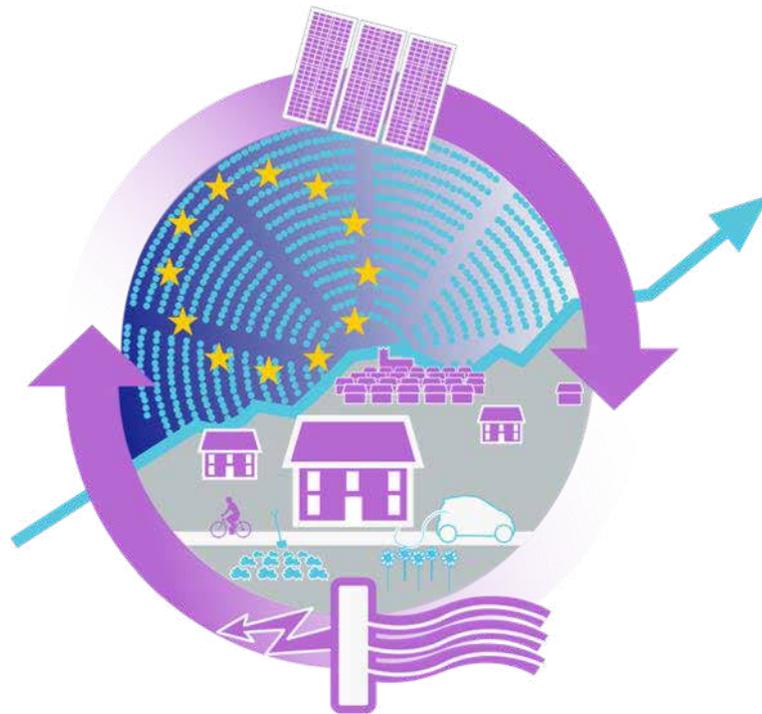


Talking About Climate Change with Centre-Right Politicians and Members of the European Parliament



Practical Recommendations for Climate Lobbyists and Advocates

**Supplementary Report to: 'Starting a New Conversation on
Climate Change with the European Centre-Right'!!**

Project team

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About COIN

The Climate Outreach and Information Network (COIN) is a charity focused on building cross-societal acceptance of the need to tackle climate change. We have 10 years of experience helping our partners to talk and think about climate change in ways that reflect their individual values, interests and ways of seeing the world. We work with a wide range of partners including central, regional and local governments, charities, trades unions, business and faith organisations.

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This is a supplementary report to our ['Starting a New Conversation on Climate Change with the European Centre-Right'](#) report.

INTRODUCTION

The main report “Starting a New Conversation on Climate Change with the European Centre-Right”¹ contains general recommendations for language and narratives that can be applied to all centre-right audiences at the European level. This supplemental report provides some additional narratives and advice for those working specifically with centre-right Members of Parliament (MEP), especially campaigners and lobbyists.

As with the main report, it must be stressed that none of these proposals have yet been formally evaluated or tested. Truly effective communications need to be thoroughly tested before being implemented. However, they have been carefully developed through desk research and an analysis of the language used by centre-right MEPs and we are confident they can be used as guidelines if applied carefully and adapted as needed.

THE AUDIENCE FOR THIS REPORT

This report has been written for climate lobbyists and advocates who need to approach and engage with centre-right MEPs to mobilise support for climate legislation in the European Parliament. We hope that it will also be of value for those working on general political campaigning at a national level.

SOURCES

We draw on two sources:

- Speeches and media reporting of centre-right MEPs. These are named directly and associated with their main political group:

EPP	European People’s Party	<i>Largest pro-European centre-right group</i>
ALDE	Alliance of Liberals & Democrats for Europe	<i>Free-market pro-Europe conservatives</i>
ECR	European Conservatives & Reformists	<i>Free-market soft eurosceptics.</i>

- Twenty-one formal interviews with politicians, lobbyists and advisers working in the European Parliament. The names and expertise of the people interviewed is listed at the end of the main report, but their comments have been anonymized. The source is referenced by abbreviations:

[CR MEP]	<i>Centre-right Member of the European Parliament</i>
[CL MEP]	<i>Centre-left Member of the European Parliament</i>
[ADV]	<i>Political Advisor</i>
[NGO]	<i>Non-Governmental Organisation Lobbyist or Campaigner</i>
[IND]	<i>Industry Lobbyist</i>

THE VALUES AND IDENTITY OF CENTRE-RIGHT MEPs

There are eight political groups in the European Parliament. The two largest, representing the centre-right and centre-left respectively, are the European People's Party (EPP) and Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D). Together they account for more than half of the 751 MEPs.

There is generally common ground between centre-right and centre-left MEPs in their support for a unified and integrated Europe - even if they differ on the desired outcomes for this project. Centre-left and centre-right MEPs are all "nationalists at the EU level who believe that the EU is setting the standards for the rest of the world." [CL MEP] All interviewed MEPs commented that they are appalled by the growing anti-Europeanism of the far-right and populist parties.

The primary declared ambition shared by all interviewed MEPs is a desire to make a difference. Within this broad ambition, each has a different understanding of for whom or for what this difference will be made: their party, political principles, moral principles, business interests, citizen groups, country or constituency. There is a genuine shared ethic of collective accomplishment, and a commitment to work together across Europe.

Unsurprisingly, once elected, MEPs' primary concern is being re-elected and their main accountability is to their constituents. Visibility is therefore important to them. They want to be seen and recognised for what they do, so having items they can put in their newsletters and wider media is vital, especially if it can be seen in their own country or region. [NGO]

Although they may have strong loyalty to their party, their grouping in the European Parliament and wider ideology, MEPs' strongest loyalty is usually to their geographical area - primarily their electoral district, but also their country or region. They will rarely refuse to see people from their electoral area, even from different political groups, and will defend the interests of their geographical area.

No one interviewed believed that MEPs are strongly motivated by financial reward, although the job is well paid, with a good pension. Whilst MEPs who work closely with industry can receive jobs in industry when they leave, the perception is that there probably isn't a 'revolving door', nor is this seen to be a general motivation.

As with the wider public, some of the key differences between centre-right and centre-left MEPs relate to equality and the role of the state. The centre-left favours policies that lead to greater equality, while the centre-right sees society as inevitably hierarchical based on merit and initiative. The left works from a critique of capitalism and seeks to manage it for wider social objectives. The right is critical of state interference and favours free markets and deregulation of business.

Attitudes can vary widely across the centre-right, even between MEPs from the same national party. Asked to map these differences, one centre-right MEP explained that the members of the EPP could be divided into three categories when it came to climate change. One third could be

defined as progressives (social reformists, concerned with social fairness). Another third could be defined as conservatives who consistently resist climate change action (ten or so MEPs in the EPP are very outspoken and “make the centre-right appear more conservative than it really is” [CR MEP]). The remaining third “do not have strong views about anything and think that their main duty is to defend things. They want to please and want to be on the winners’ side.” [CR MEP]

SPEAKING TO THE IDENTITY AND VALUES OF MEPS

As noted in the main report, good communications includes respecting and openly validating the worldview and self-image of the people spoken to. Such validations, for both the centre-left and centre-right, might include:

Making a difference - stressing the capacity of climate policies to generate change and leave a lasting legacy for the MEP

Influencing the debate - stating the influence of MEPs and the importance of their decisions

Visibility - focusing on actions, events and images that raise MEPs’ profiles

Constituent accountability - focusing on the impacts of climate change and opportunities in the new carbon economy for their constituency; bringing in local constituents and business interests

THE BASIS FOR SUCCESSFUL COMMUNICATION WITH CENTRE-RIGHT MEPs

Narratives and language around climate change for centre-right MEPs should be built around centre-right values – these are discussed in more detail in the main report.

PRINCIPLES

For centre-right MEPs, some basic principles would include:

- Avoid over-emotional, catastrophic language and focus on specific impacts that have strong centre-right resonance (health, security, economy, property, stability, social order)
- Speak to a centre-right interpretation of environment (landscape, countryside, way of life, conservation and protection) rather than the green/left interpretation of environment (ecology, global systems, social justice)
- Be careful not to stress the leadership argument (some MEPs feel that Europe has led too much), but highlight that other countries are now acting and the EU could fall behind
- Emotional appeals that can be effective include the need for action in the face of major threat, unity for common purpose and the rights of future generations. However, the messenger is crucially important when these appeals are used, and they may be ineffective unless expressed by other conservatives (see section further in this report, 'Bring in Outside Communicators')

LANGUAGE AND FRAMES

The main report provides a lexicon of language used regularly by centre-right MEPs, such as balance, fairness, realism, security, reliability and opportunity. Many of these words are also frames, which is to say they embody a cluster of values, and whenever they are used they clearly indicate that the subject matter is relevant to conservatives. These words can be applied in a range of different contexts including briefings, reports, speeches and face-to-face meetings, for example:

- We have carefully weighed up the risks with the very best expert evidence.
- This is a measured and rational approach with moderate and balanced proposals.
- A fair debate is vital and we welcome it. The perspective of business and civil society are both important to help you reach balanced conclusions.
- This policy will secure investment for a safe and reliable energy supply.
- This is the real science, these are real challenges, this is a realistic proposal, with realistic solutions.
- We need a coherent climate policy that will generate a clear and fair framework within which households and businesses can make informed choices.

SUGGESTED KEY CLIMATE CHANGE NARRATIVES TO ENGAGE CENTRE-RIGHT MEPS

KEY NARRATIVE: "THIS IS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR EUROPEAN INGENUITY"

MEPs are attached to the Eurocentric narrative of Europe as a world centre of technology and creativity. In this model, Europe is uniquely positioned to respond to the challenges of climate change.

"I argue that Europe is an ageing society, densely populated without many resources. Our great advantage is our knowledge infrastructure, but we have to move fast so we can keep that leading position." **[CL MEP]**

"Arguments against action are based on a lack of faith in European corporate creativity." **Anna Rosbach (ECR)²**

KEY NARRATIVE: "OZONE DEPLETION AND CFCS - A PRECEDENT FOR INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION"

The international project to reduce and replace ozone-depleting chemicals can serve as a metaphor and precedent for action on climate change. It contains many key aspects of centre-right worldview: the strength of institutions, international co-operation, and a balanced and rational strategy based on scientific information with solutions led by business innovation. Conservatives are strongly led by precedent and familiarity, so CFCs provide a useful basis for arguing against the novelty of climate change, and for saying, "We've been here before...and we solved it."

"Arguments against action remind me of the arguments I heard when we made rules against acid rain, the rules on the protection of the ozone layer and to improve air quality. There were arguments that 'it would put undue burdens on business that will disappear abroad.'" **Anna Rosbach (ECR)³**

"We can solve this problem with technology, just as we did with ozone-depleting chemicals, using technology developed by European companies." **[CR MEP]**

KEY NARRATIVE: "THIS IS A HISTORICAL CALLING"

Building on the core conservative value of duty and the desire to make a difference, it can be said that politicians are especially drawn to historical metaphors of co-operation for a shared purpose.

For MEPs as a whole, the most common historical metaphor is one of post-war reconstruction. For the centre-right, it is the struggle against communism:

“There are very few moments in history when nations are asked to find common decisions that will change the lives of every man, woman and child on the planet for generations to come: the creation of the Bretton Woods Agreement and the architecture of the post-war economy; the Marshall Plan that rebuilt Europe after the war; the talks that led to the fall of the Iron Curtain and the reunification of Germany. Now we face another such moment. We need to find a way to tackle climate change – together with 192 nations!” **Karl-Heinz Florenz (EPP)**⁴

KEY NARRATIVE: “THIS ISSUE SHOWS WHY WE NEED A EUROPEAN UNION...”

Building on the commitment of centrist MEPs to the “European project”, climate change can be framed as justification for the European Union. Climate change requires international co-operation, especially in the setting of targets:

“Pollution does not stop at national borders - it requires us to work together. What is more, to deal with the problem [of climate change] fairly, we need a single overall standard that is proportional.” **[CR MEP]**

Climate change can be woven into a meta-narrative of co-operation and the peaceful resolution of shared challenges that started with post-war reconstruction. “When Ronald Reagan addressed Parliament in Strasbourg, he spoke of how their grandfathers sat in trenches and shot at each other - he received a standing ovation.” [NGO]

KEY NARRATIVE: “THERE NEEDS TO BE A BALANCE BETWEEN THE ROLES OF THE EU AND MEMBER STATES”

The centre-right is especially interested in achieving the right balance (an important centre-right frame) between decisions at the EU level and decisions at the national level - the principle of subsidiarity. They are cautious about over-reach and unwilling to take responsibility at a national level for the costs of extreme weather impacts and adaptation.

Narratives need to find a clearly defined balance between national and EU wide responsibilities, stressing common objectives and a European vision – for example bringing to the fore the issues that ‘we can agree on’ whilst tailoring personal communication to emphasise impacts and opportunities in their own constituency.

The centre-right often describes the role of the EU as setting an overall framework and targets, within which individual countries and companies can set their own objectives and policy. The word (and frame) of flexibility is frequently used:

“Member states should have the necessary freedom and flexibility to decide their energy mix.” **Françoise Grossetête (EPP)**⁵

ADVICE FOR INFLUENCING CENTRE-RIGHT MEPS

NGOs, businesses and MEPs alike recognise the role lobbyists can play in helping MEPs navigate complex issues in which they are not experts and for which they cannot anticipate the full implication of policies. "At their best, lobbyists create better-informed decisions." [CL MEP]

In centre-right terminology, seeing representatives of different groups helps to develop balanced policies that do not impede economic interests - which inevitably leads to giving priority to business lobbyists.

However, hearing multiple, diverging views creates greater complexity on issues that are already difficult to negotiate. Centre-right MEPs therefore favour lobbyists who can aggregate or summarise complex positions, and this is one reason why trade organisations enjoy such influence. NGO campaigners will be more influential when they can perform a similar function or, as one MEP commented, "come to a meeting with an industry representative and tell me what they can agree on." [CR MEP]

HOW TO ACCOMODATE THE DIFFERENCES IN VALUES BETWEEN CENTRE-RIGHT MEPS AND ENVIRONMENTAL/PROGRESSIVE LOBBYISTS

There are major and often irreconcilable differences in the values and worldviews of progressive environmentalists and centre-right MEPs. This raises an important question: should progressive advocates be using language based on values that they might not agree with?

As a lobbyist of a large environmental NGO explains: "NGOs face an internal tension: choosing at what point we embrace the ideology of a victor when we lose a battle and at what point we hold onto our own values and mobilise our own constituency." [NGO]

The opinion of the Climate Outreach and Information Network (COIN), shared by many of the NGO advocates consulted for this report, is that being a good communicator always depends on understanding the values and motivations of your audience - but being trusted also requires honesty and integrity about one's own values.

One solution, which is recommended below, is that progressives can maintain their independence by bringing in communicators who share centre-right values, for example business or faith leaders.

One criticism that is often made of NGO lobbyists is that they tend to be over-emotional, presenting messages based around threat without being able to back them up with facts or provide clear policy proposals. One NGO lobbyist comments: "I've seen MEPs switch off as soon as an NGO becomes emotional because he does not want to go to that place - it does not mean

that you can only use rational arguments, but there is a limit to what they want to hear across their desk.” [NGO]

Industry lobbyists advise environmental communicators to clearly identify expertise in an area other than the environment, and particularly in economics and business. In the end, though, it may be impossible to overcome suspicion of environmentalists, especially as conservatives are alert to any signs that someone is not a member of their ‘in group’ and does not really share their values. As one industry lobbyist puts it, “However professional they are, the feeling among politicians is that environmentalists do not understand real business, as if what they do comes from dogma” [IND]. One centre-right MEP says, “We can talk about the messages they use but the real problem is often more substantial - they are simply the wrong people.” [CR MEP]

BRING IN OUTSIDE COMMUNICATORS

As noted above, as well as in the main report, trust in the communicator is a vital component of effective communication on climate change. The most trusted communicators will always be fellow conservatives, business representatives and people who clearly share a centre-right worldview.

All interviewees stressed the value of bringing in outside communicators, but NGO lobbyists appear unwilling to relinquish their role as the primary authority and communicator, possibly because their work is closely tied to specific policy objectives and reports.

An alternative approach would see lobbyists not as primary communicators but as facilitators of a discussion into which they bring outside communicators who speak to specific centre-right MEP interests or values.

“My most effective meetings have been where I facilitate a meeting with someone else: someone from the coal face, a business leader, or someone who can show how they will be affected by the legislation.” [IND]

“We should broaden alliances, including people we do not normally work with. We do not all need to do things the same way.” [NGO]

This could be framed using the language recommended above, of providing MEPs with additional input to help them design well-informed, balanced, realistic and flexible policies that reflect the interests of their constituents and can build wider prosperity.

For example, meetings could be organised with:

- constituent lobby groups in Brussels or in their home country
- representatives of industries from within the MEP’s constituency - a tactic often used by industry lobby groups
- high level conservatives, including figures from outside the EU

- people of religious faith, especially from churches strongly represented in the MEP's area
- scientists and 'impartial' experts in health or economy

In particular, there is an urgent need to enable better representation of the businesses that support action on emissions reduction and energy efficiency in order to balance the influence of BusinessEurope, the largest industry lobby, which often opposes climate legislation. There is a need to provide a conduit for smaller business or maybe even consumer organisations and unions to create a broader definition of the 'economy'.

TAKE MEPS OUT OF THE OFFICE AND INTO THE FIELD

Personal hands-on experience is of immense value, especially with an issue like climate change that often becomes dry, abstract and technical.

"When the African-Caribbean-Pacific delegation went to Africa in 2008 and saw drought and cows dying and this was said to be due to climate change - they then spoke with great passion from both left and right about what they had seen." [NGO]

The same principle can be applied closer to home. On the positive (opportunity) side, this could involve organising visits of MEPs to businesses in their own constituencies involved in the low-carbon economy (insulation, efficiency, renewable power) or inviting them to open new installations.

On a negative (threat) side, this could involve ensuring that MEPs visit areas in their own country or constituency affected by extreme weather events, especially storms and flooding. Although the linkages between extreme weather and climate change are complex, such direct experience will help keep climate change at the front of their minds.

The role for campaigners in field visits is twofold. Firstly, they can organise the visits. Secondly, they can ensure that impartial expert opinion is at hand to help the MEPs understand the wider policy context - for example, what the individual business they are visiting represents at an EU level, or the probability of more storms/floods of this kind in a climate change future. Again, the role of the campaigner is to facilitate and enable a discussion whilst respecting and validating the MEP's role in finding a policy balance.

REPORTS AND NEW MEDIA

Besides personal meetings, campaigners depend heavily on a single means of communication: reports. There is an assumption that a strongly referenced and evidence-based approach is in itself persuasive. It may be for a few key people - for example those drawing up policy for the European Commission - but there is little evidence that reports are effective with wider audiences. In reality, NGOs are often dependent on reports "because they are a tangible output that can be reported to funders" [IND]. Whether these are an efficient use of time and resources is not always considered.

“The people on the staff of the European Commission are specialists. They think they are smarter than everyone else, so they need detailed information. But MEPs are not experts, though they do develop expertise, and they need a simpler broad brush approach.” [NGO]

MEPs are very short on time and unlikely to read a report, although their staff may. What is more, as argued in our main report, there may be a deeper problem of conservative distrust for environmentalists that cannot be overcome with an information-based approach. For this reason, the most important aspects of a report may be the logos and names on the cover (which should ideally be recognisable and impressive to the MEP) and the executive summary.

Campaigners could therefore consider alternative media:

- Information provided in a factsheet format
- Bespoke briefings to meet the requests of MEPs
- Videos or video letters addressed directly to the MEP
- Bringing engaging props to meetings that encourage curiosity and interaction such as samples, models and images

As noted above, MEPs are especially interested in being seen to be active. Almost all have their own websites and newsletters, so providing material that can go into these newsletters could be more important for influencing them than getting material into wider and national media. Material should be provided to MEPs in a form that can be easily used and inserted.

Here is an example of how these ideas could be put together following a strategy already used very effectively by the coal and car industry:

A campaigning NGO organises a visit for an MEP to a new solar panel factory in her constituency. The invitation is sent by the business hosting the visit. The NGO invites an independent expert to explain the wider policy context of the opportunities for solar voltaic power. The NGO ensures good media coverage and provides photographs and copy for the MEP's website and newsletter. The MEP is presented with a plaque or paperweight. When there is a specific policy opportunity, the NGO facilitates a lobby visit by the company director.

ON THE DAY PREPARATION

It is not surprising that professional industry lobbyists have gained the most experience in influencing centre-right MEPs. Three industry lobbyists were interviewed for this report. They advised:

Be fastidious in dress

Style of personal dress and manners is especially important to conservatives. “Observe the person/people you want to influence and dress or present yourself as closely as possible to their style. You should be as polished as they think they are!”[IND]

Understand motivations and the importance of validating worldviews

An industry lobbyist shared their preparation strategy for meeting a centre-right MEP: “I try to put myself in her shoes and understand her motivation. What can I use to make our conversations more human and less sterile? I look at her resume and seek points of contact in terms of education, knowledge, even hobbies and sports which I can use as a bridge. Does she come from a constituency where industry is well represented (or not)? Can she sell what she is doing to her constituency? Is she a leader or is she a follower (in which case I may get more influence by talking with her political party first?)” [IND]

Provide ongoing support with information

A key principle for industry lobbyists is to ensure that MEPs consistently gain something useful from meeting them. The lobbyists ask, “What do you need and how can we help you?” The MEPs often request expert advice. The lobbyists invite detailed technical questions and then provide high-quality tailored advice in the form of short briefing papers immediately after meetings.

ENDNOTES

¹ Climate Outreach and Information Network (2015). *Starting a New Conversation on Climate Change with the European Centre-Right*. Oxford: Climate Outreach and Information Network. <http://www.climateoutreach.org.uk/resources/>

² Anna Rosbach (ECR) [A 2030 framework for climate and energy policies \(debate\)](#) Tuesday, 4 February 2014 - Strasbourg

³ *ibid.*

⁴ <http://www.euractiv.com/climate-change/mep-climate-action-economy/article-188187>

⁵ <http://www.euractiv.com/energy/meps-confirm-ambitious-stance-20-news-533298>

