The Ecopolitics Podcast – Episode 2.7: Multilateral Agreements and Institutions in Global Ecopolitics (TRANSCRIPT)

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Guests: Radoslav Dimitrov (Western University)

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INTRO: In this episode we talk with Dr. Radoslav Dimitrov, Associate Professor at Western University to learn more about multilateral environmental agreements. How are they created? How are they enforced? Dr. Dimitrov also explains why some MEAs are essentially "hollow" or "empty" despite appearing to onlookers as legitimate institutions.

[00:00:00] **Radoslav Dimitrov:** If you do create an empty institution, grandiose like the United Nations Forum on Forests in the Copenhagen Accord, states use them as an excuse to say: 'We don't need anything else. We've we already established something'. And so that empty institution then is used as a political tool to neutralize any political pressures for creating meaningful policy at the international level and that effectively legitimizes the gap in governance or collective inaction on important issues like climate change.

[00:00:41] **Ryan M. Katz-Rosene:** Hello and welcome to the Ecopolitics Podcast, season two, Global Eco politics. This is a podcast for university students tackling some of the big questions in the field of global environmental politics. I'm Ryan Katz-Rosene from the University of Ottawa and my co-host for the show is Dr. Peter Andrée from Carleton University. And our guest for today is Dr. Radoslav Dimitrov, an Associate Professor of international relations at Western University. Professor Dimitrov has participated in a variety of United Nations negotiations on the environment since 1999. He's had a formal role on the EU delegation to international climate change talks since 2009. And these are some of the experiences that make Radoslav the perfect person to talk to about today's topic: multilateral environmental agreements. So I'm wondering, Peter, can you set up today's episode?

[00:01:38] **Peter Andrée:** Sure. Thanks, Ryan. As you said, our focus today is on multilateral environmental agreements, or MEAs for short. There are dozens of such agreements, mostly negotiated by nation-states under the auspices of the United Nations since the Second World War. Though there are also smaller regional agreements too, and some that were established earlier in the last century. They cover a wide variety of environmental issues. MEAs are typically designed to establish rules and regulations for environmental issues that transcend national borders, whether that's concerning the trade and toxic waste, or genetically modified organisms, whether it's about biodiversity protection, or the regulation of persistent organic pollutants, and climate change.

[00:02:24] While they govern transboundary issues, most MEAs are intended to establish new norms and practices at the level of the state and this is where the politics of creating and enforcing them often gets tricky. In today's conversation with professor Dimitrov, we'll get into a discussion about what MEAs are, how they work or don't, as the case may be.

[00:02:45] We'll also discuss the idea of a hollow international agreement, which is an idea professor Dimitrov has written about; this is an MEA that states agreed to, but may not have had any real intention of living up to. Professor Dimitrov, welcome to the Ecopolitics Podcast.

[00:03:02] **Radoslav Dimitrov:** Thank you, Ryan, Peter. It is very good to be here and have this conversation. Thank you for having me.

[00:03:08] **Peter Andrée:** Well, we're looking forward to this discussion. I wonder if we can start by asking you to define these things called multilateral environmental agreements. Tell us a bit about what they are, why these negotiated treaties are the main tool for addressing global environmental issues, and what difference they make?

[00:03:26] **Radoslav Dimitrov:** Multilateral environmental agreements, are roughly speaking, treaties between states. Most of them are fairly legally binding, but they do vary in terms of how strict the rules are that states undertake. Multilateral environmental agreements can vary from conventions, which are generally very broad framework agreements without very specific goals, to protocols which tend to be very specific.

[00:03:56]I think that the term really covers a very wide range of agreements amongst states and some of them are actually very nonbinding, very weak and loose agreements that almost resemble political declarations. I think that what is key really is that most of them are negotiated by state governments who continue to be probably the primary actors on the world stage when it comes to environmental policy.

[00:04:25] And we have a very, also large number of these agreements. According to the most comprehensive database, currently there are 1,300 MEAs that are truly multilateral and they cover an enormous range of environmental issues. And interestingly, many of them have been negotiated very recently, the vast majority of existing environmental treaties were negotiated after 1972, when we had the first major global conference on the environment in Stockholm.

[00:05:01] **Peter Andrée:** That's really helpful. And I was way off in my introduction when I said there were dozens of these treaties and you've corrected me in pointing out that there's well over a 1 000. I've heard, and I know that there are some treaties that really try and regulate a global issue, say like forest depletion, yet there's a differential impact in terms of which states have to change practices because of that.

[00:05:23] And those same states may not feel that they're affected in the same way. Can you tell us, what's the other side of the story? If, say on ozone depletion, an international instrument is the obvious choice and there is wide buy-in, when is there less buy-in around a multilateral environmental treaty?

[00:05:41] **Radoslav Dimitrov:** Yes. In general, if the transnational characteristic of the problem is weaker, multilateral environmental agreements become less necessary and perhaps less effective. And occasionally you would actually see states trying to discuss international issues that really don't absolutely have to be addressed in a multilateral manner, but the component of interdependence is the crucial variable that really necessitates environmental treaties.

[00:06:10] Now, even if the demand is there, some problems are much more amenable to multilateral environmental agreements because they're easy to deal with. For example, with ozone depletion, the causes of the problem were fairly concentrated and they could be found in particular industries. They didn't involve broad social practices.

[00:06:37] And so theoretically it makes it easier to negotiate because governments know where the problem is, they know who are the corporate actors that they will have to put under regulation if they go under an international treaty. And indeed, ozone depletion agreements are one of the success stories in global environmental politics. And we have almost perfect compliance with the treaties, partly because implementation is relatively easy - it doesn't affect all sectors of society and also because international transparency is a little bit easier because it's somewhat easier for other countries to follow what is happening, let's say with American industry or Chinese industries producing ozone depletion substances.

[00:07:21] There are other types of problems that are so much more difficult to tackle internationally because the causes relate to a much broader range of sources, some of which may be industrial, but some of which may relate to how society simply lives and does things. Climate change is a classic example of such a particularly maligned problem that is complicated for a number of reasons. And one of them is that the sources of climate change are such a broad range of social activities.

[00:08:00] Everything that we do really ,technically contributes to climate change, from energy consumption and production to industrial manufacturing and virtually every sector of heating and cooling of residential buildings, transportation, agriculture, and food production. And therefore when states approach this topic on the international agenda, they know that they are really negotiating the future of their society, because if there's to be a meaningful treaty, they really have to change everything that their society does. It makes it very difficult.

[00:08:34] And an additional reason why climate has been particularly tough to negotiate internationally is because monitoring compliance is a lot more complicated and providing that international transparency to state actions is also more difficult.

[00:08:50]**Ryan M. Katz-Rosene:** Radoslav I'm wondering if I can ask you about effectiveness of environmental agreements?

[00:08:55]It's often been observed that these multilateral environmental agreements 'don't have any teeth', quote unquote, and if we compare this to something like a trade agreement where if the states don't adhere to the agreements, this can result in retaliatory measures

sanctioned by the World Trade Organization for instance, and various dispute settlement mechanisms.

[00:09:14] So I'm wondering, do we see anything like this in multilateral environmental agreements? Where are the teeth and why don't we have these sort of dispute mechanisms that states can turn to if states aren't following what they say they're going to do?

[00:09:29] **Radoslav Dimitrov:** When you look at the vast majority of multilateral environmental agreements, they tend to have very weak provisions for ensuring compliance and monitoring implementation.

[00:09:41]Typically states do not really face any penalties for non-compliance. If a country violates an agreement, let's say the Kyoto Protocol, it doesn't face financial sanctions, it doesn't face any political or diplomatic sanctions. The only thing that they will have to do is to take more obligations for the next commitment period after the treaty expires, which is a very hypothetical sort of burden that they will have to face in the future. And for that reason, environmental agreements have come under criticism from all sides as being potentially ineffective because they rarely have teeth. It is just very hard to find treaties where a country would be penalized by any international body for non-compliance. The Paris Agreement has actually even weaker compliance mechanisms.

[00:10:37] What is also important to note, however, is that this situation is not unique to the environmental realm. If you look at all of international law in all issue areas, including security, human rights, and political economy, you will see that it is actually very typical for international treaties. Very rarely do we see very strong sanctions to punish non-compliance and those provisions are embedded in very few treaties. By far, international law, including in the environmental arena, relies on self enforcement, it relies on the honor system, and the promises that states have made, assuming that they will keep those promises. Now this in theory sounds very weak and unpersuasive. And theoretically and logically we would expect to see very low compliance.

[00:11:32] And then a third side of the story is that empirically, by far most states comply with most of the multilateral environmental agreements that they create. The level of compliance is very high, tends to be very high, and that is very puzzling, particularly in conjunction with the fact that there are very weak compliance mechanisms. So to be very blunt, states keep their promises even though they won't suffer any consequences if they don't do it. And that has been one of the academic puzzles.

[00:12:09] **Ryan M. Katz-Rosene:** Do you see any potential for change there? Do you think there might be a multilateral environmental agreement in the future that might be able to leverage some more teeth?

[00:12:22] **Radoslav Dimitrov:** I think it's possible to think of a hypothetical scenario where an issue like climate change, for example, can be seriously brought into the Security Council.

[00:12:31] And let's imagine that on the pressure of the United States, that has been absolutely devastated by climate impacts in the past years, the US and other powerful countries may bring climate change back to the global agenda and reframe it as a security

issue. And if you see a series of Security Council resolutions that enshrine it in this new discourse, I think that future negotiations might actually reach for real teeth and make violations of future climate law punishable, including by diplomatic sanctions and in some extreme Hollywood scenario, even military action. But that of course is hypothetical.

[00:13:16] **Ryan M. Katz-Rosene:** Well hypothetical it may be, but it's remarkable that environmental agreements might go down that path, and I think we'll come back to this in a minute when we talk about your conception of hollowness in international agreements.

[00:13:28] So we'll get back to this, but I want to ask briefly about the way that environmental agreements are negotiated. And I think if I'm not mistaken, there's an attempt to seek consensus, or there's a negotiation by consensus in many MEAs, and I'm wondering, in your experience, what does working to achieve consensus really mean in practice? How does this take shape? Does this mean that we're always beholden to the lowest common denominator, so to speak?

[00:13:57] **Radoslav Dimitrov:** Well, let me take you along to a very specific real situation. In the climate change negotiations for the last 25 years or so, consensus has been an absolute requirement for making any collective decisions at the international level. What that really means is that when the 193 countries involved negotiate climate agreements, they can only create them by consensus, if all of them agree explicitly or implicitly.

[00:14:25] After round and round of negotiations that I have attended, including major conferences of the UN, no decision is possible if even a single country imposes that decision. So what that really means is that the consensus requirement gives every single country a veto power over anything, including the completion of treaties.

[00:14:50] Now in practice, occasionally that has given tremendous leverage to countries like Bolivia, who in 2010, during a conference that we attended in Cancun, Mexico, really used that veto power to block a series of agreements called the Cancun Accords on climate change that were actually very substantive with policy elements in it.

[00:15:13] And nobody could persuade Bolivia to change its mind. Now, in that particular case, the Cancun Accords were nonetheless accepted because everybody really sidelined Bolivia. But the main problem remains, that because of the consensus requirement, agreements tend to be towards the least common denominator.

[00:15:35] Another very good example, just from my own experience, comes from the negotiations of one of the major climates scientific reports from the IPCC, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change. I attended the conference during which the final version of the reports had been negotiated among country delegations before it is made public globally. And among them, thousands of elements of the report that were negotiated was a global map that for the first time in the history of climate science, showed the entire world and how water supply and availability is going to be affected as a result of climate change.

[00:16:21] I remember at time, which was in 2007 and the meeting was in Valencia, Spain. At that time, scientists were very excited about this map because it was the first time that they actually aggregated data on a global scale to produce it.

[00:16:36] One country said, 'We don't think that the maps should be part of the report', and that country was Saudi Arabia. Now Saudi Arabia, in general, has tried everything to obstruct any kind of discussion on climate change, whether it is science or politics. And the Saudis didn't really have problems with the science behind the map, they simply said, 'Well, if you look at our own region, that is not what scientists tell us is going to happen to Saudi Arabia'. So they blocked the inclusion of the map and other countries absolutely furious because they said this is a very important policy tool that we have to provide to policy makers around the world, so that they can plan accordingly.

[00:17:18]Because the Saudis stuck to their guns, they established a separate negotiation process just on the future of this map, whether it should be part of the report or not. The negotiations lasted for a day and a half. The Saudis didn't change their minds, and as a result of this, the global map was left out. It never saw the light of day.

[00:17:37] I kept an electronic copy of everything. So I'm able to show it to my students in class, but this map never became part of an official IPCC report. And this is just one of many examples that illustrate how even a single government can actually dilute decisions and the outputs of international negotiations, just because the consensus requirement that guides decision-making in the environmental arena at the global level, really implies that agreements tend to follow the least common denominator.

[00:18:13] **Peter Andrée:** That's a really great example, Radoslav and I just want to make a plug. We have interviewed a few different people on our series who have served as reporters with the Earth Negotiation Bulletin, which is a reporting service for international environmental negotiations. And for students listening, who are doing research projects related to international environmental negotiations, it's great to go on the Earth Negotiations Bulletin website, pick the meeting that you're interested in, I believe the IPCC meetings are there and they're reported on, and you can go into the - it's not quite a transcript, but the summary of what happened in those meetings -and you can search for what Saudi Arabia said, for example. And at least in plenary, they're named by the state and what they say, and it's very interesting to see those negotiating dynamics played-out and reported on through that reporting service. Have you used the Earth Negotiation Bulletin in your own work Radoslav?

[00:19:11] **Radoslav Dimitrov:** I use the ENB reports. I think that the ENB remains the primary source of information that is publicly available to every citizen on the plant about international environmental discussions, including negotiations of future treaties. And a serious student who wants to do a research paper really must use ENB reports as part of their bibliography.

[00:19:37]It is really a very exciting way to learn day by day, what countries said what during the negotiations on any particular environmental issue. In addition, their website includes

very exciting photographs and sometimes even videos from the negotiations. So it's really great.

[00:19:52] I also feel that many observers feel that over the years, the ENB reports have evolved and they've changed their character where they've become very kind of dense and it makes it a little bit more difficult for some citizens who are not well-informed about the issues involved to actually follow the conversation. But yeah, the ENB just remains a wonderful source of information.

[00:20:20] **Peter Andrée:** So, Radoslav you've been to a number of negotiation sessions on environmental agreements, as you were just saying. And you teach students about the dynamics of these meetings through the use of in-class negotiation simulations. Both Ryan and I do that in our classes, too, thanks in part to an article you wrote about UN simulations as a teaching tool a few years back.

[00:20:42]I wonder if you can tell us a little bit more about the atmosphere of these meetings, how they work. They're fascinating events that have thousands of people meeting in these large conference centers over days, sometimes weeks, to hammer out these agreements. And when you first started going, what struck you as really interesting and exciting about how it all works?

[00:21:06] **Radoslav Dimitrov:** Well, there's a tremendous sense of elation when you first begin attending these meetings, because you see delegations from all over the world, you see the full panorama of cultures and the entire sort of political elite seems to be in one place. Occasionally, you see the mega climate conferences that always break the records in terms of the number of heads of states, for example, that attend those meetings.

[00:21:31]I remember how excited we all were in Copenhagen, 2009, when 119 Kings, Presidents and Prime Ministers attended the conference and were in the same building, in one particular time. And so it's really a tremendous experience because very often these meetings do produce important decisions and so you will feel honored and privileged to be observing history in the making.

[00:22:01] At the same time, I think that it's important to remember that these conferences that get all the media attention are actually just the tip of the iceberg. Most of the negotiations on any particular treaty take place during much smaller rounds of negotiations with exactly the same political delegations - the chief negotiators are the same, except without the media, without the hype and fewer NGOs attending.

[00:22:28] More obscure meetings are where actually much more gets done in forging the text of the future treaty. Another thing to point out is that people who do attend any of those meetings are likely to actually remain blind as to what is truly happening.

[00:22:45]The assumption is, if there's a meeting in Bonn, Germany, and if we can go and we get even accreditation to get the access to the meeting, somehow we'll go and see what climate negotiations really are. And that is simply not true and not possible because most people who attend, they receive the yellow badges of civil society and civil society representatives are not really allowed in the rooms where the true negotiations take place.

They are allowed to the grand opening of the session, the closing of the session, the plenary meetings, but they're excluded from many of the working group sessions where the actual negotiations take place

[00:23:26] And even if they are allowed, then they're not going to be able to attend the informal consultations that take place between any number of delegations. Because China and the US, for example, have bilateral consultations somewhere in a small room with nobody having access.

[00:23:43] The European Union that I have represented very regularly holds consultations with island nations who are highly vulnerable to climate change because we sympathize with them, we try to be on the same page, both the islands and the EU have always wanted strong climate treaties. But these negotiations that are informal and still important are again, completely beyond the reach of any member of civil society. And unfortunately, what that means is that in today's world negotiations are not really transparent.

[00:24:15] The media doesn't help either because journalists have very superficial knowledge about the issues and they only arrive for a couple of days just to do their little story and it invariably ends up being much more superficial than what is actually happening among key countries.

[00:24:35] **Peter Andrée:** That's been very helpful. And so I guess I want to go back to this this idea of the mock negotiations that we do in our classrooms and that you do as well because those are intended to simulate some of the real work as well, as we have our students not just representing civil society, but also often representing state actors negotiating among one another to write text for international agreements. I'm curious, when you do that kind of work with your students, what are you really hoping that they take away from that simulation exercise about how these negotiations happen?

[00:25:13] **Radoslav Dimitrov:** The simulations that I run in my courses are designed to be as realistic as possible because they constitute experiential learning. And my goal is to help the students learn, through personal experience, some of the current political realities of the actual negotiations. One of the things, for instance, that they learn is that diplomats oftentimes do not have full information either about the problem or about what other countries want.

[00:25:47] I deliberately designed uncertainty into the simulations and that is important because this is how it works in the real world. Most diplomats live in some anxiety because they feel that most of the time they are in the dark about some very important aspects of the negotiations.

[00:26:04] Nobody has lucid vision and complete information, and it is important to be able to operate meaningfully despite the uncertainty. The other thing is that time pressures are absolutely crucial for negotiations. What typically happens is many actors hold their cards close to the chest until the last days of the conference when they really put their demands on the table.

[00:26:30]And some people are even lulled into complacency because oftentimes we are on the last day of the conference, and after two weeks there is a solid text on the table ready for adoption. All the controversial issues have been solved, everybody is happy, and they think that in two hours, we can wrap up the conference and go back to go home.

[00:26:51] That is usually the time when you have to be alert the most, because this is when the skillful diplomats pull out of the blue their key demands that surprise other delegations. But because it's the end of the conference, the time pressure makes it more likely that those demands will actually be met. Therefore, one has to be on one's toes all the time, especially towards the end of the negotiations.

[00:27:21] Also students learn experientially that just as in the real world, in the simulations those who win are not necessarily the big and important delegations like China or India or the European Union, or the United States. The players that are influential are usually the ones who are the most initiative.

[00:27:44] Intellectual leadership matters a great deal in world politics and this is why we see small countries like Tuvalu being hyper-influential in climate negotiations because they table a lot of proposals, they table entire treaty texts and they say, 'We want this to be the basis of negotiations'. And any country can make text proposals and then everybody else must discuss and address them.

[00:28:13] And in order for initiatives to really be effective, delegations have to be also very prepared. The reason why the United States, for example, is instantly very influential in global politics is not just because they have a big military, which is really irrelevant in environmental negotiations, or that they have a big economy, but because American delegations in my experience, are invariably superbly prepared before they even arrive at the venue.

[00:28:43] There's so much homework going on in the weeks and months before a round of negotiations and American diplomats really know the issues inside-out, they have looked at all the angles, they have strategized every possible political development that can take place and they know what their response is going to be. And so preparation plus initiative really is the formula for effectiveness. And that comes as a surprise to many students and they learn it partly through the simulations.

[00:29:12] **Ryan M. Katz-Rosene:** This is really fantastic, Radoslav, and I've also really enjoyed teaching simulated environmental agreements and it's a wonderful experience, I find, for the students as well. And it's always those simulations that the students talk about after the course is done as being the most useful or effective learning tool. And so I echo Peter's thanks for putting together some readings and documentation on that to close-up the learning experience.

[00:29:38]I want to shift a little bit, although it's not too much of a shift actually, because you've come up with some terms that I think are really important in this field. And one of them is 'hollowness', in terms of hollow agreements, and you've also conceived the idea of an 'empty institution', which I think are similar concepts, so maybe you can touch on that.

[00:30:01] But I'm wondering if you can just define what a 'hollow agreement' is or what is it that makes a multilateral environmental agreement 'hollow'?

[00:30:09]**Radoslav Dimitrov:** So this is a concept that I introduced relatively recently to the study of global governance. 'Hollow agreements' are documents that are negotiated by states that look like policy agreements, but in fact they are designed deliberately to not do anything and not deliver any kind of policy outputs.

[00:30:31]I have seen this happening a number of times, up close and personal, and one such example comes from the forestry negotiations. Now the students should be aware that currently there is no international binding treaty on deforestation. In the 1990s, states negotiated very hard for 10 years. The negotiations failed.

[00:30:53] Canada was one of the absolute leaders in these negotiations. Canada and the European Union wanted a strong binding treaty to protect the forests. The United States and Brazil formed a tandem that was the core of a coalition against deforestry. And most of the developing countries were also against in that coalition.

[00:31:16] And so after 10 years, the negotiations were not going anywhere, time was running out and the United States came up with a proposal, an official proposal - I was there when they made it - that said, 'We need to establish a permanent international organization that is entirely dedicated to the forests'. And of course the statement was part of a very impressive monologue about the value of forests and the full American commitments to do everything possible to protect them. This is how, the US in particular, always operates.

[00:31:51] So after basically working with Brazil to kill the prospect of any international treaty on forests, the US said, 'We need a permanent forum for nonbinding discussions, and we want to call it a United Nations Forum on Forests'. Everybody else was against this because nobody wanted non-binding discussions that were unlikely to produce anything at all.

[00:32:16] To cut a very long story short, eventually everybody agreed to establish the United Nations Forum on Forests, which is now a permanent organization, and I was very privy to the negotiations of the key constitutional documents that gave the mandates to the new organizations. Countries negotiated word by word, what they will allow this new international organization to do.

[00:32:45] And together they made absolutely sure that the UNFF cannot formulate forest policy, they cannot implement forest policy at any level, and they cannot fund anybody else's forest policy. So they really cooperate on eviscerating the institution and making absolutely certain that the UNFF could not possibly deliver anything at all.

[00:33:16] A similar story unfolded in the climate change negotiations in 2009, and the Copenhagen Accord was another example of such an empty institution that was really designed to give the public the impression that states are doing something internationally and that they are agreeing on something.

[00:33:35] And mind you, that the label the Copenhagen Accord is so grandiose that it can easily fool any concerned citizen that governments have something in place. But in fact, what states had agreed in advance before the Copenhagen Conference is there was not going to be any kind of binding agreements that imposes obligations on anyone at all.

[00:33:58] And to take it now one important step further, not only these empty institutions or hollow agreements - which by the way, I use them synonymously - not only they are obviously ineffective because there's no policy in them whatsoever. More importantly, states use them to hide the failure of negotiations and to legitimize collective inaction on environmental problems because if the failure of negotiations resulted in no agreement whatsoever, the public would know it, NGOs would know it, and they would keep pushing governments to negotiate something in place.

[00:34:38] **Peter Andrée:** Given everything you've just said about empty agreements and hollow institutions, what's your overall take on the Paris Accord?

[00:34:46] I know that you were involved in negotiating it with the EU delegation. It's a very different accord, for example, than the Kyoto Protocol, which had many more mechanisms and details. This one seems to have more ambitious targets for what it hopes to achieve and yet fewer mechanisms for doing that.

[00:35:04] What's your takeaway on what the Paris Accord is and whether we might expect it to achieve what it says it will do?

[00:35:13] **Radoslav Dimitrov:** The Paris Agreement on Climate Change, negotiated in 2015, is one of the most complex international treaties ever negotiated in any issue area, and certainly the most complicated agreement on the environment.

[00:35:28] I do not say that in order to escape the question, but the reality is that it is very difficult to categorize the agreements and evaluate it by labeling it and putting it inside of a box, because the treaty does not really fit the traditional model of international law. It has elements inside that are very binding on governments who do have to formulate climate policies, who do have to report their actions and work towards mitigating climate change.

[00:36:02] But at the same time, it gives them a great degree of freedom in formulating their domestic policies as they see fit. Because of this, the Paris Agreement has been criticized by some observers saying that it doesn't really impose any obligations and governments can do whatever they want to do, and therefore it's a fake agreement.

[00:36:22] That is not true either because the key provisions of the treaty oblige governments to formulate a specific policy and then every five years to reformulate the policy by making it more ambitious. And so one of the key provisions of the Paris Agreement is something that we, in the European Union, fought for very hard is to put the progression in the treaty, or the ratcheting-up mechanism. And we succeeded at this part of the treaty, and as a result of this, a country that joins the agreement becomes locked into a long-term policy process of accelerating ambition. So even if they start from a very unimpressive starting point, with very weak policies in place, every five years every government has to revise that plan upward and make it more ambitious.

[00:37:18] So it is an extremely complex political creature to analyze. And I think that ironically enables some countries to use the Paris Agreement as an empty institution and as an excuse to have weak policies. So my take on this is that the Pairs Agreement is not clearly an empty institution, the way I define them and describe them in other cases, because many actors seriously wanted strong policy.

[00:37:47] And the Paris Agreement is just a result of an incredibly complicated political compromise and a major achievement in this long history of negotiations. But at the same time, the agreement could be used manipulatively by certain countries, like Saudi Arabia or Russia, as an excuse for weak domestic policies because the treaty does make it possible.

[00:38:12] **Ryan M. Katz-Rosene:** Well Radoslav, with the caveat of the potential for it to be used as a form of manipulation aside, we'll take the point of the Paris Agreement not necessarily being an empty institution as perhaps a glimmer of hope for that particular institution, which is of course a very important one dealing with climate change.

[00:38:34]We do have to leave the episode there and wrap it up, but I really want to thank you Radoslav. It's been great chatting with you and you've really helped us dig into the details of multilateral environmental agreements. We've talked about their challenges, their potential strengths, albeit some fairly limited strengths on that front, and you've also given us some really useful examples to explore. And we've also appreciated your thoughts on the learning opportunities that are involved in simulated environmental negotiations in the classroom. So thank you, it has been great to have you.

[00:39:07] **Radoslav Dimitrov:** You're very welcome. It's been a real pleasure being here.

[00:39:10] **Ryan M. Katz-Rosene:** Excellent. So I'll take us out now. Just a quick reminder to our listeners, the podcast is made available under a Creative Commons License 2.0, so please share it and use it widely, but we just ask you provide appropriate attribution.

[00:39:22] And follow us on Twitter, we're @EcoPoliticsP, Ecopolitics with a capital 'P', or get in touch, our website is at ecopoliticspodcast.ca. The Global EcoPolitics Podcast is produced by Nicole Bedford, support with transcription and captioning is provided by Kika Mueller, and Adam Gibbard helps us with artistic design and digital support.

[00:39:44] Thanks again, we'll see you in our next episode.