

South Africa's perceptions of the EU in energy governance: a partner in decline?

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Abstract

The European Union (EU) and South Africa have a longstanding relationship, which includes political and economic partnerships, thus providing a critical test case for norms diffusion. In the past few years, however, this relationship has changed and new powers have come into the picture, especially Brazil, China, India and Russia (BRIC), affording new opportunities for agency to South Africa in dealing with norms emanating from Europe. The field of energy governance, with its crucial impact on both climate change and sustainable development, is likely to become a critical terrain of policy cooperation in the near future. This article discusses pioneering research on how South Africa perceives the EU's role in energy governance against the backdrop of the growing influence of the BRICs. It reviews media images and uses them as a proxy of public discourse in South Africa. Our data shows that while the EU is a critical partner for South Africa, its public image in the country is in decline in the field of energy governance, with growing relevance occupied by the BRICs countries.

Key words: South Africa; European Union; BRICs; energy governance; media; perceptions.

Introduction

South Africa's relationship with Europe is longstanding and complex. It dates back to the colonial era, when South Africa was subjected first to Dutch and then to British domination, and to the apartheid period (1948-1990), when the system of racial segregation established by European descendants disenfranchised the majority of non-white South Africans. While initially ambivalent about apartheid, the then European Community eventually promoted a series of sanctions against the regime in the 1980s, which fomented the resistance against authoritarianism and eventually led to the collapse of apartheid (Fioramonti, 2010). With the transition to democracy in the mid-1990s, the relationship between the newly established EU and South Africa gradually normalized, shifting towards a more conventional economic and trade partnership, in which, for several reasons, South Africa became a preferential partner for Europe's new engagement with Africa. It may therefore not come as a surprise that South Africa was one of the first countries in the world to sign a free trade agreement with the EU, with cultural, technological and industrial cooperation also intensifying (EU-SA, 2000). Such a relationship was then sealed by the adoption of a strategic partnership in 2006 (EU, 2006). Although this growing entanglement appeared to ease the historic resentment towards colonial domination and racial segregation, it was by no means without strains. Specifically, trade negotiations turned particularly harsh, both in the early phase of the free trade agreement in the late 1990s as well as in the more recent negotiations for the so-called economic partnership agreements, which the EU finalized with most African countries between 2008 and 2014 (Fioramonti, 2013).

While the global strength of the EU is ascertained (although potentially declining, especially since the outbreak of the so-called Euro crisis in 2010), South Africa is considered

to be on the rise and is conventionally associated with other ‘emerging powers,’ which aim to challenge traditional power balances at the global level.

In the past decade, the preferential relationship between South Africa and the EU has been affected and, to a certain extent, threatened by the growing interest of other emerging economies in forging links with Africa. Particularly China and Brazil, but also Russia and India, have become crucial partners of South Africa. They are prominent allies not only in global governance, but also in reshaping foreign direct investment in the whole continent, where South Africa’s leading position is seen as an important entry point to the rest of the region (Bond, 2013).

This evolution has afforded new opportunities for South Africa to play a more vocal role internationally, diversifying its range of preferential partners and increasing its overall ‘agency’ when dealing with traditional counterparts. In this regard, it presents an interesting test case to assess the external reception of EU ‘norms’. As discussed in the Introduction to this volume, the agency of norms-receivers can trigger a variety of reactions, from adoption to adaptation or outright rejection, often through a complex interplay that includes the evolving external perceptions of the EU. This ultimately has an effect on the EU’s ‘normative power’ and its effectiveness in global governance.

There is no other field where this potential ‘clash’ of interests between the EU and other emerging powers is as evident as in the sector of energy governance, including access to the wealth of natural resources available on the African continent. Especially against the backdrop of the new ‘Africa Rising’ discourse (Taylor, 2014), which puts energy resources at the centre of the continent’s economic growth trajectory, understanding how the EU is perceived in South Africa provides important insights to assess the former’s capacity as a producer of norms that exert influence in international politics.

Against this background, the present article asks: How does South Africa's media perceive the role of the EU in this changing environment, with a particular emphasis on energy governance? South Africa offers an important vantage point not only because of its ties with the former colonial powers and the so-called 'emerging' economies, but also because it is a crucial focal point to understand how the EU is perceived on the whole African continent. In the next sections we discuss how South Africa's leading newspapers report on the EU in the field of energy governance. This discussion is placed within the context of South Africa's approach to energy governance nationally and at the continental/global level, as well as its partnerships with individual European countries and against the backdrop of the growing influence exerted by the BRICS countries. We conclude by offering some reflections on what our analysis may mean for the EU-(South) Africa energy relationship.

How South Africa Views the EU: Context and Methodology

Context

South Africa is a leading actor in Africa and among the so-called developing world (Alden and Schoeman, 2013). Its relatively recent history of reconciliation and what is considered one of the most progressive constitutions in the world have made South Africa not only an important normative player globally, but also an increasingly relevant political partner for most powers interested in forging strong ties with Africa. For instance, South Africa is the only African member of the Group of Twenty (G20). In the past, it was the only African country to achieve a level of technological development to build nuclear weapons. It was also the first country in the world to give up voluntarily its entire nuclear arsenal right after the transition to democracy. In international energy and environmental forums, South Africa's role has become increasingly important. At the 17th Conference of Parties (COP) held in

Copenhagen in 2009, South Africa put its weight behind the demand by many developing countries that climate change be tackled primarily by nations historically responsible for greenhouse gases emissions. It then formed a group with Brazil, China and India (the so-called BASIC) that was the driving force behind the Copenhagen Accord. South Africa's former minister of finance, Trevor Manuel, is one of the chairs of the Green Climate Fund, the mechanism designed to fund climate change adaptation programmes in developing countries with financing coming from more industrialized nations.

While South Africa has been able to preserve and, in key areas such as trade and political dialogue, even strengthen its ties with Europe, it has at the same time diversified its connections with the rest of the world. Since the 2007-2008 oil shock and the ensuing global economic downturn, the South African government has placed particular emphasis on revamping the energy sector with a view to ensuring energy security and sustainability. In particular, these new policy evolutions happened at a time in which the national grid revealed structural problems often leading to black outs, especially in times of high demand. It has since become evident that the current system of production and distribution of energy is grossly unable to respond to the needs of industrial development and, at the same time, the legitimate demands for access to electricity raised by millions of formerly disenfranchised communities (DME, 2008). The introduction of the South African National Energy Act in 2008, paved the way for an integrated approach to energy governance, which established new institutions and parameters for energy efficiency and highlighted its crucial role in ensuring long-term sustainable economic growth. The Act aims to strengthen energy planning in order 'to ensure that diverse energy resources are available, in sustainable quantities and at affordable prices, to the South African economy' (RSA, 2008, p. 2).

In 2009, the government explored the possibility of introducing feed-in-tariffs, but later opted for selected tenders for independent producers of renewable energy, which

totalled 3915 megawatts as of 2014 (Eberhard et al, 2014). This Renewable Energy Independent Power Producer Procurement Programme (REI4P) should result in a 34% deviation below South Africa's business-as-usual emissions growth trajectory by 2020, and then 42% by 2025. Its progress has been significant, but the procurement process appears to have capped the actual potential of the initiative (McLaid, 2014).

At the same time, South Africa's new emphasis on sustainable development is often at odds with the actual practice of infrastructural development. Indeed, the government sees the bulk of investment directed towards coal-fired plants and nuclear energy (Eberhard, 2013). It also deals with the reality of a system of distribution that provides cheap energy to a selected group of industries (mainly mines), while excluding the majority of the population from accessing a reliable provision of electrical power. Moreover, South Africa is also the 12th major emitter of CO₂ emissions in the world. As a leading producer and exporter of coal, South Africa's industrial development and dominant strategy remains profoundly anchored to this 'dirty' source of relatively cheap energy. Recently, the government decided to conduct explorations through hydraulic fracturing (a practice commonly known as 'fracking') in the central regions, where experts believe there are significant reserves of natural shale gas (Hedden et al, 2013).

It is against this complex inter-relation between industrial priorities, sustainable development and social demands that South Africa interacts with the EU in the energy field. The two partners have a number of channels for cooperation bearing directly or indirectly on energy governance (Maupin, 2014). For instance, a specific focus on energy is included in their trade agreement and strategic partnership. Both parties have underlined their common support for the UN Sustainable Energy for All initiative and the finalization of the Renewable Energy Strategy for the Southern African Development Community. Moreover, the Joint Africa-EU Strategy includes a specific energy partnership, which aims to increase

cooperation on sustainable energy services in the coming decades. South Africa also cooperates with a number of European countries on specific energy-related areas. These include France (in the field of nuclear technologies), Norway, Sweden and Germany (in technology transfers and clean carbon storage) and Spain (solar energy).

Methodology

The relations between the EU and Africa, specifically South Africa, have been the topic of a series of studies in the past few years, due to the affirmation of these players as key drivers of change in global and inter-regional governance. As discussed in the Introduction to this Special Issue, our research aims to reflect critically on the traditional concept of ‘normative power Europe’ by analysing how the EU is perceived in critical governance fields (specifically, energy) by rising powers in other regions of the world. In doing so, we aim to show how images and perceptions can constitute a powerful ‘filter’ for the diffusion of norms, ultimately affecting the success of policy interaction between the EU and other countries/regions. In the field of perceptions analysis, Fioramonti and Olivier (2007) have argued that South Africa and Europe have shifted from a relationship marked by altruism and cooperation to one characterized by self-interest. In particular, the EU is largely perceived as a declining power by South Africa and the former’s impact on trade and economic cooperation is often viewed as a form of neo-colonial domination. Similar conclusions were drawn by a study that contrasted South Africa’s perceptions of the EU with those held by two other emerging economies like Brazil and India (Fioramonti and Poletti, 2008). Comparisons between perceptions of Europe and those of China are also quite illustrative of the way in which African views of the ‘old’ and ‘new’ powers have changed over time. In particular, South Africa seems to have shifted its focus from Europe to China and views the latter as a more promising development partner for Africa, although civil society and some business

elites appear wary of China's intentions in Africa (Fioramonti and Kimunguyi, 2011). A book published in 2009 on the perceptions of the EU as a global actor (Lucarelli and Fioramonti, 2009) includes sectoral analyses of Africa's perceptions of Europe, specifically among emerging countries, international trade negotiations and at the African Union level, which confirm the tensions between the EU and its African counterparts, while acknowledging the profound ties and traditional connections (Fioramonti, 2013).

No systematic research has yet dealt with the interaction between South Africa's perceptions of the EU in the context of changing energy relations in Africa and globally. Moreover, while most of the above research focused on elite interviews and public opinion surveys, there is a dearth of analysis on how mass media interpret and convey the role of the EU in governance processes in Africa generally, especially in the field of energy. Yet mass media are key players in framing policy problems, in so far as they 'select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text' (Entman, 1993, p. 52). In particular, this process is essential to understand how policy makers and communicators exercise political influence throughout society (Entman, 2003).

Our research adopts the 'cascading activation framing theory' (Entman, 2003, p. 419ff), which highlights the key role of the media in spreading ideas on foreign policy and international affairs both from the top down (as a 'cascading activation') and bottom up (as a 'pumping mechanism'). National newspapers, especially those leading the economic and policy debates, are also more inclined to cover international affairs and constitute a more reliable source of foreign news for the general public, as well as for other domestic and international media outlets. For this research, we have selected two leading newspapers in South Africa. The first was *The Star*, which is the most-widely circulated non-tabloid newspaper in the country (estimated readership of 650,000) targeting average readers without a specific racial profile (unlike the *Sowetan*, which is the most popular newspaper but mainly

targets black communities).¹ It is the leading outlet within the Independent Group, the country's largest printed media network, which means that most of its articles are also published in the other papers and magazines of the group. The other source of information was *Business Day*, the country's leading financial daily with a readership of over 70,000. This paper is read mostly by middle class educated individuals and caters specifically for the country's financial elite. Both papers include a wide range of columnists, which cuts across the traditional left-right political spectrum. Moreover, both outlets are read in the rest of Southern Africa, with complimentary copies of *The Star* made available at all airports and main shopping centres in South Africa and in the region. We believe that the complementarity of the two media sources will offer a significant level of consistency in the collection of data and critical insights into how South Africa's public discourse portrays the EU and the BRICS in energy governance.

As is the case throughout the Special Issue, our data collection targeted both how the EU is represented and perceived in the media and how the theme of energy governance is framed. The decision to conduct separate searches over a consistent time frame (2009-2013) on the occasion of major energy and climate change events allowed us to discuss both how the EU is framed in its own right and, specifically, how it is portrayed in the energy governance field against the backdrop of the rise of new powers. In the next sections we discuss our data with respect to such a distinction and then provide some concluding remarks about the future role of the EU in energy governance in (South) Africa.

South Africa's Perceptions of the EU and Rising Powers in Energy Governance

Perceptions of the EU: a sustainable development partner in decline?

In order to gauge the perception of the EU, it is first essential to assess its visibility in the media sample identified for the periods covered by our research project. In line with the project's approach, we sifted through the media representations of the EU on the occasion of crucial energy and environmental summits (e.g. Conference of Parties) over a five year period (2009-2013), amounting to approximately 150 days of coverage overall. As can be seen in Table 1, a total of 385 news articles were analysed, with a large upturn in visibility in the year 2011, when the COP took place in South Africa.

Table 1 – Visibility: Total number of articles mentioning the EU in all periods covered

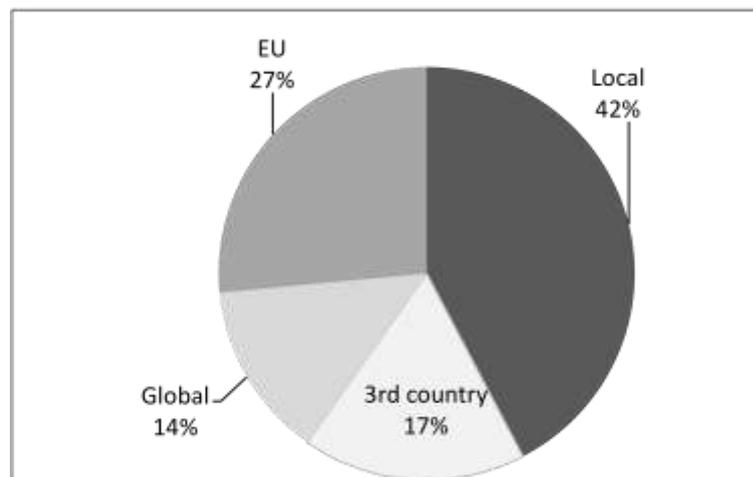
Total number of news (COP periods)						
	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	Total
<i>Popular daily (The Star)</i>	27	33	77	49	16	202
<i>Business daily (Business Day)</i>	26	35	73	32	17	183
Total	53	68	150	81	33	385

This overall presence in the news amounts to an average of 2.6 articles per day. Most articles do not represent the EU as a major (primary) actor. Over 50% of the news items we have analysed present the EU as a minor actor among all the entities mentioned, while about 30% of the data present the EU as a secondary actor. In most of these cases, the centrality of the article was either on South Africa (mentioning the EU in passing), or on a European country with the EU in the background. The EU is only seldom (17%) the central focus of the articles and – quite importantly – it is rarely seen as a single, unitary and leading actor. To an extent, this depiction seems to reinforce a perception that has already been well documented in the literature: the EU's external action is often obfuscated by the fragmentation of its various

institutional roles and the overwhelming presence of some key member states (Lucarelli and Fioramonti, 2010).

In terms of the ‘domesticity’ category identified in the Introduction as the geographical focus of the news story, we found that the representation of the EU is mainly local, concerned with South Africa in general or/and how the country is interacting with the EU in a range of issues. Slightly over a quarter of the news items focused on the EU and its member states, while 14% had a more global outlook, mostly in relation to multilateral forums, primarily the UNFCCC summits (Figure 1).

Figure 1 – Domesticity: What type of focus on the EU?



N = 385

In general, we have found an inclination towards an emotionally charged representation of the EU, leaning towards a generally negative assessment. As much as 45% of news items are either evaluating the EU as completely negative (17%) or between neutral and negative (28%), with a significant portion of the dataset giving a rather neutral evaluation of the EU. A

positive representation is given by only 8% of the sample, while 18% provide positive to neutral evaluations.

Much of this evaluation can be attributed to the political, economic and social environment being heavily affected by the so-called Euro crisis and the ripple effects it has had throughout the EU and the rest of the world. These results are further supported by the data reported in Table 2, which shows that 67% of the EU coverage fell within an overall economic frame, reinforcing not only the already mentioned strong economic perception South Africa has of the EU, but also exhibiting the economic concerns that have been triggered by the EU's relative instability and the repercussions felt by the South African economy.

Table 2 – Main frames of news items

<i>Frames</i>	<i>Popular Daily (%)</i>	<i>Business Daily (%)</i>	<i>Total (%)</i>
Economy	71	64	67
Politics	29	39	33
Development	12	31	21
Environment	9	22	15
Social	7	14	10
Energy	7	8	7

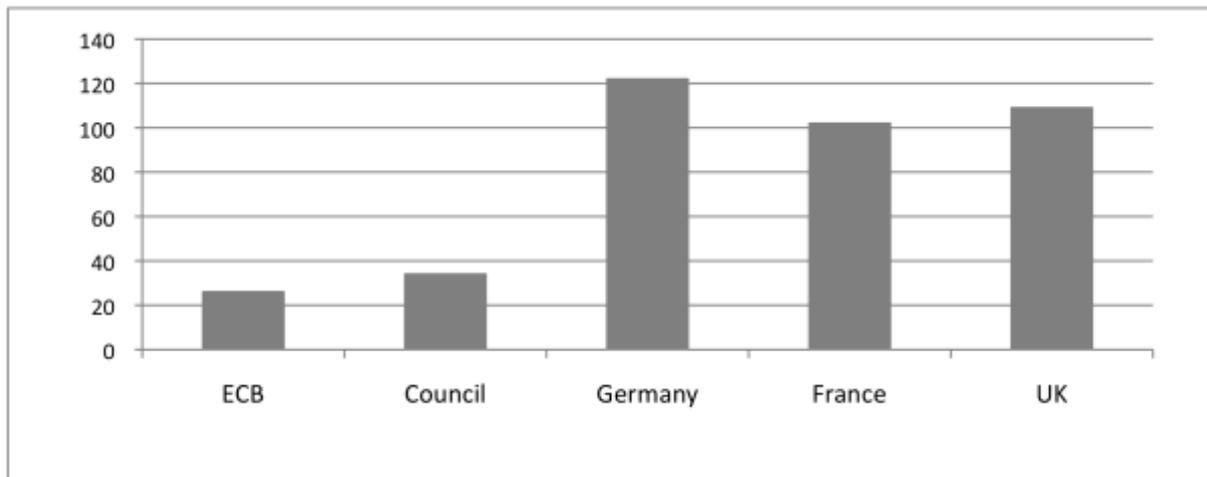
N = 385. Multiple options possible, so total percentages may exceed 100%

A more political frame is present in 33% of the articles, most of which do however present arguments that are closely associated with those identified within the economic frame, particularly with reference to the global economic crisis. These two frames largely featured news items discussing austerity policies, economic and political reforms as well as popular struggles (especially in Greece, but also in other countries such as Ireland, Spain and Portugal), while significantly less attention was given to specific social effects of the current European situation (10%). Developmental and environmental frames also remained rather marginal (21% and 15% respectively), with the only exception of the very days in which the

UNFCCC talks were being held, particularly in 2011 when South Africa hosted the COP in Durban. The prominence of South Africa in the climate talks has been a clear feature since the country's joined forces with other emerging economies in 2009 to reject the EU's proposal for a post-Kyoto agreement. At the Durban round of negotiations, South Africa centred the discussion on technology transfers for adaptation and financing for sustainable growth in developing countries, thus bringing a local perspective on how external actors (including the EU) can support developing countries in dealing with climate change mitigation and adaptation. Overall, however, the relevance of energy as a specific frame was rather limited during all periods surveyed (7%), although there is an interesting overlap between the media news items focusing on energy and various issues, from sustainable development to security, particularly with reference to the role of the BRICS countries, as will be discussed in further detail in the next section.

It is worth noting, as Figure 2 shows, when the EU is represented in terms of institutional actorness and when it is mediated via dominant member states. While it can be seen that the European Central Bank and the Council of the European Union were somewhat present in the eyes of the South African media under observation, the dominant images of the EU were actually mediated via the so-called EU3, Germany, France and the United Kingdom

Figure 2 – Visibility of EU institutions vs. Member States (no. of news items)



N = 385. Multiple options possible, so total numbers may exceed N.

Overall it seems as if the media debate conveys a rather cautious approach to the EU, which may in turn affect how South Africans view their relationship with Europe as a whole. This message is partly at odds with the traditional cultural and economic relationship between the two parties, but is somehow indicative of a general reconsideration of the importance of ties with the EU. As mentioned previously, the economic and political influence of the EU remains the most important aspect of this relationship, partly complemented by the still infrequent framing of development, despite the EU-funded aid projects and cooperation mechanisms in South Africa.

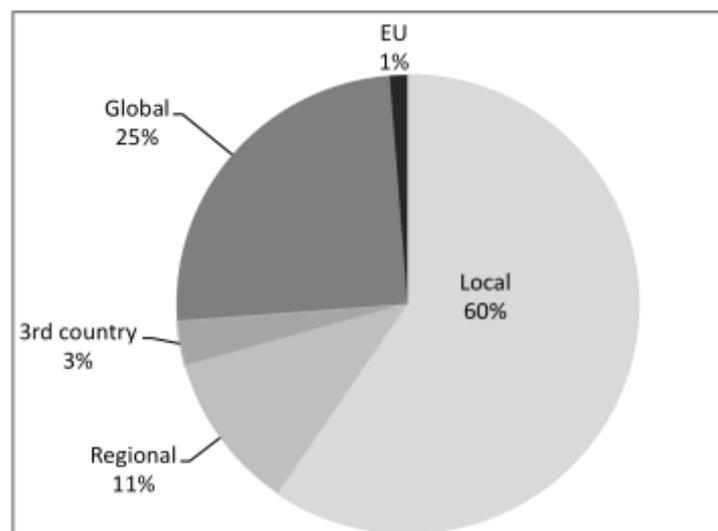
Perceptions of energy governance: the rise of other powers

Among all news items identified in the prescribed period of analysis, energy issues were present in 405 articles, the bulk of which were published in 2011. The relative surge of visibility for energy can be explained, to a large extent, by the COP 17 talks held in Durban that year, which placed more emphasis on the interlink between energy systems and sustainable development. When we look at the overall coverage across the two newspapers analysed, we notice that the financial newspaper (*Business Day*) is significantly more

interested in the energy field, with almost 20% more articles than the popular daily (*The Star*).

The energy coverage is heavily skewed towards the local focus (Figure 3), once again showing the attention paid by South African media to the national impacts of energy governance. Obviously affected by the UNFCCC summits taking place during each period of analysis, Figure 4 shows that a quarter of the data applies a global focus, indicative of the multilateral talks. Surprisingly for a country that prides itself on its presence in the wider region and continent, the South African newspapers analysed only dedicate 11% articles to issues of regional energy governance, begging the question of the extent to which the leading national press is aptly capturing the regional dimension of energy governance. At the same time, this lack of focus on the regional developments of energy infrastructure may very well be an indication that the national debate is more keen on national and global energy partnerships rather than to explore its more immediate impacts on the continent.

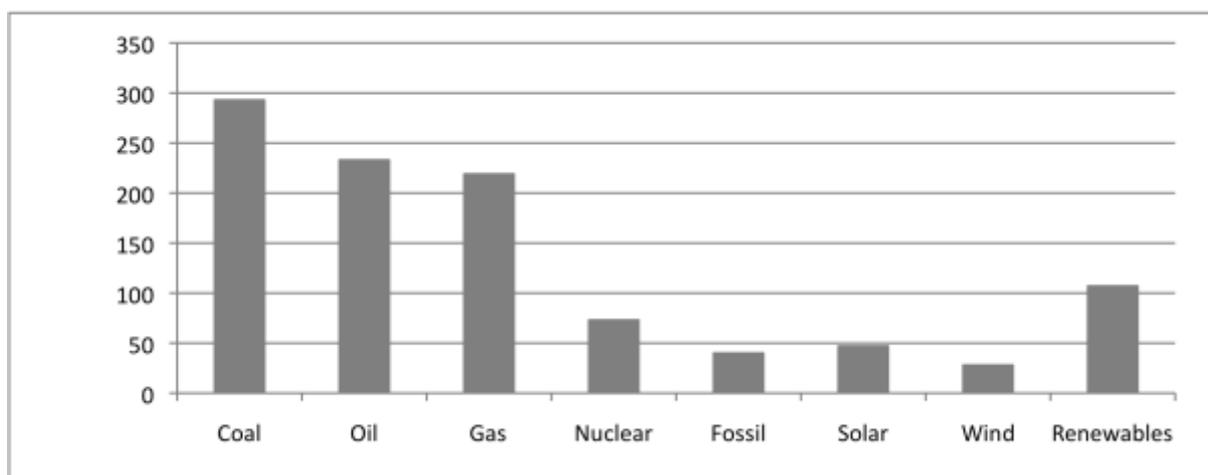
Figure 3 – Geographical focus of energy related news items



N = 405.

Figure 4 presents the variety of energy types that have emerged from the dataset. The graph is clearly echoing the aforementioned reliance on coal based energy in South Africa, showing almost 300 articles of the dataset that make reference to coal based energy. After coal, oil and gas are the most dominant sources of energy. Nuclear energy is also becoming more predominant, especially since the South African government sealed a rather controversial deal with Russia over the supply of nuclear technology for new plants (Molatlhwa, 2014). The exploration of natural gas, which is planned but not yet underway, has been met with much resistance since the idea first emerged, slowing down the momentum, again reflected by the decreasing number of mentions in the dataset over the time frame in question. It is interesting to note that, of the 241 articles in which South Africa is the central actor, coal and oil are the predominant energy expressions with 182 (75%) and 140 (58%) articles respectively. As regards renewable energies, they remain relatively marginal, but it seems as if the attention paid to solar and wind, as well as other renewable sources of energy, has been growing over time, at least in proportional terms (Figure 5). While 37% have energy as the major focus of the article over half of the dataset only gives secondary importance to energy.

Figure 4 – Types of energy sources mentioned in the news items (no. of news items)

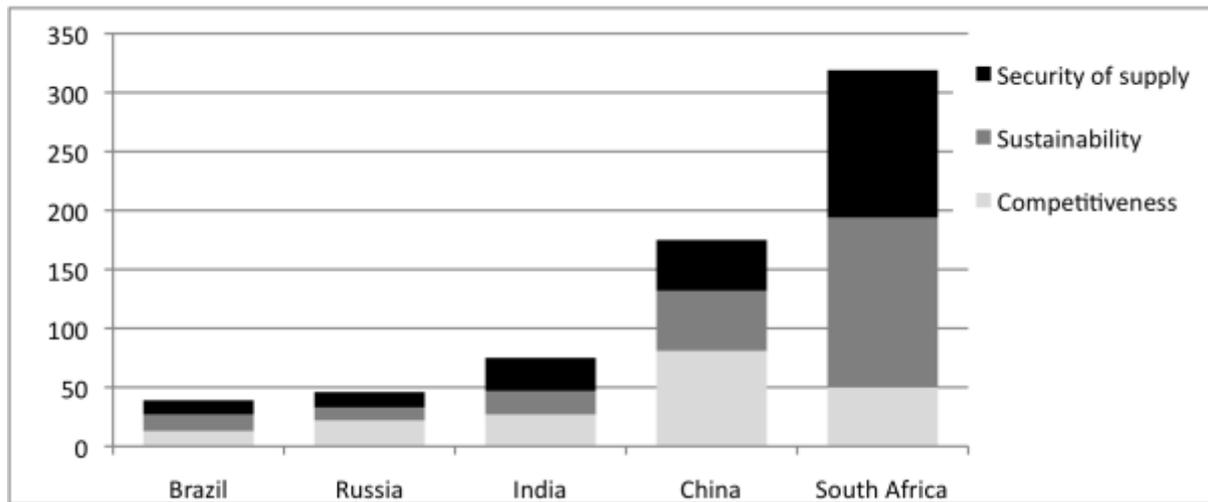


N = 405. Multiple options possible, so total numbers may exceed *N*.

When it comes to the details of energy policies, the EU virtually disappears from the news coverage. It is mentioned 13 times overall, but only once is it featured as a major actor, with reference to the climate negotiations in Copenhagen in 2009. Even major European countries feature very sporadically: the UK is mentioned 24 times, but always in passing (secondary or minor centrality); Germany and France appear only five and seven times respectively, but once as major actors.

By contrast, it is South Africa and the other BRIC countries that dominate the media focus (Figure 5). After South Africa, China is the dominant country in energy-related news items, more than doubling India's, while Russia lags behind, trailed by Brazil. The media lens would therefore confirm what we have already discussed in the Introduction, that is, that the bilateral relations within the BRICS remain preferential, while the EU is not represented as a significant energy player. In the case of China, this is in line with both trade statistics and the strength in political relations, as China is South Africa's largest trade partner and political ties remain well entrenched. Here the frames are also proportionally represented, although security of supply and competitiveness appear to be more dominant than the issue of sustainable energy production and distribution. By contrast, sustainability, specifically sustainable development, is the main frame under which South Africa's energy policies are represented by the newspapers, closely followed by security of supply. This framing echoes national worries with regard to power supply and the dominant coal industry, along with concerns regarding the insufficient rate of energy security enjoyed by the general population. The framing of the other BRICS actors tend to favour competitiveness and security above sustainability, notably not only in the case of China but also Russia, as these two countries are asserting themselves as global energy actors penetrating African markets.

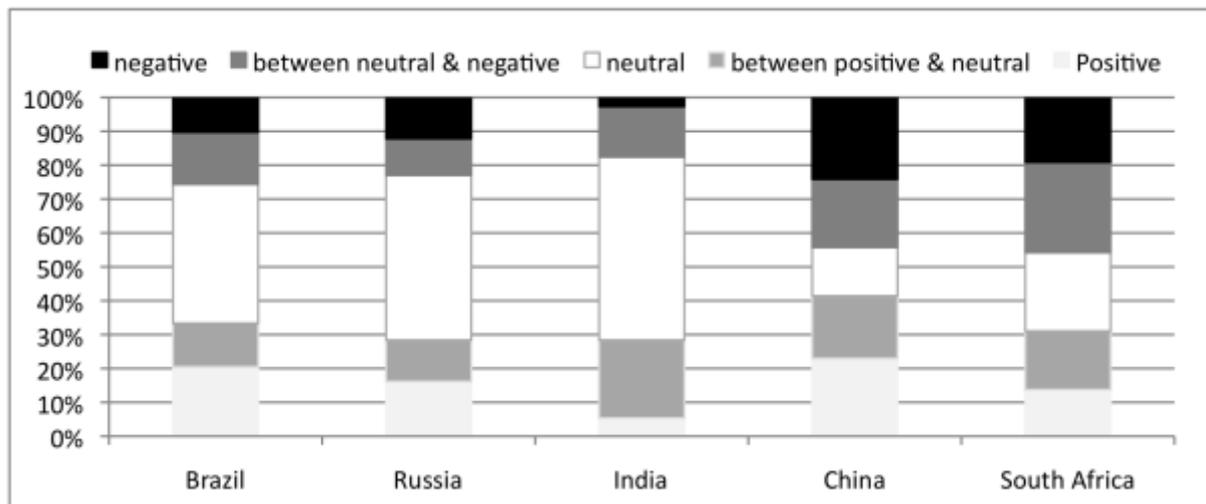
Figure 5 – Major actors and key frames of energy news (no. of news items)



N = 405. Multiple options possible, so total numbers may exceed *N*.

How does the media view the energy partnerships with the BRICS countries? Figure 6 reports the overall evaluations of these new emerging powers in energy governance, showing a relative equilibrium between negative and positive perceptions (with a slight tendency to attribute a more positive assessment). Brazil and Russia both appear to have a fairly even distribution of the evaluation. India enjoys a rather neutral to positive perception. China's larger coverage, however, shows a more polarized distribution. Its evaluation is neutral in approximately 15% of the cases, while it leans towards negative in over 45% of instances and positively in the remaining cases, just over 40%. This distribution mostly indicates the divide between a more critical stance by some commentators, which view China as a highly competitive and at times hostile energy player in Africa, with the more candid and forward looking reports emerging from government departments and policy makers, which describe China as a major opportunity for energy exports and economic growth in the continent.

Figure 6 – Evaluation of BRICS in energy related news



N = 405.

Among the most crucial themes highlighted in the news items, we find energy access and sustainable supply, thus reinforcing the constant preoccupation with a sustainable yet universal energy supply in the country. This aspect is directly linked to the development of new infrastructure to meet the energy needs of millions of South Africans. As discussed above, the country has seen an increase in public expenditure towards new energy plants (especially coal), with growing attention to renewable energies. Issues of secondary relevance include energy saving and efficiency, as well as investment. Energy saving and efficiency are both heavily tied with sustainable development and even energy access, while investment tends to be linked to infrastructure development.

It appears clear that the media representation of energy governance reflected in our data focuses primarily on the extent to which old and new forms of energy, along with new partnerships with emerging powers, may help South Africa modernize its energy infrastructure so as to ensure sustained (rather than sustainable) economic growth and augment its industrial power nationally and globally (with the regional level on a second tier). To a certain extent, the representation of energy governance appears to mirror quite well what

was indicated in the opening sections of this article, that is, that South Africa is finding its autonomous space in international affairs, diversifying its ties away from the EU and framing energy governance within the bigger picture of a more assertive political and economic stance.

Conclusion: What Role for the EU as a Partner in Energy Governance?

This study is of relevance for at least three reasons. It builds on a growing body of literature that links ‘perceptions’ and international politics, particularly with regard to how perceptions of different global powers affect the capacity of norms to travel across other regions and affect the behaviour of other countries. Second, it explores a hitherto under-investigated policy field, namely energy governance, which is likely to become one of the most relevant foreign policy issues in the 21st century, also in light of the global reforms pertaining to climate change and the green economy. Finally, it adds new knowledge to the academic analysis of the intricate relationship between the EU and Africa.

Our analysis also sheds light on the evolving relationship between the EU and South Africa in a phase in which other powers, notably the BRICs countries, are becoming more and more influential in what was historically Europe’s preferential terrain. This is particularly relevant for the EU’s ability to exert normative influence in a continent where its historical clout is on the wane and its norms are increasingly challenged by local as well as international dynamics. Our findings show that South Africa, a leading nation in Africa, is not particularly interested in Europe’s norms, especially when it comes to issues of energy governance. The focus appears to be much more on the potential of new relations forged with other emerging economies and their impact on Africa’s development trajectory. In this regard, it is indicative that the climate change negotiations since 2009 have shown a

strengthening of agency of emerging powers, with the EU relegated to the corner and often on the defensive.

While the EU continues to be a key actor and partner for South Africa, its role in the energy field is largely underrepresented and almost invisible in the South African press. Arguably, South Africa's overreliance on coal skews its perception of valuable partners more towards China and India (which are the preferential destinations for South Africa's coal) and Russia and Brazil, with which South Africa has deals in the field of nuclear energy and biofuels respectively.

As energy security becomes increasingly dominant in international affairs, the EU risks losing its relevance not only in South Africa but also in the whole of Africa. A continent replete with fossil and mineral resources may find itself increasingly at the centre of a global 'scramble' in which the BRICs are likely to have the upper hand. At the same time, both African countries and South Africa need to be further encouraged to shift their focus away from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources in order to reduce environmental degradation, social inequality and achieve sustainable development goals. Diversifying South Africa's energy mix not only contributes to the common good of curbing environmental degradation and climate change, but it also allows the country to meet the energy needs of its citizens while providing leadership in sustainable development for the rest of the continent. It is specifically in this field that the EU and its member states may find a critical comparative advantage. It is particularly in the context of technological partnership for affordable and accessible renewable sources that the EU could indeed play a leading role in Africa.

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