



Chapter 24

European Union as Environmental Governance System

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays, the environment has become a global phenomenon. The main reason for this is the environmental problems. Therefore, solving these problems requires international cooperation. Environmental governance implies that states, international institutions, supra-national institutions, and societies act together in the solution of environmental problems within the framework of international cooperation. The European Union is a global power and actor with many states. Therefore, it is an effective actor in the search for solutions to environmental problems. The European Union's environmental attitude and regulations have national, regional, and international importance. This chapter evaluates the importance of the European Union for environmental governance within the framework of environmental action programs. In this context, environmental action programs will be examined in terms of environmental governance regarding formal and informal reports.

INTRODUCTION

Environmental problems are no longer a simple pollution problem perceived at the local level; they have global impacts and become a problem that affects all conditions of life on earth. The importance of environmental problems for world societies and states is increasing day by day. Therefore, environmental policies are gaining importance and developing rapidly both at national and international level.

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The change in the extent and impact of environmental problems has increased the efforts to solve the problems and brought these efforts from national to regional and global level. This difference in the scale and perception of the problem naturally brought about discussions and attempted to address the environment as an international policy area rather than a national policy area. Environmental policies can vary considerably from country to country. However, it is not possible to speak of a national environmental policy that is completely independent of international obligations and global trends. Global environmental policies define the framework of national environmental policies and guide the national policies of states (Kaya, 2013: 466-470).

From the second half of the 20th century onwards, there has been a tendency towards the environmental problems and the policies to solve them at the international level. In this respect, the first concrete step towards the solution of environmental problems was the Stockholm conference in 1972. In the conference, attention was paid to environmental problems, and it was emphasized that the solution-oriented policies should be formed within the framework of cooperation. In the following years, many conferences were organized, and reports were published. However, although policies have been developed for the solution of environmental problems, they have not been implemented effectively. The resolution of environmental problems requires common responsibility and cooperation. This means co-formulating, implementing, and evaluating environmental policies. Environmental governance is a system that meets this understanding.

Despite all these efforts and initiatives, the lack of effective solutions to environmental problems stems from economic concerns. In order to ensure their economic development, states ignore many measures to be taken regarding environmental problems and act on the assumption that the resources are unlimited. Therefore, it is necessary to find effective solutions to environmental problems, to take the measures required and to set specific standards for these solutions and measures. However, since environmental issues are global rather than local/regional, comprehensive addressing of the environmental problems and setting specific standards is not an issue that every state can do alone.

In this context, states, international institutions and organizations should act together and cooperate against environmental problems. At this point, the concept of environmental governance gains importance. The EU is an international power and actor as it has many states. Therefore, it is an effective actor in the search for solutions to environmental problems. The EU's attitude and regulations to the environment have national, regional, and international impacts. The EU is struggling to bring environmental standards into line with global environmental policies. With this effort, it plays a leading role in the creation and implementation of global environmental policies. On the other hand, the EU is a supranational institution in which sovereign nation-states are represented. Therefore, the EU is seen as a multi-level governance system in itself.

In this framework, in this study, the importance of the EU in terms of environmental governance will be evaluated within the framework of environmental action programs. In this context, firstly environmental governance understanding will be mentioned, and then the information will be given about the EU on environmental policies and environmental action programs. Finally, environmental action programs will be examined within the scope of formal and informal reports prepared as a result of action programs in terms of environmental governance. Reports state that the objectives of environmental action programs have not been achieved. The main reason for this is the lack of stakeholder engagement during the policy implementation phase, while the policy formulation process is co-operative.

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