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One big conversation: the EU's climate diplomacy across the international regime complex on the Paris Agreement Negotiations

Keywords: European Union / climate diplomacy / international climate politics / regime complexity

Abstract:

The EU participates in many international fora related to climate change (e.g. UNFCCC, G20, Montreal Protocol), which collectively constitute the international regime complex on climate change (IRCCC). Using the case study of negotiations on the Paris Agreement, this paper addresses the question *How and why did the EU use the different fora of the IRCCC to achieve its objectives at COP 21?* It finds that the EU used the different sets of non-focal fora in four main ways: employing typical multilateral negotiating activities, overcoming specific issues of the Paris Agreement negotiations, creating political momentum, and ensuring cross-fora coordination. These uses correspond with the level of political authority of participants and the level of climate-specialization in a given forum.

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Introduction

While the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is the de facto centre of gravity for international climate governance, it is only one of many international fora dealing with climate change. Together, these non-hierarchical, overlapping fora make up what is referred to as the international regime complex of climate change (IRCCC). As the different fora of the complex overlap, one forum can impact the outcome in another, presenting specific challenges and opportunities for implicated actors (Alter and Meunier, 2009; Alter and Raustiala, 2018).

We thus expect the climate diplomacy – the negotiation activities relating to international climate policy (Woolcock, 2012) – of ambitious climate actors like the European Union (EU) to extend across the different fora of the IRCCC. Joint Reflection Papers issued by the European Commission and European External Action Service (2011, 2013, 2015, 2016) provide strong empirical hints that the EU is well-aware of the potential to use the other fora of the IRCCC as part of its climate diplomacy in the run-up to international negotiations in the UNFCCC and its annual Conferences of the Parties (COPs). This was particularly the case for 2015, the year leading up to COP 21, where the Paris Agreement was adopted. The EU identified over 30 multilateral meetings that could play an important role in achieving an ambitious outcome in Paris (European Commission and EEAS, 2015; see timeline in Annex 1). These meetings could serve as opportunities to employ specific negotiation tactics, such as seeking out coalition partners, attempting to draw political attention, or linking issues across different fora, in a way that facilitated reaching its objectives on the Paris Agreement at COP 21. However, it remains unclear whether (and how) the intentions of the Reflection Papers about using non-UNFCCC fora were put into practice. Despite the prominence of EU climate diplomacy scholarship, surprisingly little is known regarding how precisely (or not) and why the EU has weaved its action across the regime complex and conducted climate diplomacy outside the UNFCCC.

We are therefore left with a potentially incomplete picture of EU climate diplomacy not only with respect to COP 21 but within the IRCCC more generally, which could have significant implications for our understanding of the EU as an international climate actor. With more and more climate fora emerging – alongside established ones such as the Major Economies Meeting/Forum (MEF) or the Petersberg Dialogue – and increasing pressure around the world for ambitious climate

action, looking at how an actor like the EU approaches the IRCCC can offer important insights into contemporary international climate governance.

This paper therefore answers the research question *How and why did the EU use the different fora of the IRCCC to achieve its objectives at COP 21?* To do so, we examine EU diplomacy in the negotiations leading to the Paris Agreement, adopted at COP 21 in 2015. The negotiations on the Paris Agreement are a 'most likely' case for EU diplomacy that is conducted across the IRCCC because of three reasons. First, climate featured heavily on the agenda of many non-UNFCCC meetings in the leadup to Paris. Second, the key place of multilateral diplomacy in the EU's 2015 Joint Reflection Papers suggests that the EU strongly considered using different fora of the IRCCC to facilitate its objectives in the UNFCCC (European Commission and EEAS, 2015). Third, the fact that the EU's climate diplomacy has been recognized as contributing to its successful outcome at COP 21 (Cross, 2018; Oberthür and Groen, 2018; Torney and Cross, 2018) suggests that the EU was active in other multilateral fora when laying the foundations for its success in Paris. Hence, the case serves as a plausibility probe to shape our expectations on EU diplomacy in the IRCCC more generally (Beach and Pedersen, 2019).

We abductively examine the EU's cross-fora climate diplomacy in the lead-up to COP 21 and identify how the EU used non-UNFCCC fora to facilitate its work in the UNFCCC, as well as explanatory factors. We perform a qualitative analysis based on a triangulation of three types of data: ten semi-structured interviews conducted with EU and EU member state officials directly involved in EU climate diplomacy leading to COP 21 and the negotiations themselves (see Annex 2), official documents, and existing literature on COP 21 negotiations. Interviews were conducted until no new information emerged. Official documents were collected via online repositories and document requests. These include EU and EU member state position papers, coordination documents, meeting agendas, declarations, and meeting agendas from various IRCCC fora. Findings from the interviews and official documents were corroborated against each other and the existing literature to establish accuracy (Beach and Pedersen, 2019). The existing literature also provided relevant context on EU coordination and the negotiations. The data was then iteratively coded in NVivo.

We make three principal contributions to the literature. First, we provide insight into the importance of different fora in the IRCCC, building on scholarship that has thus far mainly focused

on mapping the complex. Second, we contribute to work on EU climate diplomacy by providing empirical evidence as to how the EU works beyond single fora to achieve its objectives, while also providing a complementary perspective to existing work on the Paris Agreement negotiations. Finally, by offering insight into how and why the EU connects its activity across different fora of the complex, we contribute to the burgeoning work on actor behaviour in international regime complexes.

The paper is structured as follows. First, we introduce the existing literature on the IRCCC, action within regime complexes, and the EU as a climate actor. Second, we elaborate the analytical framework for the paper. Third, we present our empirical findings. We note four specific uses employed by the EU in the IRCCC: employing typical multilateral negotiating activities, overcoming specific issues of the Paris Agreement negotiations, creating political momentum, and ensuring cross-fora coordination. They depend on the level of climate-specialization of the forum in question and the level of political authority of those participating therein. These two distinguishing factors shape the EU's use of different sets of fora in the IRCCC. Finally, we conclude and identify avenues for future research.

State of the art: the EU in the IRCCC

The International Regime Complex on Climate Change

Given climate change entails a variety of issues related to human influence on the environment, international climate governance falls across many inter-related fora. Since the establishment of the UNFCCC, a 'Cambrian explosion' has taken place at the international level, with fora emerging at different moments and contexts to handle particular aspects of climate change (Keohane and Victor, 2011, p. 12). Together, these fora constitute the IRCCC. We rely on the understanding of the IRCCC as the host of partially-overlapping and non-hierarchical institutions (fora) that collectively govern climate change (Alter and Raustiala, 2018; Keohane and Victor, 2011).

A forum entails intergovernmental gatherings of three or more state actors at the international level. The types of fora include international organizations, established negotiation frameworks, clubs, and 'mixed' fora. International organizations have established secretariats and governance structures to facilitate recurring meetings (Levy et al., 1995). Two such examples are the

International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and International Maritime Organization (IMO), which are the competent fora for regulating international greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from their respective sectors. Established negotiation frameworks refer to those fora with specific mandates, often linked to a parent treaty (such as the UNFCCC or the Montreal Protocol), for negotiating a specific agreement dealing with aspects of climate change. Clubs, like the Petersberg Dialogue, G7, and G20, gather like-minded actors to informally discuss positions on different issues but lack the formal institutional features of international organizations. In recent years, 'mixed' fora that implicate both private and public actors have emerged at the international level as venues for climate governance (van Asselt, 2014). This includes fora like the Center for Energy and Climate Studies (C2ES).

Since its introduction, the IRCCC has remained a fixture in the literature, though scholars have proposed various conceptualisations which all emphasize the overlapping, non-hierarchical nature of international climate governance. The conceptualisations differ on, first, the extension of the IRCCC to fora dealing with policy areas beyond climate change (and which ones to include) and, second, the inclusion of fora with different structures and participating actors (e.g. states, transnational, or private actors) (Earsom and Delreux, 2021). Despite an expansive mapping of the complex, how actors approach the different fora and the regime complex in general remains unexplored in the literature. This paper addresses that gap by exploring the action of the EU in the IRCCC.

Action within regime complexes

At the actor level, scholars have underscored the potential for strategic behaviour across a regime complex, though mostly with respect to structurally modifying different fora or to moving elsewhere in the regime complex when the actor is unsatisfied with the status quo of a given forum. This includes activities like regime shifting, institutional creation, and forum shopping (Drezner, 2009; Helfer, 2009; Jupille et al., 2013).

However, there has been markedly less work on how actors might use a regime complex in the context of a negotiation in which a forum is already established as a default negotiation forum – a so-called 'focal forum' (Jupille et al., 2013, p. 27). In such situations, the actor is more restricted in

looking elsewhere in the regime complex to pursue their objectives, though the potential remains to use the other fora of the complex to its advantage. The UNFCCC is in essence the ‘focal forum’ of the Paris Agreement in that it is accepted by parties as the forum where the agreement will be adopted. At COP 17 in Durban, parties collectively gave the UNFCCC a mandate for the ‘Paris’ negotiations, with the mandate calling for the eventual agreement to fall within the UNFCCC. In this case, the other fora of the IRCCC are thus non-focal fora. It is these non-focal fora – the international organizations, established negotiation frameworks, clubs, and ‘mixed’ fora dealing with aspects of the larger climate issue, yet not where the Paris Agreement will actually be adopted – that present opportunities for the EU to facilitate its objectives in the UNFCCC. Although an actor could logically use the non-focal fora of the complex to facilitate their objectives, the scholarship is unclear how an actor might do so. A notable exception is the study by Hofmann (2018), who, in the context of EU-NATO overlap, develops several types of cross-fora strategic behaviour employed by actors to facilitate their objectives, notably brokering, hostage taking, and issue linkage.

The EU as a climate actor in the IRCCC

The literature has recognized the EU as an international climate actor with leadership ambitions. From the early 1990s through the early 2000s, the EU played a leading role in spurring international action on climate change (Afionis, 2017). Following its failure at COP 15 in Copenhagen in 2009, the EU successfully re-invented its climate leadership aspirations, enacting a pragmatic, bridgebuilding approach with its counterparts and transitioning into what Bäckstrand and Elgström (2013) refer to as a ‘leadadiator’ role. The EU cemented its leadadiator role in global climate negotiations at COP 21 in 2015, notably via its work establishing a cross-cutting *High Ambition Coalition* of like-minded progressive countries. Moreover, it was successful in achieving its main objectives for the negotiations: (1) a binding agreement, (2) quantifiable emissions reductions, (3) the inclusion of a review mechanism, and (4) robust common rules to ensure ambition (Oberthür and Groen, 2018).

Over the past decades, the EU has become increasingly strategic in its climate diplomacy, not only at the multilateral level, but also bilaterally (Cross, 2018; Schunz, 2019). The EU’s ‘Green Diplomacy Network’, created in the mid-2000s but enhanced after 2009, provides the EU with a network for bilateral outreach via EU delegations and member state embassies around the world.

The EU can thereby create partnerships and 'bottom-up' programming with third countries and gather information regarding their climate objectives (Biedenkopf and Petri, 2019).

While there is a growing literature on the bilateral aspect of EU climate diplomacy, analyses on multilateral diplomacy beyond the UNFCCC have remained rather general. For instance, scholars have acknowledged the importance of particular non-focal fora at a given moment in time for the EU vis-à-vis the UNFCCC, such as the G8 following the US refusal to ratify the Kyoto Protocol and the importance of the MEF in the lead-up to the Copenhagen Accord (van Schaik and Schunz, 2012). Work on the Paris Agreement also underscores that the EU indeed was active in the G7 and G20 in the lead-up to COP 21 (Oberthür and Groen, 2018). However, there has been little systematic analysis to uncover how and why the EU used them to achieve its climate objectives, leaving us with a black box of potential climate diplomacy activity.

Analytical framework: non-focal fora with different levels of authority and climate-specialization

In order to answer our research question, we employ an abductive approach. In line with the framework proposed by Schunz et al. (2017) to study EU external action, we start with relevant theoretical insight on the underlying dynamic in which the EU acts to structure our investigation and analysis: the IRCCC. At the same time, we remain open minded in the specific ways the EU might use non-focal fora to meet its COP 21 objectives.

In the context of a negotiation inside a regime complex, an actor's use of non-focal fora to facilitate its objectives in the focal forum is influenced by its own considerations, as well as the characteristics of the fora within which it acts. With respect to the former, it must be unlikely for an actor like the EU to meet its objective by acting in the focal forum alone (Abbott and Faude, 2020). Additionally, the EU requires the necessary diplomatic capacity, as cross-forum action typically favours those with significant resources and expertise in a given issue area (Drezner, 2009). For COP 21, the EU appears to satisfy both of these conditions, based not only on the development of Joint Reflection papers suggesting the need to act strategically outside the UNFCCC, but also the combined climate diplomacy capacity of the EU and its member states in the IRCCC and bilaterally. Furthermore, the EU has sought to develop a more strategic approach to its broader environmental

foreign policy (Schunz, 2019). In this sense, it is logical that the EU, an actor with strong climate leadership ambitions, seeks to use the IRCCC to its potential to support its objectives at Paris, especially following its failure at COP 15.

As for the latter, the EU's potential for cross-forum action is affected by the characteristics of the fora in which it is acting (Kellow, 2012). If the focal forum is unsatisfactory, actors typically look towards those fora which can most obviously serve their interests (Jupille et al., 2013). In the context of a multilateral negotiation in the IRCCC, two considerations stand out. First, as the IRCCC has expanded, it has come to include a variety of fora which specialise to different extents on climate-specific issues, as opposed to fora dealing with other related areas such as energy, finance, and transportation (Earsom and Delreux, 2021). Intuitively, non-focal fora dealing exclusively with climate would be the most obvious and least-costly fora for connecting activity, as they substantively overlap with the focal forum, the UNFCCC. Connecting activities in non-focal fora not specializing in climate would be more costly and less evident. Second, over the past decades, a "high-levelisation" of international climate governance has taken place, meaning that the negotiators with higher levels of political authority (i.e. ministers and leaders) have become more involved (Schunz, 2014, p. 153). High-level meetings, like G7 and G20 summits, typically focus more on informal debate and consultation on a range of issues and help generate political compromise (Vabulas and Snidal, 2013). These high-level non-focal fora therefore present opportunities to facilitate the EU's objectives in the UNFCCC as they gather leaders with a high level of political authority whose consent will ultimately be needed for an agreement in the UNFCCC.

In sum, as the EU appears to view action in the UNFCCC by itself as insufficient and has the motivation and resources for cross-forum activity, the EU fulfils the conditions for strategic action across the IRCCC. It therefore appears likely that the characteristics of the non-focal fora themselves are important factors in shaping their use by the EU. In the case of the IRCCC, the level fora specialize in climate change and the level of political authority of their participants stand out as important considerations.

We define the two factors as follows. First, the level of climate-specialization refers to the extent that climate change related issues are discussed in the non-focal forum. The less space on the agenda dedicated to climate change, the lower the level of climate-specialization. For instance,

the IMO has a low level of climate specialization since climate change is just one small part of its broader shipping agenda. Second, the level of political authority refers to the political authority of those negotiators primarily participating in the forum. A forum convening heads of state and government has a high level of political authority (e.g. G7 summit), while one usually convening diplomats and experts has a lower level of political authority (e.g. the Montreal Protocol).

Empirics: the EU's diplomacy across the IRCCC for COP 21

This empirical section is structured in four parts: the context of the Paris Agreement negotiations, EU coordination across the IRCCC, the EU's approach to diplomacy in the IRCCC, and the EU's uses of the non-focal fora of the IRCCC.

Overview of negotiation trajectory

The Paris Agreement, adopted at COP 21, was the end-result of a tumultuous process of working towards a universal, binding agreement on GHG reduction to succeed the Kyoto Protocol. The negotiations were launched at COP 17 in 2009. A breakthrough occurred at COP 19 in Warsaw in 2013, when parties decided that the upcoming agreement would be based on submissions of intended nationally determined contributions (INDCs). Preparations for COP 21 continued throughout 2014 and 2015. With momentum building, COP 21-related issues like ambition on mitigation, finance, and resilience-related issues landed on the agenda of many different international fora (see Annex 1). These individual fora, like the G7 and G20, seemed to play an important role for building high-level political pressure for an agreement, as well as backchannel negotiations on issues like temperature targets and financing (Brun, 2016).

EU coordination across the IRCCC

While the EU was present across the IRCCC, each forum presented different dynamics for EU coordination in the leadup to COP 21. Hence, the coordination structure within the EU, as well as the actors involved, for a given non-focal forum was often different than that of the coordination

for the UNFCCC process, particularly if the non-focal forum in question mainly handled issues other than climate change.

For the UNFCCC, the so-called 'EU Team' served as the key hub for coordinating and operationalizing the EU position (Delreux, 2018). The EU Team is an informal group gathering of key players from the Commission and the member states at the level of officials and experts. For COP 21, the EU Team included lead negotiators from the United Kingdom, Germany, and the European Commission (DG CLIMA), as well as experts from several member states depending on the specific issue at the UNFCCC agenda (Betts, 2021).

The EU's diplomacy in the IRCCC was facilitated by a climate diplomacy strategy developed by the EEAS and the Commission's DG CLIMA, with input from member state officials in the Council's Working Party on International Environmental Issues (WPIEI) (Biedenkopf and Petri, 2019; Torney and Cross, 2018). Notably, it stresses the importance of different international fora, calling for "climate change to be included on the agenda at all the main bilateral/multilateral meetings" (European Commission and EEAS, 2015, p. 4).

While the EU Team was the nexus of coordination for the UNFCCC and for non-focal fora dealing primarily with climate, coordination for non-climate fora was divided along issue-specific structures within the EU. For example, as both ICAO and IMO primarily deal with transportation, EU coordination for the two international organizations falls under the Transportation, Telecommunications, and Energy Council Configuration, with DG MOVE being in the lead for the Commission. For most issues in the G7 and the G20, the Commission informally coordinates with the Council's Committee of Permanent Representatives (COREPER), though a separate process exists for finance-related issues (Antenbrink and Repasi, 2019). Moreover, positions for the summits are typically determined in European Council Conclusions. If it wanted to mobilize non-focal fora to achieve objectives in the UNFCCC framework, the EU Team had to contend with different coordination mechanisms used for the non-focal fora.

The EU's approach to diplomacy in the IRCCC

The EU Team worked iteratively to build momentum towards the COP, starting at the beginning of the calendar year. An official summarized the EU's approach towards the IRCCC as:

“It’s about bringing an ambitious climate deal and the EU position up to Paris. Which other platforms apart from the UNFCCC formal negotiations can be used? We looked at different calendars of international meetings, from the UN to the MEF and all that” (interview 8). Respondents acknowledged that there was general consensus on what meetings were important in building towards the COP (interviews 6, 7, 8, 9, 10).

The EU Team approached the non-focal fora of the IRCCC rather iteratively, seeing it as “one big conversation that’s taking place in different venues that have different dynamics” (interview 4). However, the EU was cognizant of the different types of fora within the IRCCC. According to an EU official, the different fora “work at different levels [...] some of them dealing with very specific topics, some of them are very high level.” (interview 9; see also Moosmann et al., 2015; van Asselt, 2014). Referring to different characteristics of the fora of the IRCCC, an EU official described the approach to the IRCCC as follows:

“The EU would go into every one of these meetings, depending upon the level: leader, ministerial, head of delegation, etc., but also the level of abstraction principles: ramming home the idea of what we were aiming for was a legally binding international agreement that contained a robust transparency system, and [...] Those messages would be reinforced at different levels.” (interview 4)

This differentiation of meetings in the EU’s approach based on their ‘level of abstraction’ and attendance fits with our expectations of the level of climate-specialization and the level of political authority influencing the EU’s use of a given forum. This coincides with a natural distinction of three different sets of fora of the IRCCC that emerge: *climate-specific*, *high-level*, and *horizontal* fora. Each set of fora involved not only has a different level of climate-specialization but also includes participants with different levels of political authority, as is reflected in Figure 1. While there is an implicit distinction between *high-level* fora and *climate-specific* fora in EU documents (European Commission, 2015; European Commission and EEAS, 2015), horizontal fora emerge as a logical category for those fora with approximately the same level of political authority as climate-specific but whose principal focus was not climate change. These three different sets are confirmed during the coding process.

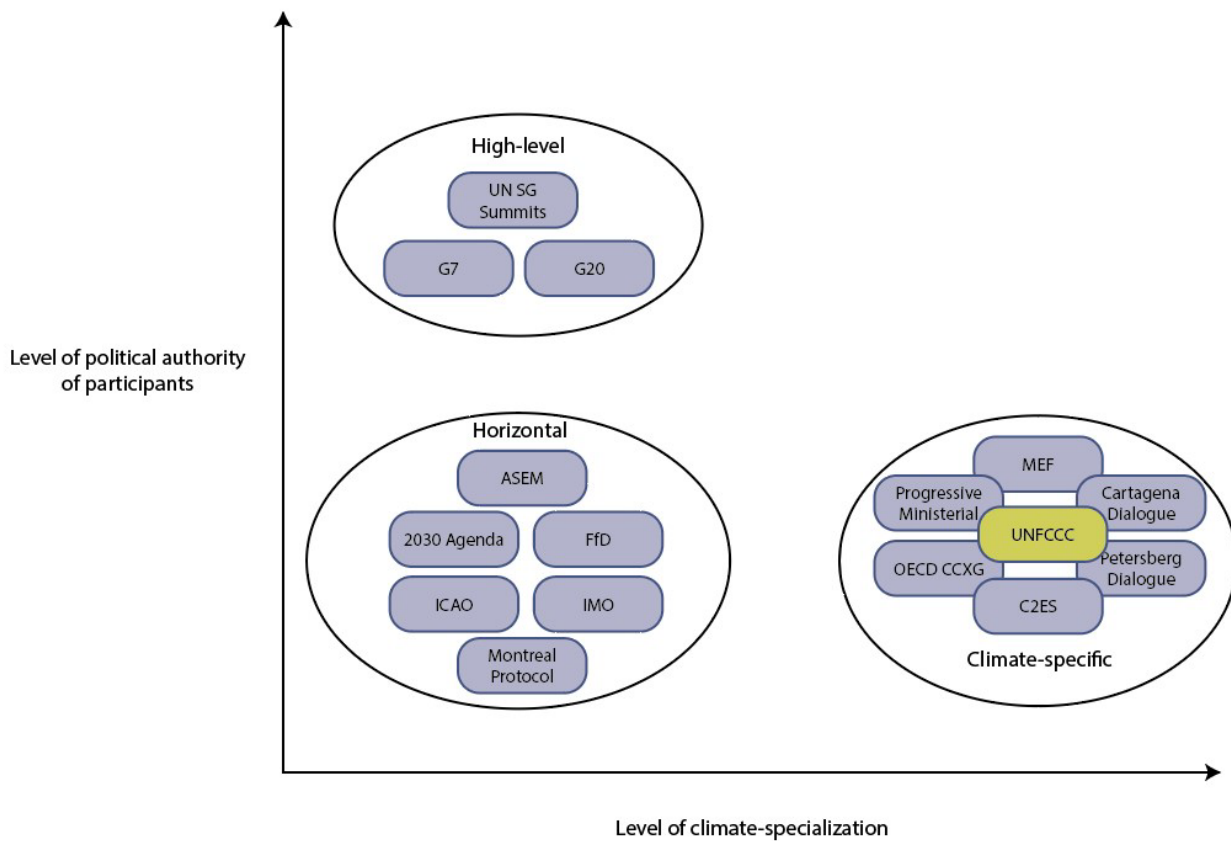


Figure 1: Sets of fora in the IRCCC

Climate-specific fora

Climate-specific fora gathered the negotiators who also conduct the negotiations in the UNFCCC, sometimes accompanied by their ministers, to work through issues related to the UNFCCC process (low level of political authority), but in a separate setting (interviews 8, 9). These negotiators were typically civil servants from the ministry of environment/climate. They approached negotiation-related issues in a relatively technical manner (high level of climate-specialization). The following non-focal fora are climate-specific: *Cartagena Dialogue*, *C2ES*, *MEF*, *OECD Climate Change Expert Group*, *Progressive Ministerials*, and the *Petersberg Dialogue*. EU action in these fora went through the informal coordination structure led by the EU Team.

High-level fora

High-level fora entail meetings of heads of state or government (high level of political authority) in settings that deal with issues beyond climate change. For EU negotiators, they represented the ‘top layer’ needed to advance international climate action (interview 8). With these fora convening leaders, i.e. those with much larger governance portfolios and higher political authority than climate negotiators, the discussions remained rather abstract as opposed to specific negotiation points (low level of climate-specialization). An EU member state official described the approach as follows: “there was no point in trying to push like...we want to, you know, renegotiate Article 6.4 of the Kyoto Agreement. No, that would be too specific, but know that we wanted to get the big G7 countries to commit to doing their NDC” (interview 5). In the case of COP 21, this included the G7, the G20, and the *UN Secretary General Summits*. For the EU, Commission coordination was managed by the diplomatic advisor to the President of the Commission, who served as the sherpa, and the Commission Secretariat General (interview 6).

Horizontal fora

Horizontal fora refer to those non-focal fora tangential to the UNFCCC in that their principal focus is not climate change. Although these officials or diplomats are typically at the same level as those in climate-specific fora (low level of political authority), there was not the same familiarity with the different technical issues related to the UNFCCC (low level of climate-specialization). While climate change-related issues were evoked in these fora, it was in a more complimentary fashion. For this case, that included *2030 Sustainable Development Agenda*, *Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM)*, *Financing for Development (FfD)*, *ICAO*, *IMO*, and the *Montreal Protocol*. EU coordination for these fora was handled by different ministries and configurations than the UNFCCC (interview 9).

The EU’s use of the non-focal fora of the IRCCC

This subsection discusses how the EU specifically uses the different sets of fora as a means of working towards its objectives. Four main categories of use emerged from the coding: employing typical multilateral negotiating activities, overcoming specific issues of the Paris Agreement negotiations, creating political momentum, and ensuring cross-fora coordination.

Employing typical multilateral negotiation activities

The first category entails using the non-focal fora of the IRCCC to conduct negotiating activities that normally take place in the UNFCCC, but were extended to non-focal fora due to the large agenda and short time frame of the UNFCCC negotiations (interview 4, 6; Moosmann et al., 2015). The condensed calendar and broad agenda meant there was a need for spill over of discussions on particular issues into non-focal fora in order to work through the process (interviews 1, 5, 6, 9). The EU primarily used *climate-specific fora* to this end in three particular ways in the leadup to Paris.

First, throughout the IRCCC, the EU used different fora to gather information on other actors' positions in the negotiations. EU negotiators worked "just to understand what parties were doing, what they were moving forward with, what their proposals were" (interview 1). The EU used climate fora with higher levels of participants, like the MEF and Petersberg Dialogue to identify potential political considerations or conditionalities in other parties' positions (interview 9; Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, 2015b; Jänicke, 2017). The unique academic and presentation-based format of the OECD Climate Change Expert Group (CCXG) provided EU negotiators with the opportunity to engage and learn from their negotiation counterparts in a transparent way, as opposed to the UNFCCC format (interviews 9, 10).

Second, the EU used different climate-specific fora to advance its negotiation position. On a larger scale, the ensemble of climate-specific fora served as venues for the EU to test its negotiation position, establish general landing grounds for the final agreement, and convince others that potential solutions were palatable (interviews 1, 2, 4, 5, 6). With all the different meetings, the EU was "constantly recalibrating and testing and trying to understand, feeling where the delegations are uncomfortable or where they might have flexibility" (interview 5). For instance, the EU actively worked in C2ES to develop text that eventually was transformed into text on transparency, the global stocktake, and the compliance mechanism for the Paris Agreement (interview 4; Dovland and Moosa, 2015). The presence of the world's largest emitters in the MEF meant that an agreement reached there would likely facilitate progress in the UNFCCC (interview 1; Betts, 2021; European Commission, 2015). As such, the EU strongly defended its position in the MEF meetings throughout

2015 and worked to convince the US and China to accept a modified approach to differentiation (interviews 4, 5, 6).

Third, the EU used non-focal fora to work with allies and create common expectations as to what the final UNFCCC agreement would include. Such is the case of the EU’s involvement (here, the Commission and several EU member states) in the Cartagena Dialogue, which was formed by the United Kingdom in 2010 in order to establish a forum where progressive countries, both developing and industrialized, were able to informally gather and translate ambitious policy priorities into UNFCCC text (interviews 4, 5, 9, 10; Blaxekjær, 2020). An EU member state official summarized the EU’s work in the Cartagena Dialogue as the following:

“What we did was actually through that engagement between, you know, being very concrete on texts while exchanging our priorities, we managed to get a common view. That translated into what was appearing in the Agreement.” (interview 9)

While not necessarily a coalition in the traditional sense, it served as a means of impulsion for treaty text suggestions that flowed back into the UNFCCC. A second use of the Cartagena Dialogue will be discussed in the following section.

Typical negotiation activities	Climate-specific	High-level	Horizontal
Gathering information on third parties’ positions	Cartagena Dialogue; C2ES; MEF; OECD CCXG; Petersberg Dialogue; Progressive Club		
Advancing EU negotiation position	Cartagena Dialogue; C2ES; MEF; OECD CCXG; Petersberg Dialogue ; Progressive Club		
Managing expectations	Cartagena Dialogue; C2ES; MEF; OECD CCXG; Petersberg Dialogue ; Progressive Club		

Table 1: Fora used for ‘typical negotiation activities’

Overcoming specific issues of the Paris Agreement negotiations

The EU also used different fora, notably *climate-specific* and one *high-level*, as a means of overcoming three main issues within the UNFCCC that were prohibiting it from achieving its objectives. This is summarised in Table 2.

A first issue relates to the industrialized/developing divide, which meant that smaller G77 countries, despite potentially diverging positions, often were corralled under the position of the larger G77+China countries, which in turn translated into political stalemate between developing and industrialized countries (interviews 5, 6; Brun, 2016). Following Copenhagen, the EU sought to undercut this divide by reaching out to progressive developing countries, namely through involvement in two climate-specific fora: the Cartagena Dialogue and the Progressive (Ministerial) Club (interviews 3, 6; Betts, 2021). The EU used these arrangements in the leadup to COP 21 to break through the industrialized/developing divide in the negotiations (interviews 1, 3, 5, 6; European Commission and EEAS, 2016). Through the Cartagena Dialogue, the EU engaged with countries that would have otherwise been “basically sitting in armed camps and not talking to each other” to understand their positions and find common ground (interview 5). Relatedly, the EU used regular Progressive Club meetings throughout 2014 and 2015 to create an alliance with small developing countries seeking large emission reductions and thereby “breaking that dynamic of ganging up the developing countries and moving themselves behind China” (interview 6). These coalitions also helped lay the groundwork for the eventual High Ambition Coalition at COP 21 (interviews 1, 3, 4, 6; Betts, 2021; Blaxekjær, 2020). Additionally, the EU utilized the G20, which included several of the larger ‘developing’ countries including Brazil, China, and India, to better understand the political dynamics of the G77+China, as the summit dynamic of G20 meetings meant that those countries were pressured to present their positions on climate-related issues (interview 6).

The second issue of UNFCCC negotiations relates to the disruption in the negotiation process. In many cases, a party generally supported ambitious action in the UNFCCC via declarations or political statements, but that party’s actual negotiation position did not always reflect that same level of ambition (interview 5; Bardram, 2015). The EU sought to in part overcome this

dynamic via action in the MEF and G20. As the MEF format bridged political and technical levels (interviews 4, 5, 6, 10), the negotiators and ministers present were forced to have concrete conversations on the landing ground of the agreement, making the use of generalities difficult (interview 5). The EU worked with its allies to push on specific points and establish a landing ground for the negotiations. The G20 had a similar effect in that its inherent political atmosphere and sherpa structure meant that the EU was able to overcome specific hang-ups by conveying the political importance of certain issues to officials from other countries with a broader portfolio than climate negotiators (interview 6).

The final issue pertains to a fear inside the EU Team that the larger emitters, notably China and the United States, would eventually push for a final text that would impose uniform, but relatively unambitious mitigation measures (interviews 5, 6). The EU thus employed a broad strategy to prevent those countries from lowering ambition, which an EU official summarized as “through Cartagena [and] through our alliance with the vulnerables [...], we created the conditions where it was impossible for the Americans and the emerging economies to move towards that place” (interview 5). In addition to the work in Cartagena and Progressive Club to create momentum and alliances, the EU also specifically defended an ambitious position with allies in the MEF (interview 4; Betts, 2021).

From this set of uses, we see that the EU uses a variety of fora to overcome specific issues within the UNFCCC.

Specific issue in UNFCCC	Climate-specific	High-level	Horizontal
Overcoming developing/industrialized divide	Cartagena Dialogue; Progressive Club	G20	
Mismatch in ambition between political statements and actual position	MEF	G20	
‘Unambitious final agreement’	Cartagena Dialogue; Progressive Club; MEF		

Table 2: Use of fora to overcome specific issues in the UNFCCC

Creating political momentum

The third category of use of non-focal fora related to the EU seeking to create political momentum for the negotiations in the IRCCC. The use broadly encompassed an attempt to incorporate political momentum into the negotiation process to move things forward. Logically, this mainly occurred in high-level fora. We note three different types of this use that emerged from the data, which are reflected in Table 3.

First, the EU sought to draw general attention to the UNFCCC negotiations at the higher political levels to increase pressure for an agreement. EU officials felt that the complexity and closed nature of UNFCCC negotiations meant that unless there was a push from outside the UNFCCC bubble, an agreement was unlikely (interviews 3, 8). The EU used the G7, the G20, and the UN Secretary General Summits to bridge the negotiations to the political level, create an expectation of agreement, and confirm the trajectory of the negotiations (interviews 3, 5, 8; Bardram, 2015; Delbeke, 2015).

Second, and somewhat interrelatedly, the EU – mainly via the EEAS – worked to reframe climate change as a more foreign policy and security-related issue in order to attract interest and build support among higher-level foreign affairs officials and heads of state and government (interviews 7, 8). This took place within a broader focus on the climate-security nexus in EU climate diplomacy (Sonnsjö and Bremberg, 2016). The German Presidency of the G7 in 2015 chaired several discussions on this nexus to underline its significance, while the EEAS brought military officials to the Petersberg Dialogue to increase political attention on climate issues (interviews 7, 8; Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, 2015a).

Finally, the EU used the high-level fora to get commitments and contributions that then fed back into the UNFCCC negotiations. The powerful membership of the G7 and G20 meant action there could send credible signals to influence the UNFCCC negotiations (Ourbak, 2017). In the G7, for instance, the EU (via the German Presidency) pushed for the two degrees target and \$100 billion in industrialized country financing within the G7, which sent a signal to developing countries (interviews 4, 5, 6; Jänicke, 2017). Additionally, the G7 resilience and insurance-related issues sent messages “that can encourage developing countries to get on with more ambitious action” (interview 6).

These political uses of non-focal fora suggest a specific added-value for the EU in the negotiations. They served as venues for increasing pressure and building towards an agreement.

Specific political use	Climate-specific	High-level	Horizontal
Increase political pressure for UNFCCC agreement		G7; G20; UN SG Summits	
Reframe climate as a security issue	Petersberg Dialogue	G7	
High-level commitments from parties		G7; G20	

Table 3: Use of fora for political issues

Ensuring cross-fora coordination

A final category of use relates to ensuring coordination across the different IRCCC fora, particularly those horizontal fora primarily dealing with issues beyond climate change. From the data, two different types of this use stand out, reflected in Table 4.

The first is concerned with ensuring consistency between ongoing, separate negotiations in different fora. 2015 had a significant negotiation calendar. Parties were negotiating several interrelated frameworks on climate – notably FfD and the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda – and working towards progress in other climate-related fora, including ICAO, IMO, and the Montreal Protocol. The EU worked to ensure there were no contradictions in positions in any of the different fora vis-à-vis its UNFCCC position (interviews 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 10; European Commission and EEAS, 2015; European Commission, 2015). For example, the EU Team conferred with their colleagues in charge of the FfD negotiations, “checking that the messages are kind of coherent of what we opposed and what we gave in the UNFCCC negotiations and in these platforms” (interview 7). In ICAO and IMO, it mainly consisted of “climate people going with the transport people [...] to make sure that things were running smoothly” (interview 9).

Second, the EU worked to reiterate the importance of climate change and the UNFCCC negotiations in non-focal fora (European Commission and EEAS, 2015; European Commission, 2015). This was mainly in the form of narrative support (interviews 8, 10). An EU official noted that

the Paris Agreement negotiations were frequent speaking points in non-climate settings: “Let’s say we always included it in the briefings, [...] who was it that always said ‘And Carthage must be destroyed!’” (interview 7). However, the messaging seemed mainly rhetorical (interviews 4, 9, 10).

Specific coordination	Climate-specific	High-level	Horizontal
Ensure consistency amongst ongoing negotiations			2030 Agenda; FfD; ICAO; IMO
Narrative support for climate change			ASEM; 2030 Agenda; FfD; ICAO; IMO

Table 4: Use of fora for cross-fora coordination

Discussion and conclusion: the EU’s use of non-focal fora in the IRCCC

Overall, we show that the EU used different fora of the IRCCC to help facilitate its objectives in the UNFCCC. We find four types of uses: employing typical multilateral negotiating activities, overcoming specific issues of the Paris Agreement negotiations, creating political momentum, and ensuring cross-fora coordination. This fits with the general theoretical assumption that the EU, as a resourceful actor with strong leadership ambitions in the IRCCC, would look outside the focal forum when unable to meet its objectives there alone. We find evidence that, in the context of the Paris Agreement negotiations, the EU was relatively strategic in its diplomacy within the IRCCC, using different sets of fora to different ends, as summarised in Table 5. This compliments the broader literature which has recognized the strategic nature of EU environmental foreign policy (Schunz, 2019).

Yet, as anticipated, these considerations alone do not explain the EU’s use of non-focal fora. The different uses of the fora largely depend on the level of climate specialization and the level of political authority of those participating. In that sense, there seems to be a rather logical division of uses across the regime complex, with action particularly concentrated in climate-specific fora. With each forum type serving particular uses, the IRCCC is not a ‘one-size-fits-all’ extension of the UNFCCC negotiations. Instead, opportunities for action are shaped by the characteristics of a given forum – in this case the level of climate-specialization and the level of political authority of the participants.

Use	Climate-specific	High-level	Horizontal
Employing typical multilateral negotiation activities	+++		
Overcoming specific issues of Paris Agreement negotiations	+++	+	
Creating political momentum	+	+++	
Ensuring cross-fora coordination			+++

Table 5: Summary of EU uses of non-focal fora sets (+ = 1 forum, ++ = 2, +++ = 3 or more)

This paper’s findings are important for three reasons. First, we provide empirical data on diplomacy within the IRCCC, identifying the factors – level of climate-specialization and level of political authority – that shape the EU’s use of different fora in its climate diplomacy. In that sense, we complement the work on mapping the relevant fora of the IRCCC. Second, we shed light on an area of EU climate diplomacy not yet considered, contributing to a more holistic understanding of EU climate diplomacy. In doing so, we stress the need to consider the multilateral aspect on equal footing with the bilateral diplomacy (Biedenkopf and Petri, 2019; Cross, 2018; Torney and Cross, 2018). Third, with respect to the work on regime complexity, we offer evidence of an actor employing cross-fora strategic action to facilitate its objectives within a given focal forum when its objectives cannot solely be met by action therein.

Nevertheless, we acknowledge the limits of this approach. Our single qualitative case study is not comprehensive of all climate diplomacy. However, it does serve as a confirmatory plausibility probe and provides an idea of what to look for in other negotiations. Therefore, further empirics are needed. A complimentary perspective from a non-EU country could help better contextualise our understanding of its use of the IRCCC. While the level of climate-specialization of the forum in question and the level of political authority of those participating therein seem to be important factors in dictating how the EU uses different fora, further reflection is needed to assess what other influential factors, both EU and non-EU specific, may be at play, notably internal coordination structures.

Finally, while we show that different fora of a regime complex can be used as part of the negotiation process, we also stress that such use can be more logical than innovative on the part of an actor. In the case of UNFCCC, fora have emerged over the two decades leading up to the Paris Agreement. The EU's involvement and evoking of negotiation issues is not so much a choice but a natural progression. In that sense, EU multilateral climate diplomacy should be viewed as both a strategic endeavour but also a normal part of being a competent climate actor.

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