The European Union and global environmental governance

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Introduction

It is now [equally] difficult to understand international environmental politics without taking cognizance of the EU, which negotiates much like a single state-like body alongside other sovereign states on global issues such as climate change, biodiversity protection, and trade liberalization.

(Jordan 1999: 1)

This quote by Jordan is intriguing since, according to Sbragia, the institutionalization of the Community’s international role occurred only gradually. It faces difficulties caused primarily by ‘questions about whether the EU has competence to deal with specific issues under consideration, and … the fact that the European Commission, even when possessing legal competence, is dependent on the member states for representation in international negotiations because the EU is not a full-fledged member of such negotiations’ (Sbragia and Damro 1999: 54). In the light of these problems, therefore, we are faced with the question of what made the European Union’s (EU) high profile on environmental issues possible? The question is not trivial. Indeed, given the specific nature of most environmental problems, i.e. the cross-border nature of environmental goods, problems arising from the complexity of socio-ecological processes, the collective nature of environmental goods and the distributive consequences of environmental protection, it is widely acknowledged that ‘large-scale environmental issues can only be solved through broadly based international cooperation’ (Young 1993: 436). Management of such issues cannot remain only local or national.

Yet, the management of environmental problems raises problems at this international level. Indeed, just to name a few impediments to international co-operation over environmental issues, as with all types of collective action, there are problems of free-riding, but more specifically for environmental issues there are the long-time horizons of some environmental harms, the difficulty of policy-making in the context of uncertainty that characterizes most environmental problems, the ‘disjuncture between the costs and the benefits’ of co-operation in the domain, and so on. For Young, ‘in cases such as climate change, where some of the products of a regime’s operations are likely to exhibit the attributes of public goods and the implementation
of the regime’s provisions is likely to prove costly [...] the negotiation of an effective cost-sharing or burden-sharing mechanism is essential’ (Young 1993: 436). However, despite a growing earth consciousness since Stockholm (1972), Rio (1992) and Johannesburg (2002), the success story of the fight over ozone depletion and chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) apart, a lot of authors agree on the negative trend lines in terms of environmental co-operation (Chazek, Downie and Brown 2006; DeSombre 2006; Saunier and Meganck 2007; Speth and Haas 2006). The Kyoto Protocol that deals with climate change, one of the most pressing environmental problems of these years, is currently experiencing considerable difficulty, and nothing indicates that the Conference of the Parties in Copenhagen in December 2009 has altered this situation.

Depicting the EU’s role in international environmental politics is interesting because it rests upon a process of expansion for EU legal competence. We will expose mechanisms that explain what enables such a process. We will subsequently turn to EU internal environmental policy, focusing more on the analytical tools it stimulated than its empirical development. Indeed, we believe the field of European Union Studies (EUS) is a useful resource—even though it has been neglected so far—for scholars preoccupied with the rethinking of international relations theory in the globalization debate (Warleigh 2006: 31).

The EU as a leader in international environmental politics?

What is intriguing in the EU role on the world environmental stage is that it moved over time ‘from being the Vienna laggard to the Kyoto leader’ (Sbragia and Damro 1999). Indeed, between the negotiations of the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer to the discussions over climate change, the EU’s role has changed tremendously: since the 1990s, the EU has been considered an important actor in international environmental affairs (Hurrell and Kingsbury 1992: 36) and even for some issues, such as climate change, it has become a ‘global leader’ (Bretherton and Vogler 2006: 88). However, the EU may prove to have a hidden agenda behind the energetic role it has sought to play in international environmental politics. As we will see, Sbragia argues that ‘the environmental arena has proven to be a fruitful arena for institution-building. The Community has been able to increase its stature, its international reach, and its effectiveness within international organizations’ (Sbragia 2002: 293).

From ‘Vienna laggard to Kyoto leader’: Empirical developments

For Bretherton and Vogler, ‘it was in attempting to solve transboundary atmospheric problems that the Community “cut its teeth” as an international environmental actor’ (Bretherton and Vogler 2006: 100). However, at the very beginning the EU was not a front-runner in negotiations. The 1985 Vienna Convention on the ozone layer, for instance, was initially led by the USA. The EU became only over time the major driving force behind what became the Montreal Protocol in 1987. It then extended its leadership role to many items on the agenda of global environmental governance, including biodiversity, the management of genetically modified organisms and chemicals, or by promoting the Basel Convention on hazardous waste or in creating the intergovernmental panel on forests. In addition, the EU constantly argued in favour of the upgrading of the United Nations (UN) Environment Programme to a UN Environment Organization with more resources and a stronger mandate (Vogler and Stephan 2007). However, the best illustration of EU leadership can be found with the climate change issue and its position on targets. The EU ensured that the lowest common denominator over target propositions would not prevail in the debate (Yamin 2000: 65).
However, attempts to characterize the EU’s position on climate change have been controversial. International negotiators may argue that behind the image of being a front-runner, the EU is actually playing a ‘political bluffing’ game, ‘taking daring positions, confident that the others will accept only a halfway compromise … ’. For them, ‘the role of the EU is seen as a moralizing role, which is more irritating than inspiring, being diplomacy weak, internally inconsistent and embodying a safety mechanism in terms of a retreat to the lowest common denominator’ (Gupta and van der Grijp 2000: 81). Being ‘strong on rhetoric and weak in action’, the EU ‘uses the luxury of being greener than it is’. Internal major policy failures, like the inability to promulgate an EU-wide carbon tax, might confirm this view. Indeed, a directive on a combined carbon and energy tax was regarded as the centrepiece of the European Community’s (EC) strategy for achieving its stabilization target, but it proved unacceptable to most member states despite Commission attempts (Gupta and van der Grijp 2000: 81). To replace the unsuccessful tax, a scheme for greenhouse gas emission allowance trading within the EU was established in 2003, after six years of difficult negotiation. It is worth noting that emissions trading had its origins—and was originally pushed—in the USA. However, at its beginning the European carbon emissions trading system raised some critiques because it allocated excessive carbon permits to member state industries. The EU would also not owe the fact that it fulfilled its greenhouse gases stabilization objectives to its own policies, but to external factors like, for instance, the German reunification and the subsequent closing of polluting factories. Since the EU allocated unevenly its reduction targets among states, some reductions compensated for emission increases in other states.

Part of the response to the critiques addressed to the EU position lies in the fact that ‘the legal complexities of the relationship between the EU and the member states in external environmental affairs are extraordinary’ (Sbragia and Damro 1999: 55). For a long time it was questionable to what extent the EU could be identified as either one or several players in the negotiation rounds. Depending on the policy sector, the EC could be in a situation of exclusive competence (trade or fisheries) where the EC becomes a party to a convention without the member states also being parties, or it could be in a situation of ‘mixed agreements’ where the Commission negotiates on behalf of the EU in accordance with a mandate given unanimously by the Council. When unanimity cannot be obtained, as in the case of CITES, all member states abstain, leading to a loss of influence (Haigh 1992: 240–42). For climate change negotiations, the process was largely intergovernmental and the EU developed a mandate only after lengthy internal discussions, not facilitated in this task by the rotating presidency of the Union and problems of continuity it raised.

Yet, notwithstanding these difficult internal negotiations, Lenschow argues that ‘the EU has become a policy shaper rather than a taker in international environmental affairs, generating rather than simply responding to policy imperatives’ (Lenschow 2004: 143). It means that the EU is aiming at a position in which it could be the standard setter, proposing and disseminating its concepts, instruments and practices (Vogler and Bretherton 2006: 105). This can be illustrated in the promotion of the ‘precautionary principle’ and of the ‘environmental policy integration’ principle, or in the practice of ‘eco-labelling’. For Gupta and Grubb (2000) the EU displays ‘directional leadership’ by changing the perceptions of others on climate change mitigation. It means also that the EU is more capable of influencing agenda than outcome. Bretherton and Vogler (2006: 103) identify that EU leadership is present in the different roles that it may claim. Indeed, we can find some degree of leadership in its normative role as a principles and practices disseminator; as a formal participant in official negotiations; and as an architect of sustainable development at different occasions such as at World Trade Organization meetings.
Factors explaining the development of the EC/EU’s external powers: The interplay between instrumental influences

For Haigh, it was ‘largely a result of decisions of the European Court of Justice’ that allowed the EC’s external powers to ‘expand without the express approval of the Member states simply in the course of developing the EC’s internal policies’ (Haigh 1992: 238–39). It all amounts to a leading case in 1970, the ERTA judgment in which the European Court of Justice initiated the doctrine of ‘parallelism’. According to this doctrine, when the Community acquires internal competence over a subject it also acquires external competence. Here the Court went well beyond the treaty establishing the EC because this has been applied to environmental policy that did not have a treaty basis by that time. Haigh provides an example of ‘institutional opportunism’ (Lenschow 2004: 142) by evoking a directive on the dumping of wastes at sea, finally refused by the Council but which the Commission had put forward at least partly in order to be able to accede to international dumping conventions (Haigh 1992: 240). In that respect, it is significant to note that the dynamics that have driven the elaboration of internal environmental policies also served to internationalize them, i.e. the pressure to respond to transboundary pollution and trade distortion removal (Bretherton and Vogler 2006: 91). Here the instrumental influence could be described as originating in the EU internal realm and being directed towards its external role.

However, it is not always clear in the literature which dimension is instrumental to which in this process of competence expansion. Some authors have conceptualized the role that the international environmental agenda played as a ‘cheval de Troie’ for pressing for more EU environmental integration. Thus, there would be an exchange from external to internal environmental integration. In that respect, Lenschow (2005: 323) underlines the fact that over one-third of current EU environmental measures can be traced back to international agreements related to water, the atmosphere, waste, wildlife, etc. Zito (2002: 252) highlights the role of external international organizations in the agenda-setting process of the EU carbon tax.

Apart from the interrelations between the external and internal environmental agenda, some authors underline the interactions between areas of influence. For them, the global environmental role of the EU would be instrumental to an enhancement of its international role. Indeed, authors underline that ‘the EU’s acceptance by third parties as an international actor was greatly increased by its assertive participation in international environmental negotiations’ (Sbragia and Damro 1999: 56). Other authors emphasize the influence between the external environmental agenda with regards to the whole EU regional integration process, alleging that what is being pursued is the ability to stand as a cohesive block on the world scene (Andresen and Agrawala 2002), the strengthening of the EU’s international role being instrumentalized afterwards for the extension of the EU integration project itself. Thus, we could identify an influence from external to internal pressure towards EU integration per se. For Schreurs and Tiberghien (2007: 33), for instance, there is no doubt that ‘the Commission has used climate policy as a means to push EU integration forward and empower the Commission with new regulatory tools and monitoring powers’. Both global and environmental politics have been instrumental to the EU integration project.

In sum, in seeking to explain the ascendance of the EU’s international role in environmental policy it is better to think in terms of several levels and dimensions, and the interaction between them, rather than of unidirectional influences between single causal factors.

International relations theory and EU studies: From international to global environmental politics

There is practically no environmental domain where one could state with confidence that the environment is being adequately taken care of. The ozone layer issue is a rare success story here,
but there were converging economic interests to facilitate the phasing out of CFC use (Haigh 1991: 176). The same does not hold for climate change, the protection of endangered species, forest protection, biodiversity, drinking water, waste-water management, the omnipresence of chemicals in the environment, etc. (Krämer 2006: 347). Najam, Papa and Taiyab (2006) identify several challenges to the current system of international environmental politics, which include: the proliferation of multilateral environmental agreements and of international institutions within the UN system; the fragmentation of the global environmental governance system that it entails; the lack of co-operation and co-ordination among international organizations and especially those outside the environmental arena which, none the less, still deal with global environmental affairs; and the lack of implementation and enforcement. Nevertheless, were all the global environmental conventions fully implemented, the environmental degradation would not be reversed. Therefore, what is needed is an impetus for strengthened decisions in international environmental politics.

In international environmental politics, the international relations (IR) school approach distinguishes itself by focusing essentially on mobilizing analyses in terms of intergovernmental negotiations, institution-building and regime effectiveness (Jakobsen 1999: 207). The sub-discipline has been mainly shaped by Oran Young’s extensive work in the field, promoting an institutionalist perspective (Young 1982: 15). For this school of thought, ‘international cooperation is often needed to achieve a collective good and to create a particular institutional framework to keep free-riding from occurring’ (Luterbacher and Sprinz 2001: 13). This leads to the question of regime formation. Keohane has depicted an international regime as a form of international institution, i.e. ‘persistent and connected sets of rules (formal and informal) that prescribe behavioural roles, constrain activity, and shape expectations’ (Keohane 1989: 3). Those rules are explicit and agreed upon by governments. These studies emphasize power relations and bargaining bloc formation, even though the history of regime creation is paved with failed efforts of powerful actors to obtain what they wanted in bargaining over international accords (Young 1993: 435–36).

However, regimes theory has been criticized (Conca 2006). Regimes are by definition ‘issue area based’, as such, they can lead to an incongruity between fragmented institutional regimes and intertwined economic and ecological systems in the real world (Vogler 1995: 213). For this reason, some authors have been reflecting on a more normative agenda about the potentiality and relevance of a global environmental organization that would replace the different environmental regimes (Biermann and Bauer 2005). International environmental politics analysis, centred on regime formation, also entails a bias in the selection of case studies that obviously will revolve around treaties and conventions that are already in place rather than on regimes that failed or were neglected (Jakobsen 1999: 211), such as an international forest convention (Smouts 2002).

In contrast, what explains the extension of the EU’s role on the international environmental scene goes beyond the limited power of intergovernmental institutions placed under the dependence of member states and their explicit agreement in order to expand their role. Indeed, for climate change, for instance, EU leadership rested on the actions and involvements of a group of pioneering states (Denmark, Sweden, Austria, the Netherlands and Germany). It was made possible partly owing to evolving underlying conditions in Germany, the United Kingdom and Italy, the three biggest polluter states, that is to say that significant cuts in emissions would not be blocked under business-as-usual scenarios (Schreurs and Tiberghien 2007: 33). It also depended upon ‘the leadership roles played by the European Parliament (EP) and especially, the European Commission’ (ibid.). Schreurs and Tiberghien describe an ‘upward cycle of reinforcing leadership within a quasi-federal system’ that ‘has been triggered by and been dependent upon strong public support and normative commitment’ (ibid.: 22). This ‘collective
entrepreneurship’ enables the emergence of more demanding policies owing to the fact that different actors were involved in the EU process of multilevel governance (ibid.: 40). This interplay between levels is also essential in the process of EU external competence extension.

Thus, what is even more crucial in the explanation of the EU’s changing role in international environmental politics lies in specific mechanisms, i.e. the unique institutional structure of the EU. For Sbragia and Damro, ‘the very process of institution building described by Jordan … which has made the EU so problematic as a negotiator and an implementer in the past is, ironically, now helping it play a leadership role in international environmental affairs’ (Sbragia and Damro 1999: 54). Something that is confirmed by Zito, for whom ‘the large number of access points to the EU system favors the position of entrepreneurs in bringing new ideas to the EU agenda’ (Zito 2000: 172) even though at the same time, it facilitates a stronger opposition to any single proposal (Zito 2002: 252).

Broadly speaking, it seems that IR theory and especially regime theory has difficulty accounting for new mechanisms of global environmental politics and the complexities of now multi-layer political systems. In their discussion, there has always been a tropism in favour of the state as the most crucial actor to the outcomes (Porter and Brown 1991: 35). For a long time, when Haas, Keohane and Levy (1993) were considering the role of non-state actors, it was only to the extent that they might play a role as a pressure group but still states were perceived as the decisive actor. The growing influence of the global environmental change movement is nevertheless broadly emphasized now (Arts 1998: 2003).

Contrarily to IR, EUS are more open and to some extent are more well-equipped than other theoretical traditions, enabling them to contribute to the debate over governance (Warrleigh 2006). Like, for instance, in the multilevel governance tradition (Hooghe and Marks 2001), there is an attention to non-state actors—private actors but also supranational institutions. This is not surprising since the story of environmental policy expansion, deepening and institutionalization relates to the initiative capacity of the Commission. The process was mainly about informal mechanisms (Jordan 1999: 2) that could be ‘traced back to pragmatic and adaptive policy-makers in the Commission, a competitive dynamic between the member states, and the facilitating roles of the Court, the EP, and societal interests’ (Lenschow 2005: 324). All these actors with very different interests exploited a range of opportunities to edict principles that over the years have become institutionalized. Indeed, since the beginning of the 1970s, the EU has developed the most progressive and comprehensive environmental policies in the world (Lenschow 2004: 140; Jordan 1999: 1). In comparison, other regional integration projects such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) or Mercosur (the southern common market) display limited environmental activities, i.e. rudimentary institutions, structures and policies. In addition, the execution of their policies is non-binding in conformity with the principle of national sovereignty in the classical intergovernmental co-operation, while the EU enjoys quasi-federal powers in the same sector (Jordan, Wurzel and Zito 2006: 471). Yet, back in 1957, the Treaty of Rome did not include any environmental law, nor any environmental bureaucracy. It was not until 1987 when the Single European Act amended the Treaty of Rome that environmental policy became an official provision of the European Community. However, starting in 1973, the European Economic Community had already begun addressing environmental concerns. European environmental legislation was benefiting from a ‘rather generous interpretation of the treaty and attracted criticism, despite some endorsement by the European Court’ (Haigh 1991: 168). Hence, the period from 1957 to 1972 is best understood as a time of pragmatic measures rather than of proper environmental policy since it is mostly about ‘incidental measures’ that aimed at harmonizing national legislations with the objective to abolish trade impediments within the EU (Hildebrand 2002: 15–16).
For some authors, since the EU is ‘unique in the degree of supranational authority the member states have conferred on it … it is most unlikely to provide a model for global environmental governance’ (Hurrell and Kingsbury 1992: 36). Other authors like Warleigh (2006: 42) do not accept the argument of the ‘sui generis’ nature of the EU, considering that EUS have more to offer than ad hoc explanation mechanisms, the scope of which would be necessarily limited and could not be applied to other regional integration projects. In that perspective, instead of accounting only for the role of the EU in global environmental politics, we will follow Warleigh (2006) and draw on the legacy of EUS, whose analysis could help derive lessons for global environmental governance system reform.

While most IR authors concentrate on international environmental governance reform, analysing its failures and discussing which institutional fix could be prescribed, in contrast, EUS authors concentrate on a more analytical level, drawing on conceptual mechanisms in EUS that could highlight global environmental governance development.

For Warleigh, it is obvious that EUS have paid far more attention to non-classical actors such as supranational institutions, interest groups, non-state actors like firms, and sub-national authorities, than has IR theory. The development and adaptation of the concept of a ‘policy network’ could be fruitful at the international level since it enables embracing the entire policy chain. Thus it does not limit the analysis to the phase of the adoption of an agreement. In addition, IR studies would definitely benefit from the confrontation of its dominating paradigm centred on realist theory to the constructivist approach on which EUS builds. For this author, the point is not to claim that these conceptual approaches are specific to EUS. Rather, the idea is to underline that the EUS research agenda can help to address the ‘rethinking of the nature, extent and evolution of politics beyond the nation state’, in a word the shift towards global polity. For instance, it could help IR to refine its understanding of the impact of (partial) global polity on ‘individual states, on national democracy and on national societies’ (Warleigh 2006: 38).

Indeed, research works over New Environmental Policy Instruments (NEPIs), such as voluntary agreements, economic incentives, flexible solutions, etc., build upon some comparative politics aspects, highlighting the role of instrument dissemination across EU countries. For Jordan, Wurzel and Zito, ‘the EU can fulfil a number of roles in relation to diffusion (i.e. horizontally between states) and transfer (i.e. vertically between the EU and the states), all pointing to learning processes. By identifying the EU’s different roles in facilitating the emergence of NEPIs, harmonizing and diffusing them, ‘we could learn more about the possible spread of these “new” tools of governance around the globe’ (Jordan, Wurzel and Zito 2006: 481).

Finally, EUS could be especially useful for their development of a science-policy interface. Indeed, the inter-linkages between science, experts and politics are well developed and analysed in EU studies (Robert 2009), their authors showing how knowledge circulating among these arenas is capable of putting an issue on the agenda and of framing the way decision-makers are going to talk about it. In contrast, IR authors have had different ways of conceiving the role of science and uncertainty. Young speaks about the potential role of ‘good’ uncertainty in facilitating the provisions of an international climate regime (Young 1993: 441). Sometimes, the more we know about responsibilities and remedy costs, the more difficult it becomes to reach an agreement (Le Prestre 2002: 84). Scientific uncertainty can be helpful in some circumstances.

More positively, other IR authors pledge on the contrary that scientific claims play an important role in global environmental governance. Haas has developed the concept of ‘epistemic communities’. It designates ‘bureaucrats, technocrats, scientists, and specialists’, groups of ‘professionals’ identified by the ‘transnational trait of their networks’ and ignoring the boundaries of disciplines and institutions. They share common motivations and values and also believe in the
same cause-and-effect relationships associated with complex and uncertain issues (Haas 1990: 350). However, the concept has been disputed. Its basic claims, namely that for an issue to be more easily tackled at the international level, an epistemic community has to seize the problem and that consensual knowledge characterizes exchanges among these experts, are contested by R. Grundmann (2006), who more broadly criticized in it the alleged decisive role of cognitive elements in international environmental politics (Leach, Scoones and Wynne 2005: 143). We can indeed find counter-examples undermining Haas’s prospects with ozone depletion where no epistemic community could be found but still the problem is solved rather quickly, while on climate change where such a consensus among the epistemic community has existed to a large extent, an equally ambitious regime is still awaited.

As we have seen, the ‘sui generis’ nature of the EU should not be taken as an excuse to downplay the valuable contribution that EUS can make to the necessary rethinking of our understanding of world politics. Indeed, in light of a shift from international to global politics, there is much to gain from a sustained, and critical, engagement with EUS literature, which is way ahead of the IR curve in exploring the development of a complex, evolving, partial post- or trans-national polity, both theoretically and empirically’ (Warleigh 2006: 43).

Conclusion

Over time the EU managed to become a front-runner on environmental issues despite diverging national interests and differing external orientation by member states. In order to account for such a ‘coup de force’, Sbragia evokes a process of institution-building taking place at both the Union level and the global one. It consists of a process of policy expansion that, in contrast to Young’s institution-building process, does not consider only a state’s actorness. Here actorness is conceived in a broader sense, encompassing a complex ad hoc interplay between intergovernmental institutions and supranational ones, but also an interplay between internal and external EU levels. As Sbragia puts it, ‘the ever-more institutionalized coupling of the “supranational” and the “intergovernmental” in the conduct of international environmental politics represents a case of institution-building at both the Community—and the global—level’ (Sbragia 2002: 293). In this process, EU institutions such as the European Parliament, the European Commission and the European Court of Justice have played a critical role. In that respect, we have seen that the EC’s more general leadership ambitions and the wish to be taken seriously at the global level in general are key factors in explaining the EU’s activism in climate and other environmental issues.

Analysts of the EU entity have a say in this scholarly discussion about institution-building at the global level because EUS help understand progress that could be made in order to tackle global environmental problems more efficiently, despite the reluctance of member states. Here it is worth noting that interplays between levels are as crucial in this process as within the EU which has been a privileged arena for developing the concept of multilevel governance (Hooghe and Marks 2001).

For climate change, it is widely acknowledged that in as far back as the 1980s, the EC was already capable of exerting pressure on reluctant countries like the USA in a way that the member states would not have been able to achieve individually (Haigh 1992: 249). Thus, despite an inadequate status at the UN and internal difficulties, it has had a significant effect on the global agenda. Yet, Vogler and Stephan (2007) point out the necessity of making internal policy coherence a priority in order to improve its credibility in Global Environmental Governance (GEG). Indeed, the EU’s role on climate change has raised critical comments, directed towards the continuing contradictions between its high stance in GEG and its internal climate
policy, or towards its internal agricultural and fisheries policies, which are particularly harmful to the environment. We could point at other paradoxical choices, like the liberal option taken by the Commission in terms of energy policy. Although the EU adopted a directive promoting the share of renewable energies in energy production, more fundamentally it forced the liberalization of the energy market in member states, an initiative that does not fit well with an ambitious objective on climate change because it stimulates investments in energy sectors producing a lot of emissions. Indeed, Keppler (2009) argues that market liberalization of electricity favours natural gas and to a lesser extent coal vis-à-vis renewable and nuclear energies, both of which need stable and predictable prices to develop because of their high fixed prices. In that respect, it is questionable to what extent, in the end, the EU is simply aiming at a promotional campaign and a communication strategy, building on an ‘ideational agenda, namely the representation of the EU as a different kind of polity, one more concerned with international law, institution-building, and a normative vision. Through their global policy-making actions the EU elites seek to increase public support for EU integration’ (Schreurs and Tiberghien 2007: 26). As regards the protection of the environment at the global level, we have highlighted the instrumental dimension in the EU’s investment in international environmental politics. Most of the time when the sincerity of the EU’s ecological stance is disputed, it is to suspect an attempt at legitimating ‘eco-protectionism’ (Vogel 2002). Besides that, Lenschow (2004: 143) remarks that ‘while its foreign policy may be fragile in the areas of security and defence, the EU has gained much confidence and credibility in pushing for global environmental responsibility’. We can assume that a high profile in world environmental politics may also represent a means to circumvent these weaknesses.

Notes

1 We would like to thank Dr Duncan Liefferink (Radboud University, Nijmegen) for his precious comments on an earlier version of this chapter.