

Green integration and formation of a united sustainable space

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Abstract. The article analyses the degree of participation of various EU countries in the implementation of the agreement's goals, with a special focus on the leaders - Germany, France, Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands, which are actively promoting measures to reduce emissions and introduce renewable energy sources. Central and Eastern European countries (Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania), which face socio-economic challenges and need additional support to transition to a sustainable economy, are also considered. They need additional support from the EU, including access to the Just Transition Fund, in order to successfully meet climate targets. The paper emphasises the importance of regional solidarity in overcoming environmental and economic obstacles to carbon neutrality, and once again highlights the need for international cooperation and exchange of experience to successfully achieve emission reduction targets and transition to renewable energy. The need to take into account national characteristics and possible impacts on the economy and society was also emphasized, since improving the well-being of society is a primary task, which accordingly requires a more flexible and adaptive approach to the implementation of the climate agenda.

1 Introduction

In March 2018, the European Commission presented the Action Plan on Financing Sustainable Growth [1]. This plan was based on the recommendations of the High-Level Expert Group on Sustainable Finance (HLEG) formed in 2016 [2]. It aims to redirect capital to sustainable investments, manage financial risks associated with climate change, resource depletion and environmental degradation, and increase transparency and encourage long-term approaches to financial activities.

Chronology of further events:

1. June 2019 - Adoption of the Regulation on the establishment of a framework to facilitate sustainable investment, also known as the EU Taxonomy [3]. The Regulation creates common criteria for defining sustainable economic activities and investments.

2. December 2019 - Unveiling of the European Green Deal, which aims to achieve climate neutrality by 2050 [4]. It includes elements of sustainable finance as part of a comprehensive strategy for sustainable economic development.

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3. July 2020 - Introduction of the COVID-19 "Next Generation EU" Pandemic Recovery Plan for the EU, which aims to rebuild the economy with a focus on green and digital investments, including 30% of the EU budget dedicated to climate change [5].

4. March 2021 - Publication of the Sustainable Finance Package, which includes updated provisions of the EU Taxonomy and sustainability reporting requirements for companies [6].

5. April 2021 - Adoption of the Sustainable Finance Disclosure Regulation (SFDR), which requires financial market participants to provide information on how they integrate sustainability into their decision-making processes [7].

6. July 2021 - Adoption of the first set of delegated acts to the EU Taxonomy establishing criteria for defining environmentally sustainable economic activities for two purposes: 'climate change mitigation' and 'climate change adaptation'.

2 Materials and methods

In the process of the research the system approach, evolutionary approach, approaches of the theory of sustainable development were used. The methods of analysis and synthesis, grouping and comparison were used as a methodological technique of the research.

3 Results and discussion

From what has been written above, it is clear that the Green Deal is an ambitious programme that should be the basis for sustainable economic growth and innovation in the EU. The EU now has legally binding climate targets covering all key economic sectors (Figure 1). The overall package includes:

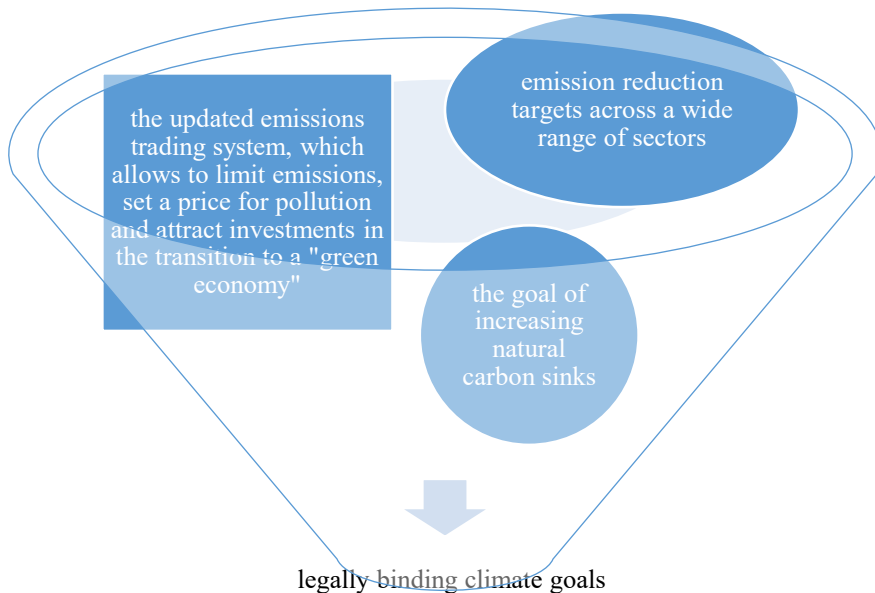


Fig. 1. Legally binding climate goals.

As a further step towards climate neutrality, the Commission presented its assessment of the EU's 2040 climate target in February 2024. It recommended a 90 per cent reduction in net EU greenhouse gas emissions by 2040 compared to 1990 levels, which is in line with the latest scientific advice and the EU's commitments under the Paris Agreement (Figure 2).

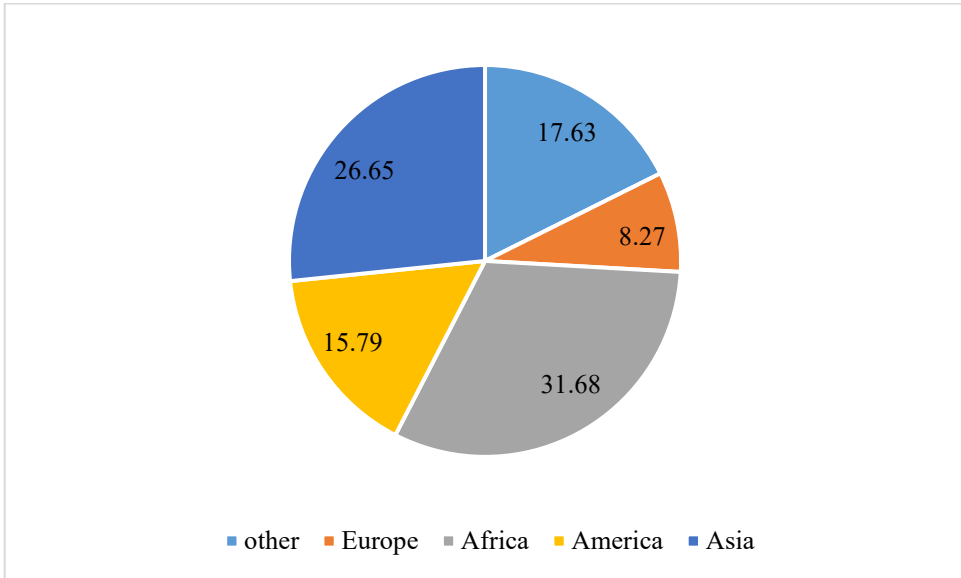


Fig. 2. Geographical distribution of EU climate finance.

Each of the signatory countries of the European Green Agreement shows different degrees of activity in achieving climate neutrality and implementing environmental policies. Therefore, they can be conditionally divided into the most active and less active in promoting the green agenda.

Most active countries:

1. Germany:

Germany plays a leading role in the implementation of the Green Deal. The country supports the EU's goals to reduce emissions and transition to renewable energy sources. Germany has already announced its goal of achieving carbon neutrality by 2045 - 5 years earlier than the EU's overall target. It is also investing significantly in green energy, particularly in solar and wind power, and promoting transport reforms such as incentivising the use of electric vehicles [8, 9,10,11].

2. France:

France is advancing initiatives to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. In 2019, France became the first major economy to legislate a goal of achieving carbon neutrality by 2050. France is not only developing nuclear power, but also looking for new ways to reduce emissions. For example, it is actively exploring solar and wind power.

3. Sweden:

Sweden is a leader in environmental policy and sustainable development. It already has one of the greenest economies in the world and aims to achieve carbon neutrality by 2045. Sweden is investing in biomass and hydropower, and is introducing strict emission reduction measures in the transport and industrial sectors [12,13,14,15,16,17,18]

4. Denmark:

Denmark, like France and Sweden, is in a key position to implement environmental initiatives. Denmark has set a greenhouse gas emission criterion of 70 per cent by 2030 compared to 1990 levels. Denmark is also investing in the development of offshore wind farms [19,20].

5. Netherlands:

The Netherlands, like France, Sweden and Denmark, is at the forefront of environmental initiatives. Moreover, the Netherlands is actively investing in sustainable transport infrastructure, including bicycle lanes and public transport, which helps to reduce car

dependency. The Netherlands pays special attention to the development of infrastructure for sustainable transport and renewable energy. [21].

Least active countries:

1. Poland:

Poland is one of the largest consumers of coal in Europe and maintains a significant dependence on this energy source. Although the country is a signatory to the Green Deal, it has expressed doubts about achieving climate neutrality by 2050, citing the socio-economic complexities of the clean energy transition. Poland is discussing the possibility of obtaining additional funding from the EU to support its energy transformation [22].

2. Czech Republic:

The Czech Republic, as one of the leading economies in Central Europe, continues to make significant use of coal, which raises concerns about the impact of the Green Deal targets on its economy and labour market. Although the country is committed to fulfilling its emission reduction commitments, it is concerned about some aspects of the agreement and insists on a more flexible approach to its implementation [23].

3. Hungary:

Hungary, like Poland and the Czech Republic, is cautious about the EU's climate goals. The country insists on the need to take into account national specificities and requests for more funding to support its climate adaptation efforts [24,25].

In addition to particularly active and less active green countries, there are countries and groups in the European Union that express significant doubts or oppose some aspects of the European Green Deal. These opponents mainly focus on the possible economic consequences and social costs of realising climate goals.

Opponents and their arguments:

1. Poland:

Arguments: Poland is the largest coal consumer in Europe and its economy is heavily dependent on the coal industry. Switching to renewable energy requires significant investment and could lead to job losses in the coal sector. Poland fears that the rapid implementation of climate measures will have a negative impact on its economy and the living standards of its citizens. It therefore expresses doubts about achieving the goal of climate neutrality by 2050 and insists on additional financial resources and a more flexible approach. Andrej Babiš (former Prime Minister of the Czech Republic): During his time as Prime Minister (2017-2021), he repeatedly expressed doubts about the fulfilment of EU climate targets. Andrej Babiš spoke out about the need to take national specificities into account in the European Green Deal at the December 2020 EU summit. During the European Council meeting on 12-13 December 2019, Babiš said that in order to achieve climate neutrality, the Czech Republic should be able to develop nuclear power as part of its low-carbon energy mix. He emphasised that each country has different economic conditions and natural resources and this should be taken into account in EU climate policy [26].

Ministers responsible for environmental protection in the Czech Republic have also made statements about the need to take national realities into account in EU climate policy. For example, Minister Richard Brabec, who held office between 2014 and 2021, has expressed concern about the high costs of climate action. Richard Brabec criticised the rapid pace of climate reforms in an interview in November 2020, where he highlighted the need for additional financial support from the EU to implement the climate agenda.

2. Czech Republic:

Arguments: The Czech Republic, like Poland, has a significant dependence on coal and industrial production. It is also of the opinion that severe restrictions will increase costs for businesses and citizens, especially in the face of the need to modernise energy infrastructure. The Czech Republic is also puzzled by the likelihood of significant economic damage and social impacts from the implementation of the Green Deal.

3. Hungary:

Arguments: Hungary is a supporter of environmental initiatives but favours a more moderate pace of change. It argues that the climate agenda should take into account the economic realities of countries with different levels of development. Hungary believes that a sharp rise in energy prices could cause social discontent and increase economic inequality.

4. Slovakia and Bulgaria:

Arguments: countries fear the economic and social consequences of the Green Agreement, insisting that implementation of climate measures will require significant expenditure on infrastructure modernisation and a shift to more expensive energy sources, which could have a negative impact on the economy and the well-being of citizens.

4 Conclusion

The study shows that the green deal is a cornerstone of the global environmental movement, eliciting a variety of reactions among countries around the world. Some countries actively support the initiative, seeing it as a path to leadership in clean energy technologies, realising that the transition to a green economy creates not only environmental but also economic opportunities by reducing dependence on fossil fuels. Opponents, some countries rich in natural resources, express scepticism about the Green Deal, fearing a deterioration of their economic position and job losses in traditional industries. They see the abandonment of hydrocarbons as a direct threat to national security and stability. However, there are also countries that take a neutral stance, emphasising that without support from developed countries in the form of investment and technology, developing countries will not be able to realise their goals, which will lead to their regression, as opposed to the progress they had planned to make. They endeavour to balance their economic interests with their environmental commitments. Thus, attitudes towards the Green Deal continue to be influenced by economic, social and political factors, forming a contradictory picture of global interaction. The need to take into account national specificities and possible impacts on the economy and society is paramount, requiring a more flexible and adaptive approach to the implementation of the climate agenda.

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