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Abstract (German)

Die Europäische Union hat den Umwelt- und Nachhaltigkeitsdiskurs durch jahrzehntelange Umwelt- und Klimapolitik legitimiert. Mit der Einführung des European Green Deal, einem wichtigen politischen Dokument, das die nachhaltige Zukunft Europas vor Augen führt, hat sich die EU ehrgeizige Ziele gesetzt, um ihre Wirtschaft zu dekarbonisieren und klimaneutral zu machen. In diesem Zusammenhang erlangte die Green Economy eine prominente Position in politischen Narrativen, die einen „grünen" Lösungsansatz für nachhaltige Transformationen der Zukunft propagieren. Angesichts der Vielfalt und Komplexität der Konzepte, Ansätze und Instrumente der europäischen Umweltpolitik zielt diese Masterarbeit darauf ab, die Bedeutung zu hinterfragen, die der Nachhaltigkeit zugeschrieben wird, und ihre Entwicklung über die Jahre des politischen Diskurses der EU zu diesem Thema nachzuzeichnen. Die Narrative zur Nachhaltigkeit und Pfaden der Nachhaltigkeit werden anhand der veränderten Konstellationen zwischen den ökonomischen und ökologischen Gebieten innerhalb der politischen Strategien der EU analysiert. Durch die Frage, wie Diskurse zur Stärkung des Umweltschutzes seit dem EWG-Vertrag (1957) konstruiert und verändert wurden, ist es das Ziel dieser Masterarbeit, die politischen Debatten über die Stärkung des Umweltschutzes parallel zur Aufrechterhaltung des Wirtschaftswachstums aufzuschlüsseln. Daher wird untersucht, wie verschiedene Begriffe (z. B. „Entkopplung", „Innovation", „Kreislaufwirtschaft", „grüne" Wirtschaft/Übergang) es den politischen Gremien ermöglichten, die neuen transformativen Wege in Richtung einer nachhaltigen Zukunft der Europäischen Union zu erarbeiten. Der jüngste „grüne" Ansatz, der durch den European Green Deal kommuniziert wurde, wird als Endpunkt der Entwicklung der politischen Ambitionen der EU im Bereich des Umweltschutzes genommen. Durch die Untersuchung der Schlagwörter und der vorherrschenden Verbindungen zu den Nachhaltigkeitslösungen der vorangegangenen EU-Umwelt- und Klimastrategien werden die narrative Kontinuität von der gleichzeitigen Adressierung ökonomischer und ökologischer Ziele, sowie die Widersprüche zwischen den verschiedenen Elementen des „grünen" Modells für nachhaltige Entwicklung gezeigt.

Abstract (English)

The discourse on the environment and sustainability has been legitimized by the European Union (EU) through decades of environmental and climate policy-making. With the introduction of the European Green Deal in 2019, a major political document that envisions a sustainable future for Europe, the EU laid out ambitious goals for decarbonizing and making its economy climate-neutral. In this context, the green economy has acquired a prominent position in political narratives that promote "green" solutionism for sustainability transformations of the future. Given the diversity and complexity of the concepts, approaches, and instruments of European environmental politics, this master thesis aims to question the meaning attributed to sustainability and to trace its evolution over the years of EU political discourse on the topic. It analyzes the narratives of sustainability and sustainable pathways through changes in the constellations between the economic and environmental domains within the EU's political strategies. Through asking how discourses that empower environmental protection have been constructed and transformed since the EEC Treaty (1957), the goal of this thesis is to unpack the political debates regarding the empowerment of environmental protection in parallel with the maintenance of economic growth. Therefore, I explore how different notions (e.g., decoupling, innovation, circularity, and green economy/transition) have enabled political bodies to elaborate the new transformative pathways toward the sustainable future of the EU. This thesis considers the most recent "green" approach communicated by the European Green Deal to be the final point of development of the EU's political ambitions in the field of environmental protection. Through examining keywords and prevalent links to the sustainability solutions of the EU's precedent environmental and climate strategies, I demonstrate the continuity of the narratives addressing economic and ecological goals simultaneously as well as the contradictions between the various elements of the "green" model for sustainable development.

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List of Abbreviations

CE	Circular economy
CO2	Carbon dioxide
EAP	Environment Action Programme
EC	European Commission
ECP	European Climate Pact
ECCP	European Climate Change Programme
EEA	European Environment Agency
EGD	European Green Deal
EM	Ecological modernization
ETS	Emission trading scheme
EU	European Union
F2F	Farm to Fork
GDP	Gross domestic product
GE	Green economy
GG	Green growth
GEG	Global environmental governance
GHG	Greenhouse gas
IPCC	International Panel on Climate Change
NECP	National energy and climate plan
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
R&D	Research and development
SEA	Single European Act
SD	Sustainable Development
SDS	Strategy for Sustainable Development
TFEU	Treaty on Functioning of the European Union
UNCED	The United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
UNEP	The United Nations Environment Programme

UNFCCC	The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
WCED	World Commission on Environment and Development

1 Introduction

> Consensus on how to combat climate change cannot and will not ever be reached; there is no one 'rational' path to take, no overarching grand green scheme that suits everyone. Any apparently inclusive agreement and rational discussion is rather a trick of power that disguises exclusion and inequality.
>
> (Machin 2013: 5)

In seeking to understand how to tackle environmental degradation and climate change, which measures to take to mitigate or adapt, and through which means to do so, political elites have not produced an "inclusive" and "rational" solution that extends beyond the existing power relations. The complex, multidimensional, and multicausal nature of environmental problems poses challenges for policy-makers. After several decades of environmental and climate policy-making, there is no universal answer or consent exists regarding how to proceed with the current crisis.

Air and water pollution, biodiversity loss, soil degradation, and changes in ocean cycles are some of – but not the only – outcomes of human-induced activities. Climate change, as one of the most complex and pressing issues of modern society, poses an alarming threat to current economic and social development. Beyond this, environmental and climate-related actions are highly politicized and often driven not by scientific or academic knowledge but rather economic interests and balancing between neoliberal policies. Therefore, our generation currently faces what can be described as the "myth" of consensus in environmental and climate change politics, which is neither equally suitable for the environment nor society.

Following the most recent logic of environmental approaches on a political level, the concepts of "sustainability" and "green growth" (GG) have been deeply incorporated into policy initiatives. The "green" discourse evolved as a response to years of environmental policy-making, which proved to be incapable of addressing environmental damage and producing ecological, cultural, and societal changes. This conceptual rethinking of the economy–society–environment relationship intends to produce new approaches and models that would, from one side, incentivize climate-friendly behavior while from another side helping to reduce the environmental externalities of modern production and consumption cycles.

Along the way, powerful institutions across the globe operate with environmental narratives, including the European Union (EU). The EU has been one of the most robust and proactive defenders of environment- and climate-oriented policies as well as a forerunner in promoting a "green" economy and growth. The political attention paid by EU institutions to the sustainability

agenda dates back to the last quarter of the 20th century. At both regional and international levels, the EU's responses were framed as transformative solutions to the global crisis that could provide for a future where climate change, biodiversity loss, air pollution, and other environmental challenges would no longer be existential threats. Over the last 50 years, the EU environmental policy has undergone several paradigmatic shifts and discursive changes, which have not been isolated from the developments of the international environmental agenda. Moreover, as a result of integration processes, environmental legislative and policy frameworks have been heavily shaped by the "Europeanization" of environmental governance, which has aligned the EU Member States' national laws, policies, and programs with the EU's overarching policy on the environment.

At present, limiting harmful emissions is positioned as one of the key directions of the EU environmental policy (Council of the European Union 2022). The dominance of the sustainability and "green" discourses can be observed across a broad spectrum of initiatives issued over the last four decades. Therefore, against the backdrop of rapidly growing attention to climate change and environmental disasters at the global and EU levels, an investigation of the political discourses on potential solutions from both modern and retrospective perspectives is of unique value. First, such an investigation would reveal how and on which foundations modern accounts have developed. Second, it would potentially contribute to the critical assessment of the dominating powers in political rhetoric. Given the complexity of problems related to the environment and climate change, the political responses and dominant approaches vary significantly, as do the underlying reasons for their selection.

Therefore, I aimed to conduct an analysis of the environmental and climate discourse, and specifically constellations of perspectives, solutions, and approaches, through examining the imperatives of key documents for EU environmental policies – namely the Environment Action Programmes (EAPs), EU strategies on sustainability and climate change, as well as specific official documents on energy and climate change policies. To investigate and trace the historical roots of the changing guiding principles and focus areas of environmental policy-making, I turned to the rich record of environmental documents issued by the European Commission (EC) from the 1970s until 2019 – the timepoint at which the European Green Deal (EGD) was issued. I took the textual analysis of the EGD as the final step in my research and identified the main aspects concerning the concept of "green" growth/transition given its interpretation in the EGD strategy.

2 Research aims and interest

The following chapter provides with an overview on international and internal context of EU environmental and climate policy-making (Section 2.1). It then introduces aims of the research and step-by-step description of research inquiries undertaken to investigate the topic (Section 2.2). Finally, the research questions are presented in the last section of this chapter (Section 2.3).

2.1 Setting the scene of environmental and climate policy-making in the EU

Internationally

Given the long historical roots and changing approaches of the EU's environmental and climate policies as well as its reputation as a "political frontrunner" in responding to ecological crises and climate change (Van Schaik and Schunz 2012; Selin and VanDeveer 2015), investigating and tracking the process through which the environmental topic has been embedded and framed in the EU political agenda appear relevant. The EU has developed a set of environmental strategies that cover components of sustainable development (SD), namely economic, environmental, and social components, while also considering their interrelationships. The EU strategies and approaches have been influential beyond the Union's borders, establishing its role as an actor that "leads by example" in international environmental and climate governance. Kelemen (2010: 336) argued that the EU took over the primary leadership of the United States in global environmental politics over the course of the 1990s with its approaches for reducing greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and the energy transition path.

Internally

The EU's policy decisions and changes as well as paradigmatic shifts are interrelated with integration processes that have been occurring since the 1970s. The imperatives of the single market, economic integration, and trade liberalization have influenced environmental policies since the early stages of EU integration. Zito et al. (2019) argued that economy-driven reasoning has always facilitated or hampered the introduction of stringent environmental regulations. Furthermore, Fischer and Geden (2015) claimed that the commitment of the EU to environmental and climate goals has served as a solid basis for the creation of a common identity. Moreover, a study acknowledged the EU environmental policy as a crucial element in the integration project (Lenschow and Sprungk 2010).

Today, the EU's model of regulatory politics, which combines domestic and international regulatory forces, allows for a balance between national and EU-level environmental politics and

international standards and requirements (Selin and VanDeveer 2015). In other words, national incentives toward environmental and climate regulations serve as grounds for stringent environmental policies at both the national and EU scale, while commitments to international environmental agreements legitimize the subsequent rules. From the perspective of levels of integration, scholars such as Holzinger and Schimmelfennig (2012) have argued that "differentiated" integration can be observed in terms of governance within the EU, with the implementation of certain rules and regulations varying among the Member States. In more radical terms, Scharpf (1999: 151) claimed that within the EU itself, multiple standards co-exist simultaneously, and adhering to them depends on the willingness of each country.

Despite the aforementioned discrepancies in approaches, the EU has been one of the most influential actors in promoting the environmental and climate objectives. Relatively recently, with the introduction of the EGD, the EU has once again proclaimed the ambitiousness of its goals of mainstreaming the agenda of "greening" (i.e., the economy and economic growth) and reaching climate neutrality. Therefore, it would be interesting to investigate how the frameworks of sustainability, the economy–society–environment relationship, and the issue of climate change have been incorporated into and transformed within the EU agenda and political discourse.

2.2 Aims of the research

Against the aforementioned background, the aim of this research was to analyze the formation of the EU environmental and climate policy and its main narratives, as well as to further correlate them with the European integration processes. First, I reflected on the domestic policies, instruments, and mechanisms aimed at improved environmental performance within the EU. Therefore, my primary focus was on analyzing the EU environmental strategies in the form of the EAPs. I examined the markers that define the role and place of environmental protection and its relationship with the economic development and growth agenda in the following documents. Second, I aimed to track the embedment of the concept of "sustainability" in European environmental policy-making as well as its articulation with integration processes. Thus, I examined EU strategic documents, such as the Lisbon Strategy (2000), EU Strategy for Sustainable Development (EU SDS; 2001), and the Sustainability Plan for Europe – Europe 2020 (2010). Another aspect covered by this research is the EU's responses to the issue of climate change. My analysis of this dataset was aimed at distinguishing the core discourses and ideas that form the basis of the EU climate change strategy. I sought to determine when and through what means the climate agenda achieved prominence and how it became tightly linked with the EU policy on energy and, specifically, renewable energy.

Last but not least, I aimed to critically analyze the EGD and its discursive framing of GG as an alternative to "brown growth," along with its communication regarding the "green transition" and "climate neutrality." Therefore, I assessed the potential novelties in the EU's views on a sustainable future and green transformation as well as their correlation with the EU's past vision of its SD.

2.3 Research questions

Building on the aforementioned background and focusing on the discursive elements of the EU environmental and climate policy, I developed the following research questions to guide my research:

1) How did the storyline of the EU environmental and climate discourse evolve over the period 1970–2019?
2) What are the main elements of EU sustainability policy-making and how did they change with the integration stages?
3) In what way does the EGD's discourse build on the problematization of GG, sustainability, and sustainable growth?

3 Theoretical and conceptual framework

The purpose of this chapter is to explain and justify the theoretical and conceptual lenses through which this research was conducted. Given a multidimensional nature of the investigated topic and numerous layers of research inquiries, it is divided into the subchapters, each of which looks into different theoretical aspects. First, Section 3.1 introduces a conceptual framework of "global environment" by elaborating on concepts of "global (environmental) regimes", "global environmental governance", "complex interdependence". Then, Section 3.2 relates these concepts to the EU context and explains how EU environmental policy-making and political discourse was and is being influenced by international narratives. Section 3.3 discuses theoretical approaches to European integration, including their application to EU environmental governance and policy-making. Finally, Section 3.4 presents different theoretical perspective on thematically related components of EU environmental policies, namely climate, energy and economic growth.

3.1 Environment and politics: Theoretical perspective on a global dimension

Environmentalism has undergone a considerable transformation over the last decades. The same can be said for the approaches employed to investigate the relationships between the ecological

environment and world politics, as well as the role of world politics in tackling the environmental crisis. In line with globalization streams, the idea of a "global environment" as well as the multilateral involvement in agreements and strategies aimed at preserving it have revealed the emerging relevance of an internationally coordinated framework, leading to the establishment of global regimes and interdependent obligations together with the gradual inclusion of new participants (Pontecorvo 1999: 710).

Environmental problems such as climate change have led to the establishment of global environmental governance (GEG). Academic scholarship has been occupied with environmental and natural resource governance since the 1950s (Partelow et al. 2020: 5). From O'Neill's (2009) perspective, traditional political science and international relations (IR) approaches have limited capacities to investigate the complexities of global environmental change. Stemming from traditional disciplinary parameters, said approaches are unable to address the mixes of transdisciplinary challenges inherent to global politics in the environmental field. For instance, in the state-centered approach, the system of IR is seen primarily through interactions between sovereign nation-states, omitting the roles of nonstate actors; thus, it is unable to depict how environmental problems are currently tackled (O'Neill 2009: 2).

In an article for the policy journal *Foreign Affairs* in 1970, Kennan claimed that "the entire ecology of the planet is not arranged in national compartments; and whoever interferes seriously with it anywhere is doing something that is almost invariably of serious concern to the international community at large" (as cited in O'Neill 2009: 4). Already in the 1970s, and especially in the post-Stockholm era, environmental politics were becoming increasingly decentralized, moving from intranational politics toward governing networks that included newly emerged actors and functioned on a multilateral basis. Therefore, global politics as a state-led system was called into question, revealing its multi-actor character and complexity.

Since the current state of world environmental politics and IR is characterized by a high degree of interconnectedness and interinfluence of actors' actions, one can turn to interdependence theory as an explanatory framework for modern processes of international environmental regulation. In political terms, interdependence refers to a state's loss of control or "power to act" and move toward multilateral cooperation (see Spindler 2010: 102). Keohane and Nye (1977) conceptualized interdependence in world politics by emphasizing the political significance of the empirical interactions or interconnectedness between actors (as cited in Spindler 2010: 104–106). As a counter-argument to the ideal type of state-centered worldview defended by realists, they developed the concept of "complex interdependence," which is based on the following assumptions:

1) States are not the sole actors in world politics – the current world system is characterized by complex relations that are no longer limited by classic interstate interactions, but rather include other influential actors, such as multinational corporations, banks, or scientific expert groups; that is, there are "multiple channels of contact";
2) Military power is only of subordinate importance as a means of politics;
3) Due to the interconnectedness of the processes, instead of a predetermined hierarchy of goals, one should consider a variety of different problems areas – namely "issue areas" (Spindler 2010: 107–8).

Hence, the regulation of various aspects, especially those attributed to soft interests, has acquired a global character due to the high degree of political, economic, and social interconnectedness of states, multinational corporations, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). Therefore, specific problems such as climate change cannot be solved autonomously by nation-states. Moreover, emerging challenges are becoming increasingly complex, incorporating various areas of concern, which in turn requires the involvement of specialized institutions, new expertise, or "bottom-up" approaches.

IR theory has been heavily reshaped by the emergence of international environmental problems. O'Neill (2009:13) suggested that international environmental cooperation is driven by nation-states' interaction with or without the coordination of international bodies (e.g., the United Nations [UN]) within the international governance regime. From the perspective of networks theory, global governance is characterized as "the result of the activity of a non-hierarchical network linking international and transnational institutions: not only NGOs and international regimes, but also transnational regimes determine the behaviour of actors" (Bruhl and Rittberger 2002: 2). Again, the agency of actors in the international arena is not limited by nation-states but rather expands to the interaction between various institutions that form regimes of a transboundary nature. While this process is influenced by the states, to a lesser extent it also leads to an increasing activity of nonstate actors in the establishment of norms and rules as well as their monitoring. Nation-states, in turn, retain mechanisms for reaggregating the interests of individual institutions, which allows them, if necessary, to interact with each other as integral actors. Krasner (1983 as cited in Auer 2000: 160) referred to the notion of "expectations convergence" in the sense that the environmental regime is a system of principles, norms, rules, and procedures that are followed and performed by the regime's participants, since they have common interests in this particular area. Further elaborating on the constitutive elements of the regime, O'Neill (2009: 13) stated that it includes signed treaties and organizations that were set up to govern the treaties and decision-making processes that govern future negotiations.

Operating with a conceptual understanding of GEG, global environmental regimes and global networks theory should not mislead our consideration of the normative, legal, and organizational frameworks provided by national governments and supranational bodies, which – despite global political transformations – play an essential role in environmental governance. Of central concern is how international environmental politics can be seen through different theoretical lenses depending on one's research interest. International interdependence, in this case, allows a focus on collective action toward problems that go beyond national borders. Moreover, the interdependence and global nature of environmental issues are highly articulated by EU institutions, making explicitly covering the aspect of an "interconnected" global response to the environmental crisis a necessity.

3.2 Connecting to EU politics

As can be concluded from the previous section, with their variety and complexity, environmental problems affect the interests of numerous actors across the globe. The EU has long been actively involved in international environmental governance and has been seen as its leader (Zito et al. 2019:197). Relating the aforementioned "governance" framework to the EU context, it should be underlined that the architecture of the EU's environmental and climate change decision-making presents a complex multi-level system that cannot be addressed through "grand" state centric theories. In this regard, Marks et al. (1996: 342) underlined that the EU's collective decision-making and supranational institutions, despite embodying national interests, erode state sovereignty to the extent that it allows the power of supranational powers to be configured.

The trajectory of EU environmental law and policy-making cannot be considered in isolation from the international environmental rhetoric. The global environmental regime has influenced and shaped the EU's environmental politics along with its vision of the environment and its place within the EU policy framework. Being subject to developments of the late twentieth and early twenty-first century, the EU's policies reacted to the changes in international environmental principles. These principles, in turn, were based on certain ideologies of a "discursive" nature. In this regard, Bodansky (1995) examined the nature of environmental approaches and cited the example of SD, arguing for its fundamental discursiveness (as cited in Jessup and Rubenstein 2012a: 193). Nonetheless, SD has, as with many other international norms, had a practical impact on international environmental governance, its actors, and the setting of their policy objectives (ibid).

In line with the premises of a discourse theory, specific narratives have been and continue to be influential and affect the formation of domestic public law principles (ibid.). As argued by Dryzek

(2005), environmental policy priorities are articulated through specific language and terminology that determine the perception of environmental issues. The EU has long been active in the adoption of "environmental frameworks," which were formed through close interaction with international environmental and climate regimes. The EU's approach to the environment, sustainability, and GG is not isolated from paradigmatic shifts that have occurred within and outside of the Union. According to theories on the role of exogenous shocks (see Rixen et al. 2016), the status quo of policy narratives can be interrupted by external shocks and/or by external international institutions. For instance, the Stockholm Conference, Kyoto Protocol, and Paris Agreement serve as exogenous catalysts for enhancing, shifting, or transforming the focus of the environmental narrative, which is being "domesticated" in EU laws and strategic documents.

3.3 Environmental and climate policy-making in the context of EU integration

In revealing the essence of the theoretical aspects of the EU's environmental and climate policy strategies, including the most recent 2019 EGD, it is essential to mention various theoretical frameworks, which in their own ways explain the emergence of the pan-European common policy. According to Skjærseth (2016: 512), discussions of the EU climate and energy policies can use the traditional theories of European integration and policy-making.

When speaking of the EU as a regional integration structure, it should be noted that several approaches exist to studying the process of regional integration. Despite the fact that this issue was not the subject of the present study, it is advisable to single out the theories that are most logically embedded in understanding the essence of the processes occurring in the EU along with their influence on the formation of its environmental and climate legislative and normative basis.

Policy direction is highly influenced by paradigmatic changes that derive from either internal or external events. Peterson and Bomberg (1999) suggested that political decisions are not an isolated self-occurring event but rather reflections of systemic and super-systemic changes at the various levels of European integration. When considering the theoretical approach to studying EU integration, there are several different lenses through which it can be analyzed. One of the first integration theories is "dual federalism," which originated from federalist ideas. Federalism in the context of European integration processes can be explained by the voluntary refusal of Member States' governments based on their political sovereignty and the creation of supranational authorities that overtake powers to make decisions (Wiener and Diez 2009: 159). The distribution of powers within the federalist framework can be organized either vertically (e.g., between the EU and the Member States) and horizontally (e.g., between the executive and legislature), just as the distribution of competences can vary between the two levels (shared or divided; Börzel 2003: 4).

Another approach is liberal intergovernmentalism, which assumes that the EU actors are determined by rationality, which determines the speed and scope of European integration (Moravcsik 1998 as cited in Wiener and Diez 2009: 67). For Moravcsik (2008: 161), the theoretical importance lies in the definition of the interests and demands of social and transnational actors caused by globalization processes. From this angle, integration processes and state preferences are shaped by situation-specific considerations and not solely linked to common policy concerns.

Alternatively, the political dynamics of European integration can be examined by applying the premises of functionalism and neofunctionalism. Functionalism is aligned with the ideological basis of liberalism and idealism in a manner that underlines the willingness of political actors for peaceful cooperation; thus, functionalism sees mutual dependence as a core incentive of states to cooperate with each other (Conzelmann 2010: 158). From this perspective, state borders or territorial limitations can cause disturbances and hinder the opportunities necessary for common interests and actions. Neofunctionalism, drawing on the concepts of its predecessor, attempted to overcome its flaws, namely the undervaluation of the political aspect of its approach to integration and the separation of factual and political conflict handling, as suggested by Mitrany (1966 as cited in Conzelmann 2010: 161). Ernst Haas's book "The Uniting of Europe" provided the foundations for the neofunctionalist view of European integration based on the evolution of the European Coal and Steel Community and the EEC (Moravcsik 2005: 350). Operating with the more static concepts of "political community" and "technocratic" or political cooperation, as with the stages that must be completed to form a community, Haas also introduced the dynamic concept of "spill-over" (as cited in Conzelmann 2010: 165). "Spill-over" in the context of EU integration implies a direct relationship between the growing cooperation and rising integration. It is divided into two types – namely functional (i.e., occurring when cooperation in one sector of the economy drives cooperation in others) and political (i.e., occurring when cooperation in some areas drives the supranational governance in other areas; Moravcsik 2005: 350). The concept of spill-over was intended to explain how the supranational EU bodies could coordinate the new forms of cooperation that emerged in the 1960s and '70s.

Another theory that explains the process of European integration is social constructivism. Risse and Wiener (1999: 778) argued that social constructivism does not offer an alternative to IR theories of European integration but rather represents a meta-theoretical approach for understanding the "constitutive" effects of norms and institutions and their socializing effects on actors. Social constructivism relies on the high role of language as an intermediary in building social reality in the context of regional integration processes. In this case, changes in the political identity of the state within the EU are explored through investigating linguistic structures or

discourses that accompany one or another alternation of political identity (Checkel 2006: 5). Here, the crucial point lies in understanding social knowledge not as a mirror image of the world but rather as a situation-specific interpretation, which can vary depending on the social categories being deployed.

The abovementioned theories provide a theoretical account of the macro-level development of policy fields, including environmental and climate change policy. However, shifts of authority in decision-making, tracking of the co-influence of (supra)national and global trends in policy-making, as well as environmental discourse at the EU level are more "perceivable" when deploying supranational approaches (Pollack 1997, Skjærseth 2017). From the perspective of the IR theory of supranationalism, supranational solidarity in the context of environmental and climate policy-making would mean a more autonomous nature of EU-level institutions, allowing it to overtake gaps in Member States' control in policy-making (Wettestad et al. 2012: 69). A key focus in this case is assigned to the Europeanization of activities, which provides an impetus for actors like the EC or European Parliament to engage in the formation of a coalition that assumes a takeover of Member States' power. Using a supranational approach allows for an investigation of the evolution of policies and deals from the perspective of the autonomy of EU institutions and to see how the issues are being framed in respective documents.

As for the legal dimension of European integration, scholars have relatively recently begun to tackle it using integration theories. Political theories present law as contingent upon politics (i.e., politics is defined by law), but Armstrong (1998:163) argued that the reality of interaction between law and politics is much more complex. Focusing again on the complex system of EU governance, the confrontation of the EU law-making bodies with political developments cannot be solely explained through bargaining between Member States or linear processes of legal integration. Relating this specifically to the EU governance system, Armstrong (1998: 168) suggested considering the EU and power distribution as the new structure of governance that takes Member States' power but simultaneously possesses elements of continuity with the nation-state.

Therefore, when approaching the EU's environmental and climate policy-making, I deployed Börzel's (1997) consideration of policy networks as my theoretical approach. Simultaneously, I acknowledged that the level of integration impacts the way domestic structures of the EU states function. Thus, it can be argued that European decision-making, including the environmental and climate change fields, may be and is determined by the Member States' governments, but it is not homogenous in terms of "agreeability" potential. In other words, the Member States' readiness to accept certain EU-level environment-related regulations can vary significantly depending on the

resources, funding, and capacity, which creates barriers to unified responses to environmental challenges.

Given that the period discussed in this thesis begins from the very early stages of European integration, the idea was to see how processes of Europeanization influenced the environmental and climate "section" of the EU's policy making. Further discussions of the environmental and climate policy of the EU were built within the framework of specific aspects, allowing a profound consideration and analysis of its key features. Specifically, I focused on an overview and critical analysis of the official documents put into force since the 1970s.

3.4 Overview of the relationship between climate, energy, and economic growth in EU policies

Climate change and energy are fundamentally connected. A link has also been established between governance in the areas of global climate change and global energy, resulting in corresponding policy responses and a so-called "climate-energy nexus" (see Zelli et al. 2020). The substances for combating climate change and transitioning to fossil-free energy overlap, resulting in a search for solutions to decarbonize energy systems. These solutions, in turn, rely on a set of institutional values, norms, and experiences (Lenz and Viola 2017) when acquiring certain traits. Therefore, synergies between climate- and energy-oriented political responses depend on the particular contexts, actors, and their interests.

Skjærseth (2021) traced the evolution of the EU climate and energy policy from disparate initiatives aimed at limiting emissions or attempting to stimulate innovation in the field of renewable energy to a comprehensive interrelated policy that uses various mechanisms (e.g., price, tax, and investment) to achieve climate change goals while ensuring social fairness. For adherents of the pragmatist tradition, a combination of different issues (as in the case of combating climate change and energy security) in joint policies can be beneficial in terms of gaining consent among decision-makers (see Tsebelis 2002). Some scholars have argued that the development of domestic climate change responses has occurred simultaneously with the evolution of international climate regimes (see Skjærseth 2016). Others believe that it has not only developed in parallel but also had its own influence on the formation of global frameworks (see Selin and VanDeveer 2015). Usui (2005:14), in turn, suggested that the EU climate change policy should be seen through two stages of its evolution – namely before and after the Kyoto Protocol was signed.

Rationalist, sociological, and discursive perspectives offer different theoretical explanations for the study of the climate and energy. For rationalists, the role and power of hegemonic countries

are a milestone in determining the adoption of rules and norms, whereas for neoliberal institutionalists the focus of attention is actors' interests and situational contexts in which the governance nexus is being established (Keohane and Victor 2011 as cited in Zelli et al. 2020: 249).

According to discursive institutionalists, such as Schmidt (2017), the policy nexus can be seen through norms and discourses that present the constellations of an underlying structured complexity.

Scholarship dedicated to the policy mix has suggested that public and private decision-making is characterized by the so-called "co-governance" of sustainability by deploying different means (D'Amato and Korhonen 2021: 7). Moreover, in accordance with the literature on the role of ideas in public policy, ideas and their framing matter not only to the extent that they matter but also how they matter (see Mehta 2014). The framing of ideas means the way in which goals, messages, and problems are assembled, ordered, and communicated in a manner that justifies the need for action (ibid.). In line with this explanation, the mix of the EU energy and climate responses is addressed through its different elements – sustainability, clean energy, GG – and analyzed according to the frameworks and their location within a larger system of EU politics.

The EGD as a key document of EU climate and energy policy aims to make Europe "climate neutral." Climate neutrality is to be assured through the use of clean and renewable energy supplies. From this standpoint, the EGD presents a package of energy and climate goals that are highly interlinked with regard to their ultimate goals. Simultaneously, it is a "culmination" of the EU-wide discourse on the topic of sustainability (Eckert and Kovalevska 2021: 1). Siddi (2020) addressed the EGD in the broader context of EU climate and related policies and explored how it continues and complements efforts made since the 1990s, offering an analytical framework for assessing its prospects. The EGD has also gained the attention of researchers and theorists of economic growth, including those concerned with the concepts of GG, "anti-growth," and "brown growth." On the rather skeptical side, Osserwaarde (2020) suggested that the EGD is not able to transform modern production models that are destructive for the climate, ecology, and other climate goals. On the contrary, it contributes to the existing trends of wealth redistribution and power imbalances.

GG logic, inherent to the EGD, stems from the belief that economic growth can be compatible with environmental limits and sustainability targets. The EU's vision of "living well within environmental limits" admits that human activity creates unconvertible pressures for the environment; however, it suggests that decoupling GDP growth from environmental pressures could be a solution. In this sense, the concepts of GG and the green economy (GE) are central to

understanding how the EU envisions future economic development considering the environmental aspects of the matter.

Debates about growth and de-growth have flourished since the 1970s, with adherents of the latter calling for a reduction of production and consumption as well as the reconsideration of the goals, rather than making economic growth the focus of attention (Demaria et al. 2013: 202). Depending on the academic scholarship, authors have differently identified which particular areas should "de-grow." For instance, according to van den Bergh (2011), there are five aspects – namely GDP, consumption, worktime, the economy (i.e., its physical size), and the whole transformation of the economic system ("radical degrowth"; EEA 2021: 23). In conditions where the economy is aligned with the objectives of profitability and efficiency, it is rather difficult to imagine a fully covered implementation of de-growth's ideas. Another theoretical school addresses the EGD from a "post-growth" perspective. For example, Renda (2021) noted that the EGD can be considered, among other things, a conceptual transition from GG to post-growth – a development strategy targeting not only and not so much economic growth rates but rather achieving specific goals, primarily carbon neutrality and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), while ensuring maximum transition equity.

Moreover, also often ignored is the geopolitical dimension of GG and de-growth. Vazquez and Plaza-Úbeda (2021:3) argued that global North/West GG is framed through a technocratic style of market capitalism where the environment serves as a commodity. From this perspective, GG is not a solution to the environmental crisis but rather a "perpetuation" of already existing systems that heavily rely on "dirty" power structures, which cannot be alternated solely through technology and innovation. Ossewaarde and Ossewaarde-Lowtoo (2020) claimed that the EGD distances itself from the de-growth ideology to gain political support, thereby remaining by the standpoint of considering the ecosystem as a commodity, rather than ecological commons.

Overall, a paradigm of GG as well as the EGD's vision is defined by the reorganization of interactions between human society and its economy (Vazquez and Plaza Úbeda 2021: 1). Nevertheless, despite interpreting environmental protection as an opportunity rather than a cost, it tends to absorb inherent features of a modern market system – the generation of wealth, even though, as with the greening agenda, from the investments in the environment. Therefore, green growth tends to be contested with regard to its capacity to produce an alternative form of interaction between the economic and natural systems. Nevertheless, as a predominant approach and a focus of national and international policy documents, GG and the GE do not necessarily challenge the neoliberal paradigm of economic growth or consumption society; thus, its full "capacity" to implement the principles of SD is disputable. Yet, due to the constellation of

political, economic, and institutional settings backed up by the power of its discourse, the greening agenda has become increasingly prevalent in current solution designs for reducing harmful environmental impacts.

4 Research design and methods

This chapter introduces methodology and methods through which this research was conducted. First, Section 4.1 aims to map out methodological considerations when addressing the topic of environmental and climate policy-making. It then goes into detail in order to show specifics of EU environmental paradigm and paradigmatic shifts as well as changing discourses of sustainability. Section 4.2 presents an overview of methods being deployed in this master thesis. It sets out "practical" grounds of the research shedding light on tools for data collection, data sources and approaches chosen to analyze the data. Finally, Section 4.3 is dedicated to describe structure of this thesis.

4.1 Methodological aspects

Acknowledging the qualitative nature of this research, I first justify my approach to the investigation of the EU environmental and climate policy-making. Mitchell and Bernauer (1998:7) claimed that qualitative research strives to find and uncover causalities, going far beyond just correlational relationships. In the present study, I exclusively analyzed nonquantifiable data, which nonetheless allowed me to address the phenomena with all its complex variables. Environmental problems, just like the responses to them, present an interrelated set of issues of an interdisciplinary nature, which are – beyond their complexity – politically framed and therefore cannot be analyzed in isolation from respective political perspectives and agendas.

To analyze the EU's perspectives and visions of environmental protection, sustainability, climate change, and GG, I turned to interpretative approaches. As previously investigated by Friant et al. (2020), Schunz (2022), Machin (2019), and Kirchherr et al. (2017), environmental policies – in addition to being based on a strong ideological basis – possess a determining power in terms of defining meanings of crucial concepts, such as "sustainability". Among various paradigms, with at times contesting and overlapping interpretations, the EU political discourse has a high degree of power authority that can influence the understandings of certain environmental approaches.

As such, analyses of environmental policies can be approached from different perspectives. If looking through the lens of ideational research, for instance, policies are seen through their different stages, channels, and mechanisms through which they have been developed. Makarov (2022) suggested that to grasp the goals of the environmental strategy, it is obligatory to consider

the economic and political contexts that stand behind the paradigms in which one or another strategy is located. Besides the contextual background, there are other determining elements – namely the actors forming the policy framework and their competing interests. Larsen (2018: 63) highlighted that the meanings of the frameworks are being constructed by these actors and are based on their own understanding of the social world. This assumption presupposes the post-structuralist approach to the investigation of social phenomena and leads to the understanding of certain policies and their formation by reflecting on the actors' own channels and approaches to categorizing a social world.

I agree that any change or transformation of environmental strategy as well as implementation dynamics is driven by various contexts. Being situated within broader environmental paradigms, environmental policy-making is subject to the changes and transformation of the former. According to Hall (1992), the policy paradigm presents a mental construct that highlights the perception of problems (by policy-makers) as well as goals and techniques for accomplishing them (as cited in Daigneault 2014: 457). Policy change from this perspective requires motivation – be it a crisis or a relevant political problem – as well as a motor or driver (usually political actors) who will implement the change. In this sense, the move from one paradigm to another does involve the emergence and accumulation of abnormalities, and also the selection of and experimentation with new forms and types of policies, which do not necessarily result in the expected outcome, leading to a search for or adoption of other competing paradigms (Hall 1993: 280). Nevertheless, chosen policies exemplify the ideological basis of actors in power and comprise certain sets of values and philosophical principles, which attribute certain meaning to actors' actions. In other words, environmental policy identifies how actors think about environmental problems.

4.1.1 Analyzing EU environmental and climate discourse with paradigmatic shifts

I assume that actors' environment-related decisions may be influenced and shaped by several factors (e.g., economy and trade). Therefore, the analysis of environmental policy-making had to be addressed as a highly complex set of actions that go hand in hand with political and economic developments. Given this interrelation, I accounted for a powerful political discourse that can transmit and reflect the trajectory of the EU's vision of environmental protection, sustainability, and GG in relation to its economic goals. Simultaneously, I support Machin's (2013: 10) point that any political discourse has a storyline in itself, enabling credibility to be gained and other alternatives to be challenged to make policies generally accepted and normalized.

When approaching paradigms and paradigmatic shifts, what is understood under these particular terms can be misleading. In this thesis, paradigms – particularly the EU environmental paradigm

– are seen as "concepts, values, perceptions and practices shared by a community and forms a particular vision of reality" (Capra 1996: 6). These can be traced from EU official treaties, strategic documents, and agreements. Yet, as Schunz (2022: 5) claimed, values can be referred broadly and across the different strategies, but changes are rather traceable when examining an alternation of meanings and understandings in concepts and perceptions. Each turn in the EU approach as well as transformation of understanding provided for sustainability, sustainable/green growth, as well as a re-thinking of society–economy–environment relations can be examined through a continuum of the past EU "visions" and determinant elements that led to a transformation of the old "vision of reality."

To further analyze discourses of sustainability and GG, I deployed a framework suggested by Hajer (1997: 44), who conceptualized discourse as "a specific ensemble of ideas, concepts and categorizations that are produced, reproduced and transformed in a particular set of practices and through which meaning is given physical and social realities." Thus, the discourses produced and advanced by the actors get to shape the vision of reality and condition the way in which political communities approach specific areas. The discourse of sustainability that has acquired "green" elements can thus be seen through Foucault's (1977) conceptualization of hegemonic discourse – a unitary account imposing visions and constructing interests and identity according to which the community performs political action (as cited in McDonald 2021: 54). However, it is crucial to underline that in this thesis, a "discourse" is seen as a macro concept deployed to analyze the language of official EU documents and strategies on the environment and climate change as well as related measures. From the point of view of this study, a combination of specific wordings and phrasings would allow one to see the substance of the social values attributed to them. Finally, as derived from the analysis of individual texts, one can see how these social values and their meaning become a broader discourse with its own power and influential capacities.

Finally, I wish to underline that the methodological basis of this thesis is grounded on the premises of interdisciplinary research. Based on the dialectical principles of the phenomena, different levels of solving the environmental problems are studied through its historical development and across its different levels. The identification of the main trends and their impacts was possible due to the retrospective qualitative analysis of various normative, legislative, and strategic discourses. By admitting that any inquiry and attempt to interpret past events is subject to the researcher's own reasoning, which is influenced by the theoretical and conceptual tools chosen, I aim to underline that the results of this thesis are not the "clean" facts, nor do they offer a universal explanation. Rather, they present an interpretation that is provided through the chosen framework. To conclude

this section on the methodological premises, I turn to Levy's (2001, as cited in Thies 2002: 353) metaphor for fact search in political and social sciences:

> What the fisherman catches depends on chance, the part of the ocean he fishes in, and what kind of tackle he uses, the latter two depending entirely upon what kind of fish he is looking to catch.

4.2 Methods

It should be recognized that in international politics and diplomatic practices, a range of documents, academic articles, and scholarly publications are devoted to the issue of environmental agenda and politics. This is also true in the field of political and social sciences. Qualitative research traditions suggest that the study of various phenomena is connected with its observation, not through numeric representation but rather through the meaningful interpretation of the sequence of events, correlations, and causal relations through chosen theoretical and conceptual lenses (see Thies 2002: 353). One of the main goals here is to define and explain specific cases and connecting points between various aspects of the subject under investigation.

Motivated by this principle, this research was first based on a thorough analysis of primary sources. These, in turn, comprised a documentary basis of resolutions dedicated to the issue of international environmental protection and the climate change agenda. For instance, the 1972 Stockholm Conference Declaration, 1992 Rio de Janeiro Declaration, and 1987 "Our Common Future Report" demonstrate how the notions of sustainability, environmental consciousness, and human–ecology relationships have transformed in a given period. Another set of sources consists of international agreements that served as a basis for the establishment of environmental regimes. In this section, I consider the 1992 UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, 1997 Kyoto Protocol to the Framework Convention on Climate Change, and 2015 Paris Agreement. The following list of international agreements is certainly not extensive, nor does it embrace a host of existing environmental regimes, but it does address a specific group within them – namely the framework agreement and protocol model operating under the UN umbrella.

The empirical analysis presented in this master thesis built on a set of policy documents and reports relevant to the development of EU environmental and climate policy. From a philosophical and methodological perspective, I deployed a pragmatic historical approach when analyzing the evolution of the EU environmental legislation. As suggested by Sheate (2011), the evolution of environmental law and policy in the EU occurred together with policy paradigm changes; therefore, I aimed to explore how different policy approaches and instruments transformed over the time simultaneously with the status of the environment within EU Treaties – namely the Treaty of Rome, the Single European Act (SEA), the Maastricht Treaty, and the Lisbon Treaty. I analyzed

how the "place" of the environment evolved from nonexistent in the Treaty of Rome to being the focus of attention in the post-SEA period. I read documents related to the environmental policy-making issued since the 1970s thoroughly and composed a framework through which environmental discourse has changed since then. This was followed by an analysis of integration processes.

The next part of the thesis was dedicated to the narrative by which the EU climate policy is led. In particular, I adopted the "policy mix" approach and sought to determine how the EU's climate goals became interrelated with its energy policy-making. I operated with a conceptual set of keywords, such as "sustainability," "sustainable growth," "green economy," and "green growth," to exemplify how the promotion of a low-carbon economy and clean energy became incorporated into the overall climate discourse of the EU. I selectively searched for strategically important policy documents and agreements that revealed the EU's vision on the interaction of ecological processes, the functioning of the economy, and societal changes together with the shifting of the proposed solutions, such as in form of greening economies. These included the main documents (e.g., staff working documents) as well as documents related to this policy area. Table 1 presents the primary sources used for the analysis:

Table 1. Primary Sources for Analysis

Period	EU Treaties	EAPs	EU Strategies	Directives and other relevant legislation	
1957–1982	The EEC Treaty (The Treaty of Rome) (1957)	First EAP (1973), second EAP (1977), third EAP (1982)		Seveso Directive (1982)	
1982–1997	The Single European Act (1987), The Maastricht Treaty (1992), The Amsterdam Treaty (1997), The Nice Treaty (2001)	Fourth EAP (1987), fifth EAP (1993)	Energy for the future: renewable sources of energy: White Paper for a Community strategy and action plan (1997)	The EIA Directive (1985), Council Regulation on the establishment of the EEA and the EEON (1990), Council Regulation on a Community eco-label award scheme (1992)	Green Paper – Towards a European Strategy for the security of energy supply (2000)
1998–2007	The Lisbon Treaty (2007)	Sixth EAP (2002)	The Lisbon strategy (2000), The European Climate Change Programme (2000), The EU Strategy for Sustainable Development (2001)	Directive on the promotion of electricity produced from renewable energy sources in the internal electricity market (2001), Directive on national emission ceilings for certain atmospheric pollutants (2001), Directive establishing a scheme for greenhouse gas emission allowance trading within the Community (2003)	
2008–2020		Seventh EAP (2012)	The EU Climate and Energy Package (2008), The Sustainability Plan for Europe-Europe 2020 (2010), The 2nd EU Climate and Energy Package (2014), The European Green Deal (2019), the European Climate Pact (2020), the European Industrial Strategy (2020)		The Green Paper. A 2030 framework for climate and energy policies (2013), "Towards a circular economy. A zero waste programme for Europe" (2014), the "Clean Energy for all Europeans" package (2019)

Source: Own compilation

When designing the analysis approach, I first focused on the chronological order of the documents listed in Table 1, which were considered the units of analysis. Throughout the analytical process, I aimed to relate these to the concepts and categories prevalent in the "storylines" of the EU's environmental policy-making. As a starting point, I took the EU's metadiscourse on environmental protection, sustainability, and GG with its linkage of environmental improvement and economic development. Following the premises of discourse theories, I traced the changes and shifts in relations to the "value" of the environment in the EU legislation and respective directives issued by the European Council and Parliament, as well as the EC's communication documents.

To analyze the EU's discourse, allocate it within the context of the integration progress, and further highlight the main features and key focus points, I deployed a qualitative approach to study the texts of the documents listed in Table 1. The analysis was performed in a corpus based on the six EU Treaties, seven EAPs, 10 EU strategies, seven directives of the European Council, and five communication issued by the EC. The listed documents were mined for categories such as "sustainability," "energy," "climate," "energy and climate," "circularity," and "green growth." Within the categories, I picked keywords for the analysis in line with the storyline method deployed previously by Machin (2019). The storyline, in this case, was based on the evolution of the rhetorical strategy of the EU on the environment and economic issues. Machin (2019) built her narrative on the place of the concept of ecological modernization (EM) in the European legislation and aligned it in the context of European integration. Consequently, I took the concepts of sustainability, climate neutrality, circularity, and GG and related them to the discourses arising from the EU's environmental, climate and climate and energy policies.

In line with Schunz's (2022) approach to the analysis of the EU sustainability discourse, I discussed a discursive paradigm shift from the early 1970s until the adoption of the EGD. By tracing how the "environmental protection" and "sustainability" paradigms evolved over this period from a macro-historical perspective, I aimed for an understanding of certain policies and their role in the overall EU environmental policy framework. Measuring "sustainability" through the EU lenses as such was not a goal of this study; rather, I attempted to demonstrate how the EU's vision on certain indicators, parameters, and features of its conceptual framing has transformed over time.

4.3 Structure

This master thesis is divided into eight chapters. Chapters 1 and 2 served as introductory chapters that presented the topic and laid the foundations of the research. Chapter 3 addressed the theoretical and conceptual framework of environmental and climate policy-making in both global and EU contexts. Chapter 4 has been dedicated to the methodological part of the thesis, highlighting the main approaches and the justifications for their use; furthermore, it has elaborated on the data and methods deployed throughout the research process. Chapter 5 defines the discourse and its role in public policy making and traces the evolution of narratives on environmentalism, sustainability, and GG in politics. Chapter 6 forms the first of the three main chapters. It examines the historical development of the EU environmental policy and analyses the main changes in political discourse on environmental protection, sustainability, and climate change. Then, the analysis continues by determining the interrelations between the environmental and climate agenda from one side and economic growth from another. It concludes with an investigation of climate- and energy-related

narratives and the emergence of "green" approaches. In Chapter 7, I examine the EU's pledges on climate-related initiatives by examining the deployment of approaches, such as decoupling and decarbonization, and the use of notions such as efficiency, energy efficiency, renewable energy, circularity, competitiveness, and innovation. Chapter 8 is devoted to a critical analysis of the EGD. It analyzes the background and main provisions and then assesses the ideological foundations of the conceptual novelties presented therein. Finally, the conclusion chapter presents the analysis results and answers the research questions.

5 Discourses and policy making

Objective of this chapter is to demonstrate relevance of discourse analysis in research of public policy-making. It elaborates on linkages between discourse, structured narratives, and political actions. First, Section 5.1 introduces the concept of political discourse in context of public policy-making. Then, Section 5.2 specifies on environmental discourses and their evolution. It offers a perspective on international dimension of debates around environment and continues with discussion on "green" discourse. Finally, Section 5.3 adds a political component into the analysis arguing about the power of environmental policies and their intersection with such concepts, as "values", "identity" and "interests" of the political actors.

5.1 The power of discourse in public policy

Sense- or meaning-making plays a crucial role in grasping how communicative interaction leads to collective political decision-making. Colebatch (2006) claimed that a policy is an exercise in the construction of meaning (as cited in Heinelt 2019: 11). The information that is provided with the policy offers interpretational sources for the actors enabling them to choose the direction of their acts. Actors' preferences and their transformation can be traced from the communicative framing of the knowledge and information they attempt to transmit with the means of the policy.

Deriving from the idea of a "cognitive turn" in policy analysis, discourses acquire a crucial role in establishing frameworks of interests and meaning systems as well as in creating certain imaginaries that should be focused on. Hajer (1997:44) defined discourse as "an ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categories through which meaning is given to social and physical phenomena which are produced and reproduced through an identifiable set of practices." Structured narratives, in this context, constitute possibilities for action and interpretation – producing not a neutral imaginary depiction of the world but rather an interpretation loaded with certain meanings.

Consequently, studying discourse can enhance the understanding of public policy. As they consist of varying arguments, discourses account for the underlying processes that define and construct

the realm of politics as well as the meaning attributed to its main elements. Political communication and political discourse are the most crucial information-communicative and psychological-political resources for ensuring the management and organization of the state and society. They frame, define, and establish the acceptability, plausibility, and appropriateness of the ideas being transmitted in specific policies (Van Dijk 2002: 211).

Public discourse is a modern and effective tool of power for creating favorable conditions for the implementation of state policy in a particular area. At the same time, the linguistic forms of public discourse have an inciting and manipulative nature, determining the political actions and behavior of both individuals and society as a whole (Van Dijk 1997: 25). The language and production of public speech, the elements of which make up public discourse, are a powerful resource consisting of recognizable and broadcast signs, images, and ideas that have symbolic meaning in the state, corporate, and social-civil dimensions, fixed, among other things, at the level of state and corporate "anthems" (see Lapshin and Kosorukova 2016). Beyond that, discourses are inevitably related to the issue of an appropriate problem-solving perspective, since any problem or challenge is communicatively constructed as such, and thus, its solution is expected to fulfill certain expectations that are to be met.

The storyline created through communicative practices cannot be solely built from "old" to "new" or "bad" to "good." Rather, it should also focus on defining the hidden interrelations, necessary commitments, and modernization of common practices. The storyline can also play a "relabeling" function, implying that communicative strategies can transform or recreate the meaningfulness of certain causal assumptions (Heinelt 2019: 79). The communicative construction of problems and sequences, goals, and responsibilities results in the evolution of certain political action potentials as well as the definition of those in charge and those who are to blame.

In sum, this section has attempted to demonstrate that political discourse together with communicative strategies can create meanings and establish priorities through specifically chosen narratives and storylines. The knowledge orders and information consequences offered by public policies are carefully chosen according to the meanings intended to be transmitted as well as the problems and issues to be prioritized. Depending on the power and effectiveness of the political discourse, political actors can operate and embed certain practices and define the direction of their actions according to their interests.

5.2 Discourses in environmental policies

The analysis of environmental and climate policy making cannot be simplified to an investigation of instrumentally defined solutions; rather, it must embrace the investigation of a social phenomenon known as environmental crisis, the dynamics in society around environmental conflict, and the interrelation of insights and ideas around its solution. The framing and definition of environmental problems play a crucial role in analyzing a broad spectrum of questions, such as what is understood under the given structures, what their conceptual limits are, the extent to which they reflect the environmental debate, and how actors exert power through their approaches to solving the environmental crisis (Hajer 1997: 9).

5.2.1 International agenda

Historically, the environmental agenda became normalized from the 1970s to the 1990s; furthermore, it has begun to be prioritized along with economic and social development in national and international politics (see Bernstein 2001). Due to the sharp aggravation of environmental consequences derived from human activity, the ideology of ecologic humanism emerged at the turn of the twentieth century. This coincided with the understanding that the further development of human civilization, with its expansionary nature, is incompatible with favorable environmental development. Questions have arisen around environmental safety and measures that should be taken to ensure it. The ecological crisis has now been acknowledged as a matter of international concern, while actions toward its mitigation have started to be seen as one of the prerequisites for the SD of civilization.

Over the same period, the ideological principle of EM was incorporated into policy discourses (Machin 2019; Zito et al. 2019). To understand the political dynamics at the time, it should be noted that Western countries were confronted with environmental alarmism caused by counter-cultures raising concerns about the environmental decline (Hajer 1997: 77). The EM paradigm emerged as a response to these concerns. Differing from the radical environmental movements of the 1970s, said paradigm offered a perspective that concerned societal capacities for overcoming environmental problems through appropriate environmental management and subsequent institutional involvement.

As early as 1972, the first major international conference focused on environmental problems was held – namely the UN Conference on the Human Environment, which is known as the Stockholm Conference (UN 2022). It brought the question of environmental degradation caused by human activity to the forefront of the international agenda and aimed to encourage states and international

organizations to shape their actions to mitigate environmental consequences. The Stockholm Declaration called for the creation of a framework or universal program dedicated to environmental protection, developing initiatives to address specific environmental issues and problems as well as bringing environmental issues to the level of political dialogue.[1] It touched on the interlinkages between economic growth, pollution (air, water, and oceans), and human well-being (UN 2022)

Three milestone documents framing the environmental agenda in the West are considered to be "Limits to Growth," "Blueprint for Survival," and "Small is Beautiful."[2] Providing different perspectives on the approaches (varying from top-down technocratic to bottom-up participatory) to handling environmental crises, they focused on the modern trends of industrialization, population growth, the depletion of nonrenewable resources, and environmental deterioration.[3] For the first time, they portrayed an environmental issue as a crisis of a global nature with the intended message or call being to change the system in the direction of economic and ecological equilibrium (Meadows et al. 1972). Environmental limits were acknowledged to be respected and morally presented as a "must" to take care of, despite the constant human desire to gain economic value. Therefore, an environmental discourse was clearly constructed that transmitted the serious nature of the environmental crisis, which was to be tackled through reconsidering existing economic activities.

From this perspective, environmental discourse can be considered both a sociopolitical and sociocultural phenomenon as well as a part of the broader political developments that contributed to the creation and formation of ecological consciousness, promoting "acceptable" environmental behavior and responsibilities. According to the "Limits to Growth" document, solutions and guidance should have been offered through technology and hierarchical management, which were later mainstreamed in policy responses in the West (Meadows et al. 1972). Simultaneously, the

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[1] See Brunner 2008.

[2] Authors correspondingly: Meadows et al. (1972), Goldsmith and Allen (1972), Schumacher (1973).

[3] It should be also noted that "Global North" dimension of the issue is crucial to underline here, since the "Global South" at the time questioned a sudden attention towards environmental problems and thought about it as a focus shift from development and redistribution of wealth issues (Hajer 1997: 79).

"traditional" view on the interplay between economy, society, and environment was called into question. One of the initial critiques of the institutional level came from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The OECD constructed a storyline that blamed the polluters for their gross inefficiency, thus claiming that the environmental costs should be borne by them – a principle that would later become known as the "polluter pays principle" (OECD 1980 as cited in Hajer 1997: 97).

Another channel through which the redefinition of the environmental issue occurred was the activity under the umbrella of the UN. With the 1987 Brundtland Report titled "Our Common Future,"[4] the post-war boom of production was questioned and the roots of what would later be known as SD were laid. The next milestone is considered to be the 1992 UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in Rio de Janeiro (Rio 92). The Rio Declaration of Environment and Development, 1992 significantly contributed to the transformation of the ideological basis of the modern worldview with regard to the role of nature and humans' interrelation with it. Specifically, it proclaimed a central role of nature and the importance of a harmonious coexistence with it. Moreover, as the results of the Conference concerned the development agenda, it has been asserted that environmental protection is a prerequisite and simultaneously an inherent part of peace and development (UNCED 1992: 1, 25). A normative framing was given to the issues of the transportation of substances harmful to the environment, environmental impact assessment, and prompt action with regard to natural disasters or other emergencies causing negative environmental consequences (ibid.: 12,17,18). Crucially, Western welfare, with its mode of production and consumption, was challenged with regard to the consequences being imposed on the environment.

Together with the abovementioned achievements of Rio 92, one could observe a proper testimony and invocation toward SD principles on the level of state and interstate policies. Even though the concept of SD was circulated before the 1992 Conference, the interpretation of sustainability and especially the coherence of environmental policies and developmental strategies within the concept itself was not articulated in a way that could present a comprehensive action plan (see Langhelle 1999). SD was seen as a model enabling the current generation to meet needs without

[4] Highly influenced by the Western idea on development, safety and environment issues, the 1987 Brundtland Report highlighted the storyline of interrelation between economy and environment and urged for multilateral cooperation under the umbrella of "global solidarity" and "shared responsibility".

limiting the next generations' capabilities by admitting the human factor and its influence on the environment.[5]

In essence, the concept of SD focuses on a socioeconomic development that ensures an environmental balance without exhausting natural resource potentials and involves increased responsibility for all forms of activity that damage the natural environment. This implies the reconsideration of common economic practices of production and consumption that did not contribute to SD at the enterprise, local, regional, national, or global levels. At the same time, in the form it was presented in back in the 1980s, the concept of SD failed to incorporate the following two core issues: First, the concept of "needs" did not cover the needs of the Global South, as the SD model was projected on developed or industrialized countries, and second, it was limited in terms of technological and social organization capacities to shift the environmental behavior and values (Langhelle 1999: 133).

In sum, the SD model arose in connection with and close relation to the rethinking of development and its core foundation. Environmental problems, which were acknowledged to be among the most globalized challenges of modern humanity, demonstrated that the old models of economic growth threatened peaceful coexistence – firstly humanity and nature, not to mention the consequences that fall on developing countries or the global South. As was constantly mainstreamed, the transition to SD and consequent measures required considerable changes, the focus of which was the transformation of the economic and social system of capitalism for pursuing a more humanized and ecologically friendly way of living. Therefore, the established discourse of sustainability and EM emphasized the moral principles of humanity as a whole and stressed the three-pillar imperative – namely the satisfaction of human needs, achievement of social equality, and consideration of environmental limits.

[5] World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) defined sustainable development as: "a process of change in which the exploitation of resources, the direction of investments, the orientation of technological development; and institutional change are all in harmony and enhance both current and future potential to meet human needs and aspirations" (1987: 43).

5.2.2 The rise of "green" environmentalism

The narrative around SD initiated debates about managing economic and environmental goals without or with minimum economic losses. Despite the idealistically framed achievable harmony of the economy, society, and environment, which had to be achieved in a multilateral and solidary manner, the political consensus was far from achieved. Tossing around the compatibility of economic growth and environmental goals, political rhetoric and policy-making elaborated a new approach to how to "unite" both sides by offering a storyline in which environmental protection no longer contradicts economic growth, but is rather seen "as an essential precondition for such [economic] development" (Weale and Williams as cited in Machin 2019: 209). With this assumption in place, the ground was given to the green discourse, which naturalized the acceptance of the economy and growth imperative as long as it complies with green standards.

GG is said to incorporate the dichotomous relation between economic growth and development from one side and environmental safety and preservation from another.[6] As a rule, the conceptual understanding of GG is linked to the discussions about the GE and takes place within the context of SD. Taken up by institutions such as the OECD, UNEP, and EC, GG first presented a new strategy for managing the global financial crisis back in 2008 and promoting investments that incorporate a "green" component (Jänicke 2012:16). Throughout the decade, GG and the GE transformed in meaning into a wider dimension that also embrace technological and social elements. Mainstreaming the environmental aspect of economic growth was seen in the double strategy of GG as supposing to "foster economic growth and development while ensuring that natural assets continue to provide the resources and environmental services on which the well-being relies" (OECD 2011).

Moreover, the UNEP's interpretation of GE relied on the crucial point of restructuring the economy in a manner that would make it function in consideration of social and environmental goals. It provided the following suggested definition: "[A] green economy is an economy that leads to improved human well-being and social justice, significantly reducing environmental risks and the deficit of environmental benefits" (UNEP 2022). Obviously, the proposed interpretation

[6] According to the OECD's definition: "green growth means fostering economic growth and development while ensuring that natural assets continue to provide the resources and environmental services on which our well-being relies" (OECD 2011).

focuses on specific areas of development. Among them, UN experts have proposed considering increased energy efficiency, reduced natural (or resource) capacity, and the social orientation of development. According to the UNEP's 2011 Green Economy Report (GER), the transition toward the GE will "improve human well-being and social equality" and simultaneously "reduce environmental risks and ecological scarcities" (UNEP 2011: 2). "Green" began to be deployed as a promising prospect that would transform the economy and its models in a manner that would ensure "wealth creation" as well as shift the focus "on the value of ecosystem goods and services and natural capital" (UNEP 2011: 7). Consequently, the meaning of environmental value would gradually shift to monetary terms and be expressed by the language of the market.

Nevertheless, the GE was attributed a crucial role in poverty reduction and pollution prevention while simultaneously creating new job opportunities in the course of transition in alignment with the SDGs. The novelty of the concept – which embraced ecosystem needs and incorporated them into the market paradigm – was appealing to policy-makers. Hereby, prominent institutions regarded their commitment to GG as having the potential to support economic and social development and ensure that natural assets can continue to provide wealth and services on which economies and people's well-being depend to a large extent.

5.3 What is political about sustainability and green growth?

When examining how politicians operate with discursive strategies on sustainability and GG, it can be noted that both approaches do not solely tackle the environmental crisis. Controversial assumptions and contradictions have been made with the paradigms of economic growth in relation to the environmental limits and their exploitation before the emergence of GG. Over the course of the last 50 years, it has been explicitly outlined that traditional GDP growth cannot continue with the environmental consequences that it brings. Already in 1972, the Brundtland Report highlighted that economic growth cannot continue in the long term without causing the collapse of global economic and environmental systems (Meadows et al. 1972). However, it did not mean, at least at the political level, that the growth-based paradigm was to be withdrawn.

Analytically, the relationship between policy and representation – either of political will or interests – is complex. If the policy itself can be regarded as an articulation of discourse (Larsen 2018: 68), then the following question arises: Who shapes or defines which discourses should prevail and in which consequence or hierarchical order should they be presented? The struggles related to environmental policies and their content, direction, and goals are played out by actors both inside and outside of the political arena. It would be wrong to assume that the elaboration and justification of certain approaches come solely from internal political factors.

Considering the context of EU environmental policy-making, certain aspects can define the EU identity, values, and fundamental principles and cause them to flourish (Schunz 2021: 26). For example, the identity of the EU as a "climate guardian" can serve ideational or interest-based motivations in both global and local contexts (ibid.: 10). It can also facilitate the exercise of influence both within the Union and internationally. From this perspective, the picturing of the EU as a leading GE or frontrunner in green or sustainable development contributes to the constitution of the common European identity alongside with other values, such as democracy (Machin 2019: 213).

The topic of the environment, particularly the EU's approach to its handling, is seen as an operating tool of the Union for establishing itself as an "environmental Union," "smart Europe," or "the first climate-neutral continent" (European Commission 2019). This proclaimed leadership often functions as an essential element in multiple areas, such as setting the agenda, advocating for the Union's interests, and exporting its standards. A key tenet in the conceptualization of the "green" Union in terms of a discourse lies in linking the practices of various sectors to new processes and technologies, ensuring resource efficiency or "eco-efficiency" while maintaining the competitiveness of the EU's economy and contributing to the goals of reducing emissions, achieving energy efficiency, and tackling climate change (Schunz 2022: 6). The EU's official documents operate with these elements of green policies determining and enabling new forms of action and strategies in line with the given paradigm.

Summing up these arguments, the SD and GG agendas are linked to political decisions, just as their framing as sources of welfare, employment, and growth opportunities smooths their acceptability as potential environmental solutions. GG has been made the source of new employment and business opportunities (Gibbs and O'Neill 2016: 5), which makes them appealing for political solutions in economic, social, and environmental domains. Being deployed also by the EU, the GG narrative was made the "win-win" scenario for a sustainable future as well as inclusive and environmentally responsible societies. This, in turn, correlated with the European values and identity as a "climate defender" and strong advocate of environmentally safe development. Bearing a strong political and economic claim, namely that growth is possible without harming the environment, the concept of GG can be considered not only a theoretical and conceptual continuation of the SD paradigm but also a political instrument for "upgrading" the effectiveness of environmental discourse and linking the long-term compatibility of economic growth and environmental sustainability with new means.

6 Roots and periodization of the EU's environmental policy

The environmental policy of the EU dates back to the 1970s. Reacting to the international preoccupation with economic growth and its consequences for the environment, environmental targets and objectives started to be elaborated as a part of European legislation. Today, more than 50 years of environmental law- and policy-making have resulted in a vast body of legislative and political incentives, which differ in their forms and bindings. Since the end of the 1960s, the European Communities, and later the EU, implemented significant environmental measures; created a legal framework for monitoring, regulating, and coordinating the environmental activities of Member States; and developed and implemented new approaches to the protection and improving the quality of the environment. At the same time, the evolution of the environmental policy of the EU became inextricably linked with the global activities in the field of environmental protection, including those held under the auspices of the UN. Therefore, this Chapter will deal with retrospective chronological analysis of the main transformations and paradigmatic shifts in EU environmental policies and environmental discourse up until the seventh Environment Action Programme.

The historical development of European environmental policies can be characterized by the search for optimal approaches to solving complex problems of natural resource management and environmental protection, aligning them with market mechanisms and policy instruments (Hey 2007, Steurer and Berger 2011, Machin 2019). Since the times of the European Communities, the policies were aimed at setting a direction toward environmental responsibility in specific areas of the economy and production, and also adopting policies that would stimulate the implementation of environmental targets. The ambitious framing of environmental goals has been proclaimed in numerous documents issued by the various bodies of the EU. These are analyzed chronologically in each section of this Chapter.

Keeping in mind the integration processes and changing nature of international reactions to the environmental problems, and consequently the views of the measures that should be taken, perspectives on environmental approaches have alternated with time. Such changes were driven by the integration levels, ideological views, and readiness in terms of political action. Partially adopting the periodization suggested by Zito et al. (2019:189), I examined the evolution of European environmental politics and policy-making according to the following stages:

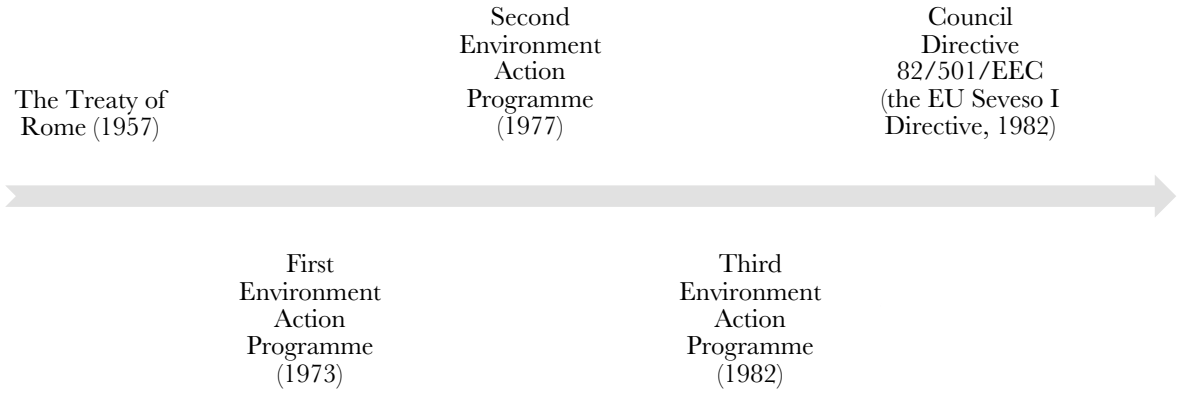
- The early years (early 1970s – mid-1980s): Social awareness about environmental protection and environmental harm increased, creating increasing political attention to

environmental issues. This was also an experimental period when no comprehensive incremental plan was elaborated (Section 6.1).

- The political and ideological rise (mid-1980s – late 1990s): Attempts were made to accommodate environmental ideology in different directions; ultimately, it was adjusted according to the neoliberal market principles (Section 6.3).
- Recognition of problems in environmental approaches (the 2000s): This stage was characterized by questioning the traditional regulatory state, focusing on improving the processes, and reinforcing the environment as the EU's priority (Section 6.3 and 6.4).
- Crises and challenges (2008–): This stage has been characterized by reaffirming environmental policies, linking them with economic rationality, and moving from state regulation to a market-, technology-, and innovation-based rationale (Section 6.4).

6.1 Early years of the environmental component: From nonexistence to recognition as a critical part of economic development

Figure 1. Timeline of the evolution of environmental legislation and policy in the 1970s and '80s



Source: Own compilation

The history of environmental law-making in the European Communities began in the 1970s with a reconsidered view of the need to be more actively involved in the field of ecology. This later resulted in the design of a joint environmental program known as the first EAP. Despite the initial efforts, the European Communities lacked competence in the field of environment during this stage. Primarily, this can be explained by the fact that the environment per se was not singled out by the EEC Treaty in 1957 as a sphere of pan-European integration. At stake was the economic integration of the states, which had to be ensured through various mechanisms, building a ground for the future economic and monetary community.

Furthermore, the 1957 EEC Treaty did not have a separate section on environmental policy. Normative regulation of environment-related issues was vaguely touched upon within the section dedicated to public security, where it was related to the protection of "health and life of humans, animals and plants."[7] There, environmental issues determined the boundaries of the legal regulation for the creation of a common market, meaning that restrictions on imports or exports of goods could be implemented by Member States unless environmental safety was observed. Expressed in vague terms, protection was related to the well-being of humans, animals, and plants. Environmental regulation was therefore not prioritized – it was not even enshrined at the level of the Communities, which would have given it the prospect of evolving either at the institutional or normative level.

Lacking the necessary legal frameworks or regulatory basis, the development and implementation of the environmental policy of the European Communities occurred in the form of so-called EAPs. In 1973, the first EAP was adopted, emphasizing the importance of mutual actions to "improve the standard of living and the quality of life" (European Commission 1973: 1). Relating provisions of the EEC treaty, particularly Article 2, the first EAP acknowledged that the "development and expansion of the economic activities" of the European Communities should proceed in a balanced manner (ibid.). Balance was linked with people's quality of life and environmental protection and considered in terms of the active and effective management of pollution and nuisances.

This EAP formulated the core principles of environmental policy for the Member States that should have been aligned with the elements of "environmental thinking" discussed at the 1972 UN Conference on the Environment in Stockholm. Specifically, it urged the harmonization of standards, methods, and instruments and the definition of industrial activities that potentially harm the environment. In addition, Chapter 2 of the EAP raised the issue of compliance across different sectors as well as corresponding policies (e.g., industrial, agricultural, and energy; European Commission 1973: 11). It was further suggested that political responses to environmental challenges should be made by the Community as a whole, especially when it concerns

[7] According to the Article 36, "the provisions of Articles 34 and 35 shall not preclude prohibitions or restrictions on imports, exports, or goods in transit justified on the grounds of public morality, public policy or public security; the protection of health and life of humans, animals or plants; the protection of national treasures possessing artistic, historic or archaeological value; or the protection of industrial and commercial property" (The EEC Treaty 1957).

representation in international organizations – but "only where applicable" (European Commission 1973: 8).

The ideas were groundbreaking at the time. It was argued that economic development and growth, social prosperity, and environmental protection cannot be addressed separately, but rather must be viewed as interconnected and mutually related (later on, these considerations became known as a basis for the ideas of SD). The first EAP proclaimed that some of the essential tasks of the Communities were the prevention, reduction, and containment of environmental damage; conversation regarding an ecological equilibrium; and the rational use of natural resources (European Commission 1973: 1, 11). Here, rationality implied limits to the availability of resources in the natural environment, and therefore, environmental goods should be treated as an asset that "can be used" but "not abused" (European Commission 1973: 6). Consequently, a suggested was made to abstain from the overuse and exhaustion of natural assets, albeit without imposing any punitive measures in the case of noncompliance.

Moreover, the provisions of the first program were not explicitly related to the market objectives of the Communities, nor were they exemplified in specific monitoring or assessment schemes. They rather signified an attempt to shift the focus to the ideology of sustainability, which was initiated at the international level. Hey (2007:19) defined this stage as an "embryonic form" of the ideas on which SD would later be based. Despite its broad goal-setting, the first EAP nevertheless set targets for environmental policy-making, or at least called for political acknowledgment of the environmental issue. Being framed between 1973 and 1982, it covered aspects of environmental protection and aimed at the standardization of rules at the level of the Communities. It was admitted that environmental policy would ideally serve the management and improvement of environmental quality. An anthropogenic factor was recognized as a cause for deterioration of the environment. Through the admission of an expansional nature of human activity, it was suggested that environmental losses should be avoided and sectoral activities guided by the "preservation of the natural environment" (European Commission 1973: 3). Economic growth and market integration were nevertheless seen as hierarchically higher. This could be seen from the framing of the scope of environmental policy that "should be carried out in such way that does not jeopardize the satisfactory operation of the common market" (European Commission 1973:7).

As a continuation of the first EAP, the second EAP was introduced in 1977 with an implementation period of four years – from 1978 to 1981 (European Commission 1977). Zito et al. (2019: 196) suggested that both the first and second EAPs served as tools for bringing the concern surrounding the environment to the public policy area, but not actually practically implementable plans that would offer instruments for regulating environmental protection. Nevertheless, the second EAP

advanced the points of the precedent program, re-stressing the physical limitations of economic growth and calling for consistent quality requirements (European Commission 1977: 1). The continuation of the first EAP's objectives was proclaimed in the following fields: the determination of environmental criteria, formulation of quality objectives, standard-setting, exchange of information, actions regarding industrial sectors and energy production, as well as protection of the environment in frontier zones (European Commission 1977: 13,14).

The program reaffirmed the point that economic growth in the Western countries "is encountering obstacles" (European Commission 1977: 5), which was mainly in reference to the limits of natural resources. However, it did not claim that economic growth should be reconsidered; on the contrary, economic growth was related closely to the quality of the environment, and measures toward its preservation should satisfy both environmental quality and economic growth (European Commission 1977: 30). Machin (2019: 217) argued that these were the first – and rather controversial – steps toward the "harmonization of economic and environmental policies," promoting the idea of a nonconflicting relationship between economic growth and the environment.[8]

Considering the scope of integration at that time, the Communities as a supranational body were not given power to intervene in Member States' own vision of how to deal with the environmental damage caused by national industrial activities. Reference was made to the "major aspect of environmental policy," which should not be elaborate and came into action isolated from the common line of the Communities (European Commission 1977: 8). The recommendation character of the EAP's provisions was justified by the prioritization of economic goals – the creation, development, and deeper integration of the common market, whereas binding environmental legislation was viewed as a threat to market competition with potentially distorting effects (see Mathis 2020). A rather vague interpretation of Member States' own environmental responsibilities and their advisory nature, in turn, allowed a consensus to be reached each time on the types, nature, goals, and basic principles, although leaving space for flexibility in their implementation. Therefore, the rethinking of the environmental field and framing of

[8] Especially, controversy lies in the fact that harmony between economic growth and preservation of environment seems to go against with overall adherence to the ideas of "natural limits" to growth and the way it (economic growth) should be limited in order to comply with the environmental quality standards (basically, the equation would rather be environmental policy = constraints for economic growth/development).

environmental damage as a problem occurred at the level of the highest institutions of the Communities; however, due to the early integration stages as well as a lack of unity regarding the common environmental policy, it remained an imperative without precise institutional implications (Hey 2007; Zito et al. 2019).

Later, in the second half of the 1970s, compared with the earlier years, environmental measures started to be elaborated and gradually intersected with integration dynamics, or the creation of the Single Market. During the same period, increasing attention was given to the concept of environmental security, leading to its formalization into one of the independent directions of the Communities' policies. The need for a new vision was the result of concerns about the safety of industrial production, which gained particular relevance after an accident at a chemical plant in the Italian city of Seveso in 1976. Resulting in the Seveso Directive, the accident prompted the introduction of measures that reduced the possibility of hazardous events occurring due to high-risk industrial activities.[9] In the aftermath, the EC adopted a number of environmental rules that embraced issues of water, air, and waste management as well as the protection of flora and fauna (Sands 1991: 2513). They were also expanded to the fields of environmental protection procedures, monitoring, and reporting of hazardous activities.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the EC's environmental policy focused on the development of legally binding acts for Member States (Zito et al. 2019: 196), partially because of the previous period's failure to actually implement recommendations from the first and second EAPs. The third EAP was intended to overcome these flows. It was elaborated in line with development of the Single Market and presented a rethought approach to environmental preservation. Introduced in 1982, it emphasized the necessity of harmonizing environmental standards to maintain the competitiveness of industries (European Commission 1983: 2). In contrast to its predecessors, the third EAP aligned environmental protection with market competitiveness; in other words, it made the environmental factor a prerequisite for future economic development (European Commission: 3).

Under the provisions of the third EAP, environmental policies were still under assessment with regard to their influence on the economy of the Communities. It was admitted that there were

[9] Council Directive 82/501/EEC of 24 June 1982 on the major-accident hazards of certain industrial activities is regarded as a reaction to the disasters caused by human activities and part of the robust political discourse aligned with the ideas of "the limits to growth", acknowledging the importance of natural capital for economic development (EEA 2021: 9)

economic difficulties, especially from regional and sectoral perspectives, but environmental policy – which by that time had acquired a preventive character – should persist as long as it was adjusted to proper political and geographical levels and did not disturb the functioning of the common market (European Commission 1983: 4). This is directly related to the reluctance of some Member States to undergo certain limitations in their economic activities (see Sheate 2011; Halmaghi 2016).

Nevertheless, the third EAP focused more deeply on the relationship between the development of the internal market and compliance with environmental standards compared with the first and second EAPs. It presented the new strategy in a more detailed manner, considering the worsening economic conditions that had occurred during the implementation of the first two EAPs. Specifically, it indicated that environmental policy is a structural policy that can result in possible "short-term fluctuations in cyclical conditions," but one that should be conducted nonetheless (European Commission 1983: 4). Thus, the third EAP shifted from idealistic assumptions of the first and second EAPs by recognizing that there might be both pitfalls and opportunities for the European market system and economic growth.

The novelty of political justification lay in the "opportunity side" of environmental regulations. Specifically, the program claimed that environmental policy in itself contains economic and social aspects that can potentially contribute to solving economic problems, such as unemployment (European Commission 1983: 1,4). It was admitted that the environmental policy, aimed initially at controlling pollution, had grown into an inherent part of economic development offering a two-fold advantage (European Commission 1983: 3). The window of opportunities was not limited to the present stage of the European integration but also considered the long-term path; therefore, the fundamental task of further policy-making was to firmly engrave the opportunity (rather than obstacle) side of environmental safeguarding.

Table 2 summarizes the shift in focus and changes in presentation of the environmental topic in the first, second, and third EAPs. Moving from vague and idealistic framings of the statements in the first EAP, the environmental discourse became clearer, with more detailed objectives as well as tighter connections with the economic component and economic growth in subsequent documents. Throughout the first three programs, the issues of limitation, compatibility, and enablement given to economic development by the environmental policy were reconfigured in a manner that would functionally serve to claim that the environmental dimension correlates with the efficiency and success of market integration:

Table 2. Summary of the discourse focus of EAPs 1–3

First EAP (1973–1976)	Second EAP (1977–1981)	Third EAP (1982–1986)
Environmental policy as a key for ensuring quality of life for the peoples in the Communities	Environmental policy as key for re-consideration of economic activities and economic growth in line with natural limits	Environmental policy as an opportunity to ease structural problems (e.g. unemployment), thus it supports and complements economic development
Action should include protection, management and improvement of the environment	Action should include constraint of economic activity and introduction of environmental quality requirements	Action should include incorporation of environmental dimension into other policy areas
Environmental action (e.g. "polluter should pay") should be incorporated, but to the extent that does not let economic distortion and jeopardization of common market happen	Economic growth should be aligned with environmental requirements, structural changes are needed, BUT not conflicting with economic development	Economic competitiveness and its strength depend on environmental quality requirements, environmental safety creates economic opportunities
Environmental policy should be compatible with economic and social development	There are natural limits to economic development and economic growth	There should be harmony between environment and market to achieve the most economical use for the natural resources

Source: Own compilation based on the first, second, and third EAPs (European Commission 1973, 1977, and 1983, respectively) and Machin (2019)

To summarize the period discussed above, environmental protection started to be recognized and included in the agenda of the European Communities. While it cannot be stated that environmental policy was a priority of the Communities at either the national or supranational level, it was acknowledged to compound a policy area that should be elaborated in the future followed by integration processes. The 1957 EEC Treaty did not grant the environmental field significant importance; therefore, environmental policy-making occurred in the form of separate directives and comprehensive strategies, such as the EAPs. At the time, these newly established mechanisms served as a main platform for establishing, assessing, and monitoring environmental standards. Many environmental laws (in the form of directives focused on air and water pollution), however, were adopted on an arbitrary basis and were reactive to changing political and economic contexts (Selin 2015: 3).

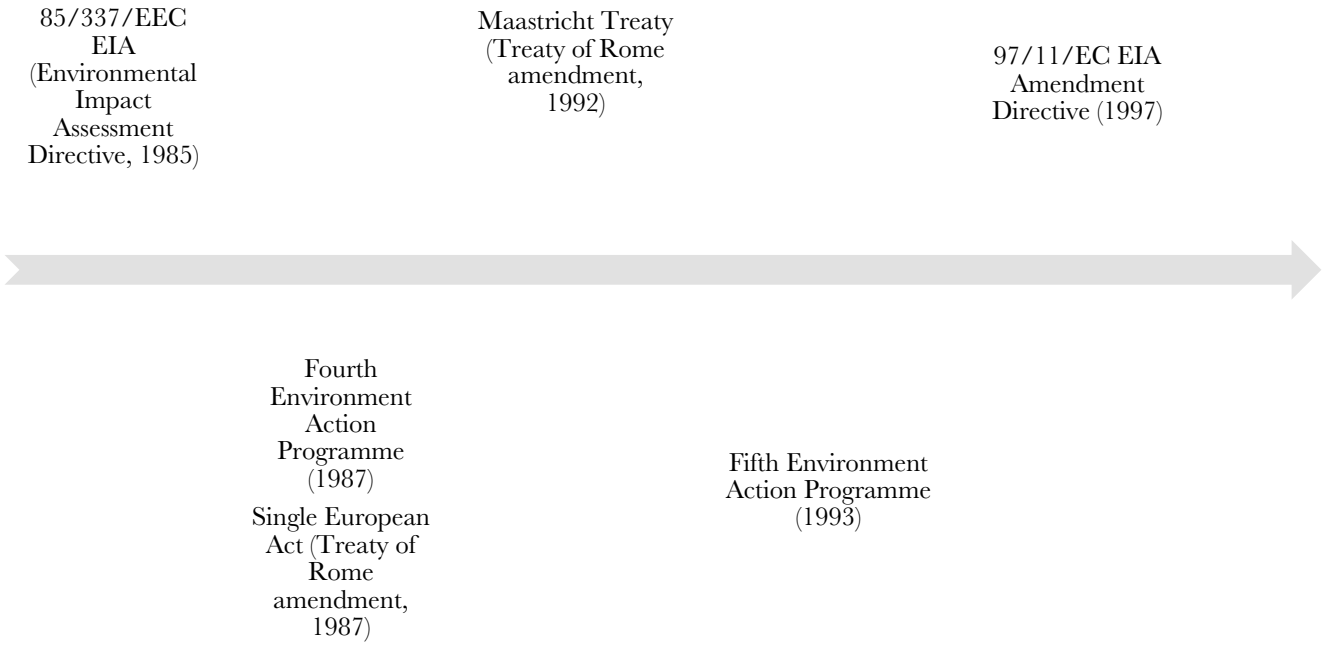
In the course of the following period and through the narratives of three first EAPs, an argument about the interrelation between economic growth and environmental protection was established. Highly connected with the international discourse on sustainability, SD, and limits of growth, the environmental policy of the Communities took the direction of "optimistic" planning and the development of new approaches to environmental quality objectives. As early as 1973, the issue of efficiency and rationality of natural resource use drew attention within the Community. First, framings of environment and environmental protection as an opportunity, rather than a burden,

were given in the context of the beneficial impact that the environmental regulations could create for economic development and market competitiveness.

Acknowledging environmental policy as being equally important as policies on economic and social development, special reference was made to the natural limits to be respected while pursuing economic goals. Finally, it was underlined that a harmony should exist between the three domains, namely the economy, society, and environment, which was respectively mirrored in subsequent public policy-making.

6.2 Environmental policy as an opportunity for the economy and economic growth

Figure 2. Timeline of environmental legislation and policy (and integration agreements) during 1985–1999



Source: Own compilation

This period can be characterized as a stage marked by the consolidation of legal competence in the field of environmental protection (Selin and VanDeveer 2015; Hey 2007). In contrast to the previous years, this period featured efforts to elaborate a common legal basis and create enforcement mechanisms toward including environmental protection in and across other policies of the Community, as opposed to separately existing directives of the earlier period. Attempts were made to institutionalize and normalize the environmental agenda alongside ongoing and deepening integration. Simultaneously, an aim was to establish an environmental framework based on a more independent legislative foundation. As will be demonstrated with the analysis of the fourth and

fifth EAPs, environmental protection and its role were further enrooted in a way closely related to the economic growth and market development. Elaborating on the provisions of the third EAP, environmental policies were plunged more profoundly into the economic imperative being communicated as an opportunity for the economic success of the Community.

Furthermore, progress was made in the secondary legislation with regard to environmental assessment and monitoring practices. Specifically, the Council Directive 85/337/EEC on the assessment of the effects of certain public and private projects on the environment (also known as the Environmental Impact Assessment Directive; EIA Directive), which entered into force in 1985, had a large impact in terms of regulating the conduct of environmental expertise. It concerned projects, such as construction works, installations, or any other intervention into natural surroundings that may have had a significant impact on the environment, excluding projects for national defense purposes and the details of which are adopted by national legislation (European Commission 1985: 2). Based on each individual case, the EIA Directive intended to "identify, describe and assess" the effects of a project on the human beings, fauna and flora, soil, water, and landscape as well as their interaction, plus the material assets and cultural heritage (ibid.). Here, it was also underlined that direct and indirect impacts on the climate should be considered.

With the introduction of the SEA in 1986, the cooperation between Member States was intensified. The SEA supplemented the 1957 EEC Treaty with several provisions, one of which was the creation of a single market without internal frontiers to enable the free movement of goods, services, capital, and people (SEA 1987: 7). Creating the European Community, it also presented changes to decision-making processes in the environmental field (Selin 2015: 4). Specifically, it acknowledged environmental issues as a community task requiring unanimity of the Council as well as an increased role of Parliament in environmental policy-making through cooperation with the Council (Selin and VanDeveer 2015: 313). It also gave the European Parliament greater power, which led to the establishment of a "co-operation procedure" with the Council for the policy-making process (ibid.).

At the content level, the SEA marked the beginning of a phase where separate treaty provisions had to turn into "more expansive and stringent environmental laws" (ibid.). Under the environmental provisions (which can be found in Title VII of the agreement), an agreement was made to include and consider environmental protection in other policies of Member States:

> … environmental damage should as a priority be rectified at source, and that the polluter should pay. Environmental protection requirement shall be a component of the Community's other policies (SEA 1987: 2).

Thus, the SEA introduced a punishment system for Member States who fail to comply with the environmental standards and defined the "polluter pays" principle. This meant that pollution damages had to be internalized by making the polluter financially bear the costs. Other principles that were the basis for the Community's environmental policy were preventive action and damage rectified at source (SEA 1987: 11).

The introduction of environmental requirements accompanied other legislative and regulative measures, which served to harmonize the EC internal market, thus signifying a critical step of mutual recognition and compliance with the established environmental standards. Moreover, the Community adhered to the principles of unity when turning to the ways of implementing the principles of environmental protection:

> The Community shall take action relating to the environment to the extent to which the objectives referred to in paragraph 1 can be attained better at Community level than at the level of individual Member States (European Communities 1986: 4).

What stands out here is a precondition for an improved implementation. In other words, relations across the EC level and among Member States in the field of environmental protection were based on the principle of subsidiarity. The subsidiarity principle suggests that the decision-making process should occur first at the lowest administrative level, so that whether the issue should be addressed at the EU level or the national and local levels can be identified (Selin and VanDeever 2015: 73). Nevertheless, the SEA generated a profound impetus for environmental integration by politically underlining the importance of environmental protection. Moreover, it created a legal foundation for renegotiating the basic principles of European integration with Denmark, Germany, and the Netherlands, arguing for a single market with high environmental standards (see Zito et al. 2019, Selin and VanDeever 2015). Finally, the ideas enshrined in the SEA, mainly the necessity of linking the environmental, social, and economic spheres to make the single market operate efficiently, reflected the rise of EM theories (Orlando 2013: 5).

The EC adopted the fourth EAP in the same year as the SEA. It reconsidered some aspects of the earlier programs, such as quality policy and emissions orientation. Specifically, the fourth EAP recognized quality policy based on the fulfillment of quality objectives as shifting problems to other regions (Scheuer 2005: 21). At the same time, emissions controls were admitted not to achieve certain objectives set by the previous EAPs. Alternatively, the EAP suggested integrating environmental protection activities into the whole production process instead of adding them to already existing ones (European Commission 1987: 2). This meant reconsidering the industrial cycle in a manner that would enable the reduction of energy or material inputs as well as the

monitoring and reevaluation of phases that might have caused certain backlashes in the form of water, air, or soil pollution.

Again, as with the earlier EAPs, norms suggested by the program were evaluated with regard to their compatibility with the economic development of the internal market. However, environmental policy together with standard-setting was taken at the supranational level to harmonize and avoid distortions that might be possible in case of separate national measures. Here, one can observe a focus on an "integrated" approach to not only how Member States should comply with the standards on the EC level but also "integration" at the level of macro-functioning of the Community. That being said, this meant that environmental damage from this time on was monitored systematically across strategic economic sectors.

Moreover, the fourth EAP explicitly underlined that "the protection of the environment can help to improve economic growth and facilitate job creation" (European Commission 1987: 5). The Commission argued that investments and environmental infrastructure were going to have a positive effect on employment rates in addition to a job-creating impact. It was also stated that no industrial success can be achieved unless environmental requirements and standards are met: "Stricter environmental standards are likely to provide growth opportunities for small and medium-sized enterprises" (European Commission 1987: 10). Despite "having an adverse effect on the competitiveness of certain enterprises" (ibid: 14) in a short-term period, environmental regulation was to bring economic benefits over the long term. Therefore, economy-centered justifications of environmental protection as a booster for future economic prosperity were a central focus of the fourth EAP. Environmental policy-making had to be considered a vital area of European integration, since it opened up new and "positive" opportunities for its functioning and development. Thus, being one of the results of strategic reorientation, the fourth EAP presented a strategic step toward a paradigmatic change and the reformulation of environmental objectives in line with EM (Baker 2007: 304).

This shift toward seeing environmental protection as an opportunity for economic growth within the Community did not occur independently of the international environmental scene. By the end of the 1980s, the international agenda and debates were focused on how industrial and other activities cause environmental damage and launch climate change processes. Subsequent considerations led to the view that the existing policies of industrialized countries should be dramatically changed. Being of a global nature and requiring international action, the environmental crisis presented an opportunity for the Community to play a major role in a new "regime building" (Hey 2007: 22). During the 1980s, a vast body of environmental policies and legislation grew together with the EU's position of environmental expertise in the international

context (Braun 2013: 26). The transformation of the system, which initially saw environment-related regulations as an obstacle or limitation imposed on the economy, moving in the direction of environment-oriented and -protecting ideological thinking was a prerequisite for proceeding with the structural changes necessary for establishing the Union as a prominent "environmental player" at the international level.

Followed by earlier institutional developments, a special body dedicated to environmental issues was established in 1990 – namely the European Environment Agency (EEA). Established by the 1210/90/EEC Council Regulation,[10] which was also the statutory document of the institution, the EEA initially took on the function of collecting and analyzing data on the state of the environment on the European continent. Article 20 of the Regulation entrusted the Agency with several competencies, namely participation in control over the implementation of the environmental legislation of the EU, development of "eco-label" standards established by Council Regulation 880/92,[11] and improvement of the criteria for EIA provided by Council Directive 85/337/EEC. Interestingly, the internationalization of environmental concern and consequent action were embedded in Article 19, which stated that other countries outside of the EU that share its approach can participate in the activities of the EEA (European Council 1992).

Clearly, environment-related policy was no longer a "complementary" activity to all other spheres of integration of the Community; environmental protection received a prominent role in the processes occurring within the Union. Consequently, the 1992 Treaty on EU (commonly known as the Maastricht Treaty), which amended the EEC Treaty, clarified the goals and objectives in the field of environmental protection and gave them a central position (Sheate 2011: 94). Creating the EU, the 1992 Maastricht Treaty made the following procedural changes to environmental policy-making: it extended Council qualified majority voting to environmental articles and made

[10] European Council (1990): Council Regulation (EEC) No 1210/90 on the establishment of the European Environment Agency and the European Environment Information and Observation Network, Brussels, 7 May 1990.

[11] European Council (1992): Council Regulation (EEC) No 880/92 on a Community eco-label award scheme, Brussels, 23 March 1992.

Parliament more equal with the Council, replacing cooperation with a co-decision procedure (Selin and VanDeveer 2015: 313).

According to Article G of the Treaty, the task of the Community was to promote "sustainable and non-inflationary growth respecting the environment" (Treaty on EU 1992: 5). Sustainability and sustainable growth stood out as an integral part of further integration and development within the EU. Simultaneously, the concept of sustainability was considered to be "adjustable" with regard to the diversity of the regions that were part of the EU. Environmental protection and its meaning were defined and concretized in section XVI as entirely dedicated to the environmental topic. In particular, under Article 130r, the environmental policy of the EU was aimed at the preservation, protection, and improvement of the state of the environment. Moreover, it stated that one of the tasks of the EU was to promote measures "at [an] international level to deal with regional or worldwide environmental problems" (Treaty on EU 1992: 28).

Furthermore, the 1992 Treaty underlined the main policy principles in line with which the EC acquired an opportunity to intervene with the aim of inspection procedures whenever necessary. These principles were defined as follows: (1) precautionary action, which requires the adoption of measures to avoid harm or pollution of the environment; (2) combating of damage to the environment, mainly with the occurrence of such damage; and (3) "the polluter pays" (Treaty on EU 1992: 28). The basic principles can also be attributed to those arising from Article 2 of the principle of sustainable growth, which in this case are reminiscent of the concept of SD and imply such treatment of environmental resources that would provide for the interests of present and future generations. Through the Maastricht Treaty, procedures and responsible EU bodies for their implementation were defined. Decisions on environmental protection measures were to be proposed by the Commission, whereas their implementation required the approval of a qualified majority of votes of the Council after respective consultations with the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions (European Communities 1992: 27).

The Maastricht Treaty signified progress – at least in political discourse – toward "ecological integration," in the sense that each Member State had to gradually incorporate environmental protection objectives into its national legislation and adhere to the common environmental policy, both within and outside of the EU. It also called for balanced and sustainable economic and social development when preparing particular actions in the environmental field (Treaty on EU 1992: 12).

Another crucial event during these years was the adoption of the ALTENER program for renewable energy sources in 1992. This marked the beginning of the EU's policy-making

addressing the energy sector, and specifically renewable energy generation. The development of renewable energy sources firmly occurred in the law-making and management policy of the EC, having secured an influential lobby in the form of green parties. Four years later, in 1996, the EU Commission issued the "Green Book" and in 1997 the "White Paper,"[12] which set the task of increasing the share of renewable energy sources in the total energy consumption to 12% (European Commission 2000). The adopted plans were later specified in Directive 2001/77/EC,[13] which postulated that by 2010 alternative energy sources would provide up to 22% of the total electricity generation (compared with 14% in 2000), as well as that biofuels would substitute up to 5.75% of motor fuel consumption in the EU by the same date (European Parliament and Council of the EU 2001: 35).

These changes in relation to energy and climate issues, as well as the place of the environmental element in EU treaties, were communicated accordingly in the fifth EAP, which was named "Towards Sustainability." Adopted in 1993, this EAP incorporated the main points and aims of SD in line with the definition of the Brundtland Report. According to the program, sustainability is defined as meeting the "needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED 1987: 42), which can be achieved through the consideration of three pillars – namely social, economic, and environmental. The fifth EAP acknowledged the need to adhere to the SD principles defined by the official UN strategy and called for a more integrated approach to sustainable production practices. Furthermore, it identified the key pollutant sectors to which specific target policies should be elaborated – industry, energy, transport, agriculture, and tourism (European Commission 1993: 9,10). Moreover, the range of instruments was broadened and enhanced with market-based and economic instruments, financial support mechanisms, and incentives to motivate the interest of producers and consumers in environmentally responsible decision-making (European Commission 1993: 3).

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[12] The "green electricity" acquired a crucial importance with these two directives, presenting a breakthrough in energy policy strategies of the European Commission. Nevertheless, it was faced with a bundle of political, institutional and legislative burdens, as well as "social reluctance" and "lack of awareness" (Haas et al 2001: 5).

[13] Directive 2001/77/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 September 2001 on the promotion of electricity produced from renewable energy sources in the internal electricity market.

Overall, the fifth EAP defined the pillars on which the SD–sectoral relationship would be based: the rational use of resources, its management, and the improvement of competitive position; the use of information to promote better consumer choices and enhance public confidence in the control and quality of production; and the establishment of Community standards for process and products (ibid.). It further admitted that the "achievement of sustainable development calls for significant changes in current patterns of development, production, consumption and behavior" (European Commission 1983: 2).

As can be derived from these notions, the EU was heading in the direction of a sustainability ideology, albeit with the deployment of neoliberal instruments of market competitiveness. Jachtenfuchs (1996) claimed that environmental damage during that period was framed as a distortion within the market, which is why environmental costs had to be internalized in the market so as not to hinder economic development (as cited in Zito et al. 2019: 197). Nevertheless, the fifth EAP firmly continued engraving sustainability and SD as the guiding principle and one of the key objectives of the EU. It declared the compatibility of economic growth and environmental protection by promoting "sustainable growth" (European Commission 1993: 1), which would respect the environment while strengthening economic welfare.

Table 3 presents the key positions of the fourth and fifth EAPs:

Table 3. Summary of the discourse focus of EAPs 4 and 5

Fourth EAP (1987–1992)	**Fifth EAP (1993–2000)**
Environmental policy helps to improve economic growth and facilitate job creation	Environmental policy is aligned with SD principles and is equally important as socioeconomic policies
Action should include economic incentives and legal instruments across various environmental fields	Action should include ensuring that economic growth respects environmental conditions
Environmental protection = economic success	Environmental conditions should be considered to ensure sustainable social and economic development
Economic growth may be boosted by environmental regulations in the future	Economic growth may be secured if technological and scientific advances would environmental harm to be minimized

Source: Own compilation based on based on the fourth and fifth EAPs (European Commission 1987 and 1993, respectively) and Machin (2019)

Later, in 1997, the Treaty of Amsterdam made changes to the content of the founding agreement of the Community as well as presented further elaborations of principles of environmental policy-

making. First, through the Treaty, the Parliament was empowered by expanding the use of a co-decision procedure for more environmental areas, and second, the concept of SD was enshrined and commitments to the integration of environmental policy were strengthened (Selin and VanDeveer 2015: 33). More specifically, this implied the integration of the EU's sustainability principles and objectives into the implementation of other policies (e.g., agriculture, transport, common market, and regional policy); thus, SD was not merely constrained to the environmental policy of the EU. Explicitly framing environment quality improvement as an inherent goal of common activities of the EU, the Treaty proclaimed that any activity should be consider the needs of the environment and leading environmental principles – namely the "polluter should pay" and "precautionary" action (The Treaty of Amsterdam 1997: 34).

The introduction of the Amsterdam Treaty is often considered one of the milestones in the development of European environmental law (Van Calster and Reins 2017: 3). Even though concepts and principles of SD were previously framed in the Maastricht Treaty and the fifth EAP, the Treaty of Amsterdam made implicit that it is one of the core areas of European integration. Moreover, in the aftermath, the concept of "environmental integration" circulated more frequently in the European political scene.

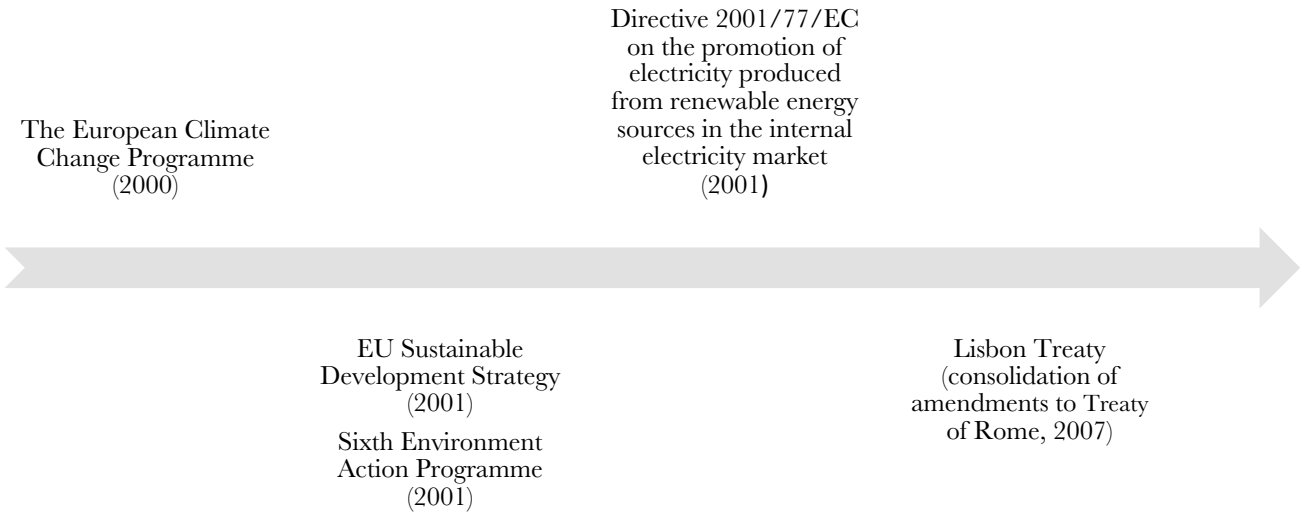
As stated previously, the EU considered the environment and its environmental policy-making one of the core opportunities for establishing itself as a strong environmental actor on the international scene. Therefore, the period from the mid-1980s to the late 1990s – with newly adopted environmental legislation and principles together with their consequent embedment in the European treaties – made it possible for the EU to exert significant power and influence within the framework of international environmental governance. The SEA formally framed the external side of the EU environmental policies, namely the external representation of the Union on environmental issues (Selin and VanDeveer 2015: 324). For instance, in the late 1990s, the EU actively promoted its adoption of the precautionary principle at the international level, which led to its consolidation in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). An example of the implementation of the principle of precautionary action is the interaction of the EU with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).[14]

[14] As part of externalization of the EU's vision on the environmental issue and, in particular, climate change, in 1996 the European Union presented its vision of the goals and measures of the international fight against global climate change, which included, in particular, the prevention of an increase in the temperature of the earth's surface by more than 2 degrees Celsius compared to the pre-industrial level.

In sum, the period from the mid-1980s to the late 1990s can be characterized by the allocation of environmental policy to the priority areas of European integration. During these years, the environmental policy was consolidated by incorporating the ideas of EM and market-based approaches into potentials solutions. This is also when the EEC Treaty was amended and the place of environmental policy-making was reconsidered. First, through the 1992 Maastricht Treaty and later the 1997 Amsterdam Treaty, the environmental area and principles of SD were firmly positioned as some of the core elements of European integration. The Commission shifted its focus from the reaffirmation of environmental protection as an opportunity for economic growth and job creation in the fourth EAP to the alignment of environmental policies with SD principles in the fifth EAP.

6.3 Sustainability as a stimulating force for economic growth

Figure 3. Timeline of environmental legislation and policy (and integration agreements) during 2000–2008



Source: Own compilation

The ambitious goals and elements of the fifth EAP were not met with much enthusiasm from the Member States. On the contrary, a demand for the "re-nationalization" of environmental policies was expressed, meaning the introduction of new regulatory approaches based on procedural requirements, voluntary agreements, and framework directives, which left more flexibility for

Member States and were less demanding on European standards (Hey 2007: 24).[15] Zito et al. (2019: 197) claimed that the focus at that time was more on safeguarding the national economies and their competitiveness. The Member States were reluctant to the limitations introduced by the EC and to shift from nationally driven environmental decision-making to more diverse and complex processes.

Despite being proclaimed as a priority and touched upon in various legislative regulations and strategies, environmental goals were put aside for a certain period of time (Zito et al. 2019: 198). Thus, the optimistically idealistic nature of the previous periods was substituted with a critical re-evaluation of the key sectoral problems, their objectives, and their goals with regard to economic development. At the same time, as a result of previous decades of environmental policy-making, several contradictory trends and approaches to the environmental legislation and regulation were promoted. The environmental agenda was faced with problems of coherence and approach suitability, such as the disputable market-based mechanisms of carbon-energy tax and the ecological structural change in the most polluting sectors (Hey 2007: 25).

In addition, the new approaches were not always met with high enthusiasm. One of the obstacles was met in 2000, the year the Lisbon strategy (2000–2010) was introduced. Due to the political challenges and changes in the EC, a process toward the proactive implementation of sustainable principles had a rather interrupted manner, calibrating between expanding and incorporating "poorer" countries, managing economic governance, and preventing decadence in environmental policy-making (Zito et al. 2019: 199). Simultaneously, economic difficulties, such as the slow-down of economic growth and high unemployment rates coupled with the 2004 enlargement of the EU, led to the marginalization of EU environmental policies as well as them being subjected to strong critique from various sides (Scheuer 2005: 9). Nevertheless, in terms of the EU's vision and political discourse, environmental protection as a shared responsibility did not seem to lose its weight – at least that is how it was presented at a political level.

Despite internal tension among Member States, the EU's sustainability agenda was driven by the outcomes of Rio 1992, which urged the elaboration of national sustainability plans (Steurer and Berger 2011: 100). In this sense, the 2000 Lisbon Strategy exemplified a response to global

[15] Hey (2007) names this timespan as the "roll-back of the environmental policies" in the European Union during this period.

challenges, particularly "a quantum shift resulting from globalization and the challenges of a new knowledge-driven economy" (European Council 2000). The strategy touched upon sustainability only when referring to the transition to a knowledge-based economy. It stated that the EU strategic goal is to

> become the most competitive and knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better cohesion (European Council 2000: 5).

References to the environment were made exclusively in the context of technological innovation and technological capacities to improve environmental standards. Therefore, the Lisbon Strategy was criticized for its pure focus on the issues of employment and growth, omitting the environmental side of the coin, as well as a lack of devotion to the SDG framework (Kopp 2006: 2).

As a reaction to the lack of references to the environment in the Lisbon Strategy, the EU introduced the Sustainable Strategy in 2001. This became associated with a paradigmatic shift from "environmental integration" (presented earlier through the 1997 Amsterdam Treaty) to SD as the EU's leading policy principle.[16] The European Strategy for Sustainable Development supplemented the Lisbon Strategy for growth and jobs (dealing rather with socioeconomic issues) by adding the environmental dimension. It set the task of incorporating "sustainability" into political decision-making and policy actions (Federal Ministry Republic of Austria 2022). Three elements – namely economic growth, social cohesion, and environmental protection – were proclaimed to be coordinated and to function in a nonharmful way to each other (European Commission 2001a: 2). The following main threats to the "well-being of the European Society" were listed: global warming, antibiotic-resistant strains of some diseases, long-term effects of hazardous chemicals, food safety, poverty, aging of the population, loss of biodiversity, waste volumes, soil loss, transport congestion, and regional imbalances (European Commission 2001a: 4). The link of the EU SDS to the Lisbon Strategy was in their reinforcing relationship as well as their mutual direction toward the fulfillment of economic, social, and environmental objectives.

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[16] In 2001, at the session of the European Council in Gothenburg, the EU Strategy for Sustainable Development (EU SDS) was approved signifying a beginning of years-long focus on sustainability and its incorporation into all the sectors of the Union. It grew out of processes taking place globally, namely growing international focus on sustainability after the Rio conference.

Strategically, the EU was at the time more preoccupied with economy-related issues. Specifically, it concerned the issues of restructuring the economy and arranging the transition to a "knowledge-based" economy, which would enable sustainable economic growth and social cohesion in line with the Lisbon Strategy. According to Steurer and Berger (2011: 99), the EU SDS can be seen as a contribution to the international political discourse on SD, rather than a "full-value EU strategy." The focus was articulated more around growth and employment than around social cohesion and environment objectives; nevertheless, achieving each of them was seen through better policy-making in research and development (R&D) and the creation of institutional space for technological innovation.

Responding to political rhetoric regarding SD, including prior provisions of the 1987 Brundtland Report, SD was incorporated into almost every foundational legislation of the EU. The text of the EU Charter of Fundamental rights (EU 2000: 17), for instance, states that policies of the EU should be aligned with SD principles. These implied provisions of the Amsterdam Treaty, namely the integration of the objectives and principles of EU environmental policy into the implementation of other policies, such as agriculture, transport, common market, and regional policy.[17]

Ambitious goals, regardless of the political resistance, were also stated in the EAPs during this period. This refers to the sixth EAP, which was adopted on 22nd July 2002 and titled "Environment 2010: Our Future, Our Choice" (European Commission 2001c). The sixth EAP appeared just before the World Summit on Sustainable Development under the auspices of the UN, which was held in Johannesburg in 2002. It presented a long-term strategy sought by the 2001 EU Sustainable Strategy in terms of the environmental component. Moreover, the provisions of the program were supposed to be integrated into all policies of the EU (European Commission 2001c: 3). In contrast to its predecessors, the sixth EAP had a longer implementation period (10 years – from 2002 to 2012), presumably signifying an attempt to overcome and compensate for the shortcomings caused by previous programs' limited duration. Furthermore, the sixth EAP had a different legal status: due to the amendments introduced by the Maastricht Treaty, provisions of the action programs

[17] Recalling the provisions of the 1997 Amsterdam Treaty that already pinned SD as an overarching objective of European integration, some scholars view the 2001 strategy as a logical continuation of the efforts made back then, e.g. see Sheate 2011.

became mandatory, in contrast to the past where the provisions were of a more political and legal nature; that is, they were part of the soft law of the European Community (see Scheuer 2005).

The program highlighted the following six priority EU actions for the coming years: climate change, nature and biodiversity, the environment, health, natural resources, and waste (European Commission 2001c: 2). As a continuation and extension of the EU SDS, the sixth EAP was supposed to provide the environmental element of the Union's objectives for growth and competitiveness. Its solution to the dissent around the environmental policies was decoupling. The program defined decoupling as an optimal solution to the economic pressures of that period, suggesting that economic growth can be pursued without a negative ecological impact in various sectors (European Commission 2001c: 3,7,8).

Understanding the improbability of strict regulation measures, the sixth program acquired a more "pragmatic" view of what the policy should look like, meaning that policy intervention should also be aligned with the industry interests. Withstanding the limitations on industrial and other activities of Member States, it promoted a vision where economic growth could potentially be justified if it caused no harm to the environment, thereby aiming to overcome resistance to the adoption of environmental policies. From an organizational point of view, a newly established cooperative approach would mean integrated product policies, standardization for environmental policies, voluntary agreements, and cooperation with expert circles from the Member States. Moreover, from this point in time onwards, one can observe a transformation of the environmental regulation as well as the emergence of a new form of environmental governance in the EU. It acquired the notions of "integration," "inclusiveness," and "multistakeholder."[18] Scheuer (2005) described this process as one that takes power from legislators and strengthens the authority of private and public professionals, thus turning the model into multi-level governance.[19]

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[18] A strategic integrated approach, incorporating new ways of working with the market, involving citizens, enterprises and other stakeholders is needed in order to induce necessary changes in both production and public and private consumption patterns that influence negatively the state of, and trends in, the environment. This approach should encourage sustainable use and management of land and sea (European Commission 2002:2).

[19] The term "governance" was explicitly defined earlier in the 2001 Commission's White Paper on European Governance by basing it on five key elements, namely: "openness", "participation", "accountability", "effectiveness" and "coherence" (European Commission 2001d: 10). It specifically implied horizontal interaction of the various actors

6.3.1 Fight against climate change and decoupling of economic growth

Thematically, one of the priority areas of the sixth EAP was climate change. Indeed, it paid greater attention to climate change than earlier EAPs.[20] Specifically, it incorporated measures that were necessary for the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol. Therefore, the main focus of the Community was on a stringent reduction of GHG emissions. This goal was to be achieved by reducing GHG emissions in the energy, transport, and industrial production sectors while shifting to renewable and lower-carbon fossil fuels, creating sustainable transportation, promoting eco-efficient practices, and developing means to adapt, innovate, and improve performance (European Commission 2001c: 7).

The reduction of GHG emissions was framed as serving as a means of "decoupling" economic growth and environmental degradation as well as creating an opportunity for new possibilities in terms of "creating new markets and business opportunities" (European Commission 2001c: 9). Decoupling was communicated as the path for the future development of the Union that would allow it to pursue its economic goals while simultaneously safeguarding its high environmental standards.[21] This was a next step for re-orienting EU policy-making with the aim of bridging the gap between environmental and economic policies, while simultaneously linking them in an "efficient" manner. The linkage or, practically, discursive distancing of economic growth from environmental harm opened up a space to promote the creation of new markets and business opportunities that would be aligned with SD principles and thus not contradict the new environmental paradigm of the EU.

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that subsequently limited a single administrative control function and rather gave space for negotiation and interdependent solutions.

[20] The 5th EAP mentions "climate change" when referring to the objectives set out by the 1992 Rio Conference (European Commission 1993: 1,4); the 4th EAP touches upon "Greenhouse effects" and their impact on "climate and agricultural productivity worldwide" (European Commission 1987: 12).

[21] As for the formulation of the Commission, "decoupling" allows to reduce the negative environmental impact of resource use and to achieve overall improvements in the environment going hand in hand with economic growth (IEEP 2010: 35).

The sixth EAP explicitly incorporated the ideological underpinnings of "decoupling" in line with the OECD's vision of it as a "cure" for a harmonious relationship between the development of the economy and environmental welfare.[22] An attempt was made to turn growth, in its neoclassical sense, around the conceptual basis of sustainability and responsible "growth," which in essence contradict the former (Mauerhofer 2013: 44). Aligning both economic and environmental domains in a mutually beneficial relationship, the EU policy-makers (following the example of prominent international institutions) set the agenda of sustainable growth respecting the environment.

Table 4 presents a summary of the focus shift in the sixth EAP:

Table 4. Summary of the discourse focus of EAP 6

Sixth EAP (2002–2012)
Environmental policy is aligned with the SD discourse, promoting the "decoupling" of economic growth and environmental degradation
Actions should include (besides previous commitments) the limitation of climate change
Environmental action is an opportunity for innovation, new markets, and business opportunities
Environmental protection is not only beneficial for tackling climate change but also for business

Source: Own compilation based on the European Commission (2001b) and Machin (2019)

It appears that SD was firmly cemented in the political discourse of the EU, making it a leading principle by which not only environmental but also other policies should be guided. Moreover, climate change stood out as a major challenge and focus point of the EU's environmental agenda, which had to be addressed from short- and long-term perspectives. In line with the Lisbon Strategy and the EU SDS, the sixth EAP also focused on the opportunity side of environmental protection

[22] According to the OECD's interpretation, decoupling occurs when at the given growth rate, the environmental pressure is lower than the economic driving force (OECD 2002).

and climate change action, specifically in its capacity to produce new jobs and markets, increase employment, and promote growth. Therefore, environmental protection was framed as beneficial, not only in terms of ecologically driven reasons but also within a broader framework of European growth strategies.

In 2005, further deepening its focus on the issue of climate change, the European Council – under the influence of the international agenda (particularly the entrance into force of the Kyoto Protocol) – adopted a 2°C target as the basis for both internal and external environmental policy. The 2°C objective meant that "global average temperatures should not exceed 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial level" (European Commission 2005: 3). Within the Kyoto obligation, the EU institutions also urged common and coordinated policies and a framework for Member States, which resulted in the European Climate Change Programme (ECCP). Initiated in 2000, the ECCP stressed the importance of combined policies aimed at all sectors of the economy, especially those that contribute the most GHG emissions. There had already been a discussion of technological innovation and reorientation of investments to "clean" production; however, at the EU level, there was little consensus on how to proceed with the respective legislation. A decision was made in favor of market-based instruments, namely in establishing the EU-wide trading system for GHG emission permits. The EU emission trading scheme (ETS) was introduced with the release of a Green Paper in 2000 and was considered a suitable tool for meeting the international commitments under the Kyoto Protocol, specifically to reduce GHG emissions (European Commission 2000).

The document underlined two crucial aspects concerning the future energy framework of the EU. First, it underlined the role of climate change and the threat that it poses globally. Deriving from this perspective, the EC urged that, according to the document, SD will result in both the efficient tackling of climate change and the reinforcement of supply security (European Commission 2000: 2). Second, it called for the establishment of an integrated energy market (ibid.), which was intended to respond to climate change at the level of the EU. Framing global warming as an issue of central concern (European Commission 2000: 3), it was suggested that despite the incorporation of the environmental dimension into all EU policies, there must be a strong emphasis on reducing GHG emissions. Moreover, it should not only be limited by provisions of the Kyoto Protocol but also be adjusted to the growth of particular sectors. Special attention was given to the transport sector and the need to reduce emissions through the development of new modes, such as electric or hybrid cars.

6.3.2 Interconnectedness of climate objectives and energy policy

The Green Paper strongly linked energy supply security and energy dependence with its climate objectives. Vogler (2013: 637) described this phase as highly technical but with a limited level of synergy along the EU energy and climate strategies. Links between climate policy and energy security were also made by the 2001 Directive, 23 which promoted renewable energy sources as advantageous – not only in terms of the energy independence of the EU but also the long-term oriented perspective of EM. The "win-win" discourse was enacted to highlight the benefits, particularly economic ones, that come with emissions reductions. Thus, legislation from this point onwards targeted the setting of emission ceilings for key pollutants. One such legislatively binding document was the NEC Directive (2001/81),24 which was based on an approach for cutting national emission levels while also granting Member States the right to choose how to achieve the required reductions.

This is also the period when new instruments of environmental policy were introduced, such as strategic environmental assessment[25] and environmental liability with regard to environmental damage. [26] A turn toward the "marketization" of CO_2 emissions was made with the introduction of the CO_2 Emission Trading Directive (2003/87/EC).[27] In addition to the aforementioned alternations, policy preparation at the supranational level grew much more participatory, which could be observed in the active involvement of NGOs, expert networks, and consultation processes

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[23] Directive 2001/77/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 September 2001 on the promotion of electricity produced from renewable energy sources in the internal electricity market.

[24] Directive 2001/81/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2001 on national emission ceilings for certain atmospheric pollutants.

[25] Strategic environmental assessment is "a decision-making support instrument for the formulation of sustainable spatial and sector policies, plans and programs, aiming to ensure an appropriate consideration of the environment" (Fischer 2003: 159).

[26] The respective directives are Strategic Environmental Impact Assessment Directive (2001/42) and the Environmental Liability Directive (2004/35/CE).

[27] Directive 2003/87/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 October 2003 establishing a scheme for greenhouse gas emission allowance trading within the Community and amending Council Directive 96/61/EC.

becoming a counterbalance to influential industry lobbying (Scheuer 2005: 26). The overall direction and focus of the policy documents at this stage followed the logic of objectives in SD, competitiveness, and energy supply security.

6.3.3 The Lisbon Treaty – greening the internal integration agenda?

Alongside the developments in environmental politics, as described previously, several EU treaties were adopted that deepened the areas of integration for Member States. The final integration stage that solidified legal mandates was the adoption of the Treaty of Lisbon in 2007, which entered into force in 2009. The Treaty changed the values and objectives of the EU, also alternating the name of the founding agreement from "The Treaty Establishing the European Communities" to "The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union" (TFEU),[28] thereby directly linking it to the EU Treaty and the goals it set for a united Europe.

Consequently, principles that were previously considered declarative – economic, social, and territorial unity, and cultural diversity, along with social and environmental goals – acquired a fundamental character for the policy of the EU as a whole. As for the changes brought through the Treaty of Lisbon in environmental policy-making procedures, Selin and VanDeveer (2015: 313) summarized them as follows: a system of three levels of competences was created, in which environmental issues fell under the shared competence; the ordinary legislative procedure for environmental policy-making between the Council and the Parliament was established; and Council-qualified majority voting was adjusted to a double-majority system.

The goals of EU policy in the field of environmental protection were clarified and the fight against climate change was incorporated into the common objectives of the EU. According to Article 191 of the TFEU, "the Union policy on the environment shall aim at a high level of protection taking into account the diversity of situations in the various regions of the Union." Thus, a new legal basis for climate change was set, including a legal framework for the EU energy policy enshrined in Article 194, where parties agreed "to promote energy efficiency and energy saving and the development of new and renewable forms of energy" (Article 194 TFEU). This was the first time

[28] Consolidated Version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union is dated to the year 2012.

that the main aspects of a common energy policy were explicitly presented in detail and in relation to the environmental objectives.

The EU, as a Union, was free to set goals that include a more successful functioning of the energy market, supply of energy resources, and development of alternative energy sources. Moreover, the EU obtained the responsibility to define and implement research and development programs in this area. The energy sector seemed to be covered and alternated to a greater extent than other areas of the Lisbon Treaty. Article 194 TFEU introduced a separate legal basis for it by stating that the development of energy policy should occur in line with the need for the preservation and improvement of the environment.

Some scholars envision the environmental provisions incorporated in the Treaty of Lisbon as the result of greening campaigns following the period from the Maastricht Treaty to the Nice Treaty (see Vedder 2008). From a legal perspective, the treaty presented three "environmental integration" principles[29] and was riddled with references to sustainability and SD in relation to integration and market functioning. Moreover, the Lisbon Treaty firmly placed the EU energy policy in the environmental context by (a) focusing on the share of energy coming from renewable energy sources and (b) relating it to the beneficial impact on the environment and contribution to the fight against climate change.

6.3.4 Ten years of integration and environmental policy – mutually enforcing transformation or decadence?

After conducting a retrospective chronological analysis of the most prominent environmental documents, I was able to highlight the following aspects and areas that were inherent to the development of the European environmental agenda in the first decade of the 2000s:

The creation of a more independent organizational mechanism for the regulation of environmental protection – consolidation of the EU's competence in environmental decision-making (with the introduction of the Lisbon Treaty);

[29] Article 194 of the TFEU restructured the relation between the energy policy, internal market and environmental policy, connecting the energy provisions with the need for environmental protection.

The unification of rules for environmental impact assessment and the collection and processing of environmental information;

A shift toward sustainability and ultimately the incorporation of the concept of SD into the vision and fundamental values of the EU (with the introduction of the Lisbon Treaty);

Increasing attention to climate change and connecting climate objectives with energy goals, framing the overarching objective for the future EU development as one of a "highly energy-efficient and low greenhouse-gas-emitting economy" (Council of the EU 2007).

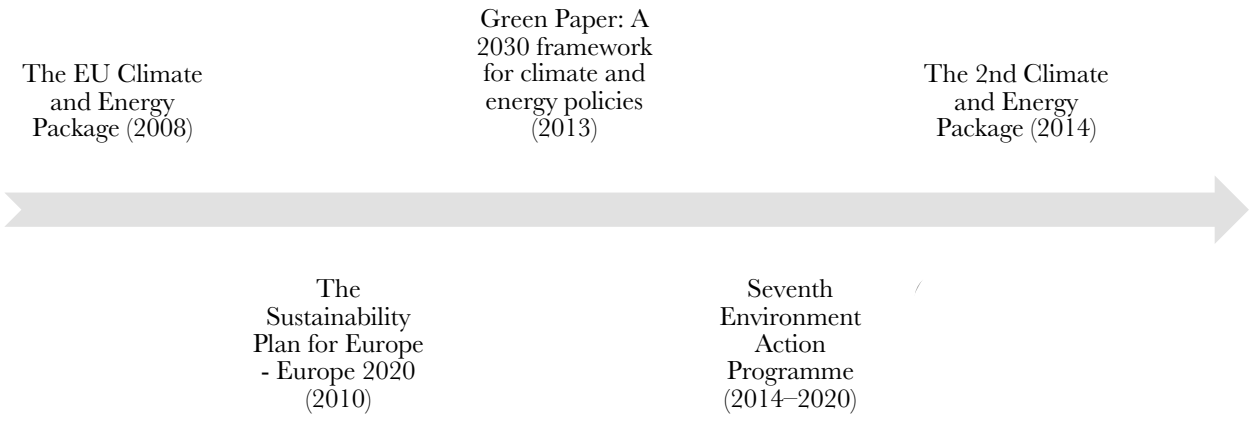
If considering a longer time span, the EU's approach to environmental policy-making indeed underwent a transformational path – from an originally almost nonexistent area of interest in the 1957 EEC Treaty to an inherent part and priority of European integration, which was consequently embedded in provisions of the SEA and the Maastricht Treaty and later established through the Lisbon Treaty as one of the integration areas. At the level of rhetoric, it was a substantial change since the EU legislation absorbed and focused on sustainability as one of the inherent goals of EU integration. Moreover, new ideas and approaches were developed, expanding the scope of the environmental policy. From a technical point of view, the novelty lay in the introduction of mixed market-based and regulatory instruments, such as an emissions trading system. As for the ideological basis, the environmental domain was transformed into an inter alia integration area. This implies, besides institutional changes, alternations of the magnitude and prominence of the environmental topic, as in the representation of environmental and climate protection as a core European value. It also led to processes on an international level, where the EU actively promoted its vision, and this would be later referred to as the "Europeanization" of environmental policies (see Unalan and Cowell 2009).

Ideologically, this vision was based on the assumption of a "win-win" situation, in which environmental protection leads to economic and social welfare in the long term. The discourse concerning the "environment as an asset" was further enacted through the linking of discourses around climate change, reduction of GHG emissions, promotion of renewable energy, and the energy security of the Union. Another point of attention was "decoupling" in the course of justifying the "positive" relationship between economic and environmental policies (e.g., in the sixth EAP). The linkage between the environment and market competitiveness was further framed through deploying rhetoric on innovation and new technologies. The development of new technologies and new sectors was seen as a means for securing and maintaining business and economic growth (European Commission 2000: 3). Finally, through the provisions of the sixth EAP and the Treaty of Lisbon, the EU committed to fighting climate change, which became

strongly incorporated into its environmental policy-making. Mirroring the development of global dynamics, namely the commitments under the Kyoto Protocol, the EU overtook ambitious goals of CO_2 emissions reduction, tightening its approach with the leadership in international climate governance.

6.4 The "green, competitive and low-carbon" economy as a universal cure

Figure 4. Timeline of environmental and climate legislation and policy during 2008-2018



Source: Own compilation

As previous chapters have demonstrated, the EU policy absorbed and actively promoted the idea of development within the environmental limits. Public and political discourse articulated the importance of natural capital and the need to reduce (or avoid) environmental degradation as well as sought approaches that would make economic development not only compatible but also beneficial for the environment. There has been a considerable change in communication, which was initiated with the principle of the "environment as a burden to economic growth," resulting in the "environment as an opportunity for economic growth." In this context, the new paradigm proclaimed that environmental challenges are to be tackled through the decoupling of economic growth and the environment.

Nevertheless, the strong rhetoric about "greening" the Union was faced with the uncertainty of the period due to the global financial crisis and the subsequent economic crisis (Zito et al. 2019: 198). Some scholars have explored the transformation of the main ideological principles and levels in the EU documents and instruments since 2008 in relation to the growing role of the market, also in the context of the EU ETS (see Marchin 2019). Others have focused on deepening attention to climate change and analyzing the Commission's actions within the framework of efforts to combat it (see Rietig 2019). Another point of view concerns the interests and willingness of the existing

and newly joined Member States in implementing progressive measures at a national level (see Zito et al. 2019). Nevertheless, all of the abovementioned perspectives agree on the nonlinear nature of the implementation procedures of the EU environmental policies during the following years.

From the perspective of integration processes, the Treaty of Lisbon's modification of previously existing EU Treaties increased the importance of the EC. It also increased its role as a generator of ideas as well as a champion of new EU policy and legislation in the field of environmental and climate protection (Selin and VanDeveer 2015: 45). Since the Treaties previously prescribed considering the requirements of environmental protection, including climate protection, in the development and implementation of EU policy in other areas, the EC did not limit itself to purely climate issues; rather, it developed proposals for action programs in such fields as energy, transport, and agricultural policy (ibid.). It thus aimed to promote coherence across different sectors and ensure that policies align with the common climate goals.

Developing with the flow of command-and-control regulations and directives, the EU's environmental policy-making, however, also acquired traits of a market-based approach and economic incentives (Selin and VanDeveer 2015: 148). Evolving from solely controlling and mandating certain ceilings for the industries, the EU arrived at a phase where it attempted to implement comprehensive regulatory measures based on a reassessment of governance structures as well as public and private sector behavior.

6.4.1 Elaborating on the topic of energy and climate

Crucially, the Treaty of Lisbon gave the EU and its Member States joint competence in energy matters (Article 194 TFEU). It does not explicitly mention the goal of climate protection in the context of energy efficiency; however, deriving from the provisions of the *"*need to preserve and improve the environment" and thus the "development of new and renewable forms of energy," it can be understood that an orientation toward alternative and "greener" energy sources was part of the sustainable course of the EU. However, at the Member-State level, measures toward the alternation of energy sources remained unchanged – "policy measures shall not affect a Member State's right to determine the conditions for exploiting its energy sources" (Article 194 TFEU).

As for the specific goals for the EU climate policy, the TFEU did not establish them, with the exception of Article 191, where it committed to "preserve, protect and improve the quality of the environment" (Article 191 TFEU) and repeated the following principles established in the previous statutes of the EU: the precautionary principle, indicating that environmental damage

should as a priority be rectified at source, and the "polluted should pay" principle. The Commission also proposed an integrated approach for climate change and energy policy by introducing a Climate and Energy package in January 2008 (European Commission 2008). Much focus, in general, began to be dedicated to the intersection of the energy sector and climate goals – the target was to boost energy security in the EU and improve energy efficiency in key areas, as well as to secure sustainable energy supplies (ibid.). Before the TFEU, as Skjærseth (2021: 29) argued, particularly over the period of 1997–2007, climate, energy, and innovation policies tended to evolve in isolated manner each focusing on different areas: climate change, energy security, and economic growth. The Lisbon strategy (2000–2010) elaborated on "sustainability" and "sustainable growth," but it did not touch upon the interrelation of climate and energy policies within the following "sustainability" framework.

With the 2008 Climate and Energy package, decarbonization and the promotion of renewable energy sources became essential parts of the EU strategy of GHG emission reduction. Both were linked to research and innovation in the field of low-carbon energy technologies – wind, solar, bioenergy, carbon capture and storage, the electricity grid, and nuclear fission (Eikeland and Skjærseth 2019 as cited in Skjærseth 2021:30). In the communication of the EC, the synergy of new energy policies and climate targets was framed through its focus on the stimulation of renewables, energy efficiency, and GG. The Renewable Energy Directive (2009/28/EC)[30] proclaimed that the reduction of GHG emissions, in line with the Kyoto Protocol and the UNFCCC, were to be achieved through the "increased use of energy from renewable sources, together with energy savings and increased energy efficiency." Energy efficiency technologies and technological improvements in general were listed as the most "effective tools" through which dependence on fossil fuels can be reduced and the problem of energy supplies can be tackled (European Parliament and Council of the EU 2009: 16).

Later, the seventh EAP – named "Living well, within the limits of our planet" – progressed the GE and framed it as "a means for sustainable development." This meant that the EU's economy had to be transformed to become "resource-efficient," "competitive," and "low-carbon" (European Commission 2013: 174). The responsibility for the implementation of the eco-modernization and

[30] Directive 2009/28/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2009 on the promotion of the use of energy from renewable sources and amending and subsequently repealing Directives 2001/77/EC and 2003/30/EC.

"greening" of the EU was shifted from governments to market-based instruments, leaving Member States' governments with the function of providing "the right framework conditions for investment and eco-innovation, stimulating the development of sustainable business or technological solutions" (European Commission 2013: 33).

In line with the provisions of the seventh EAP, the GE enables the decoupling of economic growth and environmental degradation (European Commission 2013: 177). It was the major turn in the environmental discourse of the EU, not only underlining the opportunity for growth while safeguarding the environment but also, and more than that, speculating that the environment is a new source of growth and job opportunities.

The EC claimed that progress in environmental legislation, high environmental quality standards ("the most comprehensive" at a global level), and technological and innovation achievements over the 40 years of European environmental policy-making have enabled objectives to be set for the period up to 2020 as well as beyond (European Commission 2013: 176). A strong statement related to the area of resource efficiency was dedicated to "turning waste into a resource" through means of "a lifecycle-driven circular economy" (European Commission 2013: 184).

Previously, the "circular economy" (CE) was only briefly covered in the 2008 Environment Policy Review prepared by the Commission. Specifically, underlining the insufficiency of prevention and repair measures, it was suggested that policies on sustainable consumption and production should be presented; in this context, the technology and innovation of eco-friendly practices were set as a milestone for stimulating the greening of the market (European Commission 2008: 21). Simultaneously, a "recycling society" – one that deploys resource-efficient consumption through "unavoidable waste as a recourse" (European Commission 2008: 22) – was seen as a prerequisite for waste prevention.

The seventh EAP, building upon the Europe 2020 strategy, the Climate and Energy Package, the EC Communication on a Roadmap for moving to a low-carbon economy in 2050,[31] as well as the EU Strategy for Sustainable Development, exemplified an attempt to solidify various sectors under the overarching framework for environmental governance up until 2020. Thematically, the areas of "climate change mitigation" and "climate change adaptation" were presented together with

[31] In the Communication from 2011, the Commission proposed the three-roadmap modelling for the period up to 2050. One of the overarching roadmaps was the one dedicated to transition towards a low-carbon economy and exploring the possibility of emissions reductions in the period up to 2050 (European Commission 2011).

those of "energy efficiency" and "renewable energy sources" (European Commission 2013). The seventh EAP depicted a continuation of sustainable discourse that could be traced through the framing of the EU's intentions to transform itself into an "inclusive" GE that will provide for "well-being," "decent jobs," and "reduce[d] inequalities" while simultaneously safeguarding ecosystem services (European Commission 2013: 177). A low-carbon and resource-efficient economy is an exemplification not only of the EU's overarching objective but also the means through which it will secure its sustainable growth and development. The EU ETS remained a "cornerstone" of the EU climate policy and was further maintained by the seventh EAP as a central pillar of the Union's climate strategy beyond 2020 (European Commission 2013: 183). Machin (2019: 223) referred to the increasing role of EU ETS in the EU climate policy framework as a dependence on market rationality that is seen to provide structural behavioral changes while maintaining or reducing political intervention.

Being a political manifesto for GG and the development of the EU, the seventh EAP set the scene for the EU environmental policy until 2020. Operating with the language structures that attribute to a GG meanings of necessity, desirability, and compatibility with environmental well-being, it suggests that "green logics" will enable economic targets to be met without harming the environment. Continuing the discourse on sustainability, the document postulates that SD is the only way to prevent a further escalation of climate change and to reduce the probability of natural disasters (European Commission 2013: 177).

Table 5 presents an overview of the guiding ideological principles of the seventh EAP:

Table 5. Summary of the discourse focus of EAP 7

Seventh EAP (2012–2020)
Environmental policy should focus on the absolute decoupling of economic growth and environmental degradation
Actions should include the transformation of the EU into a "smart, sustainable and inclusive economy"; sustainable investments and growth are the main enablers
The focus of attention is resource-efficiency, a low-carbon economy, and the greening of all sectors; technology and innovation are key
Environmental policy not only allows economic growth to be boosted but also creates new areas and segments of growth

Source: Own compilation based on the European Commission (2014) and Machin (2019)

Therefore, it can be seen how environmental policy reached the point in 2010s when it was perceived as an opportunity for economic (and social) improvements opposing to the initial vision

of costly restriction and limitation of activities harming the environment. Framing used in the political strategies aimed at communicating the enabling function of environmental strategies – for job creation, for quality of life, for creation of new sectors and new areas of growth. Being part of sustainable pathway of the EU, greening discourse emerged together with accompanying narratives on decoupling of economic growth from environmental devastation. Hence, growth was made to be acceptable given the conditions of resource-efficient and low-carbon economy where technology and innovation provide for the needs of natural capital.

7 Climate change as a central point of EU environmental discourse

This Chapter analyzes embeddedness of climate change topic into EU environmental agenda. It brings up arguments about decoupling, decarbonization and, consequently, greening of the economy as one of the most prominent narratives operating in political strategies dealing with climate change. The objective of the Chapter is to illustrate how political solutions are interlinked with the issues of efficiency and progress, mainly in the energy sector. Therefore, Section 7.1 presents a critical perspective on "clean energy" (through means of decarbonization and decoupling) and its place in climate-related policies. Continuing with a brief overview of EU climate commitments in context of international agreements, Section 7.2 assesses prominence of concepts "green economy" and "circular economy" in context of EU climate narrative.

7.1 The power of two Ds – decarbonization and decoupling

In 2007, based on the emission reduction scenario developed by the IPCC, the EU called on developed countries to reduce GHG emissions by 30% by 2020 and then by 60–80% by 2050; for rapidly developing countries, figures of 15% and 30%, respectively, were proposed (European Commission 2007b: 2). In the same year, the EU adopted an energy strategy that set the target of increasing the share of renewable energy sources in final energy consumption to 20% as well as moving toward increasing energy efficiency by 20% (Council of the EU 2007). This greatly influenced the energy and climate discourses in the upcoming years as well as took a prominent role in the EU's economic growth strategy – "Europe 2020." Specifically, the Europe 2020 strategy prioritized three-pillar growth, namely "smart, sustainable and inclusive" (European Commission 2010: 3). "Smart" referred to the economy being based on knowledge and innovation; "sustainable" – on resource efficiency, green economic activities, and competitiveness; and "inclusive" – on high employment resulting in social and territorial cohesion (European Commission 2010: 10). As a constitutive part of the sustainable growth pillar, the "climate, energy and mobility" initiative urged for decarbonization, decoupling, modernization, and efficiency with regard to resource use (ibid.: 32). Essentially, "green," or clean and efficient, energy was seen as

a powerful source, not only for the energy security of the EU but also for its potential to create more than 600,000 jobs (ibid.: 15).

Keeping in mind the timely limitation of the Europe 2020 strategy, the EC presented a Green Paper in 2013 that initiated the process of reforming the policy framework for the period beyond 2020. Two main areas that were touched upon were climate and energy, which corresponded with the ideas based on increasing the efficiency of the energy supply – making it not only more competitive and secure but also more ecologically sustainable (European Commission 2013). Sustainability in the energy field was to be achieved through a "fully liberalized and integrated energy market capable of mobilizing and allocating investment efficiently, until renewable energy sources become cost-competitive" (ibid: 7). Energy and climate discourse, compared with other areas, remained highly optimistic, relying on macroeconomic models that often lead to political misperceptions (Fischer and Geden 2015: 6). The 2013 Green Paper exemplified an attempt to reorganize and restructure energy governance in a way that would orient it toward the renewable targets, making decarbonization one of the overarching goals.

Decarbonizing the energy system was a milestone decision that followed the overall focus on sustainability and the "greening" of European policies. From this time on, the "green" economy was prioritized in policy debates and incorporated into key objectives and targets of the EU's environmental policy-making. The timeframes of the target setting expanded, with the goals toward new, "green," and sustainable being adjusted up until 2050 (e.g., the 2013 EEA Report was dedicated to the period from 2010 until 2050; European Environmental Agency 2014: 8).[32] In a way, the notion of GE absorbed elements of SD where the environment, economy, and society develop in a mutually beneficial manner, in addition to emphasizing the topics of resource efficiency and inclusivity. The core idea on which "greening" of the economy was based was the need not only to ensure resource efficiency (that alone would not grant steady or declining resource use) but also to work on ecosystem resilience. Moreover, the EEA report depicted focus areas of EU environmental law- and policy-making, in which the first out of nine policy areas was energy. Others were mentioned as follows: GHG emissions and ozone-depleting substances, air quality

[32] "Green economy" in the following report is explained as "the one in which environmental, economic and social policies and innovations enable society to use resources efficiently-enhancing human well-being in an inclusive manner, while maintaining the natural systems that sustain us" (European Environmental Agency 2014: 5).

and air pollution, transport sector emissions of GHGs and air pollutants, waste, water, sustainable consumption and production, chemicals, biodiversity, and land use (ibid.: 8).

In 2014, the Climate and Energy package was signed, which was followed by several reform packages focusing on air pollution, common agricultural policy, and common fisheries policy. Previously, the 2009 Climate and Energy Package set out three "20-20-20" goals up to 2020 that relied on quantitative objectives of 20%: (a) the reduction of GHG emissions below 1990 levels; (b) the improvement of energy efficiency with a reference point of 2007; and (c) the increase of the total share of renewable energy consumption (Selin and Van Deveer 2015: 111). The 2014 package, in turn, added several other goals with the period extended up to 2030: GHG emissions had to be cut by 40%, energy consumption from renewable sources was to be increased by 27%, and energy savings were to grow by 27% (European Commission 2014a: 5). Introducing new headline targets for the period up to 2030, the 2014 package linking climate and energy policies was seen as transformative plan as well as an attempt to combine the interests of different actors, including the least interested Member States (Skjæseth 2021: 32).

The 2014 Climate and Energy Package continued the climate-energy nexus and made clear that the EU's internal and international climate policy was very much interrelated with its energy politics. Moreover, one of the key objectives for tackling climate change was the reduction of GHG emissions, which in turn was bundled with two pillars – energy efficiency by increasing the share of renewable energy, meaning a full transformation from dependency on oil and gas and direction to full decarbonization. Aligning common energy policy, the EC introduced the European Energy Policy in 2015, which proclaimed its course toward decarbonization of the EU economy as part of its climate action within the 2015 Paris Agreement and a new stage of integrated energy policies (European Commission 2015b: 2). In line with these commitments, the EU urged Member States to elaborate national energy and climate plans (NECPs) for a 10-year timespan. According to the EC's recommendations for the NECPs' outline, the following areas are closely interrelated: energy efficiency, renewables, GHG emission reductions, interconnections, and research and innovation (ibid.). The underlying idea was to consolidate frameworks of the sustainability, competitiveness, and security of supplies, in which energy markets would be closely interrelated with the EU's commitments to climate goals. Nevertheless, the binding nature of policies remained fragmented with the emission reduction targets being legally binding, while the energy efficiency targets are not. This created space for differences among the Member States in terms of readiness to transform their energy approaches: Eastern and Southern states were reluctant to tighten their agreed targets in the future, while Western and

Northern states presented this plan as an opportunity to advance the EU climate commitments (Slominski 2016: 350).

Vogler (2013: 637) stated that it was the need for leadership in the post-Kyoto climate regime that intensified the bundle of energy security and climate discourses together. The EU searched for a comprehensive and integrated approach that would reaffirm its innovative and progressive vision. The incorporation of such an approach into its energy policy and the reasoning behind it seemed to be a good solution for the post-2012 period. Climate objectives were incorporated into energy policy in a manner that justified the required transformation in energy production and consumption. For instance, the EC's communications from 2007 explicitly stated that energy and related CO_2 emissions are responsible for 80% of the total EU GHG emissions (European Commission 2007a: 5). Energy was not only seen as the main "contributor" to pollution but also as a potential field for high risks in terms of the EU's exposure to natural resource prices and volatility.

Therefore, the mid-2000s changed the environmental and climate politics of the EU in the following ways. While the SD discourse proliferated in the sixth and seventh EAPs, the way in which economic growth and environmental degradation correlated with each other changed. Initiated by the sixth EAP, the seventh EAP advanced a storyline in which the environment and its protection can bring growth and, crucially, new sources of growth and jobs. This, as was claimed, was possible due to the innovation of and investment in new "cleaner" practices and solutions. Eckes (2013: 206) argued that the environment was always approached through economic lenses; similarly, the change in interrelations did not alter the dependence of environmental action on the economic circumstances – it was just reformulated in a more "preferable" way. Moreover, since the beginning of the 2000s, environmental and climate policies were linked with the energy domain, including energy security. Clean "green" energy was framed as not only contributing to a sustainable economy but also as leading to strategic independence from fossil fuels exported outside of the EU.

Strategically, energy policy was bundled with climate objectives. In line with the strategies in the following period, energy governance had to be rethought and reorganized toward increasing the use of renewables and decreasing the dependence on fossil fuels. This objective was tightly connected with the climate change agenda, as the energy sector contributed the most to pollution. The ecological sustainability of the energy sector was seen to be achieved given the conditions of cost-competitiveness and, specifically, through the efficiency of investments in the renewable energy sector. This had to lead to decarbonization and the reduction of the dependency on oil and gas, which was one of the pillars of the EU's overall climate strategy. Finally, a considerable

emphasis was placed on efficiency and security with regard to energy supplies, signifying a multipurpose political aim – not only to achieve lower pollution levels but also to ensure the secure functioning of the EU's energy system from a long-term perspective.

7.2 "Global gaze" of climate pledges

As can be drawn from the analysis presented in the previous chapters, climate change and related policies entered the EU political scene in the late 1980s. Climate change has evolved ever since into a high-profile issue in which the EU has taken the responsibility to lead the support for the goal of global surface temperatures not growing by more than 2°C above preindustrial levels in pre-Paris 2015 and 1.5°C in the post-Paris period (European Commission 2007b, 2015c). The discourse around climate change has also gained significant weight in the framework of European integration. As suggested by Jessup and Rubenstein (2012b: 280), the EU's environmental and climate discourse was determined by the "global gaze," claiming its global rather than culture- and context-specific nature. In other words, it was delivered in a manner that framed the EU's environmental and climate actions as some of the most sophisticated and progressive. This, in turn, made it one of the opportunities for the EU to act as powerful actor in international climate regimes.

The EU's 2°C objective was tightly connected with its aspirations and continuous pledges for "climate leadership" operating in the European political discourse since the 1990s. The importance of role and weight within the international climate regime served as one of the catalysts for the intensification and expansion of the EU's climate goals, so that they could deliver a successful self-image of the EU as a global actor (Vogler 2013 :635). Accordingly, the narrative of the European climate policy's goals and objectives emphasized its contribution to the solution for the global environmental crisis by means of innovative and transformative practices in the present that have a desired impact for the future. Deploying strategies of goal-setting limited by the timeframes,[33] the EU pursued the storyline of shared responsibilities in the areas of regenerative economic growth models, transitions to more efficient means of production and consumption (i.e., a CE), and the promotion of zero-emission technologies and practices. As separate elements of the

[33] For example, The Europe 2020 Strategy, The 2030 Climate and Energy Framework, etc.

coordinated system of climate goals and objectives, specific plans regarding the problematic areas absorbed the overarching discourse of a climate-friendly path of development. [34]

At an internal level, the EU climate governance was characterized by the allocation of different targets aimed at reducing GHG emissions (Eckes 2013: 201). Simultaneously, the European climate narrative was formed through the social logic of economic rationality (Remling 2018: 483). As it was in the early days of environmental policy-making back in the 1970s and '80s, ideational measures were "filtered" through a prism of economic efficiency and correspondence with economic growth. Even though, as was observed in the late 1980s and '90s, the political discourse shifted toward environmental priorities, sustainability, and sustainable growth, economic arguments were a stepping stone for reaching an agreement on common policies. Therefore, climate change measures were later made an essential step for avoiding economic damage and losses in the future due to its potential future consequences. Sustainable means of production and trade, low-carbon and "green" economy were attributed the meaning of a main saving solution that "will help the EU […] will promote sustainable growth […], and create new jobs" (European Commission 2013: 5). The EU emphasized the interconnection between economic losses and ecological crisis, and climate change later on, suggesting that ecological stability should be safeguarded to maintain stable economic development.

Solutions for tackling climate change varied, but most of them focused on green solutions that were based on the ideas of "competitiveness," "technological innovation," and "growth" (Remling 2018: 484). Growth, however, had to be sustainable and green, implying a complete rethinking of previous systems. Technological advances together with strong investments in the greening of all sectors were made essential for overcoming the era of "brown growth" or the dependence on dirty production cycles. For instance, already in 2001, the EU SDS (see Section 6.3) stated that the limitation of climate change had to be achieved through the "cleaning" of energy sources – meaning an orientation toward alternative fuels (including biofuels). In 2010, the Sustainability Plan for Europe – Europe 2020, an ideational approach, was already exemplified through a combination of energy self-sufficiency, which was to be achieved through a knowledge- and innovation-based economy. To fulfill climate obligations, the economy itself was presented as "efficient," "greener," and "more competitive" (European Commission 2020:3).

[34] See, for instance, Circular Economy Action Plan (in particular, focusing on sectors of the economy with a high potential for cyclicality, ensuring the cyclical nature of production and consumption) (European Commission 2015a).

Climate policy became part of other policy areas, one of which was the energy policy framework (see Section 6.4.1). This resulted in coupling policies and the creation of mixed policy packages (i.e., climate and energy). At the same time, debates around sustainable consumption and production entered policy priority debates. The whole system started to be questioned with regard to its efficiency and durability with the idea of the CE introduced by EU policy makers in 2014 (European Commission 2014c). The leading idea was to reduce material inputs into industry that, from an economic point of view, would bring potential savings, and from the environmental side would reduce waste. Grounded on the ideas of efficiency and alternative production and consumption models, circularity and the CE were also made to be constitutive parts of the EU's response to the climate crisis.[35]

As for the definition of circularity, it has been approached differently depending on the context. Considering the EC's communication, it mostly concerns a transformation from "linear" (i.e., make, use, and dispose) to more circular cultures (i.e., recycle, reuse, and repair; Völker et al. 2019: 104). At the same time, "circularity" was heavily linked with the ideas of innovation, sustainability, growth, and efficiency. The driving motivations behind the transition to circularity, as suggested by Völker et al. (2019: 109), are economy-driven concerns and resource efficiency. Again, aligned with the principles of SD, the contribution of circularity is highly related to economic growth, or "smart" and "sustainable" growth. Put differently, "reimagined" growth (Völker et al. 2019: 116) makes economic growth "morally acceptable" – recycling, for instance, is seen as an activity that does not only allow economic activities to be maintained but makes it socially and environmentally desirable.

Table 6 indicates the main conceptual pillars of the CE and compares them with those inherent to the GE:

[35] See "An EU strategy on adaptation to climate change" (2013), "Closing the loop – An EU action plan for the Circular Economy" (2015).

Table 6. Comparative overview of the green economy (GE) and circular economy (CE) concepts

Concept	GE	CE
Economy–society–environment relationship	Society and the economy depend on the global biosphere	Society and the economy to some extent inevitably rely on the global biosphere
Goals and actions	Substitution of fossil energy with renewable energy + coordination of regulatory processes + public and private financial support	Alternation of consumption and production patterns through the circulation of material and energy inflows/outflows + coordination of regulatory processes + public and private financial support
Guiding principles	Polluter/beneficiary pays	Avoid lock-in, responsibility in efficiency/effectiveness of resource use

Source: Adapted from D'Amato and Korhonen (2021:4)

Circularity was supposed to bring an "overall savings potential of 630 billion [euros] per year" (European Commission 2014b: 2). One of the central goals for moving toward a CE, as suggested in a 2014 communication of the EC titled "Towards a circular economy: A zero waste programme for Europe" was to "meet the objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" (ibid.: 29). The EU policy on the CE was offered as a holistic overarching framework for already existing policies (waste, chemicals, eco-design measures, bio-economy, and climate), which was supposed to bring all of those elements together.

Speaking of narratives that emerged after 2014 (with the introduction of GG and circularity), it can be observed that the GE and CE were considered core elements of the EU's strategic sustainability framework. Both approaches acknowledge that the economy operates together with society within the global biosphere, and nature as well as its preservation should be valued due to their benefit to humans (D'Amato and Korhonen 2021: 6). Based on the EU's environmental management principles back in the 1980s, climate policy-making that started to rely on GG and the CE explicitly elaborated on the roles of "innovation" and "transformation," which in theory should bring benefits not only for the environment but also for society (e.g., boosting local economies through creating new job opportunities).

Both the GE and the CE were attributed a crucial role in terms of sustainable solutions for the future of the EU. Conceptually, both approaches were grounded on the premises of the change that must be introduced to the relationship between the economy, society, and the environment. The

GE explicitly focuses on the ideas of decoupling prosperity for resource use, whereas the CE places greater emphasis on the trade-offs of material inputs. Each, however, was built around the common goal of achieving such maintenance of an ecosystem that can reproduce and restore the services given the improved material and energy performance.

8 The European Green Deal: Background, challenges, and a new growth paradigm

This Chapter explores background, main elements and discursive components of the European Green Deal. It aims at uncovering and identifying continuities and changes in environment- and sustainability-related discourse of the European Union within textual framing of the EGD. Being a final point of the following thesis, analysis of the EGD serves as a final outcome of the EU approaches and paradigm changes investigated in the previous chapters. Accordingly, Section 8.1 sheds light on the background and motives behind introduction of the EGD, namely post-Paris 2015 agenda and EU's commitments towards net zero emissions by 2050. Then, Section 8.2 illustrates a leading narrative about efficiency, decarbonization and green growth being firmly incorporated within the EGD's text. Section 8.3, in turn, gives an overview and critical assessment of the EGD's vision as well as elaborates on the additional relevant documents, such as European Climate Pact, European Industrial Strategy and EU Action Plan for the Circular Economy. Subsequently, Section 8.4 focuses on ideology and ideological paradigm of the EGD analyzing its vision of the EU's role in green transition, assessing GG against the conceptually opposing "brown growth" and in relation to "eco-social-growth trilemma". Afterwards, Section 8.5 evaluates novelties being presented to the vision of climate and energy policy mixes and their presentation in the EGD. Finally, Section 8.6 illustrates the way through which sustainability framework is linguistically framed in the European Green Deal. Conducting analysis of the keywords (e.g. "green" or "sustainable"), frequency of their use and particular placements, this section concludes with how the EGD envisions sustainable future of the European Union.

8.1 Post–Paris 2015 challenges

Since the 2015 Paris Agreement, EU politicians have been faced with growing pressure to deliver policies that regulate net-zero greenhouse emissions by 2050. Often considered a challenge to the current status-quo of production and transportation capacities (Jordan 2022: 2), climate and energy policies have been confronted with critiques and resistance at both the political and business-circle levels. Many previous policies have been dismantled in favor of favorable economic conditions, which calls their durability into question. Despite the continuous political focus on rearranging the economic system in a manner that would reduce its environmental impact, it is clear that the

framing in which it is presented is no longer compatible with the desired outcomes. Therefore, the "eco-social-growth trilemma"[36] is still present and creating new challenges for policy-makers.

The post-Paris period has seen further attention to more ambitious objectives being urged. To maintain global warming within safe levels and specifically limit the increase in the average global temperature to 1.5°C, the world's GHG emissions must decline to net zero by 2050 (UNFCCC 2022). Therefore, the radical and timely transformation of various sectors – such as energy, industry, and transport – has been urged. The concepts of "carbon neutrality," "green innovation," and GG have begun to circulate with a higher frequency. The dependence on fossil fuels and "dirty" production models have been considered the main challenges in the area of climate change mitigation. In this context, much attention has been paid to the possibility of ecological or "green" transition, which implies switching to sustainable growth, CE, cleaner production cycles, and a bioeconomy to secure environmental and climate capacities. The idea of greening the economy was also adopted by the EC as a continuation of environmental campaigns initiated in the 2000s (i.e., increasing renewables in the energy sector, circular production cycles, and resource efficiency; for examples, see Sections 6.2, 6.3.2, 6.4.1, and 7.1).

Later, the EU's approach to the "green" transition and the ecological nexus of future economic development was tightly incorporated into its 2019 EGD, in which the GE and the CE would serve as potential "game-changers" for a zero-carbon ecological transformation of the current economic system. Active engagement with narratives on resource-efficiency and low-carbon technologies would result in a search for a more comprehensive and all-embracing political and economic strategy that could potentially serve as a framework for the long-term future development of the EU. Moreover, it could create an image of it as the most innovative and climate-considerate actor as well as a leader in low-carbon economic growth.

8.2 Continuing the tale of efficiency, decarbonization, and green growth

Sustainability- and ecologically determined political action, as previous chapters have demonstrated, have long been present in the policies of the EU and the EC. The very meaning of sustainability and the measures toward the implementation of SD have changed with time. Moreover, over the past 20 years, the EU has actively developed a green agenda in the energy

[36] "Eco-social-growth trilemma" exemplifies a triangle corners of which consist of economic, social and environmental spheres with their specific goals and objectives; is meant to show complexity of interrelations between three spheres and understand the challenges of governance of three of them simultaneously (Sabato et al. 2021: 16).

sector, the ultimate purpose of which is to implement the transition to renewable energy sources, thus decarbonizing the EU energy system. This means reducing the carbon footprint derived from energy consumption and production, subsequently transitioning to renewable energy sources, and obtaining a corresponding increase in energy efficiency.[37]

In the context of climate change, the EU has led the narrative of "thinking imaginatively" about the architecture and polycentrism of its climate governance by underlining the critical involvement of different actors at multiple levels (Fisher 2020: 6). The strong commitments to the climate targets were tightly intertwined with the transition required in the energy sector. In line with the IPCC's statement about the interconnection between the limitation of global warming and the need for a far-reaching clean transition (IPCC 2018), the EU has pursued a climate–energy paradigm in which the key element is the transformation of energy production and use. One of the main approaches is sector coupling, which was developed in line with the rearranging of climate goals to tightly relate them to energy policies. Sector coupling was seen as a means of achieving both climate and energy objectives, which in turn were entangled into the framework of competitiveness, sustainability, and security. This position is observed in calls to decarbonize the economy, achieve a competitive low-carbon economy, and deploy GG and EM, which combine economic and environmental concerns (European Commission 2011).

The transformation of the economy and economic growth in a manner that was communicated in the pre-EGD period can also be associated with an understanding of sustainability that highly depends on technoeconomic elements. Technology and innovation were communicated as the means by which transformational change may occur (European Commission 2008). Moreover, the assumed efficiency in terms of decarbonization was tightly linked with the growth and investment agenda, in which the financing of projects was supposed to be aimed at scaling up the technology (European Commission 2015a: 9). This technocratic belief has strongly influenced the EU's political narrative regarding how to frame the new approach combining climate change mitigation and maintaining pace with economic growth.

From these considerations, one of the main pillars in the EU's environmental, energy, and climate strategy was to rethink the growth paradigm and transition to a low-carbon and resource-efficient

[37] See, for instance, European Commission (2019): Delivering the Energy Union and Climate Action—Setting the Foundations for a Successful Clean Energy Transition.

economy. This, in turn, affected all sectors of the economy – including transport, energy, agriculture, construction, and heavy industry. The transition itself was presented – in line with narratives of previous environmental strategies and the EAPs – as opportunities in all of the aforementioned segments, promoting not only environmental but also economic and political benefits.

Moreover, there has been a strong impetus from the international arena in the form of international agreements and corresponding commitments. Since the very early stages of international environmental and climate regimes, the EU has aimed to consolidate its position as an international climate action pioneer. Its climate strategy underlines its aspirations to continue leading the stage of climate-neutral economies at an international level. The EU attempts to incorporate its discourses around climate-neutral practices when interacting with its international counterparts. Recent strategies, such the EGD, have underlined a prominent position of environmental requirements and standards set by the EC in the context of cooperation with EU trade partners. Besides the goals of climate-neutrality, resource efficiency, and economic competitiveness, which are considered a prerequisite for the transition toward a green and circular economy, the EU explicitly claimed its plans to promote these models on a global level.

8.3 The EGD – a culmination moment

Against this background and due to the strong need to switch from fragmented goals to long-term and appropriate solutions for unifying previously established approaches, the EU adopted the EGD in 2019. With strong rhetoric on the transformational nature of the EU's approach and ideational impulse to pursue this transformational path, the EGD has played the role of "game-changer" in the EU environmental and climate policy streamlines. Its aim was to solidify an initial roadmap for the key policies and actions and to present a "summary" of one of the most recent visions of how sustainability is projected across different sectors. It set a mandatory target for the EU – namely to achieve zero carbon emissions by 2050 (European Commission 2019a). Together with the expansion of the EU's ambitions toward reaching climate neutrality, the EGD presented a culmination of the transformative processes occurring in EU climate policy-making.

Unifying fragmented elements into one comprehensive package of actions and targets, the EGD set out quantifiable objectives and timelines to be accomplished. Later, these timely framed goals

were formalized by a special regulation,[38] in which the EC conceptualized a blueprint for a policy that would not oppose climate goals and growth or even just consider the carbon footprint of development; however, it would make the achievement of climate neutrality the center of the model for growth and recovery from the crisis (European Commission 2020a: 1,9).

In a sense, the EGD was suggested as a new vision or mission for Europe to become a carbon-neutral continent by 2050. The EC's President Von der Leyen described it as "Europe's man on the moon moment" (Hutschinson 2019). When introducing the EGD, the EC presented it as a response to existing challenges: "[The EGD is] a new growth strategy aimed at transforming the EU into a fair and prosperous society with a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy, where in 2050 there will be no net GHG emissions and where economic growth will not depend on the use of resources" (European Commission 2019a: 2). Thus, the EGD incorporated key elements of the EU discourse on sustainability and the ideology of a carbon-free future for Europe, while simultaneously underlining the central role of ideas on sustainability, EM, and precautionary principles, which had long been present in the EU's view on future environmental development (Eckert and Kovalevska 2021: 5).

The emphasis on the energy sector suggests that it holds the most blame for GHG emissions in the EU. From this perspective, the share increase and total transition toward renewable energy sources in various sectors of the EU economy are necessary elements for fulfilling the EU's goals in the field of energy, which are, in turn, tightly connected to its sustainability and climate commitments. In this regard, the EGD's content is highly concerned with the use of alternative energy for the sake of higher achievements of EU climate targets. Bundled with the 2018 Directive and the "Clean Energy for All Europeans" package, the EGD exemplified an attempt to fulfill EU commitments to reduce emissions and maintain the framework introduced by the 2015 Paris Agreement (European Commission 2019a: 20). Moreover, it was aimed at maintaining the EU's status as a world leader in renewable energy sources and the global transition toward a net-zero-GHG emissions economy (European Commission 2020a: 3).

[38] European Commission (2020a): Proposal for a Regulation of The European Parliament and of the Council establishing the framework for achieving climate neutrality and amending Regulation (EU) 2018/1999 (European Climate Law), Brussels, 2020.

Low-carbon and digital infrastructural development are central to the new strategy for "clean Europe," and they are coupled with the previously established principles of the CE, smart mobility, food system innovation, and the introduction of "smart mobility" (European Commission 2019a). Corresponding to the legislation of the EC (European Commission 2019b: 5,8), the EGD is seen as a new – and more comprehensive – vision for the efficiency of energy markets, which claims that the clean energy transition will promote growth, jobs, and competitiveness. Moreover, it stands by the view that economic growth and market-mechanisms, through which the European energy market will transit, are reliable methods for mitigating climate change (Dunlap and Laratte 2022: 5).

Part of the EGD is the European Climate Pact (ECP), which was proposed to EU Member States in December 2020 and addressed to "regions, local communities, civil society, industry and schools," aimed at encouraging collaboration between all of those actors (European Commission 2020f: 1). The goal of the initiative is to create a European networking structure for discussing green issues as well as disseminating best practices and relevant scientific and technical information. Although focusing on the creation of new conditions for business and the economy, the ECP nevertheless also focuses its attention not only on the transformation of the economy but also on lifestyles of the individuals who make it more sustainable (European Commission 2020f: 1). The importance of technological change and its acceleration is accentuated not only in terms of its impact on economic structural change but also in the context of changing rules for individuals. While the implication of such changes is the production of certain restrictions on citizens, what is being brought to the forefront is the beneficial impact; as in the earlier EM discourses in Europe, the suggested "green" transition is expected to form new economic and social opportunities (European Commission 2020f: 14).

To deepen the EGD, the EU adopted the European Industrial Strategy, the New Industrial Strategy for a Competitive, Green and Digital Europe in 2020. It highlighted the priority areas within which the European economy should develop from 2019 onwards – "more reliable protection of intellectual property," "strict compliance with the rules and norms of competition," "protection of the European market from goods subsidized from outside," "reinforced focus on innovation, investment and manufacturing excellence," and "planning and investment in low-carbon generation technology, capacity and infrastructure" (European Commission 2020b: 5, 8).

At the same time, an Action Plan for transitioning to a CE was adopted, directing European producers and consumers toward such an economic transformation, in which either the prevention of waste generation or their transformation into a "quality secondary resource" must be achieved (European Commission 2020a). The Plan proposed paying special attention to electronic

components, transport chemicals, packaging materials, fabrics, building structures, and food waste. Moreover, the topic of agriculture was developed in two interrelated documents of the EGD – namely the Strategy for the Conservation of Biodiversity for the period up to 2030 and the Strategy for the Development of a Sustainable Food System of the EU (The EU Farm to Fork [F2F] Strategy; European Commission 2020c and European Commission 2020e). Altogether, the Biodiversity Strategy, F2F Strategy, and CE Action Plan have been established as three main pathways through which the objectives of the EGD are planned to be achieved.

8.4 Ideological aspects of the EGD

The ambitiousness of the EGD and its goals, namely the intention to put climate goals at the center of the EU economic policy, the size of the European market concerned, and its significance for many partners, makes it necessary to investigate the ideological milestones under which it has been developed and through which ideological lenses it is being communicated. The EGD has exhibited a shift in its orientation toward the pathway of long-term and all-embracing action, which will concern internal and external interactions of the EU. Therefore, the ideological basis for such a framework must be sufficiently firm to overcome the institutional and organizational challenges to be met along the implementation path.

From the outset, the topic related to the global and international dimension of the strategy was articulated. The notions of "global leadership," "defender of environmental policy," and "promotion of climate goals on the global level" can be traced throughout the texts of the EGD and the ECP (European Commission 2019a and European Commission 2020f). From framing the decarbonization strategy as being dedicated to the European continent to defining the goals of the external dimension, such as influencing other actors' "green" behavior and pushing ecological transition forward through international trade agreements (European Commission 2019a: 21), the EGD can be considered the means of imposing a new framework of bi- and multilateral relations between the EU and its partners. Otherwise, in case the EU ambitions are not shared by its partners, it would not be possible to meet the climate objectives of the 2015 Paris Agreement (European Commission 2019a: 5).

At the content level, it is clear that the EGD is built upon the green ideology. However, it also incorporated the ideas of a CE as well as the step-by-step abandonment of the linear development model. It presented a transition of European economic development in "revolutionary" and "groundbreaking" terms, suggesting the EU's role as a frontrunner in various areas – namely climate-neutrality, clean energy, and recycled resource use. Growth is no longer limited to

economic indicators but, through means of the "green" transition, is decoupled from environmental pressures.

Thus, the EGD skillfully incorporated the concept of GG, abandoning traditional "brown" growth, which was based on the extraction of fossil fuels and did not consider the negative impacts on the environment.[39] Circulating in political circles since the 2010s,[40] the concept of GG nevertheless varied in conceptual understanding and approaches, as well as the means through which it should be achieved. As for the EU's vision of future transformation in the 2019 EGD, the crucial elements for a green transformation are new technologies, sustainable solutions, and disruptive innovation (European Commission 2019a: 18). Innovation is deployed in various parts of the EGD's text, concerning various areas such as financing, forms of engagement with partner countries, SMEs, R&D, and infrastructure.

In addition, innovation and solutions based on innovative and "smart" technologies are presented from the perspective of their key role in the transition to climate neutrality (European Commission 2019a: 6). At the same time, they depict a sustainable solution in terms of its affordability and access for society. For instance, the green transition through innovative technologies is *"*an opportunity to expand sustainable and job-intensive economic activity" and leads to "a sustainable model of inclusive growth" (European Commission 2019: 7). Specifically, a shift of focus toward new technologies and technological advances claims that technocentric solutions could potentially assist in abandoning the traditional "brown" economic cycle. Therefore, the EGD presents a form of ecological discourse development by basing it on innovation and technology, which are supposed to overcome the flows of earlier agendas through the capacity to create favorable conditions for society and the environment.

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[39] Eckert and Kovalevska (2021: 5) argue that the discourse being promoted by the EGD assembles old tradition growth ideology, but reframes it with positive connotation of climate-safeguard and, therefore, morally acceptable connotations.

[40] Pearce et al. (1989) were the first to discuss a concept of "green" economy in context of environmental and social costs and their undervaluation in the existing price system (Loiseau et al. 2016: 362); however, the "green" growth firmly entered the environmental debate with the first comprehensive report from the OECD in 2011.

However, as several critics of the GG paradigm have addressed, “green” capitalism in terms of solutions to current business and industry models remains as capitalist as it used to be, without actually transforming the very core ideas underpinning it – which are, in practice, economic gain and economic growth (see Eckert and Kovalevska 2021, Schunz 2022). Nevertheless, the EU’s new vision of the eco-social-growth trilemma does not actually intend to distance itself from market-focused approaches; rather, it plans to reorient the market’s functioning toward nonpolluting and nonenvironmentally-harming practices. Specifically, it is necessary for the environment to be safeguarded due to its need to be used as an asset in the future; therefore, the “brown” cycles are the main obstacles to be overcome.

As can be seen from the textual framing of the EGD, economic growth remains the center of attention for the EU transition. It is, however, attributed a morally acceptable image through links with notions such as “just,” “inclusive,” and “fair” (European Commission 2019: 2). Ideologically, this strongly relates to SD, and thus, makes it acceptable from both social and environmental angles. The “new” model is seen to allow the EU to develop in a sustainable manner, but it will also add the “economic weight” to the transition (European Commission 2019a: 22). The economic side, in turn, will enable the EU to influence – and even dictate – the rules for its partners, or “to shape international standards that are in line with EU environmental and climate ambitions” (ibid.).

In other words, the new ideology does not intend to deny the market and market relations, but rather frames it as having the social responsibility for the population and nature. “Greening” presupposes different means for achieving sustainability (e.g., increased investment in R&D and innovation, technology policies, and environmental regulations); however, at its core it relies on the premises of increased efficiency and competitiveness, while framing an environmental impact as a leading force. As suggested by Lietart (2008), a vision in which environmental protection is coupled with economic growth (even through framing it as “decoupling”) presents a contradiction due to the limited nature of environmental and human resources and, simultaneously, unlimited growth rates (as cited in Eckert and Kovalevska 2021: 6). Indeed, the focus on technology- and innovation-based ideologies does not really bring a solution in terms of the transformation of current social relations, distribution of resources, and growth-oriented development. Therefore, it modifies the practices and partially alleviates the consequences of crisis phenomena; however, it scarcely contributes to solutions for deeper social conflicts and economic crises.

8.4.1 External dimension of the EGD ideology

Another aspect of interest when examining the case of the EGD, besides its ideological content, is its geopolitical aspect. In particular, when examining the international dimension, what stands out is the EU's aim to incorporate its climate goals into a wider context of its foreign policy. The text of the EGD does not only concern a new strategy for "green" development within the EU, but it is also directed at the consolidation of geopolitical and geostrategic positions as well as the expansion of its political influence in the new rearranged global value chains (European Commission 2019a: 22).

As touched upon previously, the EGD seeks to prioritize environmental protection in almost all activities at the EU level. It stresses that the ecological crisis can be overcome with a "growth-oriented" and "competitive" economy, given that they are "greened," presenting a green technologized transformation as a means for achieving climate neutrality. Thus, it simultaneously prescribes the technological solutionism that accompanies the green path for Europe (Ossewaarde and Ossewaarde-Lowtoo 2020: 5). Moreover, it creates a narrative through which pushing green policies in the European manner is attempted, with European indicators and sets of measures and indicators.

In an advisory manner, the EGD suggests the following:

> [T]he EU will step up bilateral engagement with partner countries and, where necessary, establish innovative forms of engagement;
>
> The ecological transition for Europe can only be fully effective if the EU's immediate neighborhood also takes effective action;
>
> [T]he EU will use its diplomatic and financial tools to ensure that green alliances are part of its relations with Africa and other partner countries and regions, particularly in Latin America, the Caribbean, Asia and the Pacific (European Commission 2019a: 20,21).

Nevertheless, the value chain remains almost identical – the "win-win situation" is tied with the economy and market, but with "another face." The EC underlined that its cooperation within the green strategy framework can be performed through corresponding trade regulations. In other words, the trade partners must comply with relevant standards and requirements set by the EU. The EU's positioning as "the world's largest single market" (European Commission 2019: 22) is stressed in the context of its ability to shape and reform international standards so that they comply with the EGD's requirements. On the other side, the issue of climate change serves as a unifying element with regard to the repetitive notions of collective action and engagement. Opposing the

leadership narrative and leading role in "green" standard-setting, the focus around climate action is based on mutual responsibilities and actions for overcoming threats of an international scope. Therefore, considerable attention is paid to the "collective" nature of the EU and its prominence in a global setting, as the following excerpts indicate:

> The EU will continue to promote and implement ambitious environment, climate and energy policies across the world. It will develop a stronger 'green deal diplomacy' focused on convincing and supporting others to take on their share of promoting more sustainable development;
>
> The EU will engage more intensely with all partners to increase the collective effort and help them to revise and implement their nationally determined contributions and devise ambitious long-term strategies. This will build on the EU's own increased ambition as outlined in section 2;
>
> The EU should use its expertise in "green" regulation to encourage partners to design similar rules that are as ambitious as the EU's rules, thus facilitating trade and enhancing environment protection and climate mitigation in these countries (European Commission 2019a: 19, 21).

Attributed to the symbolic weight of the strategy, the global dimension adds authority power to the EU in terms of defining and shaping a sustainable path and a "green" transition.

The value orientation explicitly stated in the EGD – striving toward solutions to global environmental and climate problems – does not solely depict a good will to combat issues that serve as catalysts for global security and stability. Eckert and Kovalevska (2021: 5) argued that the EGD's consolidated form of the previous European environmental and climate policy-making presents a modernized strategy that plays two essential roles. First, it allows or gives perspective for the EU to (re-)gain the position of the global leader in international environmental and climate governance, and second, it opens up a space for promoting or dictating a particular ideology of sustainable or green approaches that other actors have to follow.

To summarize, besides reframing the ideology of growth, the EGD is also a means of conducting foreign policy. Considering the necessity of promoting or imposing the EGD's standards, it undoubtedly serves as a catalyst for multilateral agreements that must incorporate the core points of the strategy. Given the assertion of the EU's power and weight in the international setting, it also has an element of soft power, through which it aims to export standards that enable the maintenance of the EU green strategy's competitiveness.

8.5 Green growth and the energy sector

As demonstrated in Chapters 6 and 7, the climate and energy policy of the EU has evolved with a focus on the following three main goals: reducing GHG emissions, increasing the share of

renewables in final energy consumption, and improving energy efficiency. Derived from these considerations and based on the previously introduced principle of circularity, the EGD urges a transformation toward the reuse and recycling of materials in the production, distribution, and consumption processes. This concerns the areas of the climate, economy, energy, and natural resources, which must respectively become "climate-neutral," "circular," "clean," and "secondary" (or recycled) to protect the diversity of the natural environment as well as the health of citizens.

Energy and climate action seem to occupy the most prominent place in the strategy with regard to the set of objectives and their ambitiousness. In fact, some researchers have claimed that the EGD is one of the most significant historical steps in convergence between the European climate and energy policies (e.g., Christou 2021: 365). The new vision represents a historical development of mixed energy and climate packages, which were discussed in Chapters 6 and 7, where the focus was on ensuring the efficiency of energy supplies and increasing the share of renewable energy sources as means of ecologically SD.

With regard to the EU's vision on the transition and transformation of the energy sector in a manner that would serve the Union's 2050 climate goals, there are two "supplementary" documents to consider – namely the Industrial Strategy and the CE Action Plan introduced in 2020 (European Commission 2020b and European Commission 2020a). As part of a larger vision of the EU's "competitive" sustainability, both documents represent a reorientation of economic and industrial policies that would be most compatible with the 2015 Paris Agreement and the SDGs. Specifically, the EC focused on the leading role of industry in helping to achieve climate neutrality. The 2020 Industrial Strategy states that the current strategy "must reflect European values and social market traditions" (European Commission 2020b: 1). Deriving from earlier considerations of efficiency and innovation-based revolutionary approaches, value changes at the European level can be highly articulated, but they remain attached to the ideas of open markets and competition. Market orientation is considered to present opportunities for innovation, financing, and smart governance. Following market- and technology-oriented approaches, the European industrial strategy is to be implemented through "new technologies," "artificial intelligence," boosting of innovation, improvement of the single market, and enhancement of an SME-centric approach (Renda 2021: 134). Operating with the notions of "green" and "digital," the EC presents its plan as "an opportunity" and as the means through which the EU will defend its "autonomy" and "sovereignty." This connection has its roots in earlier discourses that explicitly stated that the EU's green transition is a prerequisite for the Union's invulnerability to external shocks.

Another constitutive element of the European green policy is the CE Action Plan (European Commission 2020a). Again, based on the need for efficiency and resilience of the EU economy, the circular path suggests that circularity presents an opportunity not only for the transformation of the economy but also for embracing the entire production and consumption culture. Energy and resource efficiency are some of the main objectives of the Action Plan, but it does not limit itself to energy and energy-related products, implying that the instruments will also apply directly to the "broadest possible" number of products and services (European Commission 2020a: 4). One of the appealing outcomes, according to the Action Plan, is that the new circular economic model will contribute to an increase in the EU's GDP of an additional 0.5% by 2030 as well as create approximately 700, 000 jobs in the European "green" labor market (European Commission 2020a: 2).

These complementary strategies mirror the ideological provisions of the EGD, which dedicates four sections to the issue of "clean, affordable and secure energy" (European Commission 2019a: 6). Interrelating the energy system's transformation and climate neutrality, it suggests that energy efficiency should be a priority for reaching the 2050 climate objectives. It reproduces the three-fold growth concept – introduced earlier by the Europe 2020 strategy (European Commission 2010) – which relies on the following five constitutive targets: employment, investment in R&D, reduction of GHG emissions, energy efficiency, education, and poverty reduction (Schunz 2022 :11).

Even though the central narrative concerns energy efficiency and climate objectives, there are links to energy security as one of the highlighted interests of the EU. For instance, the EGD aims to "to ensure the EU's resource security and reliable access to strategic raw materials" (European Commission 2019a: 21). This is coupled with the issues of market competitiveness to maintain its supply security (ibid.: 2). Nevertheless, it seems to not attract salient attention: targets concerning GHG emission reduction, energy efficiency, and the share of renewables are more firmly linked with climate objectives rather than energy security goals.

8.6 How green is the EGD?

An analysis of the keywords within the text of the EGD suggested that the words "green," "climate," "sustainable," and "sustainability" are the most frequently used in the EGD. In addition, there are recurrent references to "energy," "transition," and "economy." Moreover, the growth model offered by the EGD is framed through the notions of "new" and "inclusive," aiming to achieve a zero-emissions economy on the premises of resource efficiency and competitiveness, which is decoupled from resource use. As for the narrative around climate, the EC deployed the

tactics of "threat-solution," where it operates with climate change as a risk to society and the "green" transition as a strategy for tackling it (European Commission 2019a: 2).

Listing the EU's achievements in reducing GHG emissions over the period 1990–2018, the EGD states that to maintain the ambitiousness of the climate action – namely climate neutrality – "much remains to be done" (European Commission 2019a: 4). Climate is used with emotionally charged words, such as "ambition (s)" (ibid.: 4, 5, 6, 17, 20, 22), "resilience" (ibid.: 21), "neutrality" (ibid.: 4, 6, 10, 13, 18), "objective (s)" (ibid.: 5, 6, 9, 13, 15, 22), and "shocks" (ibid.: 17). The solutions suggested by the Commission are commonly related to the words that would underline the "positive" impact of the EGD:

> The Commission will assess the ambition of the plans, and the need for additional measures if the level of ambition is not sufficient. This will feed into the process of increasing climate ambition for 2030 (European Commission 2019a: 6).

Alternatively, as in the case of negatively loaded terms, such as "climate shocks," they can be overcome by means of a "green" transition:

> Well-designed tax reforms can boost economic growth and resilience to climate shocks and help contribute to a fairer society and to a just transition (European Commission 2019a: 17).

A key enabler of this path is "green" and "digital" transformation (European Commission 2019a: 7). This, in turn, is presented as a "modernization" and "stimulation" for the EU's economy. A modernized economy is a low-carbon economy based on renewable energy sources and a more effective use of natural resources. These are highlighted outcomes of the changes that will be put into force with the EGD. The advantages are said to be transposed in a fair way, protecting "the most vulnerable" from climate change and environmental degradation (European Commission 2019a: 15). The beneficial impact of the transformation is related to "preserving and restoring the natural capital" and "ensuring healthy environment" (European Commission 2019a: 12) while overcoming the failures of previous decades.

It remains questionable whether the EGD's vision illustrates a "revolutionary" and "groundbreaking" turn in practical terms. However, from the perspective of environmental discourse, the EGD indeed presents the most elaborated and fundamentally solidified version of the EU promotion of sustainable future. From the analysis, it can be concluded that this future is highly driven by technology-based green transition. It is based on the premises of low-carbon economy and efficient (renewable) energy use. Therefore, paradigmatically, the EGD depicts a continuity of political strategies circulating since the beginning of the 2000s. Nevertheless, a

broader inquiry shows that environmental thinking got much more prominent and goal-oriented bridging the gap of the previous strategies where environmental component was rather seen as a complementary and achievement of environmental goals perceived rather as desirable. The EGD, in contrast, made a strong statement that the EU (including both macro- and micro-levels) is driven by a common vision of sustainable, "green" and "climate-neutral" future.

9 Conclusions

Environment- and climate-related topics have gained a prominent position in EU politics over the last four decades. Furthermore, sustainability and the "green" agenda have been incorporated into the policy-making and political discourse in recent years. Motivated by the prominence of the environmental and climate approaches of the EU, this master thesis was driven by the idea of demonstrating the development of the EU's environmental and climate discourse since the EEC Treaty (1957). Moreover, its objective was to critically assess the milestone periods of the European environmental strategies and to define goals dedicated to environmental protection and their interrelation with the ideology of economic growth in the key legislative and strategic documents of the EU.

The purpose of the textual analysis of legislative and strategic documents was to examine how the particular arrangements served to establish and sustain new norms and practices. In particular, the analysis concerned language constellations and the meanings attributed to environmental protection, sustainability, and – most recently – "green" growth. Discursive analysis, deployed previously by scholars in political and social sciences (Ossewaarde and Ossewaarde-Lowtoo 2020; Eckert and Kovalevska 2021; Schunz 2022), was a useful tool for this thesis. Specifically, it was helpful with regard to analyzing and critically assessing the language of the EU's environmental and climate strategies. Moreover, through this method it was possible to focus on the interlinkages between various elements of the sustainability policies (e.g., climate and energy, innovation and technology, circularity, and "green" growth) that constitute the ideological and socioeconomic premises of the EU's environmental policy.

The first research question was as follows: "How did the storyline of the EU environmental and climate discourse evolve over the period 1970–2019?". To answer this question, it was crucial to assess the approaches, techniques, and tools that evolved together with the integration stages of the EU. I examined how environmental problems have been addressed as well as analyzed how the goals and direction of the EU environmental policy have changed. Section 6.1 demonstrated how economic growth that does not consider the environmental dimension started to be questioned and how environmental responsibilities entered the political agenda of the European Communities

through the first EAP (1973–1976). In the consequent second (1977–1981) and third (1982–1986) EAPs, environmental policy gained significantly more attention and was formulated as a prerequisite, but to the extent that it did not conflict with economic interests of the Communities. My analysis of the first three EAPs revealed a rising interest in questions of how to establish a coherent development of the economic, societal, and environmental domains. Crucially, environmental objectives started to be defined as a potentially essential element of European public policy-making. Section 6.2 examined the period where the environment and environment-related concerns were incorporated into the SEA, with the 1957 EEC Treaty being refined and the "polluter pays" principle firmly defined. Later, with the introduction of the fourth EAP (1987–1992), environmental policy was mentioned as an opportunity for economic growth and job creation in line with continuing the storyline of the third EAP, where it had been seen as an enabler for solving structural problems (e.g., unemployment). In the same section, I demonstrated how the European Community, through the Treaty of Maastricht and the Treaty of Amsterdam, shifted its discourse toward sustainability and sustainable growth, which were considered to be an inherent part of further European integration. Consequently, the second research question ("What are the main elements of EU sustainability policy-making and how did they change with the integration stages?") was answered in the upcoming sections. Namely, as was seen from the analysis of the fifth EAP (1993–2000), SD principles were communicated as a prerequisite for all sectoral policies, especially key pollutants, such as industry, energy, transport, and agriculture. Section 6.3, after considering the provisions of the Lisbon strategy (2000) and the EU Sustainable Development Strategy (2001), thematically extended beyond them to an examination of climate change and climate-related policies that were transmitted in the sixth EAP (2002–2012). The sixth program continued the course toward sustainability and sustainable growth, highlighting its necessity for tackling climate change. Subsection 6.3.2 shed light on how the fields of climate protection and energy supplies became intertwined in EU environmental policy-making. Subsection 6.3.3 concluded the examination of the integration stages and the embedment of the environmental element in EU treaties by demonstrating how the Treaty of Lisbon (2007) provided for a new legal framework for the issues of environmental protection and climate change. Thus, revising the development of the European environmental policy-making, the environmental field was identified to go from nonexistent in the 1957 EEC Treaty to being the inherent part of European integration through the Lisbon Treaty.

The further evolution of the environmental and climate change storyline in the EU legislative and strategic documents followed the basis set up with the fourth and fifth EAPs. Specifically, it took direction of possible environmental "well-being" while maintaining and enhancing economic growth. The new narratives that emerged throughout the 1990s and 2000s were "decoupling" (of

economic growth from environmental degradation), "efficiency," and "innovation." As climate objectives became tightly connected to the energy policies, much attention was given to renewable energy sources, through which the aim was to reduce GHG emissions in line with international commitments. In this regard, sustainability was articulated around changes in development, production, consumption, and behavioral patterns, but built upon the logics of market and market competitiveness. Transforming the contradiction between expanding economic growth and environmental safeguarding into a harmonious coexistence and co-functioning of both relied on the reframing of core growth pillars. As was demonstrated in the "Europe 2020 Strategy," the seventh EAP, and consequent strategies, aligning growth with notions such as "smart," "inclusive," and "innovative" played a crucial role in revising attitudes toward the economy–environment dichotomy. An equally critical influence in sustainability debates was that of concepts introduced in the early 2010s – namely the CE and the GE – which were seen as crucial elements for achieving the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Therefore, before the analysis of the EGD, the strong basis of conceptual changes and paradigmatic shifts was explored through milestone documents related to the European environmental and climate policy-making. In addition, I analyzed how different constitutive parts of the environmental dimension (e.g., climate change, renewable resources, and energy) were articulated with those of the economic dimension (e.g. growth and competitiveness). The last research question was: "In what way does the EGD's discourse build on the problematization of GG, sustainability, and sustainable growth?", therefore it remained to analyze to what extent the EGD builds on, expands, and innovates the previous positions on sustainability. Deriving from the textual analysis, the EGD's vision of sustainability is a continuation of earlier assumptions based on the belief that innovation and technology will enable favorable conditions for the economy and the environment. Green growth, presented in the EGD, is connected with the ideas of circularity and efficient resource use, whereas the "green" model is depicted not only as a means for SD and transition but also the strategy through which the EU will gain economic weight. Regarding contextual and historical framing, the EGD operates with novel ambitions and transformative paths, which should serve the aims of climate neutrality and full decarbonization by 2050. In contrast to previous strategies, it signifies a shift in aims; that is, while earlier policy-making positioned the environmental element as an "opportunity" or "support" for growth, the EGD made it a goal in itself. Nevertheless, references to growth in the EGD and the subsequent Industrial Strategy and CE Action Plan reveal continuity in linking sustainability with economic growth and building it upon economic and business indicators.

Finally, the aim of this thesis was to determine how the environment- and climate-related political discourse of the EU has evolved over the time together with the European integration processes. By asking how the interlinkages between the environment and economy, climate and energy, decoupling and GG were constructed and communicated, my goal was to identify the main turning points that led to the periodical reconsideration of or change in EU public policy on sustainability. Given the numerous existing sources and legal and strategic documents issued over the considered period, the first limitations on the study were anticipated in the rather condensed selection of primary sources. Future research can undoubtedly focus more specifically on either of the areas discussed in this master thesis, such as the climate and energy mixes and their interplay in the post-EGD period. Another major area of interest is to analyze shifts in or the reshaping of sustainability discourses in European and global contexts as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and ongoing conflict in Ukraine, especially in relation to fossil fuel dependency. Moreover, this thesis considered both endogenous and exogenous factors that have influenced shifts in the discursive framing of environmental policies in the EU, working solely with legislative documents, strategies, and EU treaties. Further research could refine the role of exogeneous drivers, not only by considering the UN framework but also the ideological premises of de-growth and alternative visions of sustainability and then examining how they are echoed in the EU political discourse.

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11 Appendix

A. List of the Environment Action Programmes (EAPs)

N	Date	Timeframe	Keywords
EAP1	20.12.1973	1973-1976	Pollution, nuisance, harmonization, living quality, air quality, water quality, waste prevention, polluter pays principle.
EAP2	17.06.1977	1977-1981	Ecological balance, coordination, harmonization, living quality, scientific and technological knowledge, regional development, polluter pays principle, prevention.
EAP3	07.02.1983	1982-1986	Growing economic problems, prevention, polluter-pays principle, harmonization.
EAP4	07.12. 1987	1987-1992	Job creation, facilitation, economic growth, information on relationship between economy and environment, environment as a component of other policies, achievement for internal market, new technologies.
EAP5	01.02. 1993	1993-2000	Sustainable growth, sustainable development, environmental integration, shared responsibility, market-based approach, “clean or cleaner” technology.
EAP6	22.07.2002	2002-2012	Climate change, GHG concentration, integration (of environmental concerns in all policies), decoupling, energy efficiency, innovation, technological innovation, sustainable production and consumption, greening the market.
EAP7	20.11. 2013	2012-2020	Circularity, green, low-carbon, competitive, resource-efficient economy, circularity.

Source: Own compilation based on Environment Action Programmes (1-7)

B. List of the EU Treaties

Treaty	Signed (in force)	Provisions addressing environment
The Treaty of the European Economic Community (The EEC Treaty, The Treaty of Rome)	1957 (1958)	Article 36: "public safety, the protection of human or animal life or health, the preservation of plant life".
The Single European Act (SEA)	1986 (1987)	Article 130r-t: objectives, principles, instruments, action; environmental protection requirements as a "component of the Community's other policies".
The Treaty on the European Union (The Maastricht Treaty)	1992 (1993)	P.102: "[…] the Member States undertake in implementing those proposals, to take full account of their environmental impact and of the principle of sustainable growth". Article 130r-t: objectives (same with the SEA, but added international commitment to deal with environmental problems); principles (same), 130s changed procedure and voting type.
The Treaty of Amsterdam amending the Treaty on European Union, the Treaties Establishing the European Communities and Certain Related Acts	1997 (1999)	P. 26: "[…] to promote economic and social progress for their peoples, taking into account the principle of sustainable development and within the context […] reinforced cohesion and environmental protection"; Incorporated sustainable development as a guiding principle (p.7); urged for environmental policy integration (p.7).
The Treaty of Nice amending the Treaty on European Union, the Treaties establishing the European Communities and certain related acts	2000 (2003)	Changes only in voting procedures.
Treaty of Lisbon amending the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty establishing the European Community	2007 (2009)	Article 191: "[…] the Union policy on the environment shall aim at a high level of protection taking into account the diversity of situations in the various regions of the Union"; Article 194: "[…] to promote energy efficiency and energy saving and the development of new and renewable forms of energy"; Article 11: integration of environmental protection requirements; alignment with sustainable development.

Source: Own compilation based on the EU treaties