

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Regional dimension of international environmental cooperation: the European Union environmental policy and its relations with its neighbors in the case of Russia

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Abstract

This article aims to examine factors influencing the development of international environmental cooperation and the roles of particular actors participating in environmental cooperation. In general, the majority of international actors agree with the importance of environmental protection but demonstrate different visions in terms of necessary measures. The final result depends on their capability to find common ground. It is assumed that the EU, with its strong environmental policy, realizes the importance of transborder coordination of environmental measures and tries to promote environmental cooperation. Russia was a serious challenge to the EU in terms of environmental security due to its geographic proximity, its severe environmental problems, and its harmful influence over environmental situation in the EU member states. The EU policy towards Russia demonstrates how the EU promotes environmental cooperation and ensures improvement of the environmental situation in the neighboring states. This paper will answer the following research questions: what factors determine the motivation of international actors participating in environmental cooperation; how the EU environmental traditions and decision-making procedures influence its external environmental activities; and how the EU tries to influence Russian environmental policy.

Keywords

Environmental cooperation, European Union, Russia, regional cooperation, environmental policy

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Introduction

The transboundary nature of various environmental challenges has determined the increasing importance of regional cooperation and joint activities of neighboring actors. Such cooperation is a necessary condition for efficient environmental policy, as unilateral efforts of single states have limited effect when it comes to transnational problems. No wonder that international actors demonstrate a growing interest in the coordination of environmental policies and an eagerness to participate in regional environmental cooperation. Common concerns about the environment can overcome political contradictions; in fact, environmental agendas can be used by political antagonists to find common ground for cooperation.

The European Union (EU) has a reputation as the world environmental leader promoting strong environmental standards and high quality natural resources. However, the efficiency of its environmental policy is dependent on the practices of other international actors. In order to ensure that other actors also support environmental policies and measures, EU officials promote international environmental cooperation both on the global and regional levels integrating environmental dimensions into its policies towards the third countries. The EU and Russia share 2,200 km of the common border; their geographical proximity results in common environmental problems and determines the necessity of environmental cooperation. The EU officials understand that there is a serious difference between European and Russian approaches to environmental policy. They know that Russia tends to implement a pragmatic approach towards environmental protection on the national level, to express concerns about economic consequences of environmental measures, and to demonstrate a cautious position during international environmental negotiations trying to avoid excessive external control over domestic practices. Focusing on the efficiency of environmental policy, the EU uses multiple political and economic instruments to influence Russian environmental practices.

This article aims to examine factors influencing the development of international environmental cooperation and the roles of particular actors participating in environmental cooperation. In general, the majority of international actors agree with the importance of environmental protection but demonstrate different visions in terms of necessary measures. Some of them support more demanding practices; others agree with minimal requirements. The final result depends on their capability to find common ground. In this paper, it is assumed that the EU with its strong environmental policy realizes the importance of transborder coordination of environmental measures and tries to promote high standards and environmental cooperation. The EU policy towards Russia demonstrates how the EU promotes environmental cooperation and ensures improvement of the environmental situation in neighboring states. This study will answer the following research questions: (1) what factors determine the motivation of international actors participating in environmental cooperation; (2) how the EU environmental traditions and decision-making

procedures influence its external environmental activities; and (3) how the EU tries to influence Russian environmental policy.

The regional dimension of international environmental cooperation

I suggest starting with an evaluation of factors, which influence actors' decisions to join environmental cooperation. Of course, today the majority of international actors demonstrates concerns about environmental challenges, as they undertake various domestic measures to ensure environmental protection. Due to the transboundary nature of environmental threats, international actors interested in efficient solutions to environmental problems cannot limit their activities to domestic policies and measures. Rational actors accept the essential nature of international environmental cooperation; they recognize it as a necessary instrument for proper solution of environmental problems and demonstrate their political will to participate in various forms of collective actions targeted at environmental protection. Increased intensity of environmental cooperation required theoretical consideration of actors' behavior and motivation. International relations (IR) scholars examine different aspects of environmental cooperation, including the formation of international environmental regimes,¹ the evolution of international environmental cooperation and different forms of collective environmental actions starting from international environmental associations and interstate environmental treaties to environmental intergovernmental organizations,² and the effectiveness of environmental regimes.³ Numerous environmental projects and their controversial results determined researchers' interest in particular factors that influence the development of environmental cooperation. In a similar way, this article focuses on those factors that have affected EU-Russian environmental cooperation.

To begin with, among such important factors that could be mentioned, is the level of cooperation: a regional level or the global one. It is widely believed that regional cooperation is easier to arrange than global one.⁴ Regional cooperation involves a smaller number of international actors facilitating negotiations, common agreements, and collective actions. Moreover, regional actors because of geographic proximity tend to share certain regional similarities, like values, cultural preferences, political culture and traditions, and level of economic development. Interdependence is also higher within a region making environmental cooperation on the regional level

¹ O.R. Young, "The politics of international regime formation: managing resources and the environment," *International Organization* 43, no. 3 (1989): 349–75; O.R. Young, "Effectiveness of international environmental regimes: Existing knowledge, cutting-edge themes, and research strategies," *The Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 108, no. 50 (2011):19853–60.

² J.W. Meyer *et al.*, "The Structuring of a World Environmental Regime, 1870–1990," *International Organization* 51, no. 4 (Autumn, 1997): 623–51.

³ M.J. Peterson, "Organizing for Effective Environmental Cooperation," *Global Governance* 4 (1998): 415–38; O.R. Young, "Effectiveness of international environmental regimes."

⁴ S. Shin, "East Asian Environmental Co-operation: Central Pessimism, Local Optimism," *Pacific Affairs* 80, no. 1 (2007): 9–26.

particularly significant.⁵ Montgomery describes five criteria that ensure the success of regional cooperation: (1) social and cultural homogeneity; (2) similarity of political attitude and external behavior; (3) integration of political institutions; (3) interdependence of economies; and (4) geographical proximity.⁶ However, other factors should also be considered for proper analysis of regional environmental cooperation. Closely located actors still might have problems discussing environmental cooperation and negotiating policies and measures. Shin refers to ‘national income level, the nature of the state-society relationship, the level of civil society’s environmental awareness, and the level of technological development’.⁷ In fact, environmental policy often is perceived as an expensive policy that requires substantial financial support. Often states with economic and social difficulties tend to minimize their environmental activities. Even within the EU, which has managed to harmonize the environmental policies of its member states, some states like Greece, still lag behind in terms of their environmental measures.⁸ To explain their failure to implement EU environmental legislation, they usually refer to economic and social problems.⁸ Thus, general regional similarities do not guarantee the success of environmental cooperation. There are both examples of progressively developing regional environmental cooperation; e.g., the Baltic Sea regional cooperation was launched during the Cold War and developed, overcoming various political obstacles, and regional cooperation with little practical results; e.g., cooperation in Southeast Asia.

Another significant issue that should be taken into account is the motivation of the actors involved in environmental cooperation. International relations scholars and political scientists provide us with several versions of international actors’ behavior that could be used to clarify actors’ attitudes to international environmental activities. The first reason for active environmental policy is the spread of scientific approaches to nature and environmental issues, as researchers enable politicians to proceed with the scientific rationalization of environmental protection. The perception of nature as an ecosystem without clear boundaries justifies international environmental activities.⁹

⁵ L.B. Campbell, “The Political Economy of Environmental Regionalism in Asia,” in *Remapping East Asia: The Construction of a Region*, T. J. Pempel (ed.), (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 217.

⁶ J.D. Montgomery, “The Asia-Pacific as an Environmental Region,” *The Journal of Developing Areas* 28, (October, 1993): 7.

⁷ S. Shin, “East Asian Environmental Co-operation: Central Pessimism, Local Optimism,” 12.

⁸ I. Botetzagias, “Chapter 8. Green Politics in Greece at the time of fiscal crisis,” in *Sustainable Politics and the Crisis of the Peripheries: Ireland and Greece*, L. Leonard and I. Botetzagias, (Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2011), 161–79.

⁹ A.A. Alimov, “Environmental policy and environmental diplomacy (terminology and specific issues),” *Vestnik of Saint Petersburg State University. Series 6: Political Science. International relations* 22, no. 3 (2003): 101–09. (In Russ.); M. Finnemore, “International Organizations as Teachers of Norms,” *International Organization* 47, (1993): 565–97; M. Finnemore, “Sociology’s Institutionalism,” *International Organization* 50, no. 2 (1996): 325–47; E. Schofer, “Science Association in the International Sphere, 1875–1990: The Rationalization of Science and Scientization of Society,” in *World Polity Formation Since 1875*, J. Boli and G.M. Thomas (eds), (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).

The second explanation is based on the realist assumption that powerful nation-states support international environmental regimes as they treat international institutions as structures representing the national interests of member states, particularly the interests of major nation-states. They try to use collective structures as instruments to expand their spheres of influence. They ensure that norms and regulations adopted by international institutions represent their interests and enable them to abuse political and economic control over other states. They can benefit from easier access to natural resources. They raise concerns about national environmental security. Considering the possibility of international cooperation, they make sure that particular environmental projects correspond to their expectations and provide some benefits.¹⁰

The third set of arguments refers to the neoliberal tradition to describe international activities as problem-solving mechanisms that correspond to the national interests of participating states, help to minimize potential costs, and maximize benefits from collective actions. The transnational nature of environmental problems and interdependence in the environmental area determine the necessity of joint actions and political coordination. Therefore, actors' participation in international environmental regimes is a rational decision made on their understanding of the necessity to face environmental challenges and mutual interests with other actors to solve transnational problems. Rationality assumption requires actors to expect certain benefits from international environmental cooperation.¹¹ Another explanation is close to the neoliberal idea and could be described as 'functional' as it emphasizes the 'functional' necessity of international environmental cooperation due to the serious deterioration of environmental resources.¹² According to this approach, international institutions are supposed to ensure some functional duty and deliver a result. There is also an approach focusing on the importance of domestic politics. According to this logic, a national debate on the environmental agenda is determined by such factors as national political leaders' concerns about environmental protection, distribution of power between particular parties, public awareness about environmental problems, and the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the country. Then national representatives move to the international level and reflect results of national environmental discourse. Eventually, international environmental cooperation is shaped by the national politics of participating states.¹³

¹⁰ K. Gould, A. Weinberg and A. Schnaiberg, "Natural Resource Use in a Transnational Treadmill," *Humboldt Journal of Social Relations* 21, (1995): 61–93.

¹¹ O.R. Young, "Effectiveness of international environmental regimes," 2011.

¹² M. McCoy and P. McCully, *The Road from Rio: An NGO Action Guide to Environment and Development* (Utrecht: International Books, 1993).

¹³ R.D. Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: Logic of Two-Level Games," *International Organization* 42, no. 3 (summer 1988): 427–60.

Finally, there is a growing concern about the normative power strategy of some international actors.¹⁴ It is believed that actors, which behave as normative powers, tend to project their norms and regulations to the international level and other international actors (states and institutions) in order to ‘normalize’ international practices. Originally, normative power was related mainly to the liberal agenda of democratic values, rule of law, and human rights,¹⁵ but later this concept demonstrated significant explanatory potential in relation to other aspects, including international environmental cooperation. Examination of international environmental activities also shows that some international actors implement advanced environmental practices on the national level, so when they participate in the environmental negotiations, face other states, and discuss collective policies and measures, they expect other actors to follow their experience (best practices) and adopt their rules and regulations.

Of course, considering prospects of international environmental cooperation, international actors also need to examine potential negative consequences of environmental cooperation: undermined state’s sovereignty, the necessity to comply with international agreements, and to deal with external authorities that would control implementation of commitments and could penalize the state for failure to comply with its obligations. Implementation of commitments requires financial resources, which sometimes lead to serious economic difficulties and can undermine the economic competitiveness of national producers on the world market. However, states are usually motivated enough to participate in international environmental cooperation, but they are carefully negotiating particular conditions to minimize the potential negative consequences of environmental agreements.

Environmental cooperation between the EU and Russia has an asymmetrical nature in terms of the partners’ environmental policy experience, motivation, and approach to international environmental activities. The EU plays a leading role in this partnership and makes substantial efforts to encourage Russia to further develop its environmental policy. However, their environmental activities demonstrate actors’ rationality behind regional cooperation. Due to geographic proximity, they share concerns about a wide range of environmental problems and, because of the transnational nature of those problems and environmental interdependence, neither the EU nor Russia can solve them on their own and have to combine their efforts. Environmental studies provide evidence demonstrating deteriorating natural resources to support environmental policies and measures.¹⁶ Though environmental discourse within Russia is rather different from the environmental discourse within the

¹⁴ I. Manners, “Global Europa: Mythology of the European Union in Global Politics,” *JCMS* 48, no. 1 (2010): 67–87, 76.

¹⁵ I. Manners, “Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?” *JCMS* 40, no. 2 (2002): 235–58.

¹⁶ *Taking nature into account: a report to the Club of Rome: toward a sustainable national income* (New York: Copernicus, 1995).

EU, and the Russian authorities tend to spend fewer financial resources on environmental protection in comparison with the EU authorities, the EU and Russia still manage to find common ground concerning the importance of environmental cooperation. The EU is ready to share its norms and best practices with its neighbor, provide experts and financial support, in order to ensure environmental protection in the regions neighboring the EU. Taking into account the EU's leadership in the EU-Russian environmental rapprochement, it is necessary to examine the EU's approach to international environmental cooperation.

The EU environmental traditions and its external policies

Let us turn to the background of EU environmental policy and its decision-making procedures, which influence its external environmental activities, including policy towards neighboring states.

The EU has strongly advocated environmental protection measures and high environmental standards among its member states. Its environmental policy was launched in the 70s, and today the EU is acting as a world leader in this area. Firstly, some EU member states have long traditions of strong environmental policy, influential green parties, active environmental NGOs, and public awareness about environmental problems. This tendency had strengthened as a result of the 'European Free Trade Association (EFTA) enlargement' in 1995, which increased the proportion of such states in the EU.¹⁷ Secondly, the EU has all the technical means to implement environmental protection measures, as it is one of the leaders in 'clean' and energy-efficient technologies.¹⁸ Finally, the influence of the industrial lobby in the EU is relatively low; it cannot have the same impact on the policy-formation process as the industrial lobby has in countries like the United States or Japan and the impact the oil industry lobby has in Norway. Those countries, despite their high level of technological development, have always found it difficult to endorse strong environment protection regulations. The European Commission (EC) actively has promoted the idea of the EU as an environmental leader on the global level and the member states have supported the Commission's strategy. The EU's ambitions, and claims for environmental leadership were demonstrated during various environmental conferences (the Kyoto Conference of 1997, the Paris Climate Change Conference of 2015, etc.). The EU tends to shape the environmental agenda and to persuade other countries to follow its practices because of its accumulated knowledge and experience. Even in those cases when it had to agree to compromise decisions and to adopt new instruments suggested by other countries, the EU was ready to develop them on European ground and adapt in accordance with EU traditions: such as the case of the emission trading mechanism supported by the US during

¹⁷ D. Richardson and C. Roots, *The Development of Green Parties in Europe* (1995): 23.

¹⁸ S. Oberthür and C.R. Kelly, "EU Leadership in International Climate Policy: Achievements and Challenges," *The International Spectator: Italian Journal of International Affairs* 43, no. 3 (2008): 35–50.

the Kyoto conference.¹⁹ The EU criticized this Kyoto mechanism for its low environmental impact but launched a discussion about it on the European level and eventually introduced the Emissions Trading System (ETS).²⁰ The EU demonstrated that it could use for environmental objectives and in accordance with its environmental norms, even those concepts and mechanisms that originally were perceived as incompatible with EU traditions. The EU managed to reshape and revise them, and then suggested renewed concepts and mechanisms to the global community as a new European environmental experience and new EU practice that could be projected to other countries. The EU strategy during international environmental negotiations corresponds to the concept of normative power as the EU acts as an international actor with the best environmental practices willing to project its norms and regulations to the international partners. Therefore, the EU's environmental power has a strong normative basis.

Of course, speaking about the EU as a normative power, its environmental leadership, and norms and regulations, it is important to understand that those norms are also subject to negotiations on the European level and that internal coordination of environmental policy is also a complicated process. The importance of both national and supranational levels of negotiations when the final result depends on the interaction between the levels is described in Putnam's two-level game theory, which provided an analytical framework for evaluation of the interaction between different international players and paid attention to the importance of internal factors that determine their behavior on the international level.²¹ In the case of the EU, the influence of the domestic (European) level is more serious than the influence of the national level in the case of state actors. The EU is far from being a unitary state or even a federation. Although it often performs as a unitary actor, it is less flexible than other parties, and it is more difficult for it to manoeuvre within the win-set of all of 27 EU member states, each presenting its national interests and interests of its regional, subregional, and industrial sectorial constituencies, etc. Moreover, as all the major decisions concerning environmental policy are taken in the framework of the EU's institutions, their role in policy formation must also be taken into account.

To understand the EU's international performance in the environmental policy area, it is necessary to examine the factors determining its internal development and decision-making on the European level, to go beyond the simple consideration of the domestic (European) level and to present it not as a unitary actor, but taking into account its institutional structure, possible diversities among the constituencies,

¹⁹ Text of the Kyoto Protocol, Art. 6, <https://unfccc.int/process-and-meetings/the-kyoto-protocol/history-of-the-kyoto-protocol/text-of-the-kyoto-protocol>.

²⁰ EU Emissions Trading System (EU ETS), https://ec.europa.eu/clima/eu-action/eu-emissions-trading-system-eu-ets_en.

²¹ R.D. Putnam, "Diplomacy and Domestic Politics: Logic of Two-Level Games."

and other circumstances that might influence its position on the international level. The measures of the environmental policy depend mainly on the agreement of national governments in the Council of Ministers (<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/topics/environment/>); it is a subject to all the difficulties facing European inter-governmental policymaking. Due to the intergovernmental character of the environmental policy, it reflects member states' concerns and might be easily blocked when national interests diverge.²² This makes the whole procedure extremely complicated. The problem with environmental regulations is that they usually relate to economic issues and quite often might lead to increased costs of production and lower competitiveness. Serious difficulties emerge because of the diversity between the member states. There are substantial differences among national styles of environmental protection policy or national economic performance. Some governments might not share 'green' preferences for high level environmental standards. Others cannot afford implementation of such environmental regulations. States with economic problems have to defend themselves against European harmonization of environmental regulations as they might be beyond the capabilities of these economically less developed countries.

The institutional element is highly important as a framework, which determines the decision-making process on the European level. Environmental policymaking is traditionally perceived as one with a high degree of uncertainty.²³ This uncertainty determines its special character. The traditional rational approach that the main actors try to maximize their benefits does not work in this area. First, the institutions do not have any preexisting interests in the environmental policy sphere. Second, they might have a disagreement on the concrete nature of the problem, which is why it is quite difficult for them to come up with a common position on the necessary or desirable measures to avoid negative consequences. Therefore, policy formation in the environmental sphere, where there is such a high degree of uncertainty and a different understanding of the current problems, becomes very difficult.²⁴ So the first step for an effective environmental policy is to solve this uncertainty, to make common definitions of the problems in order to implement the common policy.

Internal coordination of environmental policy could be illustrated by the case of climate change policy. The crucial role of defining the problem and further coordination of community climate change policy was left to the Commission. It was placed in charge of the natural scientific research of the causes and the possible consequences of climate change. The research was arranged on the European level for efficiency reasons. Meanwhile, the Commission used these research programs as an opportunity

²² F.W. Scharpf, "Negative and Positive Integration in the Political Economy of European Welfare States," *Governance in the European Union* (1996): 27.

²³ P. Haas, *Saving the Mediterranean: The Politics of International Environmental Cooperation* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990).

²⁴ M. Jachtenfuchs, *Institutional Structure and Patterns of Problem-Definitions in the European Union. The Case of the Greenhouse Effect* (1996).

to promote the supranational model of European integration, as in this way the community's competencies were extended to environmental policy. The Council represented the intergovernmental approach in this area, as it agreed to the transfer of competencies to the community level but only to a certain degree, as far as it deemed necessary, and no more.²⁵ The Council strongly supported the idea, promoted by the Commission, of European leadership in the environmental sphere. Thus, the competencies were divided between the EU institutions presenting both supranational and national interests: the problem definition on the European level was left to the Commission, and the Council determined the guidelines and represented the European approach on the international level on the ground of common position.

Therefore, the EU attitude to international environmental cooperation is strongly influenced by 'domestic' policy including: the two levels of the EU negotiation (supranational and national levels), the environmental policies of particular member states, and political and economic factors that determine the position of member states, etc. To participate in international environmental cooperation, the EU should elaborate a single approach to the negotiated issues based on the agreement between member states and the EU institutions. The special nature of the EU decision-making process requires a long process of negotiations on the European level to prepare for interactions on the international level, and results in a lack of flexibility during negotiations on the international level as the EU representatives have limits determined by the negotiating position agreed on the EU level. Eventually, the EU negotiating team can maneuver within its mandate and has to put pressure on other actors to gain their support.

Since the early 90s, active participation of the EU in various international environmental activities has contributed to its reputation as an international leader in environmental cooperation.²⁶ European officials realized that the EU's environmental policy should be supported by international activities. The efficiency of environmental measures implemented on the European level and by the EU member states would be limited without projection of similar practices to neighboring countries in case of regional problems and around the world in case of global problems. The necessity to ensure external support of its environmental norms and regulations resulted in various activities of the EU towards international institutions and third countries. On the international level, the EU has tried to use multilateral and bilateral frameworks for promoting its environmental norms around

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ R. Falkner, "The Political Economy of 'Normative Power' Europe: EU Environmental Leadership in International Biotechnology Regulation," *Journal of European Public Policy* 14, no. 4 (2007): 507–26; S. Oberthür, "The EU as an International Actor: The Protection of the Ozone Layer," *JCMS* 37, no. 4 (1999): 641–59; J. Vogler, "The European Contribution to Global Environmental Governance," *International Affairs* 81, no. 4 (2005): 835–49; J. Vogler and H.R. Stephan, "The European Union in Global Environmental Governance. Leadership in the Making?" *International Environmental Agreements* 7, no. 4 (2007): 389–413.

the world. It relies on its resources to support the development of international environmental governance, particularly the role of the UN Environment Programme (<https://www.unep.org/>) and other international environmental institutions. It is an active participant in international environmental conventions. During environmental negotiations, it traditionally pushes other parties for more ambitious commitments and has demonstrated its leadership in general environmental negotiations and dealing with particular issues, including climate change, biodiversity, the ozone layer, etc.

In order to be able to promote its position and project its norms on the international level, the EU tends to use its special influence on partners to get their support for its position. Such influence was particularly strong in the case of candidate countries. In the context of accession negotiations, they were extremely vulnerable to EU pressure. As a result, they had to support the EU's ambitious agenda during international environmental negotiations. In 1997, during the Kyoto conference, the EU created an alliance with then-candidate countries from Central and Eastern Europe, using their interest in EU membership as a bargaining chip.²⁷ They also had to approve environmental legislation of the EU and join the European Environmental Agency (<https://www.eea.europa.eu/>). Enlargement provided the EU with a perfect opportunity to extend its environmental practices to the new member states.²⁸ The way the EU was dealing with then-candidate countries could be considered as evidence of its normative power performance.

However, in other cases of external activities, the EU's normative power lacks arguments similar to the prospect of the EU membership and, as a result, it is more difficult to persuade the EU partners, without accession ambitions and prospects of joining the EU, to adopt the EU norms and regulations. Though it is widely recognized that EU environmental legislation is the most comprehensive and advanced in the world, EU partners often prefer not to copy EU best practices. They realize that introduction of EU environmental practices in other countries can cause social and economic problems. As a result, EU partners often are reluctant to implement EU legislation. It was already mentioned that in the EU there are also different positions, and some member states find it economically damaging to implement the EU environmental norms.²⁹ National authorities of the EU partners are also concerned about potential economic losses; undermined competitiveness of the

²⁷ K. Smith, "The Instruments of the European Union Foreign Policy," European University Institute (EUI) Working Papers, RSC # 97/68, December, 1997, 34.

²⁸ L.B. Andonova, "The Europeanization of Environmental Policy in Central and Eastern Europe," in *The Europeanization of Central and Eastern Europe*, F. Schimmelfennig and U. Sedelmeier, (eds.), (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), 135–56; J. Carmin and S.D. VanDeveer, "Enlarging EU environments: Central and Eastern Europe from transition to accession," in *EU Enlargement and the environment: Institutional change and environmental policy in central and Eastern Europe*, J. Carmin and S.D. VanDeveer (eds.), (New York: Routledge, 2005), 3–24.

²⁹ I. Botetzagias, "Chapter 8. Green Politics in Greece at the time of fiscal crisis," 161–79.

national industry and agriculture, and costs of a technological shift to clean technologies. They also are reluctant to change national environmental legislation under external pressure as they perceive it as an attempt to undermine sovereignty. They see the normative power of the EU in realist terms as an instrument of projecting influence. Nation-states are traditionally sensitive to the pressure from external powers and the projection of norms from outside. Considering the economic and political consequences of environmental norms, they often are reluctant to follow EU recommendations. With the exception of candidate states, the EU's capability to influence third countries is limited as it highly depends on the attitude of those countries' national authorities to the EU, its environmental legislation, and political will to adopt the EU norms and regulations.

The European Union had also other ways of influencing third countries using a large variety of external policies, particularly regional programs targeted at cooperation with particular regions. The EU has started to integrate the environmental component into its external policies, into different regional cooperation programs arranged with its partners, including the Union for Mediterranean (https://ec.europa.eu/environment/enlarg/med/ufm_en.htm), the European Neighborhood Policy (https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/european-neighbourhood-policy_en), and Northern Dimension (<https://northerndimension.info>). EU officials recognize the importance of the external dimension of EU environmental policy. The European Green Deal (https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en) a new ambitious strategy presented in 2019 is also highly dependent on the cooperation with EU partners.³⁰ To illustrate the EU external environmental influence, its contribution to regional environmental activities, the strategy it tries to pursue cooperating with the third countries, and the way this strategy is perceived by those countries, I would turn to the case of the EU's attempts to influence the Russian environmental policy.

The EU's influence on the Russian environmental policy

As noted, geographic proximity and a long common borderline determined the importance of the environmental situation in Russia for the EU. Unfortunately, environmental standards in Russia were much lower, as it faced various environmental problems. In the early 90s, collapse of the Soviet Union led to political and institutional reforms effecting regulation of environmental administration and regulation; serious economic problems in Russia constrained the national authorities from financing environmental programs; environmental legislation inherited from the

³⁰ Council conclusions, On Climate and Energy Diplomacy – Delivering on the external dimension of the European Green Deal, 25/01, 2021; V.B. Belov “European Green deal,” *European Union: Facts and Comments* no. 99 (2020): 33–39, (In Russ.).

Soviet Union was outdated.³¹ Russia also inherited Soviet institutional problems, including the tradition to divide environmental administrative competences between several institutions and the lack of a strong environmental institution.³² Another problem rooted in the Soviet past was the attitude to natural resources. The Soviet authorities tried to promote efficient use of natural resources, but state ownership of all resources made it difficult to motivate people and enterprises.³³ Differences in environmental regulation between the EU and Russia made their environmental cooperation particularly difficult.³⁴

The EU was concerned about the environmental damage caused by Russia and its business entities, which undermined EU efforts in this area.³⁵ Vast resources of Russia ensured its significance for global environmental cooperation making it an important partner for the EU during international negotiations, e.g., in the framework of the Convention on Biological Diversity, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Kyoto Protocol, and the Paris Agreement, the UN Convention of the Law of the Sea, and in the regional structures such as ‘Environment for Europe’ process, the Helsinki Convention on the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Baltic Sea Area and the Bucharest Convention on the Protection of the Black Sea against Pollution.³⁶ Russia’s influence on global environmental cooperation could be illustrated by climate change negotiations and ratification of the Kyoto

³¹ P.N. Joshua and L.A. Henry, “The state of environmental protection in the Russian Federation: a review of the post-Soviet era,” *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 57, no. 6, (2017): 1–23; F. Singleton, *Environmental problems in the Soviet Union & Eastern Europe* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1987); J. Oldfield, “Structural Economic Change and the Natural Environment in the Russian Federation,” *Post-Communist Economies* 12, no. 1, (2000): 77–90; G.O. Yarygin, “International Environmental Politics,” *Russia and the world: understanding international relations* (Latham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2017): 207–30.

³² L.V. Kochtcheeva, *Comparative Environmental Regulation in the United States and Russia: Institutions, Flexible Instruments, and Governance* (SUNY Press, 2009): 11.

³³ *Ibid.*, 131.

³⁴ J. Caddy, “Harmonization and asymmetry: environmental policy co-ordination between the European Union and Central Europe,” *Journal of European Public Policy* 4, no. 3 (1997): 318–36; G.T. Shkiperova, “Effect of environmental policy changes on pollution: A comparative analysis of European Union and Russia,” *Economic Analysis: Theory and Practice* 18, no. 7 (2019): 1256–1272, (In Russ.).

³⁵ I. Massa and V.P. Tynkkynen, *The Struggle for Russian Environmental Policy*. Kikimora Publications (2001).

³⁶ L.V. Egorova, “Ecological Policy Non-Effectiveness of Russia in Absence of Global Ecological Policy,” *Vestnik of international academy of science (the Russian section)* no. 1 (2012): 18–21, (In Russ.); M.L. Lagutina and Y.S. Naumkin, “Russia’s role in global environmental governance, in the case of climate change problem solution,” *Crucial Issues of World Politics in the XXI Century* (St Petersburg: St Petersburg University Press, 2012), 479–504. (In Russ.); I.A. Sosunova and L.V. Egorova, “Non-affectivity of ecological policy of Russia in absence of global ecological policy,” *Use and Protection of Natural Resources in Russia* 124, no. 4 (2012): 109–11, (In Russ.).

Protocol, as its entry into force became possible only after its ratification by the Russian Parliament.³⁷

Russia also was interested in establishing environmental cooperation with the EU, but its motivation was different from the European one. Russia had a pragmatic approach to international environmental activities; its decisions were based on the rationality principle and were determined by expectations of certain benefits as a result of regional environmental cooperation and recognition of scientific evidence behind environmental protection. Russia has faced serious environmental problems, which have been mainly caused by minimal environmental requirements for industry, energy, transport, and agriculture. The economic crisis in the early 90s and the drop in economic production surprisingly had a positive effect in terms of an environmental situation as they led to decreased pressure on the environment. However, it was clear that economic recovery without the proper introduction of environmental norms and stimulation of clean technologies would again cause deterioration of the environmental situation. Russia could face a dilemma choosing between economic interests and environmental concerns. The growing role of energy resources for post-Soviet Russia made environmental protection rather vulnerable. Already in the 90s, the EU was perceived as an important partner for Russia as it could provide its expertise in environmental regulation, share its experience of stimulating environmentally friendly behavior, and introduce clean technologies. Russia was not going to copy the EU environmental legislation, but it expressed intent to analyze it and to follow the processes that would correspond to its domestic situation. Russia also could not risk its potential economic recovery and undermine the interests of national producers.³⁸ Thus, Russian authorities supported the development of environmental cooperation with the EU but limited it because of economic concerns.

Major issues for environmental cooperation between the EU and Russia have included: global environmental problems (e.g., climate change, risks for biodiversity, deforestation, and pollution of water and air resources); cross-border environmental problems that the EU Member States shared with Russia because of the long common border and common water resources like the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea; environmental problems in Russia, which required urgent measures from the Russian authorities, and EU assistance was considered important to improve the

³⁷ B. Buchner and S. Dall'Olio, "Russia and the Kyoto Protocol: The Long Road to Ratification," *Transition Studies Review* 12, no. 2 (2005): 349–82; V. Danilov-Danilian, *Climate Change: the Russian Vision* (Moscow: Teis, 2003), (In Russ.); L.A. Henry and L.M. Sundstrom, "Russia and the Kyoto Protocol: Seeking an Alignment of Interests and Image," *Global Environmental Politics* 7, no. 4 (Nov, 2007): 47–69; V. Kotov, "The EU-Russia Ratification Deal: The Risks and Advantages of an Informal Agreement," *International Review for Environmental Strategies* 5, no. 1 (2004): 157–66; N.G. Zaslavskaya, "The European Union at Kyoto Conference," *Vestnik of Saint Petersburg State University. Series 6: Political Science. International relations* 6, no. 1 (2000): 128–35, (In Russ.).

³⁸ I. Massa and V.P. Tynkkynen, *The Struggle for Russian Environmental Policy*.

situation; and the development of advanced environmental legislation in Russia under the influence of European partners.³⁹

The first serious consideration of environmental cooperation between the EU and Russia was launched during negotiations of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), which was signed in 1994. Of course, this agreement was primarily focused on political and economic cooperation. However, the final document also demonstrated the importance of the environmental dimension as there were multiple references to environmental cooperation. The agreement explicitly acknowledged the necessity of ‘close cooperation in the area of environmental protection’ as a result of interdependence between the EU and Russia (Agreement on Partnership and Cooperation 1994).⁴⁰ The PCA provided formal status of the environmental cooperation and determined particular areas for joint activities: ‘monitoring of pollution’, ‘assessment of environment’, ‘ecological restoration’, measures against air and water pollution, monitoring of water resources, ‘protection of forests’, waste-management, ‘classification and safe handling of chemicals’, monitoring of environmental impact of industry, energy, agriculture, protection of biological resources, and measures against climate change. The agreement also mentioned specific instruments that should be used for environmental protection: exchange of environmental information, environmental education and public awareness, joint research activities and environmental impact studies, economic and fiscal measures, transfer of environmentally friendly technologies, and environmental cooperation at the regional and global level. It also stated that Russian environmental regulations should be upgraded towards EU standards (Art. 69). Environmental issues were also referred to as part of the legal approximation between the EU and Russia (Art. 55.2) and they were included in various economic projects, industrial, energy, and agricultural cooperation (Art. 56-57, 64, 65). Eventually, the PCA dignified important decisions of the EU and Russian authorities to combat environmental problems together; they formally recognized their interdependence in this area and the importance of joint and coordinated activities. They were ready to start environmental cooperation before the agreement came into force. As a result, the first joint environmental projects were launched in 1995 few years before the PCA was ratified and came into force.

In 2001 the European Commission suggested creating a bilateral dialogue on environmental problems. By that time, ‘dialogue’ as a form of consultations and activities’ coordination proved to be particularly efficient in political and energy areas of cooperation. The environmental dialogue was supposed to promote consultations on such issues as environmental protection, sustainable development, and

³⁹ E.A. Kurbanov and A.E. Fomykh, “The problems of climate change and ecology in the interaction between the European Union and Russia: the prospects of research and educational cooperation,” *West-East* no. 12 (2019): 175–88, (In Russ.); M.L. Lagutina and Y.S. Naumkin, “Russia’s role in global environmental governance.”

⁴⁰ Agreement on Partnership and Cooperation between the European Communities and their Member States and the Russian Federation (1994).

the efficient use of natural resources. However, it took several years to negotiate all the aspects of the new framework for environmental cooperation. Finally, the ‘dialogue on the environment’ was established in 2006. It involved representatives of Directorate-General Environment (DG Environment) on behalf of the EU and officials from the Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment representing Russia. For bilateral consultations and expert discussions, special working groups were created; they dealt with aspects such as climate change, cleaner production, biodiversity, environmental impact assessment, and convergence of environmental policies, water, and marine issues.

The EU-Russian environmental cooperation was influenced by the general development of the EU-Russia relationship. New concepts suggested to stimulate cooperation between the European Union and Russia resulted in the strengthening of cooperation in specific areas, including environmental cooperation. In 2001, a new plan to stimulate economic cooperation, including environmental issues, and to create a Common European Economic Space (CEES) was proposed. The High-Level Group consisting of the Deputy Prime Minister of Russia Victor Khristenko and Commissioner for External Relations in the EU, Chris Patten, was created to prepare the concept of a ‘common European economic space’. In 2003, this concept was projected to new areas: security, justice and home affairs, research, and education, establishing four ‘common spaces’ between the EU and Russia. Environmental cooperation was integrated into ‘common economic space’. The road map adopted in 2005⁴¹ suggested measures to strengthen cooperation in the area of environment, including promotion of cleaner technologies and natural resource saving technologies, support of sustainable use of water, wood, and other natural resources, conservation of forest and marine environment, monitoring of pollution, and reduction of the negative effect of pollution. It also implied the necessity to promote legal convergence and ensure high environmental standards in various economic sectors, including energy. The road map reflected the increasing importance of coordinated activities of the EU and Russia in the international arena: consultations in the framework of various international environmental agreements and discussions about the implementation of their commitments.⁴² By that time, Russia had made progress in the development of its environmental norms and regulations. The EU-Russian environmental cooperation became more balanced; Russia was no longer a recipient of EU assistance; it reacted to the EU environmental agenda taking into account Russian interests. To illustrate the strengthening of the Russian environmental policy, we can refer to the main development directions of the water

⁴¹ *Road Map for the Common Economic Space – Building Blocks for Sustained Economic Growth*, EU-Russia Summit, Conclusions, Annex 1, May 10, 2005 https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/research_and_innovation/strategy_on_research_and_innovation/documents/ec_rtd_russia_eu_four_common_spaces-roadmap.pdf.

⁴² *Road Map for the Common Economic Space – Building Blocks for Sustained Economic Growth* (2005).

system management complex of Russia until 2010 (adopted in 2004),⁴³ Russia's marine doctrine (2001, 2015),⁴⁴ and climate doctrine (2009).⁴⁵ Today, Russia is an active participant in the Paris Agreement,⁴⁶ and takes measures for substantial reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. In order to implement the Paris Agreement, Russia agreed to drop its emissions by 70 percent by 2030 in comparison to 1990. In 2019, it elaborated a national plan until 2022 describing necessary policies and measures to prepare the Russian economy and its population to the effects of climate change.⁴⁷ In 2020, the Russian authorities started to prepare for implementation of Russia's obligations according to the Paris Agreement and examined Russia's potential to develop a low-carbon economy.⁴⁸ In response to the European Green Deal, Russia introduced the Green Transition policy indicating its intention to decarbonize the country's economy. The basic scenario of the strategy aims to reduce carbon emissions to 67% of 1990 levels by 2030 and to reach 64% by 2050.⁴⁹

Increased environmental cooperation resulted in multiple projects. Objectives of particular projects reflected major priorities of the EU and Russia, their concerns about global, regional, and local problems, and the necessity to improve legislation and coordinate the behavior of various actors. The importance of global cooperation on climate change, greenhouse gas emissions reductions, and the introduction of the Kyoto protocol's flexible mechanisms led to Russia's preparation for its implementation and the development of climate change policy. Regional dimension of environmental projects could be illustrated with BALTHAZAR project (https://archive.iwlearn.net/helcom.fi/projects/en_GB/BALTHAZAR/index.html), which was launched in 2009 and was meant to improve the environmental protection of the Baltic Sea, particularly by minimizing damage from hazardous waste. The local impact of environmental projects demonstrated by the city of St. Petersburg, which benefited from several projects of that kind, including one project launched to improve the quality of drinking water and another initiated to improve wastewater treatment

⁴³ Government of the Russian Federation, Main Development Directions of the Water System Management Complex of Russia until 2010 (31 May 2004).

⁴⁴ President of the Russian Federation, Marine Doctrine of the Russian Federation until 2020, Presidential Decree (27 July 2001); President of the Russian Federation, Marine Doctrine, Presidential Decree (26 July 2015).

⁴⁵ President of the Russian Federation, Climate Doctrine, Presidential Decree No 861–RP (17 Dec, 2009).

⁴⁶ Press release on Russia signing the Paris Agreement under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (22 April 2016), https://archive.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/ckNonkJE02Bw/content/id/2248604.

⁴⁷ Government of the Russian Federation, Directions on National Plan of Measures to Prepare for the consequences of Climate Change Policy until 2022 (25 Dec 2019).

⁴⁸ President of the Russian Federation, Presidential Decree On Greenhouse Gas Emissions Control, No 666 (4 Nov 2020).

⁴⁹ Government of the Russian Federation, Decree On approval of the strategy of social and economic development of the Russian Federation with low greenhouse gas emissions until 2050, N3052 (29 October 2021).

in the city.⁵⁰ Several projects were aimed at legal convergence between the EU and Russia, improvement of environmental norms in Russia, and upgrading of Russian environmental legislation towards the EU standards; e.g., the EU provided financial and expert support for the ‘Harmonisation of Environmental Standards’ project.⁴³ This was a joint project devoted to the creation of the Russian Regional Environmental Centre (<http://www.rusrec.ru/en>) was supposed to ensure coordination between federal, regional, and local authorities in charge of environmental policy, to strengthen environmental initiatives of the civil society, and to promote the participation of environmental NGOs and national businesses in environmental projects.⁵¹

The regional dimension proved to be extremely important for EU-Russian environmental cooperation as there are several different frameworks for joint environmental activities in specific regions, for example, the Baltic Sea Region and the Black Sea Region. The Baltic Sea basin has been damaged by multiple environmental problems, including water pollution caused by industry and transport and additional threats to biodiversity. This region has a long history of environmental cooperation in the framework of the Helsinki Commission (a governing body of the Helsinki Convention on the Protection of the Maritime Environment of the Baltic Sea Area) (<https://helcom.fi>). Environmental cooperation in the region was strengthened with the reform of the Northern Dimension (ND) (<https://northerndimension.info/>) and the introduction of the ND Environmental Partnership with special emphasis on North-Western Russia.⁵² The Black Sea region also requires special environmental measures as natural resources are also damaged by pollution caused by transport and energy. Environmental cooperation in the region is arranged in the framework of the Bucharest Convention on the Protection of the Black Sea against Pollution (the Black Sea Commission for the Protection of the Black Sea) (<http://blacksea-commission.org>) and supported by other regional organizations like the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (<http://www.bsec-organization.org>).

Regional environmental cooperation between the EU and Russia has been based mainly on the rational basis of common interests and shared concerns about environmental problems. Geographical proximity determined necessity of coordinated environmental regulation. The EU and Russia have found common ground concerning the necessity of joint measures and political coordination in order to improve the environmental situation. Dealing with Russia, the EU as a normative power tended to project its environmental norms and regulations. It emphasized the essential

⁵⁰ Helsinki Commission, Heads of Delegation, 29th Meeting, Saint-Petersburg, the Russian Federation (2–3 December 2009).

⁵¹ D. Hahn and M. Begak, “Harmonisation of Russian Environmental Standards with EU Legislation,” in *Environmental Finance and Socially Responsible Business in Russia: Legal and Practical Trends* F.M. Mucklow, W.Th. Douma (eds.), (T.M.C. Asser Press, 2010), 85–99.

⁵² Northern Dimension Environmental Partnership, <https://ndep.org> (accessed on Nov 21, 2021).

role of legal convergence, which implied the necessity to improve Russia's environmental standards and make them similar to EU standards. But for the Russian authorities it was important to take into account local administrative and economic situation and adjust the EU norms to Russia's conditions. Russia as a rational actor, perceived international environmental cooperation as a problem-solving mechanism, so it is more interested in projects targeted at particular environmental problems. They found it difficult to accept the EU's role as a normative power. This cautious reaction of Russia to the EU's normative ambitions might be explained by Russia's fear of growing external influence. For Russian authorities, it was highly important to control domestic policies, including environmental measures. Recognition of the EU normative influence could lead to the weakening of national authorities, so they preferred to focus on particular environmental problems and their joint solutions.

However, their intention to proceed with environmental cooperation faced serious challenges. First of all, even though the EU and Russia agreed on the necessity of environmental policy, they had different traditions of environmental regulation and approaches to environmental problems. Second, Russia's environmental efforts were constrained by economic interests, particularly, concerns of energy producers, and by administrative structure (lack of a strong environmental institution on the national level). Third, environmental cooperation was undermined by political contradictions between the EU and Russia. In 1999, 2008 and 2014, it was possible to overcome political crises taking into account the importance of environmental cooperation, but the 2022 crisis demonstrated fundamental differences of values, which prevented possibility of further cooperation.

Conclusion

So, are all rational international actors eager to participate in environmental cooperation? There are indeed serious arguments in favor of environmental cooperation, particularly between neighbors who might share their concerns about environmental problems. Their intention to solve environmental problems efficiently and to minimize costs usually facilitates regional environmental cooperation.

At the same time, potential environmental cooperation might face serious obstacles. Such obstacles could be caused by the general attitude to international cooperation of an actor or by the actor's vision of environmental cooperation. Some states like North Korea, perceive other actors as antagonists and prefer conflictual strategies to cooperation. Of course, it depends on a particular state; for example, during the Cold War, antagonistic relations between the West and the East did not affect environmental cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region within the Helsinki Commission. At the same time, after February 2022, relations between the EU and Russia have been totally ruined preventing any cooperation, including environmental coordination. For some states, it might be rational not to cooperate, to preserve their sovereignty and to minimize external influence on their policies. Environmental cooperation might also face challenges caused by differences between actors. Actors

can have a different evaluation of environmental problems because of their experience, so environmental problems considered urgent by some actors might be seen as minor issues by others. Actors can also differ in terms of their environmental policy background; some might be more advanced and put pressure on others to follow the same road, but other states might be not ready to follow the suggested practices; they can vary in terms of their resources and capabilities, as not all states have enough resources to implement advanced environmental regulations.

The EU is an actor implementing advanced environmental policy within its borders and promoting environmental cooperation with other actors. The EU unites Member States with very different traditions of environmental policy and visions of current environmental problems. Member States have an opportunity to express national concerns and to influence internal and external decisions through inter-governmental institutions like the Council of the European Union. With this, the EU demonstrates how to overcome internal differences and to speak with a single voice during international negotiations advocating for strengthening environmental cooperation. The EU's active stand on the environmental agenda and its advanced environmental practices have enabled it to perform as an environmental leader.

Other actors have accepted EU leadership in environmental policy and agreed to cooperate with it to protect the environment, but they might find it difficult to copy European norms and practices as they need to take into account local conditions. Examining environmental cooperation between the EU and Russia, one should recognize its asymmetrical structure due to the partners' environmental policy experience, motivation, and approaches to international environmental activities. The EU's concern about transnational environmental problems that it shares with Russia has led to various environmental projects suggested by the EU to Russia. The EU has accumulated the leading role in this regional cooperation as it tried to encourage Russia for further environmental activities. Russia accepted the necessity to transform its environmental legislation and participated in various EU-led projects. However, Russia's concerns about its political independence from external authorities, energy sector's economic benefits and administrative capabilities led to Russia's desire to constrain cooperation with the EU, focusing mainly on common environmental problems and mutual interests. It was ready to accept the EU's environmental leadership but refused to recognize the EU as a normative power.

The further development of the EU-Russia relationship will be a very important indication of the advantages and constraints of environmental cooperation. On the one hand, the need for joint action to solve environmental problems is obvious; on the other hand, it is also obvious that these actors are divided by political, normative and ethical contradictions, which are extremely difficult to overcome.

Data availability

No data are associated with this article.