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Presentations	Session 3.1	<i>European Forest coalitions – past, present and future.</i>

*Abstract Session 3.1 – The Coalitional Politics of European Union’s Forest Environmental Policy: Biodiversity Conservation, Timber Legality and Climate Protection.*

Despite contrary expectations triggered by apparently missing legal provisions and countries’ distaste for a common EU forest policy, a multitude of forest related environmental issues have been regulated through policy changes in the European Union (EU) over the last two decades. Societal debates and related policy-making have taken place in a complex policy and institutional framework driven by progressing European integration, notable ideological divisions and diverging (country) interests. In this paper, we focus on the coalitional politics in regulating three key forest environmental policy issues: the EU’s nature protection and biodiversity policy (the EU Habitats and Birds Directives/Natura 2000), the EU’s timber legality policy (EU Timber Regulation/Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade-FLEGT), and EU’s climate protection policy in the Land Use, Land Use Change and Forestry sector (EU LULUCF Regulation/European Green Deal). Guided by a synthesis of the Advocacy Coalition Framework and the Shifting Coalition Theory, and informed by a qualitative content analysis of more than 150 key informants’ interviews and 90 policy documents from all three issue areas spanning a time frame of 20 years, the paper examines both stability and change in coalitional politics and resulting policy development. We show that while a stable lineup of supporting “environmental” and opposing “forest sector” policy advocacy coalitions have remained largely stable, the emergence of different policy issues over time and policy feedback loops have promoted redefinition of interests and strategic adaptation of beliefs/values shaped by issue specific shifting coalitions, strategic alliance-building across coalitions resulting in a dynamic EU forest environmental policy development. The paper explains both change and stability in policy and politics with an analysis of beliefs/values and strategic interests and actions. The main mechanisms are similar patterns of coalitional politics between state- and non-state actors as well as shifting coalitions and issue specific cross-coalitional cooperation driven by strategic interests and few complementary or shared beliefs/values. Finally, conclusions on the impacts of coalitional politics on EU’s forest environmental policy, and the underlying (ideological institutional) forest environmental frontier in Europe are drawn.

Key words: beliefs, conflicts, policy change, policy stability, shifting coalitions, EU national states, multi-level governance, Natura 2000, EUTR/FLEGT, LULUCF, European Green Deal

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