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In this paper I explore the place of the European Union and the United States in the politics of global climate change governance. Climate change is arguably the key challenge in 21st century politics – it poses a threat to the world as a whole, but has not yet been met with appropriate action. Although both the EU and the US have adopted numerous measures to thwart the effects of global warming, they have been reluctant to engage more seriously with addressing its underlying causes. While the economic growth is *the* driver of climate change, the modes of production and

consumption in the West continue to facilitate it, and still the EU and the US hesitate to pursue action that would reframe the foundations of their economies. With economic globalization and the efforts of countries in the Global South and East to catch up with the living standards and life-styles in Europe and America, serious US and EU climate action has to involve deeper engagement with ideologies underpinning their economic models. Effort to pursue accountable global climate governance has to involve more investment into leading by example rather than speculating over the best coercive strategies.

## The EU and the US in the Politics of Global Climate Change Governance: Avoiding the Crucial Questions

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EU    US    Climate change    Foreign trade    TTIP    TAFTA

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## 1. Climate Change: Why It Matters and How We Got Here

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In *The Neverending Story*, a B-rate German fantasy movie from 1984, a little boy learns that succumbing to despair is the easiest way to get drowned in the swamp and the only way to escape that fate is to have hope and imagination. The world of flying dogs, talking horses and little boys able to visit fairy-tale kingdoms just by reading a magic book may seem miles away from the very concrete figures of CO<sub>2</sub> emission reductions. Yet the global politics of climate action *is* shaped by much more than scientific evidence of climatologists. Believing (and not believing) in evidence shapes international negotiations and the debates at national levels just as much as hard data does. A paper recently released by Carbon Tracker Initiative, a group of professionals engaged in consultation with industry representatives over the need to preclude a burst of carbon bubble concluded that “the incumbents have done the maths, but don’t all believe the answer” (Carbon Tracker Initiative 2014:5). While there is ample evidence of man-induced climatic changes, which have impacted human activity, climate action has been thwarted by interest groups who either refuse to *believe* this evidence, or they doubt the ability of humans to take necessary action. Thus hope and resignation are the key motives in the politics of global climate change governance.

Atmospheric changes are not a new topic on the global agenda – the UN agencies have been addressing them since the 1960s. Growing scientific knowledge on the anthropogenic causes of global warming led to the first World Climate Conference in 1979. In their final declaration the participating scientists asked the governments of the world to foresee and prevent potential man-made changes in the climate that might be adverse to the well-being of humanity (Zillman 2009). The conference was followed by several UN negotiation rounds, leading to establishment of the United Nations Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 1988. The IPCC, originally erected under the auspices of the World Meteorological Organization and United Nations Environmental Program, is an intergovernmental panel, whose findings must be approved by the governments before they are released to the public. The five reports it has produced until now have provided instructive guidance on man’s role in the Earth’s changing climate. In spite of numerous meetings and international agreements reached in the

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past decades, the most recent IPCC report, released in April 2014, stated with high confidence<sup>1</sup> that: “Globally, *economic and population growth* continue to be the most important drivers of increases in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from fossil fuel combustion. The contribution of population growth between 2000 and 2010 remained roughly identical to the previous three decades, *while the contribution of economic growth has risen sharply*” (emphasis added, IPCC 2014:8).

The claim that the origins of climate change lie in human activity has been frequently viewed with skepticism and dismissed as a controversial suggestion, yet this line of reasoning has found almost no support in the ranks of climate scientists. Surveys of the research published in peer-reviewed journals showed that there is indeed a scientific consensus that global warming is being caused by human activity (Oreskes 2004). Out of 13 950 peer-reviewed articles on the climate published in the period 1991-2012, only 24 have challenged the consensus (Powell 2012). The necessity to adopt climate action is thus contested politically, not scientifically. The rising seas, droughts, increased risks of fire or floods carry with them socio-political consequences with repercussions for security. Literature on the impact of climate change is quickly growing (see e.g. Wheeler and Braun 2013, Hunt and Watkiss 2011, Mora 2013) and a number of institutions (including the US military) have already begun strategically planning how they will adapt to the challenges of a warmer world.

The scientific consensus on the causes and probable consequences of global warming, however, has not been yet matched by a determined and concerted global action. While most states have undertaken mitigation and adaptation measures domestically, a global regime is not in place. There is an ongoing debate on whether the term “global governance” should stand for description of currently existing interactions or whether it should refer to a political project that aims to introduce new institutions (Biermann 2004). This paper understands global governance as the latter meaning - as a project not yet in existence, although envisioned (in various forms) by some actors in the global political arena and opposed by others. It thus explores the US and the EU visions, behavior and interests in their “project in the making.” Although the world seems to be heading towards more regional as opposed to multilateral solutions (Peterson et al. 2012), the actors in international politics do voice their visions on how the current system of governance can be corrected.

The theoretical case for the adoption of global environmental governance is underpinned by the following assumptions: the world’s economy is globalized; the economic and ecological systems are interdependent; the planet’s resources are finite; and environmental degradation crosses the political boundaries of nation states (Harrison and Sundstrom 2010; Paterson et al. 2003). Importantly, climate change has a strong human rights dimension and the inaction of some states will have repercussions on rights of citizens of other states.<sup>2</sup> Thus, the current crisis is hardly manageable without transnational coordination and a joint commitment to a set of principles that can be globally enforced via a mechanism that holds all major actors accountable. However, while the necessity of global governance is discussed and a number of measures adopted at national levels, international actors are reluctant to commit to a binding regime – unless all other actors do so. Here it is essential to emphasize that some non-state actors, especially business/industry are increasingly becoming independent actors in world politics, especially in the environmental domain (Levy and Newell 2005). While the states remain the primary duty-bearers with companies having to abide by state regulations, the companies have amassed the power and resources to influence which regulations are adopted – in short, to shape the agenda (Mitchell 2013, Gore 2013).

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1 The findings presented in IPCC’s reports are accompanied with scientists’ qualitative evaluation of degree of confidence in the findings (from very low to very high).

2 The UN Independent Expert on Human Rights and Environment has urged repeatedly the states to consider environmental dimension in fulfilling their human rights obligations. See Knox (2012 and 2013).

The distinct acronyms and nitty-gritty details of the quantities of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions to be cut and the monitoring and accountability mechanisms are usually only followed by a narrow group of environment professionals. Yet the climate action talks, while very specialized, tap into several broader themes of world politics. A key factor shaping climate change politics is the North-South divide, or, the historical and present-day responsibility of industrialized countries in the global North for the high greenhouse gas levels and the demands for development raised by the global South. The climate talks expose the competitive nature of the international system: the emphasis on narrow national interests questions the viability of a plan to protect the global commons. More importantly, the very foundation of the world's dominant economic paradigm are a key stumbling block in climate action progress: the economic model of 21st century states, including the US and the EU, is still based on *growth*. The economic downturn in the West and the perceived need to keep pace with emerging markets prevent discussions on alternatives. While the growth itself is a crucial contributor to climate change, it seems that global climate action is in a state of deadlock.

## 2. Who Draws the World Climate Map?

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While in the past two decades industrializing countries have become the world's biggest polluters, the current politics of global climate governance is still shaped by the fact, that historically, the industrialized countries of the North and West have carried a key share of responsibility for global warming. The share of the EU and the US carbon emissions in the global pie decreased – in 2013 their share has already been less than 30 per cent of the whole world (EU 11 per cent and USA 16 per cent) (Olivier et al. 2013:4, see also Groen et al. 2012). They both still belong to the world's top 10 polluters in total CO<sub>2</sub> emissions (Table 1). Speaking in per capita terms, in 2012 the top 10 still included two EU members (Luxembourg and Estonia) and the US, which produced 3-4 times the world average.<sup>3</sup> The historical responsibility and current high levels of energy consumption and emissions play an important role in the US's and EU's leverage in negotiations with emerging economies in the Global South.

Although the future of global environmental governance does not only depend on US and EU visions, their leverage in influencing the debate is determined both by historical track record and current levels of consumption. The Southern actors (G77) have been challenging EU/US leadership on numerous grounds in the climate action debate.

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<sup>3</sup> Emission Database for Global Atmospheric Research (2013), *CO<sub>2</sub> Time Series 1990-2012 Per Capita for World Countries*, [http://edgar.jrc.ec.europa.eu/overview.php?v=CO2ts\\_pc1990-2012&sort=des9](http://edgar.jrc.ec.europa.eu/overview.php?v=CO2ts_pc1990-2012&sort=des9).

• Table 1 | Emissions Total per Country/Region (in ktons CO<sub>2</sub>)

	1990	2000	2012
1	USA	USA	China
2	EU 27	EU 27	Developing countries except: Asian tigers*, Brazil, Mexico, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, India, Iran
3	EU 15	China	USA
4	China	Developing countries except: Asian tigers*, Brazil, Mexico, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, India, Iran	Brazil, Mexico, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, India, Iran
5	Russia	EU 15	EU 27
6	Developing countries except Asian tigers and Brazil, Mexico, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, India, Iran	Brazil, Mexico, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, India, Iran	EU 15
7	Brazil, Mexico, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, India, Iran	Russian Federation	India
8	Other Annex 1- EIT	Asian tigers*	Asian tigers*
9	Japan	Japan	Russia
10	Germany	India	Japan

Source: Emission Database for Global Atmospheric Research, CO<sub>2</sub> Time Series 1990-2012 Per Region/Country, <http://edgar.jrc.ec.europa.eu/overview.php?v=CO2ts1990-2012&sort=des9>.

Note: \*Asian tigers = Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, South Korea and Taiwan.

The current state of development and growth in the West has emerged out of a carbon intensive economy. The developing countries argue that their primary focus is on their economic growth and lifting their populations out of poverty. For China or Brazil, the dominant theme is eradication of poverty, and while they have adopted climate change mitigation policies, they are reluctant to go further unless the West or the North pays their dues. The US or EU's efforts to bring the developing world's emissions down is often viewed as "carbon colonialism," especially in light of their tactic of outsourcing emission-heavy industries to the South/East (Zhang and Barr 2013:20).<sup>4</sup>

It is important to highlight that the debate goes well beyond historical responsibility. The G77 have contended that emission targets should be calculated on the basis of consumption, not production, as much of what is produced in East/South is consumed in the West. In China the outsourcing of emissions-heavy production has led some to conclude that "China is the kitchen, while the West is the dining-room" (Dale 2009:5, see also Hallding et al. 2009). Certainly, China is not innocent. In the last decade it has increased its CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 150 per cent, and adopted external economic policy similar to the ones pursued by US or EU companies – as is notable in its policy in Africa, Indonesia or Burma and in Latin America (Zhang and Barr 2013, Edwards and Roberts 2014). At the same time, the BRICS have also adopted adaptation and mitigation measures on their domestic levels and in 2009 China, India, Brazil and several other developing countries pledged to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 20-40 per cent by 2020 (King et al. 2012:i).

In spite of the measures undertaken in the last two decades, the EU and the US belong to the world's top energy consumers per capita. Although the per capita consumption rate has been slightly declining, their total energy consumption by far surpasses low and middle-income countries combined (see Table 2 and Graph 1). The Western levels of consumption represent a considerable challenge for US and EU leadership in climate

<sup>4</sup> Interview with a Brazilian diplomat, April 2014.

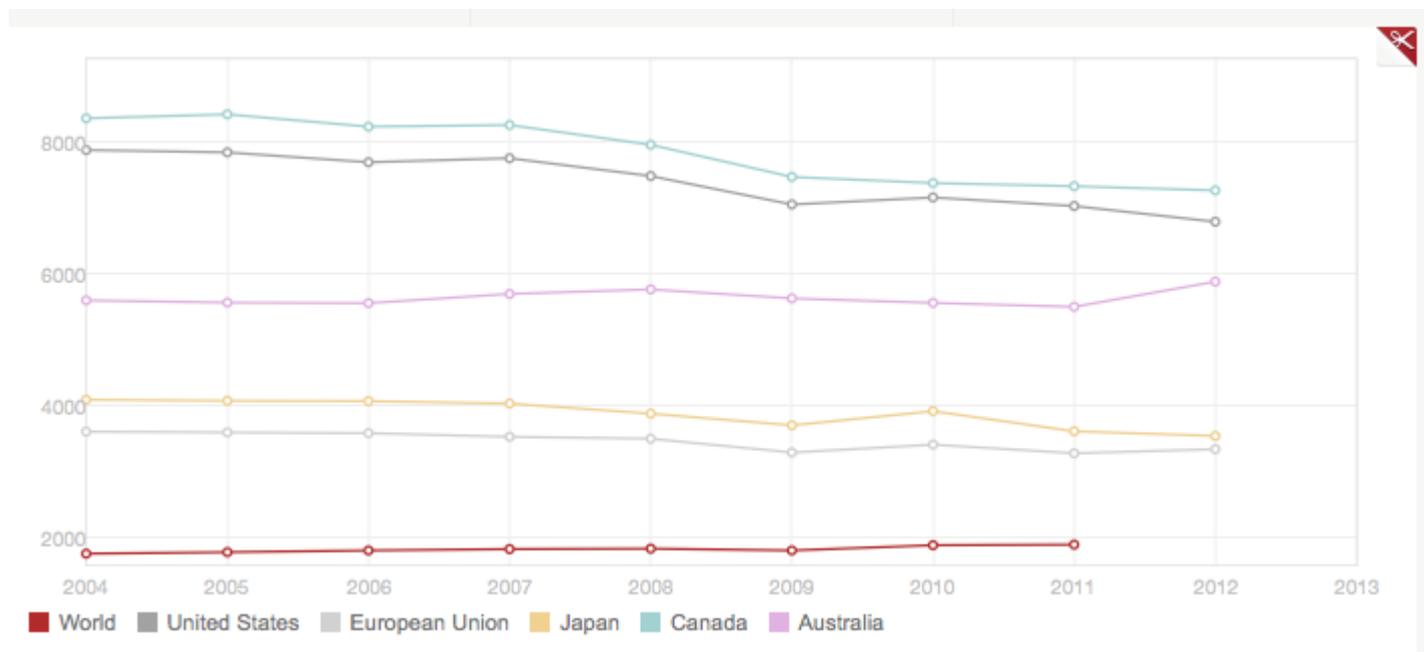
talks. The emerging economies (especially the low income countries) request more financial assistance from the high-income countries, in order to meet the costs of mitigation and adaptation measures. More importantly though, they challenge the credibility of industrialized countries, who request more measures from emerging economies, while the average European and American create far more emissions than an average African or Asian.

• **Table 2 | Energy Production and Use**

	Low Income		Middle Income		High Income	
	1990	2011	1990	2011	1990	2011
Energy production (1000s metric tons of oil equivalent)	168.8	279.9	3 504.2	6.680.7	5180.6	6255.2
Energy use - total	193.8	276.5	2974.8	6179.6	5435.5	6299.6
Energy use - per capita (kilograms of oil equivalent)	396	360	820	1281	4776	4872
Fossil fuel as a % of total energy use	40.2	29.6	74.5	81.5	85.6	83.2
Combustible renewable and waste as a % of total energy use	56.1	66.0	21.6	13.5	2.7	4.3

Source: World Bank, *World Development Indicators: Energy Production and Use*, <http://wdi.worldbank.org/table/3.6>.

• **Figure 1 | Energy Use in West/North (kg of oil equivalent per capita)**



Source: World Bank, *World Development Indicators: Energy Use*, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/EG.USE.PCAP.KG.OE>.

The position of the US and the EU in the politics of global climate action is thus determined by the carbon-origins of their wealth and by continuing high-levels of consumption. While the West/North is the world's major source of climate finance (funds for mitigation and adaptation measures) in parallel, it continues to subsidize carbon-

intensive economy. At the summits in Copenhagen (COP 19) and Cancun (COP 20) the developed countries committed to provide 30 billion dollars in “fast start” finance between 2010-2012, with a projected reach of 100 billion dollars by 2020.<sup>5</sup> While they have exceeded the fast start commitment, environmental groups have highlighted that in this period fossil fuels subsidies surpassed the contributions for climate finance (Whitley 2013, Makhijani 2013). Importantly, Northern climate finance contributions do not match Southern needs and already the 2013 COP summit in Warsaw illustrated that the determination to provide more resources is not firm (Sterk et al. 2013).

US and EU leverage is further undermined by historical legacies of relations between North and South, chiefly European colonialism and their failed post-colonial efforts to “develop” the South. Of particular importance are the living legacies of the Washington Consensus implementation in several developing countries. The structural adjustment policies sponsored by the World Bank and the IMF encouraged the withdrawal of the state and limited provision for public services. This has had repercussions also for the quality of local democracies and citizens’ ability to influence public affairs in the South (Easterly 2006, Birdsall et al. 2008, Abrahamsen 2000). While the bargaining strategies and demands of low and middle-income countries are sometimes dismissed in the North for “playing the blame game” or as “irresponsible blackmail when the focus should be on a common challenge,” these perspectives have to be taken into account in analysis of the US and EU’s role in global climate change politics. Especially because the EU and US’ own contributions to protecting the global commons lag so far behind.

### 3. The US and the EU: Leadership or a Scramble for Resources and Influence?

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Transatlantic cooperation on climate change mitigation and adaptation policies is constrained by a number of factors and there is not much evidence suggesting that the US and the EU would be pursuing common goals. Although both Europe and America have shown leadership in climate change action, their steps in the international arena are constrained by the difficult dynamics of domestic politics – some of which are outlined below.<sup>6</sup> More importantly, climate action does not constitute a priority topic in the US and the EU’s bilateral cooperation – it is sidelined by focus on economic growth and energy security, both of which have generated policies that have been at odds with reducing the carbon footprint. Of special relevance to the US and EU role in global climate change politics are the current Transatlantic Free-Trade Agreement (TAFTA/TTIP) negotiations. TTIP is mainly a geopolitical tool used as an instrument of competition, and can potentially conflict with the declared efforts of the transatlantic partners to *engage* the emerging powers.

#### 3.1 Climate Action in the EU, the US and Limits to Cooperation

The United States has seen a vibrant and polarized climate action debate in recent years – one that has provided Europeans with “cycles of hope and despair.”<sup>7</sup> While the Obama Administration has undertaken bolder rhetoric

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5 European Commission (2014), *International climate finance*, updated 22 September 2014, <http://ec.europa.eu/clima/policies/finance/international>.

6 For a more detailed overview see the Transworld Working Papers produced under the Work Package Environment (WP4): <http://www.transworld-fp7.eu/?cat=84>. See also Bakker and Francioni (2014), an edited volume that includes the most up to date research produced under this work package, and Cusumano (2014).

7 Interview with an official in the Council of the European Union, Brussels, May 2014.

and action than the previous Bush Administration, its policy proposals are not finding sufficient support in Congress and thus the Administration has acted through its own powers. It is important to note that although public opinion polls have shown American's increased environmental awareness (Leiserowitz et al. 2014), recent studies also show that they have limited means of influencing government policy (Gilens and Page 2014).

In addition to federal policy, there are a number of climate action arrangements pursued at the level of individual states (e.g. the Californian Global Warming Solution Act of 2006 that laid grounds for cap and trade scheme) (Schulzová 2013:9-10). Yet for now these have been insufficient contributions in reaching the 2°C target (UNFCCC's target to avoid increasing temperatures over 2°C from preindustrial levels).

President Obama focused on climate action especially in his second term, and this was highlighted in the release of the White House's May 2014 comprehensive, National Climate Assessment (Melillo et al. 2014). This was the third of its kind since 2000 and the President subsequently engaged in an intensive communication campaign in the media, with members of Congress and with the public at large. In June 2014 the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) announced a plan to cut CO<sub>2</sub> emissions 30 per cent by 2030 – a key part of the Obama Administration's climate package. The plan asks the states to present compliance plans by June 2016 and to implement them within the next 15 years.<sup>8</sup> The coal industry and several representatives of coal-producing states have campaigned against the plan (even before its official announcement), opposing its supposed negative impact on jobs, while asking for a longer implementation period (Harder et al. 2014).

Interestingly, the Administration is not the only key proponent of more intense climate action – the US Army has begun exploring opportunities for downscaling dependence on fossil fuels for strategic reasons ("greening the military" debate) and started bringing renewables in to battle zones (Rosenthal 2010). Several security think-tanks (e.g. the Center for Naval Analysis and American Security Project<sup>9</sup>) have engaged in research and advocacy work on the impacts of climate change on US national security, framing climate change as a "threat multiplier." Yet the military itself is a heavy consumer of fossil fuels and receives a much bigger portion of the federal budget than climate action measures do. In 2011, for every dollar allocated to climate action, 41 were allocated to the military – a huge gap compared to China where the ratio ranges from 2-3 dollars for climate action compared to every dollar of defense spending (depending on estimates of China's military budget) (Pemberton and Glyn 2010:1). Although military can hardly be considered the best friend of environment, it is only beneficial that the military and affiliated institutes which do enjoy trust in circles where climate scientists do not, have started giving more serious consideration to climate debate. The fact that a conservative institution such as the US Military is taking climate change and the evidence produced by climate scientists so seriously is certainly a blow to the arguments of non-believers towards. For now though, the military's presence in the public debate on climate action remains limited.

The recent beginning of exploitation of shale gas and oil has added a whole new dimension to the American debate, deepened its polarization, and strengthened the leverage of the fossil fuel industry in policy debates. Despite the optimistic prognoses about a "Saudi America"<sup>10</sup> that might eventually become energy self-sufficient and even contribute to the diversification of its allies' energy supplies, the environmental impacts of fracking are a cause of concern (Mauter et al. 2013). This will further weaken the US Administration's climate action

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8 US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), *Clean Power Plan Proposed Rule*, updated 16 September 2014, <http://www2.epa.gov/node/52319>.

9 See CNA (2007) and the American Security Project website: *Climate Security*, <http://www.americansecurityproject.org/issues/climate-security>.

10 "Saudi America", *The Economist*, 15 February 2014, <http://www.economist.com/node/21596553>.

leadership efforts in the international arena.

The European Union has been implementing its climate action commitments with more determination and success than the US. The EU is a party to all major international binding agreements, it is close to meeting the 2°C target and its cap and trade scheme (although partly dysfunctional) has been proposed as an inspiration to other regional trading schemes (should the multilateral negotiations fail) (Borghesi and Montini 2013). This despite the fact that the dynamics of EU policy-making are complicated by the difficult task of reaching consensus between the 28 member states and reconciling energy security and climate action agendas. The intra-European debate often resembles the one between the developing and developed nations at the international level, with the East and Central European member states often highlighting their need to catch up to the economic development of other members, without giving much priority to climate mitigation measures.<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, the crisis in Ukraine once again brought attention to the fragility of Europe's dependence on Russian hydrocarbons and short-term energy security prevailed over climate action. The new strategy proposed by the European Commission does not perceive the crisis as an argument for greater attention to decreasing EU's dependence on fossil fuels as such (European Commission 2014a). While the document does refer to renewables, it mostly focuses on the diversification of fossil fuels and pays only a passing attention to downscaling consumption. Getting the US shale gas into the EU market (or on the world market) is seen as one of key priorities in the TAFTA/TTIP talks discussed in more detail below.

Importantly, climate change policy is highly specialized – it has its own set of acronyms and concepts and a very narrow in-group of specialists talking to each other in a language that outsiders do not always understand. Hence, the technical dialogue on the nuances of climate policy takes place within a relatively small group of people. At the highest level, the dialogue is further complicated by the diplomatic protocol – while in the EU, the climate change agenda falls under the portfolio of Commissioner for Climate Action, in the US the climate agenda is in the portfolio of the Secretary of State. Since the formal counterpart for the US Secretary of State is the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (whose portfolio does not include climate action), there is basically no formal high-level dialogue between the EU and the US in this realm.<sup>12</sup> Although the Lisbon Treaty stipulates that climate is among the priorities of the EU's external action, the EEAS portfolio is a huge one and climate has not belonged to the “actually existing” priorities of the first High Representative (2009-2014).

### 3.2 EU and US Non-state Actors: Constraints and Impulses

The companies that have stakes in carbon exploration and trade have invested considerable efforts into influencing the public debate on the causes and effects of climate change. The goal has been to create the impression that anthropogenic global warming is merely a theory – the validity of which, scientists are still debating. The effort of companies including Western Fuels Association and British Coal Corporation to influence the public debate by hiring PR firms and spokespeople who do not have environmental science credentials to counter the claims of environmental scientists, has been widely documented (Gelbspan 1998 and 2005, Hoggan 2009).<sup>13</sup> In the US an especially crucial issue has been the influence of business lobbyists on campaign

11 Interviews with an official in the Council of the European Union and two representatives of EU15 (member states that joined before 2004), May 2014.

12 Interview with a EEAS representative, June 2014.

13 The DeSmogBlog (<http://www.desmogblog.com>) publishes updates on collusion between business and policy-makers; Greenpeace has created an interactive map showing Exxon's funding for opponents of climate action: <http://www.exxonsecrets.org/>

finance (e.g. the Koch brothers). Some companies (e.g. Exxon) continue to publicly state that they will continue coal exploration, assuring investors that no reserves will be “stranded” (McKibben 2014).

It would, however, be wrong to argue that positive impulses have not emerged from the business environment. Although parts of industry that are the most affected by climate change mitigation measures have been resisting attempts to downsize emissions, there are a number of initiatives that were launched by the private sector that aim to do just the opposite. A case in point is the Carbon Tracker Initiative (CTI), an NGO composed of financial specialists that have been encouraging corporate conversation on the financial risks of carbon investments and have, in the language of finance, argued that resisting the decreasing demand of hydrocarbons is not a good risk-management strategy. Already in 2011 the CTI produced an analysis on “unburnable carbon”, urging investors to take lessons from the recent burst of a financial bubble. They advised them to be aware that a sizeable portion of fossil fuels to be traded by publicly listed companies simply cannot be explored (in light of the commitments to cut emissions). Thus the CTI aims to make investors aware of portfolio risks in the case that fossil fuel demand is not downsized (Carbon Tracker Initiative 2011). Yet so far pushing this case has been met with considerable resistance by investors.

Other non-state actors – environmental groups – have also been vocal in the climate policy landscape, yet, given their limited resources, these civil society movements can hardly compete with corporate players in gaining leverage over public space and public policy. In both the US and the EU there are civil society organizations campaigning for the adoption of more responsible policies, and more research still needs to be conducted on their policy impacts and on linkages with non-Western civil society. A recent paper analyzing the engagement of civil society in the climate action arena concluded that while US civil society has been more introspective, the EU-based actors have been more “keen to engage with international climate law and policy” (Savaresi 2013:10). There is no doubt that non-governmental organizations contribute to awareness raising among the public at large, and a number of them have managed to introduce global development education which encompasses environmental education into curricula. A number of success stories have occurred when Northern and Southern NGOs have teamed up and forced Western-based companies to adopt more responsible approaches to production. A prominent case occurred in 2012 when US civil society engaged with Chinese NGOs and pushed Apple to reveal its supply chains (Duhigg and Greenhouse 2012), yet the bulk of the work was conducted by the Chinese environmental movement. While civil society actors have been able to mobilize and campaign against potentially harmful policy decisions, or uncover corrupt government and business practices, they have been much less apt in setting up a global climate agenda and pursuing its adoption and implementation.<sup>14</sup>

### 3.3 Climate Action in the Shadow of Energy Security

The US-EU high-level dialogue on climate change, clean energy, and sustainable development was established in 2006.<sup>15</sup> Yet, for the most part, the climate action agenda has been overshadowed by energy security.

In the wake of the 2009 Ukrainian gas crisis, the US and the EU established the Ministerial Energy Council with the goal of deepening “the dialogue on strategic energy issues of mutual interest, foster[ing] cooperation on energy policies and further strengthen[ing] research collaboration on sustainable and clean energy technologies” (Council of the EU 2009:11). However there are no environmental ministers (commissioners)

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maps.php.

14 Interview with a senior environment specialist, May 2014.

15 European External Action Service (EEAS), *EU-US Summit Vienna June 2006*, [http://eeas.europa.eu/us/sum06\\_06](http://eeas.europa.eu/us/sum06_06).

serving as members of the Council. Although “clean energy” and the “reduction of carbon emissions” were mentioned in the joint statements from the first four meetings (e.g. Council of the EU 2012), they seemed only marginal and the core attention was dedicated to gas corridors, cooperation on gas and oil markets, and conflicts that have a bearing on energy security (e.g. Iran’s nuclear program). Only the fifth meeting, held in April 2014 dedicated explicit attention to “climate change”. Welcoming President Obama’s Climate Action Plan and the EU’s 2030 Climate and Energy Package in Progress, the partners have focused their attention on the global regime and measures assisting third countries, while speaking of a “global transition to a low carbon economy” (European Commission 2014b).

Since the energy dialogue was established to manage Europe’s short-term energy security in the first place, it should not come as a surprise that climate action has not been considered as a pressing issue and has been given a smaller priority. Yet in light of the IPCC findings and given the large share of energy consumption in generating climate change, the limited presence of a discussion on climate change mitigation and adaptation in the transatlantic energy dialogue only indicates the lack of mutual will or interest to tackle this issue bilaterally.

### **3.4 The TTIP: Limiting or Strengthening the US and EU Leverage in Climate Change Politics?**

The negotiations on the Trans-Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (TAFTA) or Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) that have been taking place since the middle of 2013 now constitute a key framework for the US-EU talks on the future of economic and political cooperation. Importantly, the TAFTA/TTIP has a significant geopolitical dimension with potential impacts on the adoption of a global climate action regime. While it has been presented to European and American constituents mainly as a mechanism to boost jobs and growth (European Commission 2014c), the political ambitions of the project should not be neglected, especially when considering global climate governance. Importantly, the project’s emphasis on growth and the extraction of natural resources is clearly at odds with climate mitigation measures.

The talks on TAFTA/TTIP have raised concern of European trade unions and environmental organizations regarding the agreement’s impacts on environmental standards, food security, and working conditions. The first matter of concern was the secrecy accompanying the talks and the lack of consultation with non-business actors. Originally the European Commission contracted a few studies<sup>16</sup> outlining the benefits of the deal for everyone, yet several others were carried out independently and their assessment of TTIP’s advantages was much less optimistic.<sup>17</sup> The watchdog, Corporate Europe Observatory, in cooperation with Deutsche Wirtschafts Nachrichten, has published the list of meetings with stakeholders, which is mostly comprised of business groups.<sup>18</sup> After pressure from civic groups the European Commission increased transparency of the process by creating public consultation mechanisms and by publishing documents from meetings on a more regular basis.

One of the declared political ambitions of TTIP is the harmonization of US and EU standards that would further serve as “global standards”: “The harmonising of EU and US technical standards could well provide the basis for global standards: the size of the transatlantic market is so big that if it had a single set of rules it would be in the interest of other countries to adopt them too. That way, they would only have to produce goods to one set of

16 Notably Francois (2013). See also Felbermayr et al. (2013).

17 See e.g. Raza (2014) and Cardoso (2013).

18 TTIP meetings 2012/01-2013/04, List of confidential meetings in preparation of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, <https://ttip-meetings.jottit.com/#addendum>.

specifications, making trade throughout the world easier and cheaper”.<sup>19</sup>

Yet it is not that clear that the TTIP can indeed bring about common standards that the US and the EU would subsequently pursue at the global level. Currently, the US and the EU operate in two different regulatory environments and the US internal regulatory framework is not fully harmonized. While harmonization is one of the options on the table, it is also politically the most difficult one to pursue. This leaves many questions unanswered such as, “Who will determine which standards will be adopted?” and “Will it be a race to the bottom or to the top?” Of course, in Europe especially, the ratification process will be very complex – once the deal is negotiated, it will require the approval of the Council (member states), European Parliament and possibly the national parliaments of member states, so there are a number of opportunities to prevent or block potential downscaling of standards. The effort to find common standards can easily fail, and the TTIP might end up being based on principles of mutual recognition of existing standards, meaning that whatever can now be sold in one market can be sold in the other (De Ville 2013). Thus one of the declared political goals – greater EU and US capacity to influence global standards – would not be fulfilled.

Another controversial issue is the investor-state dispute settlement mechanism. It has been questioned on grounds that it might eventually lead to the loosening of democratic control over policy-decisions.<sup>20</sup> This discussion essentially taps into wider debate on the state regulation of market forces and on mechanisms meant to prevent the destruction of finite common goods. Even if TTIP’s current level of environmental protection was maintained in the EU and the US, from a narrow trade perspective, the introduction of higher environmental standards after TTIP’s ratification might be seen as a trade barrier. There are several key differences that must be considered – e.g. the US is further ahead on clean air legislation, while the EU has much higher standards (and ambitions) in the elimination of dangerous chemicals. It is not yet clear how either harmonization or mutual recognition would work in practice and what leeway would be left to elected public bodies to work on increasing eco-protections. Thus the TTIP raises a number of questions for the maneuvering capacities of governments on environmental protection.

Keeping in mind the complex relations between the North and South in negotiating global climate action, perhaps the most contestable aspect of the TTIP is its geopolitical dimension. If the trade agreement is pitched as a way to balance or even counter other players in the world arena, then other UN members could easily doubt that the EU and the US are interested in universally accountable regimes and global responsibility. While some have portrayed China and other Global South actors’ opposition as a possible surprise and side effect (Ham 2013:6-7), this dimension deserves more than marginal attention. Portraying the TTIP as an “economic NATO” (Ignatius 2012, Boyden 2013) does not necessarily send out the message that the EU and the US are truly interested in engaging other actors in international arena, or working towards building a common order. Emphasizing competition over cooperation might be a stumbling block when engaging China on climate action. This is especially the case when considering the nature of climate change politics – the non-adoption of climate change mitigation and adaptation measures in one country has impact on other countries. If the US and the EU aim to convince China to significantly downscale its CO<sub>2</sub> emissions for the benefit of the global community, the parallel process of framing a US-EU economic agreement in competition can be counterproductive. There are already voices from Chinese think-tanks suggesting that being left out of the TTIP and also the TPP (Trans-

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19 European Commission, *In focus: Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). Questions and answers*, updated 30 July 2014, <http://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/in-focus/ttip/questions-and-answers/#ttip-and-rest-of-world>.

20 On 10 September 2014 the European Commission has turned down the European Citizens’ Initiative (ECI) asking it to repeal its mandate on negotiating the TTIP. See the Commission’s reply dated 10 September 2014: <http://ec.europa.eu/citizens-initiative/public/initiatives/non-registered/details/2041>. For reasoning of the ECI proponents see Hilary (2014).

Pacific partnership) would be harmful to the Chinese economy (Zhang 2014). Add to this the deep sentiment of historical injustice brought about by colonialism and some post-colonial practices of Northern governments in the South, a sentiment that serves as a powerful mobilizing tool for G77 and the TTIP, an instrument of competition might as well counter the US and EU global climate action agenda.

### 3.5 The US and the EU at UN-level Talks and Pre-Paris Agenda

At the international level, the EU and US hardly act as one. While the EU's and the US's chief negotiators meet before the international Conference of the Parties (COP) summits, they have often followed different objectives through different means, not necessarily acting in concert. The most visible divergence has certainly been the refusal of the US to adopt the Kyoto Protocol, which was adopted in 1997 at COP 3.<sup>21</sup> In Kyoto the high-level actors actually agreed on a joint protocol and President Clinton signed it, but the conservative forces in the US House of Representatives opposed its ratification.

After over a decade, the 2009 Copenhagen (COP 15) Summit again brought climate change to the top of international agenda, with even more urgency. While this summit is often cited as the one in which the EU was sidelined while the US tried to strike a deal with the BRICS, this interpretation overlooks that it is the biggest polluters (the US and China) who need to arrive at a compromise. The EU has made its positions clear from the onset; it has led by example and continued to demonstrate the willingness to comply with the agreed targets.<sup>22</sup> The Warsaw Summit in 2013 (COP 19) however left many delegations of developing countries under the impression that the industrialized countries are trying to step out of their "commitments" to the developing world, and started talking more about less binding "contributions" (IISD 2013).

In preparations for the upcoming Paris 2015 Summit the EU and the US have declared their "mutual determination to work towards the adoption [...] of a protocol, another legal instrument or an agreed outcome with legal force under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change applicable to all Parties, to strengthen the multilateral, rules-based regime" (European Commission 2014b). While the language of the declaration speaks to commitment, the hope among EU and US policy-makers that a binding agreement in fact could be adopted is close to zero.<sup>23</sup> Given unfavorable forces in the US Congress and the living memory of failure of ratification of Kyoto, it seems that US negotiators are unwilling to commit to an agreement, thus again preventing ratification. This does not mean that the international negotiations are useless – they still provide an opportunity to keep the issue on the international agenda and incentivize governments to take action at the national levels. Regarding cooperation, Washington seems to favor a "push and pull" strategy, whereby the US would "push" with its geopolitical leverage and the EU would "pull" and lead by example.<sup>24</sup> The European Union is split – on the one hand, the Ukrainian crisis brought back concerns about immediate energy security (and thus interest in US fossil fuels), and on the other hand the pro-climate actors and member states would certainly welcome Washington's determination to lead by example and adopt comprehensive measures at home, as well as show its willingness to commit to international treaties.

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21 The Kyoto protocol, ratified until now by 192 parties, is based on the principle of "shared but differentiated responsibilities" which means that it acknowledges that the industrialized countries have had core share in accumulation of CO<sub>2</sub> in atmosphere.

22 Interview with a European Commission representative, DG Energy, Brussels, May 2014.

23 Interviews, New York and Brussels, April and May 2014.

24 Interview with a representative of US Mission to the EU, Brussels, May 2014.

## 4. Sustainability of Production and Consumption and the Growth Trap: A Dialogue Yet to Be Held

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In its 1987 report the UN Brundtland Commission introduced the concept *sustainable development* – as a development that “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Brundtland 1987:par. 27) and elaborated on the interconnectedness of the social, the economic, and the environmental dimensions of development. World governments recognized already in 1992 at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro that lifestyles in developed countries are destructive to ecosystems, yet the pace of measures adopted since then has not matched the pace of deterioration (Fedrigo and Tukker 2009).

Two decades after public acknowledgement of the scale and source of the problem, only minor progress had been achieved to solve it – in the developed and the developing world alike. Within democratic countries, this is closely related to the nature and driving forces of their politico-economic systems. As Holliday et al. (2002:18) have summed it up: “politicians tend not to run for office on promises of making the prices of goods reflect their real (higher) costs for the sake of sustainable development; consumers tend not to demand to pay such higher costs; business tends not to lobby lawmakers for higher prices”.

As highlighted earlier, the climate scientists in the IPCC panel have repeatedly concluded that the driving force of climate change is economic *growth*. Yet “growth” is at the same time the driving force of our economies. While “clean growth” or “green growth” are already standard phrases in political rhetoric, with impacts of climate change at the doorstep it is reasonable to ask whether producing “green” and “clean” can in fact be as efficient as simply producing and consuming *less*. European and American per capita consumption is much higher than consumption in the rest of the world. While Western lifestyles are becoming increasingly popular in the richer pockets of society in the Global South, the EU’s and the US’s quest for downscaling CO<sub>2</sub> emissions worldwide can hardly be endorsed (and considered credible) in the non-West, if these transatlantic partners do not consider more seriously the creation of a more sustainable cycle of consumption and production. This however does not seem to be the case yet – in fact the Q&A sheet explaining the currently negotiated TTIP, lists raising demand for raw materials<sup>25</sup> as one of *positive* impacts on the rest of the world. This further illustrates the gap between the science and the politics.

Although both the EU and the US are part of the same global economic system, there are substantial differences between their understanding of the relationships between individuals, states, and the market. While internally neither Europeans nor Americans are unified in their views on the roles of the state and the market or the desirable size of government spending or taxation, there are significant differences in these two actors’ existing legal environments. A prominent illustration of this would be the very different approaches they take towards comprehensive public health care systems – something considered standard in Europe and an extremely divisive issue in America. The recent publication of the bestseller “Capital in the 21st Century” by French economist Thomas Piketty, and the debate on the origins and consequences of economic inequality that it generated only further underline the seemingly unbridgeable polarizations between the Left and Right within the West. It also highlighted the fact that the questions of development are not restricted to the “developing world”; and that the hollowing out of the American middle class and those in several other Western democracies is likely to have repercussions on democratic politics and climate action.

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<sup>25</sup> European Commission, *In focus: Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). Questions and answers*, updated 30 July 2014, <http://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/in-focus/ttip/questions-and-answers/#ttip-and-rest-of-world>.

In 2008, the European Commission introduced a policy document on sustainable production and consumption (European Commission 2008) and initiated a debate on curbing overconsumption. While such practices are important at the national level, they also have repercussions for greening the production chains in developing countries, to which Western companies outsource much of their manufacturing (Lindén and Carlsson-Kanyama 2007). Yet the conservative political forces in the West, most notably in the US, frame unlimited consumption as a “way of life” (White House 2001) and staunchly defend it. While the United States also established a national dialogue on sustainability, in recent years it has lagged behind the European debate (Cusumano 2014).

The debate on sustainability of production and consumption is crucial to success on climate action, yet it faces a most difficult challenge, as it involves the introduction of a paradigm shift in political thinking and rhetoric. In the 4 to 5 year election cycles in democratic countries, leaders have to regularly stand for reelection, and the prominent messages to voters in election campaigns include “growth” and “more jobs” – not “less consumption.” Although the recent austerity policies in Europe were accompanied by calls for more modesty, they did not go well with the electorate, as the austerity measures applied mainly to the lower and middle classes.

## 4.1 Challenges to the Growth Paradigm

With the deepening of environmental degradation and the reluctance of the UN members to act fast enough, several fringe movements that challenge economic growth have appeared. The post-growth paradigm (Alexander 2014) questions the viability of an economic model based on growth on the grounds that resources are finite and existing economic models have brought about unprecedented depletion. Civil society movements that espouse de-growth emerged in the West, some of them openly dismissing sustainable development and greening in favor of “sustainable de-growth” and the “downscaling of production and consumption” instead (Daly 1996, Daly and Farley 2010, Latouche 2009). Yet politically this is not yet considered an alternative to sustainable development, chiefly because its potential impacts on employment have not yet been concretized and would need to be implemented jointly with other paradigm shifting measures (e.g. the basic income) (Martínez-Alier et al. 2010).

In 2008, the first international De-growth conference took place, yet only 5 out of 126 participants came from institutions beyond Europe and North America.<sup>26</sup> While de-growth movements also exist in the non-Western world, it seems that the international academic community and civil society are not yet fully interconnected – despite the fact that many Western debates have implications for the emerging economies of the G77 (Xue et al. 2012). Several Green parties have initiated debate on de-growth, and the Green Party in the European Parliament has included it in its list of priorities, yet the idea has not been picked up by any major political force in Europe or the United States. De-growth made a short appearance in the 2009 UK government report *Prosperity without Growth* (Jackson 2009), which was prepared for the UK Sustainable Development Commission (later abolished by PM Cameron) (Jacobs 2012). There is a burgeoning new literature on de-growth and the climate, including macroeconomic modeling that suggests substantial (over 80 per cent) decrease in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in case a de-growth model was adopted (Victor 2011). While de-growth sounds like a utopia (or, perhaps a dystopia) to the majority of current policy-makers, it is important to ask whether the existing approach to the challenges posed by climate change is not in fact based in fantasy rather than realism – the dominant economic paradigm is at odds with environmental protection and poses threat to future generations. For now, globally managed de-growth, as a climate action measure is unlikely and politically unfeasible – especially since the emerging economies are driven to catch up with the industrialized North. Without more attention given to the

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<sup>26</sup> See the participants list (Flipo and Schneider 2008:319-321).

sustainability of production and consumption, we are unlikely to see a workable global climate governance.

## Conclusions

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Climate change, arguably a product of man-made action, is one of the gravest and the most complex challenges of the 21st century world – for developed and developing countries alike. Although the European Union and the United States have a complex track-record on adopting climate mitigation policies at home that can inspire other actors, there is not much evidence that their individual leverage and bilateral cooperation has thus far contributed to the adoption of a globally binding and accountable climate change governance regime. It needs to be highlighted that especially in recent years the EU has demonstrated considerably higher commitment to a globally binding regime than the US.

The successive UN (COP) Summits have seen several instances of reassembling coalitions of states, and the EU and the US have not always stood on the same side of negotiating table. Although the EU has campaigned long-term for a binding treaty, the US has made it clear on several occasions that it would be willing to enter such a treaty once every relevant player commits – including growing emitters like China, India, and Brazil. Yet the US is not the only reluctant state – several others have shown disinclination to enter into agreements for fear that they might not be capable of delivering. Preparations for September COP in Paris 2015 have not raised much optimism that a binding treaty might be adopted. Although key actors agree that even if a multilateral regime is not adopted, the international talks are an important forum that incentivizes states to adopt bolder measures at national levels, the currently circulated proposals are still far from responding to the gravity of the challenge.

US and EU cooperation in climate action and contribution to viable global governance have been limited by the different dynamics of their domestic politics, the different perceptions by third countries and because climate is not a priority in US-EU cooperation. For the EU, the US is one of many partners in international climate change discussions, not an exclusive partner. In light of the recent developments in Ukraine, the EU is increasingly preoccupied with its own energy security and the partnership with the US has prioritized this dimension. Also, in climate change, the EU is not a key interlocutor for China, currently the biggest polluter. This despite the existing channels of EU-China dialogue and cooperation. China prefers to talk to the US and to individual EU member states - Germany chiefly.<sup>27</sup> The climate change debate at the international level is increasingly becoming caught up in geopolitical debates and the framework of US-EU cooperation (e.g. the TTIP/TAFTA) talks are sending messages that the developing world is not to be engaged, but competed with. This can potentially undermine a global multilateral climate arrangement. Importantly, in US-EU bilateral talks, climate action is secondary to economic growth and energy security.

Importantly, although climate change is becoming increasingly present at fora that tackle issues beyond environment (e.g. conferences on socio-economic development and security), the increased rhetorical attention has not really produced action sufficient in addressing the scope and irreversibility of climate change. This is exactly because efficient climate action requires measures to be adopted at the nexus of economic, development and human rights policies. The proposals for efficient action challenge a number of long-standing assumptions about global trade and development and the debates between the North/West and South/East expose the inequalities between citizens of developed and developing world. The persisting disparities in per

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<sup>27</sup> Interview with a senior environment specialist, Brussels, May 2014.

capita energy consumption between the economies that underwent early industrialization and the emerging economies fuel a sense of inequity amongst the G77 actors, and thus a blame game takes precedence over a joint effort to protect the global commons.

Although the US and the EU have adopted a dialogue on sustainability of production and consumption, this dialogue has been more a formality. A sustained engagement in the search for an economic model that would be an alternative to a growth-based and resource intensive paradigm is lacking. Without deepening this debate, efficient climate action led by the EU and the US is unlikely.

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## THE PROJECT

In an era of global flux, emerging powers and growing interconnectedness, transatlantic relations appear to have lost their bearings. As the international system fragments into different constellations of state and non-state powers across different policy domains, the US and the EU can no longer claim exclusive leadership in global governance. Traditional paradigms to understand the transatlantic relationship are thus wanting. A new approach is needed to pinpoint the direction transatlantic relations are taking. TRANSWORLD provides such an approach by a) ascertaining, differentiating among four policy domains (economic, security, environment, and human rights/democracy), whether transatlantic relations are drifting apart, adapting along an ad hoc cooperation-based pattern, or evolving into a different but resilient special partnership; b) assessing the role of a re-defined transatlantic relationship in the global governance architecture; c) providing tested policy recommendations on how the US and the EU could best cooperate to enhance the viability, effectiveness, and accountability of governance structures.

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