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German and British parliaments and conceptions of the global climate threat during the United Nation Earth Summit of 1992

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ABSTRACT

Ever since the beginning of international climate conservation politics there has been variation across nations in political traditions in debating the climate issue. Political decision-makers have interpreted the scientific findings on global warming with different emphases, thereby giving rise to variation in views on preferred national or international solutions. These tensions first became evident before and during the Earth Summit of the United Nations in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro, when the United Nations Climate Change Convention was prepared and eventually signed. This article discusses the historical background of international climate conservation politics and illustrates the tensions between contrasting parliamentary traditions in conceptualizing the climate issue. It analyses concepts and arguments presented in the German and British parliaments, which debated the necessity and justifications for international and national climate politics and the form these should take. Empirical analysis of the parliamentary debates of the period shows that during this phase in the early 1990s of introducing and initiating climate conservation policies parliamentarians debated the limits and prospects of national, international and supranational decision-making. The German and British parliaments have traditionally articulated different ideas on international and European co-operation and this difference is also apparent in the field of climate conservation policies.

KEYWORDS

Germany; Britain; climate conservation; parliament; concepts; arguments

Introduction

President Donald Trump's announcement in early June 2017 of the USA's withdrawal from the Paris Agreement on climate change caused extensive public debate on the future of the climate treaty and the world's prospects in general. This withdrawal opened up opportunities for other political actors to play a greater part in international attempts to avert the threatening climate crisis. Furthermore, national, international and supranational legislatures, governments and organizations are once more in conflict over the definition power¹ of the climate issue; about the political significance

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¹J.G.A. Pocock, 'Verbalizing a Political Act. Toward a Politics of Speech', *Political Theory* 1, (1973), pp. 28–31; C. Ilie, 'Parliamentary Discourse and Deliberative Rhetoric', in P. Ihalainen, C. Ilie & K. Palonen (eds), *Parliament and Parliamentarism: A Comparative History of a European Concept* (New York, 2016), p. 134.

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of scientific evidence of climate change from the viewpoint of global security, and what national or international alternatives are available to control it. The European Union (EU) has traditionally been clearly ambitious to take the lead in attempts to prevent climate change. When President George W. Bush announced the USA's withdrawal from the 1997 Kyoto Protocol in 2001, the EU was seen as the major driving force possibly able to save the Protocol.² In addition, China has announced its willingness to take the lead in global climate conservation policies. A new cycle³ in political debates about national and international climate conservation policies was launched fairly recently, thereby creating new space for political actors to define the issue.

This article discusses the historical background of international climate conservation politics and illustrates tensions between rival parliamentary traditions in the conceptualization of the climate issue. More precisely, I study conceptions and arguments debated in the parliamentary discussions of two European powers, Germany and Britain, during the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. This period in the early 1990s was the earliest phase in international debates about a concrete international climate treaty and these debates resulted the United Nations Climate Change Convention⁴ signed in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992. The period was crucial since political decision-makers such as the German and British national parliaments among many others debated the necessity and justifications for international and national climate politics more actively than ever before, and also the form that these policies should assume. Scholars have pointed out how the EU became a remarkably cohesive actor in the global climate conservation policies of the 1990s, but during the Earth Summit this was not yet the case.⁵ Thus at the European level the political debates of nation-states were of crucial importance in defining the political meanings of the climate issue and in requesting national and international to address the issue.

The aim of this research was to study parliamentary debates both in Germany and in Britain around the year 1992, when politicians and the wider public debated global warming and the prospects of an international climate change convention. Empirical analysis of parliamentary debates of the period shows that this phase in the early 1990s introducing and initiating climate conservation policies resembled earlier significant phases in world history during which politicians have debated the limits and prospects of national, international and supranational decision-making. The development around the First and Second World Wars in particular raised similar questions concerning the necessity to re-evaluate the meaning of national and global security and to initiate international and supranational co-operation, which inevitably limited national sovereignty. Further, the phase also allowed national parliaments to challenge the power of the executive to decide on foreign policy commitments.⁶

²S. Oberthür, 'The European Union's Performance in the International Climate Change Regime', *Journal of European Integration* 33, (2011), p. 669.

³S. Boyd & Å. Palviainen, 'Building Walls or Bridges? A Language Ideological Debate about Bilingual Schools in Finland', in M. Halonen, P. Ihalainen & T. Saarinen (eds), *Language Policies in Finland and Sweden: Interdisciplinary and Multi-sited Comparisons* (Bristol, 2015), p. 64, 69, 73.

⁴The UN Climate Convention later turned into the Kyoto Protocol (1997) and the Paris Agreement (2015).

⁵C.F. Parker, C. Karlsson & M. Hjerpe, 'Assessing the European Union's Global Climate Change Leadership: From Copenhagen to the Paris Agreement', *Journal of European Integration* 39, (2017), p. 246, pp. 248–50; Oberthür, 'The European Union's Performance', p. 673.

⁶The project *Supra- and Transnational Foreign Policy versus National Parliamentary Government, 1914-2014* Founded by the Academy of Finland (2014-17). Pasi Ihalainen, Antero Holmila and Teemu Häkkinen have addressed the constitutional development and establishment of supranational settings during these earlier periods. See, for example, T. Häkkinen,

Scholars have carried out conceptual analysis of political arguments and the emergence of key conceptions at the micro and macro level in the political use of language⁷ in the context of foreign policy issues and energy politics.⁸ Yet there is still room for further research in the language-oriented analysis of parliamentary debates in the context of national and international climate conservation policies. As the following empirical analysis illustrates, parliaments participated actively in the process of defining and conceptualizing threats posed by global warming and preferred forms of political solutions. The debates of the legislative institutions provide a fruitful source of material to study political concepts and arguments as used in various historical circumstances when policies were formulated, as scholars have illustrated.⁹ Political debates have considerable influence, for instance, on how institutions or policies are defined and formed. National legislative parliaments are often at the core of debates on current affairs, especially in a nation like Germany, whose Basic Law of 1949 gives considerable powers to parliamentary foreign policy. Parliamentary debates have been forums in which different parties and individuals have used political language in order to challenge or support politics.¹⁰ The purpose is to analyse how the climate issue was conceptualized in the German and British parliaments in competing or conflicting ways in order to promote certain views on international climate conservation policies.

A comparison of Germany and Britain is reasonable since both already recognized the importance of the climate issue in the early 1990s and eventually set ambitious targets for greenhouse gas emissions.¹¹ On the other hand, the German and British parliaments have traditionally expressed different ideas on international and European co-operation, also in the field of climate conservation policies. In the field of European integration, the German parliament has traditionally favoured an intensification of supranational decision-making, whereas Britain expressed concerns about its national sovereignty long before the 2016 Brexit referendum.¹² Rebecca Wills has studied how politicians in the British parliament

⁷British Parliamentary Attitudes Towards a Supranational Parliament and the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe, 1948-49', *Parliaments, Estates and Representation* 38, (2018), pp. 63-75; P. Ihalainen, *The Springs of Democracy: National and Transnational Debates on Constitutional Reform in the British, German, Swedish and Finnish Parliaments, 1917-1919* (Helsinki, 2017).

⁷For more on the micro and macro level analysis of political language, see, for example, P. Ihalainen, *Agents of the People. Democracy and Popular Sovereignty in British and Swedish Parliamentary and Public Debates, 1734-1800* (Leiden & Boston, MA, 2010); C. Ilie, 'Parliamentary Discourse and Deliberative Rhetoric', in P. Ihalainen and C. Ilie and K. Palonen (eds), *Parliament and Parliamentarism. A Comparative History of a European Concept* (New York & Oxford, 2016), pp. 133-45.

⁸T. Häkkinen, *The Royal Prerogative redefined. Parliamentary Debate on the Role of the British Parliament in Large-scale Military Deployments, 1982-2003*, (Jyväskylä, 2014); P. Ihalainen & S. Matikainen (eds.), *The British Parliament and Foreign Policy in the 20th Century* (Malden, 2016); M. Kaarkoski, 'Conflicting Conceptualisations of 'Democracy' in the German Bundestag During the Anti-nuclear Demonstrations, 1995-2001', *Parliaments, Estates and Representation* 38, (2018), pp. 121-33; Kaarkoski, M. 'Energemix' versus 'Energiewende'. *Competing Conceptualisations of Nuclear Energy Policy in the German Parliamentary Debates of 1991-2001* (Jyväskylä, 2016).

⁹Ihalainen, 'Agents of the People'; Ihalainen & Matikainen, 'The British Parliament', pp. 1-14; Ilie, 'Parliamentary Discourse', pp. 133-45; Kaarkoski, 'Energemix' versus 'Energiewende'; C. Wiesner, T. Haapala & K. Palonen, *Debates, Rhetoric and Political Action: Practices of Textual Interpretation and Analysis* (New York, 2017); K. Palonen, 'Speaking pro et contra: The Rhetorical Intelligibility of Parliamentary Politics and the Political Intelligibility of Parliamentary Rhetoric' in S. Soininen & T. Turkka (eds), *The Parliamentary Style of Politics* (Helsinki, 2008), pp. 82-105; A. Schulz & A. Wirsching, 'Parlamentarische Kulturen in Europa – das Parlament als Kommunikationsraum', in A. Schulz & A. Wirsching (eds), *Das Parlament als Kommunikationsraum* (Düsseldorf, 2012), pp. 11-26.

¹⁰W. Steinmetz, 'New Perspectives on the Study of Language and Power in the Short Twentieth Century', in W. Steinmetz (ed.), *Political Languages in the Age of Extremes* (Oxford, 2011), pp. 3-51; Ihalainen, *The Springs of Democracy*, pp. 37-41.

¹¹C. Downie, 'Shaping International Negotiations from within the EU: Sub-State Actors and Climate Change', *Journal of European Integration* 35, (2013) p. 706, 709, 711.

¹²T. Häkkinen & M. Kaarkoski, 'Sovereignty Versus Influence. The Question of European Unity and the Conceptualisation of Sovereignty in British Parliamentary Debates, 1945-2016', *Contributions to the History of Concepts* (13), issue 2, (2018), forthcoming.

have understood and articulated the issue of climate change. Her findings show that in the twenty-first century there was ‘a clear tendency on the part of politicians to “tame” climate change, presenting it as a technical issue, amenable to straightforward policy action’,¹³ which was largely also the case in the early 1990s. This was one contrasting tendency differentiating the German and British debates, since in the German parliament the climate issue was presented more as an obvious global threat requiring fast and effective actions and a shared position on the part of the European Community (EC)/European Union (EU) Member States.

All in all, even though the necessity to formulate an international climate convention as well as some kind of shared policies by the EC had been debated both in Germany and Britain since the late 1980s, there were differences in the expectations and ideas expressed in these parliaments. As other scholars have already pointed out, and as the case of this paper discusses further, nation-states like Germany and Britain, among other countries, have claimed to be leaders in international climate conservation policies even though they have actually occasionally articulated significantly different ideas on the nature of the threat posed by the climate issue and what this leading position entailed in terms of policy commitments.¹⁴ This notion highlights the importance of the debates studied since the parliaments were evidently struggling over the definition power of the climate issue and the political settings. Loren R. Cass studied the early framing (in the late 1980s and early 1990s) of climate change as a political problem at the international level and the associated normative debates in American, German and British climate policy debates. He argued that in the American climate policy debates climate change was framed as a scientifically uncertain, long-term threat that would be economically devastating to address. By contrast, in (West) German policy debates climate change emerged as an important international issue framed as a serious threat demanding both an international and a domestic response. In Britain the emissions reduction commitment did not initially resonate either with the political leadership or with the general public. Britain was therefore reluctant to go along with specific targets because it was wary of the potential costs to its economy. During the 1990s, Germany, and later also Britain, accepted emissions reduction commitments and pursued domestic greenhouse gas emissions reduction policies which in many cases could be difficult and costly to achieve. By contrast, the USA claimed that climate change was not sufficiently understood to justify costly domestic policy changes.¹⁵

The following empirical parts discuss first how the German parliament, the *Bundestag*, debated the issue of global climate change and which forms of national or international co-operation it emphasized as a solution. I then compare these debates with simultaneous discussions in the British parliament to identify tensions and similarities in the political argumentation of the national contexts.

¹³R. Wills, ‘Taming the Climate? Corpus Analysis of Politicians’ Speech on Climate Change’, *Environmental Politics* 26, (2017), pp. 212–14, p. 255.

¹⁴R. Watanabe, ‘Climate Policy Changes in Germany and Japan. A Path to Paradigmatic Policy Change’ (Oxon/New York, 2011); M. Jänicke, ‘German Climate Change Policy. Political and Economic Leadership’, in R.K.W. Wurzel & J. Connelly (eds), *The European Union as a Leader in International Climate Change Politics* (London and New York, 2011), pp. 129–46; T. Rayner & A. Jordan, ‘The United Kingdom. A Paradoxical Leader?’, in Wurzel & Connelly (eds), *The European Union*, pp. 95–111.

¹⁵L.R. Cass, ‘Measuring the Domestic Salience of International Environmental Norms: Climate Change Norms in American, German, and British Climate Policy Debates’, in M.E. Pettenger (ed.) (2007), *The Social Construction of Climate Change. Power Knowledge, Norms, Discourses*, (Hampshire/Burlington, 2007), p. 23, pp. 34–5, p. 41, pp. 46–7.

The German *Bundestag*: the climate issue as a global threat to humankind and security

From the German case, two extensive plenary debates of the *Bundestag* were selected for analysis. The first of these took place on 20 May 1992 and the second on 17 June 1992. The debate in May started with Chancellor Helmut Kohl's statement on the upcoming UN conference in Rio de Janeiro, but (as was common typical of the German parliamentary debates) many motions on related topics by different party groups were debated simultaneously. The second debate in June concerned the federal government's declaration with the title 'our responsibility in the world' and the 'Europe debate' and it also included many motions tabled by various party groups. In 1992 the federal government was formed by Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU) and liberals (FDP), whereas the Social Democrats (SPD), the Greens (Alliance 90/The Greens) and the left-wing party (PDS/Linke Liste) were in opposition.

In the German *Bundestag* in the early 1990s, MPs evidently considered the climate issue to constitute a global threat, which could cause far-reaching crises in the future of humankind or then serious security problems. Germany had committed to the national target to reduce CO₂ emissions by 25–30 per cent from the 1987 level by the year 2005. This was significant, since at the same time there were remarkable tensions in the political sphere, as also in society caused by the question of using nuclear energy in electricity production and its contribution to climate protection. Opinions were divided on whether nuclear energy should be supported as a CO₂-free energy source or if nuclear energy was preventing investments in climate-friendly energy production. Nuclear energy had been a cause of major tensions in German society and politics since the 1970s. The debate on the contribution of nuclear energy to the climate issue intensified in the second half of the 1980s, when the international scientific community raised political awareness on the issue and when the Chernobyl nuclear accident (1986) gave rise to greater opposition to nuclear energy in Germany. Helmut Kohl's cabinet in the early 1990s advocated an energy policy, which included the use of nuclear energy and an option to construct further nuclear power plants. Thus the CDU/CSU and FDP promoted nuclear energy as a CO₂-free substitute for fossil fuels. This policy line was strongly opposed by the German Green Party, which since its founding in 1980 had been demanding a rapid phasing out of nuclear energy. The party insisted that only more radical changes in energy production would solve the climate issue, since the use and construction of nuclear power was inhibiting investment in new, more climate-friendly forms of energy. Although less consistently, the Social Democrats also opposed nuclear energy. Immediately after the Chernobyl nuclear accident (1986) the party had made a decision to demand the phasing out of nuclear energy within ten years. The SPD's position on energy policy and climate protection was ambivalent as the domestic coal sector was traditionally very important to the party.¹⁶ Therefore the political parties had different ideas on which alternative means of energy production should be preferred in order to meet the challenge of climate protection, although they were unanimous on the importance of finding national and international solutions.

The MPs habitually described climate change as a potential global threat, which, without necessary and urgent efforts at the national, European and international levels

¹⁶Kaarkoski, 'Energjemix' versus 'Energiewende'.

would become a reality.¹⁷ The MPs clearly considered the Rio Summit to be one important element in launching a new era in world affairs during which the task was to bring environmental issues onto the international agenda. Before the summit of May 1992, Chancellor Kohl pointed out how the UN conference was being held at a time when the Western industrialized nations faced enormous economic and social challenges. Kohl warned about the temptation for countries to concentrate exclusively on their own problems. He claimed that the task of the Rio conference was to articulate an unequivocal intention to oppose such a provincial way of contemplating the issue. Further, the Rio Summit was not only a platform for the Third World countries but also for 'Germany's vital interests' as 'the dangers of worldwide climate change' also specifically concerned the living conditions in Germany.¹⁸

This illustrates an attempt to redefine the meaning of 'national interest' from the viewpoint of new environmental challenges and of arguing for the limitations of national-minded decision-making on issues of global significance, but not seen among the topics traditionally raised in high-profile political meetings at the international or at the supra-national levels. By the 2000s climate change had clearly become a part of 'high politics' as it was established as a priority item for virtually every bilateral, regional and global meeting of world leaders.¹⁹ In the early 1990s, this process was taking its first steps as articulated in the German MPs' discussions.

Besides the viewpoint that the climate issue imperiled the future of nature and the earth and hence of mankind, the German MPs also saw it as an issue that compelled them to reconsider concepts of 'safety' and 'security'. This desire to reassess safety conceptions was also considered more widely due to the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989 and other recent political upheavals in the countries of the Eastern bloc. Due to this political development, the meanings of safety and security increased and became a subject of re-evaluation. In scholarly discussions, the tendency to redefine safety and security conceptions from the viewpoint of environmental issues has been called the 'securitization' of environmental topics. For example, political actors have contributed to people's conceptions of various topics as safety-related. This 'securitization' process has also come to subsume environmental issues alongside more traditional aspects of geopolitics or international relations.²⁰ This process was already ongoing in the German parliament in the early 1990s. There were many references by the German MPs to the East–West division, which had just recently lost its earlier meaning as a serious potential threat to global security or to Western European security. New prospects for promoting world peace and prosperity therefore had to wait.²¹

However, at the same time the MPs argued how the North–South conflict was causing new security problems, necessitating, for example, a redefinition of the traditional tasks of the UN in order to properly promote world peace from the perspective of environmental

¹⁷For example, Schäfer (SPD) & Feige (Alliance 90/The Greens) Deutscher Bundestag (DB) 93. sitting, 20 May 1992, p. 7579, 7588.

¹⁸Kohl DB, 20 May 1992, p. 7575.

¹⁹Oberthür, 'The European Union's Performance', p. 678.

²⁰M. Trombetta, 'Climate Change and the Environmental Conflict Discourse', in J. Scheffran, M. Brzoska, H.G. Brauch, P.M. Link & J. Schilling (eds), *Climate Change, Human Security and Violent Conflict Challenges for Societal Stability* (Berlin, 2012); M. Brzoska, 'Climate Change as a Driver of Security Policy', in Scheffran, Brzoska, Brauch, Link & Schilling, *Climate Change*.

²¹For example, Baum DB, 20 May 1992, p. 7586; Repnik DB, 20 May 1992, p. 7606.

threats as, Gerhard Rudolf Baum, for example, argued in May 1992.²² Chancellor Kohl stressed in May 1992 how poverty and despair in the Third World countries had already driven people to search for a better future in the prosperous countries and caused conflicts in regions very near to Europe, which ‘could one day also threaten our security’.²³ The Minister of the Environment, Klaus Töpfer, stressed the value of the Rio Summit for foreign policy, since the conference promoted dialogue between North and South as the Helsinki conference in 1975 had achieved for the East and West.²⁴ Concerning the climate convention more specifically, Hermann Otto Solms (FDP) hoped in June that ‘the German government must at the next plenary session of the United Nations undertake to ensure that this organization carries major weight’.²⁵

All the speakers in the *Bundestag* seemed to agree on the necessity to introduce further efforts at different political levels to protect the global climate, which illustrates how by the early 1990s environmental discourses had already become mainstream political language. For example, all the political parties emphasized the idea of ‘sustainable development’ (although with varying meanings), which a few years earlier had not been the case.²⁶ However, there were some differences in the speeches by the right and left-wing MPs of the federal parliament, which mainly concerned how to combine economic growth and climate protection. For the Christian Democrats and Liberals, these were not necessarily mutually exclusive, whereas the Greens argued for the necessity of a more radical change in economic thinking ought more comprehensively. In the scholarly theoretical discussion about environmental policies, these different tones have been described as discourses of ‘ecological modernization’ and more radical green discourses. These tendencies in environmental discourses obviously include a wide variety of views. In general, ‘ecological modernization’ has emphasized technological solutions to environmental problems and continuity of economic growth, whereas more radical green discourses have in multiple ways emphasized the need for a more fundamental change in changing people’s awareness.²⁷

For example, according to Klaus-Dieter Feige (Alliance 90/The Greens), Germany was not able to offer ‘protection against climatic breakdown’ without ‘far-reaching structural changes in habits of production and consumption’. In the field of domestic energy policy, he advised against the use of nuclear energy, which the Green Party considered to preclude the possibilities to change the existing ‘inefficient’ structures in the energy system and hence to fulfil the German national target to reduce CO₂ emissions by 25–30 per cent from the 1987 level by the year 2005.²⁸ Joschka Fischer (Greens), Minister of Environment, Energy and Federal Affairs in Hesse, argued in the *Bundestag* how ‘the ecological crisis’ was the result of industrial growth and related social problems. He therefore encouraged the Chancellor to acknowledge the impossibility of financing both growth and additional environmental protection, especially when the fast-developing nations and the Third World countries were aiming at catching up with the industrialized countries.²⁹

²²Baum DB, 20 May 1992, p. 7586.

²³Kohl DB, 20 May 1992, p. 7575.

²⁴Töpfer DB, 20 May 1992, pp. 7598–9.

²⁵Solms DB, 97. Sitzung, 17 June 1992, p. 7971.

²⁶For more about the mainstreaming of environmental language in the *Bundestag* in the 1990s, see Kaarkoski, ‘Energimix’ versus ‘Energiewende’, pp. 105–36.

²⁷For example, J.S. Sryzek, *The Politics of the Earth. Environmental Discourses. Second edition* (New York, 2005), pp. 169–202.

²⁸Feige DB, 20 May 1992, p. 7589.

²⁹Fischer DB, 20 May 1992, p. 7598.

On the other hand, Gerhard Friedrich (CDU/CSU), for example, stressed how a position as a pioneer in environmental policies was actually a precondition for advancing the German economic position.³⁰

In the German parliament the climate issue was more prominent and precisely articulated as a global threat with far-reaching consequences than it was in the British parliament, where economic and scientific arguments took precedence over this kind of crisis talk, as will be argued later.

German parliamentary views on national, European and international climate efforts

Before the Rio conference the shared expectation in both the German parliament and the British parliament was that the climate convention would be signed at Rio. A draft for the convention had been prepared earlier in spring at a meeting in New York. In the international negotiations leading to the adoption of the UNFCCC (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) in 1992, the European Community and some Member States had unsuccessfully pushed for a binding commitment for all industrialized countries to stabilize their CO₂ emissions at 1990 levels by the year 2000. Since other OECD countries, notably the USA, resisted this pressure, the UNFCCC referred to the stabilization target only in an aspirational, non-binding manner and did not lay down any specific measures or quantified objectives.³¹ In the German parliament MPs frequently noted how Germany had hoped for binding targets for emissions reductions, but the preparations of the convention had already made clear before the Rio Summit that no binding targets could be agreed on at that point. Speakers from the opposition parties in particular criticized the participants of the Rio Summit for a lack of enthusiasm to truly push forward any binding targets to reduce CO₂ emissions.³²

The speakers of the ruling parties and the federal government for their part emphasized perceiving the Rio Summit as a starting point for a future-orientated process to protect the world's climate and to secure the future of humankind. They stressed how this process had started during the earlier decade, when the Vienna Convention (1985) and the Montreal Protocol (1987) to protect the ozone layer were agreed on and when the Toronto conference on global warming took place in 1988.³³ In his statement of 20 May 1992, Chancellor Kohl had already announced that Germany would host the first follow-up conference in which concrete international obligations for reducing CO₂ emissions would be handled.³⁴ According to Hans-Ulrich Klose (SPD) on 17 June 1992, an opportunity to further develop the Rio results already took place at the G7 summit in July 1992 in Munich.³⁵ The first conference of the parties to the UNFCCC took place in Berlin in 1995 and resulted a 'Berlin Mandate', i.e. the participants agreed to establish a process to negotiate strengthened commitments for developed countries.

³⁰Friedrich DB, 20 May 1992, pp. 7613–14.

³¹Oberthür, 'The European Union's Performance', p. 669.

³²Schäfer DB, 20 May 1992, p. 7579; Klose DB, 17 June 1992, p. 7965.

³³Kohl & Baum (FDP) & Paziorek (CDU/CSU) DB, 20 May 1992, p. 7575, pp. 7577–8, p. 7586, 7618.

³⁴Kohl DB, 20 May 1992, p. 7577.

³⁵Klose DB, 17 June 1992, p. 7965.

All in all, MPs from all parties agreed that the main responsibility for reducing CO₂ emissions rested with the industrialized countries, since they had largely caused the climate problem in the first place and had better financial means or other capabilities to combat it.³⁶ Gerhard Rudolf Baum (FDP) stressed in May 1992 that reluctance to agree on binding targets did not occur in Germany, but ‘in other sovereign countries’, especially ‘in the United States or in Japan or in some parts of the European Community led by social democratic governments such as Spain’.³⁷ According to Marita Sehn (FDP), the attitude of the USA towards any binding targets regarding amounts or timetables of emission reductions were proof positive of ‘how strong the national interests’ were.³⁸ On 17 June 1992, the Federal Minister on Environment, Klaus Töpfer, pointed out that in such a situation the ability of the Rio Summit to gather together 180 countries with highly diverse political and social situations to build mutual confidence was more important than immediately stabilizing CO₂ emissions at the 1990 level.³⁹

The MPs in the *Bundestag* emphasized the view that Germany was actually a pioneer or leader in the field of environment and climate protection. Moreover, even though they evidently considered international or supranational settings to be most important in order to take sufficient action against climate problems of global significance, they stressed the importance of national efforts in the meanwhile in the interests of international progress. Hence in this process in the early 1990s we can already see how Germany aimed at gradually taking the lead in global climate policies, when the USA was reluctant to do so by making any binding commitments and Britain emulated the USA, as the following sections will illustrate. Many speakers pointed out the German commitment to reduce CO₂ emissions by 25–30 per cent by the year 2005, which they saw as an ambitious target even though not sufficient in the long run.⁴⁰ In May 1992, Chancellor Kohl himself referred to his earlier statement in the *Bundestag* on 18 March 1987, in which he had encouraged making ‘the greenhouse effect’ a topic of international politics and protecting ‘the ozone layer’ more effectively. Further, Kohl stressed his own efforts in the G7 – meeting in Toronto in 1988, which, according to him, had raised the awareness of the world’s seven leading industrialized countries of the importance of environmental protection. According to Chancellor Kohl, the Rio Summit was an important milestone in the process of formulating a worldwide partnership on environmental questions.⁴¹

Given that Germany was actually a pioneer or leading promoter of climate conservation policies, the MPs attempted to redefine Germany’s role and efforts in foreign relations and world politics. The MPs saw that the climate issue opened up new opportunities for Germany to redefine its role in world politics in this emerging field of climate and environmental issues. Peter Paziorek (CDU/CSU) in May 1992 stressed the wider importance of the Rio Summit for Germany, since it enabled a ‘recently unified Germany’ to show that, ‘after decades of being divided Germany was living up to its responsibility in global environmental policies’.⁴² After the Rio Summit Chancellor Kohl made the interpretation that Germany had fulfilled this task of declaring its willingness to bear its responsibilities

³⁶Schäfer DB, 20 May 1992, p. 7580; Klinkert DB, 20 May 1992, p. 7582.

³⁷Baum DB, 20 May 1992, p. 7585.

³⁸Sehn DB, 20 May 1992, p. 7604.

³⁹Töpfer DB, 17 June 1992, p. 7986.

⁴⁰Klinkert DB, 20 May 1992, p. 7582; Feige DB, 20 May 1992, p. 7589.

⁴¹Kohl DB, 20 May 1992, p. 7576.

⁴²Paziorek DB, 20 May 1992, pp. 7617–18.

in the world.⁴³ MPs from both the ruling coalition and the opposition parties were fairly unanimous on this view about the visibility and success of Germany at Rio, especially when the USA had shown no inclination to take the international lead.⁴⁴

Yet the necessity for national efforts was likewise emphasized by many speakers; Ulrich Klinkert (CDU/CSU) argued in June 1992 that 'at the time of the crucial moment international attempts at CO₂ reductions are currently lacking both in the EC and in the world'.⁴⁵ According to Peter Paziorek (CDU/CSU), efforts to reduce CO₂ required efforts within national frames as well as within the EC and worldwide.⁴⁶ In June 1992 Ulrich Klose (SPD) stressed the importance of making local efforts in Germany if the target was to gain success at the international level. Therefore Germany's role in the world was initially defined by domestic actions.⁴⁷

Such expressions clearly acknowledged the lack of operational international or supra-national settings to act against the threat of environmental catastrophe, which made national solutions and policy decisions essential. At the same time, they also demonstrated the willingness to find solutions through domestic decision-making procedures, which highlighted the role of Germany's own parliament and its ability to determine policy lines. Since the UN conference in Rio de Janeiro and the UNFCCC stood for a new kind of global environmental policies, the related debates evidently also concerned the political power of various institutions including parliaments. In many countries issues related to foreign policy have traditionally belonged to the executive power and national parliaments have had only limited opportunities for involvement. In spite of a gradual increase in the chances for MPs to participate in foreign policy debates in recent decades as part of a wider process of democratization starting after the First World War, the ability of national parliaments to make decisions in this policy field has varied.⁴⁸ In the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm (1972) Germany was represented by the Federal Minister of the Interior, Hans-Dietrich Genscher. In the process leading up to the Kyoto Protocol, environmental departments both in Germany and in Britain played a key role. In Germany, parliamentary commissions and inquiries had been under way since the mid-1980s.⁴⁹ In 1992, MPs referred especially to the work of the inquiry commission entitled 'Protecting the world's climate' (1987–95).⁵⁰ In Rio de Janeiro Germany was represented by Chancellor Helmut Kohl and the Federal Minister of the Environment Klaus Töpfer, but Töpfer himself highlighted how the conference was of fundamental importance as an event to define foreign relations in the field of global environmental issues.⁵¹

The development at the EC level in the early 1990s also left much to the Member States' discretion, since the EC/EU common climate policy was making only little progress. In 1992, a directive introducing a tax on CO₂ emissions and energy, submitted by the

⁴³Kohl DB, 17 June 1992, p. 7955.

⁴⁴Schmidt (CDU/CSU) & Ganseforth (SPD) DB, 17 June 1992, p. 7980, 7990.

⁴⁵Klinkert DB, 20 May 1992, p. 7582.

⁴⁶Paziorek DB, 20 May 1992, pp. 7617–18.

⁴⁷Klose DB, 17 June 1992, p. 7962.

⁴⁸P. Ihalainen & S. Matikainen, 'The British Parliament and Foreign Policy in the 20th Century: Towards Increasing Parliamentarisation?', in Ihalainen & Matikainen (eds), *The British Parliament*, pp. 1–2.

⁴⁹Downie, 'Shaping International Negotiations', pp. 711–12.

⁵⁰Klinkert DB, 20 May 1992, p. 7583; Lippold DB, 20 May 1992, p. 7592.

⁵¹Töpfer DB, 20 May 1992, p. 7598.

Commission to the Council just before the Rio Summit, failed to be adopted.⁵² In the *Bundestag*, necessity and the anticipated or feared failure of this energy tax was often mentioned and the opposition criticized the EC countries for a lack of enthusiasm to promote the tax if the USA and Japan were not planning a similar tax simultaneously.⁵³ The German MPs generally hoped that the EC would take a similar leading role in the world as they considered Germany had within the Community, since they emphasized the EC as an instrument to solve problems which were too complex for individual nation states to tackle on their own.⁵⁴ In this question of an EC-wide energy tax, the British position was different since the British parliament clearly did not attach as much importance to the EC as did the German MPs.

Even though EU cohesion and unity in the international climate negotiations increased significantly during the 1990s, national policy decisions by the Member States continued to be important. While the Council of Ministers was the single most important actor shaping EU external climate policy and was agreed on common objectives, positions and strategies from the beginning of international negotiations, individual Member States nevertheless submitted their own proposals and evinced arguments in the actual negotiations on the UNFCCC. With regard to the Kyoto negotiations, the EU was considered to speak increasingly with one voice, namely that of the Council Presidency.⁵⁵

British parliamentary debates on the economics of climate change

In the British parliament the debates concerning the climate convention and the Rio conference were significantly shorter and less comprehensive than those in the German parliament. Hence there were several debates in the House of Commons and House of Lords in May and June 1992 and these were selected for analysis. In 1992 Britain was governed by the Conservative government of Prime Minister John Major. In the question of the climate issue, its global significance and possible national or international solutions, the House of Lords appeared to be more actively engaged and longer, more comprehensive debates took place there than in the House of Commons.

In Britain global warming began to attract more attention in public debate from the second half of the 1980s onwards. The public was especially interested in the question of scientific evidence of climate change and the work of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. Public as well as scientific interest in the global warming was thus apparent, but in the meetings of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change Britain, like the USA, already expressed a negative attitude towards any binding targets to reduce carbon dioxide emissions before the Rio Summit. In the late 1980s Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher had stressed the importance of combatting global warming and that Britain should play a leading role in this, but she also made it clear that this should not overburden domestic industry.⁵⁶

⁵²Oberthür, 'The European Union's Performance', p. 673.

⁵³Schäfer DB, 20 May 1992, p. 7580; Sehn DB, 20 May 1992, p. 7604.

⁵⁴For example, Klose DB, 17 June 1992, p. 7963.

⁵⁵Oberthür, 'The European Union's Performance', p. 671.

⁵⁶N. Williams & I. Guest, 'The Clouds of Uncertainty', *The Guardian*, 9 February 1990, p. 23; P. Brown, 'PM to Rally Fight Against Warming', *The Guardian*, 14 May 1990, p. 20; Author unknown, 'Reality of Global Warming is Acknowledged', *The Guardian*, 26 May 1990.

One of the most obvious differences between the German and British parliamentary debates on climate change was the articulation of the potential risks caused by the warming of the world's climate. This notion of global warming was not openly questioned in the British parliament either, and many speakers invoked convincing scientific evidence to support the case.⁵⁷ However, there were significantly fewer speeches on the possible consequences of climate change for the nation, the environment or national security. No equally far-reaching crisis talk as similar to that in the German parliament about the consequences for humankind and security occurred in Britain in spite of some attempts to argue more strongly about these aspects. In her research on British parliamentary debates on the Climate Change Act (2008) Rebecca Wills has concluded that in the late 2000s, the Labour Government made a conscious choice to frame climate change as a discussion about economics. This approach won the support of business groupings and helped to build the cross-party support which contributed to the successful passage of the Climate Change Act. She has further interpreted that the Labour strategy can be seen as part of a wider trend towards using economic language and policy instruments to achieve environmental goals, which has been called discourse of 'ecological modernization'⁵⁸ as discussed earlier. In Britain the courts were fairly actively involved in the climate issue and most of the cases were brought by industry actors typically seeking to challenge policies that affected their commercial interests.⁵⁹

This tendency to use economic arguments was already well established in the early 1990s, and MPs highlighted the importance of a workable market economy as a precondition for and consequence of climate conservation policies or environmental protection in general. For example, according to Anthony Coombs (Conservative), on 15 June 1992 'sustainable, market-led economic growth is a precondition for environmental improvements, rather than an alternative to them'.⁶⁰ This viewpoint evidently did not place economic growth and environmental protection as mutually incompatible, but rather presented how environmental protection required a market economy and its achievements. On 23 June Baroness Chalker of Wallasey highlighted that she also considered 'the position of our environment' serious, but she stressed the necessity of realism instead of to 'always look at it in terms of the doomsday scenario'. According to Chalker, it had been British scientists who had discovered 'a hole in the ozone layer which allowed us to push forward for a conference on environment and development'. Chalker recommended respect for 'the wealth that we in this country have of scientific knowledge which enabled us to see what could be done'.⁶¹ This comment described environmental and climate problems as surmountable or sufficiently controllable through advanced science and a workable economy.

All in all, there were significantly fewer voices in the British parliament to demand more radical changes or to speculate about the possible consequences of climate change than in the simultaneous debates in the German federal parliament. One of the strongest speeches promoting views other than economic or scientific considerations was that by the Bishop

⁵⁷Lord Thomas Strathclyde House of Lords Debates (HL Deb) 20 May 1992, vol. 537 p. 618; Baroness Lynda Chalker of Wallasey HL Deb 23 June 1992, vol. 538, p. 428.

⁵⁸Wills, 'Taming the Climate?', p. 215.

⁵⁹L. Vanhala, 'The Comparative Politics of Courts and Climate Change', *Environmental Politics* 22, (2013), pp. 447–9, p. 452.

⁶⁰Coombs House of Commons Debates (HC Deb), 15 June 1992, vol. 209, p. 660.

⁶¹Baroness Chalker of Wallasey HL Deb 23 June 1992, vol. 538, p. 428.

of Southwark, Robert Williamson, in the House of Lords on 20 May 1992, in which he defined the attitude of the Church of England to the forthcoming Rio conference by saying:

What the Church is saying – I hope humbly rather than arrogant – to the nations of the world as they prepare for the Rio summit is that the only way forward is in partnership and co-operation, not in exploitation and alienation.⁶²

He did not openly call for greater structural changes in ways of consumption and production, but he strongly stressed the seriousness of the situation. He quoted texts written by European theologians according to which:

What we call the environmental crisis is not merely a crisis in the natural environment of human beings. It is nothing less than a crisis in human beings themselves. It is a crisis of life on this planet, a crisis so comprehensive and so irreversible that it cannot unjustly be described as apocalyptic. It is not a temporary crisis. As far as we can judge, it is the beginning of a life and death struggle for creation on this earth.⁶³

In the German parliament, a similar religious element, even though less outspokenly, was present in the speech by Chancellor Kohl on 20 May 1992, when he demanded the inclusion of environmental thought in the UNs fundamental idea of promoting peace and prosperity in order to protect the ‘creation trusted to us’.⁶⁴

The element of potential instability in the world was also mentioned in the British parliament, when MPs spoke about a division of the world into North and South. For example, in the House of Lords on 20 May 1992 Lord Andrew McIntosh of Haringey called climate change ‘the issue between North and South’, since it was ‘produced by rich countries and suffered by poor countries’. For him, too, the solution was to promote a transfer to cleaner technology in southern countries.⁶⁵ In the same debate on 20 May Lord David Ennals argued ‘It is a sad irony of history that at a time when the world is freed from East/West tension, typified by the cold war, we should now be moving toward the possibility of North/South divisions.’⁶⁶

Conceptions of international co-operation in the British parliament

International co-operation in the field of climate conservation was also considered to be important in the British parliament. MPs presented the Rio Summit and the climate convention signed there as only the first steps and starting point for a process that would continue afterwards.⁶⁷ On 20 May 1992 the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State at the Department of the Environment Lord Strathclyde highlighted how Britain had played ‘a leading role’ in intergovernmental negotiations preparing the climate convention. The convention represented ‘a significant first step in the global response to climate change’ in which ‘developed countries will be taking the lead by taking measures aimed at return-

⁶²The Lord Bishop of Southwark HL Deb, 20 May 1992, vol. 537, p. 621.

⁶³The Lord Bishop of Southwark HL Deb, 20 May 1992, vol. 537, p. 621.

⁶⁴Kohl DB, 20 May 1992, p. 7578.

⁶⁵Lord McIntosh of Haringey HL Deb, 20 May 1992, vol. 537, p. 612.

⁶⁶Lord Ennals HL Deb, 20 May 1992, vol. 537, pp. 628–9.

⁶⁷For example, Lord Patrick Jenkin of Rodin HL Deb, 20 May 1992, vol. 537, p. 625.

ing emissions of CO₂ and other greenhouse gases to 1990 levels by 2000'. He continued how 'Further commitments to limit emissions may be necessary in future in the light of improved scientific and technological information.' In this process, 'the United Kingdom cannot go alone'.⁶⁸ Overall, the British parliament also wanted the country to be seen as having an important role in the international process of promoting climate conservation.

In common with German MPs, MPs in the British parliament emphasized their earlier aspiration to achieve a binding climate convention, which the preparations of the convention had proved impossible. For example, on 20 May 1992 Lord McIntosh of Haringey noted how 'the meeting which took place in New York last month significantly watered down the target, particularly on carbon dioxide'. Further, 'Instead of having a binding commitment to a return to 1990 levels by the year 2000, what the Government agreed to in order to get President Bush to Rio was that there should be an aim to get that figure.' He criticized the government's lack of enthusiasm, since it was only ready to make commitments concerning climate conservation at the EC level or internationally if other countries were ready to make similar commitments.⁶⁹ According to Baroness Inga-Stina Robson of Kiddington, 'international action on a grand scale will be necessary', but instead 'in order to persuade President Bush to attend the Rio conference the convention now refers to the return to 1990 levels as a guideline and that nations will report on progress at future conferences'. She, too, pointed out the British willingness only to commit Britain or Europe to the convention if other countries would do the same.⁷⁰ On 15 June Prime Minister Major answered criticism concerning the non-binding climate convention by saying 'without the negotiating skills of my right hon. and learned Friend the Secretary of State for the Environment, there might not have been a climate convention to sign at all'.⁷¹

The criticism of the USA in the negotiations about climate convention was altogether more direct in the British parliament (especially in the House of Lords) than it was in the German parliament. The British government, on the other hand, was more willing to support the position of the USA.

An illustrative example was a speech by Lord John Hatch of Lusby on 23 June, when he argued with some vehemence that the USA was obstructing progress without any real reason:

It became quite clear that the British Government were playing a part in the emasculation process. The British Government were making it easier for the United States phraseology to be used in the treaty which removed the commitments, and the targets, that had been fought for over that two-year period of negotiation and substituted mere empty aims. When the final negotiations were entered into, it was seen that it was the United States, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait that were the main opponents to making commitments in the climate treaty. Why was that? It was because they were anxious to continue the use of oil, and in the case of the United States it was the use of oil and coal. That was borne out by President Bush in the statement that he made just before Rio when he said that the environment movement would not be allowed to shut down the United States. What short-term, blind

⁶⁸Lord Strathclyde HL Deb, 20 May 1992, vol. 537, p. 618.

⁶⁹Lord McIntosh of Haringey HL Deb, 20 May 1992, vol. 537, p. 614.

⁷⁰Baroness Robson of Kiddington HL Deb, 20 May 1992, vol. 537, p. 623–4.

⁷¹Major HC Deb, 15 June 1992, vol. 209, pp. 652–3.

myopic language to use! Such language is short term because, by any test, a programme of energy efficiency, allied with the development of high technology, could very well increase economic progress, wealth and recovery in the United States.⁷²

The EC energy tax discussed earlier in the German context was also debated in the British parliament. These debates made clear how important it was for Britain, at least at this point, to first ensure competitiveness in the world markets. Promoting European integration in the field of climate conservation was only of secondary importance. Lord Derek Ezra, who gave a report about the EC energy tax on 20 May 1992 said that the British committee doing the preparatory work ‘fully supports the Commission’s twin objectives in the energy field, namely to improve efficiency and to cut emissions of carbon dioxide, the major greenhouse gas’. According to Ezra, Britain supported ‘the European Community to seek to persuade the international community to take action to tackle global warming’. However, he continued that the committee had ‘serious reservations on the carbon/energy tax as originally proposed by the Commission’, since ‘unless major competitor countries outside the Community followed suit Community industry would be put at a serious disadvantage by the additional costs’. The preparing committee had therefore recommended that ‘member states should levy the tax only if America and Japan did so as well’.⁷³ On the whole the MPs in the British parliament appeared to be more satisfied than their German counterparts when the EC energy tax appeared unlikely to make any rapid progress and there was a call for a similar tax by the USA and Japan as a precondition. However, the necessity of national, international and EC efforts was not denied by MPs.⁷⁴

The British Prime Minister Major also highlighted Britain’s leading role in the Rio Summit and existing national efforts in reducing CO₂ and other greenhouse gas emissions. However, he did not specify the exact amount of reductions, whereas in the German case it was to be 25–30 per cent during the same timeframe. On the other hand, by referring to Britain’s success in talking the USA into signing, he actually pointed out that the targets were practically more flexible, since otherwise the USA would not have signed the convention. Prime Minister Major stressed how he had been the first head of government in the G7 to commit to attend the Rio conference and, according to him, he encouraged others to do the same. Major called the results of the conference compromises and in the field of ‘climate change’ the UK would have been ready to go further.⁷⁵ John Bowis (Conservative) noted how the Prime Minister’s leadership was widely acknowledged before and during the Rio Summit throughout the developed and the developing world. According to Bowis, this was because of the Prime Minister’s insistence that ‘Rio was a first step and not an end in itself’.⁷⁶

More recently, Britain has been among the countries to develop one of the world’s most ambitious and far-reaching programmes of climate change legislation. Over the last decade governments have passed laws that regulate CHGs directly and developed legal provisions on renewable energy, energy efficiency, biofuels and measures to encourage investment in low-carbon technology. The flagship legislation was the Climate Change

⁷²Lord Hatch of Lusby HL Deb, 23 June 1992, vol. 538, p. 416–7.

⁷³Lord Ezra HL Deb, 20 May 1992, vol. 537, p. 615.

⁷⁴Lord Strathclyde HL Deb, 20 May, vol. 537, pp. 619–20; Lord Euan Geddes HL Deb, 20 May 1992, vol. 537, pp. 636–7.

⁷⁵Major HC Deb, 15 June 1992, vol. 209, p. 649.

⁷⁶Bowis HC Deb, 15 June 1992, vol. 209, p. 659.

Act of 2008, which provided a long-term framework for improving carbon management. It included specific and binding emissions reduction targets of at least 80 per cent reduction from 1990 levels by 2050.⁷⁷ Interestingly, the current Prime Minister, Theresa May, still refused to sign a joint declaration by Germany, France and Italy in opposition to Donald Trump's withdrawal from the Paris Treaty.⁷⁸

Conclusion

This article has presented ideas and conceptions regarding climate conservation policies that were expressed in the German and British parliaments in May and June 1992, when the United Nations Climate Change Convention was internationally debated and eventually signed at the Rio Summit. The climate issue was recognized and described by MPs as a potential threat to the future of humankind and global security. The climate issue was more clearly articulated in the German *Bundestag* than in the British parliament but attempts to protect the global climate were nevertheless considered as fundamental topic and as a new era in world history in both parliaments.

This phase in world history in the early 1990s introducing and initiate climate conservation policies at national, supranational and international levels resembles earlier significant phases during which the role of national parliaments was reconsidered and re-evaluated in relation to the decision-making power of the executive and to supranational or international decision-making processes. The constitutional development especially, around the time of the First and Second World Wars, raised similar questions which were now considered in the context of the climate issue.

The need to formulate an international convention, as well as some kind of common policies by the EC, was debated in both Germany and Britain, but there were differences in the expectations expressed in these parliaments. German MPs were clearly more inclined to move towards supranational or international decision-making, whereas the sovereignty of the nation-states was more important for Britain. National parliamentary decision-making was considered to be important by both the German and British parliaments and both countries wanted to be seen as the leader in the climate convention preparations. For Germany, this meant setting an example through binding targets at the national level whereas Britain stressed its contribution in getting the USA sign the climate convention.

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⁷⁷Vanhala, 'The comparative politics', pp. 255–6.

⁷⁸For example, author unknown, 'No 10 Defends May not Signing Letter Opposing US on Paris Climate Deal', *The Guardian*, 2 June 2017.

especially on parliamentary debates, political concepts, the history of European integration and on environmental and energy history. This article was written as part of the research project 'Supra- and Transnational Foreign Policy versus National Parliamentary Government, 1914–2014'. Her publications include: M. Kaarkoski, '*Energiemix*' versus '*Energiewende*': *Competing Conceptualisations of Nuclear Energy Policy in the German Parliamentary Debates of 1991–2001* (Jyväskylä, 2016); M. Kaarkoski, 'Conflicting Conceptualisations of "democracy" in the German Bundestag during the Anti-nuclear Demonstrations, 1995–2001', *Parliaments, Estates and Representation* 38, (2018).