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Europe as a Green Leader? A Brief Evaluation of both the European Union's Climate and Energy Policy and Common Agricultural Policy

Bernd Sommer (bernd.sommer@uni-flensburg.de)
Europa-Universität Flensburg, Germany
Andrea Hain (andrea.hain@uni-flensburg.de)
Europa-Universität Flensburg, Germany

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The European Union aspires to be a frontrunner in the field of sustainability and environmental protection, often referred to as being a green leader. However, this self-description is being challenged by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and scholars who question the sustainability of European policies. Based on the climate and energy policy, as well as the Common Agricultural Policy, this paper evaluates whether the EU meets the requirements for sustainable development, meaning avoidance of a destructive exploitation of resources. This literature-based appraisal considers both an analysis of sustainability related policies as well as explanations for the recent developments in both fields. The analysis reveals that by means of developing these policies, the European Union continues at aiming to lead the way as a green frontrunner. At the same time, the Union falls short of fulfilling its role as a green leader when considering its self-imposed aims and goals, namely its policies to achieve these targets.

1. Introduction

In the political arena, the understanding of sustainability is still based on the Brundtland Commission's report from 1987 that defined sustainable development as a development that "seeks to meet the needs and aspirations of the present without compromising the ability to meet those of the future" (WCED 1987, ch. 1, point 49). Though various economic and social issues are increasingly being discussed under the heading of sustainability as well (see for instance, Neckel in this issue), the concept centres around its normative claim to avoid the "overuse" of resources and ecosystems, i.e. using them only to the extent that does not exceed their natural capacity of regeneration. For many years, the European Union (EU) has been committed to sustainable development and claims to be at the international forefront combatting global warming and fostering environmental protection. Just in November 2016, the European Commission declared in a communication concerning the EU's actions to promote sustainability: "Sustainable development has long been at the heart of the European project" (European Commission 2016A: 2). And further "sustainability is a European brand" (ibid.: 17). This self-description of the EU as a "green leader" has been widely echoed in academic literature (Oberthür & Kelly 2008; Schreurs & Tiberghien 2007; Volger 2005). More recently, however, the EU's leadership role in green politics has become disputed. Especially in the field of climate and energy,

Europe's portrayal as a frontrunner has been challenged by non-governmental organizations (NGOs; see Bals et al. 2013) and scholars (Kilian & Elgström 2010; Aykut 2016)
This article assesses two core policy fields of the EU with regard to sustainable development and environmental protection: the EU's climate and energy policy as well as its Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Since the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), the so-called Earth Summit in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro, mitigation of anthropogenic climate change lies at the centre of the international sustainability agenda. Preventing "dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate" (UNFCCC, Art. 2) can only be achieved by a total decarbonisation of the global energy supply (WBGU 2011). Modern agriculture contributes to many of today's most severe environmental crises, such as biodiversity loss, climate change, deforestation, soil degradation, water pollution and shortages etc. (UNEP 2010). Therefore, it can be argued that climate and energy as well as agricultural policies can be regarded as crucial for benchmarking a polity's efforts to promote sustainable development.
The second part of this paper roughly outlines the EU's climate and energy policies and its key institutions. Additionally, the EU's recent role in the field of UN climate diplomacy is described. Afterwards, the EU's Common Agricultural Policy, as well as the latest CAP reform 2014-2020 are introduced. Both sections end with a literature-based evaluation of these policies concerning the question of if these reforms are sufficient in order to meet the requirements for sustainable development, respectively to reach the EU's self-set policy goals in both fields. The final section of this paper aims at providing some explanations for the EU's present performances in the field of climate and energy policy as well as agricultural policy.

2. The EU a Global Leader on Climate Policies?

2.1 EU climate and energy policies

Political Leadership can be demonstrated in various ways (Gupta & Grubb 2000): In the field of climate and energy policies, the EU aimed at showing *leadership by example*. For years, the EU has unilaterally been committed to binding domestic emission reduction and energy targets (Aykut 2016: 4; Andresen et al. 2016: 190; Schreurs 2016: 219). In 2008, the EU agreed on the so-called 20-20-20 targets, including (1) cutting GHG emissions by 20% by 2020 compared to 1990 levels, (2) obtaining 20% of EU energy consumption from renewable resources by 2020, and (3) reducing 20% in primary energy use (compared with projected levels), by improving energy efficiency (European Commission 2010A). This "climate and energy package" became law in 2009. Targets and policies for 2020 were just seen as the first step towards defining long-term goals. In 2009, in advance of UN climate summit in Copenhagen (COP 15), the EU also announced the goal of reducing GHG emissions between 80% and 95% by 2050 against 1990 levels (Andresen et al. 2016: 190).
In order to meet its targets, the EU has taken several actions. Already in 2005, the EU launched the EU Emissions Trading System (EU ETS). Emissions trading (or cap and trade) is a market-based approach to reducing emissions: Polluters are required to hold permits for their emissions that are allocated or sold by a governmental authority. If polluters increase their emissions, they must buy additional permits. In theory, this mechanism provides an economic incentive for reducing emissions, for instance, by investing in clean technologies. The EU ETS covers around 45% of the EU's greenhouse gas emissions and is the world's largest carbon market to date (Andresen et al. 2016: 192). However, the EU ETS has struggled with a carbon price that has been too low to provide strong incentives to a low-carbon transformation (ibid). Despite a structural reform of the EU ETS and the adoption of the Paris Agreement on Climate Change in 2015, the European carbon price remained low or even dropped further (ibid).

In October 2014, the EU countries agreed on a new framework for climate and energy, including EU-wide targets and policy objectives for the period between 2020 and 2030. The targets for 2030 include (1) a 40% cut in greenhouse gas emissions compared to 1990 levels, (2) at least a 27% share of renewable energy consumption, and (3) at least 27% energy savings compared to projected energy consumption (European Commission 2014A). To meet these targets, the European Commission has proposed various policies, including a reform of EU ETS (see above). When the 2030 framework for climate and energy was negotiated, more determined member states (such as Germany) and the European Parliament were pushing for more ambitious targets. However, Poland opposed these ambitions, arguing that Europe was taking on too much of the global climate burden and that its coal-dominated economy would be threatened by the changes" (Schreurs 2016: 220). In contrast to the 20-20-20 target from 2008, this time also no agreement has been reached on how responsibility for achieving these targets can be distributed on a country-by-country basis (ibid).

2.2 The EU's climate diplomacy and the Paris Agreement

The EU's own binding climate and energy targets have been underpinning the EU's persistent support of an international climate agreement. This sustained engagement in UN climate diplomacy constitutes a second realm of EU leadership in the field of climate policy (Groen et al 2012). Since the EU speaks with one voice in international climate negotiations, its influence has traditionally been comparatively strong (Aykut 2016: 3). The most significant instance of EU leadership in the field of climate diplomacy "is arguably its decision to move forward with ratification of the Kyoto Protocol after President George W. Bush made clear on March 28, 2001 that his intention was to withdraw the US from the agreement" (Schreurs & Tiberghien 2007: 20). History repeated itself when US president Donald J. Trump announced on June 1, 2017 that the US would withdraw from the Paris Agreement, the post-Kyoto climate treaty. In response, the president of the Commission, Jean-Claude Juncker, declared that the EU would "step up" its climate leadership, this time in close collaboration with countries of the African Union and China (European Commission 2017). However, in 2009, at the UN climate summit in Copenhagen (COP 15), the EU's aspiration to perform leadership in the realm of international climate negotiations suffered a severe setback. At Copenhagen, a post-Kyoto international climate agreement was supposed to be negotiated. In the course of the conference the EU found itself excluded from the core negotiations, and the US and with the so-called BASIC countries (Brazil, South-Africa, India and China) agreed on the so-called Copenhagen Accord, a legally not binding document without determination.

In Paris, 6 years later, when an international climate agreement for the post Kyoto period could finally be reached, the EU played again a much more important role: Despite initial attempts of Poland's right-wing government to torpedo negotiations, the EU managed to maintain a considerable political unity throughout the Paris Conference, helping to build a 'high-ambition coalition' that proved instrumental in achieving a dynamic agreement with all big emitters on board (Andresen et al. 2016: 191). Poland could be pleased when references to 'phasing out of fossil fuel subsidies' were deleted from the Paris Agreement (ibid.). Additionally, French diplomacy – France's foreign minister Laurent Fabius hosted the conference – gained much international recognition for facilitating the treaty.

The Paris agreement aims at maintaining the global temperature rise to "well below 2 °C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels" (Paris Agreement). The Paris Agreement can be described as legally binding *and* voluntary at the same time (Schreurs 2016: 220). It obliges all parties "to undertake and communicate ambitious efforts" (Paris Agreement) and to

become more progressive over time. However, what kind of effort can be decided independently by each participating party. The agreement only expects signatory states to "prepare, communicate and maintain successive nationally determined contributions" (ibid.). These so-called Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) are to be communicated every five years and may later be adjusted "with a view to enhancing its level of ambition" (ibid). The 40% emission reductions of the 2030 target (see 2.1) served as the EU's NDC. The great achievement of the Paris Agreement is that it can be regarded as universal: almost 200 countries have communicated their climate targets. Existing pledges do not, however, appear to go far enough to remain within the goal of international climate politics, the 2°C target. Assessments suggest that the countries' pledged NDCs will most likely keep temperature rises only at between 2.6 °C and 3.1 °C by 2100 (Schreurs 2016: 219). The EU ratified the Paris Agreement on 5 October 2016.

2.3 The EU`s contribution to combat climate change

Without political climate action, the global mean temperature in the 21st century might rise by up to 4.8 °C compared to the late 20th century (IPCC 2014: 60). In the field of international climate governance, sustainability translates into the widely accepted threshold to limit global temperature rise below 2 °C above pre-industrial levels. This target has been confirmed at various international climate summits and is quoted in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs; goal 13).

The 2°C target was already adopted by the EU Council in 1996 (Hulme 2012: 122). So how can the EU's actions to reach this target be evaluated? According to the "Climate Action Tracker" (CAT), an independent scientific analysis produced by Climate Analytics, Ecofys, and The New Climate Institute, the target of 40% emissions reduction by 2030 is "significantly behind what is achievable and necessary by the EU" (CAT 2017). "Between 1990 and 2015 the EU's emissions decreased by 24%, or approximately 1.1% per year. As a result, from now until 2030, emissions only need to decrease by about 1.2% annually to achieve the 2030 emissions reduction goal. A continuation of this trend would lead to emissions reduction by around 64% below 1990 levels" (ibid.). In other words, the EU's 2030 target represents a slowdown in ambition compared to the preceding 25 years. However, the 2°C target would require the opposite, an acceleration of climate actions „to at least three times the historical rate of reduction—for decarbonisation by mid-century to be achieved" (ibid). The aspirational goal mentioned in the Paris Agreement to limit global warming at 1.5 °C compared to preindustrial level even widened the gap between the Paris outcome and EU targets, policies, and position, which are based on the 2.0°C goal (Andresen et al. 2016: 191). In March 2016, the Commission published its Communication "The Road from Paris" (European Commission 2016B) and confirmed that 2020 and 2030 targets were to remain unchanged. The EU just committed to consider more ambitious action beyond 2030 (Andresen et al. 2016: 191). In other words, the level of climate action, which is necessary to reach the EU's self-set targets, is postponed to future decision makers, hoping that they will find the necessary majorities to promote them.

What else can so far be said about the outcome of the EU climate and energy policies? Currently, the EU (EU 28) is responsible for approximately 10 % of all global greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Relatively, this is significantly less than in 1990 when the EU caused roughly 17% of global emissions and was the second largest emitter after the US. Of course, this relative decrease of the EU's share in global total emission is due to increasing emissions of emerging economies, especially from China, which today accounts for 30% of the global GHG emissions and is the single largest contributor to anthropogenic climate change (PBL Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency 2015). However, by 2015, absolute EU GHG emissions were also 23% below 1990 levels. On the first sight,

these numbers look impressive. However, experts agree that this reduction is largely not a result of related climate policies. Rather it was caused by the breakdown of industries in Eastern Europe in the early 1990s, the offshoring of production sites outside the EU (Aldy/Stavins 2009), and more recently, the activity-dampening effects of the economic crisis (Andresen et al. 2016: 190).

A direct outcome of the climate and energy policies – not only for the EU itself but of various of its member states too – is the enormous diffusion of renewable energies: Just ten years ago more than 80% of set up capacities for generating power in the EU were invested in fossil fuels (Aykut 2016: 11). This changed fundamentally. Today, 72% of newly installed energy capacities are renewables (ibid). However, the situation within the EU and its various member states differ fundamentally. For instance, in Germany, which triggered investments in renewable energies technologies by guaranteed feed-in tariffs, the share of renewables for generating electricity increased from 6% in 2000 to 30% in 2015 (ibid). In contrast, "nearly 90% of Poland's electricity is produced by mainly indigenous coal that feeds 53 coal-fired plants, with a dozen new ones expected to come online before 2020" (Andresen et al. 2016: 191). These examples seem to show that up to now and in its current shape, policies on the level of the national state appear to show more impact than general EU policies (such as the EU ETS).

3. Towards Sustainable Agriculture in Europe?

3.1 The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP): Origin and Background

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) of the EU is a globally distinct and comparatively stable policy which formation by the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1962 had a significant impact on Europe's agricultural production and consumption as well as on the environment. Only one decade after its implementation, the CAP regulated more than 90% of the community agriculture, remaining to date a policy with one of the highest budgets in the EU (Tekin 2013). The CAP, as characterized by the European Union itself, functions as "a partnership between Europe and its farmers" (European Commission 2014B: 1), emphasizing the importance of the rural and agricultural space in Europe. This characterization can directly be related to the objectives of the CAP which, as laid down in the Consolidated Version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), Article 39, refer to an increase in agricultural productivity, a fair standard of living for the agricultural community, the stabilization of the markets, the availability of supplies and the access of consumers to these supplies at reasonable prices. These objectives, with a focus on ensuring food supply, have been maintained since their introduction in 1962 but have gradually been shifted towards an increased recognition of the fact that agriculture is embedded into wider social, cultural and environmental interactions, rather than solely the production of food (European Commission 2014B; Weingarten 2010).

Economically and environmentally, agriculture remains a significant sector where in 2013 10.8 million farmers worked on utilized agricultural land (UAA) of 174.4 million hectares, representing 40% of the total land area of the EU (Eurostat 2016: 32). These numbers indicate that agricultural production goes beyond its main policy objective of food production, playing a central role in social and ecological terms. The coherence of the EU's agriculture and the environment have appropriately been described by Weizsäcker et al. (2010), stating that it is "ironical that the impacts of the climate change on the agricultural production are raised by the agricultural production itself" (p.160 *own translation*). Although declining over the past decades, the agricultural sector remains with 10.35% of total GHG emissions (Eurostat 2016: 128; *data from 2012*) one of the major branches responsible for the emissions, while also being responsible for 93.3% of total ammonia

emissions of the EU (Eurostat 2016: 134; *data from 2013*). Additionally, European agriculture causes a diversity of other environmental problems such as biodiversity loss due to habitat degradation and the spread of monoculture practices; deterioration of the soils through, amongst others, loss of fertility, erosion and salinization; pollution of the water and the air due to pesticides and fertilizers as well as fossil fuel use; and change in the natural scenery (Commission of the EC 2000; Nilsson 2004; Weizsäcker et al. 2010).
It is also for this reason that the European agricultural policy has undergone several significant reforms since its establishment. In its early years, the CAP has been the main driving force behind agricultural intensification and specialization, leading eventually to negative impacts on the environment and "production beyond consumption" (McAdam 2005: 19). This production-oriented policy has been reformed over the years where since the mid-1980s emphasize has increasingly been given to a greening of the CAP, including inter alia considerations in form of cross-compliance as well as agri-environmental measures to encourage farmers to enhance and protect the environment on their farming land. The measures have been implemented to promote environmentally sustainable agricultural practices, integrating environmental concerns and priorities into the CAP (Commission of the EC 2000; DG Agri 2005). The introduction of such measures have altered the balanced weight of the objectives and goals of the CAP where a general shift towards sustainability and environmental considerations can be identified (Drăgoi & Bâlgăr 2013; Weingarten 2010).

3.2 The CAP Reform 2014-2020

The CAP has continuously been a subject of review where critics argue that the set of measures are highly protectionist, while at the same time being resistant to change (Burrell 2010). This resistance to change can especially be applied to the fact that the key objectives of the CAP have remained relatively stable over the years where the reforms followed a "consistent reform trajectory" (Burrell 2010: 6). The CAP reform 2014-2020 can be argued to be no exception to this consistency, since the adoption of a new set of regulations in 2013 resulted only in minor regenerations of the general objectives and instruments, especially regarding environmental considerations (Erjavec et al. 2015; Garske 2016; Hoffmann 2016)
In response to the debates on the future of the CAP, the European Commission published the Communication 'The CAP towards 2020: Meeting the food, natural resources and territorial challenges of the future' in November 2010. The Communication identified the main challenges and objectives for the CAP, framing the debates around the CAP reform ahead. The Commission pictured a future CAP that "should contain a *greener* and more equitably distributed first pillar and a second pillar focussing more on competitiveness and innovation, *climate change* and the *environment*" (European Commission 2010B: 3; *emphasizes customized*) with a focus on an environmentally and territorially balanced agriculture. This picturing of the Commission was termed the 'greening of the CAP' as widely acknowledged by politicians and academics (Erjavec et al. 2015).
Following the wording of the Commission, the final reform agreement offers a "more holistic and integrated approach to policy support" (European Commission 2013: 1) based on a strengthened link between the two persisting pillars of direct payments and market-related expenditures (pillar 1) and of rural development (pillar 2). First and foremost, the agreement implies readjustments of the direct payment in the first pillar of the CAP which also inherit the highly discussed greening element (Hiß 2013). The main greening elements of the CAP reform can be narrowed down to the implementation of the green payments, which are defined as decoupled payments for agricultural practices, being beneficial for the climate and the environment. The green payments form 30% of the total direct CAP payments and are devoted to the compliance with environmental

standards, which only those farmers who fulfil the environmental requirements receive. As laid down in Art. 43(2) of Regulation 1307/2013, these agricultural practices are identified as crop diversification, maintaining existing permanent grassland and having ecological focus areas (EFAs) on the agricultural area. A farmer satisfying these requirements of agricultural practice is entitled to receive the 'green' payment which takes form of annual payments per hectare (Anania & D'Andrea 2015). Farmers practicing organic agriculture are standardly considered to fulfil the requirements and therefore automatically receive the green payment. This is also the case for farming in natural constraint areas, Natura 2000 areas as well as forestry measures and investments (European Commission 2013). These direct greening payments indicate that environmental considerations have been incorporated into the scheme of the CAP reform. However, the final regulations on these decoupled payments contain a variety of loopholes and implementation decision to the member states that dilute the environmental specifications. By leaving slightly more than half of the direct payments schemes to voluntary decisions of the member states, the direct reform effects are therefore restricted. It is for this reason that civil society actors as well as a significant number of scientists have criticized the CAP reform as being watered down and greenwashed (Erjavec et al. 2015; Greer 2014).

3.3 Sustainability of the CAP

The EU has acknowledged that agricultural practices and thus the regulations of the CAP must comply with environmental standards and sustainable farming methods. Amongst others, this comes to the fore in the Communication 'Indicators for the Integration of Environmental Concerns into the Common Agricultural Policy' (Commission of the EC 2000) where it is conceded that the development of modern agricultural practices have increased the pressure on the environment, threatening the natural habitat. The EU therefore aspired to implement "sustainable agriculture" (p.6) within the CAP by means of introducing environmental measures through reforms. The above mentioned cross-compliance scheme, as well as the agri-environmental measures, indicate two major provisions to integrate environmental concerns into the CAP. But although the course of the CAP history indicates an increased recognition of targeting environmental concerns, agricultural practices within the EU can nevertheless be argued to continue to be restricted in terms of ecological sustainability.

Agricultural practices within the EU remain predominantly conventional and intensive, implying that environmental pressure due to farming methods is still persisting. This can be based on a variety of indicators: Firstly, the total organic area comprises only 5.9% of total EU UAA (Eurostat 2016: 103; data from 2014) although it is recognized as a practice beneficial for agricultural and environmental development. Secondly, pesticide usage remains one of the highest within the EU as compared to other regions of the world (De et al. 2014; Storck et al. 2016). Therefore, as research by Storck et al. (2016) proposes, the pesticide policy of the European Union is in an emerging need to change its legislation in favor of agricultural practices that do not harm the environment. Thirdly, related to the dominant agricultural practices, a sharp decline of biodiversity within the EU's farmland over the last decades can be detected. The European bird population, where a decline in the common farmland bird population has been verified, is one of the major examples of biodiversity loss. Between 1990 and 2013, an overall decline of 45% of the common farmland bird population has been detected where the intensification of crop rotation patterns as well as the usage of pesticides have been named as main causes (Eurostat 2016: 139). Similar developments can be detected concerning insects including bees that play a vital role for pollination.

Based on the CAP Reform 2014-2020, Garske (2016) as well as Hoffmann (2016) analyzed the CAP regarding its greening elements and its overall sustainability. Both studies on the reform documents conclude that its impact on the overall sustainability and effectiveness for protecting the environment remains limited. The introduction of the greening elements "have the potential to support the transition towards a more sustainable agriculture in Europe" (Garske 2016: 43; *own translation*) but only have a minor direct and implicit affect due to the persisting discourse of food security. This is also concluded by Erjavec & Erjavec (2015), arguing that the CAP remains dominated by a "productivist discourse" that is focused on guaranteeing food supply rather than sustainability. Therefore, on an overall scale, it can be argued that environmental aspects have only subordinately been included into the CAP, where the food demand remains the leading policy concern.

4. Discussion and Outlook

In *The Metamorphosis of the World*, published posthumously, Ulrich Beck (2016) argues that the anticipated catastrophe of climate change could lead to the development of new and strengthening of existing cosmopolitan institutions, in order to addresses this inherently global problem: „Perhaps the topos of climate change is even a form of mobilization thus far unknown in human history that breaks open a sanctimonious national autistic world with the vision of the impending apocalypse? Could it be, then, that the global climate risk, far from being an apocalyptic catastrophe, can be changed by active (cultural) work and cooperative politics of many actors into a kind of 'emancipatory catastrophe'?" (ibid: 117). To support his reasoning, Beck refers to the experiences and horrors of World War II which "has led to a series of cosmopolitan institutions, such as the UN, the IMF, the World Bank and, most significantly, the European Union" (ibid: 115). And indeed, in March 2014, Donald Tusk as president of the European Council, suggested a deepening of vertical European integration by proposing a so-called European "Energy Union". In February 2015, the European Commission launched the Energy Union Strategy, "an initiative to enhance coordination on energy policy among the EU Member States focusing on five policy areas: supply security, an integrated internal energy market, energy efficiency, climate change, and research and innovation for low carbon technologies" (Schreurs 2016: 220). However, this project can only partly be seen as the result of the "emancipatory catastrophe" of climate change. Mainly, it was enabled due to rising tensions with Russia related to the annexation of Crimea and the following Ukrainian crisis. The EU – the world's single largest importer of energy – rather strives for energy security and seeks to reduce its related dependencies from Russia than finding a common ground for fighting anthropogenic climate change (Aykut 2016: 12; Schreurs 2016: 220). Especially Poland and a group of Central and Eastern European countries dependent on coal do not favour the EU's long-term climate targets (Andresen et al. 2016: 190). In recent years, they have managed to push for a slowdown of the European ambitions in climate change mitigation. But also "model students" in climate and energy policies – such as Germany with its announced *Energiewende* – have undermined the EU's ambition to reduce GHG emissions. For instance, the German government has repeatedly blocked EU plans on limiting emissions from new cars in order to protect its automotive industry including luxury marques with relatively high emissions. Diverging interests also exist between the energy-intensive industries that argue for a level playing field between the EU and major competitors, and the electric power industry shielded from competition outside Europe (ibid). In sum, this leads to a paradoxical situation, in which the EU supports relatively ambitious long-term goals – such as the 2°C targets or even the Paris agreement that aims at keeping global temperature "well below 2 °C above pre-industrial levels" – but so-far fails to deliver the short-term targets and policies that would be necessary to achieve these goals.

In the field of agriculture and the Common Agricultural Policy a similar gap between claims and reality can be witnessed. The outcomes of the 2014-2020 reform underline that the CAP is moving in the direction of environmental considerations but that the changes are made within the existing system, which ultimately slows down the process of implementing and prioritizing environmental sustainability. Food security by means of the EU's food demand remains the dominant discourse in the CAP and hampers the development towards solid environmental commitments that the EU's agriculture must follow. The course of the CAP reforms indicate that the CAP is increasingly incorporating sustainability and the protection of the environment. However, the agricultural policy field comprises a broad range of interests and strong lobby groups, such as the food industry, who remain to have a tremendous influence on the CAP development and its greening. By means of interest mediation, environmental standards are therefore only slowly being targeted.

Coming back to the main question of this paper whether the EU can (still) be regarded as a green leader. Leadership is a relative concept. The preceding analysis for the field of climate and energy policies showed that – compared to other major emitters (such as the US or China) – the EU has been able to act as a "leader" for many years. More recently, this role became challenged by China and the US, which also pushed the Paris Agreement (for instance, both countries jointly ratified the agreement one month before the EU). Additionally, concerning investments in clean energy, China and the US showed high dynamics in recent years while green investments in the EU largely stagnated (PEW 2014). In total numbers, China surpasses EU investments in clean energies, while the US invests on the same level in clean energies as the EU (ibid). With the election of Donald Trump as the 45th president of the United States, this situation could, however, change again. Trump already announced that the US will withdraw from the Paris Agreement, and made several decisions supporting the fossil fuel industries. Therefore, Europe could regain or defend its position as a green leader. Ironically, this would happen at a moment when the EU slowed down its own ambitions (compared to last two decades). This constitutes a kind of leadership that can best be summarized with idiom "In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king".

How can the EU's weakened ambition in green politics be explained? Above, several tensions and frictions between member states concerning environmental policies have been named. However, these cannot function as ultimate explanation since these tensions could already be witnessed at the beginning of the century when the EU still strived for more rigorous goals. So, what has changed? In recent years, the political situation has been more difficult for climate action commitments and environmental politics in general. The resurgence of nationalist and far right parties as well as populism in Europe has generally weakened support for European polices and further integration. Most of these right-wing and populist parties – such as the Le Pen's National Front in France or the German AFD – also deny the findings of climate science and oppose participation in the Paris Agreement. In some Central and Eastern European countries, respective parties have come to power and succeeded in torpedoing Europe's environmental agenda (see above).

Additionally, worries about the economic situation after the financial crisis – with parts of Southern Europe still struggling – marginalised environmental concerns in Europe and shifted to political focus on issues such as economic competitiveness and growth, job creation etc. (Andresen et al. 2016: 193). This does not only hold true for official politics and political decision makers. A strong level of public concern has been identified as one of the factors that explain why the EU has been at the forefront of global efforts to tackle environmental problems such as climate change (Schreurs 2016: 220). However, data

from the World Values Survey for eight European countries suggests that in recent years the preferences in public opinion have partly shifted from environmental protection towards economic growth and job creation (see Figure 1).

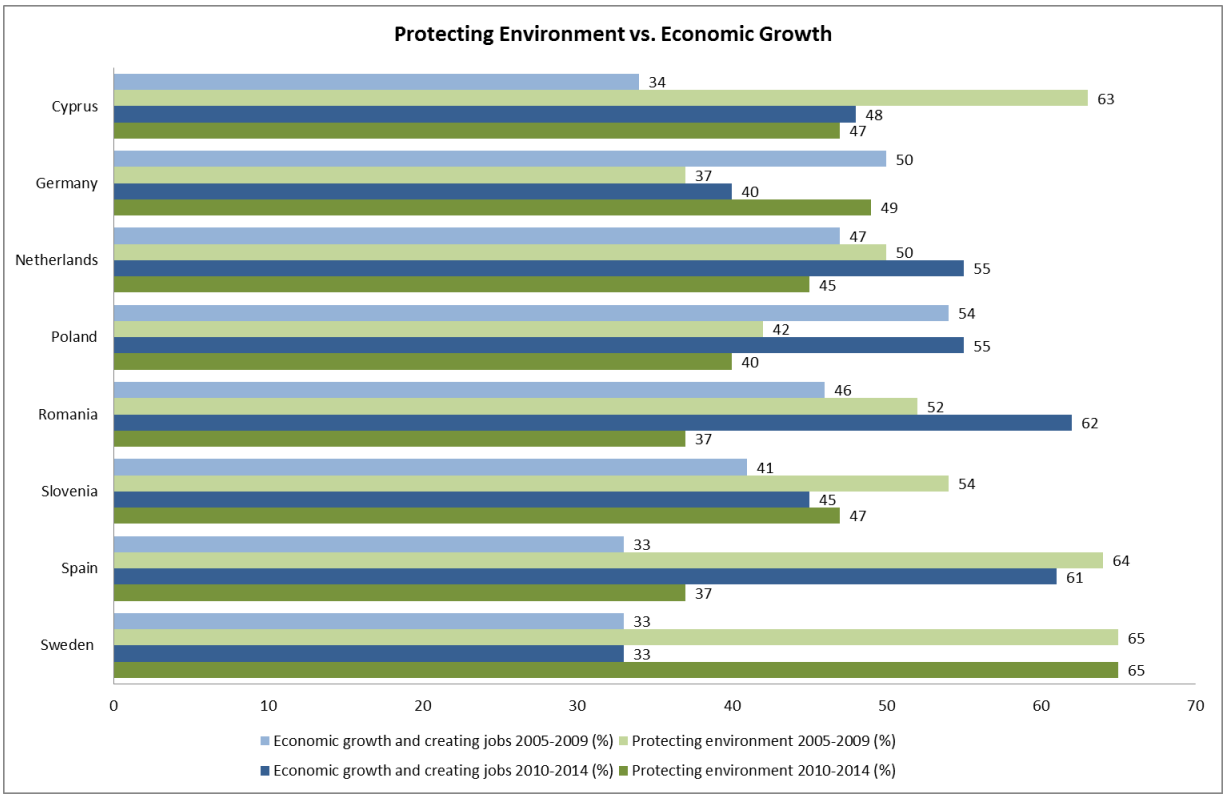

Figure 1: Economic growth and creating jobs vs. protecting the environment. Findings from 8 European countries. Source: WORLD VALUES SURVEY WVS-5 & WVS-6. World Values Survey Association (www.worldvaluessurvey.org); own calculation (n = 10.881).

It is striking that only in Germany, which has not been hit by a long-lasting economic depression, the situation is reverse. Additionally, there are countries (Slovenia and Sweden) that constantly favour environmental protection, or Poland that constantly favours economic development. These results hint to a structural dilemma: It seems that economic growth, which itself can be identified as one of the main drivers of environmental degradation (Jackson 2009), is a prerequisite for public support of strong environmental policies. If this is the case, the current political and economic outlook will make it challenging for the EU to become a "green leader" that is not only leading because other international actors perform even worse or fall behind.

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