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Pro-Environmental Behaviour of EU Citizens:

Attitudes to Common Environmental Legislation and Standards

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the pro-environmental behaviour of EU citizens and the potential connection with their attitudes towards common environmental legislation and environmental standards. It analyses factors of the pro-environmental behaviour of EU citizens and their attitudes towards EU environmental legislation and helping non-EU countries improve their environmental standards. The article uses cross-sectional regression analysis based on Special Eurobarometer survey. Respondents show a mostly positive view of EU environmental protection legislation and standards enforcement. Respondents with pro-environmental behaviour in their daily life are significantly more in favour to common environmental legislation and standards. Women, managers, and those interested in political affairs are more positive as well.

KEYWORDS

Environmental Issues, Environmental Legislation, Environmental Policy, Environmental Standards, Environmentally friendly travelling, Pro-environmental Behaviour, Standardization

INTRODUCTION

Environmental problems come hand in hand with increased human activity. Population growth, increased production, technological development and economic growth are all related to the problem of environmental degradation. The rising number of environmentally oriented contributions proves the current importance of environmental issues (Kube et al., 2018; Mao et al., 2018; Wu et al., 2018). Many threats exist, but air and water pollution are globally regarded as the biggest environmental problems (Kube et al., 2018; Tagaris et al., 2015) or environmental factors (Fried et al., 2019).

Environmental protection and environmental policy tools are all limited – or supported – by the level of citizens' pro-environmental attitude. Environmental legislation and environmental standards can play an essential role in environmental protection. Public acceptance and support of common environmental rules as well as the introduction of environmental standards can have significant benefits. The main objective of the paper is to identify factors affecting pro-environmental behaviour and examine the potential consequences of pro-environmental behaviour on support of environmental regulations and standards. We also examine factors affecting attitude towards common EU legislation to protect the environment as well as respondents' views on the EU helping non-EU countries improve

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their environmental standards. In the next section we describe the theoretical background of our research. Following sections show the methodology and data as well as the most important results of our research. Finally, we make certain conclusions based on the obtained results.

BACKGROUND

Smith et al. (2017) and respondents of World Economic Forum (2013) surveys consider climate change the world's gravest environmental problem. Recognizing the seriousness of the environmental situation has led to environmental aspects being taken into account in the decision-making process and the idea of sustainable development being promoted on all governmental levels.

The United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, which took place in Stockholm in June 1972, was a crucial moment. It was attended by representatives of 113 countries; economists, politicians and other major actors recognized environmental pollution as a serious economic problem. Subsequently, a specific segment of economic policy, known as environmental policy, focused on environmental care with appropriate instruments collection, has been set apart. There are diverse approaches to classify environmental policy instruments.

According to Barbieri (2015), Clò et al. (2017), Liao (2018), Piciu and Trică (2012), Xepapadeas (2009), environmental regulation has two basic forms: command-and-control and market-based policy instruments. Command-and-control (regulatory or green regulation) instruments put pressure on polluters to change their behaviour by means of direct restrictions, commands, limitations or prescribed procedures that cannot be lawfully circumvented. If the polluters contravene them, they will be sanctioned. They have different degrees of commitment – laws, regulations, directives, standards (emission, technology and product standards), or agreements (Bergek et al., 2014; Liao, 2018; Singh et al., 2017).

Financial incentives that stimulate the polluter to choose the least costly alternative – to invest in a sustainable solution or to incur additional costs for pollution – are the key element of market-based (economic) instruments. Environmental taxes, environmental fees and charges, deposit-refund systems, tradable permits and subsidies are the most well-known economic instruments. (Bergek et al., 2014; Piciu & Trică, 2012; Xepapadeas, 2009)

In addition to the two types of regulatory instruments mentioned above, there is the third group of so-called voluntary instruments. The main purpose of voluntary instruments is to integrate environmental awareness and responsibility into decision-making processes of managing authorities. Voluntary instruments are, for instance, various environmental co-operation solutions, environmental education, (voluntary) environmental standards (such as ISO 14000), product environmental labelling, green public procurement (European Environmental Agency (EEA), 2016; Liao, 2018; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), 2019; Piciu & Trică, 2012).

In relation to solving environmental difficulties, it is possible to encounter another typology of tools, for example, single-source and multisource instruments (U. S. Congress, 1995), informational, cooperative, economic and regulatory policy instruments (Böcher, 2012), or push and pull policy instruments (Harring, 2018).

It is important to point out that the individual instruments do not appear separately in practice, but they constitute an optimal combination, a policy mix, that is effective in achieving environmental objectives (Schader et al., 2014).

The success rate of environmental policy, not only as a whole, but also of its instruments, has been the subject of numerous analyses. For example, Lan et al. (2017) focused on environmental regulation stringency and its impact on eco-industries. Their results have shown that a more stringent environmental regulation of both industrial SO_2 and wastewater emissions will not only contribute to the improvement of industrial environmental performance but will help eco-firms develop, too. Requate and Unold (2003) examined the environmental policy instruments incentive to invest in more environmentally friendly technologies. They have found that taxes provide stronger incentives

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