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**RISING POWERS IN GLOBAL  
CLIMATE GOVERNANCE.  
NEGOTIATING IN THE NEW WORLD ORDER**

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with the cooperation of Astrid De Man, Joke Langens, Liene  
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## ABSTRACT

This paper studies the role and impact that rising powers have in the global climate change regime, and how those actors challenge the course of climate negotiations in the future.

The global climate change regime, centred around the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), is plagued by a number of problems, which make that it is insufficient today to deal with the problem it was intended to solve. A number of those problems relate to the regime's design, which assigns reduction targets to only a specific type of countries (Annex 1 countries). Considering that global emissions have increased considerably, it is obvious that the institutional solutions of the UNFCCC do not match the scale of the problem in the 21st century. That is because emissions in developing countries, most importantly in the new economic powerhouses, are rising exponentially. To increase its effectiveness, a redesign of the global climate change regime is needed, but any reform seems futile if it does not include the acceptance by rising powers of binding reduction targets. Besides China and India, the commitment of other non-Annex 1 countries such as South Korea, Brazil or the OPEC members will be extremely significant.

At the same time, the reality of global climate negotiations does not remain unaffected by the new world order. While the negotiations are still dominated by large coalitions such as the G77/China, underlying dynamics and power relations are changing, for instance through the creation of BASIC. Furthermore, climate discussions seem to be shifting to new groups and institutions outside the UN framework, such as the G20 or the Major Economies Forum. The paper concludes that those 'clubs', for the time being, fulfil only a limited role in the broader regime complex of climate change. It also argues that other developing countries are de facto sidelined because of the increasing clout of rising powers in climate negotiations.

## KEY WORDS

BASIC – climate change – emerging powers – G20 – G77/China – MEF – minilateralism – UNFCCC

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## **1. INTRODUCTION: RISING PLAYERS ON THE GLOBAL ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL STAGE**

When O'Neill (2001) coined the term 'BRICs', he accelerated the political and scientific debate about the role of so-called 'emerging' or 'rising' players on the global stage. Brazil, Russia, India and China were put in the spotlight because of their enormous economic growth potential and the opportunities for investments brought along by that—at a time when economic prospects in the West were gloomy. The countries have not left the political and economic agenda ever since, and even O'Neill's most ambitious projections were far outstripped by the BRICs' actual growth numbers (O'Neill 2011).

Nowadays, a number of other countries beyond the initial four qualify as 'growth markets' or 'emerging players' and challenge global power balances. In this paper, we prefer the concept of 'rising powers', because some of those countries are more 'reemerging' than 'emerging', such as China (Nye 1997).<sup>1</sup> The inclusion of South Africa replaced the BRICs with the BRICS (EDGE 2012). Other acronyms were invented for another group of rising stars, i.e. the TIMSK or MIST (Turkey, Indonesia, Mexico and South Korea) (Cooper and Mo 2013). While many differences still exist among each of those countries, the rising powers have some basic characteristics in common. The first refers to their growth potential, which gives them enormous economic clout in global markets.<sup>2</sup> Second, rising powers represent an important proportion of world population: the five BRICS together account for more than 40%. The same applies to their surface, as a small number of them already controls 25% or more of global land use. As a consequence, rising powers are significant actors for most global challenges. Their importance for climate change is furthermore related to their role as 'rising polluters'. Indeed, the industrialization of the rising powers accounts for an ever increasing part of the world's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. In 2006, China overtook the US as the largest emitter, and India will soon be number two (Walsh et al. 2011).

The above-mentioned characteristics suggest that rising powers also have (or should have) a significant political role (cf Kasa et al. 2008). Indeed, their emergence has unleashed a debate on the need and feasibility of redesigning global governance in general and reforming multilateral institutions in particular. Questions of representation, legitimacy and effectiveness are at the core of that debate.

Contemporary global governance is largely based on a grand liberal multilateral order that was gradually constructed after the end of the Second World War. When the concept of the BRICs was put on the agenda, it was immediately linked to a debate

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<sup>1</sup> There is no single definition or list of rising powers, in part because the criteria for being considered as a rising power differs from issue to issue. For instance, while China can be considered as a rising power in global monetary governance, it is clearly an incumbent or 'old' power in the UN Security Council.

<sup>2</sup> Even though a deceleration is currently being observed in the growth numbers of, for instance, China and India, the economic growth of emerging powers still by far outstrips that of industrialized countries.

about involving them—and especially China—more closely in global economic governance (O'Neill 2001). The G8, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) are particularly targeted. That discussion is not without consequence, because the view of many rising powers on governmental intervention in the economy and the financial sector is very different from that of most Western states (Carlson 2008; Zhihong 2003). But the debate is not confined to international financial institutions. The emergence of new powers is also an issue in the reform of the UN Security Council and in many other areas of international cooperation (Cooper 2013; Scott and Wilkinson 2013).

It was not until the global financial crisis broke out in 2008 that genuine shifts were witnessed on the world stage. Most importantly, the G20 arose as the main institution where the most pressing global economic problems were discussed, partially to the detriment of the more traditional G8 (Cooper and Bradford 2010; The Stanley Foundation 2010). The prominence of the G20 was instrumental in forging reforms within the Bretton Woods institutions, as evidenced by the 2010 revision of voting powers (IMF 2010).

The emergence of new economic and political powerhouses also has tangible consequences in global climate change governance, which is the particular focus of this paper.

## 2. THE GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE REGIME AND RISING POWERS

We are interested here in the question of how the emergence of new powers poses challenges to the global climate change regime. An *international regime* is defined as “[a set] of implicit or explicit principles, norms, rules, and decision-making procedures around which actors' expectations converge in a given area of international relations” (Krasner 1982: 186). The *climate change regime* is designed “to mitigate human-induced climate change by limiting anthropogenic emissions of greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide and methane and protecting associated sinks” (Downie 2011: 74). Its main components include, but are not limited to, the principles, norms, rules and procedures of the 1992 UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), of the UNFCCC's annual Conference of the Parties (COPs) and of the 1997 Kyoto Protocol (Downie 2011: 74).

Since a number of years, the intergovernmental negotiations that govern the climate change regime are in a deadlock. Several successive COPs have been unable to agree on a new comprehensive agreement to limit GHG emissions after the end of the first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol (2008-2012). The deadlock is in part due to the institutional design of the regime, which no longer reflects the global economic and political reality, and which is unable to provide an effective solution to today's climate challenges. That is why a debate is ongoing about the reform of the global climate change regime, bearing significant similarities with the debate about reforming other multilateral institutions.

Following the UNFCCC's central principle of common but differentiated responsibilities, the climate change regime subdivides parties into two groups. On the one hand, the Annex I countries gather industrialized economies and former Soviet states, who are responsible for the bulk of historic GHG emissions. On the other hand, the non-Annex I countries include those states that were considered as 'developing countries' when the UNFCCC was designed in 1992. The separation between the two groups is also known as the 'firewall'. The difference between them is marked most strongly in the Kyoto Protocol, which exclusively assigns binding reduction targets to

Annex I countries. At the same time, non-Annex I countries profit from financial instruments such as the Clean Development Mechanism (CDM), which allows Annex I countries to compensate a lack of domestic emission reductions by investing in projects that mitigate climate change in non-Annex I countries.

Numerous problems are associated with the design of the climate change regime. While the Kyoto Protocol has had a significant level of institutional effectiveness—illustrated by the reductions achieved by the Kyoto Protocol’s ratifying parties—there is a total lack of environmental effectiveness, as global emissions have risen by 49% between 1990 and 2012 (PBL 2012). A regime-related reason is that some major Annex I parties, such as the US, have never ratified Kyoto. But even so, scientists now urge for an emission reduction of 80 to 95%, while the Kyoto Protocol only advocated a 5.2% decrease in the industrialized world (compared to 1990 levels). Today’s increases in GHG emissions are largely located in the non-Annex I countries. In 2012, China and India alone accounted for more than 34% of emissions, while their share was around 15% in the early 1990s (PBL 2012).<sup>3</sup> A final flaw in the current climate change regime is its lack of a universal agreement to mitigate climate change after 2012.<sup>4</sup>

Since 2007, negotiations have focused on agreeing on a successor to the Kyoto Protocol. Prominent milestones were COP15 in Copenhagen (2009), COP16 in Cancún (2010), COP17 in Durban (2011) and COP18 in Doha (2012). Considering the current repartition of GHG emissions, it seems clear that, for the regime to be more environmentally effective, a new agreement must include the major industrial emitters such as the US, but also the new rising powers. The negotiations in those recent COPs take place in a very different context compared to when the UNFCCC was designed in the early 1990s. First, while the end of the Cold War then created considerable enthusiasm about multilateral cooperation to solve common challenges, the popularity of multilateralism dwindled since 2001.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, economic and political globalization have drawn entirely different power relations. The multilateral context was further complicated after the eruption of the global financial and economic crisis in 2008, the consequences of which have dominated international relations in the years that followed. A second change in the context since the early 1990s is the progression of climate science and the awareness of the problem amongst broad groups of society. While policy-makers still assumed in 1992 that total mitigation would be achievable, it is publicly accepted now that global temperatures will rise as a consequence of climate change (with a maximum increase of 2°C as the official *idée fixe*, but with plausible scenarios going up to 4°C or more). The issue of adaptation now figures much more prominently in the debate, with new questions focusing on the identification of victims and culprits, and arguments about who should pay for the damage. A third and final major difference with 1992 is that the traditional division of industrialized and developing countries is much more blurred today. The diversification within the G77/China, the negotiating coalition which largely represents the non-Annex I countries, is significant. The group contains the poorest of nations, e.g. Malawi or Liberia, but also rich Asian Tigers such as Singapore. It represents

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<sup>3</sup> A significant part of those emissions, of course, are caused by production facilities that cater for consumers of Annex I countries.

<sup>4</sup> At COP18, a last-minute agreement was reached to open a second commitment period for the Kyoto Protocol between 2013 and 2020. But because even less parties join the Kyoto Protocol in that period, a comprehensive agreement is still not in sight. At COP17, it was agreed that the parties to the UNFCCC would commit to agreeing on a universal agreement by 2015, which would come into effect by 2020 (UNFCCC 2013).

<sup>5</sup> 9/11 was followed by a period of decline of multilateral cooperation on several issues. In global environmental politics, additional reasons for the downturn of multilateralism were the growing frustration with the implementation gap of global commitments, the awareness of the difference between institutional effectiveness and environmental effectiveness and the decreasing optimism for globalization and its potentially positive effects for environmental performance.

many countries that will be climate change's major victims, with the threatened small island states as iconic examples, but it also harbours the most polluting oil-producing countries. Some countries, such as China and India are both major polluters and likely victims (in terms of droughts, diseases, decreased agricultural production, etc.). Some members of the G77/China occupy a particular position in the climate debate. Brazil and Indonesia, for instance, are of importance because they are home to large rain forests where carbon is stored.

In this paper, we argue that the ongoing shifts on the world stage that we have introduced above, and in particular the emergence of new powerhouses, have two significant consequences on the climate change regime. First, climate change discussions are not limited to the formal UNFCCC framework anymore, but take place in an institutionally much more fragmented setting. The recent difficulties within the COPs have brought some to think of creative complements to and out-of-the-box solutions for traditional multilateralism. That is why climate change has emerged as a new topic on the agenda of clubs such as the G20 or the World Economic Forum. New clubs have even been especially created for it, such as the Major Economies Forum on Energy and Climate Change (MEF). Second, rising powers have shaken up the negotiation practices within the UNFCCC itself, for instance through the emergence of new coalitions such as BASIC (Brazil, South Africa, India and China), with uncertain consequences for the G77/China. Those two issues form the research interest of this paper.

### **3. RESEARCH FOCUS AND METHODOLOGY**

Our analysis addresses two research questions. First: to what extent do climate discussions shift towards smaller clubs outside the UN regime and which role do those clubs have within the broader institutional landscape? We focus on the G20, a previously existing club, and the MEF, a newly created club. We analyze the positions that the G20 adopts with regard to climate change and how those are implemented, and explore the role of the MEF as a minilateral setting for climate change discussions.

Second: how do rising powers affect the creation, weight and interaction of negotiating coalitions within the UNFCCC? We start by looking at the creation of BASIC, assess whether the positions of those four countries have converged in recent COPs and analyze whether it can be considered as a new coalition. Subsequently, we zoom in on the long-term impact of those recent developments on the coherence of the G77/China coalition within the climate change regime.

The research presented here reflects the analyses conducted in the framework of five master theses, each focusing on one of the topics mentioned above (De Man 2012; Langens 2012; Van Dyck 2012; Vandamme 2012; Wintmolders 2013). The studies used a combination of different methodologies to answer the research questions. They involved discourse analysis, influence analysis focused on key issues of the negotiations, and longitudinal analysis comparing negotiations at different time periods on the long term (COP1 to COP15) and the short term (COP15 to COP17). The analyses were based on secondary academic literature<sup>6</sup>, on ENB reports of the COPs (IISD 2013), on policy documents of the analyzed states and groups, and on quantitative data (e.g. on states' socioeconomic situation). Furthermore, a number of interviews were conducted with members of the Belgian delegation to the UNFCCC or MEF negotiations, and the results of the theses were presented and discussed in a

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<sup>6</sup> It must be noted that secondary data in the case of the MEF is scarce.

policy seminar of the Flemish Government's International Environmental Policy Division in November 2012.

#### 4. CONCEPTUAL FOUNDATIONS

##### a. REGIME COMPLEXES AND MINILATERALISM

We now turn to a brief presentation of the main conceptual and theoretical discussions in which the research is situated. With respect to the first research question, we explore the formation of regime complexes and the appeal of minilateralism. Regarding the second research question, the next section focuses on the concept of coalitions.

We already introduced the concept of international regimes and the definition of the climate change regime. International regime theory has long been dominant in the description and explanation of international institutions built by states—as the primary creators of regimes (Downie 2011: 70)—to achieve the benefits of cooperation, including in the environmental domain (Young 2002). But that domain also abounds with examples where regimes remain weak and ineffective, for instance when the gap widens between practice and the regime's principles, norms, rules and procedures. Examples are biodiversity or desertification (cf Downie 2011).

According to Keohane and Victor (2011), governing efforts in the international system can be placed on a continuum between comprehensive regulatory institutions and fragmented arrangements. Along that continuum, they position 'regime complexes' as a more fragmented set of institutions than traditional regimes (which are often centred around a single regulatory instrument). A *regime complex* is "an array of partially overlapping and nonhierarchical institutions governing a particular issue area" (Raustiala and Victor 2004: 279). It is marked by connections between specific, narrowly-focused regulatory regimes and by the absence of an overall architecture or hierarchy (Keohane and Victor 2011). The emergence of a regime complex for climate change, gradually replacing or broadening the scope of a comprehensive regime, can be explained by uncertainty and interest diversity. Climate change brings along a degree of uncertainty for actors about the costs and benefits of regulation initiatives, which is why they are pushed towards a variety of simultaneous cooperative structures (Keohane and Victor 2011: 9). Furthermore, the diversity of interests in current global politics, which not only opposes American and European priorities but also involves the interests of rising powers, favours a regime complex because a multitude of regulatory regimes allows 'forum shopping' and the accommodation of those diverging interests (Keohane and Victor 2011: 8-9). Keohane and Victor (2011) conclude that a regime complex, although not necessarily superior, is politically more realistic than a comprehensive climate change regime, and they see potential advantages in terms of increased focus of separate, loosely coupled initiatives, larger impact in terms of GHG reductions, and higher flexibility to adapt rules to different issues and interests and to changing circumstances. After failures such as COP15 in Copenhagen to agree on an all-encompassing regime, "[f]or policy-makers keen to make international regulation more effective, a strategy focused on managing a regime complex may allow for more effective management of climate change than large political and diplomatic investments in efforts to craft a comprehensive regime" (Keohane and Victor 2011: 7). The research on regime complexes is closely related to the recent focus on the fragmentation of global environmental governance in scholarly debates (Chasek et al. 2012: 256; Zelli and van Asselt 2013). Figure 1 shows Keohane and Victor's regime complex for climate change.



**Figure 1 The regime complex for managing climate change (Keohane and Victor 2011: 10)<sup>7</sup>**



The figure shows the inclusion of clubs within the regime complex, but located outside the 'UN Legal Regimes'. The uncertainty of climate change and the gridlock of the UNFCCC have incited several governments to form smaller groups of key countries that could cooperate on climate issues and that are easier to manage because of their size. Some clubs are new (e.g. MEF), which has the advantage that the membership can be adapted to the problem, while other clubs build on existing institutions (e.g. G20), where transaction costs are lower.

The emergence of clubs is related to *minilateralism*, a concept introduced by Kahler (1992) that refers to "cooperation [...] promoted and advanced through smaller group interactions that typically involve the most powerful actors in the international system" (Hampson and Heinbecker 2011: 301). Minilateral initiatives are often a reaction to the flaws of the multilateral system of the post-1945 order.<sup>8</sup> While Copenhagen clearly showed the limits of multilateralism in the case of climate change, similar conclusions have been drawn for the trade regime or other global issues. As UN membership climbs to a near 200, the question is how agreements will continue to be concluded with the 'one nation, one vote' rule. The focus of international bureaucracies on procedural issues adds to the frustration of multilateral negotiations. Many Western powers are therefore supportive of minilateral settings to broker deals, arguing that decisions will be reached more efficiently when only the key actors sit around the table, which should also lead to more effective agreements (Eckersley 2012; Hampson and Heinbecker 2011). Among the advantages of minilateral solutions are the potential to focus on specific issues, to overcome political gridlock, to advance creative and flexible compromises that are unhindered by bureaucratic procedures and to move away from fixed agendas and decision-making rules (Keohane and Victor 2011: 10).<sup>9</sup> The assumption is sometimes made that clubs are composed of

<sup>7</sup> For Keohane and Victor, "[e]lements inside the oval represent forums where substantial efforts at rule-making have occurred, focused on one or more of the tasks needed to manage the diversity of cooperation problems that arise with climate change; elements outside are areas where climate rule making is requiring additional, supporting rules" (2011: 10).

<sup>8</sup> Karns and Mingst (2010: 279) use the concept of 'ad hoc multilateralism' to denote strategies of states to form small groups to collaborate on specific issues, as a complement to other forms of multilateralism.

<sup>9</sup> One of the main disadvantages of minilateral, versus multilateral, settings is their lack of legitimacy (Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen and McGee 2013).

like-minded countries (Keohane and Victor 2011: 9). The creation of the G7 in the 1970s was a result of such 'minilateral' reasoning among Western powers. But rising powers are also in favour of minilateralism, for reasons of increasing their say in global governance (cf Hampson and Heinbecker 2011). The G20 serves as the prime example there.

A minilateral solution for climate change makes sense because a relatively small number of countries is responsible for three quarters or more of global GHG emissions. That is why clubs such as the G20 or the MEF are considered to have a high potential for brokering climate deals. It is important to point out that minilateralism does not necessarily have to replace multilateralism, but can serve as a stepping stone towards a comprehensive, multilateral climate agreement (Eckersley 2012).

## b. COALITIONS AND NEGOTIATING GROUPS

In global environmental politics, intergovernmental negotiations are known to take place among powerful negotiating groups or coalitions.<sup>10</sup> Coalitions can be defined as "cooperative efforts for the attainment of short-range, issue-specific objectives" (Dupont 1995: 148). They are formed by states, as those want to pool their sovereignty and thus maximize their power (especially in the case of small states) and because it is easier to handle a common platform of collective demands than the complexity of individual interests (Chasek 2005). Negotiating among a relatively small number of coalitions also reduces the complexity of multilateral negotiations (Jönsson 2002). In the early years of the climate change regime, four main coalitions were commonly identified: the European Union (EU), JUSSCANNZ (Japan, the US, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, with Switzerland and Norway joining during the Kyoto negotiations, and Iceland), Russia and other economies in transition, and the G77/China (Schunz 2010: 76). Other coalitions formed more recently, such as the Umbrella Group (the successor of JUSSCANNZ, with Australia, Canada, Iceland, Japan, New Zealand, Norway, Russia, Ukraine and the US) or the Environmental Integrity Group (Liechtenstein, Mexico, Monaco, South Korea and Switzerland) (Audet 2013; Depledge 2006).

Coalition-building is of particularly vital importance for developing countries, most of which do not yield much individual influence in global politics. Although, as mentioned before, there is much diversity among developing countries, including with respect to their environmental priorities, they consistently choose to negotiate environmental agreements through the G77/China, and represent themselves collectively as the 'global South'. While the G77 started as a temporary grouping of 77 developing nations, it evolved into a quasi-permanent bloc of 132 members, plus the associated member China (Najam 2011: 242).

Analyses of coalitions in international negotiations often refer to the coalition theory of Dupont (1995), for example when it comes to the formation and effectiveness of coalitions. Since coalitions are temporal by nature (Chasek 2005), scholars are also interested in defining characteristics of coalitions, so that they can determine the moment when a group of states can start to be considered as a coalition. In Dupont's theory, coalitions have two important characteristics. On the one hand, the aspirations, purposes and goals of the actors need to converge during coalition formation. On the other hand, a coalition seeks to yield collective influence in international negotiations (Dupont 1995).

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<sup>10</sup> In contrast to the concept of 'clubs', which is related to minilateral settings outside the UN framework, the concept of 'coalitions' denotes country groupings that act as actors within intergovernmental, multilateral negotiations.

## 5. CLUBS AS MINILATERAL SETTINGS FOR CLIMATE CHANGE DISCUSSIONS

This first part of the analysis centres on the question whether climate discussions shift to smaller clubs outside the UNFCCC framework. From the perspective of an emerging climate change regime complex, we want to assess whether minilateral settings are being applied to govern the issue. We focus our attention on two clubs that have engaged in climate change discussions in recent years. The G20 is a case of a previously existing club that became part of the regime complex when it put climate change on its agenda in 2009. We investigate the G20's commitments with regard to climate change, and how those have an impact on the UNFCCC in general and on the G20 members' cooperation in the UNFCCC in particular. The analysis then turns to the MEF, a club newly created in 2009 with a specific climate mandate. Considering the scarcity of data and the limited amount of existing research regarding the MEF, we explore the existing and potential role of this new club in the climate change regime complex.

### a. G20<sup>11</sup>

The G20 was created as the 'Group of Twenty Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors' in 1999 and intended as a forum for cooperation on international financial matters. The group includes 19 major economies<sup>12</sup> and the EU. It represents 90% of global GDP, 80% of global trade and two thirds of the world population (Karns and Mingst 2010: 279). The eruption of the global financial and economic crisis heralded a significant evolution for the group. Since 2008, it convenes at the level of heads of state and is by some considered to have replaced the G8 as the main economic forum of the major powers (Cooper and Bradford 2010; Drezner 2012).

Another evolution has been the broadening of themes on the G20's agenda. Initially conceived as a financial consultation group, it came to discuss other issues such as climate change and a 'green' recovery from the crisis. Since the G20's increasing activeness on climate change coincided with mounting frustration about the UNFCCC process, some suggested that the G20 might be a more appropriate forum to conclude agreements on climate change (Cooper 2010; Houser 2010). That is based on the arguments supported by the proponents of minilateralism, that smaller clubs can take over certain tasks of the UNFCCC or at least function as a forum where crucial deals can be brokered.

In order to assess the potential role of the G20 in the climate change regime complex, we first identified the commitments made by the G20 on climate change (in its Final Declarations) and assessed the implementation of those commitments (partly based on previous research by the G20 Research Group at the University of Toronto). The G20 discussed climate change for the first time explicitly at its 2009 London Summit. The evolution of the theme on the G20's agenda is much influenced by the priorities of the chairing member. The attention for instance decreases under the chairmanship of Canada. But a number of general trends can be drawn. When climate change is discussed by the G20, there is a clear tendency to link it to energy issues and to focus as much as possible on solutions related to energy policy. Furthermore, the original mandate of the G20 is visible in the frequent references to international financial institutions as actors in the climate change regime, for instance with regard to climate funding. It is also interesting to note that the G20 consistently emphasizes its support to the UNFCCC process and that it often refers to key principles of the regime, such

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<sup>11</sup> This section is based on Vandamme (2012).

<sup>12</sup> Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, the UK and the US.

as common but differentiated responsibilities. In limited instances, the G20 members indicate their preferences about the further development of the climate change regime, within the UNFCCC framework.

In their final declarations, the G20 members formulate a number of commitments on specific issues, including climate change. In our analysis, we identified and counted the commitments made during six consecutive G20 summits between 2008 and 2011. That shows a rise in the number of paragraphs containing commitments on climate change in the run-up to and aftermath of COP15 in Copenhagen (with a slight drop when the G20 was hosted by Canada). The commitments relate mostly to fuel subsidies, to the stimulation of clean energy technology and to the role of international financial institutions in climate funding. We are also interested in the nature of the commitments that are formulated. A four-fold distinction is made between (1) declarations that confirm the role or commitments of other institutions or that request those institutions to act, (2) the repetition of previously made commitments by the G20 or its members, (3) hollow commitments that state that something will be committed to, without further specification, and (4) concrete, measurable commitments (e.g. containing timed goals and specified targets). Table 1 shows the number of paragraphs that contain those different types of commitments.

**Table 1**      **Number of paragraphs containing commitments in G20 summits' final declarations**<sup>13</sup>

(adapted from Vandamme 2012: 54)

	reference to other institutions	repetition	hollow commitment s	concrete commitment s	total
Washington, 2008	0	0	1	0	1
London, 2009	1	0	1	0	2
Pittsburgh, 2009	5	0	1	1	6
Toronto, 2010	5	2	0	0	5
Seoul, 2010	3	1	2	0	6
Cannes, 2011	7	1	1	0	8
<b>total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>	

From Table 1, it can be concluded that the increase in the G20's discourse on climate change is not translated into concrete commitments. Only one concrete, enforceable commitment was identified. It refers to the rationalization and phasing out of inefficient fuel subsidies that encourage wasteful consumption (and the promise to develop implementation strategies and timeframes within the year) made at the Pittsburgh Summit (G20 2009: §29). In short, although the G20 recently tries to be seen as an important forum for non-financial issues, the case of climate change shows that specific actions have yet to be undertaken.

In a next step, we investigated to which degree the G20's only concrete commitment has been implemented. The University of Toronto's G20 Research Group publishes annual compliance reports that show that energy and climate related commitments<sup>14</sup> are relatively well implemented (e.g. Montpetit et al. 2012). The compliance of the commitment with regard to the phasing out of inefficient fuel subsidies, for instance, is calculated at 65%. Lang (2011), however, identified a number of errors in the

<sup>13</sup> In Pittsburgh, Toronto and Cannes, one paragraph contained more than one commitment, which is why the totals in the horizontal rows are not an addition of the individual counts.

<sup>14</sup> It must be noted that the G20 Research Group's conceptualization of energy and climate-related commitments is much wider than ours.

calculation of the University of Toronto. She concludes that none of the G20 countries made a real reform in its subsidy policies as a result of the commitment, but that the commitment in itself was a catalyst for actions in the wider international community. For instance, it brought the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) to take a concrete initiative and it was also helpful during the negotiations at the Rio+20 Summit.

In a final stage of the research, we looked into the relation between the G20 and the UNFCCC. The analysis found that the number of common positions about the UNFCCC process is limited, and that the most critical issues are not mentioned in the G20's declarations. That is explained by the fact that the positions among the members on those critical issues are widely divergent. Exactly those questions that divide states within the UNFCCC are equally dividing within the G20. That also means that the G20 members do not have common positions to defend during the UNFCCC COPs. Because of the lack of a common position, and because of the fact that the G20 members are scattered across the different negotiating groups of the UNFCCC, the G20 has until now not been able to influence the UNFCCC talks. Although the G20's bureaucracy is much lighter than the UNFCCC's procedures, unilateralism has not led to different results, and the hope that a substantive deal would be more easily reached within that club, thus proves idle.

Nevertheless, interviews conducted in the framework of our research have suggested that the G20 could fulfil an instrumental role in support of the UNFCCC. For example, during the Pittsburgh Summit, the G20 requested its finance ministers to write a report about innovative finance strategies that could be presented to COP15. Considering the G20's expertise, the elaboration of technical issues or the development of reports on financial and technological topics could indeed be an added value (see also The Stanley Foundation 2010). The emergence of clubs outside of the UN framework could thus be a complement to the UNFCCC within the climate change regime complex.

#### b. MEF<sup>15</sup>

The MEF was created in the spring of 2009, several months before the crucial COP15 in Copenhagen, at the initiative of US president Obama, and met 16 times in the following four years, at political and expert level.<sup>16</sup> Its 17-country membership<sup>17</sup> seems to include the 15 largest national economies (which are both industrialized and emerging economies), complemented by South Africa and the EU. Those members roughly coincide with the largest GHG emitters (when one ignores Iran). The initiative has three self-stated goals. First, it wants to create "a candid dialogue among major developed and developing economies" on energy and climate, framed within the concept of a low-carbon economy (MEF 2009a). Secondly, that dialogue should contribute to building a global partnership for low-carbon technologies. The MEF members agreed to develop Technology Action Plans to elaborate best practices in a number of technological fields. After the COP in Copenhagen, the US-hosted Clean Energy Ministerial took over that discussion, based on the action plans that the MEF

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<sup>15</sup> This section is partly based on Wintolders (2013).

<sup>16</sup> The MEF is the successor of the Major Economies Meeting (MEM), convened by US president Bush in 2007 and 2008. The MEM stated its intention to complement the UN process, but was widely perceived by other actors as a strategy to undermine the Kyoto Protocol. After the new US administration took over, the MEF was regarded with less suspicions (Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen and McGee 2013: 62-63).

<sup>17</sup> Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, the EU, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Russia, South Africa, South Korea, the UK, and the US. Those were the exact same countries that attended the MEM (see footnote 16). They are also the same members as the G20, but without Argentina, Saudi Arabia and Turkey. The reports of the meetings of the Forum, however, show that representatives of other countries and international organizations are also often invited.

members developed (CEM 2013). The third objective of the MEF is to contribute to the global negotiations on climate change. In that context, the Forum explicitly states that it does not see itself as an alternative to the UNFCCC, but that it wants to contribute to the UN regime and have an informing and complementary role (MEF 2009c). That expected role should build, on the one hand, on the expertise with regard to low-carbon technology that the MEF wants to generate and, on the other hand, on the “political leadership” that the members aspire to show (MEF 2009a). The Forum’s intention at the outset—i.e. “we will work between now and Copenhagen, with each other and under the Convention, to identify a global goal for substantially reducing global emissions by 2050” (MEF 2009d)—illustrates that ambition. It is clear that the creation of the MEF fits in the trend that emerged before and after COP15 to work in smaller and informal groups to make progress in the climate change regime, but from a much more voluntary and nationally based perspective than from a top-down UN-led approach. The US, but also several rising powers, have long been in favour of a pledge-and-review approach (cf Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen and McGee 2013: 73).

Our research departed from the potential advantages that clubs and minilateral settings have to offer, and we applied those on the MEF case. Those advantages refer to a smaller and more effective membership, a targeted thematic focus and flexible decision-making (see above). A first main finding is that the thematic focus of the MEF, as can be found in the summaries of the Forum’s meetings and from a limited set of interviews, is practically as wide as the UNFCCC agenda itself. Besides the group’s initial priority on low-carbon technologies, other themes such as funding and adaptation are also raised. A second important observation relates to the membership of the Forum. Although that is restricted to 16 national governments and the EU, the group remains very heterogeneous. Many subgroups of developing countries are not represented in the MEF, such as the least-developed countries, the oil-producing countries and the small island states (see below). With its focus on the world’s major economies, the MEF is therefore not representative of the UNFCCC’s membership. But it does assemble many of the regime’s major players, i.e. the EU, the US and the major rising powers (who often act as spokesperson for all developing countries, see below), and thus imports most of the substantive conflicts and divided positions of the COPs (e.g. with regard to the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol) (MEF 2011). As a result, the group has not produced unanimous positions with regard to the topics that they discuss. An exception to that is the Forum’s relatively clear position on climate funding, but the elaboration of that position was immediately deferred to the G20 (MEF 2009b). Those two findings show that the MEF is unable to overcome the UNFCCC’s difficulties with the potential benefits of minilateralism. Rather, it fails to achieve those benefits (especially in terms of thematic focus and targeted membership) by importing the assumptions and complexities of the UNFCCC.

Additional problems arise as a result of the MEF’s organization. While there is a lack of a permanent secretariat, our interviews indicate that certain participants have a rather unprofessional impression of the Forum, for instance because of the way meetings are organized and venues changed at the last minute. Moreover, they denounce the lack of information flowing out of those meetings, both among participants as well as externally (see also Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen and McGee 2013: 67). Those organization and communication flaws generate an overall unfavourable perception of the MEF.

Our conclusion is that the MEF hardly surpasses the status of a discussion forum. As the potential benefits of a club are not fulfilled by the MEF, it cannot aspire to fulfil a complementary or preparatory role with respect to the UNFCCC negotiations, which is one of its three objectives. Moreover, the MEF’s difficulties and its lack of common

positions prevent it from generating political leadership in the field. When it comes to the Forum's two other objectives, there are serious doubts regarding its added value. It is hard to see why a 'candid dialogue' on energy and climate change cannot take place within the G20, which has an almost identical membership. And the goal of developing a partnership on low-carbon technologies shifted rather quickly, it appears, to another forum. Because of those reasons, and because of the unfavourable perception of the MEF and the overcharged agenda of climate negotiators (cf Depledge and Chasek 2012), we believe that the Forum is not likely to adopt a role of importance within the global climate change regime complex.

## 6. NEGOTIATING GROUPS AND COALITION DYNAMICS IN THE UNFCCC

The second question of our analysis looks into how the emergence of new powers affects the creation, weight and interaction of negotiating coalitions at the heart of the climate change regime, i.e. within the COPs of the UNFCCC. While rising powers traditionally belong to the group of developing countries in the UN logic, they have frequently adopted leading roles in the G77/China.<sup>18</sup> However, at COP15 in Copenhagen, the outcome of the negotiations was strongly influenced by the US and BASIC, a new group of the four major rising powers. We assess whether BASIC can be considered as a new coalition in climate negotiations, and how its creation influences the coherence within the G77/China on a longer term.

### a. BASIC<sup>19</sup>

The BASIC acronym became part of the climate vocabulary during the final night of negotiations at COP15 in Copenhagen, when the group struck a deal with the US that led to the Copenhagen Accord (which proposed a solution based on the pledge-and-review approach). The BASIC group was actually established shortly before COP15, when representatives of Brazil, South Africa, India and China met during a preparatory meeting in China and announced a joint strategy for the negotiations (Nhamo 2010; Olsson et al. 2010). Observers were not surprised about the enhanced cooperation between those four countries, as it was only a matter of time before the BRICS' claim for larger representation in multilateral institutions would extend to the climate change regime.<sup>20</sup>

We investigated the detailed positions of the BASIC countries with regard to some of the key issues of the negotiations. Those issues are (1) the goal of the negotiations (what is the content of the agreement that states want to achieve?), (2) the type of agreement that should come out of the negotiations (e.g. what kind of legal status?), (3) the timing of the agreement's validity and the commitment period, (4) the

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<sup>18</sup> At the UN Conference on the Human Environment in 1972, for instance, Brazil and China led a coalition of developing countries urging for development priorities instead of strong environmental measures. Another example is Brazil's mediating role between industrialized and developing countries during COP3 in Kyoto (Hochstetler and Viola 2012).

<sup>19</sup> This section is based on De Man (2012) and Langens (2012). The latter provides specific details on the influence of one of the BASIC countries, Brazil, at COP15, COP16 and COP17. Brazil holds a key asset in climate change discussions, as it is home to the major part of the largest rain forest on Earth. While its position on issues such as deforestation have long been controversial (cf Hochstetler and Viola 2012), Brazil is recently adopting an ambitious profile on climate change and issues such as biofuels. It has achieved important emission reductions, in contrast to the other BASIC countries and to other emerging powers, and consequently tries to adopt a leadership position. Langens (2012) concludes that Brazil exerted substantial influence attempts on the negotiations at COP15 and COP17, but that contextual and regime-specific factors have an important impact on the success of those attempts.

<sup>20</sup> The reason that Russia is not a part of BASIC—and that BRICS is not the group asserting itself in the climate change regime—is found in the fact that it is an Annex I country, and thus in a totally different position within the UNFCCC.

mechanisms to fund the agreement and (5) the firewall principle dividing Annex I and non-Annex I countries. We analyzed the positions during COP15 (Copenhagen), COP16 (Cancún) and COP17 (Durban). They are briefly summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2 Summarized positions of BASIC countries at COP15, COP16 and COP17 (De Man 2012: 52)**

	<b>Goal of the negotiations</b>	<b>Type of agreement</b>	<b>Timing</b>	<b>Funding mechanism</b>	<b>Firewall</b>
<b>Brazil</b>	ambitious reduction objectives under a second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol (KP)	extension of the KP; separate space for issues of legality	second commitment period of the KP		historical responsibility of Annex I
<b>South Africa</b>		two-track legally binding outcome; lack of clarity about legal form is the elephant in the room	second commitment period of the KP		
<b>India</b>	common reductions for Annex I; stricter measures going beyond KP	decide form after content; legal under UNFCCC	second commitment period of the KP	Green Climate Fund should have fully judicial personality to ensure direct access	historical responsibility of Annex I
<b>China</b>		legally binding (for Annex I)	second commitment period of the KP		emission reductions for Annex I

Not all cells in Table 2 are filled, because not every country defends an individual position on each issue. The positions regarding funding, for instance, are mostly expressed by the G77/China coalition and not by its individual members. The analysis of the positions regarding the key issues also shows that there is a large consensus among the BASIC countries on issues such as timing, but that there are noted differences elsewhere. But when we look at how these positions were expressed at the three COPs consecutively, and how they were agreed during the ministerial meetings of BASIC, we observe a trend of increasing convergence in the viewpoints of the four countries. It should be noted, however, that those commonly defended positions are often a consensus of individually divergent ambitions. It was found that Brazil's position was often one of the most ambitious among non-Annex I countries, but that Brazil consistently looks for a middle course between that ambition and the more conservative position defended by BASIC (see also Malerba 2011). Our analysis suggested that China and India have the heaviest weight within BASIC.



Considering the generally converging positions of the BASIC countries on a number of issues, we turn to the question whether BASIC can be considered as a new coalition in the climate change regime. It was found that BASIC fulfils most conditions of an 'informal group' in the definition of Van den Berg et al. (2011), meaning that it is a small group that regularly meets, that has a specific goal and where personal contacts are important. With the regular ministerial meetings, however, BASIC also achieved a certain degree of formality. According to the criteria of Dupont, BASIC can be regarded as a genuine coalition.<sup>21</sup> First, it was stated above that the positions of the four countries converge during the coalition formation. Second, the influence of BASIC was established shortly after its creation, when it succeeded in forging a deal, together with the US, that would become the main decision of COP15. The way the Copenhagen Accord was decided signalled an upheaval in the climate change regime and a complete reshuffling of power relations, with the EU losing its leadership role. It is also clear that BASIC is recognized as a coalition by external actors (although that is not a characteristic of Dupont's coalition theory). In the international press and the broader international community, the BASIC acronym became widely used right after Copenhagen. The concept emerges in the ENB reports since COP17 in Durban, where China explicitly spoke on behalf of the coalition.

The identification of BASIC as a new coalition does not automatically mean a weakening of the G77/China coalition, or a breakaway of the BASIC countries from that group. To the contrary, BASIC explicitly intends to support and reinforce the G77/China and its position in the climate negotiations, as we can conclude from the statements made by the four countries. Another sign of the strong cooperation is the fact that G77 experts are regularly invited at the BASIC ministerial meetings (which is called the 'BASIC+' approach). Therefore, although BASIC fulfils the theoretical conditions of a coalition, it should rather be regarded as a subgroup of the larger G77 coalition, than as a separate negotiating group in itself.

In short, a new association between Brazil, South Africa, India and China emerged during the Copenhagen talks as a new coalition and subgroup of the G77/China, with a very clear position about a second commitment period under the Kyoto Protocol and the historical responsibilities of Annex I countries. The dynamics of the negotiations during COP15 were beneficial for BASIC to gain an international profile, and the coalition's power was immediately established by crafting the Copenhagen Accord. This analysis suggests that the coalition will continue to be important in the UNFCCC in the near future, as a significant voice of rising powers in the climate change regime.

#### b. G77/CHINA<sup>22</sup>

The G77 was created during a meeting of the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in 1964. It can be situated in the growing self-awareness of newly independent states in the South, and their collective stance against the group of industrialized countries. As stated above, the group quickly grew in numbers, and embraced China as an associated member. It gradually institutionalized and has its own structures and procedures (Najam 2011). Its goals are to represent the collective economic interests of the South, to strengthen its members' negotiation capacity on economic issues in the UN system and to promote South-South cooperation (G77 2013). The G77's mission is clearly defined in the framework of the UN, and it thus evolved into a major negotiating group in several UN bodies and agreements.

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<sup>21</sup> In Dupont's typology, BASIC can be considered as a broad-based coalition, because of its high visibility, the relative consensus about important issues and its leading role in the negotiations.

<sup>22</sup> This section is based on Van Dyck (2012).

Since the G77/China coalition already existed when the UNFCCC was established, we conducted a longitudinal analysis of the cooperation within the group, comparing the start of the UNFCCC talks with the present situation, given the different evolutions described in this paper. We compared COP1 in 1995 (Berlin), COP3 in 1997 (Kyoto) and COP15 in 2009 (Copenhagen), with regard to four key issues (type of agreement, funding, firewall and timing). We focused especially on the interests and the relations between the G77/China as a whole and its four main subgroups. A first subgroup is BASIC, which we already presented above.<sup>23</sup> Next is the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS), a relatively homogenous collective of 44 small and poor island nations. The existence of the alliance is intrinsically linked to climate change, as AOSIS's members are fundamentally threatened by rising sea levels. Their economic weight is marginal, and their own GHG emissions negligible (Betzold 2010; Chasek 2005). A third subgroup is formed by the member states of the Organization for Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). In contrast to AOSIS, the OPEC countries have high GHG emissions and some of them are relatively rich. Their vulnerability refers mostly to the declining consumption of fossil fuels in the world. The literature suggests that OPEC has close ties with the oil industry and that it is a very active subgroup of the G77/China (Barnett 2009; Dessai 2004; Kasa et al. 2008). Finally, the subgroup of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) consists of 49 states of sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and the Pacific, which have a low income level, high economic vulnerability and a low human assets index.<sup>24</sup>

The analysis of COP1 suggests an active role of AOSIS, who advanced a first substantive proposal for a protocol in the UNFCCC framework. Because of its vulnerable situation, it was in the utmost interest of AOSIS to have a fast agreement on emission reductions. The OPEC countries, however, defended the status quo. In the end, the AOSIS proposal was not supported by OPEC nor by China, hiding behind the supposed lack of evidence in climate science. In general, the negotiations of COP1 were to a large extent blocked by a lack of consensus within the G77/China on reduction obligations for the Annex I countries. At the same time, a 'Green Group' (led by India) formed within the G77/China, seeking association with the EU and paving the way for the Berlin Mandate (which initiated a process for negotiating strengthened commitments for Annex I). Overall, the G77/China agreed during COP1 on the issues of funding and the firewall, but a lack of consensus on the other issues prevented the coalition from acting as one. Especially OPEC was an outsider. Openly critical of AOSIS and of the G77/China as a whole, it eventually sided with JUSCANNZ. India tried to find a middle course on thorny issues such as timing. The LDCs did not yet act as a subgroup in Berlin.

COP3 in Kyoto saw a less active presence of the subgroups in general, while countries such as India, China and Brazil notably adopted an individual leadership role. While the AOSIS proposal was off the table and there were no more references to the Green Group, the agreement inside the G77/China was higher, and the coalition adopted a predominantly reactive position. The existing consensus on the issues of funding and the firewall principle was preserved, although AOSIS expressed some support for the idea of voluntary reduction targets for developing countries. Other topics, such as emissions trading, could count on both supporters and opponents within the different subgroups.

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<sup>23</sup> As explained above, BASIC was only institutionalized as a coalition in 2009. But the four countries can collectively be considered as a subgroup of the G77/China before that date.

<sup>24</sup> In addition to being a subgroup of the G77/China, the LDCs are a category of UN member states that are often exempted from efforts within multilateral agreements, and frequently receive more funding than other developing countries.

At COP15, AOSIS again took a proactive stance, advancing a proposal by Tuvalu for a new protocol. The role of BASIC in Copenhagen has been extensively analyzed above. Their position was not always consistent, but they clearly supported reduction targets and were against their legal character. The LDCs for the first time acted as a real subgroup. They supported the AOSIS proposal, but their position did not carry much weight. The OPEC countries remained largely in the background. OPEC and BASIC eventually opposed the AOSIS proposal, and the G77/China chose the side of BASIC. At several instances during COP15, South Africa *de facto* took over the G77/China chairmanship from Sudan, which facilitated close contacts between BASIC and the coalition as a whole. On the issue of funding, there was a general consensus that more money should go to the developing countries, but the four subgroups were in disagreement over the specific financial mechanisms. As the official negotiations at the conference largely focused on procedural issues, the G77/China coalition was mostly active there. When it came to substantive decisions, it was seen to follow BASIC, who eventually made a deal with the US leading to the Copenhagen Accord.

We thus conclude that there has never been an absolute consensus within the G77/China at UNFCCC. The coherence was the largest in Kyoto, where, because of the issues at stake, the collective interest of developing countries was most important. Yet, disagreements have always come up, especially as witnessed at Copenhagen, where the positions of the four subgroups diverged widely. Regarding the key issues discussed within the UNFCCC, the largest division arises on the type of agreement and on the firewall principle. When there is no consensus, the G77/China has two options. Either it does not adopt a position, or it defends a lowest common denominator (which is often precisely in the interest of BASIC and/or OPEC). When the divergence among the subgroups is too wide and the G77/China is unable to unite the four positions, one subgroup is *de facto* abandoned. This happened for instance to OPEC in Berlin and to AOSIS in Copenhagen. In practice, the G77/China coalition always follows the BASIC position. The other three subgroups are much less powerful. The literature's claim that OPEC is a "negotiating superpower" (Barnett 2008: 6), is negated by this analysis, as their position is only supported insofar it corresponds with the BASIC position. AOSIS has never achieved its goals, because of a lack of support by the other G77/China members. And the LDCs' influence is overall nonexistent.

The heterogeneity of the G77/China coalition is not recent. It has existed since the start of UNFCCC negotiations—which in fact were a revival for the coalition—but is recently manifested more clearly because of the institutionalization of BASIC. But because of historical and institutional reasons, it is expected that the coalition will survive this heterogeneity, as its collective values are still strong.

## **7. CONCLUSIONS**

Since the end of the previous century, major shifts have occurred on the global stage. The reshuffling of the world order is to a large extent due to the emergence of new political and economic powerhouses, such as China and India, but also Brazil and a number of other countries. Besides their growing economic clout and political power, they are also responsible for an increasingly significant part of global GHG emissions. This paper studied the role of rising powers in the global climate change regime. The growing weight of those powers in world politics coincides with mounting demands to reform the UNFCCC. The efforts of rising powers will be crucial to achieve a more environmentally effective regime.

The paper first dealt with the question whether climate negotiations are shifting to smaller clubs within the climate change regime complex. Since the disappointment of multilateralism at COP15 in Copenhagen, climate change increasingly appeared on the agenda of other forums and institutions, some of which had just received an upgrade after the eruption of the global financial crisis, and others were newly formed with the explicit purpose of facilitating climate change discussions. But our analysis is not hopeful about such minilateral solutions. The G20 does have the potential to play a limited, instrumental role in the regime complex, as a complement to the UNFCCC. The MEF is not likely to play any role of significance. Basically, these minilateral constellations are no magic formula because they include almost all the same opposing interests as the UNFCCC. Complementing Eckersley's (2012) findings on minilateralism, ultimately the distribution of interests within such clubs matter rather than their size. If an intergovernmental agreement must be reached, those interests will eventually have to be reconciled.

Our second purpose was to analyze changing coalition dynamics within the UNFCCC. The institutionalization of BASIC—where China and India are clearly the leading members—indeed signals a change in negotiating relations, but that did not mean much more than the mere formalization of an already established reality. The analysis demonstrates that the BASIC countries have been important in the UNFCCC since the start, and that countries such as India or Brazil have adopted the role of leader or bridge-builder in several instances. In that perspective, it is rather surprising that BASIC did not assume a prominent position as a new, institutionalized coalition sooner. Copenhagen, a turning point for climate politics in several regards, was the defining moment for the creation of BASIC. While the four countries express their willingness to support rather than oppose the G77/China coalition, our analysis draws a different conclusion. Throughout the years, as the BASIC countries saw their political and economic power increase, came to dominate the G77/China. The subgroup now defines the position of that 50-year old coalition. As a consequence, the institution created in a previous century to defend the position of newly independent developing countries, is now overtaken by the rising powers. The 'other' developing countries are *de facto* sidelined.

Taking the analysis one step further, and building upon the conclusions of Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen and McGee (2013: 72-73), the two issues that we addressed in this paper are interlinked. While the G20 and the MEF did not have any substantial influence on the UNFCCC discussions, it is clear that the popularity of minilateral settings in recent years is linked to a trend of supporting a voluntary pledge-and-review approach in climate change mitigation instead of binding reduction targets. That is exactly the course that the COP15 took with the Copenhagen Accord, which was propelled by BASIC and the US. It could thus be assumed that the discussions with rising powers in minilateral settings paved the way for that turn in the UNFCCC negotiations.

Much has changed in the global climate change regime in recent years. The emergence of new powerhouses is a major factor of those changes, but not the only one. It coincides with other trends in international politics, with the global financial and economic crisis, and with developments proper to the climate change regime itself. It is therefore not surprising that a more complex world order is mirrored in a more complex climate change regime. The challenge now is to find a way to overcome that complexity in time to open up a path that can lead to a climate solution. In that endeavour, more research should be conducted on the specific ambitions of the rising powers with regard to mitigating climate change, and on how those can materialize in global solutions.

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