

GREEN DEAL IN A TIME OF “GREEN BASHING”

Assessing the Implementation of the
Commission’s European Green Deal –
Achievements, Setbacks, and Future Prospects

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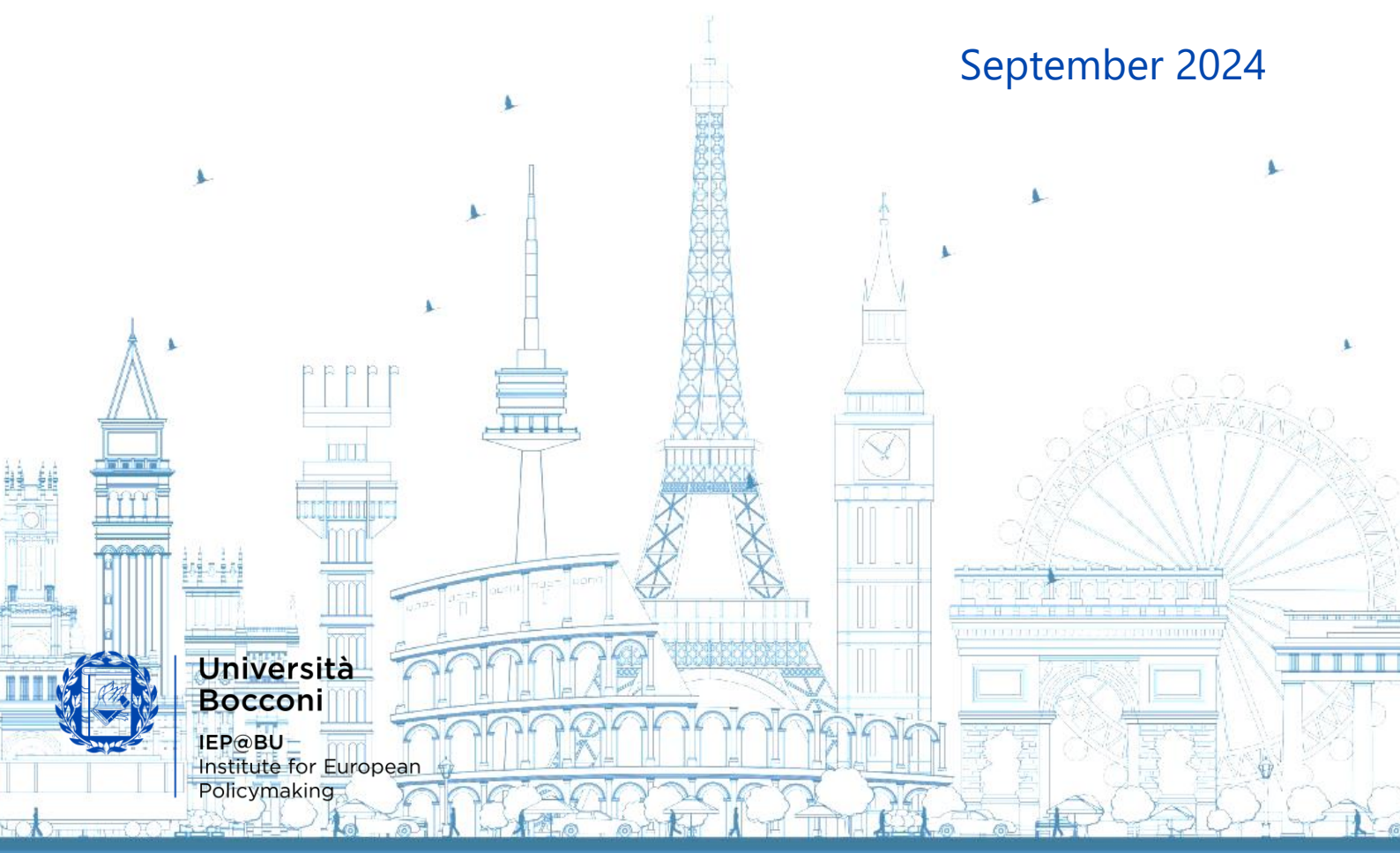
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This article is based on an in-depth study of the implementation so far of the Green Deal. This study accompanies the article, in a document that brings together the main initiatives (legislative and non-legislative) of the Green Deal, their application status and their content. You can find it [here](#).

Executive summary¹

The European Green Deal is an unprecedented package of initiatives proposed by the European Commission (2019/2024) in all sectors for Europe's ecological transition. It responds to various objectives through concrete measures and ambitious regulations, including energy transition, climate neutrality, 'zero pollution', agricultural transition, biodiversity protection, building renovation, deployment of net-zero industry, or just transition. The efforts to deal with biodiversity related issues and climate in a comprehensive approach deserve to be recognized.

However, not all of these ambitious initiatives have come to fruition, and some have been watered down or blocked during the legislative procedure. Moreover, criticism of the European Green Deal has occurred before the 2024 European elections, leading to fears of a certain 'greenlash' on the environmental and climate policies implemented over the last five years, at a time when there is a growing awareness of their very necessity and urgency.

This multi-faceted project needs, therefore, to be examined more in-depth to explore its actual legal implementation, its achievements, its difficulties, and its future. This paper aims at assessing such a large, crucial, and unprecedented project, providing paths to reflect on its uncertain future.

After a detailed presentation of the Green Deal's main measures in each sector, we will focus on a few of them to analyze its failures or successes in greater detail. We will then explore the prospects for the Green Deal's future within a global framework of 'greenlash', i.e. growing resistance to environmental policies, and why implementing the Green Deal has never been so crucial. Finally, we will reflect on why citizen involvement and a thorough reflection on what we mean by just transition are crucial to avoid backsliding and the current deadlock.

¹ The authors would like to thank Valentina Bosetti, Gabriella Perotto, and Romain Svartzman for their useful comments, and Stefano Feltri for the editing and production of this report.



Introduction

The end of the European Commission's 2019-2024 term of office calls for an assessment, particularly of one of its significant achievements: the European Green Deal (EGD). This unprecedented project was launched in December 2019 by the European Commission² and covers all the political initiatives proposed by the European Commission from 2020 to 2024 with the overriding aim of making Europe climate-neutral by 2050. It results from the newly elected European Parliament's request to the European Commission to ensure that the objective of limiting global warming to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels is met, in a context of the success of the Green parties in the European elections, particularly in France and Germany³, and the need for Ursula von der Leyen to consolidate her narrow majority⁴, which included a diversity of positions on Greening within the Renew, S&D (Socialists & Democrats), and EPP (European People's Party) groups.

Described as a "man on the moon's moment" by Commission President Ursula von der Leyen⁵, the Green Deal's announcement is undeniably ambitious and courageous. Among others, it includes a review of all existing legislation regarding environmental objectives, reassessing sectoral policies across major branches, clear emission reduction targets, incorporating climate neutrality into European law, new disclosure rules, and nature restoration objectives. It responds to the many calls from scientists for action, and from the IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) for a far-reaching transformation.

Accompanied by a plan to reduce the EU's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by at least 50% and towards 55% by 2030 compared with 1990 levels, to become the first climate-neutral continent by 2050, the EGD exerted a global influence, with China announcing its carbon neutrality target for 2060 in September 2020⁶, and Japan⁷ and Korea⁸ announcing it for 2050 in October 2020.

During these five years, there have been some notable successes, such as the almost complete implementation of climate initiatives to reduce greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) by at least 55 percent by 2030 ('Fit for 55' package) and proposals of groundbreaking policies in all sectors, often marking the achievement of crucial steps towards a sustainable Europe. The COVID-19 crisis and the Ukraine war did not halt the implementation of the Green Deal, with the publication of numerous sectoral strategies in 2020, and even allowed for ambitious energy policies, linking the need for

² *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the regions - The European Green Deal*. 2019. <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2019%3A640%3AFIN> (Accessed 14 June 2024).

³ 'Elections européennes 2019 : les Verts européens saluent des résultats « au-delà des espérances »'. 2019. *Le Monde.fr*. https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2019/05/26/elections-europeennes-2019-les-verts-europeens-saluent-des-resultats-au-dela-des-esperances_5467608_3210.html (Accessed 14 June 2024).

⁴ She only had a 9 vote majority in the European Parliament in July 2019; beyond the support of EPP, S&D and liberals, the support for the Green was a plus for her.

⁵ 'President von der Leyen on the European Green Deal', European Commission, 2019. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/fr/speech_19_6749 (Accessed 14 June 2024).

⁶ 'An Energy Sector Roadmap to Carbon Neutrality in China – Analysis'. 2021. *IEA*. <https://www.iea.org/reports/an-energy-sector-roadmap-to-carbon-neutrality-in-china> (Accessed 14 June 2024).

⁷ 'Japan's Roadmap to "Beyond-Zero" Carbon'. (Accessed 14 June 2024). https://www.meti.go.jp/english/policy/energy_environment/global_warming/roadmap/index.html.

⁸ Justin McCurry, 2020. 'South Korea Vows to Go Carbon Neutral by 2050 to Fight Climate Emergency'. *The Guardian*. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/oct/28/south-korea-vows-to-go-carbon-neutral-by-2050-to-fight-climate-emergency> (Accessed 14 June 2024).



energy independence to the energy objectives of the Green Deal. Despite the inflationary context, ambitious proposals on nature protection, industrial emissions, or air and water quality were made in 2022 by the Commission.

While it has provided the European Union with a clear direction and a comprehensive framework for households and businesses alike, its actual legal adoption has not been without difficulties or even stumbling blocks, with some countries taking surprising steps backwards following agreement by the Council and Parliament.⁹ Its full implementation will take years.

Moreover, 2023 – on the eve of the European elections - marked a certain slowdown in the implementation of the Green Deal, with the crucial-yet-watered-down Nature Restoration law, the request by certain heads of state for a regulatory "pause"¹⁰, and the harsh debates on the Commission's proposal to reduce the use of pesticides. Even if there have been numerous proposals for the circular economy, critical raw materials, and a net-zero industry, in addition to the voting of major Green Deal texts, such as the reform of the carbon market and the legislation against imported deforestation, the recent farmers' protests at the beginning of 2024 still indicate reluctance towards European policies.

So, while support for the Green Deal appears to be partly waning, the extent of this decline is questionable: does it represent a temporary withdrawal, linked to the perspective of the European elections? Or the understandable difficulties of implementing an ambitious program? Or is it a more profound step backward, which could persist, reflecting a more worrying denial of climate and environmental issues even if the majority in the European Parliament is optically the same?

We, therefore, need to study the compelling legal and practical implications of the Green Deal's action plan and the strategies that have resulted from it, in specific fields: energy, buildings, biodiversity, industry, mobility, pollution, and agriculture, to assess what has been implemented or not.

After a brief description of the general framework of the European Green Deal and its main elements, we shall concentrate on a few instructive initiatives, be it because they are marked by ambitious texts or significant blockages. Finally, we will analyze the worrying 'greenlash' the Green Deal faces, to explore its prospects.

⁹ Tripartite meetings ('trilogues') between Parliament (the group of rapporteur and shadow rapporteurs), the Council (represented by the rotating presidency), and the Commission are meant to mark a provisional agreement, which usually leads to official approval by the two bodies owning the legislative power (Council and Parliament). However, some of these trilogues agreements, such as the ban on internal combustion engines from 2035 or the development of renewable energies and the role of nuclear power, failed to be officially adopted during the last mandate.

¹⁰ 'Macron's Calls for "Regulatory Pause" in EU Environmental Laws Wink at Conservatives'. 2023. *POLITICO*. <https://www.politico.eu/article/emmanuel-macron-the-eu-sophies-choice-moment-juggling-growth-and-the-environment/> (Accessed 14 June 2024).



I - The European Green Deal: a multifaceted, comprehensive package of rules

As we cannot go into the details of every communication, directive, or regulation of the European Green Deal, we will try to summarize its main points and the most important initiatives taken in each sector, providing brief insights on what has been successfully implemented, what has been abandoned or withdrawn, and what has been watered down. The appendix details each action of the EGD and their legislative status for more information.

Climate

The first concrete implementation milestone of the Green Deal was the *European climate law*, adopted in April 2021. This law made climate neutrality a legal obligation for the EU and committed to reducing net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030, compared to 1990 levels, based on an impact assessment carried out by the European Commission. In February 2024, the Commission finally recommended an additional intermediary target of a 90% reduction in GHG emissions by 2040¹¹, following the European Parliament's request.

The 'Fit for 55' package, announced in July and December 2021, translated these ambitions into a detailed set of proposals to revise energy, transport, and climate legislation and to introduce new legislative initiatives to align EU legislation with the EU's climate objectives. The 17 initiatives concern:

- the reduction of Greenhouse Gas emissions: Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) reform, effort sharing and Land, Forestry and Agriculture regulations, Forests Strategy, energy performance of buildings;
- the energy transition: higher energy efficiency and renewable energy targets, energy taxation, reduction of methane emissions in the energy sector, natural and renewable gases and hydrogen;
- transport: alternative fuels infrastructure, CO₂ emission standards for cars and light vehicles, ReFuelEU Aviation Initiative, Maritime FuelEU Initiative.

All initiatives are adopted by the ordinary legislative procedure, except for the *Energy Taxation Directive*, which requires unanimity in the Council to be adopted by the ordinary legislative procedure. The Commission also published a new strategy for climate change adaptation in February 2021, while launching *the European Climate Pact*.

Energy and Buildings

Except the 'Fit for 55' package, the main other actions around the energy sector are announced by the European Commission in the Strategies for Energy System Integration and for Hydrogen (July 2020).

First, the revision of the TEN-E regulation, adopted in May 2022, aimed to develop an interconnected energy infrastructure through the EU's energy corridors, adapted to future clean energy needs (e.g.

¹¹ 'Press Corner | European Commission'. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_24_588 (Accessed 14 June 2024)



end of the support for new natural gas and oil projects and introduction of mandatory sustainability criteria for all projects).

The RePowerEU Plan, published in May 2022, in turn, suggests measures to tackle the energy price crisis, by making Europe independent of Russian fossil fuels, developing renewable energies, and replenishing gas stocks through joint purchases, thanks to the EU energy platform. The reform of the European electricity market's organization in June 2024 tackles the volatility of fossil fuel prices and encourages investment in low-carbon energies.

The 'Renovation Wave' strategy, published in October 2020, seeks to combat fuel poverty by renovating the least efficient buildings, to reduce energy consumption, renovate public buildings, and accelerate the decarbonization of heating and cooling systems. It aims to double the energy renovation rate of buildings by 2030, with the revision of several key directives, such as the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive and the regulation on construction products for new harmonized and strengthened environmental, functional, and safety product requirements, which both of which have been provisionally agreed and are expected to be adopted after harsh negotiations.

Industry

The actions undertaken in the industry sector are summarized in the new Industrial Strategy for Europe, published in March 2020, and the 'Green Deal Industrial Plan for the Net Zero Age', published in February 2023. The latter includes the Net-Zero Industry Act, which aims to simplify the deployment of net-zero industry and encourage strategic European projects, and the Critical Raw Materials Act, which aims to ensure sufficient access to critical raw materials essential in the development of key technologies, set up national and circular value chains for these materials, and encourage research and innovation.

Many actions have also been undertaken to strengthen circularity at the European level.

The new Circular Economy Action Plan (March 2020) includes regulations on sustainable batteries, on packaging and packaging waste, on waste shipments, on the right to repair, and many other initiatives.

For example, the circular economy package, announced in March 2022 and adopted, aimed to encourage sustainable products with eco-design requirements (Sustainable Products Initiative), to promote sustainable and circular textiles, and to empower consumers in the green transition, through better protection against unfair commercial practices and better information. The revision of the Industrial Emissions Directive was also adopted in April 2024 to improve, extend, and modernize the management of industrial emissions from Europe's most polluting plants.

The Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive and the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive, both adopted, provide for the publication of standardized sustainability information by companies and favor responsible behavior by extending companies' duty of diligence. The directive on Green Claims, still in negotiations at the end of Ursula von der Leyen's first mandate, also aims to prevent greenwashing.

Mobility

In the mobility sector, the Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy details 82 initiatives, most of which have been implemented, such as the modernization of the trans-European transport network, an action plan to boost long-distance and cross-border passenger rail services or a revision of the



Combined Transport Directive, still in negotiations, to encourage a shift from road freight to lower-emission modes of transport such as inland waterways, maritime transport, and rail.

Other than what has already been described above, there is the 'Greening freight' package, announced in July 2023 and seeking to boost passenger and freight transport by rail, encourage the use of low-emission trucks, and enable the measurement of GHG emissions from the freight sector.

Pollution

EU action around pollution revolves around three publications: the EU Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability, the Zero Pollution Action Plan, and the EU Methane Strategy.

The Chemicals Strategy, published in October 2020, includes stillborn amendments to the REACH directive, the revision of the regulation on hazard classification, labeling and packaging of chemical substances and mixtures, which was the subject of a provisional agreement in May 2024, and the 'One substance One assessment' package, still in negotiations, to establish a common data platform on chemicals, re-attribute scientific and technical tasks to the European Chemicals Agency and improve cooperation among Union agencies.

The Zero Pollution Action Plan, published in May 2021, includes several initiatives on microplastics, the revision of the mercury regulation, the air quality standards, the surface and ground waters standards, and urban wastewater treatment rules, while the EU Methane Strategy aims to improve measurement of methane emissions and mitigate them more effectively.

Biodiversity

Moreover, one of the main strengths of the EGD is the consideration of the nexus between climate and biodiversity. Indeed, top scientific researchers have shown that they are inextricably connected, and any action trying to mitigate climate change or protect biodiversity must take account of its consequences on both and possible trade-offs¹². Not focusing only on climate and GHG emissions' reduction objectives, the EGD therefore also adopted comprehensive strategies and clear objectives on biodiversity.

The EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 stated clear biodiversity objectives that were then set in the Nature Restoration Law. This law, announced in June 2022, aiming to introduce restoration measures for 20% of the EU's terrestrial areas and 20% of its marine areas by 2030, and all ecosystems in need of restoration by 2050, was finally adopted in June 2024. However, it was watered down in the adoption phase by debates in the European Parliament and the Council.

The EU Forest Strategy 2030 led to the adoption of legislation against imported deforestation and a forest monitoring law, still under negotiations. The EU Pollinators Initiative, published in January 2023, followed a European Citizens' Initiative, to mitigate the impact of pesticide use on pollinators, species and habitat conservation, and habitat restoration in agricultural landscapes.

¹² Hans-Otto Pörtner, Robert J. Scholes, John Agard, Emma Archer, Almut Arneth, Xuemei Bai, David Barnes, et al. 2021. *Scientific Outcome of the IPBES-IPCC Co-Sponsored Workshop on Biodiversity and Climate Change*. Zenodo. doi:10.5281/zenodo.5101125



Finally, the Strategy for Soil Restoration and Resilience, published in November 2021, paved the way for the first soil monitoring law, aiming at making all soils across the EU in healthy condition by 2050 by measuring, monitoring, and remediating soils, but still in negotiations at the end of the legislature period.

Agriculture and food

In the agriculture sector, the adoption of the 'Farm to Fork' (F2F) Strategy was decisive, with 26 cross-cutting initiatives to ensure sustainable food production, promote sustainable processing, trading, and catering practices, facilitate the adoption of healthy and sustainable diets, and reduce food loss and waste.

Among the main actions undertaken by the Commission, there were recommendations to the Member States on their Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) strategic plans, the action plan on organic farming, the EU code of conduct on responsible food trade and marketing practices, an emergency plan to ensure food supply and food security in times of crisis, and an amendment to the *Waste Framework directive* to reduce food and textile waste (still in negotiations at the end of the legislature period).

However, many measures, such as the proposal for a framework regulation on sustainable food systems, the revision of the regulation on animal welfare, the proposal to harmonize nutrition labeling, or the proposal for a regulation on the sustainable use of pesticides, have either never been announced or have been withdrawn.

The Commission also announced a carbon farming initiative, followed by a proposal for the first EU-wide voluntary framework for reliable certification of high-quality carbon removals, adopted in March 2024.

Financing

The European Commission intends to mobilize at least €1,000 billion in sustainable investments to finance this EGD, with the Investment Plan for a Sustainable Europe, including 30% of the EU's multi-annual budget (2021-2027) and of Next Generation EU (recovery plan from the pandemic), revenues from the carbon market and 37% of the endowments received by the Member States.

InvestEU will also devote 30% of the fund to the ecological transition. Finally, the Just Transition Fund will act as a lever for the regions lagging furthest behind in the transition, thanks to co-financing from the Member States, InvestEU, and the EIB's public sector lending facilities. Sustainable finance initiatives were also launched, with the renewed Sustainable Finance Strategy published in February 2021, the EU Taxonomy Climate Delegated Act to support sustainable investment, and the establishment of an EU green bond standard, adopted in October 2023.

II – Achievements and limits of the European Green Deal

As shown above, the *Green Deal* is a complex and multi-faceted project to study. Because of the magnitude of its ambition and, as a result, the high number of rules, it is easy to criticize. Green Deal or red tape? In a democracy the question is perfectly legitimate.

However, to answer the question it is also useful to admit that since the beginning of the industrial



revolution, our economies have been completely ignoring their negative externalities (such as pollution or impact on temperature for example), while ignoring the value of the ecosystem services delivered by Nature: clean water, fresh air, pollination, timber, and fish, to mention only these, were never included in macro-economic analysis and management decisions for what they are worth.

The ones who criticize the EGD as a “bureaucratic” initiative rarely admit that it actually is an effort to reduce preexisting, long lasting distortions having vital consequences for human health and the future of mankind. These joint efforts are not only ecologically motivated, they are also meant to safeguard our economies in the long run.

To facilitate the reading, we decided to focus on a few instructive initiatives, marking groundbreaking successes or significant blockages in various sectors, even though many other crucial themes would have equally deserved to be detailed.

ETS Reform

The *Emissions Trading System (ETS) reform* stands out as one of the Green Deal’s major successes. The reform is proposed in July 2021 as part of the ‘Fit for 55’ package and encompasses various initiatives. It introduces more ambitious targets, raising the emission reduction objective in 2030 to 62%, instead of 43%, compared to 2005, and adjusting the global emissions cap and its annual reduction rate.

Additionally, it extends the scheme to the sectors of fuel sales for road transport and buildings, fuels for small-scale industry, and maritime transport. It includes the gradual phasing out of free allowances for aviation and certain industrial sectors, replaced by other specific requirements.

This reform is crucial to enable the long-term investments required by the ecological transition, and to provide businesses with a clear framework for the future.

In the midst of inflation, such a reform was only possible because it properly weighed its possible social consequences. These were central to the debates, with fears of a potential « gilets jaunes crisis » as seen in France in 2018. As a reminder: the French government’s announcement of a carbon tax increase had led to widespread protest, forcing the State to reverse this measure and better consider its impact on the working and middle classes.¹³

As the creation of a new emissions system for the transport and construction sectors might affect the heating and petrol bills of low-income households, the Commission has proposed the creation of a Social Climate Fund, financed partly by revenues from the new ETS, to provide financial support to the citizens and businesses most affected.

Another major concern of opponents was the competitiveness of European carbon-intensive industries and the risk of carbon leakage, i.e. the simple relocation of polluting production outside the EU.

To mitigate this, the Commission proposed to compensate for the abolition of free quotas by introducing a Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism for imports of these energy-intensive products,

¹³ ‘Macron et les “gilets jaunes” : cinq mois de gestion de crise chaotique’. 2019. *France Inter*. (Accessed 16 June 2024) <https://www.radiofrance.fr/franceinter/macron-et-les-gilets-jaunes-cinq-mois-de-gestion-de-crise-chaotique-4503683>



taxing them if their production exceeds European emissions standards, and increasing support for decarbonization with the Innovation Fund. Thanks to these two measures protecting European industry against unfair competition, the market reform was successfully adopted in April 2023.

Buildings Renovation

In contrast, the dilution of the revision of the *Energy Performance of Buildings Directive* is disappointing compared to the ambition of the 'Renovation Wave' Strategy and given the critical importance of the energy renovation of European buildings.

The strategy, published in October 2020, aimed to renovate public buildings, accelerate the decarbonization of heating and cooling systems, and combat fuel poverty by renovating the worst-performing buildings. It planned to at least double the rate of energy renovation in buildings by 2030.

The main tool for this was the revision of the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive, which aimed to renovate 35 million buildings in the EU, ensure all new buildings are zero-emission by 2030, and decarbonize the building stock by 2050.

Proposed in December 2021, the Council and Parliament only adopted the directive after significant compromises. The failure of Italy's 110% Superbonus introduced in 2020, which cost 129 billion euros¹⁴ without promoting green energy renovation, led Italy to firmly oppose the principle of compulsory renovation and fight for the abolition of minimum energy performance standards, forming a coalition of opponents.

Other countries, led by France and Germany, supported the proposal and backed the European Parliament's ambitious positions. However, Germany's sudden withdrawal in January 2024, due to opposition from the SPD (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands) to mandatory renovation and from the FDP (Freie Demokratische Partei) following Germany's delicate ban on fossil-fired boilers, almost buried the law completely at a stage where it was considered adopted.

The directive was finally adopted in April 2024 but with key measures removed.

Originally intended to oblige each Member State to renovate 15% of its worst-performing buildings by 2027, this renovation obligation was replaced by a simple target of reducing energy consumption by 16% for residential buildings by 2030 and by 20% to 22% by 2035, with at least 55% of this reduction to be achieved by renovating the worst-performing buildings.

The harmonization of energy performance certificates was postponed, and the "energy renovation" passport was not made compulsory. These concessions allowed for a ban on fossil-fired boilers for heating and air conditioning by 2040, as well as an obligation for all new buildings to be zero-emission by 2030.

Instead of a rigorous and uniform EU-wide approach to systematic renovation, the proposal became another series of more flexible objectives, to be effectively implemented through the proposition of national renovation plans.¹⁵

¹⁴ Riccardo Saporiti, 2024. 'Quanto ci costa il superbonus 110%'. *Wired Italia*. <https://www.wired.it/article/superbonus-110-quanto-costa-stato/> (Accessed 16 June 2024).<https://www.wired.it/article/superbonus-110-quanto-costa-stato/>

¹⁵ 'European Parliament Votes through Controversial Buildings Law – Euractiv'. <https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy->



Imported Deforestation

The *legislation on imported deforestation* represents another significant step forward for the Green Deal: Europe is finally accounting for its global carbon footprint and seeking to regulate the impact of its consumption on other countries with a binding regulation.

In November 2021, at the European Parliament's request, the European Commission proposed a draft regulation for "zero deforestation" supply chains, prohibiting the placing on, or export from the European market, of products derived from deforestation or forest degradation.

Adopted in May 2023, it introduces strict product traceability requirements starting in 2025 for commodities responsible for most of the deforestation caused by agricultural expansion, such as soya, beef, palm oil, rubber, coal, wood, cocoa, and coffee (and some of their derivatives).

Companies will now have to ensure their products do not come from deforested or degraded land after December 31, 2020, and check that these products respect the legislation of the country of production, including human rights and the rights of indigenous populations.

Countries of production will be classified by their deforestation risk, and the frequency of checks will be adjusted accordingly, with penalties of up to 4% of the supplier's total EU turnover. This regulation is ambitious and necessary, pointing towards a future where Europe cannot regulate its own production without necessarily considering its global impact.

Indeed, Europe's internal market allows for great normative power and enables ambitious policies, which can inspire other regions to commit to more aggressive climate actions, even if one must underline that it encounters as well strong oppositions in some countries of origin.

For example, the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism aims to prevent carbon leakage and encourages other countries to adopt similar standards, potentially leading to a global shift towards greener policies.

Green Deal policies must encourage positive developments but also mitigate potential adverse consequences, such as the geopolitical impacts of the energy transition, increased dependence on China for critical materials, or a possible drop in European competitiveness.¹⁶

The deforestation law or the Critical Raw Materials Act are examples of policies beginning to address these factors, but this approach should be systematic in every European environmental policy.

Climate change is a global issue, and the response cannot be purely European if it is to be truly effective and not simply shift emissions from one continent to another.

Therefore, our impact on other world powers should not be underestimated and our green policies withdrawn. Our impact has to be thought strategically, for Europe not to be the only one to act or lose strategic advantages.

Continuing along this path and better think the EU's world positioning is therefore crucial, even if

[environment/news/european-parliament-votes-through-controversial-buildings-law/](https://www.econstor.eu/handle/10419/237660) (Accessed 25 June 2024).

¹⁶ Leonard, Mark, Jean Pisani-Ferry, Jeremy Shapiro, Simone Tagliapietra, and Guntram B. Wolff. 'The Geopolitics of the European Green Deal'. *Research Report. Bruegel Policy Contribution*, 2021. <https://www.econstor.eu/handle/10419/237660>.



Europeans should not ignore the investments made in other parts of the world (Inflation Reduction Act in the US for example). The EU, as a rule-based union, focuses mainly on rules when competitors have other tools at their disposal (the large federal budget or federal discretionary powers in the US).

Pesticides

Finally, the withdrawal of the *Sustainable Use of Pesticides Regulation*, one of the key regulations planned by the Farm to Fork Strategy for the ecological transition of the agriculture sector, might be the Green Deal's biggest failure.

Proposed in June 2022, this regulation aimed to set legally binding EU targets to reduce by 50% the use and risk of chemical pesticides and the use of the more hazardous pesticides by 2030, encourage environmentally friendly pest control, and ban all pesticides in sensitive areas. Member States were to set their own binding national reduction targets to reach this EU-wide target.

In December 2022, the Council requested another study to complement the existing impact assessment, particularly regarding the consequences on food security, following several partial studies questioning the Strategy's economic impact¹⁷, powerfully supported by the agri-food lobbies.¹⁸

The Commission submitted the study in July 2023, noting that food security would not be threatened by the proposal but rather safeguarded in the longer term and that the cost of inaction would be higher than the cost of action.¹⁹

Production is often opposed to sustainability, though techniques such as the ones known as "regenerative agriculture" can provide sustainability and production. The use of chemicals can also create geopolitical dependencies, the argument of "food security" does not envisage. Debates, however, continued on mandatory reduction targets at the national level and the prohibition of pesticides in sensitive areas.

The European Parliament proposed over 200 amendments, including less ambitious and precise targets, new requirements, and measures to accelerate market access for low-risk PPPs and biological control.²⁰ However, the amended text was rejected, both by the opposition and by some MEPs disappointed by the now-watered-down regulation, leaving the Council to decide on the regulation's future.

In February 2024, seeing the lack of progress in Council discussions, the Commission announced

¹⁷ P-M Aubert, X. Poux, 2021. *La stratégie «De la fourche à la fourchette»: Une trajectoire d'innovation ambitieuse et réaliste pour le système alimentaire européen*. (n.d.). IDDRI. <https://www.iddri.org/fr/publications-et-evenements/billet-de-blog/la-strategie-de-la-fourche-la-fourchette-une-trajectoire> (Accessed 13 May 2024)

¹⁸ 'A loud lobby for a silent spring: the pesticide industry's toxic lobbying tactics against Farm to Fork', Corporate Europe Observatory, 2022. <https://corporateeurope.org/en/2022/03/loud-lobby-silent-spring>

¹⁹ *Commission Response to Council Decision (EU) 2022/2572 of 19 December 2022 Requesting That the Commission Submit a Study Complementing the Impact Assessment of the Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the Sustainable Use of Plant Protection Products and Amending Regulation (EU) 2021/2115*. T_11. https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CONSIL:ST_11644_2023_INIT (Accessed 25 June 2024).

²⁰ Yoann Coulmont, 2023. 'Règlement SUR pesticides: qu'en est il après le vote en commission AGRI du Parlement européen?' *Générations Futures*. <https://www.generations-futures.fr/actualites/reglement-sur-pesticides-parlement-europeen/> (Accessed 25 June 2024)



its intention to withdraw the proposal.²¹ The lack of consensus on such a crucial issue as pesticides – a few years after a severe health crisis and scientific warnings about pollinators -, and thus on the urgent agricultural transition more generally, is deeply concerning. Pesticides have been for a long time pointed out as possibly responsible for neurological diseases and disorders, impaired reproductive function, impaired development, and cancer.²²

Another major component of the Strategy, the legislative Framework for Sustainable Food Systems, supposed to lay down general principles and objectives for the EU food system, has never been proposed, as many other initiatives of the Strategy.

The reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) for 2023-2027, postponed after tough negotiations and finally adopted in December 2021, was one of the main ways in which the EU could hope to reduce the ecological impact of the sector.

It set ten specific objectives, including climate change action, environmental care, and the preservation of landscapes and biodiversity, and made CAP subsidies conditional on a set of nine mandatory rules ('good agricultural and environmental conditions') and 25% of direct payments conditional on 'eco-regimes', close to payments for environmental services.²³

It also introduced national strategic plans, setting out CAP measures at the national level and ensuring their contribution to the EGD targets.

However, the new CAP still largely supports the traditional production system and does not enable a real transformation of the EU food system, thus failing to significantly reduce EU greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture or increase biodiversity.²⁴

Moreover, in mid-March 2024, in response to European farmers' protests, the Commission proposed to abolish some of the CAP GAECs (Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions), such as the set-aside requirement or crop rotation on 35% of arable land (in favor of simple crop "diversification"), simplify the requirement for minimum soil cover during sensitive periods, clarify the use of the concept of "force majeure" and "exceptional circumstances" (allowing penalties to be avoided), reduce on-farm inspections, and provide for the exemption of small farms of less than 10 hectares from controls linked to environmental conditions.

It also introduced greater flexibility for EU countries wishing to modify their national CAP strategy plans. The proposal was adopted in April 2024, highlighting a clear impasse in Europe's ability to transform agriculture.

²¹ Gyapong, Olivia. 2024. 'EU Commission Chief to Withdraw the Contested Pesticide Regulation'. [www.euractiv.com](https://www.euractiv.com/section/agriculture-food/news/von-der-leyen-to-withdraw-the-contested-pesticide-regulation/). <https://www.euractiv.com/section/agriculture-food/news/von-der-leyen-to-withdraw-the-contested-pesticide-regulation/> (Accessed 25 June 2024).

²²Inserm (dir.). Pesticides : Effets sur la santé. Rapport. Paris : Inserm, 2013, XII-1001 p. - (Expertise collective). - <http://hdl.handle.net/10608/4820>

²³ 'CAP 2023-2027 - European Commission. https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/common-agricultural-policy/cap-overview/cap-2023-27_fr (Accessed 18 June 2024).

²⁴ Simone Højte 2023. 'Green Reform of EU's Agricultural Policy | CONCITO'. <https://concito.dk/en/concito-bloggen/groen-reform-eus-landbrugspolitik> (Accessed 19 June 2024)



III – Perspectives for the European Green Deal: A Delicate Stepping Stone to Face Greenlash

A Worrying Greenlash Endangering the EGD

The work done at the European level by the *Green Deal* is invaluable and shows a credible path for reducing emissions to avoid the worst, taking also into account biodiversity loss. These initiatives are crucial in enabling the advent of a coherent framework of environmental regulations and achieving climate neutrality. However, the EGD implementation has clearly faced a 'greenlash', a term popularized by Nathalie Tocci²⁵, on several policy initiatives. Delving deeper into the reasons and prospects for this greenlash is necessary to understand whether it could grow in a worrying denial of environmental issues and if it could potentially jeopardize the future of the Green Deal, and of European environmental policies in general.

The 'greenlash' refers to resistance to green policies, leading to a slowdown or backtracking. This is often exploited by European populist parties, highlighting the costs or fears of transition to win votes, and leading often to a worrying denial of environmental stakes in the political sphere. Their attitude has unfortunately some influence on the votes of other political parties. Some deals concluded in trilogues were also undone at a later stage, which is worrying for the well-functioning of EU institutions.

This green backlash has hit several Green Deal policies, which have been slowed down, watered down, or abandoned, such as the Nature Restoration law, the Common Agricultural Policy, or the Sustainable Use of Pesticides regulation. As seen, the fear of this greenlash also impacted the ETS reform and the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive revision.

Some European parties are now even calling for certain measures to be reversed, such as the 2035 ban on new diesel and petrol car sales, or the minimum standards for energy-efficient home renovation, both of which providing review clauses that could be used to weaken them.

While a rollback of these measures would be unlikely, their transposition at the national level is under threat, and the finalization of the Green Deal could well be abandoned. Ursula von der Leyen, in her political guidelines for the next five years²⁶, indeed clearly showed a focus on competitiveness, security, food security, and 'clean' industrial policy, putting the Green Deal aside. The EGD is mentioned in her programme²⁷ but does not seem to be at the top of the political agenda anymore and could fall by the wayside for the next mandate of the European Commission.

This would also mean abandoning measures that have not yet been adopted, such as those for the agricultural transition - pending the results of the Strategic Dialogue on the Future of EU agriculture -, energy taxation, soils, forest monitoring, or chemicals.

²⁵ Tocci, Nathalie. 2023. 'After Two Years of Real Progress on Climate, a European "Greenlash" Is Brewing'. *The Guardian*, 12 July 2023, sec. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2023/jul/12/progress-climate-european-greenlash-populist-right>.

²⁶ 'Europe's choice - Political guidelines for the next European Commission 2024-2029', Ursula von der Leyen, 2024 https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/e6cd4328-673c-4e7a-8683-f63ffb2cf648_en?filename=Political%20Guidelines%202024-2029_EN.p

²⁷ "We must and will stay the course on the goals set out in the European Green Deal"



However, according to the IPCC, to limit global warming to around 1.5°C, and avoid the catastrophic consequences of not achieving this target, global GHG emissions need to “peak before 2025 at the latest and be reduced by 43% by 2030; at the same time, methane would also need to be reduced by about a third.”²⁸ We are at a decisive turning point: if the EU has decreased its GHG emissions since 1990 by 32.5%, the implementation efforts and emissions reduction have to be immediately enhanced and scaled up.

The Green Deal is an important European contribution to ensuring that we live on a habitable planet. Political and collective will is necessary, and continuing to regulate public action and companies is crucial, as 75% of the decrease would depend on companies and the State.²⁹ In-depth implementation is therefore much needed and there is still a long way to go before Green Deal measures are effectively implemented and roadmaps are completed.

The protests and tensions surrounding certain policies should, therefore, not lead us to underestimate or marginalize people's desire to take action. While there is indeed a challenge to acceptability, opposition to certain climate policies does not mean a general opposition to climate policy, as shown by Théodore Tallent.³⁰ The greenlash does not justify a rollback or a reduction in ambition regarding the environmental policies that urgently need to be implemented at the European level. It questions rather how these policies are implemented and encourages us to understand how it can be avoided.

One of the main mistakes the Europeans could make is to deny the necessity to accelerate the transition. To prolonge industries such as combustion cars may be seen as a positive move in a short-term perspective. It would however be the best way to destroy the long-term competitiveness of our industry and lose ground when the US and China are engaged in an in-depth transformation. At this stage, 3 scenarios can be envisaged for the European Green Deal's future.

1° For tactical reasons, Ursula von der Leyen does not insist anymore on the EGD because the set of rules is in place. The Commission focuses on its implementation, rather than proposing new rules. After such a massive legislative effort, the choice can be wise. Some new regulations such as CSRD will provide data and create more transparency on the environmental impacts and dependencies of European and foreign companies based in Europe. The ETS and CEBAM regulations as well as the imported deforestation rules will help transform value chains. The use of the word ‘clean’ does not change the commitment.

2° Aware of the new resistance, the Commission shows pragmatism in the implementation phase. Some delays may be given, or some tactical steps back are meant to avoid a radicalised opposition to the EGD. Unlike regulations, the implementation of directives indeed relies on the Member States and not only on the Commission. However, it sticks to the main objectives and manages to put into the next financial perspectives, enough money to accompany the Green

²⁸ ‘The Evidence Is Clear: The Time for Action Is Now. We Can Halve Emissions by 2030. — IPCC’. n.d. Accessed 12 July 2024. <https://www.ipcc.ch/2022/04/04/ipcc-ar6-wgiii-pressrelease/>.

²⁹ ‘Faire sa part ? | Carbone 4’. n.d. Accessed 12 July 2024. <https://carbone4.com/fr/publication-faire-sa-part>.

³⁰ ‘Backlash écologique : quel discours pour rassembler autour de la transition ?’ n.d. Fondation Jean-Jaurès. Accessed 12 July 2024. <https://www.jean-jaures.org/publication/backlash-ecologique-quel-discours-pour-rassembler-autour-de-la-transition/>.



transition, in particular in the agricultural field. In this hypothesis, the degree of pragmatism matters a lot. It should not be an excuse for a U turn.

3° The most worrying scenario would be the one in which the EGD is actually dismantled. Delays are given not only to make things happen, but to circumvent or even forget the rules. Implementing acts are watered down, enforcement is not done properly. Member states are allowed not to respect the rules. The first result would be a fragmentation of the single market.

Ways to Face Greenlash

Understanding and answering the questions of citizens is essential to avoid the worst scenario, fight the greenlash, and continue the work of the EGD.

First, the failure of the 'Farm to Fork' strategy clearly highlighted the crucial need to find effective ways to integrate European citizens into the conception of European policies, to ensure that the EGD really becomes a 'Deal', involving citizens, civil society, companies, and the public sector. The need to further involve citizens and to anticipate its possible consequences on citizens might be one of the major lessons and future challenges of the EGD and the only way to counter the 'greenlash' threatening the EU ecological transition.

It means changing the image of climate action as a burden to highlight its tangible benefits for our daily lives, at the local level, in the short term and the long term.

Furthermore, such far-reaching reforms require the involvement of all stakeholders in the decision-making process to guarantee their success and enable profound changes to our models of agriculture, waste management, or consumption. The attempt to create a European Climate Pact³¹, aiming at involving citizens and communities in climate action, has been insufficient to allow for the societal participation required, with resources and political will lacking. Deeper engagement of civil society, local authorities, with the private sector is indispensable. Many companies are actually working to safeguard their business model, their value chain and adapt to the new environment.

New initiatives could be initiated, for example using the Citizens' Convention model, in line with the Conference on the Future of Europe.³² The Irish Citizens' Assembly on climate change is a notable example of successful public engagement, which led to impactful policy recommendations.³³

Secondly, it means making policies that are truly inclusive and just. Distributive choices are indeed crucial in the opposition, or acceptance, of green policies and voting behaviors. The study of a major ban on polluting cars in Milan evidenced the importance of compensation for the owners of banned vehicles to avoid electoral populist shifts.³⁴ Just transition strategies seem to be electorally successful: the establishment of a 'just transition agreement' in Spain to phase out coal mining while

³¹ 'European Climate Pact - European Union'. 2024. 24 June 2024. https://climate-pact.europa.eu/index_en.

³² Céline Charveriat, *The Green Deal: Origins and Evolution*, Jan 2023, 14.

³³ Environmental Protection Agency. n.d. 'Research 314: Deepening Public Engagement on Climate Change: Lessons from the Citizens' Assembly'. Accessed 12 July 2024. <https://www.epa.ie/publications/research/climate-change/research-314-deepening-public-engagement-on-climate-change-lessons-from-the-citizens-assembly.php>.

³⁴ Italo Colantone, Livio Di Lonardo, Yotam Margalit, and Marco Percoco. 2024. 'The Political Consequences of Green Policies: Evidence from Italy'. *American Political Science Review* 118 (1): 108–26. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055423000308>.



supporting workers, led, for example, the Socialist Party to increase its electoral base in mining municipalities.³⁵ The transition must therefore be 'just' and include rightful redistribution processes to compensate for policies that could exacerbate current inequalities.

The EGD communication clearly stated that the transition should be fair and inclusive. The Just Transition mechanism, which is planned to mobilize €100 billion between 2021 and 2027, is based on a Just Transition Fund, dedicated to the regions lagging furthest behind in the energy transition, a Just Transition Facility, directing funding to the worst affected regions under Invest EU, and public sector lending facilities. In particular, it aims to support professional retraining, energy efficiency, research and innovation, sustainable public transport and clean energy infrastructure.

Detailed analysis of the implementation of these 'Territorial Just Transition Plans', financed by the fund, shows, however, that they primarily finance economic policies, in particular supporting SMEs and large corporations in their decarbonization and job preservation, but not so much environmental or social policies.³⁶

More globally, if public aid to households has increased, deeper analysis shows that it has focused on short-term support rather than long-term resilience.³⁷

To be truly fair and “leave no one behind”³⁸, Europe should reflect on a common definition of “justice” and properly assess the practical implications of this definition, whether positive or negative, for the contemplated transition.

³⁵ Diane Bolet, Fergus Green, and Mikel González-Eguino. 2023. 'How to Get Coal Country to Vote for Climate Policy: The Effect of a “Just Transition Agreement” on Spanish Election Results'. *American Political Science Review*, December, 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055423001235>.

³⁶ 'The Road to a Just Transition'. n.d. *Foundation for European Progressive Studies* (blog). Accessed 12 July 2024. <https://feps-europe.eu/publication/the-road-to-a-just-transition/>.

³⁷ 'État des lieux des progrès de l'Union européenne vers la neutralité climat'. 2024. *I4CE* (blog). 2 July 2024. <https://www.i4ce.org/publication/etat-lieux-progres-union-europeenne-neutralite-climat/>.

³⁸ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2019%3A640%3AFIN>



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