

Private Governance, Corporate Power and Environmental Politics in Europe

For Section 26: [Environmental Politics](#)

Endorsed by the ECPR Standing Group on Environmental Politics

Panel Chairs

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Abstract

The role of business actors in EU environmental policy is a long-standing issue, which has produced a comprehensive body of research. The history of EU environmental policy as a flanking policy to the creation of a common market has built a tradition where business has been not merely in the defensive role mobilising to prevent high environmental standards, but has had an active interest in developing a level playing field with respect to environmental regulations at EU level. Thus, research on private governance (Lenschow and Rottmann 2010) has shed light on the fact that policies are not only implemented, but potentially also formulated by private, including business actors. Nevertheless, these developments have met also critical accounts concentrating on low environmental ambitions or a lack of governmental control or enforcement (Pollex, Lenschow 2019).

The literature on regulation has come up with a rich terminology which seeks to cover the involvement of industry, such as co- and self-regulation (Héritier and Eckert 2008), or more nuanced concepts such as regulated self-regulation and delegated self-regulation (Ronit and Schneider, 2000: 23). Finally, scholars in the field of international political economy (IPE) have conceptualised business involvement as business and corporate power (Fuchs 2007, Mikler 2019). This approach can be usefully linked to the study of regulatory governance, when analysing corporate power and regulation (Eckert 2019).

This panel aims to build on this rich conceptual literature to address the present-day developments and implications of private governance and business power for environmental politics in the European Union. We are starting from the assumption that the regulatory environment for environmental policymaking is highly ambiguous. On the one hand, calls for better regulation aim at making EU rules simpler, less costly and potentially less demanding for corporate and administrative actors, suggesting a regulatory environment conducive to corporate actors undermining the advancement of environmental policy. On the other hand, we witness a revival of societal pressure to improve corporate responsibility and ensure that sustainability and climate commitment are being met. Furthermore, notions of green growth and innovation point to increased attention to new business opportunities on a highly competitive global market. These developments have produced a favourable framework for increased private governance activity.

The panel's focus is on the role of private actors in the field of European environmental policy in light of these contrasting contexts. It is open to different theoretical and methodological approaches and invites both conceptual and rich empirical analyses. While we generally aim to better understanding today's role of business in EU environmental policy (including formulation, implementation, dismantling), we also solicit contributions that address more specific aspects or topics in this context such as:

- determinants of policy design, especially of voluntary environmental agreements and their relevance in policy mixes
- the mobilisation of corporate power in the regulatory process
- the balance between corporate and diffuse interests
- the legitimacy of private governance
- public perception of private governance and the role of societal pressure

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