

Risk perceptions within the EU

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Climate change and the proposed climate engineering schemes pose long-term policy challenges to both national and global governance institutions. Long-term policy challenges occupy at least one human generation, include substantial uncertainty over time and engender public goods problems. These challenges can be described as risks in terms of uncertainties about involved actors and potential losses in the future that are not anticipated by stakeholders at present. Climate change thus poses such a substantial risk. According to the IPCC critical man-made climate change is unequivocal and the increase in global average air and ocean temperatures will cause harmful impacts.

Against this background the European Union (EU) has displayed considerable global leadership with respect to carbon emission goals in recent years. Through tactical cohesion the Union has provided international leadership in the process of creating an internal burden sharing scheme for CO₂ mitigation. Accordingly, the political science project analyses political leadership from the perspective of uncertainty and asks to what extent the EU and its member states can build up common risk perceptions and mechanisms of solidarity to cope with collective action problems in the field of climate change and geoengineering.

The project starts from the assumption that EU leadership in climate policy points to governance qualities that may potentially help to overcome the protracted long-term challenges involving climate engineering. In the run-up to the United Nation Climate Change conference in Copenhagen the EU again pledged to play a leading role in international climate policy. The European Council calls upon all countries to embrace the 2°C objective and to agree to global emission reductions of at least 50% by 2050. The EU also stresses the importance of research on and development of safe and sustainable technologies to encounter climate change.

Therefore, the project examines the positions of three member states (Germany, United Kingdom, Netherlands) and the European Commission with respect to risks and benefits of climate engineering technologies. First, the project analyses how the risk-benefit perceptions of climate engineering technologies differ and evolve across time and political actors. Secondly the project asks if these differences result in demands for EU leadership and the construction of a regulation framework for climate engineering. Overall the political science cluster will contribute to three main research areas: risk research, comparative foreign policy analysis of democratic states and scholarship on the EU's climate policy.