

# TRANSFORMING EU FOREIGN POLICY

Reforms to elevate climate in the 2024-2029 EU cycle



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## Disclaimer

The views and assumptions expressed in this report represent the views of the authors and not necessarily those of the European Climate Foundation or those interviewed.

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# SUMMARY

In June 2024, European Union (EU) voters elected representatives to the European Parliament, with key concerns centred on competitiveness, security and the cost of living. The election took place at a time of numerous international conflicts, highlighting European defence and crisis response capabilities. It also took place against the backdrop of rising geopolitical tensions, shifting economic and security interests, and an evolving industrial policy landscape. Concerns about the future of the EU as a clean energy manufacturing hub are increasingly prominent, especially in light of the United States' Inflation Reduction Act and China's dominance in the cleantech sector.

Despite the gains of far-right parties, the European Green Deal continues to be supported by a majority of citizens in a number of EU countries and is key to ensuring future European competitiveness and security (Abou-Chadi et al., 2024). The EU's Strategic Agenda for 2024-2029 emphasises central election themes like European competitiveness, energy sovereignty, and economic growth, integrating climate through this lens. The incoming Commission faces the challenge of implementing Green Deal legislation and enacting further ambitious climate policies while addressing concerns about the costs of transition.

For decades, the EU has been a global leader in international climate action through its economic influence, political leadership, technical expertise, and position as a standard setter, while addressing its responsibility as a historic emitter. European leadership increasingly aims to embed climate considerations into all foreign policy decisions to influence the global transition and protect European interests. Policy channels like development cooperation, trade, industrial policy, and security are increasingly seen as levers for transformational action. Since 2011, the Foreign Affairs Council has repeatedly emphasised the importance of climate diplomacy and global leadership on climate action in annual conclusions (Council of the European Union, 2024a). The 2020-2024 Joint Conclusions of the European Parliament, Council, and Commission further elevated climate foreign policy and global climate leadership as a strategic priority, alongside its mention in the Green Deal. Various EU bodies, including DG CLIMA, DG ENER, DG GROW, DG INTPA, DG TAXUD, DG Trade, and the EEAS, have integrated climate priorities into their agendas, albeit to varying degrees.

Effective implementation remains challenging, necessitating strengthened coordination among EU institutions and Member States and institutional reforms to elevate climate in foreign policy. In this policy brief, we outline the main challenges

**Fig. 1**  
**Summary of the challenges and reform proposals**

the EU faces in the realm of climate diplomacy and present a menu of reform options that provide opportunities to elevate the prominence of climate in EU foreign policy. The options presented result from a literature review, interviews with experts within and outside EU institutions, and an expert workshop. The challenges and reform proposals include:

## CHALLENGE



### **The EU lacks a long-term strategy for climate diplomacy**

The EU's approach to climate diplomacy lacks a long-term, unified vision, relying instead on annually developed near-term strategies in the form of Council conclusions that primarily focus on COP negotiating positions.

## REFORM PROPOSAL



- **Climate foreign policy strategy:** The adoption of an overarching strategy for climate foreign policy, endorsed at the highest political level, which articulates a common vision of Paris-aligned foreign policy.

## CHALLENGE



### **Unclear distribution of responsibilities**

The mandates of key officials are unclear regarding the ownership on climate foreign policy, and the responsibilities are scattered with insufficient coordination across various institutions.

## REFORM PROPOSALS



- **Strengthen high-level political mandates on climate diplomacy:** A high-level Commission official, such as an Executive Vice-President, leads on the external dimension of the EU's climate action.
- **Improve political leadership in EU delegations:** Heads of delegation have a clear mandate to promote climate action and increase its visibility in relations with partner countries.

## CHALLENGE



### Communication and coordination challenges

Internal communication between EU delegations, Brussels and Member States lack strategic coordination and is often siloed. External communication to partners also lacks strategic coordination, impacting trust and EU visibility.

## REFORM PROPOSALS



- **Strategic Communication Task Force:** Led by the Cabinet for Commissioner for climate action, this task force is responsible for unifying and amplifying communication on the EU's external climate action and for coordination.
- **Launch the Green Diplomacy Hubs:** Regionally based with participation from EU delegations, Member State embassies, the EEAS and DGs, serving as platforms to share information, update on activities and enable cooperation.
- **Climate Focal Points:** A climate officer in EU delegations to enhance communication and coordination between Member State embassies and Brussels, and amplify external communication on EU activities in host country.

## CHALLENGE



### Insufficient resources

The EU lacks resources and capacity to effectively implement the mandate to mainstream climate in EU foreign policy.

## REFORM PROPOSALS



- **Increase capacity on climate diplomacy through reprioritisation:** More staff working on external climate action in DGs, the EEAS and EU delegations to strengthen the implementation of the EU's climate foreign policy.
- **Increase the EU public administration budget:** The next Multiannual Financial Framework can provide more resources for increasing climate capacity on EU external action.

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# ABBREVIATIONS

<b>CBAM</b>	Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism
<b>COP</b>	Conference of the Parties
<b>CSO</b>	Civil society organisation
<b>DG CLIMA</b>	Directorate-General for Climate Action
<b>DG ENER</b>	Directorate-General for Energy
<b>DG GROW</b>	Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs
<b>DG INTPA</b>	Directorate-General for International Partnerships
<b>DG TAXUD</b>	Directorate-General for Taxation and Customs Union
<b>DG TRADE</b>	Directorate-General for Trade
<b>DGs</b>	Directorates-General
<b>EEAS</b>	European External Action Service
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>FAC</b>	Foreign Affairs Council
<b>GNI</b>	Gross national income
<b>GoF</b>	Group of friends for an ambitious EU climate diplomacy
<b>HR/VP</b>	High Representative and Vice President
<b>IRA</b>	Inflation Reduction Act
<b>JET-P</b>	Just Energy Transition Partnership
<b>MFF</b>	Multiannual financial framework
<b>NCQG</b>	Next Collective Quantified Goal on Climate Finance
<b>NDC</b>	Nationally Determined Contributions
<b>NGO</b>	Non-governmental organisation
<b>SME</b>	Small and medium enterprise
<b>UNFCCC</b>	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
<b>WTO</b>	World Trade Organisation

**/ Λ 01**

# **INTRODUCTION**



In June 2024, voters in the European Union (EU) cast decisive ballots for their representatives in the European Parliament. The election cycle was dominated by concerns about EU competitiveness and economic security. Despite the increase in far-right parties in the European Parliament, the EU Green Deal is unlikely to be rolled back as its key policies are enacted. Centrist parties still have a majority in the European Parliament and largely support the transition (European People's Party, 2024). The primary challenge now lies in implementing Green Deal legislation, enacting further ambitious climate policy such as the 2040 emissions reduction target and supporting partners in their transition. While climate remains on the agenda, the EU's 2024-2029 Strategic Agenda set by the Council engages with climate through the lens of competitiveness, energy sovereignty, and economic growth (European Council, 2024). Compared to the 2019-2024 agenda, the focus on climate is reduced (European Council, 2019).

The EU faces significant challenges in an evolving global order marked by the rise of authoritarian powers like Russia and China, mounting unilateral measures, protectionism and supply chain disruptions. Economic concerns over the EU's future position in the clean economy are intensifying, especially with the United States' green industrial policy shift under the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and China's continued dominance of cleantech manufacturing and supply chains. The rise of international conflicts has also raised questions about European defence and security capabilities, and the EU's collective ability to respond to global crises.

In 2024, about half of the global population are heading to the polls, sharing concerns about globalisation, security and the cost of living (Ewe, 2023). Elections could have significant implications for the multilateral system and climate cooperation at large. The United States election, in particular, will have global impacts, especially affecting the EU, given the close transatlantic relationship. Elections in several key emitting countries could impact multilateral climate efforts, including the positioning of emerging economies like Mexico, India, Indonesia and South Africa in UNFCCC Conference of the Parties (COP) negotiations. The shifting political landscape underscores the need for the EU to project stable global leadership on climate, especially as the next round of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) are expected in 2025. Furthermore, emerging and developing economies will look to the EU to step up in ongoing negotiations over the New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) on international climate finance and the operationalisation of the Loss and Damage Fund, topics high on the COP29 agenda.

Against the backdrop of rising distrust in the multilateral system and growing fragmentation among countries, strong European leadership on international climate action and multilateralism is needed. The EU plays a pivotal role in holding up the multilateral system, especially through its leadership in supporting other countries in their transitions. In this complex geopolitical landscape, it will be crucial

for the EU to continue to deliver a credible offer on partnerships with developing countries and emerging economies. The EU's critical role in supporting the multilateral system is underscored by the historic COP28 declaration to transition away from fossil fuels, a rare triumph of multilateralism amid growing global polarisation.

As the world grapples with escalating climate impacts, now is the time for the EU to be strategic with its climate foreign policy and strengthen its global climate leadership. Despite the EU's longstanding commitment to climate diplomacy and leadership in global climate action, the EU must now strengthen its strategy to respond to a shifting geopolitical landscape. Further, to ensure the EU remains competitive in the clean economy, it is crucial for the EU to keep climate action firmly on the agenda, both domestically but also abroad. The EU can elevate its role as a climate leader in the face of increased global challenges by restructuring key EU institutions and integrating climate into all aspects of foreign policy.

Effectively implementing a cohesive foreign policy is a huge challenge for the EU, given that Member States retain exclusive competence on legislating certain parts of foreign policy and shared competency for others. This often leads to fragmented and inconsistent positions on the EU level. While the Green Deal has certainly prompted a narrative shift on the opportunities for economic growth the transition offers, the implementation of the external dimension varies, highlighting the need to mainstream climate across all foreign policy channels (NewClimate Institute, 2023). A restructuring of the EU key's institutions will be necessary to effectively implement EU climate foreign policy. This requires incorporating climate considerations into all EU foreign policy decision-making and ensuring that climate is treated as a cross-cutting issue within the EU's external action agenda. A coordinated approach with strong leadership from the highest political level is essential, supported by a clear mandate, adequate resources and capacities, and an effective institutional structure to implement the climate foreign policy strategy (NewClimate Institute, 2023).

The external dimension of the Green Deal is inherently linked to the EU, and the world, achieving its ambitious mitigation targets. Under Green Deal policies and measures, the EU will be closer to reaching its emissions reduction targets for 2030 (Climate Action Tracker, 2024). But the EU must also engage and support partners to be equally ambitious and close the implementation gap. To build on its Green Deal success, now is the time to bolster EU climate diplomacy and address how the external dimension of the Green Deal impacts partner countries, whether through the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) or the Regulation on Deforestation-free products. Supporting climate action in partner countries is also crucial not only for securing clean energy supply chains but also for advancing a new green growth strategy for Europe.

The terms climate diplomacy and climate foreign policy are used interchangeably throughout the report.

The EU election, which ushered in the new leadership for the EU Commission and the European Parliament, presents a unique opportunity for EU leaders to rethink climate diplomacy and consider institutional reforms to elevate climate considerations in foreign policy. In this policy brief, NewClimate Institute presents the state of EU climate diplomacy, the direction the EU can take and reform opportunities to help the EU realise this vision. This brief draws on research from a series of expert interviews with government representatives from selected Member States, EU institutions, and civil society organisations.

**/ Λ 02**

**THE EU'S AMBITION  
TO MAINSTREAM  
CLIMATE IN FOREIGN  
POLICY**

EU institutions have increasingly faced calls to prioritise climate as a key aspect of their foreign policy and exhibit global leadership in climate. Since 2011, the Council of the European Union has published numerous Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) conclusions on climate diplomacy, calling for leadership and strategic engagement with partners on climate change (NewClimate Institute, 2023). The 2020-2024 Joint Conclusions of the European Parliament, Council, and Commission further underscored the importance of the EU's global leadership in addressing climate change as a strategic priority (Joint Conclusion 2021/C 451 I/02, 2020). Additionally, the European Green Deal under the von der Leyen Commission set out the aim to strengthen "green deal diplomacy", which involves mobilising all diplomatic channels to tackle the climate crisis (European Commission, 2019).

The call to elevate climate in European foreign policy is strategic. A just and Paris-aligned global transition has wide-reaching geopolitical implications on economic, security, and trade interests. European leadership increasingly aims to embed climate considerations into foreign policy to influence the global transition and protect European interests. This has led to a push to expand the scope of European climate diplomacy outside the UNFCCC to multilateral and bilateral forums. The

■ EU is increasingly pursuing climate partnerships with "like-minded" third countries as a mechanism to not only support partners' transition but to expand European influence in relation to China and ensure energy and supply chain security. Policy channels like development cooperation, trade, industrial policy, and security are increasingly seen as levers for transformational action.

Climate foreign policy is increasingly emphasised in the strategic agendas of Commission Services and the EEAS. The level of integration of climate objectives into European foreign policy channels varies across different EU bodies. The Directorate General for Climate Action (DG CLIMA) has traditionally been at the helm of European climate diplomacy, leading international negotiations. DG CLIMA is stepping up bilateral and multilateral engagements with partner countries through Green Alliances and Partnerships (European Commission, 2020b; NewClimate Institute, 2024). The Directorate General for International Partnerships (DG INTPA) identifies climate change, environment, and energy as core priorities in its 2020-2024 Strategic Agenda (DG DEVCO, 2020). Through Global Gateway, the EU's geopolitical instrument for long-term and sustainable investments in partner countries, DG INTPA supports the green transition abroad. The Directorate General for Energy (DG ENER) focuses on external energy policy and energy diplomacy around the clean energy transition, aiming to bolster European competitiveness, technological leadership, and socio-economic benefits (European Commission, 2020c). Energy cooperation with neighbouring countries, key emitters, and key partners is high on their agenda.

The European Green Deal refers to the EU's desire to "continue to lead international efforts and... build alliances with the like-minded" (European Commission, 2020a).

Climate foreign policy is also increasingly relevant to non-traditional Commission Services. The Directorate General for Internal Market, Industry and Entrepreneurship, and SMEs (DG GROW) emphasises several climate diplomacy-related themes such as green and resilient procurement and critical product value chains in its strategic agenda. DG GROW engages with partners in EU critical raw material partnerships through what it calls “raw materials diplomacy” (European Commission, no date; NewClimate Institute, 2024). The Directorate General for Trade (DG Trade) has experienced a paradigm shift in its approach to climate in recent years, moving from a stance of ‘non-impediment’ to one of ‘positive contribution’ (Weyand, 2021). This can be seen in the addition of more stringent sustainability clauses in Fair Trade Agreements or measures restricting access to the EU market for imports that do not meet EU standards, like deforestation-free supply chain regulations. The Directorate General for Taxation and Customs Union (DG TAXUD) has also played a role as a foreign policy lever through the introduction of the CBAM. The CBAM aims to prevent emissions leakage, ensure European competitiveness, and promote climate ambition abroad by imposing costs on high-carbon imports in specific sectors. Lastly, within the European External Action Service (EEAS), the EU’s diplomatic service responsible for ensuring consistency and coordination of the EU’s external action, climate policy gained prominence with the appointment of an Ambassador at Large for Climate Diplomacy. The Ambassador is tasked with improving the integration of climate considerations into the EU’s external relations and coordinating officials through the informal Green Diplomacy network and high-level Climate Ambassador Network.

However, not all aspects of foreign policy fall under the EU’s purview; therefore, the Council has called for strengthened coordination, cooperation and information exchange between EU institutions and Member States (Council of the European Union, 2024b). It has also encouraged utilising a Team Europe approach to coordinate in partner countries to maximise impact and avoid silos between EU delegations and Member State Embassies. Recent FAC conclusions on EU climate diplomacy included a proposal on informal green diplomacy hubs to encourage and support more coordination on EU external action on climate between Member State Embassies and EU delegations (IBID). Member States have also led the drive for improved coordination and integration of climate in foreign policy through an initiative like the Group of Friends (GoF) for an ambitious EU Climate Diplomacy in 2022 (German Federal Foreign Office, 2022).

While the EU and Member States have set ambitious goals to be a global leader and mainstream climate into foreign policy on paper, implementation has been proven challenging. The next chapter will delve into these implementation challenges.

Belgian diplomat Marc Vanheuklen was appointed to the position in 2019. The title of the position changed when Vanheuklen retired. The current appointee Tony Agotha holds the post “Special Envoy for Climate and Environment”.

**/ ^ 03**

# **CHALLENGES IN MAINSTREAMING CLIMATE IN FOREIGN POLICY**

For a detailed analysis of the institutional responsibilities for climate foreign policy please refer to our previous publication: [Climate Audit of the EU's Foreign Policy](#).

In the 2019-2024 European Commission, President von der Leyen identified climate action and asserting the EU as a geopolitical actor as key priorities. Despite this, mainstreaming climate action into foreign policy remained a challenge. The 2019-2024 Commission made significant progress in advancing the climate agenda, notably through the creation of the priority cluster 'A European Green Deal', headed by an Executive Vice President. In parallel, the Commission sought to position the EU as a key international player and strengthen its geopolitical role through the 'A Stronger Europe in the World' cluster, led by the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. The rising geopolitical importance of climate positioned climate diplomacy at the intersection of these two key political priorities. However, internal coordination and institutional challenges undermined the EU's potential for effective climate diplomacy. Overcoming these challenges is crucial for the new Commission to make a sustainable contribution to global transformation and strengthen its relationship with international partners.

The main challenges for European climate diplomacy include:

## CHALLENGE:



### **The EU lacks a clear, holistic and long-term strategy on climate diplomacy**

Forming a collective response to foreign policy challenges has been a particular challenge for the EU and its Member States, given the pooled nature of their sovereignty. As climate issues become increasingly pertinent across various foreign policy arenas, the EU faces difficulties in finding and projecting a cohesive response. This is partly because many aspects of foreign policy remain the responsibility of Member States. Without a collective vision, this institutional set-up can negatively impact the EU's consistency, credibility and coordination efforts.

The Foreign Affairs Council aims to establish consensus among Member States through its annual conclusions on green diplomacy (Council of the European Union, 2024b). These conclusions set high-level priorities and often outline the EU's negotiation positions before the UNFCCC COPs, thus providing a near-term vision. However, ambition is limited and often watered down in the approval process. Furthermore, the FAC conclusions provide no monitoring framework to ensure the implementation of action items. They also fail to provide a clear indication of how climate should be prioritised in external relations. Consequently, the EU is missing a long-term, shared vision for its institutions and Member States to reference and implement in their daily work.



## CHALLENGE:



### **The distribution of responsibilities on climate diplomacy is unclear in the current institutional set-up**

Within the EU, unclear division of responsibilities and political leadership puts climate-related policies and actions at risk of being a low priority in external relations. The institutional configuration of the executive branch and official documents point to the High Representative and Vice President of the Commission (HR/VP) as, theoretically, a key figure in leading the EU's climate diplomacy (Croatia and the European Commission, 2020). Yet, in practice, their working agenda has focused more on short-term geopolitical crises such as conflicts and migration. In the absence of a clear institutional mandate to mainstream climate, the ownership on EU climate diplomacy depends on the HR/VP prioritising climate. Political officials at the Commission like the Climate Commissioner or the Executive VP for the Green Deal have often taken the lead in international climate action, drawing on their expertise of EU domestic climate action. This situation puts a significant burden on the Climate Commissioner and DG CLIMA, whose mandate is mainly to implement the European Climate Law and lead UNFCCC negotiations, leaving limited resources to mainstream climate into foreign policy. The responsibilities for climate diplomacy are thus spread across several functions and institutions without sufficient incentives or resources to coordinate effectively. This results in challenges for the EU in implementing efficient and coherent climate foreign policy.

## CHALLENGE:



### **The EU faces difficulties in communicating and coordinating its climate diplomacy efforts**

Communication and coordination challenges affect the efficiency of EU and Member States' climate diplomacy. The 2024 FAC Conclusions on Green Diplomacy call on the High Representative, Commission, and Member States to prioritise climate foreign policy and “increase coordination, information exchange and cooperation at headquarters level and at the local level between EU Member States' embassies and EU delegations” (Council of the European Union, 2024b).

Internal communication between EU delegations, Brussels and Member States stands as a significant challenge. Officials in EU delegations often have unclear roles and responsibilities, reporting to different DGs and the EEAS and sharing limited information among each other. Commission services and the EEAS play important roles in the EU's international climate action but can tend to work in silos with limited communication channels for effective collaboration.

On the ground, EU delegations are crucial in mainstreaming EU climate diplomacy as they serve as key dialogue points with local authorities and Member States' embassies in partner countries. Officials in the EU delegations often cover an array of important issue areas, not solely climate, which leaves limited time for external communication on all climate projects. Most delegations lack sufficient resources

and expertise dedicated to climate issues, which makes it difficult to prioritise climate and maintain a consistent strategic approach to climate diplomacy. This has led some Member States to voice concerns about not being consulted on the strategy and goals of newly launched EU climate partnerships, which may overlap or differ from existing bilateral Member State climate partnerships. Some EU delegations in major emitting countries or countries with which there is a JET-P may have a climate focal point, but not all delegations do, which hinders a unified strategic approach. This challenge is particularly evident in communicating the external dimensions of the EU Green Deal, which includes extraterritorial policies that may impact partner countries. This poses severe challenges to the EU's credibility on international climate action and affects its reputation as a reliable partner on the ground (see → **Box 1** on communication challenges around CBAM). Externally, inefficient communication about its international climate ambitions can undermine the EU's and its Member States' visibility and public support, despite them being the largest contributors of public climate finance and official development assistance.

### **Box 1**

#### **Communication issues on the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism**

Communication on the external dimension of the Green Deal has been a particular sticking point for the EU. When the Green Deal was announced in 2019, the EU proposed a CBAM for selected sectors to reduce the risk of carbon leakage and ensure a level playing field for EU industries by imposing costs on imports that do not have a cost on embedded emissions (European Commission, 2020a). The CBAM legislation was passed and signed into law in 2023. However, several countries have expressed concerns over the CBAM, labelling it incompatible with World Trade Organisation (WTO) rules and protectionist (Kumar, 2024; Roelf and Abnett, 2024). While the EU maintains that the CBAM is WTO-compatible, some in Brussels acknowledge that the EU was unprepared to engage with partners on the CBAM and its impacts. Interviews conducted for this research revealed that prior to the passage of the CBAM legislation, there was limited engagement with trading partners due to a lack of resources. DG TAXUD has since hired more staff to engage in dialogue with trading partners on the CBAM and its impacts. The EU has also proposed a carbon markets task force to encourage other countries to adopt carbon pricing mechanisms. Nonetheless, the initial lack of communication on the CBAM jeopardised the EU's credibility with partners. As the CBAM was proposed at the start of the Green Deal negotiations, the EU could have developed a strategic engagement plan and proactively reached out to trading partners to explain the proposed measure and its expected impacts.

The ongoing uncertainty on whether the CBAM revenue will support developing countries in transitioning their affected industries or will be directed to the EU general budget continues to strain relations with some partners.

**CHALLENGE:**



**EU staff and officials face a lack of resources and capacity to carry out the EU's ambition on climate diplomacy**

Key teams in Brussels focused on climate diplomacy are understaffed, and EU delegations abroad often lack staff solely dedicated to climate issues. The European Parliament highlighted this issue in their 2018 report on climate diplomacy, calling for “increased allocation of human and financial resources to EEAS and the Commission, [...] focal point[s] on climate change in the main EU delegations in third countries, and [...] a higher percentage of climate experts” in EU delegations (European Parliament, 2018b). Despite calls from the European Parliament for an increased public administration budget, including provisions for climate initiatives, the European Council reduced the Commission’s proposed budget for administration in the MFF 2021-2027 by EUR 2 billion (European Parliament, 2021). The expansion of climate across various policy channels requires sufficient human and financial resources for effective implementation. Institutions may need to reconsider the distribution of resources and cost-cutting measures, but expanding responsibilities will likely require increased resources.

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# INSTITUTIONAL REFORMS TO ELEVATE CLIMATE IN EU FOREIGN POLICY

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To meet its stated ambition, the EU must integrate climate-conscious policies into every aspect of its foreign policy. This demands a whole-of-government approach across all foreign policy channels, including trade, industrial policy, development cooperation, and finance to ensure coherent, consistent, and effective integration of climate considerations. By coordinating efforts across EU institutions and Member States, the EU can yield a greater impact than through individual efforts alone. The successful integration of climate into European foreign policy relies on several key components:



### **CLIMATE FOREIGN POLICY STRATEGY**

The adoption of an overarching strategy for climate foreign policy, endorsed at the highest political level, with a common vision of Paris-aligned foreign policy which outlines a shared approach to mainstreaming climate.



### **STRONG GOVERNANCE**

Effective policy implementation requires strong governance characterised by clear roles and responsibilities. This entails providing guidance on mainstreaming climate priorities to institutions tasked with coordinating, planning, and executing foreign policy initiatives.



### **STREAMLINED COORDINATION & COMMUNICATION**

Effective internal and external communication channels are essential for communication and coordination. Internally, this involves establishing communication channels within and among institutions to avoid silos. Externally, streamlined communication means presenting a unified voice and proactively communicating with partners about extraterritorial policies and partnership opportunities.



### **SUFFICIENT RESOURCES**

Adequate financial and human capital are essential for effectively integrating climate considerations into foreign policy.

The following section introduces a menu of eight institutional reform opportunities across the different components to elevate the prominence of climate in EU foreign policy and strengthen the aforementioned components.



## 4.1 CLIMATE FOREIGN POLICY STRATEGY

### THE CHALLENGE

The EU's approach to climate diplomacy lacks a long-term, unified vision. Instead, it relies on annual near-term strategies in the form of Council conclusions that primarily focus on negotiating positions for COP. While the Foreign Affairs Council's conclusions on climate diplomacy foster high-level consensus among Member States, they fall short of deep consultation with key institutions like the European Parliament and the Commission on a long-term vision and are insufficiently embedded into the EU's efforts to strengthen competitiveness and industrial transformation. In addition, there is a lack of a monitoring framework to ensure the implementation of announced initiatives.

### DESIRED OUTCOME

A long-term vision for climate foreign policy with guiding principles and a clear mandate for EU institutions. A grand strategy which integrates climate considerations into all EU external actions, including trade, industrial policy, international finance and development cooperation. The strategy enables the adoption of a cohesive and coordinated approach to climate diplomacy within the EU's wider strategic agenda and involves the Council, the Commission, the Parliament and Member States, thereby strengthening the EU's role in global climate governance and partnerships.

### REFORM PROPOSAL: **Development of a European Consensus on Climate Diplomacy**



The proposed reform focuses on developing a consensus for the EU's climate diplomacy, modelled after the European Consensus on Development. This Consensus would provide a shared, long-term vision and framework for climate diplomacy, aligning the priorities of the Green Deal, particularly its external dimension, with the Paris Agreement. This initiative would involve comprehensive consultations with all relevant EU institutions, including the European Parliament, the European Commission, and the EEAS, as well as Member States. Additionally, public consultations with stakeholders would be key to ensuring broad input and support.

This proposal is in accordance with a recommendation made by the European Parliament in its 2018 resolution on climate diplomacy, which “invites the Commission and the EEAS to further develop a long-term vision in order to put forward a joint communication setting out their understanding of EU climate diplomacy as well as a strategic approach for the EU's climate diplomacy activities [...]” (European Parliament, 2018a).

### **Change implementer**

The process for developing a Consensus for EU climate diplomacy would need to be initiated by the Foreign Affairs Council. The European Commission and EEAS would lead the drafting process, consulting Member States and other EU institutions to refine the strategy. Once a final draft is agreed upon, it would undergo a review by the EU institutions and Member States before formal adoption. After adoption, the strategy would be implemented and continuously monitored to ensure its effectiveness.

### **Success factors for implementation**

Securing the buy-in from key actors to initiate the process of establishing a Consensus is crucial. This complex initial consensus-building can be facilitated by fostering open communication and ensuring all stakeholders understand the shared benefits of the reform.

To effectively manage the timeline for developing this consensus, it is crucial to establish clear timelines and milestones ensuring steady progress without unnecessary delays. To keep the strategy relevant and responsive to geopolitical dynamics, it is essential to build flexibility into the reform process. This can be achieved through regular reviews and updates, allowing the strategy to adapt swiftly to new developments.



## 4.2 STRONG GOVERNANCE

### THE CHALLENGE

The mandates of key officials are unclear regarding ownership of climate foreign policy, and responsibilities are scattered with insufficient coordination across various institutions. For instance, key bodies like EU delegations often lack a clear mandate on climate diplomacy, resulting in a lower prioritisation of climate among other pressing issues.

### DESIRED OUTCOME

The aim of reforming governance structures is to equip the EU with clear political leadership, mandates, responsibilities and resources to lead and implement strategic climate diplomacy. Leadership on climate is essential for ensuring that climate priorities are integrated into the agendas of all EU institutions involved in external relations, especially for the most prominent portfolios like competitiveness and EU industrial policy. It is also vital for creating an enabling environment for both technical and political staff engaged in climate diplomacy. This entails providing climate mainstreaming guidance to institutions tasked with coordinating, planning, and executing foreign policy initiatives. Such efforts can foster a sense of ownership in climate diplomacy, improve consistency, and build strategic bridges between key institutions. More broadly, this would strengthen the EU's presence internationally by displaying clear ambitions and establish who leads on what. This would reinforce the EU's position as a strong and essential partner in climate alliances and secure EU interests to increase competitiveness.

### REFORM PROPOSAL: **Strengthen high-level political mandates on climate diplomacy**



High-level leadership on climate within the Commission is necessary to push forward the external dimension of EU climate action. Appointing an Executive Vice President of the Commission to oversee climate policies is essential to ensure that climate action remains a priority in the Commission's work and to strengthen the development of climate diplomacy within the EU's external action. With key domestic Green Deal legislation already adopted, the next Climate Commissioner would primarily focus on policy implementation, potentially increasing capacity for active international engagement. Portfolios will have to be bundled strategically to facilitate strong uptake of climate foreign policy by new Commissioners. Options for this approach are detailed below.

Potential portfolios for the Commissioner leading on EU climate diplomacy:

- **Super Commissioner for Climate, Energy and Environment:** Discussions around the new Commission's top jobs have suggested integrating oversight of climate, energy, and environment under a "Super Commissioner", previously divided by separate Commissioners. Approaching these policies jointly would emphasise the



development of clean energy while providing the new Commissioner with powerful leverage on energy policies to develop climate diplomacy through strategic partnerships (Cagney and Grier, 2024; Mathiesen and Hernández-Morales, 2024).

- **Commissioner for Climate and Competitiveness:** Growing concerns over the EU's competitiveness in Brussels placed this topic high on the European Council's new strategic priorities (European Council, 2024). Combining responsibilities for competitiveness and climate would ensure that all measures to increase competitiveness are aligned with the climate agenda. This would strengthen the Commissioner's geopolitical role and the EU's climate diplomacy ambition.
- **Commissioner for Global Gateway:** Global Gateway, a key geopolitical strategy in response to China's Belt and Road Initiative, aims to strengthen the EU's international role and to develop the necessary infrastructure to pursue the green and digital transitions globally. It is thus perceived by observers as an important external branch of the EU Green Deal (E3G, 2021). Elevating Global Gateway as a key portfolio within the new Commission would enhance strategic planning around Global Gateway and the external dimension of the Green Deal and address key concerns expressed by DG INTPA in a leaked internal briefing (Politico, 2024). Further, some Member States have undergone similar governmental reorganisations, like Denmark by having a Minister for Development Cooperation and Global Climate

### **Change Implementer**

The President of the Commission oversees the formation of the College of Commissioners and has the authority to appoint Executive Vice Presidents or Vice Presidents. After being appointed, the appointees must be approved by the European Parliament. Given the recent political shift to the right within the Parliament, merging the climate portfolio with others such as energy or competitiveness could increase the chances of the Commissioner to get an Executive VP position, as these issues are at the forefront of more right-leaning political priorities.

### **Success factors for implementation**

The success of this reform is highly tied to the political priorities of the new Commission. If linked with other high-priority issues like energy, competitiveness or development, there is an increased chance of international climate action getting picked up as a top priority, building a favourable ground for climate mainstreaming across external relations. Yet, such a decision depends heavily on the priorities of the incoming President of the Commission.

**REFORM PROPOSAL: Improve political leadership in EU delegations**

Heads of delegations (i.e., EU Ambassadors) should have a clear mandate to promote climate action and increase its visibility in relations with partner countries. This guidance can come from the EEAS headquarters in Brussels and the HR/VP and target the heads of delegations, following the new Consensus' objectives. In practice, this could mean that when appointing top diplomats for regions/countries of strategic importance to the EU – for example, countries with high emissions or countries with important resources for decarbonising the global economy - specific criteria such as experience with climate action are taken into account. This would signal at both the HR/VP level and the delegation levels the prioritisation of climate action within a given political and economic context.

**Change Implementer**

The High Representative is in charge of appointing EU top diplomats, including heads of delegations. Therefore, ensuring that heads of delegations are knowledgeable on climate action before their appointment would be the responsibility of the new HR/VP.

**Success factors for implementation**

Currently, the process to appoint EU diplomats is quite untransparent and overseen by the High Representative. Including climate knowledge as a key criterion could be a way to enhance transparency.

Depending on the new HR/VP's political priorities, they could express some reluctance on this reform. Pushback could also come from EU high-level officials and potential candidates coming from the EEAS, the Commission, the European Council, and the 27 Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the Member States. Concerns might be raised that the pool of candidates with sufficient climate credentials could be limited. To address this potential reluctance, it is crucial to emphasise the strategic importance of climate expertise in international diplomacy.

Lastly, staff in delegations report to different institutions: diplomatic staff to the EEAS, technical staff to Commission services like DG INTPA, DG TRADE, etc. depending on their core expertise. Having the EU Ambassador commit to climate action and overseeing its implementation within the delegation's work should create an enabling environment for climate action to be embedded in relations with partner countries.



## 4.3 STREAMLINED COORDINATION & COMMUNICATION

### THE CHALLENGE

The EU faces a unique set of challenges in internal and external communication and coordination on international climate action due to its institutional structure and Member States' retained sovereignty in foreign policy. This complexity makes it difficult for the EU to present a unified stance on climate issues. Internally, the EEAS, relevant DGs and Member States experience a shortage of resources, staffing, and effective communication channels for coordination. Externally, some EU delegations struggle to effectively communicate with the public on the EU's partnerships, projects and policies like the CBAM, primarily due to limited resources at these missions. Despite the EU and Member States being the largest collective contributors to public climate finance and official development assistance, the EU faces a challenge in externally communicating the extent of European financing in other countries under a common Team Europe brand. A leaked DG INTPA briefing states that while the EU has been a top contributor, "the EU trails well behind other strategic players in public opinion surveys. And the EU is too often taken for granted. Others did less, but marketed better" (Politico, 2024).

### DESIRED OUTCOME

Efficient, well-coordinated internal and external communication for the effective implementation of EU climate foreign policy.

**Internal Communication:** Efficient communication channels can help prevent officials across teams and institutions working in silos. Strengthened internal communication between the EEAS and the Commission is necessary, not only between DG CLIMA and the EEAS but across the Commission and institutions, including DG INTPA, TRADE, TAXUD, among others.

**External Communication:** Externally, streamlined communication means the EU and Member States speaks with one voice on issues of shared interests and proactively communicates with partners on projects, external EU actions on climate, and the extraterritorial impacts of domestic climate policies. EU delegations play a key role in communicating EU climate projects and partnerships with stakeholders and the wider public. Communication and promoting of Global Gateway and Team Europe Initiatives (and European public climate financing more broadly) are tailored to specific country contexts and audiences to improve clarity around what the EU partnership offers.

Overall, the EU effectively communicates the advantages of partnering with the EU on projects to stakeholders and citizens and ensures that all major activities in partner countries are well-publicised so that stakeholders are aware of projects in their communities. DG INTPA, CLIMA, the EEAS and relevant services implement communication strategies for these projects.

**REFORM PROPOSAL: Establish a strategic communication task force**

One option is to create a Strategic Communication Task Force on Climate Foreign Policy, led by the Cabinet for the Commissioner for Climate Action, to unify and amplify communication on the EU's external energy and climate policy efforts. Led by high-level officials from the Cabinet of the Climate Commissioner, the task force could bring together representatives from the EEAS, DG CLIMA, DG ENER, DG INTPA, DG TRADE and DG TAXUD, among others, to coordinate communication strategies and ensure cohesive EU external action on climate. It could include all staffers working on external climate action, encompassing the external dimension of the Green Deal and climate partnerships for instance. Regular, structured meetings can help facilitate continuous dialogue with open lines of communication, ensuring transparency and rapid information exchange.

The task force could help EU delegations with strategic communication during key moments in climate diplomacy. A key focus could be developing and coordinating a comprehensive strategic communication strategy for EU external action on climate, marketing Team Europe Initiatives and climate partnerships to specific countries, and improving clarity on the EU's offer.

Another major goal would be to overhaul how the EU communicates its external financing for climate action. The task force could enhance the EU's ability to communicate its financial contributions clearly and effectively, emphasising high-quality projects that showcase the EU's commitment to mutually beneficial, durable climate partnerships. With strong leadership, the task force could not only align the EU's communication across diverse initiatives under a unified strategy but also improve the EU's impact.

**REFORM PROPOSAL: Operationalise the Green Diplomacy Hubs**

The 2024 Foreign Affairs Council Conclusions encourage Member States' Embassies and EU Delegations to explore establishing informal green diplomacy hubs under a "Team Europe spirit" to enhance EU outreach and support (Council of the European Union, 2024b). These hubs could improve internal communication, outreach and coordination on climate diplomacy. A high-level official with strong political connections to the Commission and the EEAS, potentially from the Cabinet for the Commissioner on Climate Action or DG CLIMA, could lead these hubs.

The hubs could be regionally based, each managed by a senior official from an EU delegation in a key country within the respective region. Membership could include representatives from the EEAS climate diplomacy team, DG CLIMA (including climate finance advisors), DG TRADE, DG TAXUD (including CBAM staff), DG INTPA (climate projects team and geographical desk staff), as well as staff from EU delegations and Member State embassies focused on climate, and international partners.

These regional hubs could target regions where the EU seeks to strengthen relationships, develop climate partnerships, or areas crucial to the EU, such as the EU neighbourhood. An internal briefing from DG INTPA notes that strategic engagement and coordination on partnerships might require narrowing the focus of Global Gateway or Team Europe initiatives to focus on high-impact strategic partnerships over smaller, more numerous projects (Politico, 2024). This approach would result in intensified cooperation and better coordination on a fewer, but more significant, high-investment projects in partner countries. The hubs could serve as platforms for sharing intelligence, updating on activities, identifying joint cooperation opportunities, and developing strategies for collaboration with partner countries, the private sector, academia, civil society, and NGOs. The green diplomacy regional hubs could hold regular structured meetings, create task forces for specific topics, and develop metrics and indicators to monitor their impact, reporting progress to EU institutions and Member States. The establishment of green diplomacy regional hubs could significantly enhance the EU's capacity to coordinate and implement its climate diplomacy efforts globally, playing a crucial role in advancing the EU's goal of supporting the global transition and partner countries.

## **REFORM PROPOSAL:**



### **Establish climate focal points in EU delegations**

To improve the external and internal communication of EU climate action, establishing a climate focal point in each EU delegation – or at least the EU delegations deemed critical for the EU's climate partnerships – could be another option. Assigning a climate focal point would be beneficial for implementing Global Gateway projects and launching critical raw materials partnerships, for example (NewClimate Institute, 2024). Establishing a climate focal point in each EU delegation can enhance communication between the EU, its delegations, and Member State embassies by providing dedicated staff knowledgeable on climate issues. These focal points could develop targeted communication strategies for climate cooperation. They could lead on developing campaigns with local influencers local languages, linking EU climate diplomacy efforts with local concerns. By increasing climate expertise within delegations, these focal points could facilitate dialogues with partner countries on the ground and ensure that the external dimension of the EU Green Deal is clearly communicated.

### **Change implementer**

For any of the several reform options to succeed, strong political leadership is needed from the presidency of the Commission, along with buy-in at the working level. The task force on communication and coordination would need a mandate from the highest political level, in addition to staff trained in strategic communication. The operationalisation of the Green Diplomacy Hubs would require support from all participants across the Commission, the EEAS, the EU delegations and the

Member State embassies. Establishing climate focal points would require additional resources for more officials in the EU delegations or a reallocation of resources for DG CLIMA to either send more climate specialists or provide training to existing staff to strengthen climate expertise in the delegations.

### **Success factors in implementation**

The main challenges in implementing any of the reform options would be to gain support from the highest political level and secure adequate human and financial resources. Another potential roadblock could be securing buy-in from staff at the working level to participate in the hubs or task force. Staffers would need to clearly see the value in participating. Also, the participation would need to come from staff at a high enough level to make decisions and execute on action points, but also have the time to actively contribute. In terms of improving strategic communication on climate financing, the scope of EU and Member State funding is large and difficult to keep an overview of, let alone strategically communicate on. Implementing a more strategic approach to communicating EU public climate financing would similarly require buy-in and a mandate from political leadership to coordinate.



## 4.4 SUFFICIENT RESOURCES

### THE CHALLENGE

EU officials report that climate mainstreaming in foreign policy is undermined by a lack of human resources and expertise on climate issues across key EU institutions. Brussels-based teams relevant to climate diplomacy, such as the EEAS Green Diplomacy and Green Transition Division, are understaffed. Staffers from several DGs working on policies with an important external dimension (e.g. the CBAM) have emphasised challenges arising from the lack of expertise and competence on climate within their services. Similarly, EU delegations abroad often lack personnel dedicated to climate files. Officials at the EEAS and Commission Services have a limited travel budget, presenting another challenge for engaging with partner countries on climate diplomacy.

### DESIRED OUTCOME

Adequate resources are provided to EU institutions, enabling them to implement their mandate to mainstream climate into all foreign policy channels and to allow for better coordination and communication.

### REFORM PROPOSAL: **Reprioritise capacities and promote inter-institutional cooperation**



Alongside politically prioritising climate diplomacy, the EU could conduct a review of human resources and consider the reallocation of existing staff in relevant bodies and institutions to work on climate diplomacy. Given the cross-cutting nature of climate diplomacy and its links with other topics like competitiveness, development, and energy security, having staff with diverse experience and background working on climate diplomacy would also be an advantage. Ideally, this should be done in the light of the main strategic priorities on climate diplomacy that would be set in a Consensus.

In Brussels, it could mean strengthening the capacity on climate foreign policy by appointing climate staffers in relevant Commission services and in the EEAS. This could be achieved by reallocating staff within each body/service, with new staffers working on climate receiving appropriate guidance and training. Climate experts from Member States could also be seconded to Commission Services or the EEAS to address capacity constraints.

In EU delegations, capacity on climate diplomacy could be increased by pooling expertise on climate action (i.e., between EU delegation staff and Member State embassy staff). As mentioned above, Member States could also second climate staff to EU delegations. This would create strategic bridges between the EU and Member States on climate topics where alignment of interests is most desirable, leveraging the potential of Team Europe and avoiding duplication of work on climate diplomacy between the EU and Member States.

## REFORM PROPOSAL: **Increase the EU public administration budget**



To address resource constraints, the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) 2028-2034 could enhance the EU's public administration budget to provide adequate resources for mainstreaming climate into foreign policy. The expansion would support the EU's mandate to integrate climate considerations and advance the Green Deal's external dimension. It would enable institutions to enhance their capacity for effective climate coordination and implementation in foreign policy.

Given Member States are unlikely to increase their contribution based on gross national income (GNI) contributions, other sources of funding should be considered, such as new own resources:

- **Statistics-based or green own resources** – These contributions could be derived from Member States based on statistical indicators linked to EU climate and environmental policies, such as waste management or energy consumption.
- **CBAM-based own resource** – Revenue collected from the CBAM from countries are likely to be incorporated into the EU's general budget. The EU could instead earmark some of this revenue to support climate diplomacy efforts in developing countries and strengthen EU institutions' capacity related to global climate action.

### Change implementer

Strong direction from the Council is needed to reallocate resources or supplement the EU budget and distribute additional resources to priority areas, such as climate diplomacy. High-level officials from the EEAS and relevant Commission DGs would need to carry out this reshuffling within their teams. Specifically, the High Representative and the President of the Commission are key players in setting the political agenda and determining the distribution of staff across their respective institutions.

The Commission, Council, and Parliament are responsible for negotiating and enacting an increase or restructuring of the MFF. The Commission alone is responsible for proposing new own resources.

### Successful factors for implementation

The reallocation or increase of resources and capacity alone may not necessarily lead to better implementation of climate mandates. The reallocation of staff to climate files highly depends on the political agenda of the President of the Commission and their College of Commissioners.

Proposals to increase resources for climate diplomacy could face resistance. Member States routinely push the EU to cut administrative costs (Lilyanova et al., 2021). The electoral success of right-leaning parties in 2024 could also result in renewed austerity policies in Member States and increased pressure to trim the EU

The Commission proposed 75% of revenues from CBAM flow into the EU budget, amounting to EUR 1.5 billion as of 2028 (European Commission, 2023). CSOs and the European Parliament have called for the funds to be allocated back to developing countries to support climate transition. This has not yet been approved but should be a priority. The own resource use is a potential option if EU institutions decide against creating a fund to directly transfer CBAM funds to developing countries and instead incorporate the revenue into the EU general budget – a proposal that is currently the consensus.



budget given right-leaning parties tendencies to be more sceptical of EU budgets. This scenario would complicate discussions on increasing the EU budget, even if increases to national GNI-based contributions are off the table.

As climate policies might not to be at the top of the agenda for the incoming Commission, allocating additional resources to climate diplomacy may prove challenging. However, the geopolitical dimensions of climate change intertwine closely with EU concerns surrounding competitiveness and energy security. Therefore, there may be some room for manoeuvring as these factors could become essential components of climate diplomacy given their current importance in EU politics.

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