions trading system backfired, however (Birchfield, 2015). This move aimed at gaining leverage over unregulated international airline emissions provoked hostile reactions in the US, leading Congress to pass a bill *forbidding* US companies to comply with EU legislation. EU-US climate relations were thus not at their best when the start of new climate regime reform negotiations was decided upon at the Durban COP 17 in late 2011.

In the period that followed, EU-US climate relations improved again, especially when Obama began his second term in office with reinvigorated climate activism. The milestones of US climate policy were Obama's decision to empower the Environmental Protection Agency on the regulation of emissions and, in August 2015, the adoption of the 'Clean Power Plan', which foresaw GHG reductions in the power sector of 32 percent from 2005 levels by 2030 (EPA, 2015). In parallel, US climate diplomacy was reinforced through overt 'multiple bilateralism', particularly via strengthened relations with the BASIC. The US primarily reached out to China in view of forging a bilateral partnership around its preferred bottom-up approach to global climate governance, based on (intended) 'nationally determined contributions' (NDCs) as nuclei of a global multilateral treaty. The abovementioned November 2014 US-China agreement was the most tangible outcome of this strategic engagement.

Both the US commitment to stronger domestic action and to forging a global deal made the EU more actively seek engagement with the Americans again in the run-up to COP 21. However, beyond the joint willingness to reach a meaningful deal, US-EU interaction in the climate negotiations was based on only "loose cooperation [and] frequent information exchange" (Biedenkopf & Walker, 2018: 308). This exchange did allow the EU to better understand the US (and by extension the US-Chinese) positions and attitudes, notably on the ultimate objectives of the negotiations. At the Paris summit, EU-US cooperation would become one crucial ingredient for the adoption of the final deal. To enable the Paris Agreement, "the position of the US-BASIC coalition around the bottom-up nature of the agreement had to be reconciled with the position of the EU's 'High Ambition Coalition' with developing countries, which pushed firmly for the objective of keeping global warming below 2°C … and for a robust framework for reviewing future 'nationally determined contributions' so that these could actually

[5] This coalition comprised more than 100 countries: next to the EU-28 especially small-island states as well as other vulnerable and least developed countries.

allow reaching this ambition" (Schunz, 2016: 443). During the final days of COP 21, the US (and Brazil) asked to join the 'High Ambition Coalition', putting pressure on China and India and thus enabling the ultimate deal.

In sum, during the period 2010-2015, the EU's climate diplomacy vis-à-vis the United States was characterized by an attempt at addressing the US in the framework of its broader cooperative MB strategy. Where EU climate diplomacy had in the past often been overly focused on the US, it had now – while diversifying its outreach considerably – offered the US opportunities for cooperation with limited fervency. For both sides, the engagement with the other was clearly no longer at the core of their climate diplomacy strategies. While the US was thus a piece in the puzzle of EU's cooperative multiple bilateral strategy, the Union arguably invested more into its relations with the BASIC, specifically China, and the High Ambition Coalition.

The EU's approach vis-à-vis India: mixed multiple bilateralism

During the entire period 2010-2015, the EU's relationship with India remained more strained compared to its ties with China and the US. As in the case of China, the EU attempted to better understand and address Indian positions after COP 15 via extended diplomatic outreach. While the country's emphasis on equity, differentiation and 'means of implementation' (i.e. climate finance and technology transfer) remained strong, notable changes in its position occurred when the new Prime Minister Modi took charge of setting the diplomatic agenda on climate change. By 2015, this translated into several bilateral deals with the US and several EU members (including Germany and France) aimed at promoting clean energy. They included Modi's own efforts to create an 'International Solar Alliance' of 120 countries, launched with French support at COP 21. Based on the impetus from its new leadership, India itself thus clearly embraced a form of multiple bilateralism, as did the EU (Belis et al., 2018).

Its better understanding of the Indian positions helped the EU to accept that pushing the country towards top-down, binding commitments would not be successful. Yet, in the absence of a real Indian willingness to engage with the EU in the type of hands-on cooperation that the Union had developed with China, concrete areas of agreement were harder to identify. Despite bilateral dialogues, several contentious items remained, as became visible during the Durban COP and especially at the Paris summit (Belis et al., 2018; Van Schaik, 2013).

In this context, the EU's climate diplomacy relied on a mixed form of multiple bilateralism with regard to India. On the one hand, it attempted to engage the Indians – including via individual member states – as much as possible in dialogues linked to

the UN climate negotiations (Belis et al., 2018). On the other hand, and because it had prepared the Paris summit through *multiple* bilateral relations, the EU was able to pursue a more confrontational stance vis-à-vis India. The existence of acceptable landing zones between the EU and China and the other BASIC countries (Brazil and South Africa) on issues such as differentiation, as well as its solid anchorage in the High Ambition Coalition (which excluded both China and India, but eventually included the US and Brazil) enabled the EU to put pressure on India to compromise on issues related to differentiation and the level of ambition during the final days of the Paris summit (Schunz, 2016; Oberthür & Groen, 2018).

In sum, there is thus significant evidence that the EU adopted a confrontational MB approach, with some cooperative elements, vis-à-vis India during this period.

The EU's engagement with major emitters after COP 21 (2016-2020): sustaining multiple bilateralism to implement the Paris Agreement

The Paris Agreement adopted at COP 21 was widely hailed as a success of multilateralism, despite its nature as a "high-stakes experiment" in international law and in policy-making (Doelle, 2016). Its ratification was achieved in record time: the US-China tandem led the way, followed by the EU and India so that already in October 2016, before the US presidential elections, the treaty could enter into force. Subsequently, parties engaged on two parallel negotiation tracks: one aimed at operationalizing key PA provisions (e.g. on the 'ambition mechanism', transparency and review) to prepare it for implementation; and a second one focussing on enhancing parties' ambitions. The announcement of the newly elected President Trump in June 2017 to withdraw the US from the PA slowed these processes down, but did not halt them, thanks also to the reinvigoration of multiple bilateralism between the remaining major emitters.

During the period 2016-2020, the EU's multilateral objectives were unequivocal: it wanted to obtain, on the one hand, "a common set of rules for the implementation of all provisions of the Agreement in a balanced and tailored manner, applicable to all Parties while addressing Parties' different starting points and evolving capacities" (Council of the EU, 2018: point 19) and, on the other hand, high levels of ambition, calling on parties to "step up the global efforts to tackle climate change in light of the latest available science" (Council of the EU, 2019: point 11). The EU undertook this latter step in 2019-2020 when announcing the European Green Deal and updating its 'nationally determined contribution' from 40 to 55 percent GHG reductions from 1990 levels until 2030.

The EU's approach vis-à-vis China: cooperative multiple bilateralism

Ever since the Paris summit, the EU and China have been on rather solidly good terms regarding climate change. Despite numerous frictions in a general bilateral relationship that saw the European External Action Service (EEAS) (2019: 1) characterize China as "simultaneously, in different policy areas, a cooperation [and] negotiating partner ..., an economic competitor ..., and a systemic rival", the climate domain has continuously remained an area of cooperation.

The EU has chosen to pursue a cooperative approach on climate change with China to encourage positive domestic developments in light of the country's steadily growing emissions. Under Xi Jinping's leadership, China has adopted more ambitious climate policies in its successive Five-Year Plans, while undertaking major investments in renewable energy technologies that could make it durably surpass the EU and the US as the planet's no. 1 clean tech nation (Holzmann & Grünberg, 2021). In late 2020, China also committed to reaching net-zero emissions by 2060, a target that the EU's High Representative Borrell qualified as "a tipping point in the fight against climate change", "provided acts follow words" (EEAS, 2020). At the same time, the country still faces the challenges of sustaining its growth and meeting continuously increasing energy demands while phasing out its fossil fuel consumption – a monumental defy the EU acknowledges and wishes to help tackling.

The solidity of the partnership manifested itself particularly after Trump announced the US withdrawal from the PA. At that point, China and the EU did not only individually reinforce their commitment to the multilateral regime, but also actively undertook to reinforce multiple bilateralism with each other and key third parties, including the other BASIC countries and Canada (Yan, 2020: 161-162). On the one hand, this became visible via reinforced direct ties, which culminated, in 2018, in a remarkably strongly worded 'EU-China Leaders' Statement on Climate Change and Clean Energy' (EU-China, 2018). Initially planned for 2017, when it failed over disagreements regarding China's 'market economy' status, the statement underlined that the "EU and China consider climate action and the clean energy transition an imperative more important than ever" (ibid.: 1). It was accompanied by a novel cooperation impetus, notably in areas such as emissions trading and low-carbon cities cooperation (Yan, 2020).

On the other hand, EU-China cooperation took the form of explicitly 'triangulating' bilateral relations by including the US' neighbour, Canada (under the climate-progressive Trudeau government), into the exchanges. Since September 2017, and in preparation of UN climate meetings, the EU, China, and Canada have met annually in a format known as the 'Ministerial on Climate Action' (MoCA) (European

Commission, 2021). Under their co-leadership, the MoCA was gradually extended to the participation of other major emitters. In the absence of US leadership, it filled an important void, notably when it came to reaffirming climate commitments during the Covid-19 crisis (Simon, 2020).

Altogether, the post-Paris pattern of EU engagement with China, notably during the Trump Presidency, was unequivocally one of cooperative bilateralism that became cooperative MB via its efforts to extend the bilateral relations to Canada and to co-lead global negotiations on the operationalization and implementation of the PA. This yielded positive outcomes, most importantly by contributing to the adoption of a rulebook operationalizing the Paris Agreement at the 2018 COP 24 Katowice.

The EU's approach vis-à-vis the US: from one-way bilateralism to multi-level cooperative MB

The story of the EU's approach vis-à-vis the US in the post-COP 21 period can be quickly told: the transatlantic channels of communication came to an abrupt halt when climate denier Trump moved into the White House. His agenda foresaw a complete roll-back of Obama's climate policies, renewed investments into the fossil fuel industry, as well as a disengagement from the global climate regime, which was quickly confirmed with Trump's announcement of withdrawing the US from the PA (Steinhauer, 2018). Added to this were an open hostility towards the EU and its integration process.

Where EU policy-makers had initially looked for ways to nonetheless constructively engage with the Trump administration, for instance by gradually reviving dialogue in the US-EU Energy Council (ibid.: 22), these attempts soon proved ineffective. As a result, EU-US bilateral climate relations at the governmental level were essentially suspended for the remainder of Trump's presidency. Instead, the EU increasingly engaged with US sub-national – state and city governments – as well as civil society actors, for instance through EU-California cooperation and the Global Covenant of Mayors (Biedenkopf & Walker, 2018). This engagement included informal exchanges in the context of global climate regime negotiations.

Despite an EU climate diplomacy strategy vis-à-vis the US that could initially best be understood as (futile) one-way bilateralism, the emerging pattern of engagement with US sub-national and other players points to a form of cooperative MB at different levels. This multi-level cooperative MB has not yet been borne fruit at the multilateral level but may provide the fertile ground for re-building EU-US bilateral climate relations, with positive repercussions for the UN climate regime, under Biden (Schunz, 2020).

The EU's approach vis-à-vis India: towards primarily cooperative multiple bilateralism

The EU's approach towards India and their multiple bilateral relationship developed in the run-up to the Paris summit has since remained rather stable. The prospects of a US PA withdrawal could have provoked a change in 2017, but in the light of further Chinese engagement, reinforced EU-China climate links, but also domestic developments in India, the Indian commitment to solid climate relations with the EU (and the BASIC) endured.

The pragmatic path global climate negotiations pursued with the Paris Agreement has – together with domestic factors – contributed to a change of attitude towards climate change in India: where the topic "was considered an exclusively diplomatic ... issue" until the early 2010s, "now, there is a slew of policy and institutional activity [with] [n]ational and sub-national levels of government ... internalizing climate change ..., as well as building linkages across climate and non-climate actions" (Dubash & Ghosh, 2019: 345). A major indicator of India's commitment is its nationally determined contribution, which comes with unconditional (an emissions intensity of 33-35 percent below 2005 levels) and conditional (a non-fossil fuel share of power generation capacity of 40 percent, depending on external support) 2030 targets (CAT, 2020). Of the major emitters, India was, in 2020, the only one on a below 2°C global warming trajectory (ibid.). The Indian government was also quick to underscore its commitment to the PA following Trump's withdrawal announcement.

Not surprisingly, the EU sought to continue engaging India around climate change after Paris. In 2016, the two sides concluded a new 'EU-India Clean Energy and Climate Partnership', which has since contributed to reinforced policy dialogue as well as numerous cooperation projects on renewables, notably solar energy, energy efficiency and bi- and multilateral climate action (EU Delegation to India, 2020). The partnership was further strengthened at the 2020 EU-India summit with the 'EU-India Strategic Partnership – Roadmap for 2025', in which the two parties vow to collaborate closely around the PA implementation (EU-India, 2020: 3-4). Despite occasional frictions in climate negotiations regarding the differentiation between developed and developing countries, the EU and India have thus found ways to use their bilateral cooperation for fruitful engagement in the context of the multilateral climate negotiations.

Altogether, EU-India climate relations have thus further improved, leaning more towards cooperative than confrontational MB in recent years.

Comparing the EU's climate diplomacy strategies across major emitters and time

The findings for the EU's engagement with major emitters during the three examined periods allow for a comparison that clearly shows a strategic turn in the Union's climate diplomacy (see Table 2).

Table 2: Forms of EU strategic interaction with major emitters from 2005 until 2020

Time period / EU interlocutor	2005-2009	2010-2015	2016-2020
China	One-way bilateralism	Cooperative (and confrontational) multiple bilateralism	Cooperative multiple bilateralism
United States	One-way bilateralism	Cooperative multiple bilateralism	Multi-level cooperative multiple bilateralism
India	One-way bilateralism	Mixed – confrontational and cooperative – multiple bilateralism	Cooperative multiple bilateralism
Cross-actor pattern	One-way bilateralism	Strategic hedging	Cooperative multiple bilateralism

Source: author's compilation

During the period 2005-2009, the EU invested, for the first time, into its bilateral climate relations with China and India, while attempting to reinforce its relations with the US, especially since the start of the Obama Presidency. Each of these bilateral relations took the form of 'one-way bilateralism'. In the case of the US, the EU used its internal climate regime, based on policies adopted with the 2008/2009 climate and energy package, and especially its ETS, as a model for the Americans to follow – in vain, as the failed attempt at passing cap-and-trade legislation in Congress illustrated. Regarding China and India, the EU forged bilateral relationships relying to a larger extent on a combination of showcasing its model and positive incentives to have them adopt EU-like policies: it offered capacity-building, technology transfer and other forms of support in return for climate dialogues and (ideally) cooperation in the multilateral arena. This led however to limited successes: in the Chinese case, it resulted in the selective adoption of EU policies and strong cooperation around the CDM; in the Indian case, the EU encountered above all resistance (Torney, 2015a). Altogether, during this period, the EU's climate diplomacy approach amounted thus to a peculiar mix of one-way bilateralism with the three major emitters, paired with a quite principled, rigid approach to the multilateral negotiations aimed at creating a maximum of global predictability in line with its own values related to multilateralism, the development of international law and precaution. Neither individually regarding the three players, nor at the multilateral level did this self-referential approach allow the EU to successfully attain its objectives.

After COP 15, the EU's relations with the three major emitters gradually changed, as the EU engaged in forms of two-way bilateralism that were explicitly linked to the multilateral arena. This strategy was most apparent in the EU's dealings with China and (to a lesser extent) the US in the form of cooperative MB, but also detectable in its interactions with India, where it took a mixed, confrontational-cooperative form. It was coupled with an overall change of attitude. The EU now pursued objectives that were no longer purely centred on its internal climate regime and defined in function of its own ideal outcome of a top-down governance nature. Instead, it sought to develop a better understanding of the global context including others' positions, interests and values. In so doing, it started to reflect more strategically on how to approach these other players in parallel, showing a greater understanding for the complexity of global climate politics. Importantly, it reasoned in terms of a multilateral outcome achievable for all major emitters, as well as about the concessions it would take to forge such an outcome. Part of this exercise was an active reflection on how to counterbalance – via strategic coalition-building – the power of these other players. It was then also during this period that the EU deployed both cooperative and confrontational forms of MB and was thus most obviously – and successfully – using 'strategic hedging' to deal with a very complex, multipolar negotiation context. This particularly served the purpose of countering the power of the BASIC group (especially India) and its resistance on certain negotiation items (e.g. differentiation) while still cooperating with them on others. In sum, during the period 2010-2015, the EU's approach thus changed from wanting to create a maximum degree of predictability of the global context to wanting to create a 'conducive environment' for global climate action, in which further EU ambitions could be pursued in the medium to long term.

The continuation of this approach – especially a further pursuit of cooperative MB – could be regarded as a fundamental ingredient for the successful implementation of the Paris Agreement. Yet, during the period 2016-2020, the global context remained rather dynamic, with repercussions for the EU's climate diplomacy. The hostility of the Trump administration to climate action, multilateralism and the EU per se, implied that MB vis-à-vis the US government – even of the confrontational sort – was no longer an option. This would have presupposed open channels of communication, which were not given. Instead, the EU creatively pursued a path it had already taken during the George W. Bush Presidency, namely that of engaging with sub-federal level actors at state and municipal, but also non-governmental levels in what could be considered as a form of multi-level cooperative MB, preparing the ground for the post-Trump era. With China and India, trends of the pre-Paris period were reinforced, without however taking the confrontational form the EU had resorted to at Paris. This yielded some success when, at COP 24 in Katowice, the Paris Agreement rulebook was adopted.

In synthesis, the longitudinal analysis of the EU's climate diplomatic strategy clearly reveals a strategic turn in the early 2010s. The EU's strategy evolved from a self-centred, one-way bilateralism that did not duly consider its partners' positions and interests and values, to forms of MB that – at Paris – were of both the cooperative and confrontational type, amounting thus to a form of 'strategic hedging'. This made sense in an uncertain, complex and volatile context where pressure for an outcome was high, but the positions of the EU and the BASIC on key agenda items diverged. In the period that followed, the pattern stabilized regarding China and India, in the latter case with a penchant towards greater cooperative MB. It changed vis-à-vis the US due to Trump's climate denialism. This does not call into question the overarching pattern, however. From a counterfactual perspective, a Hillary Clinton presidency that would have continued Obama's climate diplomacy would most certainly have led to continued EU-US cooperative MB. The multi-level cooperative MB the EU tried to develop during the Trump years form the basis for an effective re-engagement with the US under Biden, taking due account of the current state of the bilateral relations with its other key partners and of the significantly evolved multilateral context.

The next section offers an explanation of the patterns detected.

Explaining the EU's strategic turn to multiple bilateralism

The strategic turn in EU climate diplomacy comprises two aspects requiring explanation: first, a shift from a principled 'leadership-by-example' approach relying on 'one-way bilateralism' to a more flexible strategy of 'hedging' through cooperative and confrontational MB; and second, the slight variation in approach vis-à-vis different major powers. Rather than developing a monocausal explanation of its strategic adjustment, which would account for EU external action with reference to, for instance, either its interests (Kelemen & Vogel, 2010) or its norms (Van Schaik & Schunz, 2012), this paper adopts a multi-causal perspective focusing on the interplay between opportunity and presence, as well as EU agency.

The policy window: a changing opportunity meets an entrenched presence

The durable change of the EU's climate diplomacy during the first half of the 2010s was enabled by a policy window emerging from the clash of a radically changing and challenging opportunity with a reinforced EU presence demanding effective external climate action.

Opportunity: changing global climate politics

COP 15 represented a forceful manifestation of a major geopolitical change producing both complexity and uncertainty, for which neither the EU nor other major emitters had been adequately prepared (Belis et al., 2018). Until the mid-2000s, global climate politics had been strongly influenced by the major developed country emitters, the US, the EU and Japan. The general rise of the BASIC countries in economic terms as well as the important growth of these countries' emissions during the 2000s durably altered this geopolitical constellation. It resulted in a multipolar setting that found its expression in the negotiation scenario and the minimalistic result of COP 15. The outcome of that summit prompted serious strategic reflections by all major emitters. In China, it resulted in a significant modification of the framing of climate change and contributed to a fundamental shift in position fuelled by a changing economy and a new, ambitious leadership under Xi Jinping. In the US, by contrast, the immediate response was an attempt to move the global climate talks out of the UN altogether before domestic politics stalled US climate diplomacy during the remainder of Obama's first term. A more assertive US climate diplomacy – based on more reliable and predictable internal policies driven not by Congress, but by the Executive – emerged during his second term. When the US and China, based on these internal changes, forged their November 2014 climate deal to clear the path for agreement at Paris, they were engaging in a form of cooperative bilateralism. Given that they also sought to construe additional bilateral dialogues, knitting a dense web of cooperative arrangements, inter alia with the EU and India, their strategy was clearly one of MB.

The evolving geopolitical context and other major powers' strategic adjustments to this dynamic environment, fuelled by their domestic debates, provided a significantly altered external opportunity for the EU: suddenly it faced several major powers with positions diverging fundamentally from its own and strategies focussed on bilateral ties.

Presence: constitutionalizing the EU's identity as a climate guardian

When it comes to the EU's presence, its already very solid legal framework regarding climate change, which had been lifted to a new level of communitarization with the 2008/2009 climate and energy package, was further reinforced with the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty in December 2009. Article 191.1 TFEU elevates climate change to the rank of a quasi-constitutional objective: "Union policy on the environment shall contribute to … the following objectives: … promoting measures at international level to deal with regional or worldwide environmental problems, and in particular combating climate change". This implies that the EU has a treaty-based

obligation, now even more than before, to pursue its role as a regional and global climate guardian through effective internal and external climate policies.

Yet, it is this effectiveness that was lacking from EU climate diplomacy: given the altered opportunity, the EU's 'leadership-by-example' strategy embodied in 'one-way bilateralism' had clearly not delivered on its desire to successfully promote "measures at international level to ... combat ... climate change" at COP 15. As a result, the objective of pursuing effective climate diplomacy ingrained in the EU's legal *acquis* (presence) clashed with the changing geopolitics (opportunity). This discrepancy opened a policy window that was exploited by a coalition of long-standing and new policy entrepreneurs.

EU agency: coalescing long-standing and new policy entrepreneurs transcend the 'more of the same' approach

After COP 15, the EU's climate diplomacy initially seemed on a 'more of the same', 'leadership-by-example' path (Schunz, 2012), before it was gradually adjusted to the Copenhagen experience. This adjustment resulted from the expansion of a traditional coalition of pro-external climate policy actors to new actors injecting foreign policy and strategy thinking into the EU's climate diplomacy.

Until the late 2000s, EU climate diplomacy had been prepared and implemented by a coalition of norm-driven policy entrepreneurs with a strong preference for a leadership-focussed EU climate diplomacy (Schunz, 2012). This coalition comprised top-level staff of the Commission's DG Environment (later DG Climate Action) and officials from progressive member states meeting within the Council Working Party on International Environmental Issues-Climate Change (WPIEI-CC). They formed a group of norm entrepreneurs driven by a strong attachment to several key principles regarding climate change, including the necessity to strive for a high level of protection and to adopt a precautionary approach in the climate domain (Van Schaik & Schunz, 2012). Their ideas persist until the present day, and have, since the early 2010s, been widely supported by majorities in all relevant EU institutions: key member states in the Environment Council, the (relevant) Commission DGs and the main political groups in the European Parliament. They were also backed by important segments of European civil society and EU citizens, with Eurobarometer surveys consistently indicating that "nine in ten Europeans (90%) think that climate change is a very serious or a serious problem" and requesting more action (European Commission, 2014: 5). As a result, climate change activities were gradually reinforced, with the European Green Deal as the most recent example. Over time, the key premises of the approach defended by this group – such as that of keeping global

temperature increase to 2°C, and since the Paris Agreement even to 1.5°C – have remained stable (see also Oberthür & Groen, 2018). So had its preference for the 'leadership-by-example' approach.

Following the limited EU success at COP 15, this coalition came under increasing pressure. With reference to the flagrant ineffectiveness of the EU's approach and to the policy window described above, critics within the EU questioned not so much the substance of its positions, but rather the ways in which its climate diplomacy had been deployed to defend them. Gradually, relevant EU policy-makers began to accept that the 'leadership-by-example' approach and its derivative, 'one-way-bilateralism', did not prove fit for the purpose of maintaining the EU as an influential actor in the new geopolitical constellation of global climate politics.

The ensuing reflections on how the EU's continuously ambitious positions could be defended more effectively externally were impacted by two major institutional novelties brought about by the Lisbon Treaty: first, Art. 218 TFEU enabled the Commission to externally represent the EU more widely, allowing it also to play a stronger role in global climate politics. This role was taken up by the Commissioner for 'Climate Action', a post created (together with a Directorate-General of the same name) in early 2010. The first Climate Commissioner, Connie Hedegaard, immediately assumed a leading role in the EU's climate troika, a move confirmed by her successor, Climate Action and Energy Commissioner Arias Cañete. In both cases, this also implied greater medium-term strategic impetus to EU climate diplomacy by the Commission. This trend was confirmed when Commission President von der Leyen entrusted the Executive Vice-President in charge of the European Green Deal (and Green Deal Diplomacy), Frans Timmermans, with the role as chief EU climate diplomat.

Second, the Treaty provided the opportunity for the newly created High Representative and EEAS to become involved in EU external climate policies. While it would be exaggerated to claim that the HR and EEAS have had any major impact on the substance of EU climate diplomacy, they have been contributing to designing its implementation, notably via a series of climate diplomacy action plans adopted by the Foreign Affairs Council since 2011 (Dupont et al., 2018: 118). These have helped focus the EU's attention on the evolving external context and on the strategic dimension of its external climate action, as well as on the 'how' of defending its positions (e.g., the most recent one: Council of the EU, 2021).

In this vein, new agents reinforced the established pro-external climate action coalition, bringing foreign policy and strategic perspectives into the design of the EU's climate diplomacy. Their insights underscored *that* EU climate diplomacy needed a

strategic change, which had to start with a greater consideration for the external context. This emphasis on the external opportunity then also determined to a large extent the specific form that the EU's changed climate diplomatic strategy took. Where a 'leadership-by-example' approach had ultimately been entirely derived from internal policies (and could content itself with focusing on projecting the EU's climate regime), a foreign policy perspective made EU climate diplomats understand that – given China's and the US' reliance on multiple bilateral climate strategies –, its weight in the multipolar climate politics depended on the capacity to better understand and deal with other key emitters, and thus to also play the game of MB. In doing so, the EU initially clearly adapted to the rules set by other major emitters, before – in the wake of Trump's election – becoming a motor of continued MB.

At the same time, the EU sought to remain flexible in the pursuit of its ambitious climate objectives via strategic hedging. Depending on the interlocutor and the degree of convergence or divergence with its positions, the Union was able to vary between – and sometimes combine – cooperative and confrontational approaches. Its objective has been to, as a preferred option, seek common ground where possible. Yet, to protect the red lines set by its norm-based positions, the EU assertively counterbalanced other players' power where necessary. This necessity to adopt a confrontational stance emerged especially during the Paris COP when the EU coalesced successfully with the High Ambition Coalition to keep India and China in check. Strategic hedging remained an option during the Trump Presidency and will also do so in the future. One of the documents emanating from the reflections of relevant EU policy entrepreneurs, a Joint Non-Paper of the European Commission and the EEAS (2013: 4), unequivocally captured this idea: "The EU should invest even more strategically into its bilateral relations with individual partners ... to ensure convergence and shared leadership on climate ambition. Special attention needs to be paid bilaterally to the largest emitters" via "targeted strategies".

Altogether, the EU's strategic turn resulted thus primarily from its reaction to a significantly transformed external context. Faced with its own ineffectiveness, a change in climate geopolitics, and a reinforced climate-specific presence, a reconstituted coalition of policy entrepreneurs initiated reflections on a readjusted EU climate diplomacy. These led to a mixed multiple bilateral strategy, which offered the possibility of hedging, to provide a better fit between the Union's ambitions and the realities of global climate politics.

Conclusion: EU multiple bilateralism and the future of global climate politics

This paper started from the observation that after the 2009 Copenhagen climate summit the EU has considerably modified its climate diplomatic approach, notably through a stronger bilateral outreach. To better understand this 'strategic turn', it undertook a comparison between the EU's bilateral interactions with the three other major global emitters – China, the US and India – during the periods 2005-2009, 2010-2015 and 2016-2020. The analysis revealed that the Union's climate diplomacy had indeed transformed from a rigid and self-referential 'leadership-by-example' approach centred on 'one-way-bilateralism' and the promotion of top-down global climate governance to a mix of cooperative multiple bilateralism vis-à-vis most notably China, but also to some extent the US under Obama, with cooperative and confrontational multiple bilateralism vis-à-vis India and, at the end of COP 21, China. Key features of the EU's novel strategy are greater pragmatism relying on attention to other players' positions, interests and values, and a greater flexibility in its approach, including a willingness to accept a universal, but bottom-up UN climate regime based on nationally determined contributions. The multiple bilateral approach the EU pursued in the run-up to and at the Paris summit enabled it to co-create – together with the other major emitters and in cooperation with its partners from the High Ambition Coalition – a negotiation environment that made the Paris Agreement possible. In that sense, its strategic adjustment bore immediate fruit. It was, also for that reason, sustained during the turbulent years of the Trump Presidency.

The paper offers a plausible multicausal explanation of the EU's strategic turn which argues that its climate diplomacy was adapted by an ambitious coalition of long-standing and new EU climate policy entrepreneurs that consciously reacted to a policy window which had opened by the changing global climate geopolitics and a reinforced EU presence in the climate domain.

The paper's findings have both academic and practical-political implications. Regarding the academic debate, the emphasis that this paper places on a foreign policy perspective highlighting strategic forms of interaction at the intersection between bilateral and multilateral arenas significantly adds to the state of the art. By adequately embedding the analysis of EU climate diplomacy into the novel global geopolitical context of (not just) the climate domain and taking due account of contemporary intra-EU realities, it overcomes the EU-centrism prevailing in many existing studies. EU-centric perspectives and a focus on its rhetoric could point to a desire for continuing attempts to lead by example for the purposes of fostering a multilateral rules-based order – an aspiration that has indeed been reinvigorated with the European Green Deal. However, a close inspection of EU external climate action

yields a more nuanced picture. It reveals that the EU's activities de facto transcend by far the introspective 'leadership-by-example' and multilateralism-centred 'leadiator' approaches: the Union chooses to invest in well-selected partnerships and interacts with those partners based on ever more carefully polished strategies. These strategies rely on a higher level of EU assertiveness. It no longer shies away from resorting to strategic hedging if this can help advance its positions on climate change (and other matters it really cares about – see, but with more scepticism regarding the strategic thinking behind EU hedging, Higgott & Reich, 2021: 11-13).

The analysis also exposes, however, that this new strategic approach is not entirely of the Union's own making: rather than setting the rules of the game, the EU has had to adapt to geopolitical realities shaped by others, most notably China and the US. Only this enabled it to remain a meaningful player – despite its relative decline in emissions – at all. This realization goes hand in hand with tempered ambitions: rather than the hybris embodied in the desire to lead the world by the example of its regional climate regime, EU policy-makers realized that they needed to enhance its strategic capacities to be able to weigh on global negotiations. Future analyses should therefore duly take into account that climate diplomacy is not (and never has been) simply the external dimension of EU internal climate action. It is thus not sufficient to analyse how the EU tries to explain and project internal climate *policies*. Rather, external climate policy is *foreign policy* unfolding in a context of complex geo*politics*. Studies of EU climate diplomacy can thus benefit from more amply drawing on insights from IR theories and Foreign Policy Analysis about multipolarity and strategic behaviour.

With the recent US re-engagement in global climate politics, all major emitters are now part of the global regime setting again. 2021 thus marks the *real* start of the PA's implementation. The paper provides pointers as to how the EU should further approach the challenge of successfully implementing the PA in future, notably in the run-up to the Glasgow COP 26 aimed at enhancing parties' GHG reduction ambitions. In this context, the US are forcefully trying to (re-)impose themselves as the world's climate leader. President Biden's ambitious climate agenda comes with a clear claim to "lead an effort to get every major country to ramp up the ambition of their domestic climate targets" by deploying "America's economic leverage and power of example" (Biden, 2020). Biden's campaign promises have been followed by concrete domestic and international action underscoring his administration's dedication to the climate cause. Most notably, the Biden administration proposed a national emissions reduction target of 50-52 percent from 2005 levels by 2030, described as "the biggest climate step made by any US government in history" (CAT, 2021), alongside a 2.25 trillion USD infrastructure and clean energy plan. Simultaneously, the US President has

been spearheading international climate action by organising, on 22-23 April 2021, a (virtual) Global Leaders Summit bringing together 40 heads of state from major emitting as well as vulnerable countries. The Summit had been prepared by the US Special Presidential Envoy for Climate, John Kerry, through several bilateral initiatives: on a visit to Brussels on 9 March, he exchanged with the College of European Commissioners; in Shanghai, he and his Chinese counterpart met on 15-16 April to conclude a widely discussed 'U.S.-China Joint Statement Addressing the Climate Crisis' (U.S. Department of State, 2021a); with India, Kerry launched, on 22 April, the 'U.S.-India Climate and Clean Energy Agenda 2030 Partnership' (U.S. Department of State, 2021b). The US strategy of using reinforced bilateral ties to build – via the intermediary of a minilateral summit – towards progress in the multilateral regime clearly provides new momentum for the PA implementation. At the Summit, several parties (notably Brazil, Canada and Japan) already publicly committed to enhanced pledges.

If the Union wishes to remain an effective co-leader in the climate regime, it is well-advised to pursue a cooperative multiple bilateral strategy that responds positively to US' initiatives without jeopardizing the consolidated relations built with the other major emitters during the Trump years. This would be consistent with the experience that, despite its current re-emergence as a trend-setter in global climate politics, the US has not been a durably reliable partner in the past. It seems therefore important for the EU to ensure that all major emitters continue to hold joint ownership of the PA implementation process. Strategic hedging therefore remains an option to enhance the chances of attaining the PA targets. If it becomes necessary to resort to confrontational MB to remind a major player of earlier pledges or of the level of ambition needed to reach net-zero emissions, the EU should not shy away from displaying the assertiveness that made its strategy successful at COP 21.

Regarding the broader political debate around the EU's 'strategic autonomy', the EU's climate diplomatic strategic turn, relying on a web of interconnected bilateral relations and the activation of a confrontational approach as part of its strategic hedging, demonstrates how a more geopolitical Union can – "in living by its laws" (read: autonomously) – pursue its objectives (Tocci, 2021: 8). In this vein, EU climate diplomacy represents a significant avant-garde area allowing the EU to further experiment whether the 2016 Global Strategy's desire for (re)gaining geopolitical relevance despite its decreasing clout as a global player is indeed feasible and effective. Recent developments point to an extension of its hedging strategy to other policy areas, also those which do not explicitly involve the development of bilateral relations in the context of a multilateral negotiation setting. The most striking example is the simultaneous conclusion, in December 2020, of the negotiations of the 'EU-China

Comprehensive Agreement on Investment' and the offer of a comprehensive 'New Transatlantic Agenda for Global Change' to the incoming Biden administration.

Lessons learned from the climate domain may help the EU to keep its relations with major powers in balance and to strategically maneuver through an ever more complex global political landscape. They include, first, a focus on the importance of giving comparable weight to different major partners. Second, the EU has learned that the parallel conduct of bilateral negotiations with a continuous awareness for their interconnectedness and of the intricacies of each bilateral relationship enhances the effectiveness of its foreign policy. This concretely entails, for instance, closer, issue-specific cooperation between individual 'country desks' at the EEAS but also in Commission DGs dealing with particular policies (e.g. US and China divisions in DG Trade). Finally, a key lesson from the climate domain is that of the importance of assertiveness, which involves keeping the option of making issue-specific advances with one partner also against the will of another major partner while still maintaining open channels of communication with this latter.

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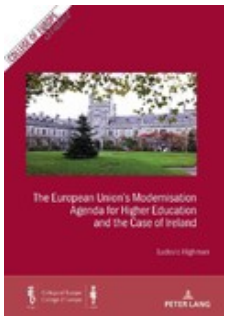

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