The European Union as an Environmental Leader in a Global Environment

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Abstract
Since the 1970s the European Union has made enormous strides in the global environmental arena and developed a considerable global standing. This article assesses the nature and scope of this new international leadership. It examines the EU institutional context and historical opportunities. The article presents an analytical overview that helps explain the dimensions of the EU role, as well as the conflicts within these roles. The article asks the following research question: how have the institutional and ideational complexities of the European policy-making structure defined both the scope and the impact of EU policy efforts? It offers some analytical propositions about how the EU shapes the global arena.

Introduction

The environmental sector has witnessed the transformation and internationalisation of the problems, processes and actors that compose it. The policy problems of global warming, for example, contain many cross border issues of uncertainty and complexity that require international responses and leadership. Since the 1970s the European Union (EU) –referring to the overall political entity as opposed to the European Community (EC) governing aspects of the Common Market - has evolved into a supranational actor of international standing in its own right (Jupille & Caporaso, 1998). The EU arguably now surpasses the United States as an environmental driver (Vogel, 2003; Sbragia and Damro, 1999).

This article conceptualises the EU’s potential for international leadership, examining the EU institutional context and historical opportunities. It asks this question: how have the institutional and ideational complexities of the European policy-making structure defined both the scope and the impact of EU efforts?

Using the institutionalist, ideational and organisational learning literatures, the paper studies the opportunities and conflicts that this historical process has embedded within both the internal and external faces of the environmental area. The article explores
the EU’s institutional nature and offers a future research agenda highlighting a number of important means (involving both direct and indirect processes) for international environmental influence.

**Analytical Perspectives**

The EU’s complexity is fundamental in driving the EU’s international potential (Geyer, 2003). Studying this complexity in the environment sector is not new (e.g. Weale, 1996; Bretherton and Vogler, 1999), but further elaboration is required to unravel the different implications.

This paper emphasises the EU’s institutional and ideational dimensions. Institutions are ‘collections of interrelated rules and routines that define appropriate actions in terms of relations between roles and situations’ (March and Olsen, 1989). Institutions provide rules and norms that create conditions under which certain policy choices are selected or excluded (Weale, 1992). Because (1) institutional actors operate with limited information, (2) institutions gradually alter the thinking of actors operating within the institutions and (3) institutional decisions lead down unanticipated paths, actors find it difficult to change the policy direction or wider institutional norms (Pierson, 1996).

Ideas provide the means for making choices and establishing the rules of the game; they provide a focus for new policies and political coalitions (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993). In contrast to institutions, ideational explanations posit the possibility for substantial change as old ideas are challenged. Ideas can exist as a larger set of beliefs (which may be quite amorphous) or as more specific notions operating within a particular belief system. Rein and Schön (1994) offer a useful conceptualization of ‘policy framing’: framing isolates how actors organize and interpret the complex
Learning theory helps explain how institutional structures and policy ideas change: organisations make inferences on the basis of history and transform them into structures of belief and organisational routines that guide behaviour (Levitt and March, 1988, pp. 320). The actors normally perceive some mismatch between the expected course of action and the reality (Argyris and Schön, 1996); alternatively, a separate coalition of actors holding a different set of policy principles seizes policy control (Sabatier, 1998). As organisations resist dramatic value changes, more incremental changes of procedures and instruments are more likely in any given political situation. Substantial change in world views is possible, particularly if the political actors face a substantial crisis/challenge to their certainties (Sabatier, 1998).

**Complexity and tensions**

The complex nature of the EU institutional system generates a number of inherent tensions, which affect (positively or negatively) the EU’s potential as a global environmental leader. This paper concentrates on four tensions, but first explains the EU institutional array that, with the 25 member states, induces this complexity.

The Commission, led by its President and a College of Commissioners, acts to some degree as ministers with portfolios overseeing a number of bureaucratic directorate-generals. It proposes EC environmental legislation and oversees its implementation. The Commission requires approval for the proposals from the Council of Ministers, which each member state chairs for six months as EU President. Although the Council represents the ministers of each country, the Council structure involves a number of working groups and committees including the critical Committee of Permanent
Representatives (Hayes-Renshaw and Wallace, 1997). The only directly elected institution remains the European Parliament (EP), and its increasing policy significance signifies that environmental legislation must also get through the Parliament, which has the ability to block legislation if it has a sufficient majority (Bomberg and Burns, 1999). The Parliament’s organisation includes rather amorphous catch-all European party groups and specialist committees that provide policy expertise. The last main body, the European Court of Justice (ECJ), has the power to uphold the EU Treaties and law while having some scope to interpret law (often in a way favourable to environmental protection, see Cichowski, 1998).

The complex EU system, when combined with the activities of the member states and other actors in such policy matters as implementation, generates numerous tensions. First, the EU shares a characteristic of federal systems: the inherent institutional tension between territorial concerns of the individual member states versus the more supranational concerns of the political system. Despite the striking success of the EU environmental policy sector, there remains an outlook within some member states that seeks the devolution of policy-making power away from the supranational level (Golub, 1996; Flynn, 2003).

Closely associated to this point is the tension between the prioritization of efficiency versus control (Kerremans, 1998). Territorial representation of member states is embedded consciously in all EU institutions (Sbragia, 1993). Particularly with the 2004 accession of 10 states, there is a struggle to maintain the voice and control of individual states while ensuring efficiency in the supranational decision-making process through greater qualified majority voting in the Council (i.e. states lose their individual vetoes).
Second, while territorial concerns partly define the EU organizational structure, the heavy institutional orientation towards policy sectors (single market, environment et cetera) cuts across the territorial dimension. The institutional emphasis on policy sectors allows for the possibility of institutional specialization, but it also creates the potential conflict between different sectoral interests and bureaucratic politics (Peters, 1992). Policy priorities, values and frames of the individual sectors shape EU actors and how they interact. Sectoralization means that both the Commissioners and individual directorates have their own specific policy duties and priorities. These priorities are built around particular policy frames, bureaucratic interests and policy constituencies. The environment ministers may share more in common with their counterparts in the EU Commission and the other member states than with the finance ministers of their own country (Hill, 1993). Many view the Commission Environment Directorate-General as being less influential than the more senior DGs and co-opted by environmental interests (Wurzel, 2002).

One of the most difficult EU environmental objectives has been the integration of environmental priorities into other EU policy sectors despite its explicit policy prominence (Schout and Jordan, 2005). The Commission has created a number of operating principles to integrate environmental concerns more effectively, but the results have been limited due to conflicting operational approaches and philosophies within the EU institutions. The Common Agricultural Policy, which continues to result in over-intensive farming despite well-publicized environmental consequences, illustrates this problem (Lenschow and Zito, 1998).

Third, EC policy specialization creates its own set of complexities and tensions. With a supranational organisation containing a bureaucracy (the Commission) than that found in a medium sized city, such as Aarhus, EC actors require technical expertise
from the member states to operate regulations (Majone, 1997; Zito, 2004). This and limited financial resources force Commission reliance on technical support from both member state representatives and willing interest groups. Much of the Commission activity heavily involves member state representatives who sit on committees with the Commission representatives (Demmke, 1998). Although the Commission is both the key agenda setter and compliance monitor, it relies on the knowledge, expertise and support of the actors that it regulates. Heavy consultation and significant involvement with various interested parties also helps the Commission to build the consensus necessary to get Council and Parliament agreement.

External experts are involved from the very start of the policy process, which normally is conducted behind closed doors. This reality limits the non-expert ability to monitor or influence such deliberations (Beetham and Lord, 1998). Thus the EU policy-making system is in one sense extremely open but simultaneously is perceived as being extremely closed: while the formal structures for civil society and popular input are quite limited, interest group participation is important for environmental governance.

The fourth policy complexity is related in that it limits the influence of less organized and knowledgeable environmental actors: the sheer complexity of the EU institutional process. The EC policy process involves a number of institutions (Commission, Council of Ministers, European Parliament, individual member states and other bodies) in the creation, negotiation, decision-making and implementation stages. The Commission shares executive functions: i.e. policy leadership, with the Council of Ministers, and implementation with the member states. This and the sharing of the traditional legislative functions of ratification and accountability (between the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers) create a complex system.
This complex institutional chain has a number of implications for placing issues on the EC environmental agenda and then manufacturing a policy consensus. Various actors and interest groups have numerous opportunities to find favourable institutional actors and access points. It is easy to place new and innovative definitions of the policy problem and the solution onto the EC decisional agenda (Zito, 2000).

Nevertheless, each important actor within this long policy chain is a veto point, and any actor promoting a particular goal must build consensus and compromise across all the veto points (Weale, 1996). It is relatively easy to influence the EC agenda, but much harder to maintain the issue on the agenda and achieve agreement – i.e. ‘agenda maintenance’ (Zito, 2000).

**Policy complexity within the environmental sector**

In order to understand how the tensions mentioned above manifest themselves in EU global behaviour, it is important to study the history and evolution of the EU environmental sector. Offering only a snapshot of the enormous sector, the article focuses (1) on the administrative structures and procedural arrangements that develop and implement policy; and (2) on policy goals, often based on a framework of ideas, that inform EU policy content (Hall, 1993). This section identifies how the tensions in the EU institutional framework are embedded in the evolution and the current dimensions of environmental policy.

*Institutional structure*

One sees the immediate tension between EU policy frames in the very creation of EU environmental policy. The main EU constitutional basis, the Treaties signed by the member states, did not mention environmental policy until the 1987 ratification of the
Single European Act, but environmental policy was one of the most dynamic Community areas two decades before this (Hildebrand, 1993, Jordan 1999a). Before 1987, the Commission primarily based legislation under Treaty Article 100 (harmonising national regulations that inhibit common market trade) or Article 235 (permitting the pursuit of Community objectives in the course of operating the common market where the Treaty has not provided the necessary powers). Accordingly, an important rationale for Community environmental activity was protecting the common market from national environmental legislation that act as trade (non-tariff) barriers.

Consequently the environment had to be inserted into a pre-existing European Treaty and ideational/institutional structure that explicitly prioritized other objectives (Lenschow and Zito, 1998). The policy frame of environmental sustainability and protection had to compete against pre-existing priorities, particularly economic ones. The subsequent Treaties have included the environmental priority, explicit mentions of environmental policy integration and the enhancing of the power of certain supranational bodies – i.e. the EP - held to be pro-green, but the tension remains.

In additional to the sectoral policy and value conflict, the Treaties contain rules to protect member state autonomy (the territorial dimension); these rules place strong limits on EU environmental action. Significantly, member state governments retain the EU budget setting powers although the supranational institutions have a role. Consequently, the member states have imposed significant limits to the EU budget; this budget spending is quite limited beyond the traditional agricultural and regional funding. This necessarily limits the range of EU environmental activities; it creates a political dynamic where member states support EU frugality (Sbragia, 2000).
The EU ability to act in its own right as an environmental actor is a by-product of the historical evolution of complex institutional forces. Just as the EU was expanding its environmental policy scope, it also was enhancing enormously its international profile. The original Treaty of Rome creating the EC contained specific provisions allowing the Community to exercise external competence in the areas of foreign commercial trade (Jordan, 1999). The 1970s saw not only the threat of national environmental policies to the common market, but also member states becoming signatories to multilateral conventions protecting the environment that might create non-tariff barriers (Sbragia, 1998). The Commission used this economic imperative to expand the Community role and seek international status (Sbragia with Damro, 1999).

The ECJ affirmed this by ruling in the 1971 ERTA case that the ability of the Community to legislate a common policy within the market enable it to also have external powers. The ruling left ambiguous whether the Commission or the Council Presidency represented the EU; moreover, member states continued to have their international status in participating in such negotiations (Sbragia, 1998). Evidence of the political conflict present has been in the continued prohibition of separate Community participation in the Convention on International Trade on Endangered Species (CITES). There has been a move to reclaim some of the exclusive competence on the trade front in the 1990s (Meunier, 2000).

Environmental treaties are termed ‘mixed agreements’ as they involve the ratification of both the Community and the individual members states, thus thoroughly enmeshing territorial considerations with the system’s supranational thrust. A rather elaborate EU negotiation procedure ensues at the international level in mixed competence areas. The Commission serves as negotiator under a mandate unanimously approved by the Council (without the participation of the EP) and consults continuously with the
member state representatives (Krämer, 2003). Member states retain the right to negotiate on their own where they retain jurisdiction, but often the Commission (in areas of exclusive competence) or the Council President (in areas of mixed competence) will be asked to speak on the Community’s behalf. Where the Commission does have a mandate, member states also participate in negotiations and sometimes carry far greater clout. This creates an international actor lacking the clear unitary negotiator found more typically in the international arena (Sbragia with Damro, 1999).

Policy content

Institutional constraints noted above have pushed the Community towards more command and control solutions, specifying the emissions limits or the means of environmental protection. The EU differs substantially from the traditional state in its highly limited budgetary powers (and police powers et cetera – see Sbragia, 2000; Majone 1997). EU law-making consequently has gravitated towards creating rules which require no budgetary expenditure on the actors who formulate them. In the early expansion of Community environmental legislation, regulation dominated the Community process although this has altered over time (Weale, 1999; Jordan et al., 2003).

Since 1992 the output has changed; there has been more exploration of ‘new’ policy instrument types. This partially reflects internal learning by the Commission and other policy actors about the limitations of traditional regulation and the potential benefits of alternatives and of stakeholder involvement. The tensions mentioned above also helped create this opportunity: (1) several member states led a push towards using the subsidiarity principle (i.e. an attempt to redress the territorial balance) in environmental policy (Flynn, 2003); and (2) various actors promoting
economic competitiveness as a competing policy frame to that of enhancing the environment (Jordan et al., 2003, pp. 563-564).

The selection of instruments and the specification of standards create a parallel tension that shapes the nature of EU policy. A frequent Council dynamic occurs when certain states take a particular lead on a given issue, pushing for a Council decision or for a Commission initiative (Liefferink and Andersen, 1998). ‘Regulatory competition’ drives much of this process: member states seek to impose their own national standards at the EC level, in order to minimize the adjustment costs for their own economic sector relative to other member states (Héritier et al., 1996). Successful ‘regulatory competition’ can lead to tensions as certain states are forced to ‘follow’ the lead adopted by the whole EC. Thus the EU territorial units seek to ‘upload’ their own national preferences, which have to be ‘downloaded’ by other member states (Padgett, 2003, pp. 228-9). To successfully upload a policy, ideas must be pushed onto the EU agenda and past the various veto points, but how a policy is downloaded is equally important. This depends on how well the policy idea fits with domestic institutions and interests and the domestic institutional configuration within each member state.

The adoption of EU measures may redistribute resources and affect the political balance within the domestic constituency (Padgett, 2003, pp. 242-3). Over EC environmental history, there has developed a tension felt particularly by the ‘Southern’ states: namely that the substantial EC legislation reflects a ‘Northern’ outlook towards goals and standards and not Southern priorities (Weale et al., 2000).

**The Global impact of EU environmental policy and leadership**
Having analysed how the EU complexity has shaped its environmental policy, we now theorise how this system’s complexity shapes the EU’s global environmental impact. Extensive scholarship has noted how the EU role as an external trade actor and a promoter of environmental protection values has led to internal conflict, often resolved in favour of the trade interests (Bretherton & Vogler, 2000). However, these tensions do not necessarily work against the EU efforts. This article’s thesis is that there are circumstances where the EU actually benefits from this complex process. While this contradicts the conventional wisdom concerning EU foreign relations lacking a single voice, both EU trade and environmental scholars argue that, in particular circumstances, complexity can work to the EU advantage against an opponent such as the United States which has a more cohesive negotiating team. There are circumstances in which the EU can negotiate trade initiatives against US wishes (Clarke et al., 2000; Meunier, 2000; Rhinard and Keating, 2005). The diverse range of EC actors and member states force the EU towards a very inclusive pre-negotiation process; while problematic, the successful achievement of this stance may make the convention ratification process easier that the one confronting the US executive when it seeks Congressional ratification (Sbragia and Damro, 1999). Finally, organisations look for ways around complex formal structures that inhibit necessary change. Héritier (1999) argues that the EU policy process has witnessed the utilisation of a range of informal mechanisms to progress policy and to gain political legitimacy. The EU may conduct symbolic and rhetorical exercises in order to mask policy change, buy off particular internal or external actors by offering compensation, structure the sequence of policy negotiations to gain agreement in a more favourable arena before tackling more difficult ones, shifting a deadlocked issue from one EU institutional arena to another, and so forth.
The EU is a complex system that provides both procedural challenges and opportunities. To get some sense of how this system may influence EU international environmental negotiations and external relations more generally, we turn to the wide range of potential EU roles. Rather than offering detailed empirical analyses, the article offers some different conceptual permutations created by the complex EU process.

**EU global leadership roles**

*EU as negotiator*

A wide scholarship has examined the issue of EU global leadership, particularly concerning the EU as an active player shaping world events and negotiations. There has been a substantial discussion of the nature of EU power. Given its previous difficulties of developing a military capability, many have focused on the notion of the EU as a civilian power with international clout backed by its economic resources. Manners (2002) argues that the EU’s hybrid status and supranational development gives it a unique prominence to inculcate the global society with several key international norms (including democracy) and fundamental freedoms (including sustainable development). Manners suggests that there are a number of different vehicles by which the EU can diffuse its norms to third party actors, including procedural agreements, trade interaction and so forth. This emphasis about diffusion resonates with the roles articulated in this article.

However, the tensions and complexity found in the EU system severely complicates the EU effort to act as a normative leader. Taking the complexities in turn, the EU has endeavoured to promote the frames of sustainable development and the need for global environmental protection. The EU can develop a cohesive negotiating stance
and sustain this with a complex institutional process. The Kyoto Protocol history reveals how domestic concerns motivated member state governments while the Commission and other EU actors saw an opportunity to expand EU influence (Damro and Luaces Méndez, 2003). The respective EU Council President brokered a deal between the member states during and after the Kyoto negotiations which allowed the EU to develop a more coherent identity (Sbragia with Damro, 1999). As noted above, the EU has found it easier to ratify its Kyoto commitments than the US.

The fact that the EU has diverse actors and voices may be an advantage in dealing with complex problems as the variation of perspectives and voices that EU actors have may be attractive to counterparts. Taking a non-environmental example, the record of neutrality of some EU member states has helped reassure certain third parties (wary of NATO and the US influence) about the likely direction taken by EU foreign relations. Equally, certain EU actors may engage third parties with more sympathy in environmental negotiations than the overall EU organisation. This may not make the final negotiation easier but it may help to get opposing actors to the negotiation table.

While the Kyoto process is seen as a great success in the EU global environmental leader bid, EU complexity can hinder this effort. The EU participation in the World Summit on Sustainable Development reveals the negative impact of the EU tensions (Lightfoot and Burchell, 2005). While the EU managed to achieve some of its environmental objectives, the discussions on trade quickly fell foul to two of the core EU tensions: (1) the policy frame prioritising trade competitiveness and economic growth was strongly embedded in many key EU actors and (2) policy integration across sectors (with their differing frames) proved extremely difficult. Commission officials in the Trade and the Development Directorates ended up promoting textual
changes that conflicted with the environmental stance (Lightfoot and Burchell, 2005, pp. 85-88).

The EU also can play a negative environmental role, especially as it needs to satisfy the concerns of 25 very different member states. The tension between environmental protection and economic costs/fears can lead to a suboptimal EU negotiation stances (in environmental terms). In the agreements to protect the ozone layer, the Community fought to gain the contracting party status (Sbragia, 1998, pp. 296-298). After gaining that status, certain member state, (particularly Greece) positions led the EC to join the international coalition pushing for less stringent regulations concerning particular substances (Jupille, 1999, pp. 416-419).

EU As Innovator

One of the key means through which the EU can take global leadership is by creating innovative solutions to the complex global policy problems. In the 1980s, both the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) and UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme) adapted regulatory ideas for governing hazardous waste that the EC originated (Zito, 2000). Given its current environmental status and the Single Market’s perpetual clout, the EU has significant global agenda setting ability.

The institutional tension results in the EU having numerous actors who can veto innovation when that seems to threaten the balance of resources in favour of that particular state or organisation. However, the global complexity and uncertainty of many of the problems (such as climate change) may make it harder for actors to have a clear sense of the direct and indirect consequences of particular solutions. Organisations facing complex uncertainty also may move away from formal routines
and understandings (Levitt and March, 1988, p. 327). This may create more flexibility and potential for innovation, but there is a risk of such activities feeding into a EU separate tension, namely the concern about how distant and opaque this EU process is for the greater EU polity. While conditions of environmental uncertainty may lead the wider population to defer to the complex EU policy process and its solutions, various groups will resist discernible costs, as has been seen in the petrol tax protests (this fiscal instrument being heavily used by European governments, partly under the rationale of protecting the environment and stopping global emissions).

Besides acknowledging the legitimisation problem, it is important to conceptualise how such a complex system might constitute a learning organisation. With its diverse actors and processes, the EU should find it easier to create a diversity of theories and gather knowledge than simple national systems to solve transnational problems. Complex institutions are more likely to be able to learn and formulate approaches to complex problems as their separate constituent units follow different learning paths and perhaps even compete to find the best solutions to problems (Weir, 1992, pp. 192-194).

The tradable permits scheme within the Kyoto accord provides a useful example of a NEPI, one that may bridge frame conflicts. Originally, individual states within the US took the lead in developing practical versions of this instrument. With the change in the US approach to Kyoto, the EU has taken over the leadership role and has embraced the tradable permits solution initially promoted by the USA (Damro and Luaces Méndez, 2003; Jordan et al., 2005). The tradable permits system, which establishes markets that allow polluters to trade in a limited supply of 'pollution rights' to reduce emissions, addresses market competitiveness concerns as well as demands
for cutting emissions through the setting of overall market emission limits. The Netherlands and the UK have been seeking to develop their ideas on this system in order to gain some first mover advantage and ‘upload’ their ideas within the larger EU debate and prevent disruption to their domestic systems (Jordan et al., 2005). Here member states sought advantage from new solutions and have helped to push EU innovation overall in this direction.

**EU as Market**

As already indicated, the EU market is extremely important in giving the EU political and economic influence. Bretherton and Vogler (2004) focus on how this can shape the EU as a foreign policy actor that can use exclusion from access and membership to influence other actors. This dynamic holds true for the environment as global business and actors fear the kinds of regulations that such an attractive market may place on economic activities. This explains the enormous international attention being devoted in 2004-2005 to the EU internal negotiations to reform the chemical regulations (Ochs and Schaper, 2005). In the past there is clear evidence of actors such as Australia seeking to globalise EU chemical regulation by getting the issues shifted to a more sympathetic international environment where these countries can directly protect their interests and concerns (Kellow and Zito, 2002). The wide range of diverse actors and policy frames within the EU context can aid lobbying efforts by third parties.

By agreeing regulations about genetically modified organisms at an early stage, the EU has set a number of rules that have become the global standard, despite US opposition. The EU managed to insert the Precautionary Principle into the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and have been taken to the World Trade Organization dispute
settlement panel by the United States (Rhinard and Kaeding, 2005; Ochs and Schaper, 2005).

There is another dimension to this market activity that goes beyond exclusion: namely the EU ability to use the power of its market to penetrate other markets and force compatibility within EU norms or practices. Nicolaïdis and Egan (2001) argue that the EU effort to complete the single market has led to a number of externalities which have changed the environment for non-EU actors. The creation of a set of common standards, including environmental ones, has forced other actors to respond to EU efforts in bilateral and multilateral fora. EU firms also have a strong incentive to push the EU standards and standardization norms at the international level and within other regions (Nicolaïdis and Egan, 2001). Thus the process of the competitive advantage seen within the Common Market is also operative at the international level with the EU actors being willing to work with international organisations in a two way exchange that entrenches the EU influence.

While these dynamics suggest the EU to undertake global leadership and enhance international competitiveness, this does not necessarily mean a commitment to the highest level of environmental protection. Furthermore, although the EU endeavoured to protect the standardisation process from being deadlocked by national perspectives through such tools as mutual recognition, the tension remains, particularly when the standards in question involve politically or socially sensitive areas.

**EU as Model**

Another potentially significant means for influencing other international actors and consequently outcomes is through the role of teacher and/or model. Here the
multiplicity of EU actors can have a considerable impact on a wide range of objectives. Thus the Commission and the member state environmental ministries can offer their insights and experiences at international fora while other EU actors can engage with different levels of society.

An example of the latter effort is the effort of European environmental nongovernmental organisations (ENGOS) seeking to promote environmental governance and democratic participation. In the mid 1990s, the European Environmental Bureau (or EEB, which is partly funded by the Commission) was heavily oriented to tackling North-South questions and made a major effort concerning Latin America and Mercosur environmental groups (ENGO interview, 23.9.2003). With the onset of Eastern European enlargement, ENGOs such as the EEB have concentrated substantial effort in building the knowledge and capacity of ENGOS to help make them become more effective EU policy participants and national lobbyists (Bomberg, 2003). The EU also offers a model of a democratic regional system with active environmental groups; elements of the Latin American population view positively regional integration as a result of their attitude to the EU (Jacobs and Zito, 2003).

Nevertheless, this effort to build civil society actors to further global environmental aims runs into the EU systemic tensions created. Many of the external political elites as well as general populations are focused on the implications of the European Single market and view the success story in terms of economic competitiveness. Programmes such as the Common Agricultural Policy suggest different norms and lessons from those emphasising environmental concerns.

**Summary and Future Research**
This article has explained how the nature of the EU institutional/ideational structure has shaped the internal and external dimensions of EU environmental policy. Inherent in that structure are a number of core tensions. The EU contains a constant territorial tension between its national and EU elements. There are strong differences in policy values and frames located within the system. The strong emphasis on policy sectoralisation reinforces these differences, which EU actors have found difficult to ameliorate and integrate. There is a tendency for including a wide range of experts in an open system that nevertheless lacks transparency and thus suffers under questions of legitimacy. Finally, the sheer size of the policy process creates a number of significant veto threats that must be overcome.

Although this set of tensions can lead to internal deadlock and incoherence in the approach to external relations, it can nevertheless create opportunities. This article does not offer a comprehensive list of potential EU global roles, but rather suggests some of the more significant ones and how they might be affected by the EU institutional tensions. One must realise that, in the context of any given global environmental problem, the EU may be influencing the other actors in at least 4 different ways. This direct and indirect influence may not create coherent pressures to protect the environment.

The EU may face deadlocks or conflicting policy frames that lead to one policy priority triumphing over another. However, they also may create opportunities for shrewd players that other international actors will not expect. The arguments explored here suggest that political entrepreneurship that understands both the EU process and the policy problem may be able to achieve their objectives in a way conventional wisdom will not expect. Part of the key is being able to define the international problem and provide a plausible solution early enough in the process to
gain the advantage over other actors (Nicolaïdis and Egan, 2001; Ochs and Schaper, 2005). However, the aftermath of the Katrina hurricane suggests that all complex institutions and policy processes may face rapid policy change as environmental crises dramatically alter the policy perspectives of the policy elite and the general population.

References


