

# TRANSFORMING EU FOREIGN POLICY

## Reforms to elevate climate in the 2024-2029 EU Cycle

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As the 2024-2029 EU cycle begins, the EU has an opportunity to solidify its role as a climate leader and global competitor. To do this, it must reform its climate diplomacy strategy to respond to the shifting geopolitical landscape and worsening climate crisis. The EU faces a shifting industrial policy landscape with increased competition from China and the US in cleantech, changing economic and security interests, and rising geopolitical tensions, all of which could threaten its competitive position. This comes at a time when the impacts of the climate crisis are increasingly apparent in Europe and around the globe.

Amidst a strong focus on competitiveness, competing foreign policy priorities, and domestic challenges, alongside escalating climate impacts, it is crucial for the EU to keep climate action firmly on the agenda, both at home and abroad. Climate considerations must be integrated across all EU foreign policy domains and treated as a cross-cutting issue within the EU's external agenda.

Navigating these global challenges requires **strong leadership, a clear mandate, adequate resources and capacities and an effective institutional structure**. Bolstering the external dimension of the Green Deal and supporting a green EU competitiveness deal will be key.

Despite progress, significant work remains to fully embed climate into the EU's foreign policy. This brief presents a menu of reform opportunities for the 2024-2029 EU cycle to improve the mainstreaming of climate in EU external action. Reforms are presented in four categories identified as key components to elevate climate into EU foreign policy: climate foreign policy strategy, strong governance, streamlined coordination and communication, and sufficient resources. For further details on the reform proposals, please refer to NewClimate's publication: [Transforming EU Foreign Policy](#), reforms to elevate climate in the 2024-2029 EU cycle.



### CLIMATE FOREIGN POLICY STRATEGY

As climate gains prominence in foreign policy, the EU struggles to formulate a cohesive long-term strategy. The EU needs a collective vision for climate foreign policy that sets guiding principles and a clear mandate for institutions to integrate climate considerations into external action. By adopting a cohesive approach to climate diplomacy, and engaging the Council, the Commission, the Parliament, and Member States, the EU can enhance its leadership on climate action and improve consistency and coordination.

#### **Proposal → Development of a European Consensus on Climate Diplomacy**

**What:** Develop a shared, long-term vision and framework for climate diplomacy, aligning the Green Deal's external priorities with the Paris Agreement.

**How:** The Foreign Affairs Council initiates the development of a long-term Consensus framework. The European Commission and EEAS draft the Consensus in consultation with Member States and the European Parliament. It is formally adopted by Member States.

### Success factors

**Secure buy-in:** Establish consensus among key actors to initiate the process and the key objectives.

**Build in flexibility:** Establish clear revision milestones to ensure the strategy remains relevant and adapts to shifting geopolitical dynamics.



## STRONG GOVERNANCE

Leadership and responsibilities on climate diplomacy are dispersed across EU institutions. While the High Representative and Vice President of the Commission (HR/VP) theoretically leads on climate diplomacy, their agenda often prioritises short-term geopolitical crises and does not give sufficient attention to external dimension of the European Green Deal. A clear division of responsibilities is necessary to bolster the EU's governance and elevate the prioritisation of climate issues in foreign policy.

### Proposal → Strengthen high-level political mandates on climate diplomacy

**What:** Reappoint an Executive Vice President of the European Commission for climate action including an expanded portfolio to ensure external climate action remains a top priority and increase the Commissioner's political leverage.

**How:** The Commission President proposes an innovative and expanded policy portfolio for the Executive Vice President for climate diplomacy. Examples of innovative portfolios include:

- Merge climate, energy, and environment files under one **Super Commissioner for Climate, Energy, and Environment** to ensure strategic and coordinated focus and increase their political leverage.
- Build on the election's competitiveness focus and appoint a **Commissioner for Climate and Competitiveness** responsible for both competitiveness and climate issues.
- Enhance strategic planning on the Global Gateway and external dimension of the Green Deal by appointing a **Commissioner for Climate Action and Global Gateway**.

### Proposal → Improve political leadership in EU delegations

**What:** Provide a clear mandate to heads of delegations to prioritise and promote climate action in relations with partner countries.

**How:** EEAS issues guidance, supported by the HR/VP, to prioritise climate action in alignment with overarching objectives outlined in a Consensus on climate diplomacy. The HR/VP considers candidates' climate expertise when appointing top diplomats for regions or countries of high relevance (e.g. with high greenhouse gas emissions or critical raw materials for clean value chains).

### Success factors

**Alignment with political agenda:** Link climate to the political priorities of the new Commission, like competitiveness, to enhance the prioritisation of international climate action and mainstreaming of climate into external relations.

**Transparency:** Enhance transparency in appointing EU diplomats and include climate expertise as a key criterion.

**Address potential pushback:** Anticipate and address reluctance from the new HR/VP and high-level EU officials who may express concerns over a limited pool of candidates with sufficient climate credentials.



## STREAMLINED COORDINATION & COMMUNICATION

The EU's unique institutional structure can hinder effective communication and coordination, making it challenging for the EU and Member States to speak with one voice. Overlapping and unclear responsibilities coupled with ineffective communication can result in institutions working in silos and an unclear narrative around the impacts of extraterritorial policies and engagement with partners. The EU needs to be strategic in its coordination and communication to effectively execute its long-term climate foreign policy objectives and align its messaging across diverse initiatives.

### Proposal → Create a strategic communication task force

**What:** Launch a strategic communication task force led by the Cabinet for the Commissioner on Climate Action which includes representatives from the EEAS, DG CLIMA, DG ENER, DG INTPA, DG TRADE, DG TAXUD and DG GROW. Develop a strategic communication strategy under the taskforce for EU climate foreign policy which overhauls how the EU communicates its external financing for climate action in partner countries, emphasising high-quality projects and the EU's commitment to durable climate partnerships. Utilise the task force to support EU delegations with strategic communication on climate policy, especially around key political moments.

**How:** The President of the Commission mandates the creation of the task force under the Commissioner on Climate Action. High-level officials in the Cabinet for the Climate Commissioner lead regular, structured meetings to facilitate continuous dialogue, transparency, rapid information exchange and coordination. When appointing top diplomats for regions or countries of high relevance (e.g. with high greenhouse gas emissions or critical raw materials for clean value chains).

### Proposal → Operationalise green diplomacy hubs

**What:** Establish informal green diplomacy hubs at the regional- or country-level where the EU aims to strengthen relations and implement climate partnerships. Include staff from EEAS, DG CLIMA (e.g., climate finance advisors), DG TRADE, DG TAXUD (e.g., CBAM staff), DG INTPA (e.g., climate projects teams and geographical desk staff), and climate staff from EU delegations and Member embassies. Utilise hubs as platforms for sharing intelligence, updating on activities, and identifying cooperation opportunities and strategies with partner countries, the private sector, academia, and civil society.

**How:** Hubs are led by senior EU delegation officials based in the country or region of interest. The high-level official should have strong political connections to the Commission and the EEAS, potentially from the Cabinet for the Commissioner on Climate Action or DG CLIMA to ensure information sharing back to Brussels.

### Proposal → Establish climate focal points in EU delegations

**What:** Establish a climate focal point in each EU delegation or regions/countries critical for climate partnerships. Utilise the climate focal point to facilitate communication between the EU, its delegations, and Member State embassies on the external dimension of the Green Deal and climate partnerships and to develop targeted communication strategies for climate cooperation (e.g., localising diplomacy efforts by supporting campaigns in local languages in partnership with local stakeholders).

**How:** The President of the Commission and the HR/VP mandate climate focal points in selected EU delegations.

### Success factors

**Buy-in:** Secure buy-in from staff on the working level and officials on the political level to support reforms. Political leaders will need to mandate the reform and staff will need to see the use of the reform.



## SUFFICIENT RESOURCES

EU institutions lack the resources and staff to effectively integrate climate action into foreign policy. In Brussels, key divisions are understaffed, lack climate expertise, and have limited travel budgets for climate diplomacy efforts. EU delegations abroad often have no dedicated staff working solely on climate. EU institutions need adequate resources and administrative capacity to mainstream climate action and improve coordination and communication.

### Proposal → Reprioritise capacities and promote inter-institutional cooperation

**What:** Review and reallocate staff within relevant institutions to strengthen climate diplomacy.

**How:** **Brussels** – Appoint dedicated climate staff within relevant Commission services and the EEAS. Facilitate this through internal staff reallocation, ensuring new climate-focused personnel receive essential guidance and training.

**EU Delegations** – Foster collaboration between EU delegation and Member State embassy staff. Member States could second climate specialists to EU delegations, promoting strategic alignment on shared climate interests and maximising Team Europe's potential, thereby avoiding redundant efforts in climate diplomacy between the EU and Member States.

### Proposal → Increase the European public administration budget

**What:** Expand the EU's budget to support climate integration in foreign policy, aligning with the EU's Green Deal objectives and enhancing global climate diplomacy efforts. Explore innovative own resources such as statistics-based or CBAM-based own resources<sup>1</sup>.

**How:** The Council gives strong direction to reallocate and supplement the EU budget. Top leadership including the HR/VP and Commission President place addressing resource constraints onto their agenda. EU decision-making bodies collaborate to negotiate and approve reforms.

### Success factors

**Political priorities:** Make the reallocation of staff to climate files a political priority of the Commission President and College of Commissioners.

**Link to geopolitics:** Link the EU's administration budget for climate activities to competition and security concerns to garner broader support.

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Civil Society Organisations and the European Parliament called for CBAM revenue to be reallocated back to developing countries to support their transitions. This should be prioritised, however, if the revenue is incorporated into the EU general budget as is likely, the funds can be earmarked to support climate diplomacy efforts in partner countries.

#### Disclaimer

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