

Climate diplomacy needs a revolution

The new diplomatic service might make Europe more unified, but only a new diplomacy can make it an environmental superpower, write [Thomas Hale](#) and [Tobias Leipprand](#)

Unity is often said to be the prerequisite for EU success on the international stage. But in one key area of European diplomacy, climate change, the limitations of unity have already been shown.

At December's UN conference on climate change in Copenhagen, the US, China and other big developing countries did the final negotiating, with Europe waiting – united – outside. This frustration will, in all probability, be repeated at the EU's summit with China on 6 October. No amount of European cohesion can prevent other states from exercising their sovereign right to wreck the planet.

If the EU is to avert catastrophic climate change, it needs to transform its climate diplomacy. It should supplement the multilateral process and state-to-state negotiations by bringing a broad swathe of non- and sub-state actors – private firms, cities, regions, civil society – into

the system of climate-change governance.

Partners for such a 'UN plus' approach can be found everywhere, especially (and not coincidentally) in countries such as the US and China that are laggards at the national level.

Some of the largest US states have committed themselves to reduce greenhouse gases, along with hundreds of municipalities and the US federal government itself. That is well-known. Less known is that Chinese cities such as Beijing, Shanghai and Tianjin have created carbon exchanges where private firms can trade emissions permits. Around the world, there are companies and industries that are making voluntary emissions cuts.

Europe needs to engage and support such actors, and strengthen and facilitate the 'action-oriented networks' that they form. That, in turn, requires the EU's diplomats to do more than simply represent European interests around the world. There are some specific steps that

such a transformation of EU climate diplomacy should involve.

First, the EU should use its stature to bring together local governments, industry and civil-society groups from around the world. The EU could put the case for action to them directly, learn what these groups' interests and needs are, and assess how it might help move these groups in a more sustainable direction.

Second, the EU should help sub- and non-state actors from Europe to engage with counterparts abroad so that they can exchange knowledge and form partnerships to reduce emissions. Peer-to-peer linkages – for example, between cities, environmental regulators and energy companies – are already beginning to form. But only if European climate diplomacy supports these initiatives and encourages them to become more ambitious and rigorous can they grow to a point where they could have a meaningful impact on the climate.

Third, the EU should link its emissions trading scheme to regional and voluntary carbon markets in the US, China and elsewhere. This would support carbon-mitigating interests in those countries and give European firms new ways to

reduce their emissions.

Fourth, the EU should support voluntary efforts by firms around the world to reduce emissions. Self-regulation has mushroomed in recent years as companies have sought to turn green. The EU could sponsor a global, self-regulatory – but tightly monitored – scheme. The EU could go beyond purely private initiatives, by granting compliant companies privileged access to the European market through, for example, preferential treatment in government procurement (or from 'carbon tariffs', if the EU goes in that direction).

The best solution remains a binding multilateral treaty. But in its absence, pro-environment interests in countries such as the US and China need the EU's support. Indeed, bolstering them may be the best way to hasten a multilateral deal, since a deal will only happen if pro-environment interests in these countries out-argue their anti-regulation rivals in the domestic debate. To do this they need the EU's moral, material, economic and technical support – not just more diplomatic pressure on their national governments by a unified Europe.

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