

The environment as a strategic priority in the European Union–Brazil partnership: is the EU behaving as a normative power or soft imperialist?

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Abstract In 2007, Brazil entered the European Union's (EU) list of strategic partners; a token of recognition of the place Brazil occupies in current global affairs. Although promoting bilateral environmental convergence is a stated priority, cooperation between the EU and Brazil in this policy field is largely under-researched, raising interesting questions as to whether the current state of play could support EU claims for the normative orientation of its external environmental policy. Through an analysis of partnership activities in the fields of deforestation and biofuels, we suggest that while normative intentions may be regarded as a motivating force, critically viewing EU foreign environmental policy through a 'soft imperialism' lens could offer a more holistic understanding of the current state of bilateral cooperation. While the normative power thesis can be substantiated with regard to deforestation, we argue that by erecting barriers to shield its domestic biofuels production, the EU is placing trade competitiveness and economic growth above its normative aspirations. Subsequently, the partial adoption of sustainable development as an EU norm leads to policy incoherence and contradictory actions.

Keywords Climate change · Deforestation · Biofuels · Mercosur · Latin America · Multilateralism

Abbreviations

ACP	African, Caribbean and Pacific
ACTO	Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization
AFOLU	Agriculture, forestry and land use
ASEM	EU–Asia Meeting
BASIC	Brazil, South Africa, India and China
BNDES	Brazilian Development Bank
BP	British Petroleum

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BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa
CAP	Common Agricultural Policy
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
dLUC	Direct land use change
EIB	European Investment Bank
EU	European Union
FTA	Free trade agreement
FP	Framework Programme (for Research and Technological Development)
G-20	Group of 20
IBSA	India, Brazil and South Africa
iLUC	Indirect land use change
JAP	Joint action plan
LUC	Land use change
MEBF	Mercosur–Europe Business Forum
Mercosur	Mercado Común del Sur
NGO	Non-governmental organization
REDD	Reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation
SUNLIBB	Sustainable liquid biofuels from biomass biorefining
TPES	Total primary energy supply
UNCED	UN Conference on Environment and Development (1992)
UN	United Nations
WSSD	World Summit on Sustainable Development (2002)
WTO	World Trade Organization

1 Introduction

Environmental policy is one of the most rapidly expanding areas of EU activity, with environmental legislation being amongst the most advanced and progressive worldwide in a range of areas, from greenhouse gas emissions trading to recycling, biosafety and eco-labelling (Falkner 2007). On the global scene, the abdication of environmental leadership by the USA and its lukewarm attitude towards several aspects of international environmental regulation¹ has allowed the EU to emerge as a pivotal actor in external environmental negotiations (Falkner 2005). Since the early 1990s, the EU has assumed a clear leadership role in multilateral environmental policymaking, promoting the concept of sustainable development as a pervasive principle for global governance (Vogler 2005).

The EU played a constructive role during both the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) and the 2002 Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD or Rio+10), and took the lead in pushing for the adoption of the Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety and the Kyoto Protocol on climate change (Afionis 2011; Bretherton and Vogler 2006; Lightfoot and Burchell 2004). At the 2012 Rio+20 conference in Brazil, the EU reaffirmed its political commitment to sustainable development, arguing—albeit unsuccessfully—for ambitious actions at the international, regional and national levels—mapped out as a ‘Green Economy Roadmap’ (Van Alstine et al.

¹ Relevant examples would include the US rejection of the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) or its withdrawal from the Kyoto Protocol.

2013). As indicated in the 2003 European Security Strategy, such experiences have led the EU to value a multimodal approach to international cooperation that combines multilateral, interregional and bilateral relations (see European Council 2003).

As a result of its value-based foreign policy and high degree of activity on environmental governance issues, the EU has been described as a civilian power, a soft power and more recently as a normative power in international relations.² Despite the EU's support for universal norms and its global environmental leadership aspirations, it is also the world's largest trading bloc, accounting for one-fifth of global trade (DG Trade 2009). This link between trade and environment has provided much potential for policy incoherence, as well as for landmark contradictions³ between the EU's role as a trader and its normative environmental objectives (Bretherton and Vogler 2006). Subsequently, the EU often behaves as a 'soft imperialist', with the pursuit of self-interested objectives hiding behind its normative rhetoric.

This paper examines the EU's approaches to elicit action from Brazil on environmental problems, focusing primarily on an assessment of their bilateral strategic partnership, which was established in 2007. Several academic analyses evaluate the impact of the EU's strategic partnerships on environmental cooperation with China or India (Scott 2009; Holzer and Zhang 2008; Luff and Whitfield 2009), yet analyses of the role that the EU–Brazil partnership has played in advancing collaboration in the field of the environment are sorely lacking. Addressing this shortcoming, this paper investigates the state of play in EU–Brazil environmental convergence since the onset of their strategic partnership, thus augmenting the literature on the regional governance of European foreign affairs. We rely on secondary data from government documents, published reports and scientific studies, as well as on interviews and personal communications with Brazilian and EU officials. We focus in particular on two key environmental concerns that have been identified by the two actors as offering the greatest potential for effective collaboration: deforestation and biofuels.

Both EU and Brazilian officials have placed sustainable development concerns at the apex of their bilateral political agenda, but much of the rhetoric remains aspirational. While the normative power thesis provides valuable insights into EU–Brazil environmental relations, employing a 'soft imperialism' perspective could lead to a better understanding of the manner in which the actorness of the EU in global and bilateral environmental politics is manifest. We thus argue that by the frequent placing of trade competitiveness and traditional national interests above environmental protection, EU normative power claims cannot be substantiated in practice.

2 The EU and foreign environmental policy

Sustainable development has evolved into one of the core norms underpinning the EU's normative outlook, but one that it is increasingly more eager to expand *vis-à-vis* external partners, through its enlargement, environmental, trade, foreign and development policies (Falkner 2007). In order to disseminate its norms and incorporate others in its policies for

² The meaning of these three terms is more or less similar. A civilian power employs soft power tools, such as diplomacy and the building of interdependence, rather than military confrontation (hard power). A normative power is one that attempts to diffuse/export the values and ideas on which it is founded upon to its surroundings.

³ See, e.g. the Tuna-Dolphin case (Bretherton and Vogler 2006).

sustainability, the EU utilizes a vast arsenal of foreign policy instruments, simultaneously engaging in multilateral, interregional and bilateral relations.

Allegiance to multilateralism is the lynchpin of EU strategy. EU leaders tend to see international collaboration as a preferred—and even default—means of meeting global challenges (Afionis and Bailey 2012). This attachment to multilateralism is manifest mainly through formal involvement in the labyrinthine network of environmental regimes, as well as by striving to ensure that environmental concerns feature strongly on the agendas of international organizations such as the UN, G-20, World Bank and World Trade Organization (WTO). Indeed, the EU is the global power that is a signatory to the bulk of documents that constitute the basis of global environmental governance, having ratified, alongside its Member States, all major international environmental agreements in the course of the past two decades (Kelemen 2010; Vogler and Stephan 2007).

Consonant with persistently endorsing multilateralism as an objective is an EU tradition of favouring interregional relations, crudely defined as institutionalized closer relations between two regional actors (Doctor 2007). Far from being a threat to multilateralism, a region-to-region approach is largely consistent with the EU's multilateral commitments (Hardacre and Smith 2009; Vogler 2005). That multilateral principles underpin the EU's *modus operandi* towards interregionalism implies that the latter acts as a supplementary catalyst for the proliferation of a rule-based, multilateral global governance system. From the perspective of the EU, therefore, interregional dealings allow it to put in place the channels through which it can convey its core norms, priorities and special interests. Since 1995, as Farrell (2005: 275) notes, a 'human rights clause is standard for all EU treaties' with third countries and regions. Similarly, inclusion of environmental clauses in both regional and bilateral agreements is a *sine qua non* condition for EU officials. Often, such clauses have a multilateral intent in that the contracting parties set up diplomatic processes for mutual conferment in relation to MEAs (Vogler 2005).

To supplement multilateralism and interregionalism, EU officials have sought to include environmental protection issues in a range of bilateral meetings and strategic partnerships with China, Brazil, India, the USA and Russia, plus a number of other key powers. Climate change is undoubtedly a core issue, as—on pure efficacy grounds—mitigating the climate challenge will require adequate contributions from all major emitters, irrespective of their country classification. Like interregionalism, EU bilateralism policy is viewed as a deliberate effort to 'multilaterize' EU bilateral relations by integrating universal concerns and norms into summits with major global actors (Vasconcelos 2010). By doing so, the EU seeks to recruit major parties into a community of 'responsible powers' that recognize the importance of ensuring that 'international organizations, regimes and treaties [are] effective in confronting threats to international peace and security' (European Council 2003: 9).

3 Normative power versus soft imperialism

The idea of the EU as a normative power was first coined by Manners (2002) to describe the EU as a distinct international actor that is guided by, and seeks to advance in the wider world, the values and ideas on which it is founded, including democracy, the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms. By championing norms and principles that have universal applicability, the EU aspires to portray itself as an 'ethical power' or 'force for good' in world politics, seeking to advance its interests almost exclusively by non-military and 'soft' means (Wood 2009: 113). Indeed, EU political elites often refer to the EU's foreign and security policies as being genuinely 'ethical' in character (Hyde-Price 2008: 30).

Consistency is a fundamental characteristic of a civilian or normative power, meaning that the values and rules promoted internally should also be reflected in the conduct of foreign policy, with voluntary dialogue and consensus building with the counterpart standing out in this regard (Manners 2008; Hettne and Söderbaum 2005). To ensure that the norm-receiver is not being pressured into adopting values or rules, a normative power should rely on instruments such as dialogue, debate, argumentation, socialization, persuasion and emulation for the promulgation of its normative agenda in international affairs (De Zutter 2010). EU activeness in multilateral fora for the promotion of a global sustainability agenda has been interpreted as offering a practical example of the manner in which the EU attempts to fulfil its role as a normative power in a successful and credible way (Oberthür 2009). Thus, EU environmental leadership ‘departs from the *realpolitik* tradition in foreign policy and promotes the global common good over and above the national interest’ (Falkner 2007: 510).

While not dismissing the EU’s authentic interest for advocating a norm-driven (or cosmopolitan) foreign policy, Hettne and Söderbaum (2005) add to the EU ‘actorness’ debate by distinguishing between ‘normative power’ and ‘soft imperialism’. Differences between the two are twofold. The first difference lies in whether ‘negotiations are carried out in a symmetrical, dialogical way rather than by imposition’ (Söderbaum 2007: 119). The second concerns the extent to which the EU’s ethical normative outlook is genuine or just a façade for the pursuit of self-interested economic, political or strategic objectives (García, *in press*). To achieve its aims, a soft imperialist actor has at its disposal a selection of instruments ranging from non-physical coercion to the use of positive or negative incentives, such as conditionality or aid (De Zutter 2010). Thus, while concurring with Nye’s (2004) classic distinction between hard and soft power, Söderbaum (2007: 119) argues that soft power too may be ‘employed in [a] “hard” and coercive manner’.

From the EU’s perspective, the hard power route is neither an option nor an objective. Investing in its soft power capabilities represents the sole alternative for the conduct of its bilateral, interregional and multilateral foreign affairs policymaking. Thus, whether European influence is to be manifest in terms of normative power or soft imperialism constitutes—to all intents and purposes—the only variable. Whether the EU will opt for one or the other model depends largely on the relative strength and status of the counterpart. Taylor (2008: 139) argues that unlike the USA, the EU is unique in that its power of attraction is such that it can request other parties to adapt to its values ‘without causing undue resentment’.

Yet, in the case of soft imperialism, the EU’s asymmetric approach may not always be well received. Obviously, compliance with the *acquis communautaire* is the price that candidate countries are required to pay in order to be admitted into a club in which they will, in principle, have equal status and partake of decision-making powers. In the case of the European Neighbourhood Policy, such a prize is not envisaged and it is the neighbours that need to incorporate the values and relevant legal production of the EU, not vice versa (Zielonka 2013; Nitoiu 2013; Chilosi 2007). Russia, a ‘proud country of imperial past’, has adamantly rejected this EU approach (Chilosi 2007: 32). In the case of negotiations with the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group of states, the prevailing sense of the EU as a formidable negotiating power allows Europe to adopt a largely uncompromising stand: ‘there are no free lunches; we’ve cooked up a deal, take it or leave it’ (Bretherton and Vogler 2006: 34). According to Hastrup (*in press*), the EU has been the main beneficiary of agreements with the ACP primarily because of its ability to exercise non-physical coercion and capitalize on the grouping’s weaknesses. In such cases, bilateral or interregional dialogues are far from symmetrical, with the EU being seen to impose its

preferences without showing much concern for its ‘weaker’ negotiating partners (Hettne and Söderbaum 2005).

On the contrary, in its relations with the EU-Asia Meeting (ASEM), the EU resembles more of a normative power than a soft hegemon, given that several members of this counterpart regional group are economic giants in their own right. In such cases, the leverage they possess makes ‘engagement with, and even indulgence of them, unavoidable’ (Wood 2011: 247). In the case of EU–Brazil relations, both soft power and soft imperialist models have relevance in explaining political priorities and strategic interests, especially so with regard to environmental policy. The following sections outline the efforts taken by the two actors to combat deforestation and promote biofuels. These issues have been identified in bilateral policy documents as the areas offering the greatest potential with respect to climate change mitigation activities (see, e.g. European Commission 2007a). The normative power and soft imperialist frameworks are then evaluated in order to determine their suitability in explaining current relations and the complications encountered in each of the two aforementioned fields.

4 The EU–Brazil strategic (environmental) partnership

Unlike China and India which are robustly sovereigntist and attached to principles of non-interference, Brazil is deeply committed to multilateralism, thus sharing Europe’s multilateral perspective. For Brazil, a greater voice in global governance can only be secured through multilateral means (Armijo and Burges 2010). Eager to demonstrate its position as a ‘soft power’ in global politics, Brazil has been investing actively in the development of both South–South and wider coalitions, such as the IBSA,⁴ BRICS,⁵ or the trade and financial G-20s (Hopewell 2013; Armijo and Burges 2010). Brazilian emphasis on multilateralism and a rule-based international order has led to high expectations and implies that Brazil and the EU could be regarded as natural partners.

The current legal and political framework for EU bilateral relations with Brazil is the Strategic Partnership agreement, established in 2007 at the initiative of the EU Portuguese Presidency. Joining the ranks of EU partners entails in practice, boosting a foreign country’s diplomatic status by organizing summits,⁶ plus a plethora of ministerial- and expert-level meetings on a wide range of policy issues. In 2008 and 2011, two successive Joint Action Plans (JAPs)⁷ were adopted, calling *inter alia* for increased cooperation on trade, science/technology, renewable energy and the environment. Trade dominates the agenda, with the conclusion of an Association Agreement between the EU and Mercosur⁸ currently being the highest interregional priority. Formal negotiations opened in 1999, collapsed in 2004 due to antipodal positions on agricultural trade liberalization (see Sect. 8), and were re-launched in 2010, at the initiative of the EU Spanish Presidency. As of

⁴ The India, Brazil and South Africa group.

⁵ The Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa group. Formerly BRIC, it is now the BRICS club, following the accession of South Africa in 2011.

⁶ EU–Brazil annual summits have so far been held in Lisbon (2007), Rio de Janeiro (2008), Stockholm (2009), Brasilia (2010), Brussels (2011) and Brasilia (2013).

⁷ The first JAP was adopted during the second EU–Brazil Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 2008, while the second one, to last until 2014, was adopted during the summit in Brussels in November 2011.

⁸ South America’s leading trading block, comprising Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay and (since July 2012) Venezuela.

October 2013, consultations are currently being held and both partners are expected to present a list of offers and requests for liberalization to each other by the end of 2013.⁹

On first reading, prospects for bilateral cooperation in the fields of renewable energy (particularly biofuels) and climate change (mainly deforestation) generally look promising. For instance, the EU could use its technical expertise and financial muscle to concretely help Brazil to curb deforestation, while Brazilian biofuels could allow the EU to diversify its transport energy matrix and hence alleviate its growing dependence on imported, climate-damaging fossil fuels (Afionis and Bailey 2012). Despite this potential, only a handful of joint actions are currently being undertaken, due mainly to inadequate funding and the nascency of the partnership.¹⁰

The European Commission earmarked a total of €61 million of funding during the period 2007–2013, of which about €18 million is to be channelled to environmental projects (European Commission 2007a). During the 2011 Brussels summit, the EU identified this shortage of funds as a problem and subsequently announced that the European Investment Bank (EIB) was to provide a €500 million loan to the Brazilian Development Bank (BNDES) for projects in renewable energy and energy efficiency (EIB 2011). Insufficient funding has also been a constraining factor with regard to achieving the environmental objectives of the EU's other strategic partnerships, as the EIB announced a €500 million loan to China in 2010 and a €200 million loan to India in 2011 for climate change mitigation projects. Given the role of the EIB as the EU's financing institution to promote European cooperation objectives with third countries, these lending operations should be viewed as a sign of the EU's determination to strengthen and add more substance in its partnerships with emerging economies.

5 Climate change cooperation

By examining cooperation in the fields of deforestation and biofuels, the following sections investigate the extent to which the EU–Brazil strategic partnership has given rise to new opportunities for collaboration in environmental policymaking. As the third-largest emitter of total greenhouse gases in the world (if emissions from deforestation and forest degradation are included), Brazil's actions are pivotal to the success of global climate mitigation policy (IEA 2011). To its credit, Brazil has put in place the most stringent national climate change mitigation targets amongst the major developing countries. Following the 2009 Copenhagen climate summit, Brazil pledged to cut emissions by 36–39 per cent relative to projected Business As Usual emissions growth between 2005 and 2020 (Viola and Franchini 2012). This would amount to an absolute emissions reduction of about 20 per cent from 2005 levels (Kieffer 2011).

The rhetoric of EU–Brazil convergence is strong, with the EU having repeatedly stressed its determination to contribute to Brazil's efforts to combat climate change (European Council 2011b: 20). During the 2011 summit in Brussels, the two partners reinforced climate change cooperation by formally launching a self-standing EU–Brazil Climate Change Dialogue. This stipulated that in addition to existing discussions at technical level, senior and ministerial tiers will also be introduced into partnership

⁹ Interview with official in DG Trade, October 2013.

¹⁰ As of September 2013, the Energy Dialogue is only in its fourth session, while the Environment Dialogue is in its fifth.

Dialogues so as to enhance the formulation of strategy on major issues (European Council 2011b).

However, cooperation to date in multilateral climate change talks does not paint a picture of two tightly collaborating partners. Brazil, for example, featured as a central protagonist during the 2009 Copenhagen conference, an occasion viewed by EU officials as a highly uncomfortable experience in that it essentially signalled the stark diminishing of European leadership in the climate regime (Dimitrov 2010). On the contrary, the decision of Brazil and South Africa during the 2011 Durban conference to break BASIC¹¹ ranks and declare their willingness to sign up to an EU proposal for a roadmap to a new climate deal suggests that, for the first time ever, emerging economies appear willing to accept greater responsibilities and take on some kind of legally binding commitments from 2020.

6 Deforestation as a strategic concern

Renewables such as hydropower and biofuels account for about 45 per cent of Total Primary Energy Supply (TPES) in Brazil, which is the highest proportion worldwide by quite a margin (Giddens 2009). Despite having one of the world's cleanest energy matrices, emissions from agriculture, forestry and land use activities (AFOLU) account for some 85 per cent of annual carbon dioxide emissions (IEA 2011). Advancing bilateral cooperation on deforestation is therefore a central priority for both partners. According to Viola and Franchini (2012: 266), until the mid-2000s, Brazilian policies on deforestation were 'little short of disastrous', with around 20,000 km² of tropical forest being lost on an annual average basis.

To its credit, the Brazilian government has since enacted a series of successful policies to curtail deforestation, which have collectively resulted in deforestation declining markedly, to about 7,000 km² in 2009 (Viola and Franchini 2012). According to Tollefson (2013), Brazil registered a new record low for deforestation in 2012, with only about 4600 km² of forest being cleared. As a result, total national greenhouse gas emissions have been reduced by about 30 per cent (Hochstetler and Viola 2012). The international community applauded the announcement of Brazil's National Climate Change Plan at the 2008 Poznań climate conference, where the government pledged to pursue a 70 per cent cut in the annual deforestation rate of the Amazon by 2017 against 2006 levels (Afionis and Bailey 2012). In 2008, Brazil established the Amazon Fund, the aim of which is to raise donations to help foster the preservation of forests. Norway has already pledged to commit €300 million by 2011, potentially rising to €1 billion by 2015 (Viola and Franchini 2012).

Assisting Brazil to curb deforestation has emerged as a central focus in the EU–Brazil partnership, with the bulk of joint actions in the field of climate change having concentrated around this area. While welcoming European involvement, Brazilian policymakers nevertheless complain that the EU 'obsession'¹² with the Amazon results in other potential avenues of climate change cooperation being overlooked. Indeed, under the EU's country strategy paper for Brazil for 2007–2013, the Commission spells out that the main partnership priority will be to 'contribute to protecting the environment—more specifically Brazilian forests' (European Commission 2007a). Prior to launching the strategic partnership in 2007, deforestation again absorbed most of the EU's financial resources for

¹¹ This group consists of Brazil, South Africa, India and China. It first emerged just before the 2009 Copenhagen climate conference.

¹² Interview with Brazilian diplomat #1 in Brussels, October 2011.

bilateral environmental undertakings, mainly through the Pilot Programme for the Protection of the Brazilian Rainforests (PPG-7) (European Commission 2007a). Despite these investments, insufficient financial backing on the part of the EU is the prime reason why bilateral cooperation in this area has not really taken off. As part of remedial actions, a Commission delegation visited Amazonia and expressed keen interest in contributing to the Amazon Fund.¹³ In late 2010, Germany committed to donate €21 million to the Fund, thus becoming the first EU actor to take up this approach. Interestingly, during the 2012 Rio+20 Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil announced that the Fund's resources would be shared with the other seven members of the Amazon Cooperation Treaty Organization (ACTO) to finance deforestation projects in the region.¹⁴

Despite this progress, the debt crisis and the subsequent capital shortage in the Eurozone had a clear impact on EU funds for cooperation with Brazil. For instance, in November 2011, the European Commission informed Brazil that due to budgetary constraints it would need to divert funding for environmental projects in Brazil to the North African and Middle Eastern 'Arab Spring' countries. While funding for deforestation projects was to be discontinued, this reallocation of funds would not impact upon interregional cooperation with the Mercosur, nor would it affect other areas of cooperation under the EU's country strategy paper for Brazil for 2007–2013 (European Commission 2007a).

Apart from adequate funding, fostering a closer bilateral partnership on combating deforestation depends crucially on the successful and timely conclusion of international climate negotiations on the structure of the UN mechanism to address deforestation.¹⁵ Even though both partners have supported and pushed hard for an international agreement on Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD), there is a wide divergence of views between the EU and Brazil on the scope of the activities to be included and on whether efforts to reduce emissions from deforestation should be financed through public funds or carbon markets. Regarding the former, Brazil is *inter alia* in favour of an approach that would credit projects involving the replanting of 'forests in exhaustion', i.e. forests that are unable to regenerate naturally (Okereke and Dooley 2010). Brazil's proposal has raised strong objections since it was first tabled at the 2008 Poznań climate conference, with NGOs dismissing it as an attempt to incentivize the establishment of industrial plantations rather than natural forests. EU opposition to the idea is grounded in the argument that it contradicts the definition of reforestation adopted at the 2005 Montreal climate conference (UNFCCC 2005).

Turning to the REDD mechanism's financing modalities, while Brazil has recently emerged as an advocate of including forests in carbon markets (Hochstetler and Viola 2012), the EU has remained firmly opposed, arguing that emissions from such sources cannot at present be monitored with any degree of accuracy (ENDS Europe 2010).¹⁶ Both the EU and Brazil envisage their future bilateral deforestation strategies relying largely on

¹³ Interview with Brazilian diplomat #1 in Brussels, October 2011.

¹⁴ Interview with Brazilian diplomat #2 in Brussels, October 2013.

¹⁵ It should be noted that the UN climate regime is one of several channels through which the EU tries to tackle deforestation. The United Nations Forum on Forests offers another such channel, even though deliberations in this forum are unlikely to result in a multilateral agreement on trade in forest products due to fears among countries like Brazil of potential adverse consequences for their forest industries (Gulbrandsen 2012). Brazil has also refused to back the EU's FLEGT (Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade) initiative, which seeks to control exports of illegally logged wood (Overdevest and Zeitlin 2012).

¹⁶ In the run-up to Durban, the EU slightly modified its position by acknowledging that credits from forestry projects could potentially be integrated into international carbon markets, but only if 'subject to strict quantitative limits' and 'in light of experience gained and after thorough review' (UNFCCC n.d.).

taking full advantage of the emissions mitigation options offered by REDD. While the strategic partnership offers a vital forum within which the two partners can deliberate on their differences, augmenting deforestation cooperation is in essence tied to the conclusion of UN multilateral negotiations on REDD.

7 Biofuels

The area that probably holds the best prospects for reciprocal cooperation is that of transport biofuels. Brazil has a long tradition in biofuels, emerging as a large-scale ethanol producer since the 1970s. It is the world's second largest biofuels producer after the USA and the world's leading exporter. Notably, the share of biofuels energy in road transport is in excess of 20 per cent, far outstripping that of any other country (IEA 2011). Brazil is keen to spread its biofuels technology, even envisaging contributing to technology transfer under a future international climate agreement (Halliding et al. 2011). Biofuel consumption in the EU is also growing rapidly, reflecting Europe's increasing preoccupation with climate change and energy security (European Commission 2001). In 2009, the EU adopted the Renewable Energy Directive, requiring Member States to reach a mandatory 10 per cent biofuels target by 2020. It might therefore be expected that the EU and Brazil would be natural partners in promoting the use of sustainable biofuels on the global scene.

Bilateral cooperation in the field of biofuels to date is far from insignificant. For instance, a number of joint projects have been funded through the EU's Framework Programmes for Research and Technological Development (FPs).¹⁷ Furthermore, both partners have sought to expand their operations by entering triangular cooperation pacts with African countries, with the intention of developing bioelectricity and biofuels projects. At the initiative of Brazil, such a deal has been agreed with Mozambique, while the EU has taken the lead in negotiating a similar tripartite undertaking with Kenya.¹⁸ On the corporate front, substantial investments have been announced by companies including British Petroleum (BP) and Royal Dutch Shell. BP has been investing heavily in acquiring majority control of Brazilian ethanol producer companies and increasing its considerable land holdings in Brazil (Biofuels Digest 2011), while Shell in 2011 launched a multibillion dollar joint venture with Cosan—Brazil's largest ethanol exporter—which will make Shell a key world player in biofuels (Shell 2011).

Despite the synergies, a number of issues have emerged that have greatly polarized relations between the two partners. Though a relatively recent policy area, biofuels have triggered one of the most highly contentious debates on the current international sustainability agenda. Amongst the greatest concerns is that increased biofuel use could cause considerable land use change (LUC), both direct (dLUC) and indirect (iLUC).¹⁹ The 2009

¹⁷ SUNLIBB (Sustainable Liquid Biofuels from Biomass Biorefining) is an example of such a project, aiming *inter alia* at combining European and Brazilian research strengths in order to open the way for cost-competitive first and second generation biofuels production (see: www.sunlibb.eu).

¹⁸ To date, the project in Kenya has barely got off the ground due to disagreements between the EU and Brazil with respect to its sustainability. With regard to the project in Mozambique, the EU has again refrained from getting wholeheartedly involved due to food security concerns (Interviews with Brazilian diplomats in Brussels, October 2011 and October 2013, as well as with an EU official in the Delegation of the EU to Kenya in October 2013).

¹⁹ If a farmer grows biofuel feedstock on previously uncultivated land, this causes direct land use change. If the farmer uses existing agricultural land, the crop that was previously cultivated there will now be displaced and will have to be moved elsewhere, e.g. to forest land, thus causing iLUC in the process.

Directive draws an explicit link between consumption of biofuels and their sustainable production. Public concern for potential negative impacts, coupled with widespread NGO criticism, has compelled the development of EU-wide standards and certification criteria²⁰ to foster a more sustainable biofuels industry.

While specifying mechanisms in the Directive for dealing with dLUC, scientific uncertainties on how best to estimate iLUC impacts have prevented the EU from reaching a final decision on how to address iLUC emissions within legislation (European Commission 2010). In response to the EU's public consultations on 'Indirect Land Use Change of Biofuels',²¹ Brazil emphasized in a number of submissions to the Commission that considering the uncertainties, high complexity and lack of scientific agreement, iLUC should not at present be applied in regulation (Brazilian Mission to the EU 2010b).

In order to address both iLUC and food security concerns, the Commission proposed *inter alia* in September 2012 that food-based biofuels be used only to meet half of the 10 per cent EU biofuels target.²² According to Brazilian officials, such an approach is ineffective as it puts all biofuels currently in the market into the same basket and therefore fails to take into consideration their widely different iLUC impacts (e.g. when comparing biodiesel with bioethanol).²³ They therefore argue that a way forward for the EU in addressing iLUC would be for it to somehow reward countries like Brazil that have put in place sound land use planning policies (e.g. agro-ecological zoning for sugarcane).

A second issue related to the 2009 Directive's sustainability criteria concerns land type definitions. While the Directive defines primary forests and natural protected areas, the Commission has yet to clarify what it considers as constituting highly biodiverse grasslands, with non-natural grasslands being the main point of controversy.²⁴ Originally, the Commission proposed a definition of the latter as areas 'whose condition as grasslands is maintained [for at least 5 years] as a result of human intervention such as ploughing, sowing, mowing or livestock grazing' (European Commission 2009: 1). Several definitions have since been tabled and rejected by either the Commission or the Member States, many of which (e.g. Germany or Austria) still have sizable expanses of grasslands left and therefore have a stake in the negotiating outcome.²⁵

Non-natural grassland provisions were inserted in the Directive at a later stage; much to the surprise of Brazil, which then feared its plans to expand sugarcane plantations in pastureland, would be severely compromised.²⁶ Since the 2000s, more than two-thirds of sugarcane plantation expansion has taken place in pastures, which comprise about 60 per cent of all arable land in Brazil.²⁷ The Brazilian government and institutions dismiss intra-

²⁰ Besides greenhouse gas savings (currently 35 per cent, rising to 50 per cent in 2017), the EU's sustainability criteria stipulate that biofuel feedstock is not to be derived from primary forests, lands with high biodiversity value, protected territories and carbon-rich areas.

²¹ See http://ec.europa.eu/energy/renewables/consultations/index_en.htm.

²² See <http://www.endseurope.com/docs/120911a.pdf>. Subsequent versions have been watered down, while the proposal is currently under discussion among the Commission, the European Parliament and the Member States. In September 2013, the European Parliament voted that the cap be raised to 6 per cent.

²³ Interview with official from the Brazilian Sugarcane Industry Association (UNICA), April 2013.

²⁴ According to a personal communication with an EU Commission official, the definition was expected during 2012. As of October 2013, it remains unknown when an intra-EU agreement will be finally reached.

²⁵ Interview with EU official from DG Energy, October 2013.

²⁶ Personal communications with Brazilian policy-makers and lobbyists during the Second International Conference on Lignocellulosic Ethanol (2ICLE) in Verona, Italy, 11–13 October 2011.

²⁷ Interview with official from the Brazilian Sugarcane Industry Association (UNICA), April 2013.

EU attempts to reach an agreement on a definition as highly arbitrary and argue that given the lack of scientific consensus, the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) should be regarded as the only legitimate forum for agreeing an operational definition (Brazilian Mission to the EU 2010a).²⁸

Finally, by far the most contentious item on the bilateral agenda—largely responsible for the collapse of EU-Mercosur talks in 2004—concerns European subsidies for agricultural products and tariff barriers on Brazilian biofuels, which have greatly impeded commercial integration between the two markets. Pending further development of second and third generation biofuels, ethanol from sugarcane is currently the most sustainably produced first generation biofuel worldwide, leading to greenhouse gas savings of up to 90 per cent (Goldemberg and Guardabassi 2009; Souza et al. 2011).²⁹ Importing biofuels from Brazil could therefore offer another avenue through which the EU could cut its greenhouse emissions, as well as bolstering energy security by reducing its dependence on oil and gas imports. Yet, biofuel cooperation between Brazil and the EU had stalled as a result of the latter's defensive position on agricultural and biofuel trade liberalization. As elaborated further in the next section, such an approach scores badly in terms of the EU pursuing its foreign environmental policy objectives in a normative manner.

8 Normative power or soft imperialism?

Having outlined the current state of play in EU–Brazil environmental relations, this section assesses whether EU claims on the normative orientation of its external environmental policy can be substantiated in practice. There is no dismissing that in the environmental issue area, there are basic values underlying the EU's stance towards bilateral, interregional and multilateral cooperation. Decisions to proceed with the Kyoto Protocol in 2001, establish an emissions trading scheme in 2005, plus the pledge in 2007 to unilaterally reduce its emissions by 20 per cent by 2020, provide evidence of a normative element in EU climate policymaking. The ultimate aim of the EU in the climate regime is to put in place a multilateral climate agreement with binding commitments. Its stance on deforestation and instrumental support for the incorporation of REDD activities as an eligible mitigation mechanism may well be seen as forming part of an EU strategy to elicit the practical participation of developing countries, such as Brazil, China or India in global efforts to mitigate climate change (Potvin and Bovarnick 2008). Furthermore, by opposing the inclusion of forestry in carbon markets, through the CDM or REDD, the EU has been viewed as opting for a 'moral' stance on sinks (Boyd et al. 2008: 106).

The EU and Brazil have engaged in an authentic and symmetrical dialogue, facilitated by the fact that in the issue area of deforestation, the leverage is with Brazil. When it comes to environmental policy, power tends to be 'issue specific' and more related to capability within a particular area (Vogler 2000). In combating deforestation, Brazil is a central player, as it accounts for a far greater part of the problem. According to Paterson (1996), the proportion of greenhouse emissions is a source of power, but in a purely negative (veto) sense. It is particularly useful when an actor is unwilling to cooperate or seeking to weaken final outcomes. Until the mid-2000s, for instance, Brazil was adamantly hostile to the

²⁸ In an interview with a diplomat in Brazil's delegation to the EU in October 2013, it was noted that this still remains Brazil's official stance, even though the EU has refused to enter into concrete negotiations.

²⁹ We acknowledge here both the LUC impact of sugarcane ethanol and the diverse environmental externalities of monocrop plantations.

inclusion of forests in the international climate regime, perceiving this as a sovereignty threat over its Amazon region (Viola and Franchini 2012). Nowadays, Brazil has deviated from its historic position and has invited international support in slowing down forest loss.

In contrast to deforestation, the soft imperialist perspective is arguably more adequate in helping acquire a complete picture of the forces driving European environmental policy, especially with regard to its regulatory approach towards biofuels. As the European Commission (2007b) admits, the intention of the EU's high tariffs placed on bioethanol is to limit imports, thereby shielding local EU production against cheap imports, mainly from Brazil. By doing so, however, the EU is refusing to open up its heavily subsidized and largely inefficient biodiesel-dominated market to ethanol producers from the South in order for the most energy efficient and sustainable biofuels to be promoted, regardless of their country origin (Afionis and Stringer 2012). This stance is at odds with the EU's placement of sustainable development as a cross-cutting guiding principle to be integrated in all EU policies and decision-making (Falkner 2007).

In addition to sustainability complications, the EU, for all its goodwill and rhetorical commitment to free trade and the market economy, maintains a range of high tariff and non-tariff barriers for the exact agricultural products where Brazil and the rest of Mercosur members have their greatest competitive advantage, e.g. sugar, meat and cereals (Hardacre 2010; Young and Peterson 2013). Note at this point that according to the WTO, tariff bindings differ depending on whether a product is classified as an agricultural or an industrial good. Whereas ethanol is considered an agricultural product, biodiesel is regarded an industrial one, as products are classified based on their chemical composition and not on their potential use. Apart from receiving different tariff classifications, WTO rules are more flexible regarding the size of subsidies allowed for agricultural products (see Motaal 2008).

According to EU rhetoric, free trade agreements are based on the assumption that they will be beneficial to the poorer periphery (Young and Peterson 2013; Dimitrovova 2012). Yet, EU unwillingness to compromise vital agricultural commercial interests indicates that access to its internal market is granted only to those willing to cooperate and accept its conditions and preferences, such as *inter alia* selectivity of goods (Dimitrovova 2012). This stance has left the EU open to the charge of hypocrisy, as Brazil and other developing nations complain that while Europe asks for free trade in industrial goods, it offers little with regard to agriculture.

The EU is well placed to use conditionality to pursue its strategic interests, given that in economic terms, it is far more important to Brazil than vice versa. While Brazil only accounts for about 2 per cent of total EU trade, the EU is Brazil's main trading partner, representing close to a quarter of its total trade (Afionis and Bailey 2012). Note here that agricultural and other raw material products account for about three quarters of Mercosur exports to the EU (Garcia, in press). As a result of such trade asymmetries, the EU is in a prime position to be frugal in the number of concessions it provides to Brazil and other Mercosur members. It is therefore well placed to dominate the pace and dictate much of the conditions for interregional and bilateral cooperation.

Given the above contradictions, the relationships between the EU and Brazil, and the EU and the Mercosur, can be argued to be primarily 'built on the interests of the strongest', thus demonstrating the 'relevance of soft imperialism' (Hettne and Söderbaum 2005: 547). Scholars have stressed the imperativeness of a normative power to be consistent and 'practise what [it] preach[es]' (Björkdahl 2008: 137), as well as ensure that norms are not to be used as a 'fig leaf' to conceal the pursuit of parochial interests (Noutcheva 2009: 1068). That said, an advocate of the EU normative power thesis would struggle, for

example, to account for the bloc's insistence to continue distorting international biofuels markets when there are cheaper and vastly more sustainable alternatives readily available.

As noted earlier, ethanol is regarded by the WTO as an agricultural product. This complicates matters as the agriculture dossier has proved to be the 'Achilles heel' in the conclusion of a trade association agreement between the EU and the Mercosur (Hardacre 2010: 156). The crux of the matter concerns the EU's uncompromising stance on the lifting of trade barriers that serve to shield products designated under WTO rules as 'sensitive' from external competition—i.e. products that are the subject of specific protectionist policies under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). From a European perspective, agriculture is unquestionably the single most sensitive trade issue, explaining why overall progress in negotiations has been held up for such a prolonged period (Doctor 2007). As Sbragia (2010) notes, despite fierce competition between the EU and the USA over the pursuit of Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with Asian and Latin American countries, neither actor is as yet prepared to concede to Brazil's demands for agricultural liberalization.

The majority of Member States, headed by France, are eager to defend the *status quo* and consequently oppose any further reform to the CAP. As a collateral benefit, biofuel producing Member States also get to safeguard the interests of the relevant domestic industries. They therefore insist on keeping in place the protectionist apparatus of the internal market in the agricultural sector, as well as carrying on with export subsidies and domestic support payments (Da Conceição-Heldt 2011). Their hostility to any sort of concessions that would result in the substantial increase in market access opportunities for foreign producers is set to intensify following the release of a European Commission agricultural impact assessment in 2011 that suggested European agriculture would sustain heavy financial losses as a result of an EU–Mercosur agreement (ICTSD 2011).

The stalemate in the WTO Doha Development Round offers valuable insights into the way Europe's normative power aspirations are overridden by pragmatic realism when necessitated by economic circumstances, in this case the desire to protect European farmers. The EU has insisted that bilateral or interregional fora should be treated as supplementary, thus stressing its preference for agricultural liberalization deliberations to be conducted primarily within the multilateral framework of the WTO (Hardacre 2010). Yet, global trade negotiations face several hurdles, particularly the obstructionist attitude of the powerful EU agri-business interest group, especially when coupled with the equally commanding USA agricultural lobby (Hardacre 2010). Indicative of how agricultural lobbyists have strategically positioned themselves in core EU decision-making centres is the fact that the EU was willing to allow the Doha talks to collapse in 2006 so as not to jeopardize the continued protection of its farmers (Poletti 2010).

As mentioned earlier, the relative power of the counterpart determines to a great extent whether or not the EU will behave as a soft imperialist. In relationships where the EU has the upper hand, the interests it will seek to advance are developed and formulated *inter alia* as a result of conflict and trade between different interest groups seeking to adapt policy design in their favour (Young and Peterson 2013). In this regard, small but well-organized interest groups are well positioned to exert disproportionate influence upon policymaking, often to the detriment of less organized interest groups, the wider society, or in this case, the environment (see, e.g. Michaelowa 1998).

EU–Mercosur negotiations offer an illustrative example in this respect. Back in 1999, the Mercosur–Europe Business Forum (MEBF) was established in order to channel the voice of EU services and export-oriented manufacturing industries that stood to gain the most from an EU–Mercosur agreement (Hardacre 2010). However, the MEBF failed to

counter the influence of the single-issue agricultural lobby, as it proved unable to reconcile conflicting interests and sectoral demands, hence losing coherence and power in the process (Hardacre 2010). While beyond the scope of this paper, further research, by, e.g. public choice theorists, could provide inroads towards a better understanding of why the EU agricultural lobby has been so successful in shaping policy targets.

9 Conclusion

This paper has critically examined the stance of the EU in the field of environmental cooperation with Brazil and evaluated whether the former has actively promoted policies that have furthered the norm of sustainable development, as would be expected of a normative power in global environmental politics. We suggest that while both the EU and Brazil have recognized environmental collaboration as indispensable, this area is still not enough of a priority for the two partners to overcome their conflicting interests and invest in realizing the substantial environmental potential of their bilateral partnership.

While there is no denying that the 2007 strategic partnership has 'revolutionized' overall bilateral relations,³⁰ the environment dimension has struggled to keep up, with insufficient EU funding being the prime reason for the scarcity of joint actions in this field. Another major complication concerns the fact that EU–Brazil relations have been diachronically split between bilateralism, interregionalism and multilateralism. While the partnership will ensure closer contacts on deforestation issues, it still leaves negotiations on the REDD mechanism to be dealt with primarily through the multilateral UN process. In the case of biofuels, it is again clear that the pace of EU–Brazil and EU–Mercosur talks will largely be dictated by advances at the WTO level. In the latter case, the two partners have seemingly reached irreconcilable sensitivities, even though Brazilian policymakers are optimistic that it is only a matter of time before trade barriers are lifted, as the EU's insufficient domestic production will necessitate a massive increase in biofuel imports if it is to meet its 2020 target.³¹ Progress in the two areas with the greatest potential for environmental convergence is therefore tied to the conclusion of multilateral negotiations.

In reflecting upon the EU as a normative power or soft imperialist, this paper has revealed that both models are relevant in accounting for deforestation and biofuels policymaking. With respect to bilateral deforestation diplomacy, the relative strength of Brazil implies that the EU has to rely on the instruments in the arsenal of a normative power in order to influence outcomes. On the contrary, in the case of biofuels, values and economic interests intermingle in the EU. Here, the normative power perspective is largely unable to explain why an actor so keen on promoting the environmental sustainability of international biofuels trade, actually impedes imports of biofuels that are far more energy efficient compared to their heavily subsidized domestic counterparts.

In terms of overall significance, important lessons can be drawn that could be readily applied to other cases of EU environmental diplomacy, thereby helping to form a clearer picture of the reasons why in some fields (e.g. biosafety) the EU is acknowledged as a leader, whereas in others (e.g. agriculture) EU policy approaches have been highlighted as associated with particular policy incoherence issues (Falkner 2007). While the EU's foreign environmental policymaking is officially conducted under the pretext of civilian

³⁰ Interview with Brazilian diplomat #1 in Brussels, October 2011.

³¹ Personal communications with Brazilian policy-makers and lobbyists during the Second International Conference on Lignocellulosic Ethanol (2ICLE) in Verona, Italy, 11–13 October 2011.

norms and values, European ‘green’ ambitions are effectively circumscribed by EU unwillingness to pursue its ethical agenda at the expense of vital domestic interests (Warkotsch 2010). The analysis of EU–Brazil relations presented in this paper implies that a far more critical interpretation is required of the EU’s self-declared allegiance to environmental norms and a liberal global trading agenda.

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