

Modeling Political Decisions for Sustainability

Assignment #1

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Actor: EU Commission, DG CLIMA

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How is the actor relevant to the permissibility of carbon removals to count towards reaching the 2040 EU net zero greenhouse gas (GHG) emission goal(s)?

As the initiator of the EU Commission's climate policy positions, DG CLIMA plays a key role in formulating agendas such as the 2040 climate protection target. DG CLIMA has an extraordinary role in formulating expertise, e.g., through policy papers, (carbon removal) management plans, and other content to prepare the Commission for negotiations (*Climate Action*, 2024). Embedded in the Commission as the highest agenda-setting body in such negotiation issues, DG CLIMA is one of the most important bodies.

Describe the actor's relations with other actors on the abovementioned issue.

As a unit embedded in the EU Commission, DG CLIMA influences the EU's target formulation when negotiating the extent to which carbon removals should be included in emission reductions and provides a basis for concrete decisions by Parliament and the Council. National states whose interests are represented by the Council and parties represented by the Parliament influence the decision-making process. Lobby associations, scientific advisory boards and NGOs influence representatives of parties and nation-states. The output from negotiations on carbon removal issues with all these stakeholders is taken up by DG CLIMA and used for the concrete implementation and revision of EU policies and legislation (*Management Plan 2024 – Climate Action*, n.d.).

Where can the actor be found on the position scale? Justify.

The Commission's communiqué on Europe's 2040 climate target from February 6th states that carbon removals—both land-based and industrial—should reach up to 400 MtCO₂ (corresponding to a scale of 90), as “this is an integral part of the Commission's preferred -90% scenario” (Runge-Metzger, Dec. 2024; EUR-LEX - 52024DC0063 - EN - EUR-LEX, n.d.).

Additionally, the Commission's communication on Industrial Carbon Management highlights that carbon removals would need to grow to approximately 280 MtCO₂ (on the same scale: ~55) by 2040 (Climate Action, 2024b; McPhie, Dec. 2024).

Based on these figures, I calculate a middle ground between the fixed target of 280 MtCO₂ (industrial storage capacity) and the maximum possible target of 400 MtCO₂ (combined industrial and land-based removals). This results in a scale of **70**, corresponding to 340 MtCO₂, for DG CLIMA. This estimate considers that the additional efforts required for each incremental amount of CO₂ removed increase disproportionately and more rapidly as the targets are approached.

Which potential influence does the actor have on these negotiations? Develop a general scale/index for all actors and score your particular actor. Justify.

To create a common scale for measuring potential influence scores a scale from 0 to 100 was chosen because it provides a pragmatic orientation using percentages and thus allows a uniform and easily calculable standard to be assigned to various indications of influences. The most influential stakeholders are the Council of the EU and the EU Parliament, each with an influence score of 100. Law proposals by the Commission become binding only when both agree on a joint text in the final stages of EU legislative procedures (Policy, Law – Decision-making Process | European Union, n.d.), making them the most influential actors in the simulation.

The key question is how powerful the EU Commission, and specifically DG CLIMA, is compared to these two primary stakeholders and the other remaining actors. The EU Commission's power stems from its role as the

agenda-setter, with its exclusive right to plan, prepare, and propose new European laws. (*In Law, n.d.*; Bocquillon, 2024).

Within the Commission, DG CLIMA plays an integral role in the climate policymaking process as it leads the European Commission's efforts to fight climate change at the EU and international level and since its key mission is to formulate and implement EU climate policies and strategies (*Climate Action, 2024*). It can, therefore, be described as the most crucial stakeholder within the Commission, particularly when addressing questions related to carbon removals and emission reductions.

Concerning the potential influence score of DG CLIMA two different opinions have to be considered. A. Runge Metzger estimates an influence of 50, without giving a detailed explanation for that (Runge-Metzger, Dec. 2024). To the contrary, McPhie describes the Commission as “the sole EU institution with the right of legislative initiative – i.e. the power to put a legislative proposal on the table, or indeed to withdraw it, [which is why] one could justifiably argue that the Commission has a higher influence than the Parliament and Council” (McPhie, Dec. 2024).

For the reasons already mentioned, I would continue to classify only the Parliament and the Council as the only actors with the greatest potential influence. However, compared to the (aggregated) influence of other stakeholders such as nation-states or lobbies, the Commission's influence would still be higher in my opinion. Given these considerations, I would give DG Climate, as the initiator of the Commission, a potential influence of **80** in this case.

**What is the actor's salience and flexibility regarding the position scale?
Do they have veto status? Justify.**

Salience

According to Runge-Metzger (Dec. 2024), the value for salience should be set at 90. He states that “it is a very important topic and enjoys a very high priority.” He further emphasises that “the political advantage of climate policy [issues] lies in its ability to contribute to achieving other currently important goals, e.g. innovation, competitiveness, strategic sovereignty and job security”

(ibid.). McPhie concludes “we need to acknowledge that there will be some areas of our economy where this is particularly difficult or costly, so-called ‘hard to abate’ sectors, and therefore we need to make use of all possible technologies, including industrial carbon management, to reach our target of net zero emissions by 2050” (McPhie, Dec. 2024).

There is a wide range of ways to reduce CO₂, including many methods that are not classified as CDR. Nevertheless, all relevant documents on the EU's 2040 climate targets talk about carbon removals, sometimes deterministically (see 280 Mtoe-target: Climate Action, 2024b). In the context of the importance of the economy and the importance of competitiveness for the Commission, I assume that bringing up solutions for CDR is a high priority for a well-suited implementation within the common market.

Taking into account these different assessments I conclude that the issue of carbon removals is still very important to the DG CLIMA and certainly one of its most important issues. Therefore I suggest a score of **80** for the salience.

Flexibility

Runge-Metzger (Dez. 2024) chose 100 as the value, to demonstrate his belief in a maximally flexible Commission and DG CLIMA “as the amount will have to be based on the compromise between the Council and Parliament and on the agreed target for 2040 emissions reductions” (McPhie, Dec. 2024). He and Holzleitner argued that “reaching a compromise should be a top priority.” (Holzleitner, Nov. 2024; Runge-Metzger, Dec. 2024). Also, McPhie admits that “the Commission is never inflexible” and “our absolute priority will always be on reducing emissions as far as possible, using all feasible technologies” (McPhie, Dec. 2024). In its history, the Commission has always shown itself to be very keen to reach compromises across policy fields and accordingly very flexible. The EU Commission's rethinking of climate policy about the expansion of nuclear energy is one example (Welt, 2024).

Therefore, I assume a value of **100** as the DG Climate overwhelmingly prefers reaching an agreement and being a party to it. This stakeholder is prepared to accept almost any outcome on the continuum if it means resolving the issue. This would mean that the Commission's DG CLIMA would also accept values far below or above the 400 Mt CO₂ through CDR, provided that the

overarching target of a 90% reduction in emissions in 2040 in relation to 1990 emissions is achieved.

Veto

Unlike the Council of the EU and the Parliament, the Commission does not have a veto function. The former have the option of rejecting Commission proposals and therefore have a right of veto. The EU Commission, on the other hand, has a proactive rather than a restrictive role.

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