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ARTICLE



EU Delegations in European Union climate diplomacy: the role of links to Brussels, individuals and country contexts

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ABSTRACT

The European Union's (EU) Delegations and Offices that represent the Union in 144 countries have evolved into important satellites, implementing EU external relations. Their activities are manifold and are implemented in various ways. Building on substantive interview data, this article provides the first expansive mapping of EU climate diplomacy practices of EU Delegations and explains the surprising variance therein. It shows that the intensity and quality of contacts between individual Delegations and individual (parts of the) Brussels-based institutions – most importantly DG Climate Action – in combination with individual Delegation staff members' expertise and host country characteristics can explain the observed variation among EU Delegation activities. These factors can contribute to better understanding the nature of the EU as an international actor.

KEYWORDS

Climate diplomacy; EU Delegations; European External Action Service; DG Climate Action

Introduction

The European Union's (EU) Delegations and Offices¹ have evolved into important satellites in 144 countries, representing the Union and implementing its external relations. Their activities are manifold and are implemented in various ways. Building on expansive interview data, we demonstrate that there is a much greater variance among the EU Delegations' climate diplomacy activities than the instructions from the Brussels-based institutions would suggest. The EU Climate Diplomacy Action Plan's prioritisation of certain countries is not mirrored by and cannot explain the varying activity levels that we observed. Our study shows that a) the intensity of relations and quality of contacts between individual Delegations and individual (parts of the) Brussels-based institutions – most importantly DG Climate Action – in combination with b) individual Delegation staff members' expertise and c) the host country context can more fully explain the observed variation among EU Delegation activities.

The European Union has been praised as one of the driving forces of the negotiations that culminated in the adoption of the Paris Agreement on climate change in December 2015 (Biedenkopf and Walker 2016; Walker and Biedenkopf 2018; Oberthür and Groen 2018). This contrasts with the harsh criticism of the EU's inability to act as a leader at the 2009 Copenhagen climate summit (Bäckstrand and Elgström 2013;

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Schunz 2015). The disappointing failure to adopt an international climate treaty in 2009 coincided with the entry into force of the EU Lisbon Treaty, which newly created the European External Action Service (EEAS) that started operating in 2011 (Balfour 2015). The previous 'Commission' Delegations were transformed into 'EU' Delegations – the EU equivalent to national embassies – and made integral part of the EEAS whose headquarters is in Brussels. The addition of the EEAS to the EU institutional architecture has altered the practice of European diplomacy with a clear imprint on the area of climate change. Another important institutional innovation was then-European Commission President Barroso's decision to newly establish a Directorate-General (DG) solely dedicated to Climate Action in 2010. Previously, DG Environment was responsible for climate change. These events created a window of opportunity and raised expectations for developing and implementing enhanced climate diplomacy activities. This article evaluates EU climate diplomacy after those transformative changes with a focus on the EU Delegations within the broader institutional architecture. It thereby aims to contribute to the literature on the EU's nature as an international actor (Drieskens 2017).

EU Delegations can play an important role in various outreach activities to external countries, trying to convince them to adopt more ambitious climate policy. Since the United Nations (UN) climate negotiations take place among country (and European Commission) representatives, EU Delegations generally are not involved. Rather, their contribution lies in preparing the grounds for international negotiations by persuading and supporting non-EU countries in pursuing climate policy as well as providing thorough analyses to Brussels of the local contexts that underpin those countries' negotiating positions. Unilateral leadership through internal EU climate policy alone does not seem sufficient to make the EU a successful international actor (Bäckstrand and Elgström 2013). Sharing EU experiences, enabling external actors to adopt climate measures and convincing non-EU governments of the importance of climate action is a core part of EU climate diplomacy and one in which EU Delegations can play a central role.

We provide the first expansive mapping of EU climate diplomacy practices implemented by EU Delegations and explain the variance that we found. Overall, the role of Delegations and the interaction between Delegations and the EEAS' headquarters remain underexplored. While academic literature on the EEAS mostly focuses on the Brussels headquarters, studies that explicitly analyse Delegation activities are comparatively rare (Bruter 1999; Austermann 2015; Dijkstra 2017) and are often limited to single case studies (Austermann 2012; Laatikainen 2015; Maurer and Raik 2018). As such, a systematic analysis of a larger set of Delegations has not yet been conducted.

The next section sketches the development of EU climate diplomacy from the early Member State-dominated engagement in the international negotiations to the design of a relatively comprehensive approach with DG Climate Action and the EEAS as key protagonists. Next, the role of EU Delegations within the institutional architecture of EU climate diplomacy is modelled on the basis of a principal-agent approach, complemented with factors pertaining to Delegation characteristics and host country contexts. EU Delegations are agents that engage in a vast diversity of activities, both in terms of intensity and types. The case of EU climate diplomacy in the run-up to the Paris climate summit in December 2015 is subsequently analysed by, first, mapping the EU Delegations' climate practices and, second, explaining the observed variance. We conclude with reflections on promising avenues for future research.

EU climate diplomacy

The EU has long held leadership ambitions in international climate negotiations and consistently maintained relatively ambitious positions in the different negotiation rounds. Yet, in the 1990s and early 2000s it was criticized for spending more time on internal EU coordination and negotiations among Member States rather than on engaging with and reaching out to external actors (van Schaik and Egenhofer 2003; Oberthür and Kelly 2008). At the 2009 climate negotiations in Copenhagen, the EU's strategy was to lead the way by adopting ambitious domestic climate policy but – at the time – almost no other country followed their example. This led to the realisation that leading by example is not useful if no one is willing to follow (Torney 2015). Drawing lessons from this experience, the EU intensified its external climate outreach in the years to follow and recognised the need for a new climate diplomacy strategy that includes stronger components on coalition building, mediation and bilateral cooperation (Bäckstrand and Elgström 2013; Torney and Davis Cross 2018).

In preparation for the 2015 UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Conference of the Parties (COP21) in Paris, that culminated in the adoption of the Paris Agreement, the EEAS and the European Commission jointly drafted reflection papers outlining a relatively comprehensive climate diplomacy strategy in 2011 and 2013 (EEAS and European Commission 2011, 2013). The Foreign Affairs Council concurred with this strategy (Council of the EU 2011, 2013). On the basis of those strategies, the European Commission and the EEAS developed an EU Action Plan for Climate Diplomacy in early 2015 (European Commission and EEAS 2015). Our empirical analysis focuses on the implementation of this action plan. The pre-Paris efforts were followed by updated and readjusted EU climate diplomacy strategies in 2016 and 2018 that focus on the implementation of the Paris Agreement (Council of the EU 2016, 2018).

The EU Action Plan for Climate Diplomacy of January 2015 consisted of three strands of action for climate diplomacy, in which EU Delegations play an important role. The first stressed the importance of making climate change a strategic priority in diplomatic dialogues and initiatives. This included the strengthening of the EEAS and DG Climate Action's Climate Change Toolbox, which includes the provision of various kinds of information to all EU Delegations and Member State embassies through the internal online platform Agora in order to equip them for their outreach. The second strand was the mainstreaming of climate action in development plans to support low-emission and climate-resilient development in external countries. The third strand concerned the nexus between climate change, natural resources, prosperity and security and included the tailoring of messages to external countries' contexts and interests by taking this nexus into account (European Commission and EEAS 2015).

EU Delegations are key actors in implementing the EU Climate Diplomacy Action Plan, which stresses the need for outreach activities tailored to non-EU country contexts and for alliance building ahead of COP21. It specifically highlights the need to mobilise large economies and major greenhouse gas (GHG) emitters, limiting the focus of some activities to certain key players and influencers with specific EU Delegations receiving more instructions and information requests than the broader set of EU Delegations. An interview with a DG Climate Action representative confirmed the approach of targeting outreach activities to key countries in terms of economic weight and GHG emissions

(I62). The action plan differentiates two target audience groups. First, G20 and some mid-income countries were targeted with the aim to convince them to submit their Intended Nationally Determined Contribution (INDC) preparing for the Paris negotiations. Second, all low-income countries were targeted with the aim to showcase the EU's significant financial assistance and solidarity in order to garner momentum and their support. The action plan included a *démarche* in March 2015 targeting specific significant CO₂ emitters to encourage them to submit their INDC by the deadline. Another *démarche* in May 2015 targeted all countries and focused on INDCs while an October 2015 *démarche* focused on climate finance and support, which seems rather focused on low-income countries (European Commission and EEAS 2015). These provisions of the EU Climate Diplomacy Action Plan would suggest variance among EU Delegation outreach activities according to economic weight, GHG emissions and development status. Our analysis however reveals a different pattern.

Not only the conveying of messages to external countries but also the reporting of EU Delegations' analysis of local situations to Brussels was included in the action plan. Heads of Mission Reports on climate policy in their respective countries were requested to be submitted in August 2015. Moreover, some structural features were established. The Agora Platform is a cooperative online tool on which information can be shared in a secure environment among EU and Member State actors. Each Delegation was asked to nominate a climate focal point – a Delegation member of staff who acts as the first point of contact and coordinator within the Delegation. A Climate Action Day was designed to build momentum and encourage EU activity in external countries (European Commission and EEAS 2015). Over the past decade, EU Delegations have become integral parts and agents of EU climate diplomacy in a structured and systematic manner. The following section develops a model that situates EU Delegations within the institutional architecture of EU climate diplomacy and identifies factors that can explain variance in EU Delegation activities.

EU Delegations as agents of EU climate diplomacy

To disentangle the complex institutional relationships that define EU diplomacy, we conceptualise EU Delegations as agents, acting on behalf of their Brussels-based principals. Yet, our explanatory model includes additional Delegation characteristics and host country-related factors to more fully explain variance among activities. The EU Treaties define an inherent relationship of the Delegations as 'agents' to their Brussels-based 'principal': 'Union delegations in third countries and at international organisations shall represent the Union.' (Art. 221 (1) TFEU). Principal-agent approaches have been used to explain various instances of EU policy-making. Traditionally their focus lies on the principal's side – mostly Member State decisions and preferences – and the detailed design of delegation acts that conditions agents' discretion and autonomy (Kiewiet and McCubbins 1991; Pollack 1997, 2006). Our study contributes to this strand of literature by focusing on agent behaviour and explaining variance among agents. Zooming in on the agent side of the principal-agent relationship has, until recently, received comparatively little attention (Hawkins and Jacoby 2006, 199; Delreux and Adriaensen 2017, 9). This section first discusses the complex structure of the principal and, second, the multiplicity of agents. It then proceeds to identify factors that can explain variance

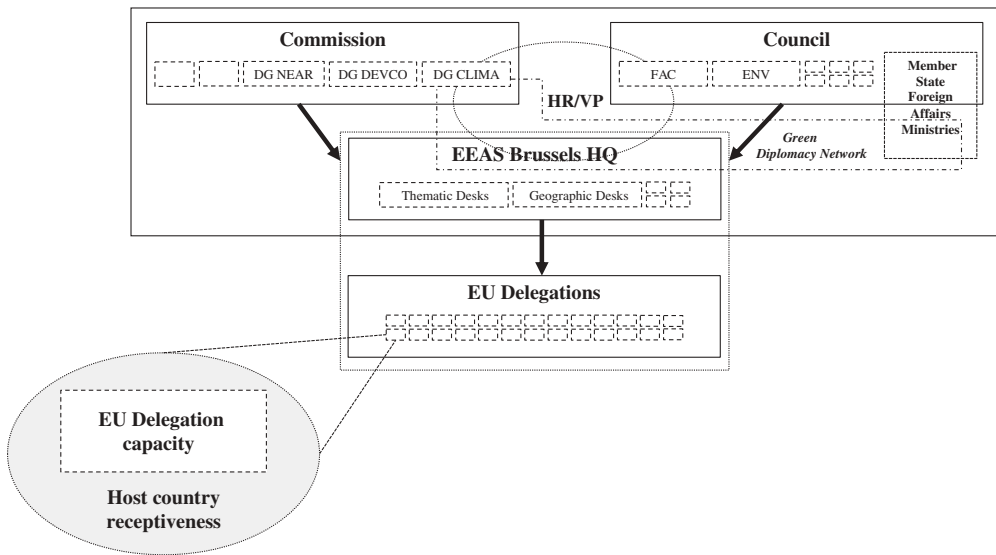


Figure 1. Factors and processes shaping EU Delegation's climate diplomacy activities.

among EU Delegation activities, in addition to the modalities of the principal's instructions to the agent. **Figure 1** illustrates our model, combining (in)direct lines of instructions and communication between Brussels-based principals and EU Delegations, as well as the Delegation characteristics and the host-country context.

A complex structure of principals

In the case of EU climate diplomacy, no single Brussels-based principal directs Delegation activities alone. Rather, a complex structure of principals, consisting of the Council of the European Union, the European Commission and – at the same time both agent and principal – the EEAS Brussels headquarters, including their substructures.

First, the EU Member States represent the ultimate principals to all processes of delegation to the EU, in climate diplomacy in the form of ‘non-exclusive delegation’ since they continue individual diplomatic activities and entertain embassies abroad (Dijkstra 2017). The Council of the EU directly represents Member State voices. More specifically, its Foreign Affairs configuration, some of its expert and issue groups under the Working Party on International Environment Issues as well as the Green Diplomacy Network are active parts of the complex structure of principals in climate diplomacy. The Council acts as the ‘main foreign policy decision-making body in the EU, both in legal and political terms’ (Keukeleire and Delreux 2014, 66), influencing the direction of EU politics through its multiple Council Conclusions on EU climate diplomacy.

Second, the European Commission with its relevant DGs – while itself an agent to Member States – acts as an essential part of the complex principal structure, instructing Delegations. ‘In areas where the Commission exercises the powers conferred upon it by the Treaties, the Commission may (...) also issue instructions to delegations’ (Council of the EU 2010). More specifically, DG Climate Action plays an influential role. It possesses

subject-specific expertise, has a large number of staff with climate expertise and, most importantly, is a key EU negotiator in the UNFCCC on behalf of the EU – together with the half-yearly rotating Council Presidency. The relatively comprehensive approach to climate diplomacy as developed in the EU's strategies includes aspects such as development financing and capacity building. This implies that other parts of the European Commission – most notably DG International Cooperation and Development – are also involved in some parts of EU climate diplomacy. The Council and Commission jointly represent a first level of principals, who in instances such as the international climate negotiations work closely together when representing the EU.

Third, with the Lisbon Treaty and the Decision establishing the EEAS, the Council and Commission delegated functions and competences to the European External Action Service as a new agent. Although the Brussels headquarters and the Delegations jointly constitute the EEAS, we conceptualise the EEAS headquarters as part of the complex structure of Brussels-based principals and the Delegations as agents. This is grounded in the fact that in most instances the High Representative and EEAS headquarters send instructions to the Delegations. The EEAS headquarters could be seen as a coordinator of the Brussels principals' instructions, channelling them to the Delegations (Lequesne 2015, 45). The High Representative and Vice-President finds her/himself at the intersection of the three principals. S/he has direct authority over the EEAS, chairs the Foreign Affairs Council meetings and is Vice-President of the Commission.

Over the past few years, the EEAS has employed between one and three members of staff entirely dedicated to climate diplomacy. They are a central link between the Delegations and the regional desks within the EEAS, but also DG Climate Action, other parts of the European Commission and the Council of the EU. Although the official direct line of communication and steering of the EU Delegations generally starts in the EEAS headquarters, the instructions and EU climate diplomacy strategy is devised by a broader set of actors, especially DG Climate Action, the Green Diplomacy Network and the EEAS headquarters. Since DG Climate Action possesses extensive issue-specific expertise, it provides information to and closely collaborates with the EEAS headquarters. The EEAS climate diplomacy official(s) also coordinate(s) the Green Diplomacy Network that is composed of Member State foreign ministry officials and some Commission representatives. This network aims to coordinate environmental and climate diplomacy (Torney and Davis Cross 2018, 44–7). EU climate diplomacy is thus characterised by a complex principal structure and chain of instructions that directs and delegates power to the EU Delegations.

EU Delegations as agents

EU Delegations dispose of the powers that their principals confer upon them. Their tasks are to represent the EU externally, to contribute to the formulation and implementation of common EU policies, to cooperate with Member States embassies and to contribute to the protection of EU citizens (Arts. 32 and 35 TEU). As agents to Brussels, the Delegations execute headquarters' instructions such as *démarches*, speeches or public diplomacy events and report back to Brussels. Yet, in areas such as climate diplomacy, Delegations possess notable autonomy in implementing instructions from their Brussels-based principals since the activities need to be tailored to specific host-country contexts.

Climate change is a complex and politicised topic that affects countries in many different ways. This renders the framing and tailoring of messages and activities particularly important.

The empirical reality of more than 140 Delegations in diverse locations and local contexts as well as varying staff numbers brings us to conceptualising Delegations as a collective of agents (Elsig 2010; Gastinger 2017; Laloux 2017). This diversity suggests differing agent behaviour and makes climate diplomacy a formidable case for exploring the factors that can explain such divergence. Based on the observation of Delegation and host-country diversity, the varying agent characteristics (such as staff number, capacities and staff expertise) as well as the varying country contexts within which Delegations act are analysed in addition to principal-agent interactions. Figure 1 illustrates the model on which we based our analysis.

Explaining variation in EU Delegation activities

This article is the first to systematically analyse the roles and practices of EU Delegations in implementing the EU Climate Diplomacy Strategy. We analyse the variation among EU Delegation activities and show that it cannot be explained by their climate diplomacy mandate as described in the Commission, Council and EEAS documents alone, but rather by the quality and intensity of the relationships between the Delegations and the complex structure of Brussels-based principals; expertise and capacities at the level of individual Delegation staff; and the local host-country context.

First, we assume that the type and strength of the relationship between Delegations and the Brussels-based institutions can explain variance in agent behaviour (Nielson and Tierney 2003). As such, not only the frequency and content of the instructions issued by the various Brussels-based institutions but also the quality of interaction – ranging from personal contacts to general written instructions – can determine agent behaviour. The closer and more direct the relationship between an EU Delegation and the Brussels-based principals, the more active we expect a Delegation to be.

Second, we assume that agent resources, in particular expertise and experience of Delegation staff as well as a Delegation's overall capacities can explain differences in agent behaviour (Austermann 2015; Bailer 2014; Dür and Elsig 2011). The degree to which a member of Delegation staff emphasises and prioritises climate diplomacy can depend on their personal commitment and their climate expertise. Most Delegation staff are responsible for more topics than climate change. They thus need to balance their tasks and prioritise. Personal commitment but also detailed knowledge and expertise can drive actors' implementation of tasks (Bailer 2014). The more expansive a Delegation staff member's climate expertise and the Delegation's overall capacities on climate change, the more we expect the Delegations to engage in climate diplomacy.

Third, we assume that EU Delegation behaviour also depends on the local context in which they operate (Austermann 2015; Bailer 2014; Plank and Niemann 2017). Host-country characteristics can influence agent behaviour since climate change is a highly multifaceted issue. It affects each country in a somewhat different manner; every country's mitigation opportunities differ and climate change transcends almost all other policy areas. The nature of climate change as a subject of diplomacy thus requires the tailoring of activities and messages to local contexts, which can vary significantly.

The EU's relation with the given country as well as the specific local climate impact and mitigation potential can be expected to explain variance in the Delegation's climate activity. Before systematically testing the three explanatory factor groups developed above, the next section first maps the variation among EU Delegation climate diplomacy activities.

Mapping EU Delegations' 'pre-Paris climate diplomacy activities

The degree of EU Delegation activity ranged from a high to a low level, measured by the number, breadth and depth of activities implemented by a single Delegation. Diplomatic meetings with host country policy-makers and public diplomacy events were the most frequently implemented activities. Our analysis focuses on the activities that were implemented in the year prior to the decisive Paris summit in December 2015. This period was crucial for preparing the ground for adopting a new international climate agreement and characterised by an intensification and systemisation of EU climate diplomacy executed by the Delegations. The practice has since been continued and adjusted based on experiences. EU climate diplomacy has also been considered as a best-practice example and blueprint for other policy areas such as energy diplomacy.

We conducted 64 interviews with climate diplomats in 61 EU Delegations and Brussels-based officials, mostly in summer 2015 with few exceptions of retrospective (post-2015) interviews. Fifty-nine of the surveyed Delegations are based in countries or territories and two at international organisations. Our interviews covered 42 percent of existing EU Delegations. We ensured a balanced coverage in terms of geography, development status and country size. All interviewees were selected based on their central role in climate diplomacy in their respective organisation. Data was collected by using a semi-structured questionnaire investigating Delegations' activities and relations with the Brussels-based institutions. Due to the sensitive nature of some of the information, interviewees were ensured anonymity and references to countries can only be made on a general level. The interview data was analysed through qualitative coding, using the software programme NVivo. The reported figures are therefore minimum figures since the open questions allowed the respondents to mention any activity that they recalled rather than our questionnaire prescribing a check list. This approach ensured that all activities that interviewees considered important were collected. The centrality of the interviewees in their organisation's climate diplomacy structure ensured accuracy and comprehensiveness.

EU Delegations engaged in various types of activities with diplomatic meetings (93.4 percent) and public diplomacy events (83.6 percent) implemented by almost all Delegations. The category of diplomatic meetings includes various kinds of outreach meetings to the host country government and in some cases also subnational authorities. EU diplomats organised meetings specifically dedicated to climate change with ministry officials and mentioned climate change in meetings on a broader set of topics. Most Delegations organised meetings at a high level of the political echelon, including foreign ministers, other ministers, advisors to the president or prime minister, and UNFCCC lead negotiators. For example, in a Latin American country the president and foreign minister were invited to an EU Heads of Mission lunch at which climate change was one of the main discussion points. In a European neighbourhood country, the

environment minister attended a Heads of Mission meeting in autumn 2015 at which climate change was discussed, among other topics. Regular contacts with foreign and environment ministries were also reported by a large number of EU Delegations. In some low-income countries, the EU supported the preparation of the country's INDC – the Intended Nationally Determined Contribution that almost every country submitted to the UN prior to the Paris meeting. The few countries for which no diplomatic meetings were mentioned were small states, one in Africa, one in Central Asia and one in the EU's neighbourhood.

Public diplomacy was directed to different target groups. The Climate Diplomacy Day that was organised on 17 June 2015 was a central element, implemented by more than half of the surveyed Delegations. This initiative was inspired by a German and French initiative in the previous year and in 2015 expanded to the EU level. Since 2016, EU Delegations have organised entire Climate Diplomacy Weeks each year. The EEAS headquarters provided suggestions for certain types of activities rather than binding instructions. Some of those suggestions were implemented in many countries, for example: the EU and Member State ambassadors cycled to work, joint EU and Member State open letters were published in local newspapers and various kinds of exhibitions and competitions with a climate focus were organised. Outreach to media and the use of social media figured high in the climate diplomacy of almost one-third of the surveyed Delegations.

While diplomatic meetings and public diplomacy were relatively pervasive activities, fewer Delegations engaged in a broader set of climate diplomacy activities. This includes funding programmes – which relates to development cooperation and is not necessarily suitable for all countries – but also variance in the details of the outreach can be noted. Only about half of the interviewees highlighted and explicitly referred to *démarches* (56 percent) and reporting to Brussels (44 percent) as one of their Delegation's activities. This contrasts with the fact that those activities are at the core of diplomatic activity and the Climate Diplomacy Action Plan. Diplomatic meetings, of course, can be triggered by *démarches* and considered a description thereof. Yet, not linking them to an explicit *démarche* suggests those activities were perceived as own initiative rather than instructed by Brussels. Other activities such as technical conferences and meetings with civil society and business actors were only implemented by a smaller set of Delegations.

Not all EU Delegations engaged in climate diplomacy activities with the same level of intensity. Some implemented a broad range of different types of activities, targeting different addressees while others only implemented a small number of activities. Twenty-eight percent of the surveyed EU Delegations can be considered as highly active on climate diplomacy, 39 percent of the Delegations engaged to a medium degree in climate diplomacy, while 33 percent only exhibited a low level of climate diplomacy activities. The different activity levels are the result of a qualitative assessment that took into account both the number of activities as well as the breadth and depth of the described activities. This included the diversity of activities, diversity of addressees and the intensity of activity.

The observation of different levels of activity could possibly reflect the EU's strategy that placed an emphasis on major economies and large emitters. Yet, the observed variation of climate diplomacy activities does not correlate with the two strategic

priorities as set out in the Climate Diplomacy Action Plan. Among the G20 members in our survey, all intensity degrees of activity were found. Some EU Delegations that are based in major economies only exposed low levels of activity while others were far more active. A similar observation can be made for the strategic target of large GHG emitters. The top-20 global GHG emitters among the countries included in the survey hosted EU Delegations with all levels of climate diplomacy. Forty-five percent of those Delegations engaged at a medium degree of activity, while 30 percent were highly active and 25 percent exposed low activity levels.

Explaining variation in EU Delegations' pre-Paris climate diplomacy activities

As demonstrated in the previous section, the great degree of variance in EU Delegation climate diplomacy activity cannot be explained by the EU Climate Diplomacy Strategy and Action Plan – which build the basis for instructions to EU Delegations – alone. While the relationship with the Brussels-based principals contributes to explaining the observed variance, it is rather the quality of the relationship that plays a role. Intense contacts between EU Delegations and Brussels-based institutions tend to go hand-in-hand with higher levels of climate diplomatic activities. Additionally, we found that high levels of individual members of staff's climate expertise were particularly frequent among those Delegations with high levels of climate diplomacy activities. The specific local host-country context remained a difficult-to-pinpoint but nonetheless often-highlighted explanatory factor. The next three subsections discuss those elements in turn.

EU Delegation-Brussels relationships

A Delegation's climate diplomacy can be conditioned by the closeness of relations that it maintains with Brussels. We analysed this relationship based on four aspects: first, we investigated the main contact point in Brussels. Second, we identified the channels of communication between Brussels and the Delegations. Third, we measured the intensity of the relationship and, fourth, we examined Delegations' perception of their relationship to Brussels.

The main principal within the complex structure of Brussels-based institutions were different Commission DGs, not the EEAS headquarters as could have been expected. They were mentioned most often as the main contact for EU Delegations (39 percent). Overall, DG Climate Action was named as a contact (main or shared) by a large majority of Delegations (79 percent), followed by DG Development Cooperation (39 percent). While DG Climate Action is a contact for almost all Delegations, it serves this function to a somewhat weaker degree for countries with low climate activities. Seventy-nine percent of the low-activity Delegations reported contacts with DG Climate Action, compared to 94 percent of high-activity Delegations and 96 percent of medium-activity Delegations. Contrarily, DG Development Cooperation is comparatively more frequently mentioned by medium and low climate activity Delegations. By comparison, the EEAS is only mentioned as the main contact by 16 out of 61

Delegations. Here again, it is mostly medium and low climate activity Delegations that refer to the EEAS as their main counterpart.

At the same time, a considerable number of Delegation officials described their main counterpart as a balance between Commission DGs and EEAS, as for example one interviewee stated: 'We work very closely with the EEAS and DG Clima (...), we report everything to EEAS. For climate change policy, we always seek help from DG Clima, we cannot work on our own.' (I50). Mostly countries with high or medium climate activities reported the relationship to Brussels as balanced between those two principals. As this quote also illustrates, climate policy-related expertise is sought from and provided by DG Climate Action while the EEAS appears to act as orchestrator of climate diplomacy, channelling Brussels principals' instructions to the Delegations and reverse. The Green Diplomacy Network and the Council expose limited direct contact with EU Delegations. This however is not surprising since their role lies largely in devising the EU strategies and action plans that then are executed by the Commission and the EEAS who in turn work with and send instructions to the Delegations. In this way, the Green Diplomacy Network and the Council rather indirectly direct Delegation activities as part of a longer chain of instructions.

The main channel of communication was the electronic Agora platform which is widely used by a large majority of EU Delegations to receive and exchange information with their Brussels-based principals. While most Delegations with high or medium climate activities report to have regularly received *démarches* from Brussels (76 percent and 58 percent), this is somewhat different for low-activity Delegations (40 percent). It is hereby important to distinguish that most Delegations reported conducting a *démarche* on Climate Diplomacy Day, however considerably fewer Delegations reported receiving *démarches* on a regular basis.

Personal contacts to Brussels-based officials often were explicitly mentioned as enabling factors to work together with the Commission DGs and the EEAS, especially by high and medium climate activity Delegations: 'I am a former Commission official too, maybe that helps. There are a lot of people I know from the past, so it helps to engage' (I19). As [Figure 2](#) shows, direct contacts are much more pervasive among the high and medium activity Delegations.

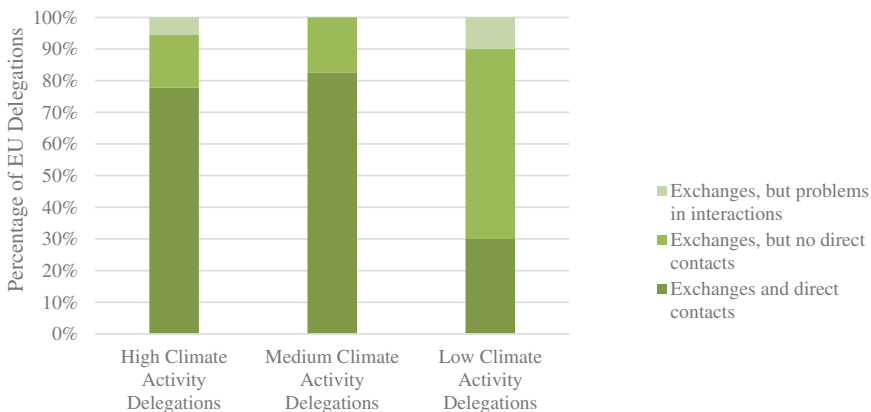


Figure 2. Intensity of relations between Brussels-based institutions and EU Delegations, grouped by degree of climate activity.

The intensity of relations between the Brussels-based institutions and Delegations coalesces with the observed high, medium and low climate activity levels. While the large majority of high and medium climate activity Delegations report having regular exchanges and contacts with Brussels (82 percent and 79 percent), it is mostly low-climate activity Delegations who report having no contacts to Brussels or who report problems in contacting Brussels: ‘there is no contact. I have several times tried to address issues with DG Clima (...) the communication is not existing’ (I2). At the same time, even some high climate activity Delegations report problems in contacting Brussels, albeit of a different quality: ‘We try very hard to somehow receive some guidelines, I would say toolboxes and so forth, but it was very hard, and at the end we just decided to go on our own’ (I3). The latter quote suggests that individuals’ own initiative and entrepreneurship as additional explanatory factor – which is addressed in the next subsection – and supports that the principal-agent relationship alone cannot account for different activity levels.

EU Delegation staff’s evaluation of their relationship with Brussels received fairly positive results with a majority of 38 out of 61 Delegations describing the relationship as a positive one, while only three interviewees expressed explicitly negative views: ‘I don’t feel we are consulted’ (I25). Those negative views were exclusively Delegations with low climate activities. In comparison, high and medium climate activity Delegations expressed more positive or neutral views: ‘We have an excellent team in Brussels’ (I32). Our analysis corroborates the hypothesis that the quality and intensity of the relationship between EU Delegations and Brussels-based institutions positively influences higher levels of climate diplomatic activities.

Delegation capacity and individuals’ expertise

The degree of a Delegation’s climate activity is moreover shaped by the climate expertise of Delegation staff members to a greater extent than the entire Delegation’s capacities on climate change. In our analysis, we distinguished two variables: the expertise of the interviewee, including his/her prior work experience and knowledge of climate issues, and the Delegation’s overall capacities on climate change, measuring the number of people working on the topic exclusively or as part of their portfolio within the Delegation. The measurement of levels of expertise relies on self-reporting but was verified through additional research of CVs, LinkedIn profiles and similar sources.

Apart from a few exceptions, climate capacities of EU Delegations are rather limited. Climate change is mostly part of shared portfolios. Only in a handful of countries is one member of staff fully assigned a climate portfolio. The most commonly reported pattern was a multitude of people in different sections (political, economic, operational and cooperation) working on climate issues, but all only in part-time and/or as a small share of their portfolio (75 percent). Asked about the share of time they spend on climate issues a variety of answers ranging from less than one to up to 70 percent were given, in small as well as large Delegations. Most interviewees had increased their share of climate-related work in 2015: ‘climate diplomacy has really woken up this year’ (I44). A clear pattern is however not discernible.

Conversely, high levels of individual members of staff’s climate expertise were particularly frequent among those Delegations with high climate activities (47 percent). Medium levels of climate expertise were also frequently observed among high and medium climate activity delegations (47 percent and 58 percent). This contrasts with the observation that low levels of

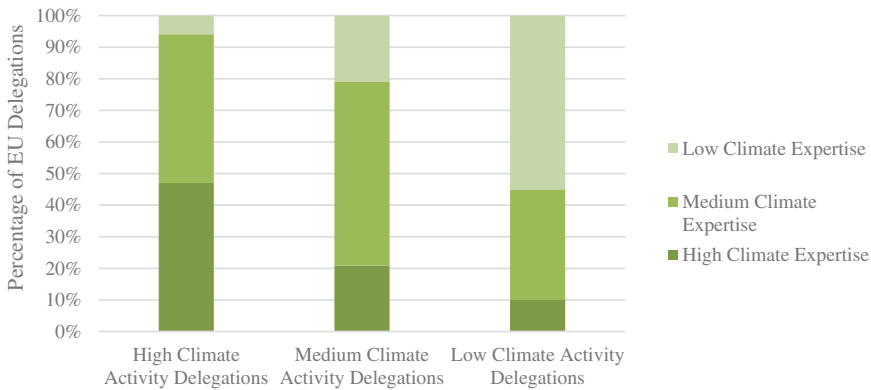


Figure 3. Climate expertise of EU Delegation staff, grouped by degree of climate activity.

climate expertise were particularly high among low climate activity delegations (55 percent). Overall, 48 percent of interviewees reported moderate knowledge of climate issues, being able to put different policy measures into context but often admitting: 'if it comes to expertise, we of course have to be a little bit modest in what we can offer (...) we are no climate change experts' (I54). At the same time, 28 percent of interviewees either reported little knowledge on climate issues, emphasising the 'lack of specialised staff' (I30). In comparison, the number of staff with profound knowledge on climate issues was 25 percent, some being former Commission staff, a few even sent to Delegations by DG Climate Action, or with long-term work experience on climate and environmental issues: 'I have been working for three years on climate change' (I21). Since most of our interviewees were central climate diplomacy staff, we are confident that our results paint a relatively accurate picture. [Figure 3](#) shows the link between the degree of climate expertise and the level of climate diplomacy activity.

Host country characteristics

Finally, the specific host-country context – namely general and climate-specific country particularities – was identified as an explanatory factor for specific climate diplomacy activities by EU Delegations. Sixty-four percent of the surveyed Delegations referred to their host country's receptiveness, limited prioritisation of climate policy and restricted willingness to engage with the EU Delegation on climate change as factors shaping and limiting their climate diplomacy activities. Some EU Delegation staff explicitly underlined: 'You have to (...) consider the different characteristics of each country and each region' (I3), when describing the nature and level of climate activities. Multiple interviewees referred to country-specific problems such as economic or political crises, receptive governments, lack of local authorities' resources, thereby emphasising the limitations to the Delegations' approach in dealing with the host country: 'there's a lack of capacity in the authorities to really work very hard on these topics' (I41). Similarly, many interviewees pointed out that climate issues were not high on the host country's political agenda and therefore only addressed to a limited degree by the Delegations: 'this environment sector in general is currently not the highest priority in this country' (I61).

Our analysis revealed the uniqueness of host-country characteristics in individual cases and we were not able to find patterns of the same factor explaining a large

number of cases. This becomes obvious, when taking a closer look at the groupings of countries with high or low climate activities, where we see very heterogenous members: large and small, high-income and low-income, stronger and weaker bilateral ties to the EU, many and few Member State embassies present, climate-vulnerable and climate-proactive countries. While our analysis strongly shows that host-country characteristics are considered an important facilitating or hampering factor of EU Delegations' climate diplomacy activities, those factors are highly multifaceted and difficult to generalise.

Although our findings did not reveal an identifiable pattern that could explain the variation in Delegation activities on the host country level, the great emphasis placed on the host-country context by the majority of interviewees suggests its central role. The seemingly random configuration of highly active or less active countries among those who stressed those factors only emphasises the importance of the individual agent engaged in climate diplomacy within every Delegation. If we consider the significance of our findings for the importance of agent-principal relationships (especially the existence of personal networks, intense contacts and close exchanges with Brussels) and the agent's climate expertise, this leads us to assume that these factors are indeed of crucial importance for the execution of EU climate diplomacy. The host-country characteristics remain a difficult-to-pinpoint group of factors but nonetheless cannot be ignored as part of the set of factors that jointly explains variance among EU Delegations' climate diplomacy activities.

Conclusions

Over the course of the European Union's evolution as an international climate actor, Delegations' centrality in implementing the EU's strategy as an agent of the Brussels-based institutions has grown. EU Delegations should not, however, be understood as uniform entities at the end of an instruction chain or conceptualised as merely executing agents. They rather are heterogenous agents that perform activities in very different manners. Our study revealed that the quality and intensity of relations between Delegations and Brussels-based principals shapes the level of climate diplomacy activities. Individual members of staff's expertise and commitment drives an EU Delegation's level of climate diplomacy activity; much more than a Delegation's overall climate diplomacy capacity, which remains relatively low in almost all Delegations. Additionally, host country characteristics condition an EU Delegation's level of activity. These characteristics are multifaceted and difficult to pinpoint or generalise, however. With our study we demonstrated that instructions from Brussels and the EU's Climate Diplomacy Action Plans are not the only factors determining a Delegation's practices.

The institutional architecture of EU climate diplomacy is more complex than the EU treaties and existing literature tend to suggest. Our clear differentiation between EU Delegations, on the one hand, and the EEAS Brussels headquarters, on the other, enabled us to show the strength and importance of direct links between Delegations and the European Commission – in particular DG Climate Action. Such differentiated institutional mapping enhances our understanding of the various actors involved in EU diplomacy. We also found that higher levels of climate diplomacy activities often occurred in Delegations with personal links to experts in DG Climate Action. Our study identified the EEAS headquarters as orchestrator, channelling EU strategies and messages to the Delegations while most issue-specific expertise rests in DG Climate Action. DG International Cooperation and Development is an important

contact for EU Delegations in low-income countries, which seems to be caused by the fact that in those countries climate change is perceived as an aspect that needs to be integrated in development cooperation, more than a subject of political outreach.

The EU Climate Diplomacy Action Plan makes explicit reference to concerted efforts by the EU and its Member States so that outreach achieves maximum benefit. If all Member State and EU-level capacity is joined, the EU can potentially mobilise about 3,000 embassies and delegations, hosting roughly 90,000 diplomats to achieve its climate diplomacy objectives (European Commission and EEAS 2015). The sum of all 28 Member States' individual diplomatic networks, plus the EU-level system is a greater numerical capacity than any individual country. Sheer numbers, however, do not guarantee success and effectiveness. While we only surveyed climate diplomacy activities of EU Delegations, expanding the analysis to EU Member State embassies could complement our findings.

Whereas this article provides a mapping and exploration of explanatory factors that can explain the observed variance of activity levels, we have not yet conducted a systematic analysis of the effectiveness and impact of EU Delegations' climate diplomacy. A study of the extent to which EU Delegations effectively reached out to their host countries and contributed to shaping local climate policies could be an instructive follow-up study to ours.

Note

1. The differentiation between Delegations and Offices is important insofar as in several locations the term Delegation cannot be used due to the host's non-state status (e.g. Hong Kong, Taiwan or Kosovo). In this article, we use the term Delegation to include Delegations and Offices.

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