

Low carbon Policies and the management of EU-China Trade Relations

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Abstract

Low carbon society objectives have won a large support from the political elites in the EU and China and have become routinely invoked on both sides as the most promising response to the challenge of climate change. Praised as a common response to a common challenge, these political endorsements in both regions have raised enormous expectations of collective action and increased bilateral and strategic cooperation on climate change and energy security. These hopes have been embodied in the EU-China partnership on climate change. Yet, whereas some cooperation has indeed taken place, paradoxically this convergence of policy goals has also led to growing trade and political tensions. Therefore, this paper asks whether the emphasis on low carbon development strategies in China and the EU is actually capable of triggering the expected benefits for “win-win” cooperation on climate change. It argues that these contradictory patterns of cooperation and competition illustrate a tension between environmental objectives and economic competitiveness. This tension is inherent in the low-carbon society concept and has not been sufficiently appraised in EU-China relations. In particular, it demonstrates that the threats of ‘trade wars’ over low-carbon energy technologies indicate a growing tendency to construe these technologies as strategic national resources and crucial assets for ensuring national economic growth and jobs, tilting the balance towards multipolar competition for emerging markets and clouding the horizon of the ‘green’ “end of history”.

A note from the author: The paper is currently under review for publication. Therefore, only the abstract can be published on this website. If you are interested in reading the whole draft paper, kindly contact Coraline Goron under coraline.goron@gmail.com