

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Parallel Universe: EU Cross-forum Coherence on Climate in International Transport Fora

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Abstract

Following the Paris Agreement, the European Union (EU) prioritised climate negotiations in the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and the International Maritime Organization (IMO), attempting to work in a way that was consistent with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Examining the negotiations of ICAO CORSIA (Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation, 2016) and the IMO Initial Strategy (2018), I demonstrate that the EU's objectives and external action were in fact incoherent with its approach to the UNFCCC. This incoherence appeared to be the result of a limited appetite for climate action in ICAO/IMO. In the former, this situation was exacerbated by the forum's technical nature, mismatched priorities and limited coordination between EU climate and transport spheres. In the latter, a lack of political interest at the EU and international levels also played a role.

Keywords: European Union; climate change; transport decarbonisation; policy coherence; international climate governance

Although the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is the main forum for international climate governance, climate issues related to international aviation and shipping are regulated by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and the International Maritime Organization (IMO), respectively. While greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from these sectors make up approximately 3 per cent of total global emissions, a study commissioned by the European Parliament suggests that the share could rise to almost 40 per cent by 2050, should the two sectors continue to lag behind on the road to decarbonisation (Cames *et al.* 2015; Rayner 2021). ICAO and IMO have therefore come under pressure to act.

As an established climate leader, the European Union (EU) has long called for progress in these two fora alongside advancements in the UNFCCC, working diplomatically and via internal legislation to support this. Following the Paris Agreement in 2015, the EU seemed to place a renewed focus on climate agreements in ICAO and IMO. In its 2016 Conclusions on Climate Diplomacy, the Foreign Affairs Council noted for the first time “that diplomatic outreach should also focus on the negotiations in the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) and the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) to address greenhouse gas emissions...” (Council of the European Union 2016). Thus, the EU appeared eager to extend its climate successes and priorities from the UNFCCC to negotiations in both fora.

Yet, as transport fora, ICAO and IMO present a significantly different negotiation context (including at the EU level) than the UNFCCC. This likely complicates the potential for the EU to intervene in climate issues in ICAO and IMO in a way that is coherent with its action in the UNFCCC. In other words, it calls into question the EU’s cross-forum coherence, which I define as the reduction of conflict and the promotion of synergies in the EU’s objectives and external action on climate in ICAO and IMO as compared to the UNFCCC. By external climate action, I mean interactions between the EU (here, its institutions or member states acting on its behalf) and a third country, international organisation or regime that concern its international climate policy objectives (Schunz *et al.* 2017).

Surprisingly, EU involvement in these fora following the Paris Agreement has received little academic attention, despite major climate agreements being reached in ICAO in 2016 (Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation – CORSIA) and IMO in 2018 (Initial Strategy for the reduction of GHG emissions from ships). Although EU politicians have praised the EU’s work in these negotiations, the Union’s actions in this regard remain a black box.

Understanding the EU’s cross-forum coherence provides insight into the extent to which the EU can use these fora to facilitate climate action in line with that of the UNFCCC or, instead, rely on internal action. This is especially relevant considering the slow progress that both ICAO and IMO have made on climate action since these agreements were signed (Rayner 2021). Moreover, the EU is close to finalising internal legislation as part of its “Fit for 55” package, which could have significant implications for the decarbonisation of international transport.

Using the two negotiations as case studies, this article answers the following research question: To what extent are the EU's objectives and external climate action in ICAO and IMO coherent with its objectives and action in the UNFCCC, and what conditions shape this (in)coherence? These two negotiations are important not only because they were targeted by the post-Paris Climate Diplomacy Conclusions but also because they are the first political agreements on climate change in either forum (Rayner 2021).

The article conceptualises and assesses the EU's cross-forum coherence in ICAO and IMO vis-à-vis the UNFCCC and draws on existing literature to investigate potential conditions that are shaping this (in)coherence. It finds that the EU's objectives and external action in ICAO and IMO were relatively incoherent with those in the UNFCCC. The constellation of actors and interests in ICAO and IMO limited the extent to which the EU could act coherently vis-à-vis the UNFCCC: what was achievable in the UNFCCC was not directly transferrable to ICAO and IMO. At the same time, the isolation of ICAO and IMO also affected the EU's external action. This incoherence seemed to be exacerbated by different EU internal considerations such as a lack of interest at the political level, diverging priorities and limited coordination.

The article is structured as follows. The next section provides an overview of the literature on climate governance in ICAO and IMO and institutional differences with the UNFCCC, as well as on the EU's external climate action therein. The article then introduces the conceptual framework and method, before presenting the empirical analysis of the case studies. The findings and their implication in the literature are discussed in the following section. The last section contains some concluding remarks.

Literature review

Climate governance in ICAO and IMO

While ICAO and IMO each have unique dynamics, they are quite similar in terms of climate governance, in that they are both specialised UN agencies with comparable institutional set-ups dealing with international transport (Martinez Romera 2017). Both are mandated by Article 2.2 of the Kyoto Protocol as the competent international fora for regulating GHG emissions in their respective sectors. The literature identifies three key differences with the UNFCCC.

First, both ICAO and IMO explicitly aim to promote and defend the international development of their respective sectors (Martinez Romera 2017). Regulating climate change is only a small part of their broader agenda. Thus, in situations in which climate action conflicts with the development of the respective sectors, sectoral interests often prevail (Rayner 2021). Overall, there is not the same widespread interest in working towards climate action as there is in the UNFCCC, whose main objective is to stabilise GHG emissions. On a related note, as ICAO and IMO primarily deal with transport, the fora bring together officials from transport ministries; this is also the case for the EU. This make-up again differs from the UNFCCC, whose mandate for climate action assembles leaders

and officials from climate, energy and foreign affairs ministries, the EU included (Biedenkopf and Petri 2021). Hence, the EU's involvement in ICAO and IMO is embedded in the broader transportation-centric context of the fora.

Second, both ICAO and IMO have different organisational cultures than the UNFCCC. Both transport fora have earned a reputation as venues of technical expertise and standard-setting based on the equal application of regulations to all members (Martinez Romera 2017; Rayner 2021). As a result, negotiations are traditionally highly technical, although political considerations have emerged on occasion. This contrasts with the UNFCCC, which, over the past decades, has become a venue for high politics and international summitry (Earsom and Delreux 2021).

Third, both transport fora present different actor constellations than the UNFCCC (Oberthür 2003; 2016). The most powerful actors in each transport forum are typically those with the strongest connections and influence in their respective sectors. Alongside European member states, Brazil, Canada, China, Russia and the United States have significant clout in ICAO. Conversely, in the IMO, those states with the largest ship registries – Liberia, the Marshall Islands and Panama – have an outsized influence (Martinez Romera 2017). For historical and technical reasons, these powerful states have close relationships with the aviation and shipping industries in each forum. In parallel, the two aforementioned industries are organised and well-represented. It is indeed industry – namely the manufacturers and transporters – which is ultimately responsible for implementing the regulations (Martinez Romera 2017; Rayner 2021). These constellations differ from the UNFCCC, which is largely dominated by state-based negotiating groups on both sides of the developing/developed divide. Furthermore, interests in the UNFCCC are more diffuse and less centrally organised.

Overall, these differences underscore that ICAO and IMO constitute an ecosystem with largely distinct objectives, cultures, actor constellations and interests compared with the UNFCCC. These differences could thus serve as barriers to the EU's cross-forum coherence.

The EU's evolution as a climate actor

The literature has repeatedly recognised the EU as an international climate actor with significant leadership ambitions (Oberthür and Dupont 2021). The EU's international climate leadership stems from a combination of its economic power, its engagement and outreach to other actors, its exemplary climate targets and its emphasis on low-carbon development (Wurzel *et al.* 2017). Moreover, frustration with inertia and a lack of ambition at the international level has led EU institutional actors, such as the European Commission, to develop ambitious internal instruments – like the Emissions Trading System (ETS) – to force movement at the international level (Skjærseth 2017). The EU has demonstrated its ability to adapt to changes in the international context, notably through its capacity to pivot from being a leader to a bridge-building 'leadicator' following its failure at

UNFCCC COP15 in Copenhagen and then cementing this role with its success at COP21 in Paris in 2015 (Oberthür and Dupont 2021).

Although not the only contributing factor, EU external action on climate played an important role in preparing the ground for the EU's successful outcome in Paris (Oberthür 2016). Through its alliance with vulnerable developing countries, it worked to create a common understanding and develop concrete negotiating texts. This ultimately laid the groundwork for the High Ambition Coalition (HAC), which played a key role in the final days of the negotiations. The EU also maintained a constant dialogue with key actors in the negotiations, notably China and the United States. Simultaneously, the EU used multilateral fora like the G7, G20 and the Major Economies Forum (MEF) to add political momentum to the negotiations and overcome blockages in preparatory work. Since then, EU external climate action has focused on implementing the Paris Agreement and convincing other actors to increase their Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) (Biedenkopf and Petri 2021). There has also been an increased focus on achieving EU objectives vis-à-vis negotiations in the other climate fora (Oberthür and Dupont 2021). It is therefore to be expected that the EU would seek to extend its climate leadership to ICAO and IMO to encourage ambitious mitigation efforts.

At the same time, it is important to emphasise that the EU is not necessarily a unitary actor, which has implications for its climate leadership and external action. Different Council of the EU configurations and different Directorate Generals of the European Commission are responsible for different issue areas and international fora. They do not necessarily approach cross-cutting issues such as climate and transport in the same manner (Skjærseth 2017; Wurzel *et al.* 2019). Having different priorities and cultures, they will not necessarily take the same position. Hence, even with the increased push for EU action in ICAO and IMO, it is not a given that its leadership will directly transfer.

EU climate action in ICAO and IMO. Unlike the UNFCCC, the EU is not a full member of ICAO or IMO, with membership only being open to states and not international organisations. Therefore, the EU must act on areas of Union competence through its members (Martinez Romera 2017). The literature on EU climate action within ICAO and IMO mainly revolves around the EU using unilateral action to encourage progress in the two fora. In ICAO, much attention has been paid to the EU's decision in 2008 to include aviation emissions from flights departing from or arriving at EU airports within ETS. The strong backlash from major aviation states, particularly the United States and China, forced the EU to backtrack and ultimately limit its implementation (Birchfield 2015; Lindenthal 2014).

As for EU action in IMO, René Taudal Poulsen *et al.* (2021) note the influential effect of the EU's Monitor, Reporting and Verification Regulation on the IMO, in that it prompted the IMO to adopt a similar system of its own in 2016. The literature thus underlines a phenomenon that has also been observed in ICAO: the ability of the EU to use its power of internal regulation to threaten the IMO and transfer legislation to the international level, where its status and ability to act is less clear-cut.

Overall, the literature on EU climate action in ICAO and IMO largely focuses on EU unilateral action and the consequences – both positive and negative – of said action (Dobson 2020). What remains to be understood is how the EU approaches climate negotiations in each forum, particularly in light of the differences in institutional structures evoked in the literature. This lack of insight is contrasted with the UNFCCC, where the literature has studied EU external action in great detail. Thus, it again remains unclear what conditions could shape this expected expansion of leadership, especially considering the different policy foci.

Coherence across policy areas

Coherence has been a recurring theme for policy practitioners and academics alike in a variety of issue areas and governance settings, especially within international organisations, at the state level and with respect to multilevel governance. The literature has focused not just on the absence of conflict between different policy processes but also on the potential for synergies therein. Factors that may affect coherence include the concentration of issues and interest groups, the level of political interest and bureaucratic politics (May *et al.* 2006; Nilsson *et al.* 2012). Moreover, coherence has become an important analytical tool for assessing EU policies in a variety of areas, at different levels of government and from both political science and legal perspectives (Lenschow *et al.* 2018; Sellier 2018). Research on environmental and climate policy integration (CPI) has paid special attention to the fit of environment and climate concerns with interlinked policies: the degree of comprehensiveness in which environmental and climate concerns are reflected at all stages of the policy process in other issue areas (Dupont 2016; Jordan and Lenschow 2010).

Yet, three main gaps in the work on (EU) coherence emerge that make it unclear as to what conditions would facilitate EU cross-forum coherence in ICAO and IMO vis-à-vis the UNFCCC. First, with regard to the more general literature, despite extensive scholarship on fragmentation and the relationship between international fora, remarkably little work has examined the coherence – or lack thereof – in the way actors approach negotiations on interrelated issue areas across different international fora (Biermann *et al.* 2009; Hoch *et al.* 2019). A notable exception is Jean-Frédéric Morin and Amandine Orsini (2014), although they focus primarily on different typologies of coherence. This lacuna is particularly puzzling if we consider the increasing overlap and complexity in global governance and the importance of actor-based studies therein (Alter 2022). Second, within the EU coherence literature, work on external action primarily takes the form of case studies assessing the EU's coherence with the same recurring results: coherence is seldom achieved (Portela 2021). However, the conditions that determine such incoherence are less evident. Finally, with respect to the work on coherence in EU climate issues, while important research (including CPI) has been done, it has mainly focused on the climate and energy nexus, often considering the EU as a rather unitary actor or limiting its perspective to internal policy. Hence, there is a pressing need for more research on the conditions that lead to policy (in)coherence at the international level.

Conceptual framework

Conceptualising cross-forum coherence

In this article, I focus on the horizontal, policy-specific dimension of coherence (Lenschow *et al.* 2018). The EU institutional bodies and actors dealing with ICAO and IMO mainly differ from their climate counterparts in their substantive policy focus, but they operate at the same level of governance (Working Parties within the Council of the EU and Commission Directorate Generals). Accordingly, I adapt the definition of Måns Nilsson *et al.* (2012, 396), which sees coherence as “an attribute of policy that systematically reduces conflicts and promotes synergies between and within different policy areas”. Coherence can be assessed on the basis of two main elements: **objectives**, the goals defined by relevant actors for a given policy; and **instruments**, the tools used to facilitate those objectives (Nilsson *et al.* 2012). I consider instruments to be the EU’s **external action** relating to these negotiations, or interactions of the EU institutions or its member states acting on behalf of the EU with third countries or international organisations in support of its objectives (Schunz *et al.* 2017). External action can take place not only during the negotiations but also in the diplomatic outreach leading up to it.

To assess coherence, I compare the EU’s objectives and related external action to those in the UNFCCC, which serves as the international focal point for climate governance. Hence, I consider coherence to be unidirectional. In essence, I am interested in the extent to which the EU’s external climate action in ICAO and IMO is coherent with that in the UNFCCC, and not vice versa. Such a unidirectional analysis fits with that of CPI. This facilitates an assessment of the extent to which the EU’s climate leadership goes beyond the UNFCCC in fora that deal with climate to a lesser degree.

I rate both elements on a continuum ranging from **conflicting** to **synergetic**. Here, conflicting means that the EU objective or external action in ICAO/IMO is incompatible with that of the UNFCCC. A synergetic element is mutually reinforcing and closely interlinked with that of the UNFCCC. An intermediate element with no contradictions but limited interaction between the two fora qualifies as **ambiguous**: an analytical middle ground. This evaluation fits not only with the literature on policy coherence within the EU (Lenschow *et al.* 2018; Nilsson *et al.* 2012; Portela 2021) but also with that of institutional interaction across international environmental fora (Hoch *et al.* 2019). Hence, this scale is an analytical tool of comparison that facilitates an assessment of relevant conditions shaping any differences between the cases, and which is not necessarily precise (Mayring 2014). For both cases, I look at the year leading up to the negotiations, as my research found that this was when the vast majority of diplomatic activity occurred.

Objectives. The coherence of the objective is assessed by examining the complementarity of the EU's negotiation positions for ICAO/IMO vis-à-vis its objectives and commitments in the UNFCCC at the time. In their work on policy coherence in the international regime complex on genetic resources, Jean-Frédéric Morin and Amandine Orsini (2014) assess the degree of complementarity and similarity in an actor's position across fora by dealing with an overlapping issue area, making it a useful template for evaluating the coherence of EU objectives in ICAO/IMO compared to the UNFCCC.

Following COP 21, the EU focused on bringing the Paris Agreement to fruition, including its binding emission reduction targets and explicit objective to limit global warming to below 2°C, with efforts to reach 1.5°C. Along those lines, it sought to finalise the implementation of the “Paris Rulebook” in the UNFCCC while also pushing third countries to increase the ambition of their NDCs (Council of the European Union 2016; Oberthür and Dupont 2021). A **synergetic** objective entails a negotiation position that encapsulates these objectives. Conversely, a **conflicting** objective is a position that does not contribute to the Paris Agreement (that is, emissions reductions). An objective with an **ambiguous** level of coherence implies a position that is not entirely consistent with the Paris Agreement but works towards it (that is, it calls for some emissions reductions but not to the scale consistent with the Paris targets).

External action. The coherence of external action looks primarily at the extent to which the EU integrates its climate diplomacy strategy in the UNFCCC into its approach in ICAO/IMO. Here, I draw on Simon Schunz *et al.* (2017), who consider the interlinkage of diplomatic activity and arguments from one issue area to another as an indicator of coherence.

The EU relies on a robust diplomatic outreach activity based on persuasion and the building of coalitions among progressive, like-minded countries, while also providing technical expertise (Biedenkopf and Petri 2021). This includes both bilateral and multilateral elements. Over the past years, the EU has developed its Green Diplomacy Network of member state embassies and EU delegations, which regularly conducts *démarches* to engage the EU's counterparts and encourage ambitious climate action. It also maintains strategic bilateral relationships with actors in the UNFCCC and is active in a variety of multilateral fora dealing with climate change – like the G20, G7 and the Petersberg Dialogue – in support of its work in the UNFCCC (Earsom and Delreux 2021). **Synergetic** external action in ICAO and IMO involves integrating these diplomatic channels into the EU's approach to the negotiations. Collaboration here takes place between EU institutional actors responsible for external action in the UNFCCC and ICAO or IMO. An **ambiguous** designation entails external action taking place separately, with no coordination. Finally, **conflicting** external action means that no use is made of the EU's UNFCCC external action.

Conceptualising influential conditions

EU diplomatic efforts in ICAO and IMO not only take place in a different internal context from its typical climate diplomacy, but also in an institutional context that is quite different from the UNFCCC. Hence, assessing the relevant conditions that shape the EU's coherence involves considering both the internal EU context and that of ICAO and IMO (Morin and Orsini 2014). For this reason, I will also discuss the literature on horizontal coherence and that on coherence and fragmentation at the international level to identify influential conditions. Four conditions stand out: two internal to the EU and two related to ICAO and IMO.

First, internally, a mismatch of priorities between the EU transport and climate constituencies (that is, coordination venues/Council configurations and implicated Directorate Generals) could indeed lead to incoherence in what the EU pursues in ICAO/IMO as opposed to the UNFCCC. Officials in each policy area constituency have their own priorities and understanding of a given issue (Skovgaard 2018). Each constituency likely seeks to frame the issue within its own priorities and is less inclined to compromise. For instance, a mismatch of priorities between different Directorate Generals in the European Commission can lead to conflict and instances where bureaucratic politics affect the overall potential for coherence in dossiers bridging different policy areas (Skovgaard 2018).

Second, and relatedly, the amount of political attention that the EU has given to the negotiations in ICAO and IMO could also affect overall coherence. The literature has found that the levels of political oversight and concentration of interests in a given area affect the degree of eventual (in)coherence with other areas (May *et al.* 2006). In areas with less concentrated interest or attention, there is less pressure for coherence with the UNFCCC.

Third, with respect to the context of ICAO and IMO, the overall objectives and interests within the different fora could affect the EU's coherence vis-à-vis the UNFCCC. Although they overlap with mandate and membership, each forum has its own objectives, interests and structure. The extent to which climate considerations and ambition travel from the UNFCCC to ICAO and IMO depends on the overall objectives and structure of ICAO and IMO and the interests of their key actors (Gehring and Oberthür 2009). Thus, what can be achieved in these fora and the extent to which it conflicts or synergises with the UNFCCC depends on the extent to which climate action fits into the functioning of ICAO and IMO and the positions of major players and coalitions in the transport fora (Biermann *et al.* 2009; Gehring and Oberthür 2009; Hoch *et al.* 2019).

Fourth, and relatedly, each forum has its own culture and working methods, which determine what is feasible in relation to a given issue (Kellow 2012). Within ICAO and IMO, climate is only one small issue that has traditionally been handled at a more technical level by officials with a transport background. The EU could therefore be constrained in its approach to the negotiation, not only in how it has been socialised to negotiate climate in ICAO and IMO but also in how other actors perceive the negotiations vis-à-vis the UNFCCC (Morin and Orsini 2014).

Method

To answer the research question, I have conducted a qualitative content analysis (Mayring 2014) of 24 semi-structured interviews with EU, EU member state, third state and secretariat officials involved in the ICAO and IMO negotiations (see Appendix) and of official EU and EU member state documents, including relevant Council Conclusions.¹ The interviews give information on the EU's approach to the negotiations and offer insight into the relationships between the various policy spheres and the place of ICAO and IMO in international climate governance. The official documents are used to triangulate themes from the interviews and serve as references for the EU's expressed negotiating positions and objectives.

Empirical analysis

ICAO CORSIA

Background. While ICAO has long considered climate-related issues, serious reflection on the use of a Market-Based Measure (MBM) for emissions reductions began in 2007. In 2013, at Assembly 38, within the context of the EU ETS, the Assembly agreed that negotiations on an MBM would be finalised by 2016. At Assembly 39, held in September 2016, the Assembly adopted CORSIA. It calls for the implementation of an emissions offsetting programme based on 2020 emissions levels and is divided into three phases: a pilot phase (2021-23), a first phase with voluntary participation (2023-26) and a second phase in which all included states will be obligated to participate (2027-35).

EU decision-making and diplomatic action for the MBM negotiations were coordinated in two main venues: the Aviation Working Party of the Transportation, Transport, and Energy (TTE) Council Configuration and a working group within the European Civil Aviation Conference (ECAC), which serves as a regional coordination body of 44 European states (hence not only EU member states), plus representatives from European aviation institutions (Lindenthal 2014; Martinez Romera 2017). Within the EU process, DG MOVE (Transport) took the lead on the file, with DG CLIMA (Climate) providing regular input (interviews 1, 3, 7). The eventual EU/ECAC position was discussed in ECAC before being approved by the Council (interview 4).

¹ For each interview, I obtained informed consent from the respondent.

Objectives. The EU's negotiation position for the Assembly was expressed via the "Bratislava Declaration", which spelt out support for an MBM and its commitment to the first voluntary phase of the process (interviews 5, 7, 9). Although the declaration welcomes the adoption of the Paris Agreement and reiterates the need for aviation to contribute to its targets, it mainly focuses on the commitment of the 44 ECAC member states to participate in the CORSIA pilot phase and encourages others to do so (European Civil Aviation Conference, 2016). Respondents acknowledged that there was an understanding among EU stakeholders that while the Paris targets were important, achieving an agreement in ICAO meeting those targets was unrealistic (interviews 4, 5, 6, 7). As such, the negotiation objective was largely structured around what was achievable in ICAO and not on what had occurred in the UNFCCC. As the objective was to reach an agreement on emissions offsetting rather than reductions, it is largely **conflicting** with the EU's UNFCCC objectives.

External action. Overall, the EU approach to external action mostly occurred in ICAO in the lead-up to the Assembly (interviews 7, 9). Aviation-specific outreach was coordinated via the ECAC expert group, based around the question: "How should we split this up and who should approach whom?" (interview 7). Inroads were mainly made with other transport officials and counterparts in ICAO, either via side meetings or through the regional bodies (interviews 5, 7). Notably, the Bratislava Declaration served as a further springboard for engagement with ECAC's sister organisations around the world (interviews 5, 7). Officials from DG CLIMA also conducted their own bilateral outreach, which was facilitated by a *démarche* via the Green Diplomacy Network in early 2016 (interviews 3, 6). A limited attempt was also made to discuss the agreement in higher-level political fora dealing with climate, like the Petersberg Dialogue and the MEF. In early September 2016, a G7 transportation ministerial served as further engagement with partners on a political level (interview 8).

At the final ICAO 39 negotiations themselves, however, the EU appeared to draw on experiences from the UNFCCC in two main ways. First, the EU attempted to recreate the HAC, the coalition of vulnerable and developed states from COP21, in order to lobby more states to join the CORSIA pilot. While this was seen as a reasonably successful publicity move, its actual impact was rather limited (interviews 1, 3, 5, 7). Second, in the lead-up to the negotiations, the EU tried to stress the need for language that fit with the Paris Agreement and to avoid the double counting of offset credits. EU transport negotiators, solicited by their climate counterparts, pushed to incorporate this climate-related language that would otherwise have been excluded (interviews 3, 6). Hence, the coherence of the EU's external action in ICAO vis-à-vis the UNFCCC appeared **ambiguous** (non-conflictual) in the early stages of diplomatic outreach. However, at the final negotiations at Assembly 39, the EU indeed demonstrated evidence of **synergy** with its approach to the UNFCCC.

Influential conditions. The limited appetite for climate action within ICAO seemed to affect both the coherence of the EU's objectives and the extent to which it considered action outside of the ICAO bubble. Additionally, clashes in priorities and framings of the negotiations between DG MOVE and DG CLIMA, as well as limited EU coordination, likely limited the potential for more coherence in its objectives and external action, respectively.

Respondents used terms like “parallel process”, “two parallel universes” and “another world” to describe the relationship between ICAO and the UNFCCC (interviews 2, 3, 6), which suggests that ICAO appeared largely isolated from the UNFCCC. As an EU official noted, in ICAO, “you have a negotiation that is led by people who look at everything that’s on the table from the perspective of their national airline” (interview 7). Additionally, although the United States was now in favour of an agreement, key players like China, Russia and India were still reluctant to agree to an MBM (interviews 1, 5, 7, 8, 9). Thus, the fact that there was a limited appetite for ambitious GHG reduction in aviation among key ICAO players reduced the EU's potential to pursue a non-conflicting objective vis-à-vis the UNFCCC (interviews 4, 5, 6, 7). EU aviation negotiators understood that “if we like to achieve a worldwide agreement, [we have to] reduce the requirements, reduce the ambitions in order to try to obtain an agreement” (interview 9).

With respect to external action, the transport-heavy nature and working culture of the forum meant there was limited scope for incorporating outreach in traditional climate fora. Even if issues were evoked in other climate fora, discussions only took place amongst climate counterparts, who then had to speak to their aviation colleagues handling the negotiations (interview 6). As an official noted about ICAO negotiations, “[a]t the end of the day, it all boils down to the aviation world, so you’re dealing with aviation ministries or transport ministries. They might bring in or not their climate and environment people” (interview 7). In that sense, it was acknowledged that climate-centric outreach outside ICAO was of limited value and not intensively pursued (interview 6).

While EU officials in ICAO were undoubtedly influenced in their approach to the negotiations by the overall dynamic, divergences between DG CLIMA and DG MOVE in terms of priorities appeared to limit the potential for a more ambitious (synergetic) objective. Although DG CLIMA sought to negotiate a position that was consistent with its Paris Agreement commitments (interviews 3, 6), DG MOVE resisted, viewing the action in the larger framework of ICAO and the EU's relations with other states therein (interviews 1, 3, 4, 5). Additionally, DG MOVE and the member states' transport ministries believed that it was better to reach a less ambitious agreement that could be adopted than to dismiss such an agreement as too unambitious (interviews 4, 5, 7). As an EU transport official said, “[i]f you just say ‘No, CORSIA is not good enough, let’s just leave it,’ then you’re not part of making it better either” (interview 5). With DG MOVE and AVIA leading the EU negotiating team, this position prevailed.

Finally, a lack of coordination at the EU and member state levels appeared to limit the coherence of outreach activities. Respondents noted that there was limited contact between the transport and climate ministries, thereby limiting the potential for further coordination and coherence

(interviews 3, 6). For instance, an EU member state official in transport was aware their climate counterparts were advocating for the EU's CORSIA position at a particular meeting without knowing any of the specifics (interview 11). This poor coordination seemed to be exacerbated by a certain amount of deference to the expertise of ICAO transport officials at the EU political level (interviews 3, 6, 11).

IMO

Background. Environment-related issues in IMO are handled by its Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC). Pressure for climate action gradually grew within the MEPC, thanks in part to a proposal for ambitious GHG reduction from the Marshall Islands at MEPC 68, in May 2015, which was followed by the adoption of the Paris Agreement. In late 2016, the MEPC established a roadmap that called for an agreement on a GHG reduction strategy within the next two years. Finally, at MEPC 72 in April 2018, IMO member states adopted the Initial Strategy, which includes (1) a review of ship efficiency standards for new ships to reduce carbon intensity; (2) a reduction of the carbon intensity of international ships of at least 40 per cent by 2030, with efforts to reach 70 per cent by 2050 (compared to 2008 levels); and (3) a cap on GHG emissions from international shipping as soon as possible and a reduction of GHG emissions of at least 50 per cent by 2050

EU coordination on a position and diplomatic action took place in the Shipping Working Party (SWP) of the TTE Configuration. DG MOVE took the lead, with DG CLIMA being consulted (interviews 15, 19). Throughout the negotiation process, the EU was represented mainly by shipping/transport officials, along with a climate negotiator from the Council Presidency, here from Estonia acting on behalf of the Bulgarian presidency (interviews 15, 20, 22, 23).

Objectives. The specific position to be adopted in the negotiations was coordinated on the basis of a non-paper, approximately two weeks before the negotiations at MEPC 72. Owing to the ambiguity of EU competence at the time, it served merely as a coordination document (interviews 14, 15, 16, 20, 22). The agreed position included multiple references to the Paris Agreement and its temperature targets, notably declaring the pursuit of “efforts to limit the temperature increase to stay below 1.5°C, as agreed under the Paris Agreement, as a critical element of the initial IMO strategy” (Council of the European Union 2018, 14). While the importance of the Paris targets was acknowledged, there was also a pragmatic view of what was achievable (interviews 12, 16, 19, 20, 21). The EU looked at “what [...] the general kind of willingness of the other IMO member states [is] to actually have an agreement [...] this gives you the kind of global understanding of what is the level of ambition that you can actually achieve” (interview 20). Since the EU objectives included emissions reductions, albeit not necessarily in a way that was consistent with the Paris Agreement, they are neither conflicting nor synergetic/consistent, but **ambiguous**.

External action. The EU’s external action followed two tracks: the traditional EU coordination within the SWP and then the separate track of the Shipping High Ambition Coalition (SHAC), which was a coalition of Pacific Island states with several EU member states and the Commission. Formed at the initiative of the Pacific Island states and composed on the EU side of Belgium, France, Germany, Netherlands and the Commission, this group later grew to include a large number of EU member states and others (interviews 14, 16, 19, 20). SHAC attempted to incorporate ambition from the UNFCCC and translate such ambition into reduction targets (interviews 16, 18, 22). This was done via bilateral outreach activities and presentations at UNFCCC meetings. SHAC also sought to draw more political attention to the negotiations (interviews 16, 18). At the initiative of France, the coalition arranged for a political declaration on the imperative of decarbonising shipping to be signed at the One Planet Summit, a gathering of world leaders to commemorate the second anniversary of the Paris Agreement in 2017 (interviews 14, 16, 18). The so-called “Tony de Brum Declaration” was named after the late foreign minister of the Marshall Islands, who was instrumental in calling for ambitious action in IMO and assembling the original HAC at the Paris Agreement negotiations. The objective of the declaration was to “get countries that were progressive at UNFCCC to acknowledge that they also needed to be progressive at IMO...make a link between environment and transport ministries” (interview 18). At the same time, since not all EU member states were part of the SHAC and it was not acting on behalf of the EU, it cannot be considered part of the overall EU external action.

Within the EU sphere, EU institutional actors sought to build capacity within IMO to address climate considerations. For instance, the Commission sponsored a capacity-building project on technology for emissions reductions (interviews 19, 24). Outreach was mainly concentrated in transport contexts, with a few discussions in climate spheres trying to draw attention to the shipping process. DG CLIMA utilised the Green Diplomacy Network, but this was done with limited input from DG MOVE (interviews 12, 19, 21). The lower level of political attention attributed to shipping largely

kept it off the radar of the G7 and the G20 (interview 12). The Commission also gave presentations at UNFCCC events (interview 16). Once a position was agreed upon, the officials of EU member states reached out to shipping colleagues around the world with whom they had close contacts (interview 20). The Council Presidency informally coordinated with member states to use existing ties and relationships with geographic areas (for instance, Spain and Latin America) and contacts in the climate and shipping spheres (interviews 20, 22). At the negotiations themselves, the Council Presidency's climate negotiator explained potential scenarios to shipping delegates and provided insight into the UNFCCC's process (interviews 15, 20, 22). An EU member state official summarised the approach as follows: "A lot of people in IMO, they do not know. They do not have this climate background [...] when you explain it several times and you have really good arguments and some numbers to show, then you can kind of convince them that this is really important" (interview 19).

Looking at the EU-specific approach (that is to say, not SHAC), in the early stages, the coherence of its external action seemed **ambiguous** in that it was largely transportation-centric, with separate but non-conflicting input from the climate sphere. However, at the MEPC 72, the EU showed signs of **synergy** thanks to the inclusion of a climate negotiator who worked towards making the link with the UNFCCC.

Influential conditions. The limited appetite for climate action within IMO seemed to affect the coherence of the EU's objectives in the negotiations as compared to the UNFCCC. Furthermore, a lack of political interest in the IMO negotiations at both the European and international levels appeared to somewhat reduce the potential for a more coherent approach to the EU's external action.

Respondents noted that since IMO is primarily populated by transport ministries and industry, it puts less emphasis on climate action than the UNFCCC (interviews 12, 13, 18, 19). While there was not as strong a push for ambitious action as in the UNFCCC, there was buy-in from industry and major shipping states for the IMO to adopt some sort of strategy to reduce GHG emissions (interviews 12, 14, 18, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24). This opening was in part triggered by the Marshall Islands' motivation and the Paris Agreement. At the same time, there was less ambition among other key actors (interviews 12, 14, 16, 18, 19, 24).

Within this opening for action, the EU had to adjust its position to something that had a reasonable chance of success in the negotiations. As an EU official said, "[w]e're dealing with 174 Member States, quite a few of which have a lot of differing concerns [...] sometimes you have to sort of moderate the tone so that you can get something through" (interview 19). An EU official even acknowledged that the EU's final negotiation target was likely unachievable and used that argument to convince reticent member states to support it, saying that "[y]ou know as well as we do that this would not be the end outcome" (interview 12). In that sense, while the IMO context provided an opening for action, it nonetheless limited the ambition of the EU's objectives and, ultimately, potential synergies with the UNFCCC.

The coherence of the EU's external action seemed affected by a lack of political interest not only at the EU level but also internationally. EU and EU member state officials noted the difficulties associated with bringing the negotiations to more political – both bilateral and multilateral – settings. For instance, at the One Planet Summit, the Tony de Brum Declaration was given only two minutes, despite France organising the meeting (interview 16). EU officials also struggled to convince colleagues to bring IMO up at various bilateral meetings on climate or other issues, noting that “[i]t’s politically less sexy of course, people tend to talk about other things” (interview 12). However, this lack of interest did not seem limited to the EU. IMO remained “sort of a little quiet water on its own” (interview 19), and this complicated the EU’s efforts to synergise with its typical – and often political – climate diplomacy in the UNFCCC.

Finally, it is worth noting that while no significant differences in approach between the climate and transport spheres within the EU emerged (interviews 12, 15, 18, 20), this could be tempered by the fact that the ambiguous competence within the EU gave climate-minded EU actors room to push for action elsewhere and that DG CLIMA had dedicated only one person full-time to the negotiations (interviews 12, 14, 15, 19).

Discussion

This article shows that the EU’s approach to the negotiations leading to ICAO CORSIA in 2016 and the IMO Initial Strategy in 2018 was relatively incoherent compared to its approach to the UNFCCC (see Table 1). Neither the EU’s objectives in ICAO nor those in IMO synergised with its approach in the UNFCCC. Moreover, its external action in the lead-up to each of the negotiations was rather isolated from its UNFCCC apparatus. However, at the final negotiations, the EU successfully brought in climate negotiators who helped to incorporate their UNFCCC experiences into ICAO and IMO. The article first looked at four conditions that could affect this cross-forum coherence: two internal to the EU and two external. It then discussed the role that each condition plays in shaping the EU’s cross-forum coherence.

First, externally speaking, the constellation of actors and industry interests in ICAO and IMO shaped the EU’s objectives for each negotiation. In ICAO, the historical resistance to ETS and the disinclination of key players to agree to an MBM meant that the EU had to adjust its objective. In IMO, industry acceptance and the engagement of key players like the Marshall Islands paved the way for an agreement. However, a reluctance to take radical action in line with the Paris Agreement made the EU temper expectations. This context reduced coherence with the UNFCCC and shaped the scope of EU engagement in the two fora. Second, the technical, aviation-focused working culture of ICAO seemed to limit the utility of the EU’s external action regarding these negotiations, especially in those multilateral settings used for UNFCCC diplomacy. Third, while originally conceptualised as an internal condition, a lack of political interest at both the international and EU levels seemed to isolate the IMO negotiations and limit the EU’s potential to engage in outreach elsewhere. Fourth,

internal divergences between DG CLIMA and DG MOVE in terms of priorities appeared to limit the potential for a more ambitious (synergetic) objective in the ICAO negotiations vis-à-vis the UNFCCC. Finally, a lack of coordination between EU climate and transportation constituencies also seemed to limit the coherence of outreach activities for ICAO.

Overall, the EU's relative incoherence appears to be largely triggered by conditions related to the two fora themselves. The overarching way in which the latter frame climate change clearly limits the overall potential for cross-forum coherence. Hence, it is the external conditions that play a driving role, which are then reinforced by internal difficulties, particularly when it comes to external action. It could be argued that a further push by the EU might even have been counter-productive, as the appetite for ambitious climate action seemed to be quite limited in either forum. This demonstrates that coherence is not necessarily synonymous with a successful outcome.

[Table 1 here]

Conclusion

By examining the EU's objectives and external action in the ICAO CORSIA and IMO Initial Strategy negotiations, this article highlights the relative incoherence with which the EU approaches climate-related negotiations in international transport. The constellation of actors and interests in ICAO and IMO limited the extent to which the EU could act coherently vis-à-vis the UNFCCC: what was achievable in the UNFCCC was not directly transferrable to ICAO and IMO. At the same time, the isolation of ICAO (its technical nature) and IMO (a lack of political interest) also appeared to contribute to the relative incoherence. This incoherence then seemed to be exacerbated by different EU internal considerations: a lack of interest at the political level, diverging priorities and limited coordination. These findings differ from the expected transposition of the EU's climate leadership and diplomatic apparatus.

Overall, this article makes two main contributions to the literature. First, the findings suggest that the EU has limited potential to be a coherent climate actor on transport issues outside the UNFCCC. The findings therefore nuance the EU's position as a climate leader in international climate governance. The EU's leadership in one international forum does not automatically extend to another, even if they deal with broadly the same issue area. Second, in looking at the conditions shaping the cross-forum coherence of the EU, the article identifies the conditions that actors need to overcome to synergise their work across climate fora. This is particularly important considering the increasingly transversal and polycentric nature of international climate governance.

At the same time, the analysis remains rather abstract. It is a first step in unpacking the extent to which climate action and leadership move beyond the UNFCCC. By dividing coherence into objectives and external action, I have developed a relatively streamlined method to assess

coherence, which could be extended to other actors. Although they face the same external context, they may not have the same internal coordination challenges as the EU. For instance, respondents stressed that a growing number of states – including the US and Brazil – send the same climate negotiators to ICAO and IMO. Future research could offer more detailed and systematic insight into the impact of institutional and structural differences in the fora. Such research could further refine our understanding of the difficulties associated with climate action in ICAO and IMO, at a time when the climate crisis is becoming all the more apparent and further action is urgently needed.

Finally, although outside the scope of the paper, the findings potentially offer insight into the implications of the “Fit for 55” legislation for future EU climate action in ICAO and IMO and its coherence with the UNFCCC. With respect to transport, the “Fit for 55” initiative has two major aspects: a reform of the aviation ETS and the inclusion of shipping in ETS (Erbach and Jensen 2022). Given that the package contributes to working towards the EU’s decarbonisation objectives and the UNFCCC’s NDC, it will likely increase the cross-forum coherence of the EU’s objectives. Furthermore, it can encourage synergies and communication among the climate and transport constituencies in the EU. Yet, as this article has demonstrated, the EU’s relative incoherence in ICAO and IMO is primarily caused by the unique contexts of each forum. In other words, the legislation does not change the broader context in which the EU pursues climate action in those fora. In that sense, the two “Fit for 55” aspects mentioned above arguably represent an opportunity for the EU to again use its internal instruments to indirectly push for change at the international level, rather than categorically changing its approach in the two fora.

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Appendix: List of interviews

Case 1: ICAO

1. 14/06/2021, EU official, MS Teams
2. 16/06/2021, EU official, MS Teams
3. 17/06/2021, EU official, MS Teams
4. 30/06/2021, EU official, MS Teams
5. 01/07/2021, EU member state official, MS Teams
6. 06/07/2021, EU official, MS Teams
7. 06/07/2021, EU official, MS Teams
8. 27/07/2021, EU official, MS Teams
9. 28/07/2021, EU member state official, MS Teams
10. 29/07/2021, ECAC member state official, MS Teams
11. 11/08/2021, EU member state official and ICAO official (2 people), MS Teams

Case 2: IMO

12. 05/02/2020, EU official, In-person
13. 10/02/2020, EU member state official, In-person
14. 11/02/2020, EU member state official, In-person
15. 12/02/2020, EU official, In-person
16. 18/02/2020, EU member state official, In-person
17. 28/02/2020, EU member state official, Skype (audio only)
18. 02/03/2020, Non-EU expert, In-person
19. 02/03/2020, EU official, In-person
20. 03/03/2020, EU member state official, Skype
21. 10/03/2020, EU member state official, Skype (audio only)
22. 13/03/2020, EU member state official, Skype
23. 21/12/2020, IMO member state official (non-EU), Skype
24. 22/12/2020, IMO official, Skype

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Table 1: EU cross-forum coherence and influential conditions

	ICAO CORSIA	IMO Initial Strategy
Objectives	Conflicting	Ambiguous
<i>Influential conditions</i>	Key actors and interest constellations in ICAO; Clashes in priorities between DG MOVE and DG CLIMA	Key actors and interest constellations in IMO
External action	Ambiguous -> Synergetic	Ambiguous -> Synergetic
<i>Influential conditions</i>	Technical nature of ICAO; Lack of coordination between climate and transport ministries/Directorate Generals	Lack of political interest at EU and international level