Evaluating EU responsiveness to the evolution of the International Regime Complex on Climate Change

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Abstract:

Over the past decades, the international governance of climate change has evolved from a singular forum—the UNFCCC—to a larger international regime complex of a variety of fora covering different aspects of the broader climate change issue. The international regime complex on climate change (IRCCC) presents particular challenges and opportunities for ambitious climate actors like the European Union. However, it remains unclear how much importance the EU has attributed to the non-UNFCCC fora of the complex over time and whether the EU is responsive in its climate diplomacy to the evolving international governance structure. This paper therefore addresses the question: *To what extent has the importance that the EU has placed on non-UNFCCC fora coincided with the evolution of the international regime complex on climate change?* Using qualitative coding of Council Conclusions related to multilateral climate diplomacy (1994-2018), the article finds that the EU is indeed responsive, though to varying degrees, to the evolution of the IRCCC. Additionally, the EU has been more responsive to fora in certain policy areas than others, though the extent this importance is reciprocated beyond the UNFCCC context is called into question. This article therefore provides an updated perspective of not only the importance of non-UNFCCC fora to EU climate diplomacy but also in the IRCCC more broadly.

Keywords: European Union / climate diplomacy / international climate politics / regime complexity

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1. Introduction

While the European Union (EU) has established itself as an ambitious climate actor, the context in which it conducts its multilateral climate diplomacy has dramatically shifted over the past decades. The EU's climate diplomacy, or its negotiation activities relating to international climate policy (Woolcock 2012), now takes place in an institutional context that has expanded well beyond the confines of the traditionally important United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The UNFCCC is no longer the "only show in town" (van Asselt 2014b), but part of a larger polycentric arrangement referred to as the international regime complex on climate change (IRCCC). The IRCCC consists of a variety of different multilateral institutions, or fora, dealing with different aspects of the multifaceted climate change issue. International climate change governance is thus spread out amongst a non-hierarchical assortment of different fora, ranging from multilateral treaty-based frameworks on climate-related policy areas to smaller, club-like settings. Diplomacy in different multilateral fora can no longer seemingly be approached or analysed in isolation (Alter and Meunier 2009).

Our research seeks to unpack how the EU has responded to the proliferation of international fora dealing with climate change and the changing landscape of the IRCCC. The extent the EU has responded—its responsiveness—is not so much a passive reaction, but rather a reflection of how the EU as an international actor approaches international climate governance. This is important for two reasons. First, it allows us to evaluate the importance the EU placed in its climate diplomacy on

other fora in the entire IRCCC where climate is increasingly dealt with, instead of at the UNFCCC only. Second, as the EU is a major actor in international climate negotiations, this provides insight into the actual weight of the different fora of the IRCCC. While there is evidence that the EU has placed importance on the other fora of the complex at specific moments, it remains unclear if and how the EU has responded to the evolution of the IRCCC and if such responsiveness is durable.

The literature on EU climate diplomacy, which has traditionally focused on the EU's activity in the UNFCCC in isolation, does not provide a sufficient lens for understanding the extent to which the EU has responded to the IRCCC. This is puzzling, as the institutional changes that have accompanied the development of the IRCCC could have significant implications for EU climate diplomacy. Therefore, we lack a longitudinal view on how the EU has responded to institutional changes within the IRCCC, with respect to how it has placed importance on the different fora of the complex over time. In order to evaluate the EU's responsiveness to the evolution of the IRCCC, we ask the following research question: *To what extent has the importance that the EU has placed on non-UNFCCC fora coincided with the evolution of the international regime complex on climate change?*

We examine the extent the EU responds to the changing international governance of climate change, as well as the durability of the response, i.e. whether that response had a long-lasting effect. In this vein, we conceptualise responsiveness as the extent to which the importance placed on non-UNFCCC fora follows the evolution, or institutional change over time, in the IRCCC (Harknett and Yalcin 2012). We evaluate responsiveness by examining references to multilateral fora of the IRCCC that were mentioned in Conclusions adopted by the Council of the EU about the EU's climate diplomacy over 1994-2018. The period 1994-2018 was chosen as it encompasses the entry into force of the UNFCCC (1994) up through four important climate-related agreements in the period 2015-2018: the Paris Agreement (2015) under the UNFCCC, the ICAO 'Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation' (CORSIA) (2016), the Montreal Protocol's 'Kigali Amendment' (2016), and the IMO 'Initial Strategy on the Reduction of Greenhouse Gas' Emissions from Shipping (2018), thus well-encapsulating the development of international climate governance in the IRCCC. Although we do not exclude that the EU has played an important role in the development of the IRCCC by for instance promoting the creation of fora, the evacuation of certain climate issues to non-UNFCCC fora or the enlargement of the mandate of non-UNFCCC fora, this paper does not address that question. Instead, it is interested in the extent to which the EU's climate diplomacy takes the existence of the IRCCC at a certain moment into account. In other words, the paper does not focus on the EU as a (co-)shaper or (co-)designer of the IRCCC, but rather as an actor within a given institutional context.

The article finds that the EU has been responsive to some degree to the vast majority of fora within the IRCCC, though it finds no clear pattern in the durability of responsiveness. However, the EU has indeed placed more importance on some fora than others, particularly those related to the

economy, sustainable development, and transport. Nonetheless, it is less clear how much climate and the UNFCCC figures into those fora outside of the immediate UNFCCC context.

The article is structured as follows. First, we present the general context in which EU climate diplomacy takes place. In the following section, we develop the conceptual framework for the analysis. We then explain our methodology and empirical process. Afterwards, we present and discuss the empirical findings of our research. Finally, we conclude and discuss future avenues for research.

2. The context in which the EU acts

2.1. International regime complex on climate change

As climate change is in fact not one specific issue, but instead a collection of many different issues related to increased greenhouse gas (GHG) concentrations (van Asselt 2014b; Keohane and Victor 2011), international climate governance is currently spread across many different fora. It can thus be better conceptualised as an international regime complex. Introduced by Raustiala and Victor (2004), a regime complex refers to "an array of partially overlapping and non-hierarchical institutions governing a particular area." Instead of one overarching umbrella institution, there are many different fora governing diverse but interrelated policy areas. Actors are presented with multiple fora for pursuing their objectives (Alter and Meunier 2009). A subset of the literature on regime complexes has focused on how actors choose or modify different fora based on their objectives at a given moment to achieve a favourable outcome. Yet, how actors address the entirety (or which fora) of the regime complex and how they potentially adapt their diplomacy to the evolving structure has remained unaddressed in the literature.

Keohane and Victor (2011) apply the concept to international climate change governance, introducing the term "International Regime Complex on Climate Change". The international regime complex and its constitutive fora, which exist independently of each other but overlap in their scope and membership, have since been a common theme in the literature (cf: Abbott, 2012; Biedenkopf, 2017; Falkner, 2016; Jordan, Huitema, van Asselt, & Forster, 2018). While these conceptualisations differ slightly as to the extent of the international regime complex, they stress the non-hierarchical, if not fragmented, nature of climate governance. These works have primarily focused on mapping the complex and the potential impact of fora overlap and interaction on climate governance. Little empirical attention has been paid to the importance of different non-UNFCCC fora in the climate diplomacy of the main actors in the IRCCC.

2.2. Evolution of the IRCCC

When it entered into force in 1994, the UNFCCC was originally envisioned as the main forum for international cooperation on the reduction of GHG emissions. However, since then a "Cambrian explosion" of sorts has occurred, with a multitude of different fora emerging from different institutional

and political contexts to deal with different policy areas relating to climate change (Keohane and Victor 2011). Figure 1 depicts the emergence of different fora into the complex over the period of 1994-2018.

We based this list of fora on the literature (van Asselt 2016; van Asselt and Zelli 2018; Keohane and Victor 2011), supplemented by the fora mentioned in the EU's Council Conclusions adopted in the run-up to annual COPs to the UNFCCC (see further). This approach allowed us to include fora that might not have been mentioned in either the literature or EU documents. To establish the year in which the forum became a part of the IRCCC, we determined the date at which a given forum became a venue for addressing a policy area related to global climate change governance. For fora created specially to address climate-related policy areas, like the Major Economies Meeting (MEM; later Major Economies Forum – MEF), we considered this to be the year in which the fora were established or first convened. For other fora that traditionally deal with policy areas beyond climate, we considered their entrance into the IRCCC to correspond with the year in which these fora began to routinely address climate-related policy areas. For the sake of simplicity, once a forum enters the complex, it remains there unless it has been explicitly disbanded or no longer convenes.

Broadly, the types of fora in the IRCCC include environmental treaty-based frameworks (TBF), soft law arrangements (non-binding international arrangements or declarations; SLA), international organizations (IO), informal settings (INF), and mixed arrangements (hybrid state and non-state; MIX). The fora deal with the following policy area categories: climate-specific, other environment, sustainable development, economic, energy, general diplomacy, and transport (van Asselt 2014a; van Asselt and Zelli 2018).

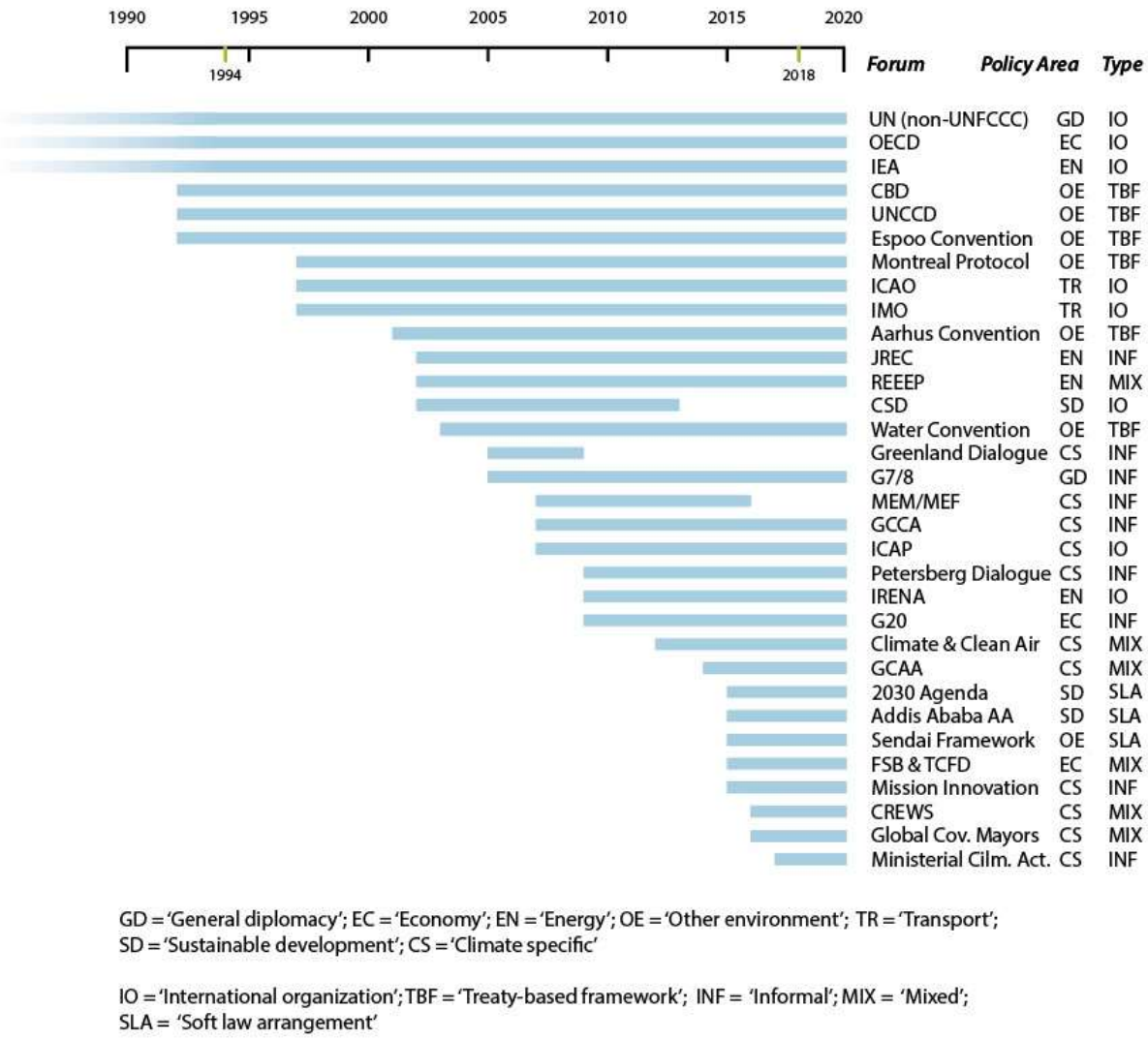

Figure 1: Timeline of the evolution of the IRCCC (inclusion of different fora)

Over time, the IRCCC has expanded outward from the UNFCCC, though the UNFCCC remains the de facto centre of gravity of international climate governance. For example, the Kyoto Protocol (1997) delegates certain GHG reduction matters to both the International Maritime Organization (IMO) and the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) for their respective transport sectors, as well as the Montreal Protocol, a separate multilateral agreement focused on the regulation of ozone-depleting gasses. Additionally, climate change issues ascended to the high politics of international relations in the 2000s, with different international organizations and other multilateral fora taking up discussion (Oberthür 2001). For example, the Group of Eight (G8; later Group of Seven – G7) began treating climate change as a substantive point of discussion in 2005 (Slaughter 2017). Similarly, the Group of Twenty (G20) began discussing climate change related issues in 2009 (Kim and Chung 2012). Other fora dealing with climate change have emerged, as actors, frustrated with the slow progress of climate action in the UNFCCC, looked elsewhere to the achieve their climate policy objectives (van Asselt 2014b; Kim and Chung 2012). More recently, the Paris Agreement (2015) ushered in a new era of climate governance, with a bottom-up approach to

GHG reduction and a push for increased ambition (Held and Roger 2018). In 2015, several soft-law arrangements were also adopted relating to the post-2015 development agenda: Addis Ababa Action Agenda, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction, and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. These arrangements facilitate synergies between climate objectives and development financing (Shine and Campillo 2016). Additionally, more mixed-nature fora, like the Global Climate Action Agenda (GCAA) have emerged to encourage state and non-state actors to cooperate on reaching climate objectives.

2.3. EU climate diplomacy in and beyond the UNFCCC

Since the early 1990s, the EU has pursued ambitious positions in international climate governance, advocating for binding international agreements on GHG emission reduction and other closely associated issues (Wurzel et al. 2017). The EU has at different moments been more successful at presenting itself a global leader on climate change. Following the United States' refusal to ratify the Kyoto Protocol in 2001, the EU played a leading role in not only saving the Protocol but also the larger international multilateral climate regime (Oberthür and Roche Kelly 2008). However, the EU was largely side-lined from the negotiations in Copenhagen in 2009, dealing a serious blow to its credibility and standing as a climate leader (Afionis 2017; Kilian and Elgström 2010). The EU subsequently reinvented its climate leadership aspirations, transforming into a "leadiator", working to build bridges and consensus with other international actors on climate issues (Bäckstrand and Elgström 2013). The EU's role in the successful outcome at COP 21 in 2015 cemented its leadiator role (Oberthür 2016).

As different fora have emerged, EU climate diplomacy has acknowledged the potential to expand into those areas. Since 2011, and after the EU's debacle in Copenhagen, such potential has been routinely reflected via references to the other multilateral fora of IRCCC in Climate Diplomacy Joint Reflection Papers (2011, 2013, 2015, 2016) authored by the Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS). While these reflection papers offer hints that the EU might be placing increasing importance on non-UNFCCC fora, their sporadic issuance and varying structures do not by themselves facilitate a systematic answer to our research question.

In its broadest sense, EU climate diplomacy can be divided into two separate, yet inter-related spheres: activities in multilateral settings (Torney and Cross 2018) and bilateral outreach to third countries, often via EU delegations or the "Green Diplomacy Network" (Biedenkopf and Petri 2019). While the importance of bilateral outreach has been highlighted in the Climate Diplomacy Joint Reflection Papers, our analysis focuses on multilateral climate diplomacy that takes place in fora of three or more states—here, the constitutive fora of the IRCCC (Jørgensen 2009). Our understanding of 'climate diplomacy' as a multilateral undertaking thus fits with our interest in the effect of the IRCCC, of which the constitutive units of the IRCCC are multilateral fora, on climate diplomacy.

The presence of these Papers would seemingly trigger a larger scholarly reflection on the EU's response to the changing institutional landscape of the IRCCC. However, that has not been the case. The literature has evoked the importance of other multilateral fora with respect to complementing EU diplomacy in the UNFCCC (c.f. Dupont, Oberthür, & Biedenkopf, 2018), albeit mostly with respect to specific moments or negotiations. For instance, Schunz (2012) notes the increased importance placed by the EU on the G8 following the US withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol, with the UK placing climate considerations on the agenda. In 2007, the EU created the Global Climate Change Alliance to assist vulnerable developing countries to respond to climate change (Lightfoot 2015). In the run-up to the negotiations in Copenhagen in 2009, the EU was active in the G8 and the MEM/MEF (van Schaik and Schunz 2012). The EU also seemed to place importance on the G7, G20 as well as various UN bodies in the leadup to COP21 in 2015 (Obergassel et al. 2016; Oberthür and Groen 2018). These examples mostly show the EU's activities in club fora, with less emphasis on other types of fora in the IRCCC. They emphasise the need for a much larger view on how the EU's action in other multilateral fora in the regime complex has served its climate diplomacy.

Overall, the literature has presented the EU as an ambitious climate actor with the capabilities necessary to engage and negotiate with other international actors (Damro et al. 2017; Vogler 2017). However, while there are some indications that the EU has been responsive to the evolution of the IRCCC at certain moments – most notably the observation that the EU is present in a wide spectrum of fora across the IRCCC dealing with diverse policy areas – there is insufficient evidence to support any larger claims on EU responsiveness over time.

3. Conceptual framework

From broader work on actor behaviour in regime complexes, we know that international actors, including the EU, are boundedly rational (Drezner 2009). Limited in their own cognitive capacity, attention span, and available resources, actors will seek to act in a way that they perceive to best meet their objectives (Jupille et al. 2013). When confronted with a multitude of fora overseeing a given policy area, they will only focus on the fora they believe to be most relevant or important.

As a response to changes in their environment, international actors, like the EU, are likely to modify their behaviour (Harknett and Yalcin 2012; Frieden 1999). Here, the change in the environment is the evolution of the IRCCC, and the expected modified behaviour is that the EU places importance on not only the UNFCCC but also potentially on other fora of the IRCCC (Jupille et al. 2013). Indeed, as an actor with the ambition to play a leading role in multilateral climate negotiations, the EU would logically place importance on new fora in the IRCCC. The EU's responsiveness to changes in the IRCCC is thus the extent to which the importance placed by the EU on given fora coincides with the institutional evolution of the IRCCC.

Yet, the durability of that response may vary: the newly emerged forum may be important in the EU's diplomacy for a longer period of time, or the attention paid to that forum may disappear over

time. As such, we develop three types of responsiveness, depending on how durable the EU's response is. First, *continuous responsiveness* means that the EU references the forum in question consistently over its lifespan in the IRCCC. This implies that the forum has become a serious consideration for EU climate diplomacy. Second, *sporadic responsiveness* means that the EU intermittently references the forum in question, with a smattering of references over time. This implies that the forum in question is only of occasional importance to EU climate diplomacy. While it is relevant enough to be useful at specific moments, it is not consistent and therefore of relatively tertiary importance. This could mean that the EU's preferences are temporarily jeopardized within the status quo arrangement at these moments or that the forum in question provides a punctual, fortuitous opening for the EU. Third, *initial responsiveness* means that the EU only references the forum in question within the first several years of its creation. Here, the EU is initially attuned to changes in the IRCCC, but then the attention for the forum disappears.

4. Methodology

In order to examine the EU's responsiveness, this article relies on the qualitative coding of Council Conclusions over the time period 1994-2018. The underlying idea is the following: as the specific Conclusions we analyse pertain to the EU's climate diplomacy, the referencing of a given forum in the Conclusions implies a certain significance of the forum to the EU's climate diplomacy at a given moment. Hence, if a forum is referenced in the Council Conclusions, it implies that the forum is relevant in some capacity to EU climate diplomacy, otherwise it would not be included. If that reference then coincides with the emergence of the forum in the IRCCC, the EU is considered responsive to the evolution of the IRCCC.

While Council Conclusions are the product of a unique institutional process, they represent the EU's understanding of a given policy area at a specific moment (Aydın-Düzgit 2013). As the Council is arguably the most important political organ in EU climate diplomacy (Dupont and Oberthür 2017), its output – here Council Conclusions – can be seen as reasonable representation of the EU perspective. While Council Conclusions are public, diplomatic documents with relatively open-ended language and structure, we assume that a reference within the Council Conclusions to a multilateral forum is indicative that the EU has placed importance on its activity therein (Larsen 2018).

We utilise two specific sets of Council Conclusions for this analysis: those issued that pertain specifically to the EU's diplomacy in the UNFCCC and then those relating to other, non-UNFCCC, fora of the IRCCC. We first unpack the importance of particular fora for the EU in function of the EU's climate diplomacy in the UNFCCC context and we then check, as a complementary analysis, whether this importance is indeed reciprocated in the non-UNFCCC fora of the IRCCC.

The first set consists of the Council Conclusions related to the UNFCCC COP meetings, annually issued by the Environment Council in the lead-up of every COP. Analysing these Council Conclusions ensures a systematic comparison over time of the importance of different IRCCC fora. Despite the fact that they are adopted in the lead-up to the central forum of the IRCCC – the

UNFCCC – these Council Conclusions are systematically-issued manifestations of the EU's multilateral climate diplomacy. The first set of Council Conclusions also includes Conclusions of the Economic and Financial Affairs (ECOFIN) and Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) as they both represent subject areas previously under the domain of the Environment Council and relevant to the UNFCCC process: climate finance was transferred to ECOFIN in 2009 (Skovgaard 2015), while climate diplomacy somewhat shifted into the purview of the FAC (Schunz 2017). In total, we look at 47 Council Conclusions over the time period of 1994-2018: 26 Environment Council Conclusions relating to the preparation of an EU position for UNFCCC COPs (1994-2018); 15 ECOFIN Conclusions dedicated to climate finance (2009-2018); and 6 FAC Conclusions dedicated to climate diplomacy (2011, 2013, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018). The Conclusions were coded manually in NVivo. For a reference to be considered a "multilateral forum," the forum needed to specifically involve two or more actors besides the EU and be a reference to specific, punctual diplomatic activity or output of a recurring forum outside the UNFCCC and its associated institutions. Additionally, the EU needed to be active in some capacity therein. This excluded open-ended references to a general need for multilateral cooperation or one-time conferences or events. Categories, both with respect to policy area and forum type, were coded as they emerged, using those proposed by van Asselt and Zelli (2018) as a starting point (see section 2.2 and Figure 1).

The analysis of a second set of Council Conclusions looks at Conclusions relating to the EU's participation in one of the non-UNFCCC fora of the IRCCC. We examine the extent to which the UNFCCC is referenced and therefore the extent the importance is reciprocated. Here, we consider a reference evoking both another forum of the IRCCC and the UNFCCC (including a related meeting or output) together indicative of that forum's importance in climate governance. We thus evaluate whether the EU is as responsive as it would seem based on the first set of UNFCCC-related Conclusions. We began with Conclusions over 1994-2018 that referenced one of the non-UNFCCC fora of the IRCCC. Of these, we selected those that also evoked the UNFCCC for coding. We ultimately arrived at 63 Conclusions meeting our criteria, which were coded manually in NVivo, issued from 2000-2018 (see further). The breakdown from the different configurations is as follows: 29 Environment Council Conclusions (separate from the ones adopted in the lead-up to the UNFCCC COP), 11 from FAC, 8 from the Agriculture & Fisheries Council, 8 from the General Affairs Council, 5 from the Transport, Telecommunications & Energy Council, 1 from the Competitiveness Council, and 1 from the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council.

However, there are important caveats with this second set of Council Conclusions, which makes that they are only used as a complementary analysis to check our UNFCCC-centric findings of the first set. First, the Council Conclusions regarding the non-UNFCCC fora are not as systematically issued as those regarding the UNFCCC, which makes an annual coding of the EU's responsiveness on the basis of that second set of Conclusions impossible. Second, not all fora of the IRCCC are regularly mentioned in Council Conclusions, for a number of reasons (EU membership, degree of formality, coordination level, etc.). Therefore, the absence of a reference in

our data set does not necessarily mean the absence of importance. Third, the Council Document Registry is only reliable with Conclusions issued after 1999, which limits the period of analysis with the second set of Conclusions to 2000-2018.

The three types of responsiveness – continuous, sporadic and initial – are operationalised as follows. For *continuous* responsiveness, the forum needs to be referenced regularly with gaps of no more than two years between references, which also accounts for calendar mismatches (e.g. a forum is established in December of one year, but not referenced until the next) or institutional delays in the IRCCC. For *initial* responsiveness, the EU needs to reference the forum within the two years following its emergence, but not after that initial time period. As for *sporadic*, that refers to all other references not fitting the first two (e.g. references in the first two years following emergence and then sparingly later or a small number of irregular references only beginning after the initial two years).

5. Findings

We first examine the extent to which the references to non-UNFCCC fora figure into the first set of Conclusions over time. Next, we study this evolution using the three types of responsiveness. Furthermore, we examine the EU's responsiveness with respect to the IRCCC by sorting via relevant policy areas and types of fora to see if any patterns emerge regarding the EU's responsiveness. Finally, we examine references to the UNFCCC in the second set of Conclusions regarding other IRCCC fora to see if the importance the EU places on these fora in the UNFCCC context is reciprocated in other settings.

5.1. Share of non-UNFCCC references

We first examine whether the share of references to non-UNFCCC fora has grown over time, and we then examine whether the moment in time that references to specific non-UNFCCC fora started to appear in Council Conclusions coincides with the emergence of the forum in question in the IRCCC. Figure 2 shows that, in general, references to non-UNFCCC fora have increased over the time period 1994-2018. From 2016 to 2018, references to non-UNFCCC fora made up more than 30 per cent of all references to different fora, as opposed to just over 10 per cent in 1994 and even no references to non-UNFCCC fora in some years before 2001. However, this increase – and thus the EU's responsiveness – has not been linear. There is some fluctuation over time, even after the share of non-UNFCCC references first took off in the early 2000s.

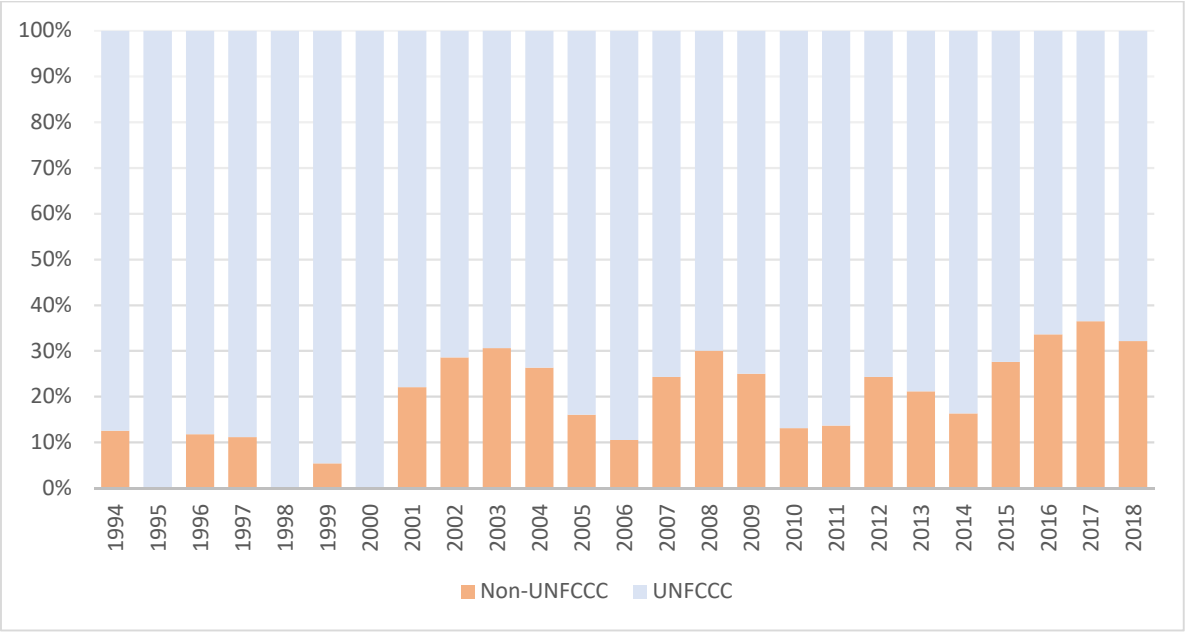

Figure 2: Share of references to non-UNFCCC fora of references to all multilateral fora

A closer look at the data reveals four peaks corresponding with important moments in the evolution of the IRCCC: 2001-2004, 2007-2009, 2012-2013, and 2015-2018. In each of these peaks non-UNFCCC references made up at least one-fifth of all references for a given year. First, the period 2001-2004 follows both the adoption of the Kyoto Protocol and the implication of ICAO, IMO, and Montreal Protocol on GHG reductions, as well as the US withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol. Second, the period 2007-2009 fits with building up momentum towards the Copenhagen COP and the increasing presence of non-UNFCCC multilateral fora to supplement activity in the UNFCCC. Third, the period 2012-2013 does not necessarily figure into our earlier understanding of the evolution of the IRCCC. However, we note the importance of negotiations in ICAO which were linked to the possible inclusion of aviation in the EU's Emissions Trading System (van Asselt 2014a). Fourth, the period 2015-2018 corresponds with significant shifts in the IRCCC after the adoption of the Paris Agreement. Our matching of these peaks of references to non-UNFCCC fora to different developments in the evolution of the IRCCC also suggests that the increased importance placed by the EU on non-UNFCCC fora at several moments coincides with important moments in the evolution of the IRCCC.

We now examine the type of responsiveness for each of the non-UNFCCC fora. Figure 3 incorporates the number of references to individual non-UNFCCC fora in the Council Conclusions (bubbles) as compared with their emergence in the IRCCC. The EU's responsiveness is broken down as follows (out of 32 total fora included in our conceptualisation of the IRCCC): 10 fora with initial responsiveness, 9 continuous, 12 sporadic, and 1 with no responsiveness. Several notable examples of the different types of EU responsiveness or lack thereof stand out. As for continuous responsiveness, the EU regularly referenced the other fora linked in the Kyoto Protocol (Montreal, ICAO, and IMO), albeit with a delay into the early 2000s. The EU was also continuously responsive

to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, while its references to the Commission on Sustainable Development (CSD) were relatively sporadic. Additionally, references to the other two Rio Conventions were also late and sporadic: the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) and the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD). With respect to initial responsiveness, for several fora that emerge post-2005, such as the International Carbon Action Partnership (ICAP), the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA), Mission Innovation, and the Global Covenant of Mayors, among others, the EU initially references them, but the references fall off thereafter.

There are also several examples of fora to which the EU was less, or even not, responsive. The EU did not reference the Petersberg Dialogue, which was created by Germany in 2010 to serve as an important high-level, informal forum for political discussions relating to climate. It also stopped referencing the MEM/MEF in 2009 (thus only initially responsive).

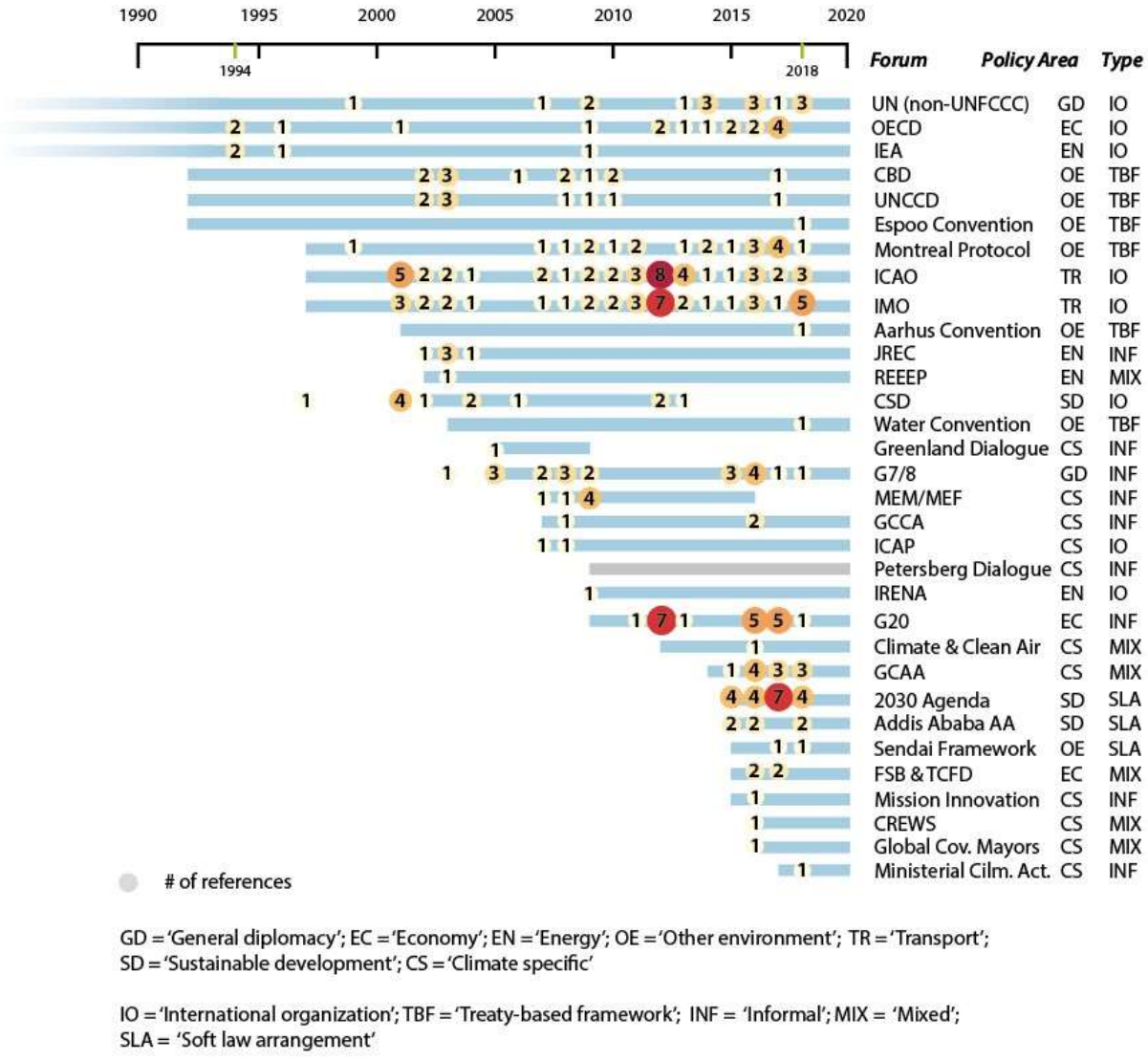

Figure 3: Number of references to non-UNFCCC fora over time

More generally, Figure 3 also shows references to non-UNFCCC fora were rare in the 1990s. At this stage EU climate diplomacy was primarily concerned with the negotiation of what would become the Kyoto Protocol (Wurzel et al. 2017). The EU was primarily focused on the UNFCCC and not on other fora. Indeed, the OECD and IEA, as evidenced in the Council Conclusions, were primarily inputs into the UNFCCC process at that stage. It is, by contrast, in the early 2000s that references to other fora take off.

5.2 Policy areas of non-UNFCCC fora referenced

We now explore variations of the EU's responsiveness based on policy area on which the non-UNFCCC forum principally focuses. Figure 4 is an adaptation of the timeline of the evolution of the IRCCC (in terms of emerging fora), with the different fora sorted by their respective policy area, combined with the number of references to specific fora (bubbles). Overall, we see some variation amongst the EU's references to different policy areas. This supports varying degrees of responsiveness based on policy area. These variations broadly correspond to the different types of responsiveness – continuous, sporadic, and initial.

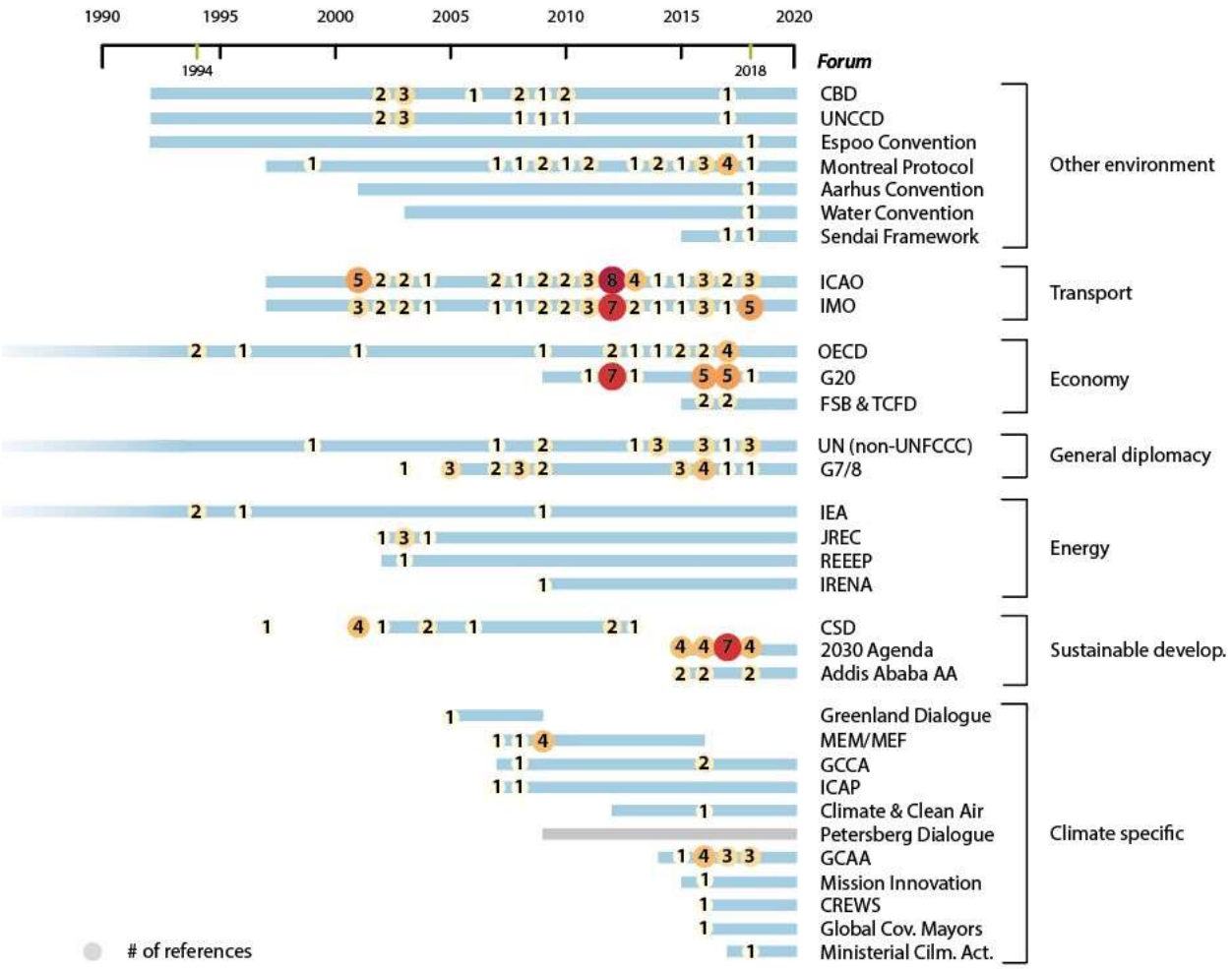

Figure 4: Number of references to non-UNFCCC fora over time grouped by policy area

Four findings can be derived from Figure 4, looking at the dominant type of responsiveness in each policy area. While there are of course exceptions, this assessment of the durability of the EU's responsiveness provides insight into which policy areas are of most importance to EU climate diplomacy.

First, the EU showed *initial* responsiveness in two policy areas: 'energy' and 'climate specific'. This limited attention suggests that non-UNFCCC fora in these policy areas are of the least importance to EU climate diplomacy, which may be related to the fact that these are two policy areas that figure under the umbrella of the UNFCCC. Second, the EU was *continuously* responsive in the majority of fora in the following policy areas: 'transportation', 'economy', and 'sustainable development'. This suggests the EU finds these policy areas to be of particular importance to its climate diplomacy. Third, the EU's responsiveness to the two 'general diplomacy' fora is quite *sporadic*. This implies a punctual importance for the EU's climate diplomacy, though there are only two fora in this category. These fora could provide political input and influence into the UNFCCC process in moments where the UNFCCC is insufficient by itself for the EU to achieve its preferences. At first glance, the references to both the UN and G7/8 in both the lead-up to Copenhagen in 2009

and Paris in 2015 support that. Finally, we note one policy area with significant variation: 'other environment'. For instance, the EU was quite responsive to the Montreal Protocol while much less so to other fora. However, as these policy areas encompass a wide variety of fora, it is difficult to draw any conclusions from the EU's responsiveness therein.

5.3. Types of fora

We now explore whether there are any variations in EU responsiveness based on the types of fora referenced (TBF, SLA, mixed, IO, or informal). From this, we can better understand the types of governance arrangements that it views as most important for its climate diplomacy. Figure 5 presents the number of references to each forum per year, categorized per forum type.

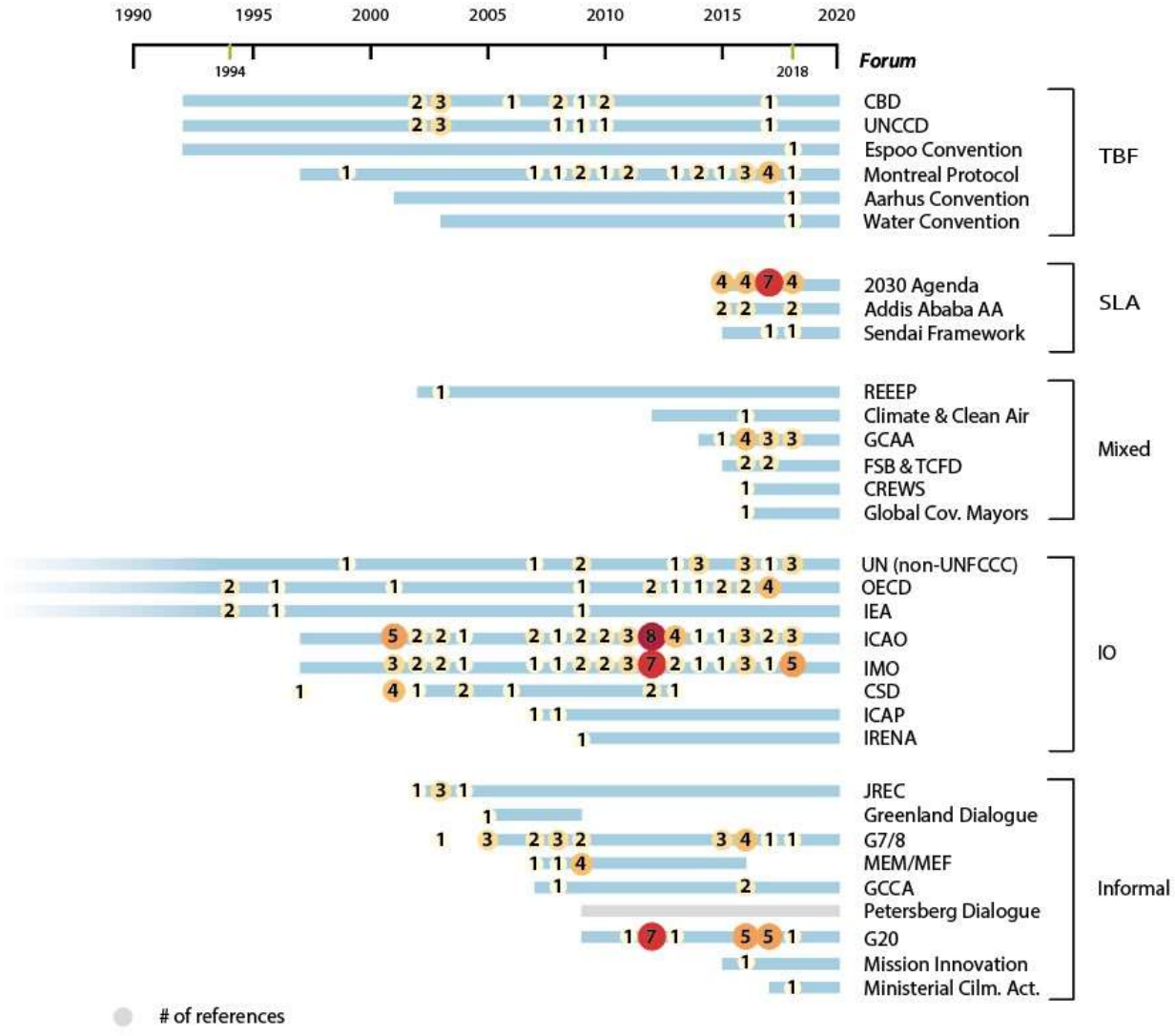

Figure 5: Number of references to non-UNFCCC fora over time grouped by type of forum

We make four principal observations on EU responsiveness in this dimension. First, the TBF type does not fit with any type of consistent pattern, as there is significant variation amongst the

references to different fora. This could be attributed to the wide variety of fora in this category, such as the CBD, Montreal Protocol, and Aarhus Convention, among others. Second, the EU appears continuously responsive to SLAs. However, as these 'post-2015' fora emerge in the IRCCC at the same time, the EU's responsiveness could also be related to policy area and timing. Third, the evidence is relatively limited for mixed fora, although we potentially see evidence of an initial responsiveness, with the EU referencing these fora briefly following their emergence in the IRCCC and then dropping off. However, their recent emergence makes it difficult to draw conclusions. Finally, we find evidence to support that, on a broad level, the EU was more consistently responsive to both IOs and informal types of fora, though variation appears amongst the different fora. There are several fora, like ICAO, IMO, OECD, G7, and G20 that receive significant (both continuous and sporadic) attention, while others of the same types receive substantially less. Hence, overall, as there is too much variation between fora within each type, we cannot draw any meaningful conclusions based on variations by fora type.

5.4 Other IRCCC-related Conclusions

While the above findings are important for our understanding of where the EU focuses its climate diplomacy, this analysis takes place in the context of EU climate diplomacy surrounding the UNFCCC. We now go a step further and explore whether the importance the EU places on these fora in this context is indeed reciprocated in the non-UNFCCC fora of the IRCCC. We therefore outline references evoking both another forum of the IRCCC and the UNFCCC made in Conclusions relating to other IRCCC fora over 2000-2018 (no documents before 2000). These are reflected in Figure 6. With the caveats mentioned in Section 4, three main findings stand out.

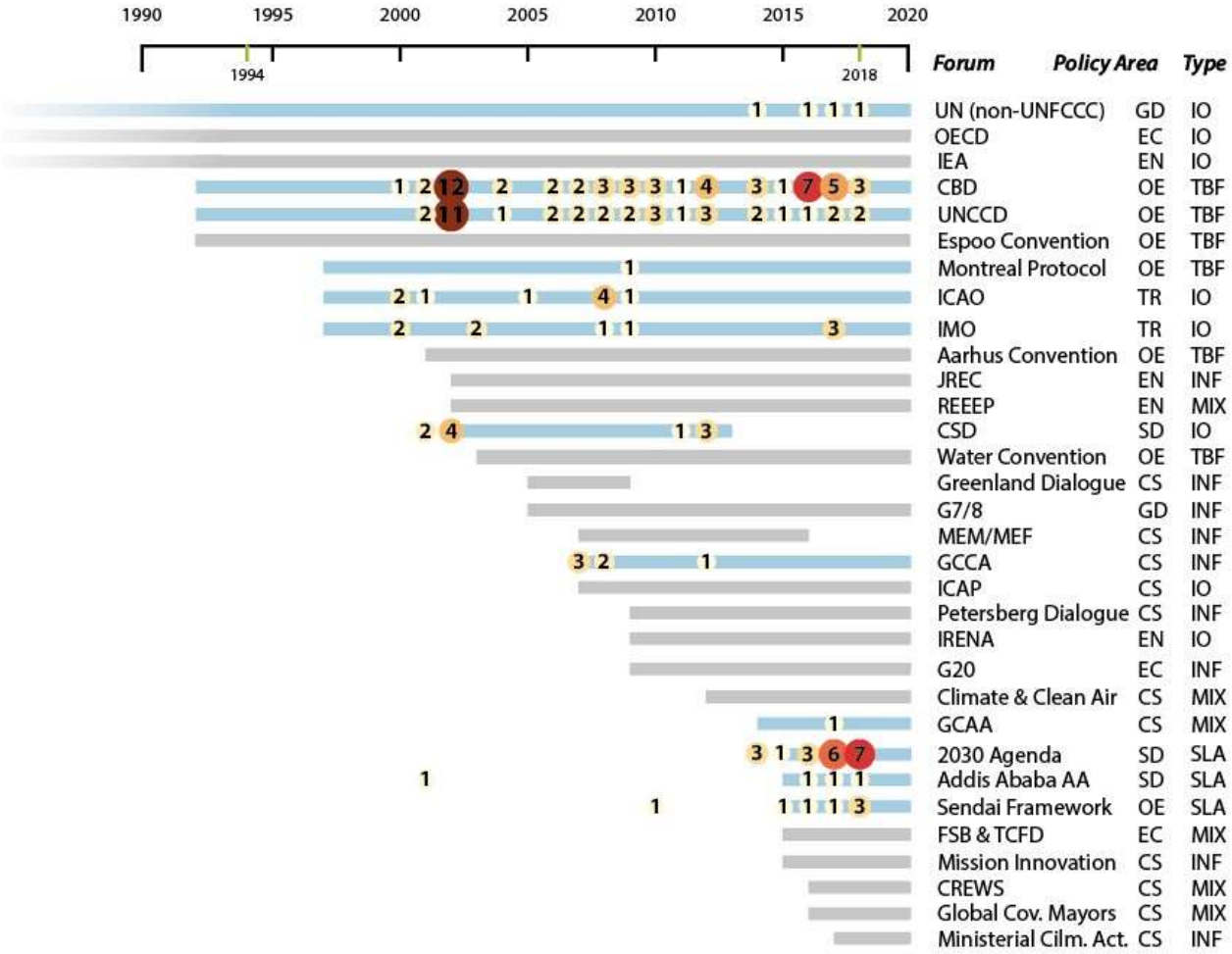

Figure 6: References to UNFCCC in Council Conclusions relating to other IRCCC fora

First, of the 32 fora we identified in the IRCCC, only 12 are referenced here at least once in conjunction with the UNFCCC (indicated in blue in Figure 6), which raises questions on the importance of the climate issues in several non-UNFCCC fora of the regime complex. While this could be related to our level of analysis, it is puzzling that fora like the OECD or the G20 are not mentioned alongside the UNFCCC in the Council Conclusions.

Second, with respect to policy area, the only fora to which the EU appeared continuously responsive fall under 'other environment' (CBD, UNCCD and Sendai Framework) or 'sustainable development' (2030 Agenda & Addis Ababa AA). Additionally, there seems to be a mismatch between how often particular fora are referenced here in conjunction with the UNFCCC and in UNFCCC-specific Conclusions. Fora to which the EU is continuously responsive in the UNFCCC-related diplomacy Conclusions, like ICAO and IMO, are only sporadically referenced in conjunction with the UNFCCC elsewhere. The reverse is also true. The other two "Rio Conventions", CBD and UNCCD are continuously referenced in conjunction with the UNFCCC in non-UNFCCC Conclusions, while they sporadically appear in the UNFCCC-related conclusions.

Third, there is some support that the "post-2015" SLA fora are becoming important, consistent considerations for EU climate diplomacy. Addis Ababa (Financing for Development), 2030

Agenda for Sustainable Development, and the Sendai Framework are all continuously referenced following their adoption in 2015. This corresponds with references in the UNFCCC-specific Conclusions.

The analysis of the second set of Council Conclusions qualifies the extent of the EU responsiveness as observed in the first set of Council Conclusions. On the one hand, there is a subset of fora (e.g. 2030 Agenda, Sendai Framework and Addis Ababa AA) where the EU's continuous responsiveness in the UNFCCC context is reciprocated in the context of the non-UNFCCC fora. These fora are clearly important considerations for EU climate diplomacy. On the other hand, responsiveness does not appear reciprocated for the rest of the IRCCC. Hence, the analysis of the second set of Conclusions shows that it is one thing for the EU to be responsive in the UNFCCC context but another for that consideration to transfer into how the EU actually approaches the rest of the IRCCC. To that end, the combined findings indicate that the EU's responsiveness to institutional change in the IRCCC does not substantially affect the UNFCCC's continued centrality within the IRCCC and in EU climate diplomacy.

6. Discussion and conclusion

The EU's varied levels of responsiveness have demonstrated its capacity to adapt to a changing institutional environment. Yet, the mismatch between its responsiveness in the UNFCCC and elsewhere could potentially reveal the limits of its agility, as one would expect a (boundedly) rational actor to be responsive in both settings. Taken together, these empirics make an important contribution to the broader work on EU climate diplomacy, the IRCCC and regime complexes more generally. First, as for EU climate diplomacy, in providing this longitudinal view, we complement punctual case studies that have studied the EU's activity in other fora of the IRCCC. Second, regarding the IRCCC, although our findings fit within the literature that views the UNFCCC as the metaphorical sun of international climate governance (Biedenkopf 2017), we identify other increasingly important satellites and constellations, as perceived by an important climate actor. Future contributions on the relationship between these different fora and the UNFCCC could help paint a better picture of the IRCCC and the relationships between the different fora. Third, with respect to the study of regime complexes, our conceptualisation of responsiveness may facilitate future assessments of the importance of a given area for an actor. In that way, it could be helpful for studying actor behaviour in regime complexes more generally. As this is a first foray into using responsiveness in such a way, further work that clarifies the conceptualisation of responsiveness could demonstrate how much our findings are supported outside of our unique EU and climate considerations.

We find that the importance the EU has placed on non-UNFCCC fora has indeed coincided with the evolution of the IRCCC. The EU has placed some level of importance on the vast majority of fora within the IRCCC. As this shift in the EU's climate diplomacy – which now takes into account the multitude of fora in the IRCCC – mirrors the evolution of the IRCCC, the EU is indeed responsive

to changes in the international institutional context. Additionally, we observe that not all non-UNFCCC fora are of equal importance for the EU, as demonstrated by the varied types of responsiveness: 9 continuous, 12 sporadic, 10 initial responsiveness, and 1 with no responsiveness. The fact that there are only 9 fora in which the EU was continuously responsive suggests that only particular areas of the IRCCC have taken on a more durable importance for the EU's climate diplomacy. Such was the case for 'transportation', 'economy' and 'sustainable development' fora. Indeed, other areas seem to be important initially or at certain moments, but it is not as durable. Finally, we see evidence that there is a significant mismatch between how much other IRCCC fora were a consideration for the EU in the UNFCCC and how much the UNFCCC was a consideration for the EU in other fora of the IRCCC.

At the same time, we acknowledge two principal limitations to our research, which could be addressed by future research. First, we have mainly painted a picture of how the EU, in a UNFCCC context, has placed importance on the different fora of the IRCCC. While the second dataset seeks to unpack the other side of this equation – how these considerations have actually made their way to the EU's approach to these non-UNFCCC fora – we have encountered the limits of using Council Conclusions. Semi-structured interviews with relevant EU and EU member state officials could strengthen the research and provide a more complete picture of EU climate diplomacy in the IRCCC, particularly how and why it places importance on certain fora. Second, our research revealed considerable variation in the level and durability of the EU's responsiveness. The factors, at the international, EU and member state levels, that could lead the EU to be more responsive at certain moments or in certain fora, and that thus explain this variation, could be addressed in future research.

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