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Navigating energy transition: exploring the impact of Russia's invasion of Ukraine on the EU energy transition discourse

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Yuliia Biro

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ABSTRACT

Diese Masterarbeit untersucht die diskursive Neurahmung der EU-Energiewende nach Russlands Invasion der Ukraine und der daraus folgenden Energiekrise. Auf der Grundlage einer qualitativen Frame-Analyse der öffentlichen Kommunikation der Europäischen Kommission in zwei diskursiven Phasen, der Phase vor 2022 und der Phase nach 2022, identifiziert die Studie zentrale Veränderungen im Zeitverlauf und zeichnet die Beziehungen zwischen entstehenden Frames nach. Die empirischen Befunde werden anschließend in breitere wissenschaftliche Debatten über den langfristigen Wandel der internationalen Klimapolitik eingeordnet: von einem Modell, das auf kollektiver Verantwortung und internationaler Kooperation beruht, hin zu einem Ansatz, der zunehmend vom globalen Machtwettbewerb geprägt ist. Abschießend zeigt die Arbeit, dass der Krieg eine bereits bestehende Verschiebung in Richtung Protektionismus beschleunigt und legitimiert hat, wodurch bestimmte Aspekte der Energiewende vorangetrieben, zugleich jedoch die Spannungen zwischen ihren zentralen Dimensionen Sicherheit, Gerechtigkeit und Nachhaltigkeit verstärkt wurden.

This thesis examines the reframing of the EU energy transition discourse following the invasion of Ukraine and the consequent energy crisis. Using the qualitative frame analysis of the European Commission's public communication, conducted across two distinct discursive phases, the pre-2022 period and the post-2022 period, the study illustrates key shifts across periods and outlines relationships between frames. Consequently, the empirical findings are situated within the broader research literature that highlights the long-standing shift in international climate policy from a model rooted in collective responsibility and international cooperation to one driven by global power competition. The thesis concludes that the war accelerated and legitimised a long-standing shift towards protectionism, accelerating certain aspects of the transition while also introducing greater tension among the core dimensions of security, equity and sustainability.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Research Aim and Outline

Energy has always been regarded as a core dimension in policy studies, representing a cross-cutting system across economics, security, environment, and governance. Energy systems have been changing over time, largely driven by technological advancement. However, the mere availability of new technologies has never been enough to effect systemic change. Therefore, the transition of energy systems is a particularly important case for analysis within the theoretical perspectives of international geopolitics and developmental studies, contextualising the historical, political, global, and ecological dynamics that accompanied it (Newell, 2021).

Over the past decade, the European Union (EU) has been leading the reshaping of international climate policy, aiming to transform its energy landscape towards sustainability and spearheading international institutional arrangements on climate change and the green transition. These aspirations culminated in the Paris Agreement, signed on 12 December 2015, which establishes a global framework to limit global warming to well below 2 °C. The EU Green Deal, which followed in 2019, defined the EU's multidimensional strategy to achieve this goal through a combination of policies, regulations, and market initiatives. The current study examines the impact of geopolitics on the framing of the energy transition, seeking to understand the complex drivers behind the systemic shift in energy provision from fossil fuels to renewable sources at both global and local scales. Additionally, it aims to discern the existing interconnections between local conflicts and this global process, contextualising the influence of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on the EU's energy transition policies and discourse.

In the scientific literature on the energy transition since the beginning of the war, there is an ongoing debate about the effects of the war in Ukraine on the energy transition towards a greater share of renewables in the EU energy mix. Despite an overall optimistic perception evident in the current literature, the issue remains controversial due to contradictions between policies and practice, between long- and short-term effects, and new challenges arising from geopolitical transformations. In this regard, the current study represents an empirical and analytical contribution to the field of EU energy policy analysis.

1.2 Research Questions

How has the EU's energy transition discourse transformed since the onset of the war in Ukraine?

How do those discourse transformations fit into the broader context of geopolitical challenges?

1.3 Structure of the Thesis

Following the presentation of the research aim and outline, as well as the research questions, Chapter 2 provides the historical context for the European Union's energy policy dynamics, grounded in geopolitical realities, and outlines prior research on the integration of the EU's climate objectives into energy policy.

Chapter 3 focuses on reframing the energy transition discourse in the European Commission's public communication and highlights competing interpretations of this shift in the academic literature.

Chapter 4 presents the theoretical framework, highlighting the relevance of frame analysis for the current study.

Chapter 5 outlines the methodology, covering the research design, coding approach, and limitations. The study is structured on two periods: Period 1 (December 2019 - February 2022) and Period 2 (February 2022 – March 2025).

Chapter 6 presents an empirical frame analysis of the European Commission's energy transition discourse, highlighting the dominant frame patterns that emerged during Period 1 and Period 2, and then reconstructing the dominant frames for each period.

Chapter 7 presents the study's findings, illustrating key shifts across periods and outlining relationships between frames, situating it within the broader research literature.

The final chapter summarises and reflects on findings across both periods, answers the research questions, and provides implications for future research.

2. Historical Context of EU Energy Transition

2.1 Historic Contextualisation of European Energy Policy Dynamics

For a deeper understanding of the problem, this chapter outlines the historical context of European energy policy dynamics, EU market integration and the structural shifts in the EU energy mix.

Integration of the energy market has been one of the central long-term issues and strategic dimensions of EU integration. Up to the 1990s, energy was not framed as a coherent European policy area but rather as an isolated issue around different energy sources (coal, nuclear, oil).

Up to the 1950s, coal dominated the world's energy landscape, driving the Industrial Revolution and new technological developments, while energy systems were predominantly nationalised (Saletnik et al., 2025). However, the sector-specific cooperations, such as the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community (1951) and the European Atomic Energy Community (1958) during the post-war period, could be seen as early forms of European integration, promoting cooperation on energy matters among Member States. Euroatom was established to promote nuclear energy cooperation among European states, as it was seen as a major hope for securing a sufficient energy supply and reducing dependence on imported fossil fuels, which gradually replaced domestic coal as the dominant part of most European countries' energy mixes.

After World War II, during the reconstruction period, coal lost its dominance as a primary energy source to oil, exported mainly from the Middle East to Western Europe and from the Soviet Union to Eastern European countries following the initial Cold War division. This transition from coal to oil was driven predominantly by economic and industrial considerations, aligning with the broader postwar shift towards economic recovery, industrial reconstruction, and the globalisation of trade, while also addressing domestic coal shortages. Some scholars emphasise the first signs of East-West energy networks as early as the 60s, driven by rapidly growing European energy demand, and associate them with the "hidden integration of Europe" in the Cold War era (Högselius, 2013, p. 3).

The oil crisis of the 1970s prompted energy security concerns in the public policies of industrialised countries, exposing their heavy dependence on foreign hydrocarbon imports. In response to that, the IEA (International Energy Agency) was created in 1974,

institutionalising a predominantly technical approach aimed at protecting energy supply from physical disruption through source diversification, strategic reserves and international cooperation. This mechanism became a cornerstone of the dominant energy security paradigm for the decades that followed, reflecting a functionalist and technocratic conception of the issue (Gutiérrez Roa, 2026, p. 4). Russian energy imports at that point became not only a commercially rational choice but also a secure option for European countries to diversify away from Middle Eastern oil, due to long-term contracts and pipeline connections.

In response to the "stagflation" the West experienced in the 1970s (predominantly caused by rapidly surging oil prices in the aftermath of the Arab oil embargo and Iranian Revolution) coupled with the broader dynamics of financial globalisation and the de-emphasis of geopolitics in European strategic thinking towards the end of the Cold War, the market-liberal dogma emerged. This market-based paradigm was characterised by placing economic efficiency and competitiveness at the centre of industrial policy and weakening state interventions in the globalising world (Proedrou, 2023, p. 3). In energy policy, this translates into liberalised energy markets, cross-border integration, and the most affordable supplier. Consequently, the principle of economic efficiency and competitiveness guided the Union's energy policy and energy markets through its first period of comprehensive integration in the 1990s-2000s, moving beyond sector-specific cooperation towards a transnational energy market, further accelerating the East-West infrastructure expansion and contributing to Russia becoming a key energy partner for the EU, which was considered economically attractive, reliable, and relatively sustainable. On the eve of that, public discourse around nuclear energy as a major hope for European supply diversification and sustainability began to shift markedly after the Chornobyl catastrophe (1986), which had catastrophic environmental consequences and laid the foundation for the gradual phasing out of nuclear power in many EU states (further underpinned by the Fukushima nuclear accident in 2011).

Since then, the gas partnership with Russia has long been at the centre of the EU's energy policy, and until the mid-2000s, this interdependence was widely regarded as a positive example of post-Cold War cooperation between Russia and the EU (Siddi, 2020, p. 2). After the expansion of climate policy and the development of the so-called energy trilemma concept, which was first outlined in the European Commission's Green Paper (2006), identifying supply security, environmental sustainability and economic competitiveness as three core objectives, the narrative of "gas as a bridge fuel" became more prominent in the

EU policy discourse. Natural gas was considered a bridge fuel because of its capacity to facilitate the transition from coal-based electricity generation to low-carbon energy systems, reconciling all three dimensions simultaneously. Since this period was characterised by rising geopolitical optimism, it was widely believed that globalised markets and economic integration would outweigh and even prevent geopolitical risks.

Although Russian gas was long regarded in the EU as efficient, economically attractive, and relatively clean (compared with coal), the gas transit disputes of 2006 and 2009 between Russia and Ukraine exposed the security risks of dependency on a single external supplier. Since 80% of the EU's gas supply transited through Ukraine, the disruptions prompted calls for supply diversification. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 further rearticulated the geopolitical dimension of energy security, as reflected in the European Commission's communication, which described it as "the most pressing energy security of supply issue" (European Commission, 2014). In the aftermath of the steadily deteriorating relations between Russia and Ukraine, the European Commission published the European Energy Security Strategy (2014), calling for diversification, improved interconnections, and accelerated deployment of renewables as tools to reduce dependency (European Commission, 2014). These goals were later formalised through the Energy Union initiative (2015), which was built on five pillars: energy security of supply, energy market integration, energy efficiency, decarbonisation of the economy, and innovation (European Commission, 2015). The European Commission's "Energy Union" aimed to further integrate national energy markets and reduce reliance on a single supplier (Hafner & Tagliapietra, 2020, p. 17). In practice, however, those attempts were very limited to sporadically increasing supply from two other partners - Norway and Algeria, as well as opening the corridor with Azerbaijan, which, however, only contributed to 5% of the overall EU's gas imports (Proedrou, 2023). Roa (2026) sees these developments as the manifestation of a divide between, on the one hand, the policy of the European Commission and the energy sovereignty of the Member States: "Despite repeated efforts to construct a common strategic vision, energy policy continued to operate under a markedly intergovernmental logic, with Member States prioritising national interests over supranational coordination" (p.5). The author further argues that this dynamic was driven by the dominance of the liberal paradigm, which favoured market-oriented approaches to energy supply, granting disproportionate influence to private actors.

Simultaneously, public discourse on the global importance of the renewable energy transition in light of global warming was gaining momentum worldwide, becoming increasingly coordinated across policy fields, particularly in the EU, which many called the "pioneer of energy transition" (European Commission, 2021c). By the mid-2010s, climate objectives had become increasingly mainstreamed across international politics. Rather than remaining the subject of environmental policy, decarbonisation became progressively embedded within energy governance, industrial policy, market regulations and strategic planning. This manifested itself in the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement, which set a target to scale up renewable energy to combat climate change by limiting global warming to well below 2°C, preferably 1.5°C, above pre-industrial levels (United Nations, 2015). Reaching the abovementioned targets required a cross-sectoral approach to decarbonisation and connected climate policy and energy transition narratives to the ideas of industrial modernisation. Those targets, however, were planned to be implemented over a long time period, until at least 2050, when the EU was meant to become climate-neutral, as mentioned in the 2021 European Climate Law (Boehm, 2022). Despite policy adjustments aimed at reducing greenhouse gas emissions and increasing the share of renewable energy to 22%, gas was still framed as a significant, relatively green energy source to support this transition, given the volatility of renewable sources, high costs associated with the projects' implementation and varying levels of access across the European Union (Boehm, 2022).

Paradoxically, despite a seemingly formal alliance between climate and security agendas, the role of gas as a "bridge fuel" further strengthened and expanded EU-Russia energy cooperation. Russian gas dependency not only persisted but also increased during this period, with pipeline networks (Nord Stream, Nord Stream 2) expanding and gas imports rising from 37% in 2015 to 45% in 2021. Although the principles of energy solidarity and security were increasingly prominent in EU policy discourse, they appeared to conflict with the diverse national strategic and economic rationalities of Member States, leading to fragmentation in strategic vision and implementation. In their energy transition plans, many Member States, given their unequal energy architectures, were heavily dependent on Russia for natural gas imports. These imports were considered acceptable due to their ability to substitute for coal and nuclear energy while further exploring ways to introduce fully sustainable technologies across all energy sectors (Wiertz et al., 2023, p. 1).

However, the full-scale attack by Russia on Ukraine in February 2022 marked a departure from "business as usual". According to the European Council, since the beginning of the

war, the share of Russia's gas in EU imports has gradually dropped from over 40% in 2021 to about 8% in 2023 (European Counsil, 2023). In April and June 2022, the EU imposed an embargo on Russian coal, oil, and petroleum products. This resulted in the Russian government proclaiming EU Member States "unfriendly," demanding payment for gas in Rubles, and cutting supplies to those who disagreed. Russia managed to reorient its exports towards other major consumers, such as China and India, despite EU and US diplomatic pressure. As Siddi (2023) argues, this shift may signal a decline of Western power in the international political arena. The EU's distancing from Russia in energy relations was further intensified by the September 2022 sabotage of the Nord Stream pipelines, which amplified energy security concerns (Siddi, 2023). This event caused further energy supply disruptions and affected Europe's already strained energy market, deepening the energy crises that had been unfolding since the end of 2021 in light of low post-COVID global energy supply, low domestic production of hydrogen and nuclear power due to drought and low water levels during the summer of 2022, and a decrease in Russian gas supply (Siddi, 2023, p. 99). From an economic standpoint, the sabotage further contributed to rising energy prices and market volatility, leading to higher costs for households and energy-intensive industries. Those events were widely framed as the "weaponisation of energy" in scholarly literature and the European Council communication (Boute, 2023, cited in Gutiérrez Roa, 2026, p. 6). The topic became a subject of contradictory discussions and sparked investigations by various countries. While many Western officials and media outlets were initially suggesting that Russia was responsible for the pipeline sabotage, Russia was accusing the United States, the United Kingdom and Ukraine. While the latest investigations did not establish signs of Russia's involvement, the German investigatory findings reported involvement of Ukrainian citizens in sabotage. However, no final legal conclusion on who was the ultimate organiser has been reached.

The implementation of sanctions, coupled with rising inflation and trade disruptions, had a significant effect on the EU economy, particularly on countries where the share of gas imported from Russia in total energy consumption was higher (Rederek, 2022, p. 6). In terms of socioeconomic impact, the crisis led to major price increases in gas, electricity, and other fossil fuels, which in turn drove up consumer prices. As an "emergency response", the European Commission introduced REPowerEU in May 2022, aiming to eliminate the EU's dependence on Russian energy, address the war's economic effects, and accelerate the energy transition. The plan articulates 4 main action points: energy savings, supply

diversification, fossil fuel speed-up substitution, and smart investments & reforms (European Commission, 2022a).
In terms of energy savings, the REPowerEU plan highlighted the implementation of minimum energy performance standards for buildings, the channelling of EU carbon market profits towards energy efficiency, and the encouragement of energy consumption reductions (European Commission, 2022a, p. 3).

From the standpoint of supply diversification, the plan promoted the EU joint energy platform for the common purchase of gas, LNG, hydrogen, and accelerated deeper cooperation with the Energy Community Contracting Parties (the Western Balkans, Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia) to provide joint security of supply. The security of Member States that rely on Russia for nuclear fuel has also been addressed, focusing on alternative sources of uranium and on boosting the conversion, enrichment, and fuel fabrication capacities in Europe and among the EU's global partners.

Regarding fossil fuel substitution, renewable energy was expected to be used for power generation, industry, buildings, and transport across the EU, increasing the share of renewables in the total energy mix from 40% to 45% by 2030. Fossil fuel substitution, together with energy-saving measures, was intended to reduce overall fossil fuel imports. 'Green' hydrogen, in this regard, was envisioned as a key element, enabling the substitution of fossil fuels in hard-to-decarbonise industries, with both domestic production and imports expected to increase by 10 million tonnes by 2030. Gas was supposed to be supplanted by green hydrogen, at least in part from renewable sources (European Commission, 2022a, p. 7). In addition to accelerating hydrogen, the REPowerEU plan focused on scaling up solar and wind energy. The European Commission called for further strengthening of those sectors by initiating rooftop solar obligations for certain types of buildings, doubling the deployment of individual heat pumps (district heating, communal heating, and industrial heat where available), and strengthening and accelerating supply chains. Production of "biomethane" was also expected to increase. The slow, complex permitting process for solar and wind projects has been highlighted as a major obstacle to achieving those ambitious goals. Therefore, the European Commission proposed measures to expedite procedures, including the use of environmental assessment experts and the issuance of country-specific recommendations. To minimise the impact of the projected rising energy prices and volatility, particularly for vulnerable groups, while promoting the low-carbon transition, initiatives such as the Social Climate Fund were meant to provide targeted support for

vulnerable households, micro-enterprises, and transport users, fostering structural low-carbon transition measures (European Commission, 2022a, pp. 12–19).

2.2 Integration of Climate Objectives into Energy Policy

The EU's climate policy has been consistently among the leading internationally. The role of climate objectives in EU energy policy has evolved over time through a gradual transformation in institutions and governance. As outlined in the previous sub-chapter, during the early period of EU integration, energy debates were largely dominated by the security of supply and economic rationalisation. In this regard, Schoenefeld & Knodt (2021) highlight that the EU's initial coordinating actions in the 1980s and 1990s on renewable energy expansion "originated from the efforts to improve the sustainability and security of the European energy supply and from the ambition to better coordinate the various support schemes emerging in the Member States" (p. 52). Environmental considerations, although they existed, remained secondary to industrial and economic priorities. However**,** ever since climate change began to rise on the international political agenda in the early 1990s, through the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the EU has pursued international leadership in climate negotiations (Oberthür & Dupont, 2021, p. 1096).

Oberthür & Dupont (2021) map the gradual transformation of climate policy from an environmental concern over rising greenhouse gas emissions in industrialised countries into a central component of the EU's internal energy governance and external climate leadership ambitions.

The 1990s-2000s were marked by the integration of environmental and climate objectives under the Maastricht Treaty (1992) and the Kyoto Protocol (1998), introducing a sustainability dimension to previously functionalistic and technocratic energy policy and marking the first institutionalisation of these objectives within the EU energy policy. Consequently, the Emissions Trading System (ETS) was launched in 2005, marking the first major market mechanism to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

As mentioned above in section 2.1, the introduction of climate objectives shaped the so-called "energy trilemma", which framed European energy policy around the triad of security, sustainability, and competitiveness. This broader approach to energy governance was further advanced by the European Commission through directives on renewable energy (RED I), energy efficiency, and the internal market, particularly following the Lisbon Treaty's entry into force in December 2009 (Gutiérrez Roa, 2026, p. 5). The 2020 Renewable Energy

Directive, adopted in 2009 as part of the EU's 2020 Climate and Energy Package, set targets for EU countries to generate 20% of their final energy consumption from renewables by 2020 and to achieve at least 10% of final energy consumption from renewables in transport. Overall, the Climate and Energy Package was proposed to enable the implementation of '20-20-20' targets, which called for a 20% cut in greenhouse gas emissions (from 1990 levels), 20% of EU energy from renewables and a 20% improvement in energy efficiency (European Commission, n.d.-a)

Oberthür & Dupont (2021) emphasise the European Commission's aspiration to mobilise the internal implementation of climate commitments to gain international credibility and leadership in climate governance, which it successfully achieved in the early stages of the international climate agenda "by strongly developing its domestic climate policy from the 2000s" (p. 1108).

As international climate governance has become 'polycentric' (recognising that it requires integration into many other policy fields) and the international landscape of the mid-2000s has seen the rapid expansion of emerging economies (particularly China), climate politics has become increasingly multipolar and contested. The main shift with regard to the climate energy integration in EU and international policies was marked by the 2009 United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen (COP 15), when the focus shifted from emissions produced by industrialised countries to all major emitters, but with different responsibilities and capacities (Oberthür & Dupont, 2021, p. 1103).

At the EU level, the launch of the Energy Union in 2015 introduced a more integrated and systematic approach, formally merging climate and energy governance (Schoenefeld & Knodt, 2021, p. 56). And while the introduction of the Energy Union was largely driven by the supply concerns articulated by the 2006/2009 gas crises and the subsequent annexation of Crimea, its architecture placed climate change rhetoric at the centre, simultaneously addressing security of supply and decarbonisation.

The turn in the international climate policy balance was later embedded in the Paris Agreement (2015), in which climate governance shifted from a rigid top-down approach to nationally determined contributions (NDCs) applicable to all parties. As climate policy has become more mainstream and strategic, it has been increasingly reframed in EU policymaking through narratives of innovation, growth, industrial modernisation, and leadership. This reframing provided legitimacy for Commission intervention in a domain

previously considered domestic, through surveillance, reporting, coordination, and implementation control via governance regulations and National Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs). Roa (2026) highlighted that the NECPs were enabling stronger EU oversight and coordination, bridging EU objectives and national planning (p. 6). The Green Deal (2019) further consolidated the "green growth" mindset, aiming to decarbonise all economic sectors and being presented as a "sustainable economic growth strategy which aims at fostering the well-being of Europeans" (Eyl-Mazzega & Mathieu, n.d., p. 34). Renewable energy expansion was an important part of the Green Deal, contributing to the significant efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030 and limit global warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius, in line with the 2015 Paris Agreement (Schoenefeld & Knodt, 2021). Consequently, climate objectives began to be increasingly integrated across nearly all major EU policy domains, making climate policy a central integration project for the EU.

To operationalise the goals of the Green Deal, the European Commission introduced the Fit for 55 legislative package in July 2021. The reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, as an overarching aim, was planned to be achieved through the following key initiatives: reforms to scale up renewables, energy efficiency, carbon border measures, and a stronger EU Emissions Trading System. Fit for 55 framed the energy transition and energy efficiency in terms of the climate imperative and demonstrated the deep integration of climate goals into EU energy governance. In less than one year after the Fit for 55 introduction, the discourse surrounding the energy transition was increasingly reframed following the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the introduction of the REPowerEU Plan (see Section 2.1).

3. The Reframing of the Energy Transition

3.1 Characteristics of the Discursive Shift

After the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the discourse surrounding energy transition was increasingly reframed, becoming closely linked to the EU's resilience, sovereignty and sustainability. The crisis-driven REPowerEU Plan (see Section 2.1) institutionalised those changes, redefining the EU's energy framework around three key objectives: diversifying energy sources, accelerating the transition to renewables (raising the initial target of 40% share in the EU energy mix by 2030 to 45%) and reducing energy consumption (from 9% to 13%) (Gutiérrez Roa, 2026, p. 1).

The REPowerEU Plan can be broadly seen as a crisis-driven amendment to the earlier Fit for 55 Package. However, while Fit for 55 primarily framed the energy transition as a climate policy project, the RepowerEU justified the decarbonization objectives through energy security, resilience and strategic autonomy considerations, marking a clear shift from the "market efficiency-based logic" to one centred on EU sovereignty (Gutiérrez Roa, 2026, p. 2).

Spikes in energy prices, rising geopolitical tensions, and disruptions in energy supplies in summer 2022 were driving the changes in the very concept of 'energy security', reframing it from the liberal integration and interdependence logics to the logics of sovereignty, resilience, and strategic autonomy (Gutiérrez Roa, 2026, p. 6). Recognising energy as a common European good and its integrated governance as a precondition for economic stability and the future of democracy constituted the cornerstone of this new narrative. In this regard, the transition to 'green' energy sources was presented as a means to strengthen energy security. Additionally, Brown et al. (2023) argue that the energy crisis has significantly blurred the concepts of energy security and political security, widely framing the former as the precondition for the latter (p. 10). This change in rhetoric served both to justify increased government spending to accelerate the energy transition and to challenge opposition to renewable energy (Wiertz et al., 2023).

As opposed to the 'liberal dogma'– a market-driven energy policy, the 'open strategic autonomy' was adopted, reflecting a government-driven approach that still embraces key market principles, and yet prioritises supply security and resilience. This approach aimed to reduce dependence on 'unreliable' partnerships and strengthen the EU's sovereignty more quickly (Proedrou, 2023, p. 4). The gas supply vulnerability in light of the unfolding energy crisis stands out as perhaps the central, although not the only, driver for this shift and the corresponding discursive transformations.

A significant change in the EU energy transition discourse is characterised by an emphasis on the moral imperatives and the ethical dimensions of energy policy and decision-making. Siddi (2023) states that the discourse around EU-Russia energy cooperation has changed tremendously since 2022, shifting from viewing it as economically practical and mutually beneficial to seeing it as synonymous with support for Russian military aggression and Russia's authoritarian regime. This shift further highlights the vulnerability of fossil fuel-dependent systems and the urgent need for a sustainable energy transition. In this regard,

Wiertz et al. (2023) highlight the emergence of a new moral imperative to reduce fossil fuel consumption in German energy discourse in light of the war in Ukraine. Similarly, Brown et al. (2023) emphasise that investing in renewable energy and energy efficiency has become almost a patriotic act. Following the invasion in February 2022, people in Poland were reported to be installing solar panels and heat pumps to reduce their reliance on Russian-supplied energy, which became increasingly framed as enabling Russia to finance the war (p. 10). Domestic renewable energy resources started to be showcased as enhancing energy independence, minimising geopolitical power imbalances between countries, and reducing the likelihood that energy will be "weaponised".

However, in the academic literature on the energy transition, those discursive changes and their projected effects on climate goals were articulated with caution.

3.2 Dominant Competing Interpretations of the Shift in the Literature

The academic literature presents competing interpretations of this shift and its potential effects on climate and energy policy. Within this literature research, 4 dominant positions were identified and outlined in this chapter.

3.2.1 Strategic Autonomy as a Driver of Renewable Energy Deployment

This strand of literature expresses a positive outlook on the energy transition reframing (Goldthau & Youngs, 2023; Knodt et al., 2024; Proedrou, 2023; Raina & Tewari, 2024; Siddi, 2023).

The material impact of the energy crisis scaled the energy and climate issues to the "first-order issue of domestic politics and also a core pillar of EU security and geopolitical strategy" (Goldthau & Youngs, 2023, p. 121). From this standpoint, the geopolitical mindset, security and ethical narratives that have become so prevalent in the energy transition discourse are seen as additional drivers that mobilise political will, capital and policy tools to accelerate decarbonisation and strengthen energy efficiency targets. In this regard, Proedrou (2023) emphasises the growing ambition for decarbonisation and energy-efficiency commitments from the onset of the war across different EU countries. He particularly highlights Germany's growing commitment to accelerate energy efficiency retrofits, allocating 56,3 billion for associated expenditure during 2023-2026 (Proedrou, 2023, p. 8). This initiative reflects the EU's increased ambition to reduce energy consumption by 13% (compared with the 9% target in the previous climate package, Fit for 55, introduced

in 2021). As for the expansion of renewables, Proedrou (2023) outlines Germany's increased post-2022 commitment to raising its renewable energy target in the total power mix to 80% by 2030, reaching 100% by 2035 (up from the previously agreed 65%) (Proedrou, 2023, p. 8). The abovementioned commitments considerably exceed the overall renewable targets, originally embedded in the Fit for 55 package. Similar tendencies were observed in other countries, such as the Netherlands and Italy, which aim to increase their offshore wind capacity by 2030, and in France, which updated its solar targets post-2022 and accelerated solar deployment (Proedrou, 2023, p. 8). Such growing ambition regarding renewable energy projects is seen as an opportunity for the EU to strengthen its global climate action through "leading by example" policy logic (Siddi, 2023, p. 117).

This strand of literature does not see the objectives of energy security and environmental sustainability as mutually exclusive, even in light of adopting a "security first" policy (Michele Knodt et al., 2024, p. 134). Furthermore, they are viewed as complementary. Consequently, Knodt et al. (2024) argue that, as the current energy crisis was caused predominantly by overreliance on imported fossil fuels, accelerating the transition to renewable energy would help resolve it.

Additionally, the prevalence of strategic autonomy narratives in the energy policy discourse creates the conditions to scale up 'bio-hydrogen' and 'bio-methane' markets by 2030, further reducing dependence on fossil fuels in line with the Green Deal commitments (Proedrou, 2023), (Raina & Tewari, 2024).

Raina & Tewari (2024) anticipate that investments in R&D for renewable energy and 'green' technologies would foster a local innovation ecosystem, not only supporting economic growth and minimising reliance on foreign technologies and supply chains but also establishing the EU as a global leader in the energy transition, allowing the EU to exert greater influence on international environmental policies and standards (p.6). The authors state that the urge to invest in the renewable energy sector in response to the crisis has the potential to boost the economy, create new jobs, and advance regional development in addition to tackling environmental issues. The authors, however, underline the need for substantial capital outlay and government assistance to engage the private sector in renewable energy initiatives (Raina & Tewari, 2024, p. 6).

This positive outlook on changes remains contingent on projections of growth in the EU clean-tech ecosystem, consolidation among Member States, increased industrial capacity in

the clean-tech sector, strong state-driven market intervention, and the temporary nature of the critical aspects outlined in the next sub-chapter.

3.2.2 The Security Turn and Concerns over Climate Ambition

The following strand of literature shares a stronger critical outlook on the geopolitisation and securitisation of renewable energy, emphasising that it will further distort climate policy, bringing it even further away from the initial target and obligation of the Kyoto era for industrialised countries to stabilise CO2 emissions (Blondel & Kleijn, 2024; Brown et al., 2023; Costantini et al., 2022; Rederek, 2022; Siddi, 2023; Vezzoni, 2023; Wiertz et al., 2023).

On one hand, critique stems from the fact that the REPowerEU plan still envisions the EU as a "massive importer of fossil fuels" and largely focuses on identifying alternative countries that could serve as the basis for Europe's future fossil fuel supply (Costantini et al., 2022, p. 12; Proedrou, 2023). To compensate for the 63.5 billion cubic meters of gas, the EU aimed to increase alternative gas imports, primarily LNG gas from the US, as well as pipeline gas from Norway, Azerbaijan and Algeria, and to establish new energy partnerships with Qatar. While increasing gas imports from Norway was considered reliable and relatively efficient, other gas cooperation initiatives raised controversy over their economic feasibility and impact on EU climate policy goals. In this regard, the target of a 5% increase in the share of renewable energy in the EU's total energy mix by 2030, as outlined in the REPowerEU plan, does not alter the overall dynamics so drastically. Quite on the contrary, since the LNG imports have become essential in light of the crisis and securitisation narratives, despite being considered more carbon-intensive and containing more environmental risks in comparison to standard natural gas and even coal (with regard to long-term global climate change*). Additionally, the EU's immediate response included increased coal generation in the Czech Republic and the lifting of coal mining bans in Germany, Austria and the Netherlands.

Despite the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report identifying fossil fuel exploitation as the main driver of climate change, with economic growth recognised as the primary catalyst, Constantini et al. (2022) emphasise that the Russian invasion of Ukraine has, in fact, accelerated global fossil fuel extraction.

Aside from immediate effects, switching to coal and scaling up infrastructure for LNG imports carry the risk of carbon lock-in beyond the duration of the crisis. Despite being

presented as short-term crisis solutions, Brown et al. (2023) highlight that, according to a new analysis released on the eve of the COP27 UN climate conference in November 2022, the implementation of all the declared projects meant to combat the supply shortage would translate into a global oversupply of nearly 500 megatons of LNG by the end of the decade (Brown et al., 2023, p. 12). Siddi (2023) furthermore emphasises that by the end of 2022, the EU will become the world's largest LNG importer. Moreover, political acceptance of LNG and nuclear power as part of the EU Taxonomy in 2022 under "bridging technologies" is being heavily criticised for being highly inconsistent with climate commitments (Wiertz et al., 2023).

Additionally, post-2022 expansion of the energy partnerships with Algeria and Azerbaijan, while increasing LNG imports from Qatar and Egypt, is perceived as a threat to create new dependencies on authoritarian regimes (Siddi, 2023).

On the other hand, the EU's revised approach to critical materials, driven by supply-chain vulnerabilities exacerbated by geopolitical turmoil, is perceived controversially in the academic literature. The European Commission began addressing the EU's reliance on foreign imports of critical raw materials in 2008, aiming to secure access through global markets. After 2022, the strategy shifted towards greater domestic capacity and supply diversification. Scholars argue that even though the Critical Raw Material Act (CRMA) proposed by the European Commission in 2023 outlined clear targets with regard to domestic extraction (10%), processing (40%) and recycling (25%) by 2030, those appear to be poorly aligned with the EU's lack of local mining and processing complexes, the timeline required for such projects to become operational and public opinion (European Commission, 2023a). In this regard, the main concern is the misalignment between the EU's desire for strategic autonomy in rare earth value chains and its domestic environmental and social policies (Jewellord Nem Singh, quoted in Blondel & Kleijn, 2024). In percentage terms, the targets remain relatively low, especially in the extraction and recycling sectors. Consequently, the growing need for new critical materials to support the major expansion of renewable energy in line with the REPowerEU targets is projected to significantly increase mining activities outside Europe. This raises concerns about the growing tendency toward "renewables extractivism," which continues longstanding practices of foreign resource extraction by Western powers and reproduces the same extractivist dynamics as fossil capitalism (Goldthau & Youngs, 2023, p. 120). Particularly considering that the major global reserves

and processing facilities for those materials are located in third countries (Vezzoni, 2023, p. 8).

Consequently, outsourcing the major share of rare earth mining and processing raises ethical and social justice questions. Raw materials are highlighted as central to this transition, and their geography carries geopolitical implications. It is particularly important, given that the vast majority of lithium projects and more than half of nickel, copper, and zinc projects are located on indigenous peoples' territories. The mining of critical materials has been observed to have a particularly devastating impact on indigenous communities, being associated with displacement, human rights abuse, and poor labour conditions (IRENA, 2023, p. 73). There are countless examples of how past races for high-value resources have triggered local armed conflicts, particularly in countries with weak state authority or in regions with a history of conflict. Often, those countries have weaker regulations on extraction activities that interfere with local energy transition plans and climate concerns, particularly because “the largest reserves of metals and minerals required for renewable technologies are found in weak states with poor governance records” (International Renewable Energy Agency, 2019, p. p.59). And although the problem of the complex geographical routes of critical mineral value chains has been present in academic debate since the 2010s, it has expanded significantly, driven by securitisation and strategic autonomy tendencies as well as major renewable expansion.

The growing need for critical minerals and the outsourcing of the major share of rare-earth mining and processing to third countries have led to a rising trend in critical-mineral nationalism, which accelerated in 2022. At the same time, initiatives on domestic projects focused on lithium mining in Serbia, Portugal, France, Germany, Austria, Czechia and Finland, which could supply 130,000 tons by 2030, amounting to 55% of European demand, faced intense community opposition and concerns over “untested production processes” (Gregoir, Liesbet/van Acker, Karel, 2022, p. 65).

3.2.3 Fragmented EU Governance and Uneven States’ Transition Capacities

This strand of literature emphasises the capacity asymmetries in renewable energy deployment among the EU Member States, as well as the longstanding issue of mixed competence in energy policy in the context of a discursive shift towards energy sovereignty and security (Blondel & Kleijn, 2024; Gutiérrez Roa, 2026; Oberthür & Dupont, 2021; Rederek, 2022; Schoenefeld & Knodt, 2021). It is argued that the post-2022 trend of major

renewable energy expansion and the integration of strategic autonomy highlighted, on the one hand, discrepancies and varying levels of resilience across EU Member States, and, on the other hand, the growing importance of consolidation.

The issue of mixed competence stems from the Article 194 of the TFEU, which on one hand grants the EU competence on the energy market, security of supply, energy efficiency and renewable energy promotion, but on the other hand preserves a Member State's right to determine the general structure of its energy mix (European Union, Treaty on the functioning of the European union, cited in Gutiérrez Roa, 2026, p. 6). In this context, the key challenge is rooted in the tendency of EU Member States to prioritise "national interests over supranational coordination" (Gutiérrez Roa, 2026, p. 5). From this standpoint, the reframing of the energy transition in EU public communication after 2022 could also be seen as yet another attempt to consolidate the Member States around the emerging common goal of resilience and strategic autonomy, which is portrayed as the precondition for security beyond energy supply.

The mixed competence makes it more challenging to accomplish common goals under the REPowerEU plan, particularly those concerning strategic projects, such as establishing a regional supply chain for rare earth materials, which require a high degree of coherence among Member States (Jewellord Nem Singh, as cited in Blondel & Kleijn, 2024). The fragmented national approaches in this regard are threatening to undermine the internal market, the collective climate targets, and the EU's image of 'climate leadership'.

At the same time, the authors argue that the energy crisis had increasingly divergent outcomes for the Member States, based on their levels of dependence on Russian gas and their internal industrial and technological capacity. Roa (2026) highlights the emerging paradox between immediate security and long-term sustainability, using the example of countries such as Poland, which had to turn back to coal in light of the strategic autonomy agenda (p. 7). The scholar draws a comparison with other lower-exposure EU countries (Spain, France, the Netherlands) that, in contrast, were able to adopt more autonomous positions compatible with the EU's decarbonization goals. In practice, countries with stronger institutional and technological capabilities have advanced their decarbonisation goals more rapidly. While the others continue to face administrative, social, or infrastructural barriers that hinder the implementation of their national plans, or are even pushed toward a

renewed reliance on coal in line with the newly adopted sovereignty agenda (Gutiérrez Roa, 2026, p. 7).

Similarly, Rederek (2022) argues that, despite the overall economic knock-on effects of Russia's war on Ukraine, the intensity of impact will vary disproportionately across European countries, highlighting the increasing vulnerability of the Central and Eastern European (CEE) Member States. The author highlights the strong historical reliance of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovenia, and Latvia on Russian gas imports, claiming that the outcomes for those states from the EU phasing-out policy will disproportionally differ from those in Northern and Southern Member States.

While the European Commission was consequently underlining the importance of global climate action and respect for human and indigenous rights, concerns over the actual prioritisation of those goals have grown stronger in recent years. Roa (2026) emphasises recent contributions to scholarship on the just transition that view the changes through "an inclusive and territorially grounded ethical lens", stating that the absence of adequate compensation mechanisms and effective social uplift programs generates resistance to the energy transition, particularly in rural or peripheral areas (p. 8). According to Dupont (2016), Schoenefeld & Knodt (2020), Oberthür & Dupont (2021), Gutiérrez Roa (2026), the tension between European climate coordination and national energy sovereignty, arising from a strong divide in Member States' perceptions of renewable targets, is one of the central challenges in the evolution of EU energy policy.

3.2.4 Geopolitical Competition as a Structural Driver of Discursive Change

This body of literature emphasises the significance of long-term geopolitical and economic transformations that have been underway since the late 2000s for the reframing of energy transition within the EU energy discourse (Gutiérrez Roa, 2026; Hafner & Tagliapietra, 2020; Köncke & Schmalz, 2024; Oberthür & Dupont, 2021; Schneider & Syrovatka, 2024).

Köncke & Schmalz (2024) point out that the economic crises the world faced in 2008/2009 already laid the foundation for deglobalization and geo-economic fragmentation. As one of the central factors in this regard, the scholars highlight, on the one hand, the strategic internationalisation of Chinese industrial groups amid economic crises and, on the other hand, the large-scale support for the development of clean-tech domestic industry, which has raised concerns among Western countries (above all, the US) (Köncke & Schmalz, 2024, p. 130). As a consequence, the US increased its domestic industrial interventionist policies and

foreign-trade protectionism, as captured in the Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. That raised concerns about the destabilisation of free trade. At the same time, China's early efforts to strengthen control over rare earths and other strategic raw materials for green tech manufacturing have led to supply-chain dominance. That started to cause international concerns over the security of mineral supply, particularly after the events of 2008, when China "imposed a limit on the supply of rare earth to foreign buyers, leading to panic in the markets and a very rapid increase in prices" (Hafner & Tagliapietra, 2020, p. 18).

Those protectionist tendencies had a profound impact on climate policy, gradually turning it into the subject of competition for zero-net industrial and technological advancement. Climate policy began to be more deeply integrated into other policy fields (energy, transport, investments, finance, buildings) in the backdrop of increasing evidence of climate change and societal pressure. Consequently, climate policy became an issue at the "highest political level" of international politics, while simultaneously becoming more "susceptible to great power competition in a zero-sum logic" (Oberthür & Dupont, 2021, p. 1104). Different actions from the side of governments, such as massive subsidies for the domestic development of the clean tech industry sector in China and the US, regulatory instruments such as tariffs on foreign technologies in the strategically relevant sectors and supply restrictions, constitute important early signs of "geopolitisation" and "competition" of the climate agenda.

The Green Deal further consolidated those changes, linking climate policy to industry, innovation, and supply chains. Particularly during the COVID-19 recovery, the expansion of "green technologies" started to be increasingly framed as economic modernisation, industrial leadership, and the key to geopolitical influence.

In this regard, the Russian attack on Ukraine is viewed as the (indirect) military dimension of the confrontation between the Western and BRICS blocks, contributing to the accelerated decoupling between them and amplifying the dynamics that had developed in the face of previously mentioned crises (Schneider & Syrovatka, 2024, p. 13). As a prominent example of rising competition, the US introduced the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) amid the energy crisis of summer 2022, directing nearly $400 billion in federal funding for clean energy projects, which constitutes the largest climate-industry package in US history (Brown et al., 2023, p. 11). Under the IRA, the US grants extensive subsidies to national industrial companies, particularly in the green tech sector, thereby contributing to the transformation

of green energy framing as an integral part of the industrial race. The introduction of the Inflation Reduction Act raised concerns in the EU over 'hoovering' "green" investments from Europe to the US (Reuters 2023, as cited in Siddi, 2023, p. 113). At the same time, China increased its purchases of Russian fossil fuels while simultaneously accelerating its renewable energy expansion, including low-carbon technologies in the mandate to "develop and expand strategic emerging industries" as per the 14th Five-Year Plan issued in June 2022 (Siddi, 2023, p. 104) (Mehling, 2025, p. 14). Viewed through the lens of intensifying global competition, the reframing of the energy transition discourse is perceived not only as a reflection of concerns over supply security in the context of war, but also as an attempt to enhance the EU's industrial competitiveness vis-à-vis China and the US (Gutiérrez Roa, 2026, p. 6).

While acknowledging that competing with the US and China for zero-net industry dominance, diversifying, and securing critical raw materials and clean-tech value chains require interventions beyond market logic, scholars emphasise that this shift carries trade and dependency risks. Those risks, on the one hand, stem from the shift from a "pipeline logic" signifying control over territorial resources and physical infrastructure to "supply chain logic" emphasising access to advanced manufacturing and digital infrastructure, strong industrial capacity, and technological expertise (Gutiérrez Roa, 2026, p. 8). Increased global competition and protectionist policies are making those globally distributed supply chains less reliable. On the other hand, the high concentration of key production and processing capacity in a small number of countries, particularly China, makes the EU vulnerable to disruptions. The faster deployment of renewables in the EU, driven by the narratives of energy security and strategic autonomy, makes this vulnerability more pronounced. In this regard, while an accelerated transition to renewables helps address current critical issues by reducing conflicts over oil and gas, it could lead to new forms of dependence and vulnerability, giving rise to new hierarchies and dominant actors unless an international rule-based framework is established. However, this 'harmonisation' becomes difficult to achieve in the current geopolitical situation, characterised by progressive deglobalisation and protectionism.

Additionally, scholars argue that the current trend of rising geopolitical tensions and confrontations between global power blocs (NATO-BRICS) can limit the exchange of technology and expertise among countries, thereby hindering the innovation and widespread adoption of critical technologies and, in turn, undermining global efforts towards the energy

transition and climate action (Brown et al., 2023; Costantini et al., 2022, p. 13). Furthermore, the rising global demand for critical metals and minerals has a big potential to cause increased competition for the resources, starting a new wave of geopolitical tensions and conflicts in areas such as the Arctic, outer space, and the deep sea, as countries rush to secure access to these resources (IRENA, 2023, p. 21).

3.2.5 Summary

In summary, the reviewed literature in this chapter reflects 4 strong positions in the broader discussion on reframing the energy transition after 2022.

The first strand of literature argues that the war and the consequent energy crisis strengthened climate policy and consolidated the European Commission and the Member States in their decision to drastically accelerate the deployment of renewables, scale up energy efficiency targets, and decouple from Russian gas imports. In this regard, the energy crisis of summer 2022 is perceived as the main driver for this shift. This group views strategic autonomy as an accelerator of the energy transition towards renewable energy sources.

The second strand of literature expresses a more critical view of these changes, perceiving the geopolitisation and securitisation of energy transition as a distortion of climate policy. From this standpoint, the aforementioned shift in transition discourse further diverts climate policy from the Kyoto Protocol and the Paris Agreements, risking carbon lock-ins and new dependencies. The most contested issues in this regard are, on the one hand, the rapid reorientation towards LNG and, on the other hand, the reactivation of coal mining in some Member States, driven by attempts to ensure supply sovereignty and security. One analysis suggests that declared projects could create a global LNG oversupply of up to 500 Mt by decade's end. The outcome directly contradicts the climate goals. Some authors also raise ethical concerns in this regard, claiming that new supplier contracts with Qatar, Algeria, and Azerbaijan not only increase emissions but also create potential ties to authoritarian regimes. Additionally, it is emphasised that the "green growth" logic risks reproducing extractive dynamics, shifting dependency from fossil fuels to critical minerals amid the major expansion of renewables. Strong EU reliance on outsourcing critical minerals extraction and refining raises questions about the quality of the change with regard to cumulative ecological pressure and human rights in the countries that source the critical raw materials.

The third strand of literature highlights the implementation capacity gap between the EU Member States. As core arguments, the authors highlight the uneven exposure and resilience

of the Member States to the energy crisis of 2022, emphasising the heavy reliance of CEE countries on Russian gas compared with other EU countries (as opposed to Southern Europe and some Western European Member States). Despite the European Commission's shared ambition for decarbonization, it is emphasised that the countries had very unequal starting points in terms of infrastructure readiness, electricity market structures, and energy mixes. Additionally, it was highlighted that the issue of mixed competences stemming from Article 194 of the TFEU can lead to fragmentation that undermines security and climate objectives.

The fourth strand of literature perceives the discursive and policy changes of 2022 as a continuation of a longstanding trend towards competition between Western Powers and China (and later BRICS). As the international climate policy balance shifted in the aftermath of COP15 in Copenhagen, the environmental agenda became increasingly intertwined with other policy fields and gradually became a subject of great-power competition for dominance in the renewable systems value chains. From this standpoint, further geopolitisation and securitisation of the renewable energy transition are perceived as intensifying this competition for resources and technical advantage.

As the literature review indicates, existing studies primarily focus on the potential implications of the post-2022 shift. However, less attention has been paid to how this shift has been discursively constructed and communicated by EU institutions. This thesis addresses this gap through a framing analysis of the official European Commission's communication.

4. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in framing theory and employs frame analysis to understand how the renewable energy transition is constructed and presented in EU public discourse.

4.1 Frame Analysis in Social Studies

Frame analysis is anchored in the social constructivist paradigm, which holds that social reality is socially constructed and that frames serve as interpretive schemas guiding our understanding of events. And therefore, frame analysis focuses on how actors construct problem definitions, causal interpretations, and appropriate responses.

Goffman is widely regarded as the first scholar to conceptualise frames as an organised principle of interpretation, laying the foundation for framing theory and subsequent

approaches. Despite originating in sociology, framing analysis, as a "fluid" concept, has gained popularity across diverse research fields, including communication science, linguistics, psychology, media studies, and political science.

Goffman's definition of frames as the organising principles that structure how political actors define and interpret energy transition challenges, rather than as isolated themes or policy areas, formed the basis for Robert Entman's work, which applied this sociological construct to the analysis of mass media and politics.

Robert Entman (1993) highlighted the relevance of "framing" for media and policy discourse while underlining its selective and salient nature, which manifests itself in highlighting certain aspects of a perceived reality and enhancing them in (media and policy) texts to promote a "particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation" (p.52). According to Entman (1993), the frames are "manifesting in the text through the absence or presence of certain keywords, stock phrases, stereotyped images, sources of information, and sentences that provide thematically reinforcing clusters of facts or judgements" (Entman, 1993, p. 52). Frames not only define the "problem" grounding them in existing cultural values, but they also further diagnose the cause that created this problem, offer moral judgement and propose solutions, all through the conscious selection and salience of certain aspects of the perceived reality while omitting the others. All of it is done to enable the "receiver" to perceive the information in a certain way. It is particularly true in political official communication. The relevance of Entman's work for this thesis lies in the proposed operationalisation of frames through the four central functions:

1) Problem definition
2) Causal interpretation
3) Moral evaluation
4) And/or treatment recommendation (Entman, 1993, p. 52).

Within sociology, Robert D. Benford and David A. Snow (2025) followed up with their study of framing processes in social movements, expanding Goffman's ideas to what's called "collective action frames", emphasising the frame's active-oriented nature that is called not only to interpret aspects of the "world out there" chosen by the communicator, but also to "mobilise potential adherents and constituents, to garner bystander support, and to demobilise antagonists" (p. 614). Legitimisation and inspiration are emphasised as the key

functions of “collective action frames”. The “core framing tasks” diverge: “diagnostic framing” identifies the problem, “prognostic framing” proposes the solution, and “motivational framing” fosters action (Benford & Snow, 2025, pp. 615–618).

Additionally, Benford & Snow (2025) devoted considerable attention to the strategic processes associated with social movement framing, so-called “frame alignment processes”: “frame bridging”, “frame amplification”, “frame extension”, and “frame transformation” (p. 624). Bridging is hereby defined as the linking of two or more frames regarding a particular subject. Amplification involves idealisation and embellishment of certain narratives. Extension is regarded as portraying the social organisation's scope of interests as extending beyond its core interests and aims, and as seeking to resonate more with potential supporters. Transformation refers to changing meanings/creating new ones around the issues/problems.

Although Snow and Benford (2025) developed their approach to framing in the context of social movements, their conceptualisation of the core framing tasks provides a useful analytical background for understanding how policy problems, solutions, and their legitimations are structured in texts. Furthermore, their notion of frame alignment processes provides a conceptual tool for analysing how dominant imperative patterns change over time.

Additionally, Jörg Matthes (2014) highlighted the significance of framing in political communication, emphasising its ability to illuminate and describe almost all aspects of the field. Similar to Entman (1993), Matthes emphasises the ability of frames to highlight certain information while ignoring the other. It is therefore assumed that for almost every topic, several frames engage in strategic competition. Moreover, Matthes provides a clear distinction between frames and frame elements, emphasising that frames are constructed from the specific patterns among frame elements. Thus, according to the scholar, the frame is not defined through one particular element, but rather through the combination of frame functions.

Matthes (2014) also emphasises that, because framing analysis is widely used across disciplines (sociology, media studies, political communication research, etc.), there is a lack of conceptual agreement on what constitutes a frame and framing (p. 18). Thus, the framing approach is rather a flexible theoretical tool ideally suited to describing phenomena in the political communication process, particularly the selection and salience of communication content and their effects (Matthes, 2014, p. 26).

While the current chapter touched on the emergence and conceptualisation of framing theory, the following subchapter focuses on the particular relevance of framing to EU energy policy analysis.

4.2 Framing in EU Energy Policy

The relevance of framing for policy analyses lies in understanding institutions as dynamic constructs rather than fixed structures, shaped by ideas at different levels that define the problem and the goals to be pursued (Schmidt, 2008). Schmidt, V.A. (2008) features how ideas and discourses become institutionalised within policy processes, introducing discursive institutionalism, which places ideas and discourse at the centre of policy-making and institutional change. Institutional change, therefore, is not only seen as the result of external shocks or structural pressures but also as actors' ability to reinterpret existing conditions and persuade others of new policy directions.

Knodt, M. (2018) argues that the common energy policy, despite always being a critical issue for the EU, became an institutionalised policy area only after the signing of the Lisbon Treaty and its Energy Article (2008). Discourse on common energy policy was shaped by security, sustainability, and competitiveness frames, each dominating at different integrating periods and guiding European actions in different directions.

Similarly to Knodt, Jegen, M. (2014) argues that the need for a common EU energy policy has historically been structured around the coexisting competing policy frames:

1) The competitive energy frame emerged in the late 1980s and aimed to support the liberalisation of electricity and gas markets, thereby driving the transition towards new, consolidated coordination institutions across domestic energy policies (Jegen, 2014, p. 9). It is argued that the competitive component was the major force driving the institutionalisation of EU energy policy.

2) The sustainable energy frame became a second important driver of the energy policy consolidation and was originally grounded in the competences of the "green" Member States – Germany, Denmark, Sweden and the UK and their extensive contribution to the ratification of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol (Jegen, 2014, p. 10). The sustainability component was further institutionalised through the EU Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS), which covers CO2 emissions from diverse industrial activities and involves 27 Member States, Iceland, Liechtenstein, and Norway.

3) The secure energy frame focused on the external dimension of energy security and was operationalised through various sub-regional and bilateral political dialogues and international partnerships to "enhance the EU's external energy security" (Jegen, 2014, p. 12).

Those frames shaped policy priorities and institutional developments; however, the lack of synergy between the initiatives, coupled with the significant differences in countries' energy mixes and political alliances pre-2022, resulted in rather fragmented policies and hybrid instruments rather than coherent ones.

Those earlier contributions to the framing of EU energy policy are useful for understanding the specific challenges embedded in the EU integration history of common energy policies and their discursive structure, making them beneficial to the current research. In this thesis, the frames are understood as the organising principles that structure how political actors define and interpret energy transition goals and challenges. The reconstruction of frames is grounded in Matthes's understanding of frames as recurring patterns across different frame elements and in Entman's (1993) specification of the four key frame functions. The following chapter outlines how this conceptual framework is operationalised in the thesis's empirical analysis.

5. Methodology

Frame analysis was selected as the methodological basis for this study, a widely used approach in political communication, media studies, and policy analysis. Identifying and comparing dominant frames over time reveals shifts in political rhetoric, priorities and justifications. In this regard, the European Commission's press corner website (European Commission, n.d.-b) was identified as an official, centralised source of the EU's strategic policy communication, representing institutional discourse and enabling the identification of frame elements and dominant narratives, in line with the aim of this study. The following chapter presents the considerations behind the corpus definition and analysis, coding approach, and existing limitations.

5.1 Research Design and Case Selection

This study aims to assess and compare the structure of dominant frames in the EU's public discourse on the energy transition and how they have been constructed over time. The period

from December 2019 to March 2025 has been identified as analytically relevant. The analytical relevance of this period is determined by the Green Deal's signature in December 2019, which was identified as a discursive baseline for the EU's commitment to pursue systemic transformation grounded in a defined strategy. For consistency and clarity of institutional framing, the corpus was limited to press releases, institutional statements and public speeches, as these documents reflect the formalised, strategically articulated position of the European Commission, unlike daily news and Q&A. This approach allowed for a dataset to reflect both the official policy narrative and the communication tone. "Energy transition" was used as a topic filter, yielding 2,241 materials published on the EU Commission's Press Corner website (European Commission, n.d.-b) between 2019 and 2025. Given the dataset's size and scope, a random sampling strategy was used to adjust the sample size to align with the aforementioned targets. From the issue-focused dataset, 10% was sampled to create a representative, manageable corpus for analysis in an MA Thesis setting, yielding 224 texts. The stratified random sampling approach was chosen to ensure good representation and minimise research bias.

Based on prior literature research, which identified the Russian invasion of Ukraine as a contextual rupture and a major driver of the shift in EU energy policies, the corpus was divided into 2 timelines: Period 1 (December 2019 - February 2022) and Period 2 (February 2022 – March 2025). By comparing the dominant frames of these two time periods, the study aims to trace how the discourse around the energy transition is built, sustained, and transformed over time. Qualitative framing analysis with a comparative design was applied in this study, as it allows for a more detailed reconstruction of interpretive patterns in public political communication and their changes across two periods.

5.2 Operationalisation of Framing

This study builds on Entman's conceptualisation of frames, applying his four-element approach as an analytical framework that reflects core frame functions: problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation (Entman, 1993, p. 52).

As highlighted in the literature on framing theory, these abstract functions require context-sensitive operationalisation into empirically observable dimensions (Matthes, 2014). In this regard, Entman's frame functions are translated into policy-discourse categories and are hereby to be regarded as:

1) Problem definition identifies the policy challenges central to the energy transition and answers the question: Which problem does the energy transition intend to solve, and how was it conceptualised?
2) Causal interpretation offers a perspective on what caused the problem.
3) Moral evaluation reflects underlying values and legitimises the European Commission's actions, constructing a certain identity through the discourse. Why is the problem urgent/important? How is it morally judged?
4) Treatment recommendations identify what has been systemically proposed as the solution, manifesting in specific policy proposals and implementations to address the defined problem.

Additionally, the concept of frame alignment processes, introduced by Snow and Benford (2025), is applied in the discussion chapter of this thesis as a further analytical step to describe relationships among frames and analyse how dominant imperative patterns change over time.

5.3 Coding and Frame Reconstruction

The coding framework is structured around the abovementioned policy-discourse categories. During the coding step, the identified text segments are assigned to the frame elements in line with Entmann's four-element approach to identify recurring patterns in the framing of policy issues across each timeline. Hereby, flexible coding units represented by phrases, sentences, or short passages where the frame was expressed are regarded as units of analysis.

Coding was conducted in several stages:

1) First reading, inductive identification of the flexible coding units in the texts for Period 1 and Period 2

2) Refining the coding units into the broader categories and mapping them onto framing elements (based on Entman's four-element approach)

3) Identifying patterns across texts and reconstructing the dominant frames for Period 1 and Period 2

4) Validating the obtained results by revisiting the codes and adjusting the categories.

To support the coding process, the software tool MAXQDA for qualitative and mixed-methods data analysis was used, helping to organise the material and visualise coding

categories. Dominant recurring patterns were identified within each period of the study, and interpretive reconstruction followed inductively to reconstruct dominant frames in line with the understanding that these organising principles structure how political actors define and interpret energy transition goals and challenges. The reconstructed frames were further analysed within and across the defined time periods to identify shifts in framing and the reasons behind them. While the study remains qualitative, indicative code frequency counts were generated in MAXQDA to reflect the research findings and illustrate the relative prominence of the identified dominant categories across the two periods.

5.4 Limitations

The limitations of this study stem, first of all, from the main points of critique applicable to research with an interpretive qualitative frame analysis. Since the frames are always analytically reconstructed by the researcher, "patterns of meaning" rather than just physically identified textual units, their identification and categorisation involve interpretive decisions, and thus making it subjective to the interpretation. To mitigate these limitations, the study is grounded in the established theoretical framework.

Secondly, by limiting the scope of the corpus to the European Commission's official press communications, the analysis is expected to capture institutional self-legitimising or interest-driven framing patterns, but not the full complexity of the energy transition discourse. However, the researcher is aware of the strategic nature of those texts, and the interpretative decisions are grounded in the previously conducted literature research on energy transition, which outlined major existing confrontations, conflicts of interest and existing challenges in this process, allowing for distinguishing the acts of "salience" and "selectivity" in political communication.

Thirdly, the scope of texts available at the European Commission's press corner for the analysed period was sampled at 10%, creating a reduced corpus that limits analysis to some extent and leaves some nuances and framing patterns undetected. However, the random sampling strategy used in this study, unlike the purposive one, prevents selection bias while ensuring the corpus's transparency and replicability.

6. Empirical Analysis

This chapter presents the study's findings, highlighting the dominant frame patterns for each period in accordance with the previously established coding tree, based on Entman's (1993) four-element approach, which further allows for the reconstruction of existing frames. The findings are presented in chronological order and interpreted within existing theoretical frameworks and debates surrounding the energy transition.

6.1 Period 1

6.1.1 Functional Patterns

December 2019 was signified as a turning point in the EU energy policy. The European Commission presented the European Green Deal, articulating the EU's strategic vision regarding the role of energy in an economic transformation towards the circular economy. Decarbonization began to be viewed as a systemic process of transforming markets and industries, aiming to reach climate neutrality by 2050. And although decarbonization was among the central political topics long before the introduction of the European Green Deal, embedded in several frameworks (The 2030 Climate and Energy Framework, The Paris Agreement, Clean Energy for all Europeans package), it became truly dominant in political discourse after 2019. Never before were climate objectives introduced as a primary driver of change across all levels of production and consumption within the consolidated policy paradigm.

Reshaping the EU's energy systems was at the core of the EU Green Deal, based on the assumption that 75% of greenhouse gas emissions are attributed to energy production and use (European Commission, 2022d). The respective policies, therefore, aimed to ensure that most of the EU's energy would come from renewable sources by 2050.

6.1.1.1 Problem Definition

Across the analysed corpus for Period 1, the energy transition is predominantly constructed as a response to the global climate crisis. Within the problem definitions, climate change stood out as a central challenge, being framed as "the challenge of our century", "the number one issue of concern", "problem of a planetary dimension" and therefore was showcased as a primary reason for the EU's energy decarbonization strategy implementation (European Commission, 2020d), (European Commission, 2020b).

The call for immediate structural change was created by emphasising the temporal continuity of global exponential temperature increases (since the 1980s) and demonstrating the deterioration of the situation throughout this time: “our planet continues to get dangerously hotter” (European Commission, 2020k). The European Commission, in its public communication, resorted to the reputable global agenda-setting organisations, such as the World Economic Forum, that placed the climate emergency as the primary issue of concern in its annual risk report (European Commission, 2020b) and the World Meteorological Organisation, confirming 2019 as the second warmest year on the record (European Commission, 2020b) to strengthen its standing and scientific grounding on the topic of climate change. Consequently, the year 2019 was emphasised to be a year of the record number of extreme weather events that framed the momentum for urgent change: “As so many have said - most recently at last week's World Economic Forum in Davos – the world has to act urgently, before it really is too late” (European Commission, 2020b). The objective of climate neutrality was therefore defined in the European Commission’s communication as the central strategy to slow down climate change and prevent future environmental catastrophes. The inevitability of this step was conveyed by various kinds of textual reinforcement: “If we do not limit the increase in temperature to 1.5°C, we are no longer masters of our own destiny. Things will get out of control”; “climate change undoubtedly represents an existential threat to humanity” (European Commission, 2020a); (European Commission, 2020d).

In terms of the scope of effect, the global temperature rise in the EU Commission’s policy communication was attributed as a main cause of a range of extreme weather events in recent years, from cyclones in the Indian Ocean, fires in the Amazon and Australia, to floods in the United States, glacier collapse on the Mont Blanc, droughts in Europe, and locust infestations in the east of Africa. Due to the broad range of effects that climate change was articulated to have on humanity, biodiversity, human health, and the potential viability of regions, it was framed as an existential challenge that would touch the social foundations of society (European Commission, 2020b).

The issue of climate change was strongly emphasised as a global problem, not only due to its nature and geography of the environmental effects, but also due to its capacity to bring longstanding socio-political effects, such as global displacement that would consequently translate into fluctuations of asylum applications: “280 million people could be displaced by rising seas” (European Commission, 2020c). It was therefore strongly emphasised that the

issue of climate change is of a "planetary" dimension, irrespective of the level of the direct impact. In this regard, the fossil fuels complex has been portrayed predominantly in terms of its environmentally damaging effects.

At the same time, the COVID-19 pandemic had a major impact on the world economy. The EU found itself amidst a major economic crisis that was called "unprecedented" due to the scope of the effects it had worldwide (European Commission, 2020k, p. p.4). Although the COVID-19 pandemic caused a significant drop in energy demand due to reduced economic activities and generally lowered energy prices, it also had a profound negative effect on the EU's economy, disrupting the global market, affecting the supply chains, reducing the revenues of the energy companies significantly, and further straining already existing geopolitical tensions. Under these conditions, economic recovery became a dominant priority along with combating climate change: "While we fight the health and economic crises that have taken over our daily lives, we cannot forget that the climate crisis already has one foot in the door" (European Commission, 2020j, p. p.3).

At the same time, the topic of the strategic dependency started to take shape in the European Commission's public discourse. Supply-chain disruptions, further strained geopolitical relationships between China and the US, as well as global technological competition, revealed the heavy dependencies on external suppliers for critical materials in energy technologies, semiconductors, that also reflected in the energy transition discourse: "…dependence on a small number of external suppliers represents an unacceptable risk to many industrial sectors, including strategic ones like defence and low carbon technologies. And it is a risk, which will only grow as the rollout of such technologies ramps up" (European Commission, 2020d). Although the narrative of strategic dependency, while present, did not dominate the energy transition discourse, it became exponentially more prominent on the eve of the war in Ukraine.

6.1.1.2 Causal Interpretation

In the analysed corpus, causal attributions are largely embedded within the problem definitions themselves and appear less explicitly named. From the standpoint of climate change, the set target of "decoupling economic growth from resource use and environmental degradation" implies that the current structure of the economy involves a structural coupling of growth and material use, which has been exponentially causing environmental harm (European Commission, 2020m). The "reduction of greenhouse gas emissions by at least

55%" as an overarching goal implies that the current environmental footprint of our activities is not sustainable. The issues of global climate change are presented as the consequence of the "centuries of largely unchecked industrial human development" (European Commission, 2020d, p. p.2). The European Commission stresses that the dominance of fossil fuels in the EU energy mix, particularly their use in power and heat production, transport, and industry, has led to "Mother Nature's violent backlash" (European Commission, 2020d). Consequently, buildings accounted for 40% of the EU's total emissions. Thus, a fossil-fuel-based economy is being identified and communicated as the primary driver of climate change and environmental degradation across the discourse: "While we were developing an economy entirely based on fossil fuels in the past 50 years, oceans have captured much of the excess heat and CO2 that was created" (European Commission, 2020c, p. 1). In this regard, fossil fuel subsidies in the energy production, transport, and industrial sectors are presented as the reason for the prolonged harmful effects, as they delay the renewable energy transition, distort markets, and sustain fossil-dependent practices.

Additionally, the absence of the global alliance in matters related to climate action was attributed to hindering the global energy transition: "If too many of our partners around the world fail to share our lofty goals, leading to the risk of 'carbon leakage' – where industrial production is transferred to third countries with cheaper and less stringent emissions constraints. This would undermine both the Paris Agreement and necessary global emission reductions" (European Commission, 2020d, p. 2).

Finally, the economic instability caused by the COVID-19 outbreak, further deepened by rising geopolitical tensions on the eve of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, was interpreted through the prism of resilience to geopolitical change. From the perspective of geopolitical instability, this period was framed in the EU Commission's energy discourse as "a geopolitical landscape which is increasingly dominated by great powers competition" and "the most radical geopolitical shifts in decades" (European Commission, 2020d, p. 1), (European Commission, 2020e, p. 1). In this regard, the question "'Do we rebuild what we had before? Or do we seize the opportunity to restructure and create different and new jobs that can serve us for decades to come?" was introduced to the political discussion. The importance of securing public support amidst health and economic crises becomes central to the energy transition's political viability.

6.1.1.3 Moral Evaluation

The energy transition towards renewable energy sources in the European Commission's public discourse is being legitimised through several normative principles, the central one being generational responsibility. Throughout the pre-2022 corpus, this argument appears frequently, framing the energy transition as a key to "a healthy and secure life" for future generations. The argument is therefore presented as such that has no alternatives: "We have no choice: we must succeed. This is something we owe to our citizens and to the next generations" (European Commission, 2020a). In contrast to this rationale, the future without systemic energy transition is presented as apocalyptic: "If we don't limit the increase in temperature to 1.5 °C, effects for humanity will be disastrous" (European Commission, 2020a). Energy transition is showcased not just as a shift in the energy sector but as a means to secure "a future for humanity, creating a balance between our natural environment and ourselves" (European Commission, 2020l, p. 1). Such constructions as "for the future", "for the sake of future generations", and "our citizens expect" dominate the discourse. The scope of moral responsibility is being extended beyond European citizens, reflecting the global nature of climate change's impact. The argument of moral responsibility for "others" reinforces the EU's self-reflection as a normative power, serving to justify the EU's aspiration to widen international cooperation on energy transition and financing the projects overseas: "The problems of climate change and biodiversity loss are of a planetary dimension, so we cannot just care about our own territory. That's why the EU is taking action not only at home but internationally as well" (European Commission, 2020c). The European Commission expresses moral obligation for the "less-developed regions", and the effects climate change would have on those parts of the world with a resource-dependent economy (European Commission, 2020d, p. p.1). From this standpoint, energy transition is being presented as an ethical and strategic responsibility, the way to increase climate resistance of particularly "the most vulnerable" partners and with that prevent the environmental fragility of those regions becoming a source of "conflict, food insecurity, population displacement and forced migration" (European Commission, 2020d, p. 3). The category of moral evaluation becomes central in framing the energy transition as a "just transition", emphasising "justice" and "solidarity" as key pillars of this transition for the benefit of all.

On the other hand, the transition to renewable energy sources is being legitimised through the prism of leadership aspirations and economic growth. As the COVID-19 crisis period was characterised as "increasingly dominated by great powers competition" and coincided

with “the most radical geopolitical shift in decades”, the economic logic behind the energy transition began to gain momentum. In the political communication, it was reflected as the “moment for Europe to lead the way from fragility towards a new vitality” (European Commission, 2020k). The EU’s aspiration “to lead by example” extends beyond minimising climate impacts on future generations. On one hand, developing green industries is presented as a way to boost the EU economy and competition, create and expand new industries and workplaces, but on the other hand, as an emerging opportunity in a changing geopolitical landscape to “obtain a stronger role at the global table” as a leader in climate neutrality (European Commission, 2020d). In this dynamic environment, the situation is once again presented as one that admits no delay: “If we do not shape the fourth industrial revolution that is happening right now with incredible speed, others will shape it for us, and I believe that some will be winners but many will lose out” (European Commission, 2020a, p. 3). In this context, the European Commission is actively expressing its aspiration to become a “leader in climate neutrality,” as pioneering systemic change in energy systems is increasingly seen as an opportunity for economic growth and an important precondition for the EU’s “prosperity” (European Commission, 2020j). Consequently, the Green Deal is being presented as “Europe’s growth strategy” because, from an economic perspective, it would create green jobs, increase competitiveness, and boost innovation (European Commission, 2020d). And from the normative one, the EU would be able to persist as a global “normative power”, advocating for a sustainable future and leading the international climate governance. Strategic investment in expanding renewable energy sources (photovoltaic, hydrogen), in cooperation with the European Investment Bank, could make energy cheaper in the long term. Furthermore, strategically, it would grant the EU autonomy from its longstanding energy interdependencies and an opportunity to “export” its model to “like-minded” countries, strengthening the EU’s place in the world.

6.1.1.4 Treatment Recommendation

In the framing analysis, treatment recommendations serve a prescriptive function: as the culmination of the policy narrative, they assign actions to address the problem. Treatment recommendations in this section reflect the ways defined by the European Commission to address the identified policy challenges through certain political reforms and instruments. In the context of the European Commission’s communication on energy transition for the analysed period, policy solutions ranged from structural reforms and industrial and market regulations to financial instruments and technical solutions.

The European Green Deal was presented as the overarching framework, being framed as the "blueprint" of energy transformation, "roadmap to climate neutrality", articulating the commitment for Europe to become a "first climate-neutral continent by 2050" while modernising the economy and industry (European Commission, 2020d), (European Commission, 2020i). The EU energy transition discourse of the analysed period increasingly suggested that the "fossil fuel economy" is no longer viable as a long-term foundation for climate governance and sustainable growth. As articulated in one of the statements of the European Commission's president, Ursula von der Leyen: "…our current fossil fuel economy has reached its limits. And we know that we have to move on to a new model – one that is powered by innovation, that has clean energy, that is moving towards a circular economy" (European Commission, 2021d, p. 1). From this strategic basis, the European Commission formulated a set of interrelated solutions that were reflected in the analysed corpus.

At the legislative level, the climate objectives were institutionalised in the Climate Law, adopted in 2021, making the targets of achieving climate neutrality by 2050 and reducing greenhouse gas emissions from 40% to 50% (as an intermediate target) and, later, to 55% by 2030 legally binding. Meeting this strategic milestone was framed as a solution to the strategic dependency while addressing environmental concerns. To reach the abovementioned climate targets, the EU Commission was employing a set of strategies.

One of the key strategies in support of climate targets was promoting the expansion of renewable energy sources (offshore wind and solar) to further electrify transport and heating, as well as employing green hydrogen produced via electrolysis powered by renewable energy in hard-to-decarbonise sectors. Scaling up markets for renewable energy was framed as both environmentally necessary and economically beneficial, under the assumption that "reliable, affordable and secure energy can only come from a decarbonised energy mix based largely on renewables" (European Commission, 2022b). Hereby, the role of renewable energy technologies was framed as fundamental in achieving climate targets, economic growth, security and resilience. Furthermore, it was described as the only "reliable, affordable and secure" option (European Commission, 2022b). At that time, renewables were constituting 32% of the energy mix. Under the new legislative package, Fit for 55, proposed in July 2021, the EU Commission started negotiations to make a 40% renewable share in the energy mix legally binding.

Additionally, savings and efficiency were highlighted as a key route for the EU to target multiple problems simultaneously: reducing energy consumption while minimising emissions. It was the most prominent in the public buildings sector, translating into the large-scale renovation program under the Renovation Wave Strategy that was framed as both an environmental necessity and a moral obligation, enabling "green" and "just" transition by, in the long run, bringing reduction of the energy bills and energy poverty (European Commission, 2021c). The other important pillar of the saving and efficiency strategy translated into an appeal to increase the recycling of critical materials for renewable technologies, such as lithium, cobalt, copper, and lead, needed for battery, fuel cell, and robotics production (European Commission, 2020d). This initiative was framed as a means to reduce strategic dependencies in the critical materials sector, as only 1% of those materials came from the EU between 2019 and 2022.

At the same time, regulatory and financial mechanisms employed to support these transformations included the introduction of binding targets, easing of permits, and guidance of public and private financial flows accordingly, as the need for solid extrabudgetary funding was framed as one of the central challenges of the energy transition. The European Commission, therefore, proposed the European Green Deal Investment Plan to mobilise public and private funds for climate- and environment-related projects (European Commission, 2020b, p. 2). While the post-COVID period was generally characterised by declines in investment in renewable energy and sustainable infrastructure, the course towards renewables became strongly embedded in economic recovery narratives to address this issue. The European Commission's course to increase the share of renewables in its energy mix was incorporated into post-COVID recovery strategies, framed around resilience, climate necessity, and economic growth, addressing the broader goal of "emerging stronger from the COVID-19 pandemic". The European Commission initiated revisions to the Energy Taxation Directive and the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), aiming to remove implicit subsidies to fossil fuels and establish a classification system for green economic activities to prevent "carbon leakage" to third countries with weaker regulatory systems (European Commission, 2020e). Those initiatives were aimed at redirecting capital flows towards sectors defined as "help to achieve climate goals" (European Commission, 2020j). On the other hand, the EU Emissions Trading System (ETS) was strengthened for the sectors included, while opening a discussion on the inclusion of road transport and housing. However, further adjustments, especially in the road transport

and housing sectors, were met with significant criticism from NGOs and some Member States, given their unequal impact across the EU (due to differences in the accessibility of public transport and more "sustainable" heating options). Nonetheless, the ETS expansion was framed by the Commission as an "unavoidable" and "proven effective tool" for reducing emissions and stimulating the green energy market, provided that adequate measures to support those at risk of energy poverty are implemented first.

NextGenerationEU was introduced as a key instrument for emergency and recovery, framed as "essential for a sustainable recovery" of the economy hit by the pandemic (European Commission, 2020g). This instrument was funded by the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) and allocated funds to the EU Member States in response to their national Recovery and Resilience Plans, embedding a "combination of the investments with the reform" (European Commission, 2020k). The financial packages aimed not only to provide economic support to the Member States amidst the crisis, but to shape the policies approved in the Green Deal, as over one third (37%) of investment from NextGenerationEU was dedicated to financing the relevant objectives (European Commission, 2020n). Through NextGenerationEU, the market has been shaped by securing investments in renewable energy sources, green hydrogen, building modernisation, and electric charging points across Member States via a system of conditional grants and loans (European Commission, 2020k). Across the EU, the main sources of funding for scaling up renewables were dedicated to offshore wind and solar facilities. On the other hand, similar developments were not only limited to the EU. Through a range of other financial instruments, the EU Commission was also funding Solar and Wind Power Plants across the Western Balkans, particularly North Macedonia.

As for private capital stimulation, InvestEU was introduced as a major instrument to stimulate private investment in areas such as renewable energy by de-risking private loans and equity. Another related instrument, the Strategic Investment Facility, was designed to support private investments in EU strategic value chains (infrastructure and new energy storage technologies). The relevance of private capital lies in the fact that private investments account for the majority of R&D funding in relevant sectors. Nevertheless, the analysis shows that the EU was increasingly active in shaping the markets of this transition, with strong top-down elements.

Another important strategic vector addressed energy system integration among EU Member States as a precondition for a successful transition. In this regard, Projects of Common Interest (IPCEIs) targeted key strategic sectors for the EU, involved several states, and received funding under the EU state aid rules. In the analysed corpus, the development of the power grid's battery industry stood out, as reflected in new projects across all segments of the battery value chain, aiming to create a "pan-European battery ecosystem" with the assistance of 7 Member States. The dominant narrative behind the strategic importance of the battery value chain was built up around its potential to secure economic growth and transition towards climate neutrality, however the frame of strategic autonomy was mentioned too: "A fully operational and vertically-integrated battery ecosystem is essential not only for achieving the green transition, but also for preserving the global competitiveness and resilience of the European industry and developing open strategic autonomy" (European Commission, 2021a). The topic of battery value chains occupied a central place in energy systems integration, as batteries represent the key system element that ensures flexibility, resilience, and cross-border integration of renewable energy. The intention to upscale the battery value chain highlighted rising demand for critical materials, including rare earths, which are crucial for batteries and for the production of solar panels and wind turbines. Sustaining that demand risked creating a new, strong supply dependency on China, a key supplier of critical raw materials, while the EU held only about 1% (European Commission, 2020d). The Action Plan on Critical Raw Materials, introduced in September 2020, was framed as an attempt to reduce that dependency by upscaling domestic sourcing of raw materials, diversifying supply, and increasing recycling and stockpiling capacity. The new Industrial Strategy, formulated based on the aforementioned goals, was framed not only as economically relevant but also as a precondition for the EU's future "prosperity, security and even survival" (European Commission, 2020d).

On the other hand, digitalisation played a very important role in enhancing collaboration and interconnectivity across the European Union. "Energy transition" and "digital transition" were framed as 'twin priorities' and simultaneously "twin challenges". Digital transition in this context was presented as a tool to reduce the environmental footprint of human activities and, with that, manage resources more sustainably while creating economic growth: "For example, the widespread use of videoconferencing plays a part in reducing flight emissions. Artificial intelligence can help us reduce the amount of fertiliser use in farming and increase the energy efficiency of our buildings. Smart homes will help us save energy, and so will

smart mobility or smart cities" (European Commission, 2021b). Therefore, investing in digital transformation (such as intelligent power grids and smart traffic systems to cut emissions) stands out among technological solutions, enabling systems to increase their efficiency, integration, and flexibility. Additionally, 20% of the NextGenerationEU (an economic instrument of conditional financing described in the previous section) was allocated to digital innovation.

Lastly, the social dimension was identified as significant for implementing the energy transition. The need to preserve the public trust and support for the clean transition, despite high prices operationalised in social support mechanisms, such as the Just Transition Fund, in support of regions, for which transition was associated with more costly changes due to their higher reliance on coal or fossil fuels (European Commission, 2020k, p. 5). Additionally, the Social Climate Fund was introduced as a stabilising instrument "to tackle energy poverty and to cut bills for vulnerable households and small businesses" (European Commission, 2021d, p. 2).

6.1.2 Frame reconstruction

In this section, the structural elements of the frame, as proposed by Entmann (1993), are synthesised into coherent frames. The roles of frames and their relations are further interpreted within the EU discourse.

6.1.2.1 "Energy Transition as a Necessity to Preserve Our Planet"

In this frame, climate change is presented, as shown in the preceding analysis of problem definition, as a systematic consequence of the fossil-based economy. This energy systems model has repeatedly been regarded as unsustainable because it depletes natural resources and results in high greenhouse gas emissions. Taken together with the moral evaluation and practical policy solutions presented above, these elements form a pattern in which climate change is evaluated as an urgent challenge that threatens the existence of future generations, and therefore, the energy transition is viewed as an appropriate response. The urgency and severity of the issue are reinforced in the text, while systemic transition to renewable energy sources has been presented as the only viable solution: "…by acting now – when we still have the policy choices – we can do things another way. We can build for our future by design and choose a better, a healthier and a more prosperous way for the future" (European Commission, 2021d).

Through this frame, the European Commission is not only advocating for a shift in the EU's energy systems, but also reinforcing the EU's self-reflection as a normative power, thereby justifying the EU's aspiration to broaden international cooperation on the energy transition and to finance projects overseas. As climate change is widely regarded to be a global issue, the EU's aspiration of "taking our European Green Deal to the rest of the world" has been presented as an investment in global wellbeing: "We will look to boost the climate ambitions of our international partners as well as their capacities to carry out the transformation, including through scaled-up EU financial support" (European Commission, 2020d, p. 2).

Consequently, from the standpoint of self-reflection, the EU is being portrayed as an aspiring global "leader in climate neutrality" in public communication of the European Commission: "EU is, and will remain at the forefront of efforts to tackle climate change", "Europe is proud to lead the way", "Europe needs to show leadership", "the EU to lead by example" (European Commission, 2020d), (European Commission, 2020e), (European Commission, 2020c). At the same time, the environmental effects, namely the carbon intensity of mining activities that ensure the necessary supply of raw materials to support the rapid energy transition, are left out of the picture.

6.1.2.2 "Energy Transition as EU's Growth Strategy"

In this frame, the COVID-19 pandemic is seen as a major catalyst for an economic crisis and geopolitical tension. In the context of economic crisis, the energy transition is seen as a path to sustainable growth, recovery, and modernisation of the economy, as it would allow the EU to achieve a stronger position in a fast-paced geopolitical environment and eliminate long-standing fossil-fuel dependency: "Green Deal will be at the heart of our efforts to rebuild our economies after the coronavirus pandemic" (European Commission, 2020f). Thus, the energy transition discourse of that time is being constructed around the narrative of "emerging stronger from the COVID-19 crisis" (European Commission, 2021e).

Through this frame, the European Commission not only promotes the vision of "crisis as an opportunity" but also emphasises the positive effects of the energy transition on society as a whole, creating new competitive industries and employment opportunities, and promoting social justice and citizens' participation. In this regard, the EU is seen as a growing market for innovation. However, the EU's heavy reliance on Chinese systems for solar and wind energy is not sufficiently articulated in pre-2022 discourse. Moreover, the unequal impact of the transition across the EU (due to varying levels of dependence on the fossil fuel complex,

including coal, and disparities in infrastructure development) is insufficiently represented as a central challenge, with the focus instead on its financial aspects.

The European Commission's course to increase the share of renewables in its energy mix was incorporated into post-COVID recovery strategies, framed around resilience, climate necessity, and economic growth.

6.1.2.3 "Energy Transition as a Way Towards Energy Security and Strategic Autonomy"

The empirical analysis suggests that the contouring of the frame linking the energy transition to energy security and strategic autonomy began to take shape after the COVID-19 crisis, driven by the supply disruptions.

In this frame, renewable energy is being positioned as a means that grants more autonomy and reduces strategic interdependencies. Additionally, it is seen as an opportunity to strengthen the EU's geopolitical positioning by exporting its Green Deal Model to "like-minded" countries. In this regard, the resilience of the critical raw materials value chain is highlighted as a core aim that would enable this trajectory. Although the security-centred frame was gaining prominence in the European Commission's public discourse, it rarely emerged as an independent interpretive structure in the corpus of Period 1 but rather as one interlinked with other dominant frames listed above.

To complement the qualitative analysis, Figure 1 provides an overview of the relative prominence of identified dominant policy justifications in the analysed corpus for Period 1.

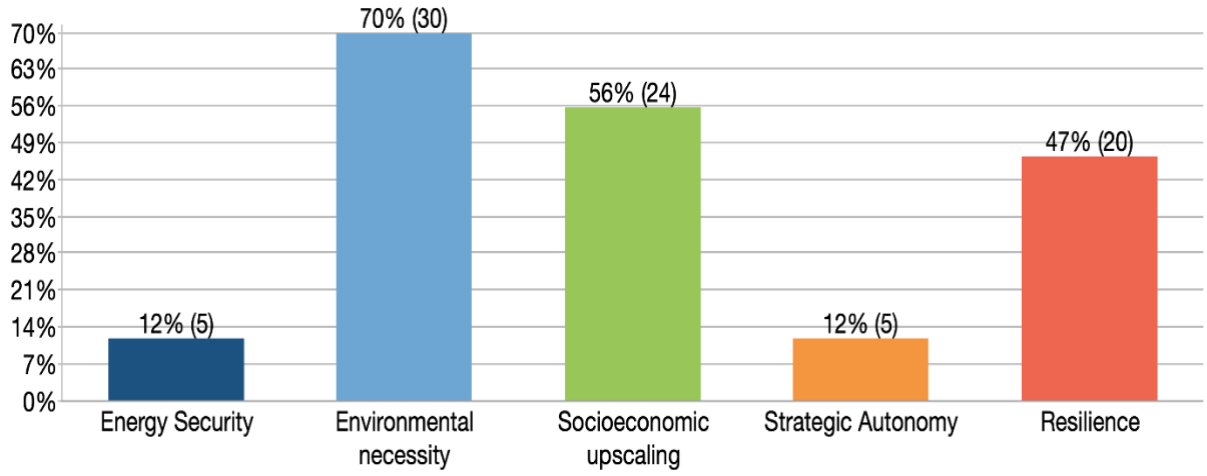

Figure 1. Relative prominence of policy justification categories in the European Commission's energy transition discourse (2019-2022)

As shown in Figure 1, the categories of environmental necessity and economic/social benefits were the dominant drivers of energy transition policy narratives throughout Period 1, whereas energy security and strategic autonomy were relatively less prominent in the European Commission's public discourse.

6.2 Period 2

6.2.1 Functional Patterns

"And let's remember, decarbonization does not only deliver clean energy, good jobs, and growth – it also delivers for our strategic autonomy and security" (European Commission, 2021g).

The onset of the war in Ukraine marked a shift in rethinking the long-standing fossil fuel partnership between the EU and Russia and introduced new factors into the energy transition discourse. The spike in fossil fuel prices, particularly gas, resulting from the major EU supplier, Russia, weaponising energy exports to gain a political advantage amid military confrontation, has forced an energy and economic crisis. As the EU was already engaged in reshaping its energy systems, moving away from fossil-fuel technologies towards low-carbon sources in response to the other global challenges articulated in the previous section, the emerging global energy crisis provided further reasons to accelerate the energy transition.

6.2.1.1 Problem Definition

The energy transition has been represented as a response to multiple problems simultaneously. However, across the analysed corpus for Period 2, the energy crisis emerges as the most legitimised challenge, due to the major instability in fossil fuel prices (particularly gas) and geopolitical turmoil. Russia's attack on Ukraine had massive economic repercussions on the global and European markets, disrupting trade flows and supply chains. The energy market was most affected, with natural gas and electricity prices rising, exacerbating an already tight supply situation after the COVID-19 pandemic (European Commission, 2022j, pp. 2–3). Consequently, the discourse around the energy transition shifted towards the security of supply against the backdrop of a "rapidly changing geopolitical and economic environment", a "new reality", and "increased geopolitical instability and fragmentation" (European Commission, 2023f, pp. 1–2).

Climate change, while remaining a significant global issue, is merging with 'energy security', 'economic growth' and 'strategic autonomy', promoting a consolidating policy

narrative across all those sectors: “Instead of having separate goals for environment and climate, energy and biodiversity, circular economy and strategic autonomy, what we have to do is bring them all together” (European Commission, 2023b). The issue of climate vulnerability is oftentimes addressed in the context of it posing “a real threat to economic growth”, as the dimension of economic stabilisation has become crucially important in the face of the energy crisis (European Commission, 2024b, p. 1). On the other hand, the environmental issues, such as the 2022 drought and heatwave in Europe, presented as such that influence the energy markets due to their impact on nuclear and hydrogen energy production: “Prices increased further over the summer months, which were also marked by extreme weather conditions caused by climate change” (European Commission, 2022j, p. 3).

However, within the dimension of the problem definition, another major discursive focus emerged - the EU’s weakening of strategic advantage in the net-zero industry market while the competition with other international powers over supply chains, technological and industrial governance only intensified. Following the sudden energy security shock in the aftermath of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, coinciding with the onset of the subsidy competition in the clean tech sector (US Inflation Reduction Act, signed in August 2022), the narrative of a “EU’s leadership” and “global cooperation” with regard to energy transition got reframed towards “new industrial race in the net-zero industry market” (European Commission, 2024a). Meanwhile, the emerging competition in the net-zero industry market is not presented by the European Commission as uniformly good or bad. From one point of view, it is seen as a potential for more innovation and lower prices in renewable energy technologies globally: “This new industrial race can be good news for the planet, because it means that the world's largest economies are getting serious about accelerating the green transition – something the EU has long pushed for. And where those lead, others will follow. Competition can spur more innovation, bring down prices and give consumers greater choice” (European Commission, 2024a, p. 2). In other cases, it is portrayed as such that should be avoided, posing it as a challenge to international cooperation and a risk of trade conflicts and global supply chain fragmentation even between ‘allies’, as countries compete for the same investments: “We need to avoid transatlantic zero-sum competition and mitigate negative effects of the IRA” (European Commission, 2022h).

The risk of weakening its manufacturing capacity and technological advancement, as well as China ‘weaponising’ its dominance across the rare earth minerals value chain, is presented from the European Commission’s standpoint as another dimension of energy security

concerns: “We cannot let the fossil fuel dependency turn into a technological one. We already see a trend emerging of being relegated to net importers of electric vehicles or solar panels, thus replacing our dependence on fossil fuels with industrial and technological dependencies” (European Commission, 2023c, p. 1). This dimension became especially concerning because, according to the International Energy Agency, renewables will account for over 90% of global electricity expansion in the next five years (European Commission, 2024d, p. 1). As a result, the structural vulnerability of energy security is being defined as a core problem of Period 2.

6.2.1.2 Causal Interpretation

The vulnerability of energy security has been primarily attributed to changes in the geopolitical landscape and to a heavy reliance on a very limited set of key energy partners under the liberal market paradigm, which coincided with the post-COVID economic rebound and adverse weather conditions (European Commission, 2022j, pp. 2–3).

In this regard, the long-standing reliance on fossil-fuel imports from Russia, a dominant part of the EU’s energy mix, has been reframed from “strategic partnership” under the liberal market paradigm to “risky dependency” under the newly adopted paradigm of strategic autonomy (European Commission, 2023f). Overreliance on a single partner for the vast majority of gas imports has been highlighted as the major factor responsible for the energy and economic crisis in light of geopolitical confrontations, calling for a change: “…we must reduce our reliance on fossil fuels, because dependence makes Europe vulnerable” (European Commission, 2025b, p. 3).

By comparison, the risk of falling into a longstanding dependency on China, the dominant exporter of critical raw materials and the largest producer of mass-manufactured clean technologies, is being interpreted as a consequence of insufficient development of domestic value chains and manufacturing bases amid the massive growth of the renewable energy sector worldwide. The rapid growth of renewables, projected to account for over 90% of global electricity expansion over the next five years, coupled with massive electrification across sectors, turns the supply of structural components needed for renewable energy production into a new geopolitical tool (European Commission, 2022i, p. 1). In this context while all the major players at the geopolitical field are trying to secure sufficient recourses for the zero-net technological upscaling, it’s stressed that in 2023, the EU was getting 98% of the total rare earth supply, 93% of the magnesium supply, 97% of the lithium supply along

with batteries for solar panels, certain types of electrolysers and heat pumps from China (European Commission, 2023d, p. 2). Concerns about further possibilities of "energy weaponisation", that got rearticulated with the economic crises in the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, emphasise a shift in the EU's narrative about those cooperations (both in the fossil fuel and green tech sectors), framing them as strongly unfavourable, "weakening" and "dangerous" for EU industries and society (European Commission, 2022f).

In the context of causal interpretation, climate change is recognised as a contributing factor to the energy crisis of summer 2022. However, unlike in the pre-war policy discourse, climate change and economic resilience are no longer presented as the only major drivers of renewable energy expansion policy.

6.2.1.3 Moral Evaluation

Within the European Commission's public communication for Period 2, the energy transition is primarily legitimised by the need to protect EU citizens from energy poverty and to ensure security for the Member States and partners. In this regard, energy sovereignty is defined as a precondition for the EU's political security and a key strategic interest. Investing in the "green transition" is presented as a bridge to long-term independence for the affected industries. In the context of the energy and economic crises, the need to invest in the "green transition" becomes "more pressing than ever" (European Commission, 2023i, p. 1).

On the other hand, the European Commission continues to reinforce the previously established image of the EU as a normative power, manifesting this in public communication by portraying it as a "protector of peace, rule of law, humanity and democracy" in the world. Staying competitive and economically strong amid global technological competition and defragmentation is projected to be essential for defending those "core values" within the EU and beyond (European Commission, 2022f). With regard to international cooperation, the European Commission emphasises the necessity and its commitment to supporting "climate-vulnerable countries" in their adjustment to the energy transition and the consequences of climate change (European Commission, 2024a). On the other hand, it is emphasised that international partnerships in the decarbonisation sector are being affected by the "battles of narratives": "We should invest in our partnerships around the world, such as with Africa and Latin America. Because those partnerships will come under pressure. This challenge is already evident in the ongoing battle of narratives over the impacts of the war in Ukraine –

for example, on Russia's false claims that it is Western sanctions that are responsible for the knock-on effects on global food supplies" (European Commission, 2022e).

The EU's far-reaching ambitions to be at the forefront of the net-zero industrial revolution shifted, in light of increasing global competition and energy crises, towards a desire to remain a "global industrial player" (European Commission, 2024a). The transition to "green" energy sources in this regard is no longer legitimised through the prism of solemn leadership aspirations but more so through the importance of remaining "competitive, resilient and sustainable**"** (European Commission, 2023f, p. 1).

From a social stance, the legitimisation of the transition towards renewables is being further built around it's conceptualization as "fair", "just", "leaving no one behind" due to prospects of public leverage, providing new job opportunities, increased citizens' participation, and cleaner air (European Commission, 2024b, p. 1).

6.2.1.4 Treatment Recommendation

Shortly after the onset of the war in Ukraine, the European Union found itself in urgent need of a strategic response to its consequences. Consequently, the treatment recommendations for Period 2 can be classified into two major categories, distinguished by the time horizons of their expected impacts. The short-term energy security measures were proposed to address the immediate consequences of the energy crisis by fast-tracking the elimination of the longstanding fuel dependency on Russian exports. The long-term strategic measures were communicated as intended to foster the energy transition, boost EU competitiveness, and accelerate progress toward the Green Deal goals. Both categories were reflected in various EU policy initiatives (REPowerEU, Temporary Crisis and Transition Framework, Green Industrial Plan) introduced in response to the economic repercussions of the Russia-Ukraine war and the rising competition in the global renewable energy market.

The measures articulated as "short-term" were aimed at ensuring necessary gas supplies and adequate pricing, as well as compensating those directly affected by the energy crisis. Considering that, by the beginning of 2022, fossil fuels still remained the major component of the EU's energy mix (21% in gas, 37% in oil), with significant variation across EU countries, certain policies, framed as an emergency response, were directed towards diversifying the gas supply (European Commission. Eurostat, 2024). As 40-45% of gas and 25-30% of oil supplies were coming from Russia on the eve of the outbreak of war, the domestic economy and industry were heavily affected (Edmond, 2022).In line with this,

minimising geopolitical risks to energy security was intended to be achieved by expanding existing LNG partnerships and creating new ones, as well as developing the corresponding infrastructure. The expansion of LNG imports was presented as a means of addressing supply vulnerability, while its environmental effects were not placed in context. Additionally, the joint gas purchasing platform, along with the default solidarity rule and gas storage obligation, was introduced as an emergency measure to ensure fair gas pricing and secure supply across the Member States (European Commission, 2022j, p. 3).

Secondly, the provisions addressing compensation for high energy prices were reflected in the_Temporary Crisis and Transition Framework adopted in March 2023, as part of the broader Green Deal Industrial Plan, to support the economy amid Russia's war against Ukraine. The framework was meant to ensure short-term crisis relief through compensation for high energy prices, measures to reduce energy consumption, and public guarantees to energy utilities for their trading activities (European Commission, 2024c, p. 1). Some key provisions of the framework were supporting the acceleration of the renewable energy rollout (section 2.5), facilitating the decarbonisation of industrial processes (section 2.6), and accelerating investments in key net-zero economy sectors (section 2.8) while on the other hand granting the support to the affected energy utilities for their trading activities without any green conditionality (section 2.2 and 2.3) and compensating the "intense energy users" companies for hight energy prices (European Commission, 2024c, p. 2).

Lastly, the need for energy saving due to peaking prices became more prominent than before and was reflected in corresponding efficiency policies, achieving fast track results: "Between August 2022 and July 2023, Member States reduced gas demand by 17% while simultaneously reducing the share of Russian gas from 50% in 2021 to less than 10% in 2023, and oil from 27% to 6%" (European Commission, 2023f, p. 1).

On the other hand, long-term measures were articulated as drivers of the energy transition and industrial decarbonization, providing support to clean-tech manufacturing companies, boosting domestic production and recycling capacity, and diversifying the external supply of critical components for net-zero industries. In this regard, the Green Deal Industrial Plan (GDI Plan) has been presented as an opportunity to remain competitive in the new industrial race for dominance in net-zero industries. And while the rising competition itself was not discursively defined as something bad, it highlighted yet another strategic dependency that, in light of the geopolitical turmoil, started to be seen as a risk: high reliance of the EU net-

zero industries on photovoltaic imports from China, which over the years started to dominate manufacturing globally. In line with the shift towards strategic autonomy, the EU Commission underscored the critical importance of diversifying sources not only in the fossil fuel sector but also in renewable energy. In the context of renewable energy, that would imply scaling up domestic capacity while diversifying external supply. Under the GDI Plan, a range of measures was implemented to support sectors defined as primary to the transition to a net-zero economy.

Thus, Critical Raw Materials (CRM) were emphasised to be critically important commodities for the net-zero industries (wind turbines, electric vehicles, electronics & semiconductors etc.) and were expected to "soon be more important than oil and gas", with the demand expected to increase fivefold by 2030 (European Commission, 2022i). In this context, the Critical Raw Materials Act (CRM) was introduced in April 2024, institutionalising the strategic intervention and industrial capacity building in the sector of critical raw materials, aiming to "improve the EU's access to a secure, diversified, affordable and sustainable supply" (European Commission, 2023f, p. 2). The necessity of achieving the goals set in the CRM Act provisions (10% local extraction, 40% processing and 25% recycling by 2030) was justified through the rising need to strengthen the EU's CRM value chains in light of accelerated energy transition and reduce the EU's dependency on the external exports (China): "…without secure and sustainable access to the necessary raw materials, our ambition to become the first climate neutral continent is at risk" (European Commission, 2022i, p. 1). Under the CRM Act, new strategic partnerships with Kazakhstan, Argentina, the Democratic Republic of Congo and Namibia were signed to ensure a sustainable supply of raw and refined materials for green energy infrastructure.

Secondly, the EU Chips Act was introduced in 2023 to reduce dependence on external semiconductor suppliers and boost local production capacity. "With the EU Chips Act, investment at the EU and national level will scale up research, development and production capacities of semiconductors across Europe" (European Commission, 2023f, p. 2). European Chips Act: aimed at doubling the EU's market share in the global semiconductor sector to 20 % by 2030 (European Commission, 2022e).

Lastly, a Net Zero Industry Act (NZI) was introduced in 2024 with the purpose of "scaling up manufacturing of clean technologies in the EU" (European Commission, 2023f, p. 2). As in the Period 1, the main focus was on solar and offshore wind technologies, batteries, heat

pumps, and green hydrogen production. The projects in the abovementioned domains would be granted priority status and receive faster approval and easier access to financing.

On the regulatory level, the climate and energy legislation package, Fit for 55, previously agreed upon in 2021, was adjusted to serve the goals set in the REPowerEU plan under the new geopolitical and economic reality, supporting the reduction of the EU net greenhouse gas emissions by 57% (compared to 55% in 2021). The most significant structural transformation was reflected in the ETS II reform, which expanded carbon pricing to road transport and housing, a move previously criticised for its potential regressive impact, given unequal access to public transport and heating options across the Member States. Additionally, the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanisms (CBAM) for imports of industrial goods, already under development pre-2022, were introduced to prevent "carbon leakage" to third countries with weaker regulatory systems (European Commission, 2022c). CBAM introduction was framed as simultaneously an environmentally just, market-stimulating and morally correct initiative: "And even though it (CBAM) has only recently started to apply in its transitional phase, we already see it is prompting companies outside the EU to invest in greener production methods and governments around the world to announce similar schemes" (European Commission, 2024a, p. 1).

During the Period 2, electrification accelerated and became more security-driven than in the pre-war period. From the standpoint of treatment recommendations, this tendency manifested itself in the EU Electricity Market Reform introduced in 2023. The backbone of this reform was the expansion of Contracts for Difference (CfDs) and support for Power Purchase Agreements (PPAs), which aimed to decouple the electricity prices from gas and reduce economic risks of industrial electrification: "…the reform of the electricity market design will further facilitate the integration of renewable energy and ensure access to affordable renewable and non-fossil electricity" (European Commission, 2023f, p. 2). Reform operationalised most prominently in heating (heat pump rollout) and automotive industries: "All new cars and vans registered in Europe will be zero-emission by 2035" (European Commission, 2022k, p. 1). In areas where electrification was challenging, such as aviation and shipping, alternative locally produced fuels were promoted as potential substitutes for fossil fuels. In the policy communication, it was promoted as a means to increase strategic autonomy from the fossil fuel complex and increase the EU's competitiveness. "ReFuelEU supports the production of sustainable aviation fuels in Europe"(European Commission, 2025b, p. 4). In some sectors, however, such as the

maritime sector, the transition to alternative fuels is expected to take many years, due to the current prices of alternative-to-fossil-fuel solutions and the absence of a "universal" solution for the whole industry (European Commission, 2022g). Overall, according to the new Climate Target Plan, it was projected that by 2040, 90% of the EU's total electricity consumption would be supplied by renewable and nuclear energy sources.

From a financing standpoint, public investments were still emphasised as playing an important role in "helping crowd-in private capital" and "compensating for market failures" (European Commission, 2024a, p. 1). However, as in Period 1, it was emphasised that public investments alone are insufficient to drive the energy transition, and that businesses should be a leading force in investment. Alongside the previously agreed RRFs and the InvestEU Programme, investment initiatives such as the previously mentioned CBAM (2023) and the EU Green Bond Standard (2023) were introduced to protect and mobilise private investment in the EU's low-carbon industry. In addition, targeted adjustments to the EU's long-term budget were introduced to complement existing instruments supporting clean and biotech and to reorient existing funds accordingly (STEP).

From a social standpoint, the energy crisis highlighted the importance of the social acceptability of the renewable energy transition, as well as the need to protect vulnerable households from energy poverty and price volatility. It was reflected in direct emphasis of the social dimension in the public discourse, as well as the introduction of the corresponding policies, the central one being the Social Climate Fund, partially financed by carbon market revenue and redistributed in support of vulnerable citizens and small businesses (European Commission, 2023g, p. 1)

6.2.2 Frame Reconstruction

6.2.2.1 "Energy Transition as a Way Towards Energy Security and Strategic Autonomy" (expanded)

In this frame, the energy crisis and supply vulnerability are regarded as one of the central policy challenges of Period 2, being presented as consequences of two simultaneous factors: a geopolitical crisis and the EU's major external dependencies in its energy sector.

In the context of the energy crisis, discursively represented as the consequence of Russia's attempts to pressure the European Union by withholding its gas exports in the aftermath of Ukraine's invasion, the long-standing energy cooperation formed during the period of progressive market liberalisation was reframed as the EU's vulnerability and a structural

problem. Energy market volatility, amplified by unfavourable climate conditions, increased supply uncertainty, and redefined supply security through strategic autonomy. The expansion of renewables in this regard underpins the strategic autonomy narrative, presenting renewables as sources of "home-grown" energy (European Commission, 2022l, p. 1). The introduction of further decisive policy decisions is being legitimised by the need to protect EU citizens and partners from energy poverty and to minimise the negative implications of the energy crisis, while increasing the resilience of energy systems. The frame is further characterised by treatment recommendations centred on gas supply diversification through the expansion of LNG imports from the "like-minded states", energy purchasing, storage and savings coordination measures, compensation measures, and further expansion of solar and offshore wind power, along with renewable hydrogen in hard-to-electrify sectors.

The central goals were articulated in the PEPowerEU Plan (2022), which was framed as a crisis response to the war in Ukraine. Advancing renewable energy employment is generally articulated as a long-term priority that should, however, occur alongside the diversification of fossil fuel supplies introduced as a crisis intervention. The above-mentioned steps are being justified through the prism of energy sovereignty.

6.2.2.2 "Energy Transition as an Opportunity to Lead the Net-Zero Industrial Competition"

This frame underpins the role of the expansion of the energy transition in remaining industrially competitive. In this regard, increased competition in the net-zero industry sector is presented as reshaping global energy markets with ambiguous consequences (European Commission, 2024a, p. 2). In this regard, the EU, in its self-reflection, is no longer viewed as a leader in climate neutrality but rather as a competitor among global players, with its policies driven by securitised logic. The need to remain among the global powers, driving the energy transition, is being legitimised on the one hand, through the need to ensure the energy security and prosperity of the Member States, but on the other hand, through the aspiration to carry its mission as a global "normative power": "It's only if we have international clout, if we are strong economically and if we are strong technologically, that we can be effective defenders of our core values: to protect peace, respect the rule of law, keep our focus on the human dimension, and promote democracy" (European Commission, 2022f).

The securitisation vector in the net-zero industry sector shapes treatment recommendations in line with energy autonomy targets, articulated through regulations introduced to strengthen the local value chains of critical raw materials (CRM Act), clean-technology manufacturing (NZI Act) and chip production (EU Chips Act) under the broader strategy of the Green Deal Industrial Plan.

To complement the qualitative analysis, Figure 2 presents the relative prominence of identified dominant policy justifications in the analysed corpus for Period 2.

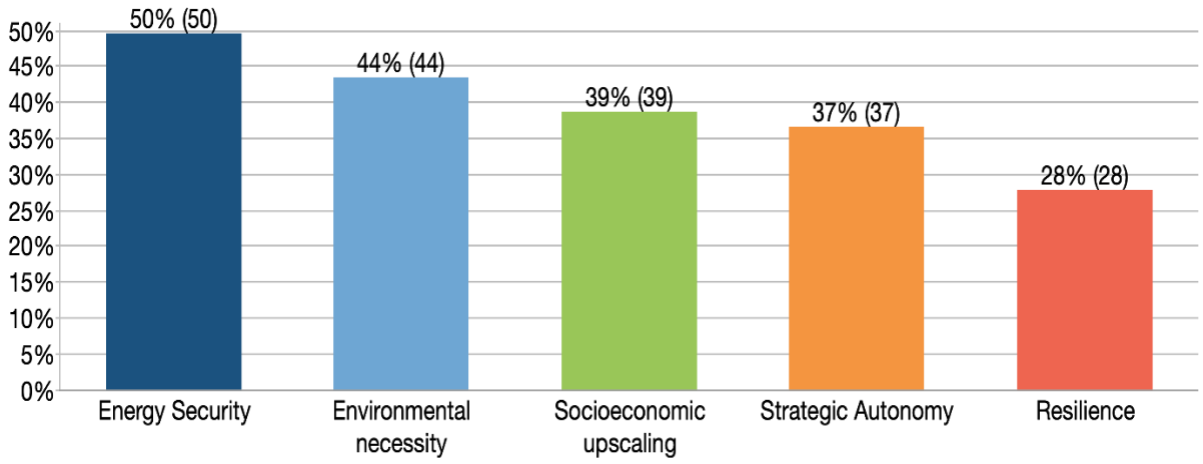

Figure 2. Relative prominence of policy justification categories in the European Commission's energy transition discourse (2022-2025)

Compared with Period 1, energy security and strategic autonomy gained significant prominence in the European Commission's public discourse on the energy transition from winter 2022 onwards. Environmental necessity and economic/social benefits remain important pillars of the European Commission's discourse on the energy transition but are no longer projected as the most dominant. With regard to resilience, across the corpus it was differentiated into either "economic resilience", contextualised by consolidating and expanding the single market, or "energy resilience", often contextualised through narratives of energy security and strategic autonomy.

7. Discussion

This section presents a systematic comparison between the two analysed periods: Period 1 (December 2019 - February 2022) and Period 2 (February 2022 – March 2025), highlighting shifts in the framing of the energy transition in the European Commission's public discourse and the underlying factors driving them. The frame analysis, based on Entman's (1993) four-element approach, revealed how the geopolitical turmoil in the periods preceding and

following the war, and the energy disruption, were reflected in the central framing shift of the EU's energy transition from a market-efficiency paradigm anchored in environmental necessity and economic growth to a securitised resilience. Building on the empirical findings, this section examines how the identified frames interact in line with Snow and Benford's (2025) frame alignment processes.

Period 1 is characterised by a strong dominance of the climate frame. As outlined in Section 6.1.2.1, this thesis conceptualises the frame as "Energy transition as a necessity to preserve our planet". The central argument of the frame is grounded in the understanding that climate change is a global, existential threat and that decarbonization is the only viable response. In terms of causal interpretation, climate change is attributed to the fossil-fuel-based economy, fossil-fuel subsidies, and the lack of global alignment in climate policy implementation. The moral evaluation is grounded in the idea of generational responsibility, justice and solidarity. This normative reasoning through which the frame justifies policy change supports the EU's self-reflection as a normative power. The treatment recommendation consists of various policy instruments that address renewable energy deployment, energy efficiency, market design adjustments, financial and social aspects.

The second dominant frame identified across Period 1 is conceptualised as "Energy transition as EU's growth strategy" and has become more prominent since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. As outlined in Section 6.1.2.2, the central argument of this frame is grounded in the assumption that energy transition underpins recovery, increases the EU's competitiveness, economic resilience and capacity for innovation, while creating new jobs. In terms of causal interpretation, the COVID-19 crisis is framed as a chance to "emerge stronger from the crisis". The moral evaluation is grounded in protecting the EU's prosperity by "shaping the fourth industrial revolution" and becoming a "leader in climate neutrality" (European Commission, 2020a, p. 3), (European Commission, 2020j).

Additionally, as outlined in Section 6.1.2.3, the empirical analysis reveals that the frame of strategic autonomy emerged as a secondary frame in the context of resilience to post-COVID supply disruptions and became exponentially more prominent on the eve of the war in Ukraine. The central argument of this frame in Period 2 is constructed around the narrative about the concentrated external dependencies in the sectors of critical raw materials and semiconductors that "pose unacceptable risk" (European Commission, 2020d). This frame, however, remains secondary to the climate and green growth narratives. Figure 1 in Section

6.1.2.3 supports the results, illustrating the relative prominence of environmental necessity (70%), socioeconomic upscaling (56%), and resilience (20%) compared with other identified frames in the Period 1 corpus.

The empirical analysis also shows a consistent tendency of frame bridging between the frames of climate necessity and green growth in the analysed corpus of Period 1: “The European Green Deal is not only a response to the predicament facing our planet. It is also an ambitious new growth strategy for the twenties and beyond” (European Commission, 2020e, p. 1). The quote demonstrates how the overlapping frames present the decarbonization policy as both a climate-necessity measure and a green-growth strategy. The frames reinforce each other, portraying the green energy transition as a global obligation in the face of the planet's “fragile future,” rooted in prospects for economic growth and resilience amid the economic and environmental crisis (European Commission, 2020k).

The findings suggest that the broader energy transition frame has been expanded post-COVID, becoming linked not only to achieving environmental targets but also to economic recovery and growth: “If we get this right, and if we get this right now, we can create new jobs and save jobs for decades to come and give future generations a healthy, secure life on this planet” (European Commission, 2020l, p. 1). In the European Commission's public discourse, the frames of climate necessity and economic recovery and growth do not appear to be in conflict, since “green growth” is depicted as an opportunity to accelerate the transition rather than hinder it. Many global think tanks and NGOs saw the COVID-19 recovery package as “inconsistent” with the EU’s broader climate targets, as it prioritised rapid economic stabilisation over decarbonisation. The measures, such as airline bailouts and support for the automotive and heavy industries, were seen as particularly concerning. However, the European Commission’s discourse was largely based on highlighting the “green” conditionality of its recovery and rescue packages (NextGenerationEU), framing recovery as structurally aligned with the global climate targets and de-emphasising relaxed state-aid rules enabling the aviation sector and the automotive industry to receive support among the major direct beneficiaries of the EU’s recovery instruments.

Period 2 is characterised by the relative expansion and amplification of the strategic autonomy narrative, linking it to security and competition and driving two highly connected but distinct frames.

As outlined in Section 6.2.2, the first dominating frame across this period is conceptualised as “Energy transition as a way towards energy security and strategic autonomy”. The central argument of this frame builds on the idea that the expansion of decarbonization can also deliver security and autonomy. In terms of causal interpretation, the supply vulnerability is attributed to overreliance on a single supplier under a liberal market paradigm and to climate hazards (such as drought and low water levels during the summer of 2022) that amplify energy market disruption. The moral evaluation is underpinned by the narrative of citizens' protection from energy poverty and defence of sovereignty. The treatment recommendation, on the one hand, consists of a set of emergency measures that address energy savings acceleration and demand reduction, gas supply diversification, storage obligations, a joint gas purchasing platform, and solidarity rules. On the other hand, it reflects long-term structural targets, such as accelerating clean energy deployment, reducing fossil fuel dependence, electrifying transport, developing alternative fuels for hard-to-electrify sectors, and reforming electricity markets.

At the same time, strategic autonomy becomes a fundamental part of another emerging dominant frame, conceptualised as “Energy transition as an opportunity to lead the net-zero industrial competition”. The central argument of this frame builds on the idea of a “new industrial race” reshaping the global clean-tech market, with consequences yet to be revealed (European Commission, 2024a). In terms of causal interpretation, the limited domestic manufacturing amid increasing global demand and a highly concentrated market (dominated by China) raises concerns about “replacing energy dependencies, particularly on Russian gas, with technological dependencies” (European Commission, 2023e, p. 1). The moral evaluation is grounded in the need to remain a “global industrial player” amid heightened geopolitical tension. The treatment recommendation includes a strategy to increase industrial capacity and diversify the renewables supply chains (such as the EU’s Green Deal Industrial Plan with its central components – Critical Raw Materials Act and Net-Zero Industry Act).

Consequently, further systemic expansion of the broader energy transition frame is illustrated in the corpus of Period 2: “Decarbonization does not only deliver clean energy, good jobs, and growth – it also delivers for our strategic autonomy and security” (European Commission, 2025a, p. 3) “for Europe's clean, secure and competitive energy future” (European Commission, 2023h, p. 1). The quotes illustrate the bridging of environmental necessity, green growth, energy security, and strategic autonomy frames. As illustrated in

Figure 2 (Section 6.2.2), energy security and strategic autonomy are amplified in the discourse of Period 2, occupying dominant positions.

Overall, a comparison of the two periods reveals the following shifts:

1. Environmental necessity, while remaining among the dominant elements of the energy transition discourse, is represented less frequently than in Period 1, where it appeared in 70% of the corpus (compared with 45% in Period 2).
2. The core risk is reframed from fossil fuel dependency and misalignment of global ambition to dependence on the Russian energy supply and deepening of technological and material dependency on China. Environmental issues are recognised as aggravating those risks, but are no longer regarded as the most dominant concern.
3. The EU's self-reflection shifts from presenting itself as a leader in climate neutrality to a key competitor in the global race to defend European values and protect its citizens and partners from energy poverty.
4. The political response incorporates new emergency security tools, aimed at security of supply, such as joint gas purchasing mechanisms, mandatory gas storage targets, demand-reduction measures and state aid flexibility.

At the same time, the focus on expanding renewables, energy efficiency, electrification, and digitalisation targets remains persistent. In addition, the "just transition" narrative remains a constant component of the energy transition discourse. The central argument of this narrative builds on the highlighting of fairness and solidarity as essential elements of the energy transition. This is supported by the repeated use of statements such as "leave no one and nowhere behind", "to the benefit of all", "transition must be fair for everyone" (European Commission, 2021f, p. 1), (European Commission, 2020h), (European Commission, 2024a) and the continuation of the support measures implementation, such as the Social Climate Fund, Just Transition Fund and instruments in support of climate-vulnerable partners. The narrative of "just transition" maintains continuity in the EU's normative position while acknowledging the effects of the "battles of narratives" on energy and climate partnerships within its post-2022 energy transition discourse.

When the empirical findings are compared with the four dominant positions in the academic discussion on reframing the energy transition, identified in Chapter 3, it becomes evident that the European Commission's communication is closely aligned with the first strand of

the literature. This position envisions positive side effects of the war and the consequent energy crisis for the EU's climate ambition. The European Commission's public discourse presents the environmental and security goals as simultaneously achievable within the current framework of energy and climate governance.

At the same time, the critical potential of the post-2022 reframing, acknowledged in the second strand of the literature review, is reflected only partially in the European Commission's public communication. The second strand of literature highlighted the continuation of extractive practices, which manifested in the combined expansion of LNG infrastructure and activities aimed at minimising strong dependence on China in the CRM sector. While the risks of fossil fuel and coal lock-ins and the environmental implications of the LNG expansion receive limited exposure in the European Commission's public communication, the environmental footprint of mining critical raw materials is largely absent from the empirical discourse.

The issue of the mixed EU governance and Member States' transition capability, highlighted in the third strand of academic literature, is only marginally incorporated into the empirical discourse. It is reflected primarily in the nature of communication throughout both analysed periods, which is characterised by a steady appeal for consolidation, integration and institutionalisation. At the same time, the analysis of the European Commission's public communication on energy transition provides only a limited outlook on the levels of Member States' exposure and resilience to the energy crisis of summer 2022.

The longstanding dynamics of shifts in international climate policy and the consequent changes in the nature of international cooperation, reflected in the fourth strand of literature, provide further context for discussion. The persistently growing global tendency towards protectionism and geopolitisation of energy and climate policy is also reflected in the empirical literature. Furthermore, the narratives of great-power competition and the development of open strategic autonomy were already present in the Period 1 corpus, though not yet dominant. However, the empirical findings indicate a significant increase in focus on strategic autonomy and competitiveness in the Period 2 corpus. This rise is reflected not only in more frequent references to these issues but also in the hardening of the discourse surrounding them, which has further expanded to include concerns about the transatlantic zero-sum competition.

8. Conclusion

This thesis has examined how the post-2022 energy transition reframing was reflected in the European Commission's public communication and aimed to reveal the structural changes it entailed.

The primary aim in this regard was to illustrate those changes and to identify the main drivers. To meet this aim, the frame analysis was conducted across two distinct discursive phases: the pre-2022 period (Period 1) and the post-2022 period (Period 2). These phases were defined on the basis of the academic literature, which attributed this discursive reorientation to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and interpreted it as a catalysing factor that marked a turning point in European energy politics (Gutiérrez Roa, 2026; Wiertz et al., 2023). To represent institutional framing, the corpus of this study consists of 224 materials published on the EU Commission's Press Corner website that touch upon the subject of energy transition.

The empirical findings suggest that the post-2022 framing of the energy transition has been substantially broadened by the systemic integration of energy security, strategic autonomy, and competitiveness. Discursive changes were traced across all four central elements of frames.

At the level of problem definition, the pre-2022 rhetoric of energy security and strategic autonomy moved to the centre of the post-2022 discourse, while the issues of climate and economic resilience remained integrated in the narrative. At the level of causal interpretation, the rhetoric about the damaging environmental effects of the fossil-fuel-based economy and the lack of global commitment to climate action shifted towards a focus on the immediate consequences of the long-standing reliance on Russia's fossil-fuel supply and on technological and raw-material dependence on China. From the standpoint of moral legitimation behind the action, rhetoric about generational duty and global leadership in climate neutrality shifted towards stronger narratives of protecting citizens and affected partners from energy poverty, preserving sovereignty, and remaining economically and technologically competitive to defend European values. Energy partnerships with third countries in this regard are deemed to be affected by the war of narratives following geopolitical tensions. Consequently, the scope of political solutions was extended from structural decarbonisation initiatives to emergency security tools, major renewable energy expansion, and an industrial de-risking strategy. The EU's self-perception in this regard also

shifted, from presenting itself as “leaders in climate neutrality” and exporting the Green Deal model to defining itself as “a global industrial player” and balancing cooperation with defensive measures in response to subsidy competition.

The findings show that the European Commission presents the shift towards energy security and competitiveness as predominantly beneficial for the future of environmental targets. In the European Commission's public discourse, security was not framed in opposition to decarbonisation but rather as a justification for accelerating it. This aligns with the first strand of academic literature, which argues that the war and the resulting energy crisis strengthened climate policy by prompting a drastic acceleration in renewable deployment, scaling up energy-efficiency targets, and phasing out Russian fossil fuel imports.

At the same time, the thesis expands this view by contextualising the empirical findings with the second strand of academic literature, which focuses on the existing discrepancies between the discourse and reality. While both aspirations – fulfilling the emission reduction target and diversifying the EU’s gas and energy transition inputs are presented as simultaneously achievable, the discrepancy between the short-term and long-term measures introduced in Period 2 appears to contradict the sustainability agenda due to numerous issues.

One of the key sources of tension in this regard is the shift from Russian pipeline gas to LNG imports. While LNG is known to be significantly more carbon-intensive than pipeline gas due to differences in its processing and transportation, as well as existing risks of methane leakage (which, even in small quantities, erodes the environmental advantage of LNG vs coal), new long-term LNG import contracts with diverse exporters entail not only immediate negative environmental effects but also lock-in risks. In this regard, the rapid reorientation towards LNG and the reactivation of coal mining, driven by the new emergency framework, REPowerEU, create a discrepancy between sustainability and strategic autonomy targets and directly contradict climate goals.

The second significant issue is the growing need for CRMs to sustain the major increase in demand for renewable energy technologies, which is driving the expansion of mining activities, as reflected in the European Commission's public discourse. The topic of the environmental footprint of mining critical raw materials is largely absent from the European Commission's public communication. At the same time, the second strand of the academic literature, identified in Chapter 3, suggests that scaling up the mining and processing of

critical raw materials inside and outside the EU, while simultaneously increasing LNG imports, would lead to a massive increase in cumulative pressure on ecosystems, communities, and the climate.

The third critical issue stems from the uneven consequences of the new energy and climate policy for Member States, due to varying levels of external energy dependence and uneven deployment of renewable energy. While this empirical analysis was focused predominantly on the European Commission's public discourse, leaving the Member States' rhetoric outside the scope of the research, this data could have provided a very fruitful basis for further research into the real policy implications of the shift. The limited scope of the corpus to the European Commission's public communication is acknowledged as a limitation in this regard, but it provides a background for further research.

The fourth strand of the analysed academic literature also suggests that international climate policy has been shifted from a model rooted in the collective responsibility of industrialised countries and international cooperation to one driven by global power competition for industrial and technological dominance. And this shift has been happening over nearly two decades. In this context, the issue of the EU energy transition reframing gains in complexity. It becomes evident that the war acted primarily as a catalyst, accelerating and legitimising a long-standing shift towards protectionism and securitisation rather than creating a new paradigm.

Taken together, the analysis shows that while the shift may accelerate certain aspects of the transition, it also introduces greater tension among the core dimensions of the energy trilemma: security, equity and sustainability. The findings suggest that the future of the EU energy transition will depend on how these competing logics are acknowledged and balanced, rather than downplayed.

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