

Who Negotiates for Europe?

*Institutional Composition, Continuity and Representation of the EU Delegation at
COP28, COP29 and COP30*

*By Lisa Franceschetti (38012000)
Supervised by Professor Amandine Orsini*

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Bruxelles Saint-Louis, UCLouvain*

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1. Introduction

The European Union (EU) has, over the past three decades, positioned itself as one of the most consistently active negotiating parties within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) (Biedenkopf & Petri, 2021; Earsom and Delreux, 2021; Wurzel et al., 2025). Its Conferences of the Parties (COPs) constitute the principal venue in which the EU translates its internal climate ambition into an external, negotiated position alongside nearly two hundred other Parties. Participating in these negotiations requires the EU to field a delegation that is itself a composite (Earsom and Delreux, 2023; Council of the EU, 2025; European Council, 2025): officials from the European Commission, Members and staff of the European Parliament, representatives of the European External Action Service (EEAS), the Council of the EU, and a number of smaller bodies such as the European Committee of the Regions, the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), the European Court of Auditors and the European Environment Agency.

The EU's climate diplomacy has been the subject of extensive academic attention. Existing research has largely focused on the Union's external performance, examining the degree of discretion enjoyed by EU negotiators within mandates agreed by the Member States (Delreux & Kerremans, 2010; Chelotti, 2013), the EU's capacity to project climate leadership despite the gap between its ambitions and its actions, and the way internal decision-making influences the coherence of its external position (Bäckstrand & Elgström, 2013; Çelik, 2022). By contrast, much less attention has been paid to a more fundamental question: who actually makes up the EU delegation at each COP? We still know relatively little about the institutional and individual composition of these delegations, how much continuity exists from one conference to the next, or the opportunities and constraints that shape delegates' room for manoeuvre once negotiations begin.

The three conferences examined here also span a period of some significance for the UNFCCC process in its own right. COP28, hosted by the United Arab Emirates in Dubai in late 2023, concluded the first Global Stocktake, which called for a transition away from fossil fuels in energy systems, a tripling of renewable energy capacity, and enhanced climate resilience under the Paris Agreement, and was, at the time, the largest COP ever held in terms of total attendance (UNFCCC, 2023). COP29, hosted by Azerbaijan in Baku in 2024, was centred on a new collective quantified climate finance goal that left many developing countries deeply disappointed (Harvey, 2024; UNFCCC, 2024). COP30 was held in Belém, Brazil, in 2025 under more difficult international conditions than the previous two conferences, including the absence of a US delegation at COP30 (Volcovici, 2025). Reflecting on the negotiations, the chair of the European Parliament delegation, Lídia Pereira, argued that the EU faced "a unified BRICS–Arab front" and regretted that "the final outcome did not go further", despite progress on implementation, adaptation finance, and multilateral initiatives (European Parliament, 2025). This trajectory, from the EU's largest recent COP presence to its smallest, and from confident public messaging to visibly more frustrated reactions, provides important context for interpreting the findings on delegation composition, continuity, and negotiation outcomes.

This dissertation addresses that context directly. Using the UNFCCC's own published lists of onsite participants for the three most recent Conferences of the Parties — COP28 (Dubai, 2023), COP29 (Baku, 2024) and COP30 (Belém, 2025) — it isolates every individual nominated under the "European Union" Party designation, supplements this with individually verified gender and nationality data and with a comparative dataset of Member State delegation sizes, and situates the resulting composition-level evidence against the EU's own institutional literature, the diplomatic-sociology literature on who negotiators are and how their backgrounds matter, and the record of what the EU actually achieved and stated at each of the three conferences.

One conclusion emerging from the analysis is that the EU delegation cannot be treated as a single category of negotiators. Most delegates attend only one COP, whereas a much smaller group, concentrated in the Commission and Parliament, appears repeatedly across conferences. These patterns, together with the legal and administrative framework governing delegates' participation, help explain the different conditions under which individuals carry out their negotiating roles.

Beyond its contribution to the academic literature, this question also has a practical dimension. The EU's ability to negotiate effectively at the COPs depends, in very concrete ways, on the individuals it sends to represent it: their technical knowledge of a given negotiating stream, their credibility with counterparts from other Parties and negotiating coalitions, and their familiarity with the specific, often highly path-dependent history of the text being discussed in a particular contact group. A delegation that changes substantially in size or composition from one year to the next, or in which only a limited number of individuals return across successive conferences, faces different practical constraints from one built around a more stable core. This is the case even where EU institutions are formally granted significant negotiating discretion.

The structure of the dissertation is as follows. The literature review examines three strands of research relevant to the study: the EU's institutional role in green diplomacy, the question of who is sent to negotiate on the EU's behalf, and the human dimension of the freedoms and rights available to those individuals during negotiations. The methodology explains the research design, data sources, and the operationalisation of the key concepts used throughout the analysis. The empirical chapters then examine the composition, nationality, gender, institutional affiliation, and continuity of the EU delegations across COP28 to COP30 before discussing these findings in relation to the existing literature and comparing them with the aggregate delegations of the EU Member States. The dissertation concludes by considering the study's limitations and reflecting on its main findings and their implications.

2. Research Questions

This dissertation is structured around two research questions.

RQ1: What is the institutional composition of the EU's negotiating delegation at COP28, COP29, and COP30, and to what extent do the same individuals return across these three conferences? More specifically, where within the EU's multi-institutional apparatus does continuity reside, and where is accumulated negotiating experience and institutional memory retained?

RQ2: How does the demographic and structural profile of the EU delegation, including its institutional affiliation, gender and nationality composition, and continuity, relate to differences in the EU's negotiating posture and outcomes across the three COPs?

RQ1 is addressed through the analysis of delegation composition and continuity, while RQ2 examines how these characteristics relate to the EU's negotiating posture and outcomes. The findings are interpreted in light of the existing literature on EU negotiations, delegation, diplomatic practice, and delegate discretion. Neither question is answered causally: the dissertation identifies patterns and develops plausible, literature-grounded explanations for them, but cannot demonstrate that delegation composition determined negotiating outcomes.

3. Literature Review

The Role of the EU in Green Diplomacy

The EU's formal standing within the UNFCCC dates back to the Convention's adoption in 1992, when the EU (then the European Community) signed and ratified the Convention alongside its Member States. This created what the literature refers to as a “mixed agreement”, under which both the Union and its Member States hold separate Party status (Pavese & Torney, 2012; Bäckstrand & Elgström, 2013). As a result, the EU's external position at any given Conference of the Parties (COP) is necessarily preceded by an internal coordination and negotiation process among the Member States and the European institutions before being presented in international negotiations (Downie, 2013).

The dominant strand of this literature treats the EU as a single but internally differentiated negotiating actor and focuses on the degree of autonomy it enjoys vis-à-vis its Member States. Drawing on a qualitative comparative analysis of eight multilateral environmental negotiations, Delreux (2009) argues that the international compellingness of a negotiation determines whether discretion is granted to the EU negotiator, but not how much discretion the negotiator ultimately has. The latter depends instead on the distribution of preferences among Member States, information asymmetries between negotiator and principals, and the institutional density of the negotiation setting. Delreux's subsequent book-length study (2011, cited in Pavese and Torney, 2012) of the same eight negotiations develops this into a broader account of the discretion delegated to the EU negotiator, typically the Commission or, at the time, the rotating Council Presidency, by Member States acting as principals. Together, these studies provide the principal-agent framework used in later analyses of EU negotiating organisation and practice (Delreux, 2011, cited in Delreux and Van den Brande, 2013). However, they say relatively little about how discretion is distributed within the delegation itself.

van Schaik (2009) describes the practical solution the EU developed to address this coordination problem. Since 2004, the EU has relied on “lead negotiators” and “issue leaders” for specific negotiating streams over extended periods, helping to reduce the coordination burden created by the six-month rotating Presidency. Delreux and Kerremans (2010) show that EU negotiators can actively expand their discretion by calibrating Member State involvement, taking the initiative in drafting instructions, and exploiting the difficulty of reaching unanimity among a large and heterogeneous set of principals under time pressure. Discretion thus emerges not simply as something conferred through Council conclusions, but as something that negotiators can actively shape through the organisation of the negotiating process. Delreux and Van den Brande (2013) later examine how this system became institutionalised and identify four main functions of lead negotiators and issue leaders: sharing the negotiating workload, pooling expertise, maintaining Member State involvement, and providing continuity despite the rotating Presidency.

A second strand of the literature considers whether the EU's international performance can be described as genuine “leadership.” Bäckstrand and Elgström (2013) trace a shift from the EU's role as a normative frontrunner during the Kyoto era towards the more qualified role of “lead negotiator”, combining its leadership ambitions with the need to mediate between opposing blocs. Pipart (2022) develops a more granular typology of EU negotiating behaviour, distinguishing between bargaining, arguing, and problem-solving, and argues that scholarship has established the EU's actorness and influence more thoroughly than the concrete strategic choices made by its representatives inside the negotiating room. Çelik (2022) examines the resulting gap between the EU's declared positions and its practice through

the concept of “organised hypocrisy”, arguing that the EU constructs different rhetorical “façades” to manage conflicting internal and external demands.

More recent work has also looked at how the EU’s diplomatic apparatus has developed, particularly the role of the European External Action Service (EEAS). Earsom and Delreux (2023b) show that the EEAS’s climate team in Brussels expanded from two full-time officials in 2015 to twelve officials in the newly established Green Transition Division. The role of the EEAS has nevertheless remained largely one of coordination, with much of the technical expertise used in EU negotiating positions still located in DG CLIMA and the Council’s WPIEI-CC.

Earsom and Petri (2026) reach a similar conclusion in their assessment of the effects of the European Green Deal on EU climate diplomacy. Although the Green Deal sought to mainstream climate considerations across EU policy, they find that it has not substantially changed the institutions at the centre of EU climate diplomacy. The WPIEI-CC remains important to the EU’s multilateral position, while the EEAS continues to have mainly a coordinating function. The changes they identify are more apparent in areas such as finance and transport, where officials have taken on greater responsibility for particular dossiers. Their findings therefore point to considerable continuity in the core of EU climate diplomacy alongside more gradual changes elsewhere.

The war in Ukraine has also been associated with changes in how climate policy is framed within EU diplomacy. Prandin (2025), based on Commission and Council sources, finds that climate change moved from a relatively peripheral concern, often framed in trade terms before 2019, to a more prominent issue increasingly connected to security after 2022. Bremberg, Earsom and Petri (2025) interpret this development as “paradigm-reinforcing” rather than “paradigm-shifting”: geopolitical considerations have reshaped the EU’s climate discourse without fundamentally reorganising its underlying diplomatic practice. Together with the Council conclusions examined later in this study, these findings provide the broader institutional and geopolitical context for assessing changes in EU delegation size, composition, and negotiating posture.

A Broad View: Who is sent to negotiate for the EU at the COPs

A smaller but growing body of work shifts the unit of analysis from the EU as an aggregate actor towards the individuals involved in its external representation. Biedenkopf and Petri (2019), examining EU Delegations across a broad range of countries, find that those most active in climate diplomacy were disproportionately characterised by close personal contacts with DG Climate Action and higher levels of individual staff expertise, rather than simply by the size or emissions intensity of their host countries. This suggests that the composition and professional characteristics of EU representatives can shape the capacity of the Union to engage in climate diplomacy.

Downie (2013) similarly highlights the importance of the actors behind the EU’s collective position, showing that the single COP position emerges from the interaction of individual Member State departments and EU institutions. Rather than treating the EU’s external representation as the expression of a unified preference, his analysis emphasises the different actors involved in constructing that position through internal coordination and contestation.

A broader diplomatic literature also points to the importance of individual representatives. Neumann (2002) conceptualises diplomacy as an embodied practice, while Adler-Nissen and Pouliot (2014) show how practical competence and prior experience can influence negotiations independently of formal authority. Pouliot and Cornut (2015) build on this practice-based perspective, showing how diplomatic expertise develops through repeated participation and everyday interaction. Adler-Nissen (2016)

extends this “practice turn” to EU studies, highlighting the importance of the everyday practices of individual officials in shaping European integration. Finally, Panke, Polat and Hohlstein (2021) demonstrate that delegate-level characteristics can help explain negotiation outcomes alongside country- and organisation-level factors. Taken together, this literature suggests that repeated participation, accumulated experience and the characteristics of individual delegates may influence how an actor performs in international negotiations. This provides the theoretical basis for examining the composition and continuity of the EU delegation across the three consecutive COPs analysed in this dissertation.

Research on participation in the UNFCCC has also increasingly moved beyond aggregate delegation size towards the characteristics of individual delegates. Carbon Brief and WEDO, for instance, have tracked the gender composition of national COP delegations using UNFCCC delegation categories, finding that women represented approximately 34% of party delegates at COP28 and fewer than one in five Heads of Delegation (WEDO, 2024). Blinova, Emuru and Bagozzi (2024) similarly compile individual-level attendance data across three decades of COPs, highlighting the limitations of treating participation solely at the delegation level. Yet these studies overwhelmingly use the Party, typically the nation-state, as the unit of analysis. They therefore provide limited insight into who is selected to represent a supranational negotiating bloc such as the EU, or how the institutional roles, national backgrounds, gender and professional profiles of those individuals are distributed within the delegation.

The Human Aspect: Freedoms and rights of the delegates negotiating for the EU

A dimension directly relevant to who negotiates and how concerns the legal status of delegates once accredited to the UNFCCC. Because the UNFCCC is a treaty body rather than an international organization with independent legal personality, delegates' privileges and immunities are not automatically conferred under the 1946 *Convention on the Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations* (Legal Response International, 2022). Instead, they must be provided through host-country conference agreements and implementing domestic legislation, which typically reflect the protections set out in Article IV of the 1946 Convention (Legal Response International, 2022; United Nations Climate Change secretariat, 2023). Under Article IV, accredited representatives enjoy immunity from personal arrest or detention and from legal process for words spoken or written and acts performed in their representative capacity. They are also granted the inviolability of official papers and documents, as well as facilities relating to currency, baggage, and travel comparable to those granted to diplomatic envoys (United Nations, 1946). Crucially, these protections attach to the status of representative rather than to institutional rank. Article IV specifies that “representatives” include delegates, deputy delegates, advisers, technical experts, and secretaries of delegations (United Nations, 1946). This rank-neutral approach is also reflected in host-country implementing legislation, such as the United Kingdom’s *Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (Immunities and Privileges) Order 2021* (UK Government, 2021).

This legal framework, however, sets only the outer limits of a delegate’s freedom to act. It does not explain the practical discretion negotiators exercise within an agreed EU mandate, nor the factors that shape their influence during negotiations.

Chelotti (2013) illustrates this distinction through an empirical study of officials in the Council’s foreign policy committees. He finds that discretion depends less on formal mandates than on the experience officials accumulate in Brussels and their familiarity with informal institutional networks. Rather than

being determined by the size or influence of the Member State represented, autonomy emerges as a function of experience, trust and embeddedness within EU decision-making structures. Although his analysis concerns CFSP/CSDP rather than climate diplomacy, it raises broader questions about how discretion is exercised within EU negotiating teams.

Climate-specific scholarship reaches similar conclusions. Wurzel, Liefferink and di Lullo (2025) describe the long-standing lead negotiator system as relying on a small and highly experienced core of officials selected primarily for their expertise and negotiating capacity rather than their nationality or seniority. At the same time, Commission and EEAS officials remain bound by the EU Staff Regulations and by negotiating mandates agreed through Council conclusions. Their discretion therefore operates within clearly defined institutional constraints rather than independently of them. Taken together, these studies suggest that practical influence in EU climate negotiations stems from the interaction between formal institutional authority, accumulated expertise and the trust developed through repeated participation.

This focus on practice also appears in research beyond EU climate governance. Chelotti (2024) argues that responsibility for negotiating tactics has increasingly shifted from political leaders to the officials directly involved in negotiations, while political leaders retain control over broader strategic objectives. Similarly, Rietig (2014) finds that experts who participate directly in negotiating delegations gain greater access to draft texts and the early stages of negotiations than external stakeholders. Dommnich and Bruhn (2024) further show that many of the relationships underpinning successful negotiations are built in informal settings, particularly through “informal informals” and “Friends of the Chair” meetings, where accumulated trust, repeated interaction and practical experience become valuable diplomatic resources. At the same time, they caution that these informal spaces are also shaped by tacit power dynamics and the physically demanding nature of negotiations, requiring participants to demonstrate strong interpersonal skills and resilience. Collectively, this literature suggests that formal legal authority is only one dimension of negotiating influence; continuity, expertise and participation in informal diplomatic practices may be equally important.

The Gap

Taken together, these strands of scholarship leave an important question unanswered. The institutional literature on EU climate diplomacy has extensively examined questions of discretion, coordination, leadership and organisational continuity, but has largely treated the EU delegation as a collective institutional actor rather than examining the individuals who compose it. Conversely, diplomatic sociology and practice theory provide strong theoretical reasons for expecting individual characteristics, including expertise, experience, professional networks and repeated participation, to shape negotiating influence, while studies of UNFCCC participation have developed increasingly sophisticated methods for analysing delegates at the individual level.

Despite these advances, existing empirical research has overwhelmingly taken the nation-state as its unit of analysis. Studies of COP delegations have mainly compared Parties in terms of delegation size, gender representation, and participation patterns, while research on EU climate diplomacy has focused more on institutional structures, coordination mechanisms, and negotiating strategies. Relatively little attention has been paid to who actually makes up the EU’s negotiating delegation as a supranational and multi-institutional actor.

This study brings these strands of scholarship together by examining who represents the European Union at the COPs, how delegates are distributed across institutional roles and national backgrounds, and what the patterns of continuity, expertise, and role allocation reveal about the organisation of EU

negotiations. In doing so, it connects institutional analyses of EU climate diplomacy with the growing literature on individual diplomatic practice and delegation composition, offering an empirical perspective that has so far received comparatively little attention.

4. Methodology

4.1 Scope and data sources

This dissertation adopts a descriptive-empirical approach. The sample consists of 528 unique individuals, represented across 675 delegate-year observations, who were formally nominated under the European Union Party designation in the UNFCCC participant lists for COP28, COP29, and COP30. These individuals constitute the EU-institutional delegation analysed in this dissertation. Throughout the dissertation, “EU delegation” refers to individuals formally nominated under the European Union Party designation in the UNFCCC participant lists. Inclusion in this dataset does not imply that every individual personally engaged in substantive negotiations.

Scope

The dissertation focuses on three COPs: COP28 (Dubai, 2023), COP29 (Baku, 2024), and COP30 (Belém, 2025). Focusing on these three conferences allows for a more detailed analysis of individual names, titles, departments, and home organisations while maintaining comparability across a period in which the EU’s institutional architecture, including the EEAS, which has been operational since 2011, was already established. This prioritises observational precision over historical breadth and is supported by sufficiently detailed documentation of COP outcomes. Furthermore, COP28 was the first COP for which the UNFCCC provided the complete list of participants in Excel format rather than as a PDF document, a methodological change that significantly influenced the decision to focus on these three conferences.

Data sources

The first, and primary, source is the UNFCCC’s official onsite participant lists, published in Excel format for each of the last three COPs (UNFCCC, 2023; 2024; 2025). These lists are compiled by the UNFCCC Secretariat from the badges issued to registered attendees and are organised by constituency (Parties, Party overflow, United Nations Secretariat units, specialised agencies, intergovernmental organisations, non-governmental organisations, host country guests, media, and so on). For the purposes of this dissertation, only the “Parties” and “Party overflow” sheets are used, filtered to the rows in which the nominating Party is recorded as “European Union.” This isolates the EU’s own institutional delegation from the twenty-seven separate national delegations of its Member States.

For each of the three lists, every row nominated by “European Union” was extracted, yielding 363 records for COP28, 197 for COP29 and 115 for COP30. Each record includes a name, a functional title, a department, a home organisation and a relation field. The home organisation field was used to classify each individual into one of nine institutional categories: European Commission, European Parliament, EEAS, Council of the EU / European Council, Committee of the Regions, EESC, European Environment Agency, European Court of Auditors, and an “Other/Unclear” residual category. The functional title field was used separately to classify individuals into role categories: Commissioner, President/Vice-President, Director-General, Director, Head of Unit/Division, Adviser, Member of the European Parliament, Ambassador, and a residual “Other/Technical” category.

Second, gender and nationality were coded manually for each individual. Gender was inferred from the courtesy title provided by the UNFCCC, while nationality was established by cross-referencing names with LinkedIn profiles, official EU institutional websites, and other publicly available sources. Nationality could not be established with sufficient confidence for twenty-six of the 675 records (3.9 per cent); these cases are therefore reported as missing rather than imputed.

Third, information concerning the delegates of each of the twenty-seven Member States was extracted from the UNFCCC lists to allow a comparison of delegation size across the three years. The data for the EU delegation were extracted from the same UNFCCC participant lists, using the same “Parties” and “Party overflow” sheets, and compiled to allow a direct, like-for-like comparison between the scale of the EU’s own institutional presence and that of its Member States.

Finally, in order to analyse how negotiations varied across the three COPs, the EU’s own official records of each conference’s conclusions were examined, including the Council of the EU’s pre-COP mandate conclusions, as well as European Parliament and Commission statements issued after the COPs. Official statements from the UNFCCC Secretariat were also analysed, alongside additional independent sources such as Carbon Brief. This qualitative material was used to characterise, for each COP, what the EU aimed to achieve and how it subsequently assessed the outcome, allowing these findings to be considered alongside the composition and continuity data from the same year.

4.2 Key concepts

Institutional positioning refers to the specific EU body through which an individual is nominated to attend a COP, as distinct from the twenty-seven Member States, which nominate separately and are compared in aggregate later in the analysis.

Professional socialisation and negotiating continuity refer, following the diplomatic-sociology literature review, to the presence of the same individual across multiple consecutive COPs, on the premise that COP negotiations are technically dense and socially path-dependent enough that understanding a negotiating stream and maintaining working relationships with counterparts takes several years to develop (Chelotti, 2013; Delreux & Van Den Brande, 2013).

Expert diplomacy versus political leadership distinguishes the work of policy officers, technical advisers and administrators who prepare and follow specific negotiating streams over time, from political leadership exercised by Commissioners, Vice-Presidents and MEPs, whose presence is typically shorter and more visible. As defined by Earsom and Petri (2026), EU climate diplomacy refers to the durable practices through which EU institutions and Member States claim to represent the EU in climate policy vis-à-vis other EU actors and third parties.

Agent discretion, following Delreux and Kerremans (2010) as discussed in the literature review refers to the practical room for manoeuvre that the individuals occupying the EU negotiator role can exercise and actively expand during the course of a negotiation, as distinct from the formal mandate conferred by Council conclusions.

Finally, the EU as a *mixed-agreement actor* frames the analytical boundary of this dissertation. In global climate politics, the Union’s capacity to act externally is governed by the division of legal competence delegated by its Member States under the founding treaties. Climate change falls under shared competence under Article 4(2)(e) TFEU, while the EU’s international environmental mandate is grounded in Article 191(1) TFEU (Pavese and Torney, 2012; van Zeben, 2022). EU action within the international climate regime therefore complements rather than replaces the individual commitments of its Member States. International climate agreements, including the UNFCCC, the Kyoto Protocol, and

the Paris Agreement, consequently, follow a mixed agreement framework in which both the EU and its Member States participate as independent Parties. Their implementation remains a shared responsibility and once ratified, they form part of Union law under the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice. Given this framework, this dissertation focuses on the EU institutional delegation while comparing it, at an aggregate level, with the delegations of the twenty-seven Member States.

For RQ2, institutional affiliation, gender, nationality and continuity are examined descriptively across the three conferences and subsequently interpreted in relation to the EU's stated negotiating priorities and the outcomes of each COP. This analysis is qualitative and does not seek to establish a causal or statistical relationship between delegation characteristics and negotiating outcomes.

5. Analytical Findings

Delegation size

The number of individuals nominated by the European Union to the three COPs examined here, listed under both the “Parties” and “Party Overflow” categories, declined sharply and consistently: 363 at COP28 (Dubai, 2023), 197 at COP29 (Baku, 2024), and 115 at COP30 (Belém, 2025). This represents a decline of nearly seventy per cent (68%) over the two-year period.

It is worth noting that COP28 was exceptionally large, with almost 86,000 participants, making it the largest COP on record. Several factors contributed to this record attendance, including extensive media attention, the large number of observer organisations, and the broad allocation of badges to NGOs (McSweeney, 2023). COP29 was the second largest COP, with approximately 56,000 participants (McSweeney & Viisainen, 2024). Attendance fell further at COP30, with around 45,000 participants. Held in the Amazon, COP30 faced significant constraints in terms of transport and accommodation, which led many Parties to reduce the size of their delegations (McSweeney & Nam, 2025).

This pattern mirrors the decline in the EU delegation, but the contraction was steeper than the roughly 47% decline in overall COP attendance following the exceptionally large COP28.

The study also compares the size of the EU institutional delegation with the delegations of the Member States, with the full breakdown provided in Appendix 1. Only a small number of Member States had larger delegations than the EU itself. Italy and Germany were the only countries whose delegations consistently exceeded the EU delegation across all three COPs. Other large delegations, particularly those of France and Denmark, varied more across conferences. Taken together, the twenty-seven Member State delegations were on average around fifteen times larger than the EU institutional delegation. This difference in scale highlights that the EU’s negotiating presence operates alongside a much larger national presence, an important feature of the EU’s multi-level participation in COP negotiations.

Institutional composition

When examining the institutional breakdown of the EU delegation across the three COPs, based on the home organisation recorded for each nominated individual, several descriptive patterns emerge.

First, the European Commission is, in every year, the single largest source of EU-delegation personnel, ranging from 36% to 42% of the total. Inside the European Commission, the largest number of people come from DG CLIMA, responsible for the development and implementation of EU climate policy, including the preparation and coordination of the Union’s positions in international climate negotiations under the UNFCCC framework. DG CLIMA representatives account for between 21 and 32 delegates across the three COPs examined.

Second, the European Parliament’s share increased sharply, from 13% at COP28 to 34% at COP30. Its presence in absolute terms declined only moderately, from 47 individuals at COP28 to 36 at COP29 and 39 at COP30. The increase in its relative share therefore reflects the much sharper contraction of other parts of the delegation rather than growth in Parliament’s own presence.

Third, the EEAS constitutes a comparatively small and volatile share of the delegation, ranging from 3% at COP29 to 10% at COP30. As a point of comparison, around twelve EEAS staff members work

on climate change-related issues. This suggests that, in absolute terms, a substantial proportion of this team participates in the COPs (Earsom & Delreux, 2023b).

Finally, the Council of the EU and the European Council together never exceed 6% of the delegation in any of the three years. This is notable given their role in providing political guidance and contributing to the coordination of the EU's position in international negotiations (Council of EU, 2026). However, these figures should be interpreted with some caution, as the UNFCCC participant lists may not fully capture all forms of high-level political participation. For instance, at COP30, neither the President of the European Council, António Costa, nor the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, appears in the delegation lists, despite both being present during the General Plenary of Leaders.

Institution	COP28 (n=363)	COP29 (n=197)	COP30 (n=115)
European Commission	140 (39%)	71 (36%)	48 (42%)
European Parliament	47 (13%)	36 (18%)	39 (34%)
EEAS	24 (7%)	6 (3%)	11 (10%)
Committee of the Regions	19 (5%)	17 (9%)	—
Council of the EU / European Council	14 (4%)	11 (6%)	2 (2%)
EESC	13 (4%)	3 (2%)	6 (5%)
European Environment Agency	9 (2%)	6 (3%)	3 (3%)
European Court of Auditors	2 (1%)	3 (2%)	2 (2%)
EU Delegation (host country)	—	27 (14%)	1 (1%)
Other / Unclear	95 (26%)	17 (9%)	3 (3%)

Table 1. Institutional composition of the EU delegation, COP28–COP30

Roles: expert diplomacy versus political leadership

Most delegates, between 60% and 70%, nominated by the European Union across the three COPs hold technical or administrative grades, which can be grouped under the category of “expert diplomacy” based on the definition of this key concept provided in the methodology section. Politically visible roles, such as Commissioners, Vice-Presidents, Directors-General and MEPs, form a consistently small minority, typically under fifteen per cent of the total delegation.

The predominance of technical and administrative roles indicates that the EU delegation is structured primarily around expert participation rather than political representation. This is consistent with the technical nature of COP negotiations, which require specialised knowledge and sustained engagement across multiple negotiating streams.

The Adviser category fell from 32 individuals at COP28 to 18 at COP29 and 12 at COP30, but its share of the delegation remained relatively stable despite the substantial decline in overall delegation size. This suggests that advisers constitute a recurring layer within the EU delegation, potentially serving as a link between technical expertise and higher-level political coordination (Wurzel, Liefferink, & di Lullo, 2025).

Role category	COP28	COP29	COP30
Other/Technical (policy officers, admin, assistants)	228 (63%)	136 (69%)	69 (60%)
Adviser	32 (9%)	18 (9%)	12 (10%)
Member of the European Parliament	23 (6%)	4 (2%)	19 (17%)

Director	24 (7%)	7 (4%)	3 (3%)
Head of Unit / Division	17 (5%)	9 (5%)	6 (5%)
Director-General	17 (5%)	12 (6%)	3 (3%)
President / Vice-President	13 (4%)	6 (3%)	—
Commissioner	6 (2%)	3 (2%)	2 (2%)
Ambassador	3 (1%)	2 (1%)	1 (1%)

Table 2. Functional role composition of the EU delegation, COP28–COP30

Continuity across COP28–COP30

When examining continuity among individuals attending the COPs as part of the EU delegation, the analysis shows that, among the 528 unique individuals nominated by the European Union, 112 attended multiple conferences: 77 returned for two COPs, while 35 were present at all three COPs. The full breakdown is provided in Appendix 2.

Of the thirty-five individuals present at all three COPs, the vast majority hold technical or administrative positions, such as policy officers, heads of unit, political advisers and administrators, rather than senior political offices. This is broadly consistent with patterns of institutional turnover within the EU. MEPs and Commissioners serve fixed five-year terms linked to electoral and appointment cycles, whereas career officials in DG CLIMA are not subject to the same rotation. Only two Members of the European Parliament, Emma Wiesner and Mohammed Chahim, appear in all three years, alongside a small number of senior Commission officials, including Kurt Vandenberghe, Director-General for Climate Action, Ditte Juul-Jørgensen, Director-General for Energy, and Jacob Werksman, who served as the EU’s Head of Delegation to the UNFCCC throughout the period.

Twenty-two of the thirty-five recurring delegates are affiliated with the European Commission, more than all other EU institutions combined. By contrast, the EEAS contributes no individual to this recurring core, despite fielding twenty-four delegates at COP28 alone. The remaining thirteen recurring delegates are drawn from the European Parliament, the European Environment Agency, and the European Court of Auditors.

As noted above, the EU delegation at COP30 numbered 115 individuals, the smallest of the three years studied. The thirty-five individuals present at all three COPs therefore represented 30% of the COP30 delegation, despite accounting for only 7% of the 528 unique individuals observed across the full period.

Gender composition

Table 3 reports the gender composition of the EU delegation across the three COPs, compared with Carbon Brief’s year-matched global average across all Party delegations, calculated using the same UNFCCC titles methodology. Across the 675 delegate-year records examined, 346 individuals (51%) were coded as women and 329 (49%) as men. The EU delegation remained consistently above the global average in every year studied: 49% women at COP28 compared with a global average of 38%, 55% at COP29 compared with approximately 40%, and 50% at COP30 compared with 43% (Carbon Brief, 2023; 2024; 2025).

However, this difference is not evenly distributed across the EU delegation. Women account for 68% of Director-level titles across the three years, while men hold 63% of Commissioner and President/Vice-President positions combined. This indicates that the EU’s higher female representation compared with the global average is driven primarily by technical and mid-senior layers rather than its most politically

visible leadership roles. The thirty-five-person recurring core identified earlier is itself close to parity, comprising eighteen men and seventeen women.

For comparison, women represent 57% of the overall European Commission workforce (European Commission, n.d.). At the Director level, however, the pattern reverses: women account for 68% of COP delegation Directors, exceeding the European Commission’s own senior and middle-management gender balance of 48–49% in 2025 (European Commission, 2026). Whether this reflects a greater reliance on more gender-balanced Director cohorts within COP delegations or a small-sample effect (34 records across three years) cannot be determined from this dataset alone. A detailed breakdown of the gender composition by year, role, and institutional affiliation is provided in Appendix 3.

Category	COP28	COP29	COP30
EU delegation, % women	49%	55%	50%
Global average, % women (Carbon Brief)	38%	~40%	43%
EU delegation, N	363	197	115

Table 3. Gender composition of the EU delegation vs. the global COP average, by year

Nationality composition

Nationality could be established for 649 of the 675 delegate-year records (96%). Across the three years, 56 distinct nationalities are represented. The distribution remains broadly stable between 2023 and 2025, with no substantial changes across the three COPs.

The five most represented nationalities are Italian, German, Belgian, Spanish, and French, broadly reflecting the nationality composition of European Commission staff. Italian nationals account for the largest share of delegates in 2023 and 2024, while the overall distribution remains largely unchanged across the three years. The complete ranking of the fifteen most represented nationalities is provided in Appendix 4.

A small proportion of delegates hold nationalities from countries outside the European Union. A notable share of these are nationals of the COP host country, with thirteen delegates from Azerbaijan at COP29, six from Brazil at COP30, and two from the United Arab Emirates at COP28. These individuals most likely reflect locally recruited liaison staff and contractor personnel accredited under the EU delegation rather than EU officials.

The observed nationality distribution is broadly consistent with that of the European Commission workforce (European Commission, n.d.). In 2023, Belgians constitute the largest nationality within the Commission (4,495 officials, approximately 13%), followed by Italians (4,359 officials, approximately 13%), French nationals (3,271; approximately 10%), Spaniards (2,617; approximately 8%), and Germans (2,026; approximately 6%). Overall, the nationality composition broadly resembles this institutional distribution, though the exact rank order differs.

Nationality	N (all 3 COPs)
Italian	69
German	60
Belgian	55
Spanish	49
French	49

Table 4. Five most frequent nationalities in the EU delegation, COP28–COP30 combined

The EU's record at COP28, COP29 and COP30

A final descriptive element concerns the relationship between the EU's stated negotiating priorities before each COP and the outcomes ultimately adopted under the UNFCCC framework. Table 5 compares the main priorities set out in the Council of the EU's pre-COP conclusions with the principal outcomes of each conference and provides a qualitative assessment of the degree of alignment between them.

The categories “largely achieved”, “partially achieved”, and “fell short” are based on the qualitative analysis described in the methodology section. They indicate the extent to which the final agreements reflected the EU's stated priorities rather than providing an assessment of the overall success of each COP.

COP	Main EU priorities (Council of the EU, 2023; 2024; 2025)	Main outcomes (UNFCCC, 2023; 2024; UN, 2025; Carbon Brief 2023; 2024; 2025)	EU assessment (European Parliament, 2023; 2025; European Commission 2024a; 2024b)
COP28	- Increasing global ambition towards climate neutrality - Global fossil-fuel phase-out language & triple renewables energy capacity - First Global Stocktake (mitigation and adaptation) - Climate finance to address loss & damage	- Conclusion of the first Global Stocktake - First COP decision calling for a transition away from fossil fuels - Renewable energy and energy efficiency targets included - Loss and Damage Fund operationalised.	Largely positive. The EU described the outcome as an important step forward despite compromises on fossil-fuel language.
COP29	- Ambitious, adequate climate finance goal - More ambition for NDC - Protect mitigation and adaptation	- Adoption of the New Collective Quantified Goal on Climate Finance (NCQG) - USD 300 billion annual finance target by 2035. - USD 1.3 trillion annual mobilisation goal. - Article 6 carbon markets finalised.	Mixed. The EU welcomed the agreement but acknowledged that the negotiations had been difficult and that the outcome represented a compromise.
COP30	- Reaffirm 1.5°C - Strengthen mitigation and adaptation implementation - Enhanced climate finance mobilisation - Boosting the energy transition	- Global Implementation Accelerator and Belém Mission to 1.5°C launched. - Adaptation finance to triple by 2035. - No new fossil fuel transition commitment in the final decision.	Disappointed. EU institutions regretted the limited progress on mitigation and the absence of stronger language on fossil fuels.

Table 5. EU priorities and negotiated outcomes, COP28–COP30

Across the three conferences, the extent to which negotiated outcomes reflected EU priorities varied considerably. COP28 showed the closest correspondence, with several major EU objectives reflected in the final agreement, although often in a less ambitious form than initially advocated. COP29 produced a more mixed outcome, with progress on climate finance but significant disagreement regarding the adequacy of the agreed financial target. COP30 showed the largest divergence between EU ambitions and the final decision text, particularly regarding mitigation ambition and fossil-fuel language.

6. Discussion

This section is the analytical core of the dissertation. Whereas the previous section established what the data shows, this section asks what those findings mean when read against the three strands of literature reviewed and against the EU's own record of COP outcomes. The discussion focuses in particular on the relationship between delegation composition and continuity, the distribution of negotiating influence within the delegation, the role of institutional and demographic characteristics, the extent to which recent institutional reforms have altered the EU's negotiating presence, and the relationship between delegation composition and negotiating outcomes.

Continuity, discretion, and the institutional-diplomacy literature

The literature on EU discretion (Delreux, 2011, cited in Delreux and Van den Brande, 2013; van Schaik, 2009) treats “the EU negotiator” as a role occupied consistently enough within a given negotiation for questions of principal–agent control to be meaningfully posed. The continuity findings complicate this picture when the delegation is considered as a whole. 79% of individuals nominated by the EU across the three COPs attended only once. There is nevertheless a smaller group for whom the pattern is quite different. The thirty-five-person recurring core is concentrated in the Commission and, to a lesser extent, the Parliament, and provides a more stable group of negotiating personnel in which experience and institutional knowledge can accumulate.

Delreux's (2009) framework helps explain why this distinction may matter. His argument is not simply that the EU negotiator has discretion, but that the extent of this discretion depends on the distribution of Member State preferences, information asymmetries between negotiators and their principals, and the institutional setting in which they operate. These conditions are unlikely to be present to the same extent when an official first joins a negotiation. They may instead develop through repeated involvement in the same negotiating stream. The composition data therefore does more than align with the discretion literature: it identifies where the conditions Delreux specifies are most likely to emerge. The 79% of one-time attendees, by contrast, are structurally less likely to possess the same degree of accumulated information or institutional embeddedness, regardless of their formal seniority.

The literature on EU leadership and “organised hypocrisy” (Bäckstrand and Elgström, 2013; Çelik, 2022) mainly focuses on the EU's political representatives, using sources such as speeches, Council conclusions and high-level statements. This is important because political representatives make up only a small part of the delegation and as shown in the continuity data, are also less likely to attend several COPs. Chelotti's (2024) framework helps explain this distinction. While political leaders set the EU's broader negotiating objectives, the officials who participate directly in the negotiations are responsible for many of the practical decisions needed to implement these objectives. Wurzel et al. (2025) make a similar point in the climate context. Their interviews show that some of the EU's most influential negotiators rely on long-term professional relationships and informal exchanges, including what one interviewee described as “famous dinner rounds”. These interactions are largely invisible in speeches and official statements. The findings of this dissertation therefore do not contradict the existing literature on EU leadership and hypocrisy. Rather, they suggest that this literature mainly captures the EU's visible political leadership, while the delegation's continuity and accumulated experience are more likely to be found among the technical officials who participate repeatedly in the negotiations.

The European Green Deal and the limits of institutional transformation

Earsom and Petri's (2026) finding that the EGD produced institutional stability at the core of EU climate diplomacy, with only incremental change at the margins, is consistent with the composition data presented in this dissertation. The WPIEI-CC's corresponding institutional venue, the Commission's DG CLIMA, remains the largest single source of EU delegation personnel in every year studied (Table 1). The EEAS provides a more specific example of the same pattern. Earsom and Delreux (2023b) document that the EEAS's dedicated climate staff in Brussels grew substantially over the period surrounding this dissertation's study window, from two full-time officials in 2015 to twelve officials in the newly established Green Transition Division. This institutional growth at EEAS headquarters, however, has not translated into a correspondingly larger or more continuous presence at the COPs themselves. The EEAS's share of the EU delegation ranges from 3% at COP29 to 10% at COP30 (Table 1), while no EEAS-affiliated individual appears in the three-year recurring core, despite the EEAS sending 24 delegates to COP28 alone. If the EGD's 2019 mainstreaming ambitions had substantially reorganised the EU's climate diplomacy around a stronger EEAS role, one might expect the growth of EEAS climate staff in Brussels to be reflected in a larger and more continuous presence at the COPs. Instead, the data show an EEAS that has expanded its climate diplomacy capacity in Brussels without a corresponding increase in its on-site presence or continuity at the negotiating table. This provides a further indication, alongside Earsom and Petri's (2026) findings, that the institutional changes associated with the EGD have not resulted in a comparable transformation of who negotiates on the EU's behalf at the COPs.

This institutional configuration is further clarified by the literature on internal compartmentalisation. While Delreux and Earsom (2024) document how transport-focused negotiating venues operate in isolation from central climate venues, Earsom and Petri (2026) observe a similar pattern of separation and jurisdictional tension among finance and trade officials. Viewed through these two frameworks, the Council's persistently small on-site share, which never exceeds 6% of the delegation, is unsurprising. The Council plays a central role in setting the EU's negotiating mandate, but this role is exercised largely in Brussels before the delegation travels to the COP, rather than through a large physical presence at the negotiations themselves. This division of labour is consistent with, although it does not demonstrate, the compartmentalised structure identified in the literature.

Institutional roles, continuity, and negotiating discretion

Chelotti's (2024) "double state disaggregation" framework helps distinguish between political leaders, who set broader negotiating objectives, and officials who implement these objectives during negotiations. Following Delreux (2009) and Delreux and Kerremans (2010), practical discretion is likely to vary according to the role that individuals occupy within the negotiating process. In this dissertation, this distinction is relevant to the contrast between political representatives and the technical Commission and Presidency officials classified under "expert diplomacy" (cf. Roles). The continuity findings further show that this group accounts for most of the delegation's multi-year continuity. Chelotti's (2013) findings provide a possible explanation for why this continuity may matter: discretion can be shaped by accumulated experience and familiarity with the informal links connecting officials to their home institutions. The recurring presence of Commission-affiliated officials can therefore be interpreted as a structural condition that may facilitate the accumulation of expertise and institutional knowledge, rather than as direct evidence that these individuals exercise greater discretion.

Applied to this dissertation, the concentration of twenty-two Commission-affiliated individuals within the thirty-five-person recurring core suggests that this group may provide particularly favourable conditions for the accumulation of negotiating experience and institutional knowledge. The data are consistent with this interpretation but cannot confirm that these individuals exercise greater practical influence or discretion, particularly because Chelotti's study focuses on CFSP/CSDP rather than climate negotiations.

Wurzel, Liefferink and di Lullo (2025) provide a closer comparison for the climate domain. Their interviews with officials involved in the EU's lead negotiator system suggest that the most influential group may be considerably smaller than the thirty-five-person recurring core identified here. They describe an informal network of sometimes only three or four individuals who maintained close professional relationships, including through what one interviewee called "famous dinner rounds". The two groups should not, however, be treated as equivalent. The recurring core is an observable continuity group identified through participant lists, whereas Wurzel et al. 's smaller group reflects informal relationships that the present dataset cannot capture. The recurring core should therefore be understood as the broader population within which such relationships are most likely to develop.

The gender findings add another dimension to this distribution of influence. The Commissioner and President or Vice-President levels are disproportionately male, while the Director level is female majority and the recurring core is almost gender balanced (18 men and 17 women). This suggests that gender representation differs across levels of political visibility and technical continuity within the delegation. However, the data cannot establish whether these differences translate into differences in actual negotiating influence.

Rietig's (2014) findings provide an additional reason why the recurring core may be relevant to the exercise of negotiating influence. In the broader UNFCCC context, she finds that experts participating directly in government delegations gain greater access to negotiating texts and earlier stages of the negotiation process than those seeking to influence governments from outside. This suggests that repeated participation creates favourable conditions for developing expertise and professional relationships. Dommnich and Bruhn's (2024) ethnographic study of COP28 likewise highlights the importance of informal interactions that participant list data cannot observe. Taken together, these studies suggest that the recurring core is a group in which negotiating influence is most likely to develop, but the present findings cannot demonstrate that its members actually exercise greater discretion.

Unlike gender and institutional continuity, nationality is treated here primarily as descriptive background rather than an explanatory variable. Because its distribution broadly reflects the Commission's own staffing pattern, it provides limited independent explanatory value for understanding variation in the EU's negotiating posture across the three COPs.

Who really negotiates for Europe? The EU institutions against the Member States

The comparison between the EU institutions and the Member States directly relates to the "mixed-agreement actor" concept introduced earlier. At every COP studied, the combined delegations of the twenty-seven Member States were much larger than the EU-institutional delegation: by around thirteen to one at COP28 and nearly nineteen to one at COP30. This gap widened because the EU institutions' delegation contracted more sharply (68.3%) than the Member States' combined presence (55.1%). In light of Delreux and Kerremans' (2010) discussion of Member States' ability to monitor EU negotiators

by being physically present at negotiations, this large Member State presence may also provide an important form of direct oversight.

Downie's (2013) analysis further shows why the EU-institutional delegation should not be treated as a completely separate actor from the Member States. The EU's negotiating position is itself the result of internal bargaining between Member States, the Council and the Commission. The distinction between the EU institutions and the Member States used in this dissertation is therefore an analytical one rather than a claim that they negotiate as fully separate groups. The data can show who is formally part of each delegation, but it cannot capture the internal coordination between them.

This also qualifies the dissertation's title: "who negotiates for Europe" cannot be answered by looking at the EU-institutional delegation alone. The Member States are numerically dominant at the COPs, while continuity within the EU-institutional delegation is concentrated in a smaller, Commission-centred core. Understanding how these two levels interact during negotiations would require analysis beyond the scope of this dissertation.

Composition against the EU's own record of outcomes

RQ2 asks how the demographic and structural characteristics of the EU delegation relate to its negotiating posture and outcomes across COP28–COP30. The data show a clear temporal association: the EU delegation decreased in size between COP28 and COP30, while the EU's own assessment of its negotiating results became increasingly critical, moving from a relatively positive assessment after COP28 to a more frustrated position after COP30 (cf. The EU's record at COP28, COP29 and COP30). However, this does not establish that the smaller delegation caused weaker outcomes. The COPs took place under very different political conditions, including the absence of the United States at COP30 and the stronger BRICS–Arab coalition (European Parliament, 2025). These factors may have affected the EU's negotiating leverage independently of its delegation size.

Panke, Polat and Hohlstein's (2021) individual-level approach provides a possible mechanism linking delegation composition to outcomes. Their research shows that individual characteristics can influence negotiators' perceptions of negotiation outcomes beyond country and organisation level factors. Combined with Chelotti's (2013; 2024) findings on the importance of experience and informal institutional knowledge for discretion, this indicates that delegation composition may matter not only through its size, but also through who is present and the experience they bring. This is relevant to the present findings: as the EU delegation became smaller, the shares of the Commission and EEAS declined, while the Parliament's relative share increased, without the EEAS developing a stronger recurring presence.

Several explanations therefore remain possible. The EU may have lost negotiating capacity as its delegation contracted, may have reduced its presence in response to increasingly difficult external conditions, or both processes may have reinforced each other. The evidence does not allow these explanations to be distinguished. What can be established is that the decline in delegation size and the deterioration in the EU's own assessment of its negotiating outcomes occurred over the same period. At the same time, the EEAS provides a particularly notable case: its climate-diplomacy staff in Brussels increased substantially from two to twelve officials since 2015 (Earsom and Delreux, 2023b), but this did not translate into greater continuity or a larger presence at the COPs themselves, where DG CLIMA and the rotating Presidencies continue to dominate the negotiating arena (Biedenkopf and Petri, 2021; Earsom and Petri, 2026). The findings therefore suggest that changes in the composition and continuity

of the delegation may be relevant to understanding the EU's negotiating capacity, but they cannot demonstrate that these changes caused the observed variation in outcomes.

Named continuity: lead negotiators and issue leaders across COP28–COP30

The thirty-five-person recurring core identified in the composition data can be illustrated through the continuity of several senior negotiating roles across COP28–COP30. The following examples draw on primary and journalistic sources and provide a qualitative complement to the quantitative findings.

Jacob Werksman, Principal Adviser at DG CLIMA and EU Head of Delegation to the UNFCCC and Paris Agreement since 2012, remained the EU's overarching lead negotiator throughout the three COPs studied. He was identified as the EU's lead negotiator at COP28 by Carbon Brief (2023). His departure from the role occurred only after COP30, with Diana Acconcia and Dimitrios Zevgolits appointed as his successors in June 2026 (Weise, 2026). The EU therefore had continuity in its overall negotiating leadership throughout the entire period covered by this dissertation.

Continuity can also be seen in specific negotiating areas. Martin Hession has led the EU's work on Article 6 since approximately 2015 (UNFCCC, n.d.), while Alessandra Sgobbi, Head of DG CLIMA's Climate Finance Unit, has been involved in climate finance and adaptation negotiations throughout the period (Bruegel, n.d.). Their tenure is documented through independent biographical sources rather than the UNFCCC participant lists, and neither appears in the thirty-five-person recurring core identified from that dataset. Their cases nevertheless point to the same broader pattern: some of the EU's key technical negotiating roles have been held by officials with many years of experience in the same area. Wurzel et al.'s (2025) finding that a small group of experienced officials can play a particularly important role in the EU's lead-negotiator system is consistent with this pattern, although the present evidence does not allow these individuals to be directly identified as members of the informal group described in their interviews.

The contrast with the EEAS is also notable. At COP30, the EEAS was represented by Ambassador Anthony Agotha, EU Special Envoy for Climate and Environment (EEAS, 2025). The change in the EEAS's political representation between the COPs should, however, be understood in the context of the 2024 European elections and the subsequent renewal of the EU's political leadership. The change therefore does not necessarily indicate a lack of institutional continuity within the EEAS itself. Nevertheless, the broader composition data shows that no EEAS-affiliated individual appears in the thirty-five-person recurring core, suggesting that continuity at the level of the wider negotiating delegation remains limited despite the growth of the EEAS's climate-diplomacy staff in Brussels.

The evidence from individual delegates reinforces two points from the wider analysis. First, continuity within the EU delegation is not evenly distributed: the most persistent senior negotiating roles identified here are concentrated in DG CLIMA rather than the EEAS. Second, this continuity does not appear sufficient to explain changes in the EU's negotiating outcomes. The same overarching lead negotiator remained in place throughout COP28 to COP30, while the EU's assessment of its negotiating results became considerably less positive by COP30. This provides further evidence against a simple explanation in which changes in individual personnel directly determine negotiating success. Instead, as discussed above, external political conditions, coalition dynamics and the COP presidency also appear to have played an important role.

7. Limitations

Several limitations of this dissertation's approach should be noted. First, the analysis relies on the UNFCCC's delegation lists, which record accredited badge holders but provide no information on seniority, speaking time, or actual influence. A technical expert attending for a single agenda item and the EU's chief negotiator may therefore appear as formally equivalent entries. The lists may also contain omissions resulting from late registration or administrative errors. Ursula von der Leyen, for example, does not appear in the delegation list for a year in which her attendance is publicly documented. The dataset should consequently be treated as the best available proxy for delegation composition rather than a complete census. The name matching procedure used to establish continuity also cannot fully distinguish individuals who share a name or account for every spelling variation. This risk is likely limited given the relatively small size of the EU delegations, but it cannot be ruled out entirely.

Second, some variables were subject to important constraints. Nationality could not be confirmed for 26 of the 675 records (3.9%) and was treated as missing rather than imputed. Where nationality was not stated by the UNFCCC, it was inferred from publicly available sources. These sources provide a reasonable basis for coding, but the resulting classifications are not authoritative. Gender was coded as Woman or Man based on the courtesy titles recorded in the UNFCCC delegation lists, such as "Ms" and "Mr". This reflects the information available in the source data but does not capture nonbinary identities. Age and career or educational background were excluded because reconstructing individual histories for several hundred delegates across three years was beyond the feasible scope of the dissertation. The comparison with Member States was therefore limited to aggregate country level totals rather than individual characteristics, rather than applying the full individual level analysis to all 9,821 Member State delegate year records.

Finally, the comparison between delegation composition and COP outcomes is qualitative rather than statistical. It is based on a limited number of official EU statements and does not account for other factors that may have shaped the negotiations, including the United States' withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, the composition of opposing coalitions, and the choices of the host country presidency. The patterns identified should therefore be read as suggestive rather than causal. More generally, the focus on formal accreditation records leaves out the informal interactions that take place around the negotiations, including bilateral meetings, regional coordination, and relationship building. Future research could build on this approach by examining these broader interaction networks and how formal delegation characteristics relate to actual negotiating influence.

8. Conclusion

This dissertation set out to address two questions that have received limited empirical attention in the literature on EU climate diplomacy. First, who constitutes the EU delegation to the UN Climate Change Conferences (COPs), and how stable is that delegation over time? Second, how do its demographic and structural characteristics relate to the EU's negotiating posture and outcomes? Rather than treating the EU as a single institutional actor, the study examines the individuals who formally constitute its delegation and the patterns of institutional affiliation, continuity, gender, and nationality that characterise its presence across COP28–COP30.

Regarding the first research question, the findings show that the EU's institutional delegation contracted sharply, falling from 363 delegates at COP28 to 115 at COP30, a decline considerably steeper than the overall reduction in COP attendance. Despite this contraction, its institutional composition remained relatively stable. The European Commission consistently provided the largest share of delegates, while technical and administrative officials greatly outnumbered senior political figures. Continuity was concentrated within a relatively small recurring core of 35 individuals, 22 of whom were affiliated with the European Commission. Most members of this core held expert or managerial positions rather than highly visible political roles. The EU delegation is therefore neither homogeneous nor equally stable across its institutions. Instead, it combines a relatively small, stable, Commission-centred core with a much larger and more transient group of delegates. Taken together, these findings provide a more detailed picture of the individuals who make up the EU's institutional presence across successive COPs.

The second research question examined how the demographic and structural characteristics of the EU delegation relate to its negotiating posture and outcomes across COP28–COP30. The delegation maintained an almost equal gender balance across the three conferences, although men continued to occupy a larger share of the most senior political positions. Its nationality profile broadly reflected that of the European Commission, while continuity was concentrated among technical and expert officials rather than political leaders. Taken together, these patterns show that continuity and accumulated expertise are concentrated within a relatively stable part of the delegation. The literature on delegate discretion suggests why this may matter, but the present data cannot establish whether recurring delegates actually exercise greater influence or discretion during negotiations.

Comparing the delegation with the EU's negotiating objectives and assessments of COP28, COP29, and COP30 provides an important qualification. The extent to which EU priorities were reflected in the final outcomes declined across the three conferences, at the same time as the delegation became substantially smaller. This overlap in timing does not, however, show that changes in delegation composition caused the differences in outcomes. The main continuity group also remained relatively stable throughout the period. Other factors therefore need to be taken into account, including coalition dynamics, geopolitical developments, and the priorities of successive COP presidencies. Delegation composition may have played a role in shaping the EU's negotiating capacity, but the present analysis cannot establish a direct causal link with the outcomes.

A further qualification concerns the scope of the analysis. The EU does not negotiate in isolation but alongside the 27 Member States, whose combined delegations were, on average, around fifteen times larger than the EU institutional delegation. The distinction between the EU institutions and the Member States is therefore an analytical one rather than a division between two entirely separate negotiating actors. Within this scope, however, the findings show that continuity is concentrated in a Commission-

centred core, creating conditions in which institutional memory, accumulated expertise, and professional networks can develop over time.

This dissertation contributes to the study of EU climate diplomacy by examining who actually makes up the EU delegation at the COPs. The findings show that the delegation is not a homogeneous negotiating group, but a combination of a large and relatively transient group of participants and a smaller, more stable institutional core. The original dataset of 528 unique individuals across 675 delegate-year observations provides a basis for examining institutional affiliation, continuity, gender, and nationality across three consecutive COPs. In doing so, the study brings together research on EU external representation, diplomatic sociology, and delegate discretion, while providing empirical evidence on an aspect of EU climate diplomacy that has received comparatively little attention.

These findings also point to several areas for further research. Applying the same individual-level approach to Member State delegations would give a more complete picture of who represents Europe within the UNFCCC process and how national and EU-level delegations interact. Interviews or biographical research with recurring EU delegates could provide further insight into how expertise, institutional memory, professional networks, and practical discretion develop through repeated participation. This would help move the analysis beyond who is present at the COPs and towards a better understanding of how the individuals making up these delegations shape EU climate diplomacy and, potentially, its negotiating outcomes.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Delegation size

	COP28	COP29	COP30
Austria	106	49	35
Belgium	163	128	78
Bulgaria	212	134	5
Croatia	27	22	13
Cyprus	41	19	14
Czechia	62	60	17
Denmark	249	197	201
Estonia	134	22	17
Finland	216	81	117
France	764	95	530
Germany	427	315	162
Greece	300	199	12
Hungary	72	99	9
Ireland	135	82	74
Italy	474	395	221
Latvia	42	24	2
Lithuania	38	22	5
Luxembourg	106	55	53
Malta	41	29	9
Netherlands (Kingdom of the)	212	126	76
Poland	116	120	16
Portugal	232	187	210
Romania	75	55	17
Slovakia	52	40	2
Slovenia	43	21	19
Spain	215	125	83
Sweden	245	165	159
Total, 27 Member States	4,799	2,866	2,156
EU institutions (this dissertation)	363	197	115
Ratio, Member States : EU institutions	13.2 : 1	14.5 : 1	18.7 : 1

EU-institutional delegation compared to the twenty-seven Member States' combined delegations

Appendix 2 – Continuity across COP28–COP30

Name	Functional title	Home organisation
Alastair Bealby	Policy Officer	European Commission
Anna-Kaisa Itkonen	Spokesperson	European Commission
Apollonia Miola	Policy Officer	European Commission
Charlotte Du Rietz	Audiovisual Press Officer/Producer	European Parliament
Christina Malmros	Administrator	European Parliament
Christofer Ahlgren	Policy Officer	European Commission
Claudia Doldo	Policy Officer	European Commission
Cristina Lobillo Borrero	Director	European Commission
Damien Thomson	Political Adviser	European Parliament
Dana Popp	Press Officer	European Parliament
Dimitrios Zevgolīs	Head of Unit	European Commission
Ditte Juul-Joergensen	Director-General	European Commission
Eleni Anna Dimitrakoudi	Political Adviser	European Parliament
Emma Wiesner	Member of the European Parliament	European Parliament
Giacomo Grassi	Scientific Officer, Project Leader	European Commission
Giuliana Torta	Policy Officer	European Commission
Herwig Ranner	Policy Officer	European Commission
Hubertina J. Van Den Berg	Expert – Climate Change Adaptation	European Environment Agency
Ilona Billaux-Koman	Administrative Assistant	European Commission
Isaac Valero	Head of Unit	European Commission
Jacob Werksman	Principal Adviser	European Commission
Kurt Vandenberghe	Director-General	European Commission
Marc-Oliver Heidkamp	Attaché	European Court of Auditors
Michael Kaczmarek	Administrator	European Parliament
Mohammed Chahim	Member of the European Parliament	European Parliament
Narcis Paulin Jeler	Policy Officer	European Commission
Ricardo Fernandez	Expert – Climate Change Mitigation	European Environment Agency
Rishi Kumar	Policy Officer	European Commission
Roxanne Lake	Policy Officer	European Commission
Samuele Fischetti	Policy Assistant	European Commission
Sophie Planchon	Assistant	European Parliament
Stella Brožek Everaert	Policy Officer	European Commission
Vanda Suha	Policy Officer	European Commission
Wilhelm Bargum	Political Adviser	European Parliament
Zoltán Rakonczay	Policy Officer	European Commission

The 35 individuals present in the EU delegation at COP28, COP29 and COP30

Appendix 3 – Gender composition

Category	N	Women	Men	% Women
All records (COP28–COP30)	675	346	329	51%
COP28	363	179	184	49%
COP29	197	109	88	55%
COP30	115	58	57	50%
European Commission	259	142	117	55%
European Parliament	122	70	52	57%
EEAS	41	17	24	41%
Committee of the Regions	36	15	21	42%
Council of the EU / European Council	27	14	13	52%
EESC	22	13	9	59%
European Environment Agency	18	8	10	44%
European Court of Auditors	7	2	5	29%
Senior roles combined (DG, Director, Head of Unit, Commissioner, Pres./VP)	128	62	66	48%
— of which Commissioner / President / Vice-President	30	11	19	37%
— of which Director	34	23	11	68%
35-person recurring core (COP28+COP29+COP30)	35	17	18	49%

Gender composition of the EU delegation, by year, institution and seniority

Appendix 4 – Nationality composition

Nationality	N (all 3 COPs)
Italian	69
German	60
Belgian	55
Spanish	49
French	49
Dutch	37
Swedish	27
Polish	26
Danish	22
Portuguese	21
Finnish	19
Greek	18
Irish	15
Croatian	15
British	12

Fifteen most frequent nationalities in the EU delegation, COP28–COP30 combined