



RETOOL

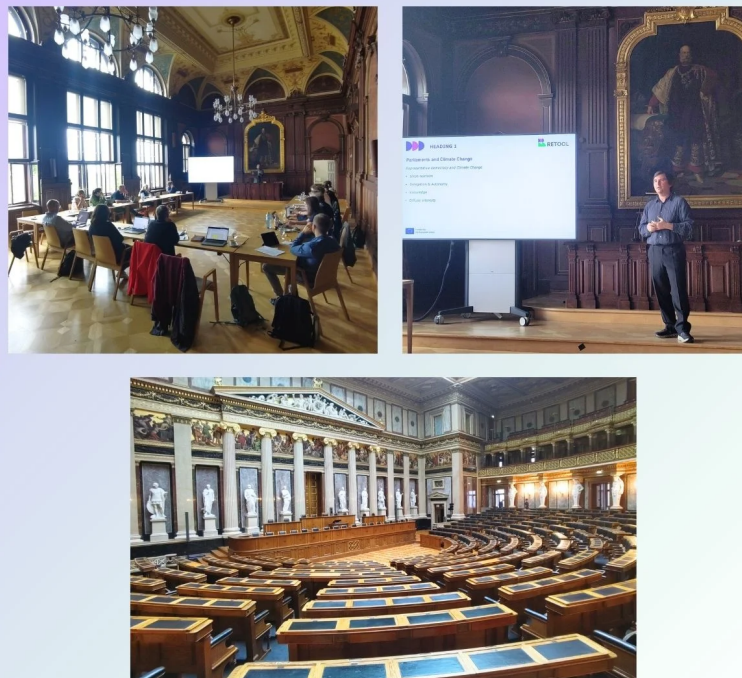
Strengthening Democratic
Governance for Climate Transitions

RETOOL Project Newsletter 7th Issue

As the RETOOL project nears its end, our journey of research and dialogue has reached an important milestone in reshaping conversations around climate democracy. Throughout this project, we have explored new perspectives on current practices and fresh innovations across key domains, deepening our understanding of how democratic governance connects with the urgent demands of the climate imperative.

With most of our core research now complete, our focus turns to sharing these final insights and frameworks designed to strengthen and renew democratic governance across Europe. Stay tuned for our upcoming final newsletter issues to stay updated on our final findings, key takeaways, and the lasting impact of this work.

EVENTS



RETOOL Workshop on Climate Change and Parliaments

On 14–15 September 2026, RETOOL hosted a workshop on Climate Change and Parliaments at BOKU in Vienna, timed to coincide with the International Day of Democracy. Across four panels, researchers from Europe and beyond discussed parliamentary oversight and accountability, party politics and climate-policy conflict, the framing of climate responsibility, and how parliaments respond to protest and backlash. Case studies ranged from Ireland and Austria to the US House of Representatives and the European Parliament. The workshop closed with a roundtable on comparative reflections and next steps for the project.



RETOOL at the Earth System Governance Conference

RETOOL partners took part in this year's Earth System Governance Conference at the University of Bath, which brought together early-career and senior researchers working on environmental governance. In the panel "Strengthening Democratic

Governance and Climate Action in Europe," held in the council chamber of Bath's historic Guildhall, the team presented ongoing research on how context shapes the meaningful implementation of public participation in EU climate governance.

JOURNAL ARTICLES

Research Article

Is far-right ecologism going mainstream? A comparison of right-wing groups in the European Parliament

Balša Lubarda  & Aron Buzogány  

Received 06 Aug 2025, Accepted 14 May 2026, Published online: 25 Jun 2026

Has far-right discourse on the environment permeated the mainstream right? This article tests the “far-right mainstreaming” thesis in environmental politics by comparing the voting records and parliamentary speeches of the European People’s Party (EPP), the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) and far-right party groups in the European Parliament since 2009. It finds some mainstreaming of far-right positions within the ECR since the mid-2010s, especially in the post-pandemic era. However, while right-wing groups share certain environmental positions, such as pro-people protectionism, subsidiarity, and balancing competitiveness with environmental policy, these are outweighed by more significant ideological and contextual differences.

→ [Read the article](#)

Human Rights, ESG Duties, and the Quest for Corporate Climate Accountability

open-access

Annalisa Savaresi

DOI <https://doi.org/10.21552/cclr/2026/2/5>

Human rights and Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) duties, once largely voluntary or soft-law standards, now increasingly shape corporate legislation and litigation. Analysing recent case law and regulatory developments, this article shows both the promise and the limits of relying on these duties to address corporate climate harms. It argues that their growing recognition signals a new phase in corporate governance, but that enhanced accountability must be balanced with legal certainty: the impact of due diligence regimes will ultimately depend on clear standards, coherent legislative design, robust enforcement and accessible remedies.

→ [Read the article](#)

Fast Today, Fair Tomorrow: Competing Priorities Shaping EU Climate Law and Policy

Alessandra Accogli , Jonas Meuleman, Aron Buzogány, Elena Fasoli, Diarmuid Torney

This review assesses how EU legal frameworks and institutions have balanced urgency ("fast") and justice ("fair") in climate governance since the launch of the European Green Deal, across the Commission, Parliament, Council and European Council, the Court of Justice of the EU and national courts. Bridging legal and political science perspectives, it identifies a recurring temporal mismatch: urgency is built in from the start, while fairness tends to be added afterwards. The Commission and Parliament broadly align on urgency, often reducing justice to distributive compensation; the Council and European Council emphasise nationally framed justice, which can temper urgency; and national courts engage strongly with urgency but leave burden-sharing to political actors. The authors argue that embedding justice early in policymaking is key to making fast and fair transitions reinforce each other, and set out an agenda for future interdisciplinary research.

→ [Read the article](#)

The European Green Deal and Dissensus over Liberal Democracy.

In a new chapter for *The Palgrave Handbook of Dissensus over Liberal Democracy in Europe*, Jeff Rosamond and Amandine Orsini examine how growing disagreement over the values of liberal democracy in Europe is spilling over into climate action and sustainability governance under the European Green Deal, the EU's flagship strategy to make Europe climate-neutral by 2050. Taking stock of the climate policy achievements of the first von der Leyen Commission (2019–2024), which launched the Green Deal, they trace how this political dissensus is playing out across the EU's institutions and in international fora.

They find that climate action has become a lower political priority for the EU's executive and legislative branches in the 2024–2029 term than in the previous one, driven by shifting electoral results, geopolitical realities and instances of green backlash. In response, the chapter argues for broadening democracy through civil society engagement and youth movements, both to rebuild citizens' trust in the EU political system and to make decarbonisation processes more inclusive.

→ [Read the chapter](#)

European Union Environmental Policy and Democratic Governance

In a new chapter for the *De Gruyter Handbook of European Union Environmental Policy*, RETOOL partners Diarmuid Torney, Aron Buzogány and Louisa Parks examine how democratic principles have shaped EU environmental policy. They argue that democratic legitimacy, meaning whether citizens accept EU decisions as fair and accountable, was not historically central to this policy area. Over time, however, the EU has increasingly responded to criticism of its "democratic deficit" by opening up more opportunities for citizens and civil society to take part in and deliberate on policy, alongside the traditional role of elected representatives. Looking at EU environmental policy through three lenses (representative, participatory and deliberative democracy), the chapter traces how its democratic dimensions have evolved in distinct phases, up to the launch of the European Green Deal.

→ [Read the chapter](#)

Corporate Climate Litigation in Europe: Scaffolding from State Obligations and the Rise of Polluter Pays

Europe has been the crucible of path-defining climate cases over the last decade. This essay argues that corporate climate litigation in the region has developed along two intersecting trajectories. The first extends public-law standards to companies, translating human rights and carbon-budget principles into private-law duties of care, due diligence and disclosure across entire value chains. The second is the rise of polluter-pays litigation, which seeks to apportion damages and adaptation costs to major emitters, testing how attribution science and emissions accounting can ground financial responsibility for climate harm. Drawing on leading and pending cases, the authors identify emerging principles alongside persistent enforcement challenges linked to insolvency, insurance and cross-border jurisdiction, and conclude that Europe is building a provisional but concrete framework for corporate climate responsibility and financial redress.

→ [Read the article](#)

POLICY BRIEF

Policy Brief | August 2026

Deliberation without delivery: what Estonia and Poland's climate assemblies got right, and wrong

By Aishwarya Machani



[Deliberation without delivery: what Estonia and Poland's climate assemblies got right, and wrong](#)

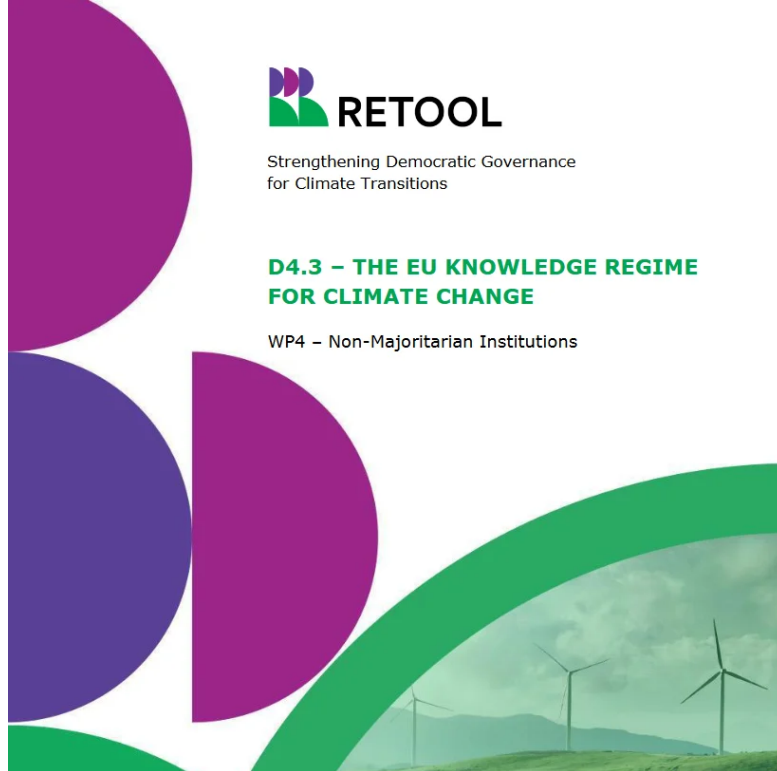
As the European Union transitions toward its 2040 climate targets, securing socio-economic legitimacy for green policies is more critical than ever. In response to rising policy backlash, Estonia and Poland experimented with citizen climate assemblies. This new RETOOL policy brief evaluates their real-world outcomes.

The analysis shows that while these deliberative processes succeeded in shifting mindsets and building technical literacy ("conceptual impact"), they failed to translate citizen recommendations into binding policy ("instrumental impact"). The brief highlights a core structural tension: deliberation thrives at the local level, where systemic political power is weakest. To prevent citizen fatigue and build genuine democratic legitimacy, the authors argue that future deliberative processes must be embedded from the start with explicit political mandates and enforceable follow-up frameworks.

NEW DELIVERABLES

**D4.3 – THE EU KNOWLEDGE REGIME
FOR CLIMATE CHANGE**

WP4 – Non-Majoritarian Institutions



The EU Knowledge Regime for Climate Change

Knowledge, expertise and policy advice play a key role in EU climate policymaking, given the regulatory nature of EU law and the multifaceted challenges posed by climate change. This report maps the EU's knowledge regime for climate change: the broad system of organisations, processes and actors that produces policy-oriented research, data, ideas and advice, with particular attention to its policy advisory system. Drawing on documentary analysis and interviews, it outlines the knowledge landscape surrounding the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of the EU, as well as cross-cutting bodies such as the European Scientific Advisory Board on Climate Change. The picture that emerges is of a complex, evolving regime with intricate patterns of advice creation and use.

The report then examines how the Commission used expertise in two key files: the revision of the Emissions Trading System (ETS) Directive under the Fit for 55 package, and the setting of the EU's 2040 greenhouse gas reduction target. The ETS impact assessment relies heavily on the Commission's own research and the Joint Research Centre, whereas the 2040 target documents draw far more on external EU bodies (the Scientific Advisory Board and the European Environment Agency) and on international organisations such as the IPCC and the International Energy Agency.

Independent Climate Advisory Bodies

More than 40 countries have set up independent climate advisory bodies, but their democratic role and their ability to withstand political pushback have received little attention. This RETOOL report assesses Ireland's Climate Change Advisory Council. It also looks at how advisory bodies in the UK, Ireland, Finland and Sweden cope with rising contestation over climate action. The report finds that these bodies contribute most to effectiveness and accountability but little to public participation, mainly because of limited mandates and resources. Their resilience depends less on public profile than on firm legal foundations, engagement with parliament and links to

binding commitments such as EU targets. The report ends with recommendations on how to strengthen them.

Courts and Climate Litigation

This RETOOL report looks at how climate litigation contributes to democratic climate governance in the EU. It draws on a mapping of climate cases before national courts and the Court of Justice of the EU, and an in-depth case study of Ireland. Most cases do not ask courts to make climate policy. Instead, they ask whether governments are following the climate laws and commitments they have already adopted, and courts generally leave policy choices to elected institutions. The report finds that litigation's main value lies beyond individual rulings: the prospect of court scrutiny pushes authorities to plan better, use scientific evidence and act more transparently, while giving citizens and civil society a way to take part. Challenges remain, including barriers to accessing justice, unequal legal resources and growing political resistance to court oversight.



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Send us an email for any questions or to express interest in the RETOOL research.

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