

# How the EU's multi-level environmental governance has changed from the signing of the UN's 2030 Agenda

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## INTRODUCTION

Climate change is one of the greatest and most pressing challenges of our day and addressing it requires collaboration and cooperation between all governments, organizations, and individuals.

The European Union has long acknowledged the need of solving environmental challenges to ensure sustainable development and protect its citizens' well-being. The EU has been actively working towards meeting the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and updating its environmental governance framework, and it has made substantial progress since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This study will include a particular focus towards the incorporation of Goal 13, Climate Action, into the European policy framework.

The purpose of this thesis is to examine the evolution of the EU's multi-level environmental governance since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda, shedding light on the significant changes it has undergone, their implications, and the driving forces behind them.

The dependent variable of this study is the alignment of EU governance with the 2030 Agenda. It aims at assessing how the EU's environmental governance has progressed in terms of its compliance with the Goals and targets set forth in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This variable serves as a measure of the effectiveness and responsiveness of the EU's environmental governance framework.

The independent variable explored in this study is changes in governance. It encompasses the various modifications, reforms, and adaptations undertaken by the EU in its environmental governance practices. This variable aims to analyse the extent and nature of changes implemented within the EU's governance framework and assess their impact on the alignment with the 2030 Agenda.

The hypothesis to be demonstrated through this research is that changes in governance have brought about a strengthening of the EU's environmental governance and have created space for the introduction of new climate change related policies. It asserts that the EU's efforts to adapt its governance framework in response to the 2030 Agenda have resulted in enhanced environmental governance practices and the ability to introduce innovative policies that align with the sustainability goals set forth in the Agenda.

Chapter 1 introduces global and European environmental governance and analyses the similarities and differences between the MDGs and SDGs.

In this chapter, I shall explore the broader context of global environmental governance, including international efforts to address sustainability challenges. I shall examine the evolution of global agendas and initiatives such as the Millennium Development Goals

(MDGs) and the subsequent transition to the more comprehensive Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By comparing the MDGs and SDGs, I will highlight the shifts in focus, targets, and approaches, and assess the lessons learned from the previous framework. Furthermore, I will investigate the EU's engagement and contributions to the global sustainability agenda by examining its action programs, setting the stage for understanding its subsequent environmental governance adaptations.

Chapter 2 explores the European funding programs and policy frameworks with a focus given to the most relevant ones to climate action.

This chapter focuses on the funding programs and policy frameworks that demonstrate the EU's commitment and willingness to adapt its environmental governance practices. I shall analyse key initiatives such as Horizon Europe and the LIFE program, which provide financial support for research, innovation, and environmental conservation projects. These funding programs showcase the EU's dedication to promoting sustainable development through scientific advancements and green initiatives. Moreover, I will examine the EU's response and commitment to international agreements and frameworks, including the Paris Agreement, the European Green Deal, the Renewable Energy Directive II, the 2030 Climate and Energy Framework, the EU Emissions Trading System, and the Circular Economy Action Plan. These programs and policy frameworks demonstrate the EU's efforts to align its environmental governance with global sustainability objectives and its commitment to being the front runner of sustainable development and climate action on the global stage.

Chapter 3 analyses EU official documents and how they pursue climate change mitigation and adaptation.

This chapter analyses the key EU documents that demonstrate the EU's efforts to adapt its environmental governance to the 2030 Agenda, mainly exploring European Commission's directives, which plays a key role in developing and delivering directives that outline the EU's objectives, principles, and standards for environmental regulation. I shall explore the European Green Deal, a comprehensive policy framework aimed at making the EU the world's first climate-neutral continent by 2050; the Next Generation EU initiative, designed to address the socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic while promoting sustainable recovery, as well as the programs that can be financed under it. Moreover, I shall inspect the EU Commission's communication documents, including COM (2020) and COM (2021), which provide guidance and strategies for implementing the 2030 Agenda and addressing climate change challenges within the Union.

This thesis adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative analysis and empirical research. Qualitative methods such as document analysis, policy reviews, and case studies shall be used as the main instrument to examine the evolution of global and European environmental governance, advance the comparison between the MDGs and SDGs, and explore the European Commission's documents that address climate change. Additionally, quantitative data and statistical analysis shall be employed to measure the impact of funding programs, assess the effectiveness of policy frameworks, and analyse progress towards the SDGs, with a focus on Goal 13. The research draws upon a comprehensive review of relevant literature, official documents, reports, and statistical data to provide a thorough analysis of the EU's environmental governance transformation within the context of the 2030 Agenda.

In conclusion, this thesis's scope is that of shedding light on the evolution of the EU's environmental governance since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. By analysing global and European environmental governance, examining the EU's funding programs and policy frameworks, and inspecting key EU documents related to climate change adaptation, we shall gain comprehensive insights into the EU's adaptation strategies, its commitment to achieving Sustainable Development Goals, and its role as a global leader in environmental governance.

This research seeks to demonstrate the hypothesis that the 2030 Agenda has brought about a strengthening of the already existing EU's environmental governance and created space for the introduction of new policies that align with its Goals and targets.

## FIRST CHAPTER

### *Climate change*

Climate change is the long-term alteration in the Earth's overall temperature, which is a phenomenon that causes massive ramifications, for example the change in weather patterns. Human activity is believed to be the main cause for this change, having increased the release of non-natural greenhouse gases into the air because of the rise in demand of burning fossil fuels. The Earth's atmosphere acts as a greenhouse where various gases assimilate solar radiation that would have been reflected into space. This is a beneficial process because it keeps the planet warm and enables life to flourish; however, since the industrial revolution, humanity has been overusing this practice. Greenhouse gases are produced by almost every human activity (Falkner, 2013).

Humans have been burning fossil fuels like oil and coal to power their energy streams, which release CO<sub>2</sub> into the atmosphere, their use ranges from electronic devices in their homes to machines in factories. It is used for nearly everything. Greenhouse gases trap heat radiating from the sun and that is the reason our planet is getting warmer.

The global population has also tripled in the past 70 years, causing the resources provided by our planet to become scarcer. There is abundant evidence for rapid climate change. By 2100, it is expected that average global temperatures will increase by up to 4 °C, changing precipitation patterns in the process.

One of the greatest challenges we are facing today is that of determining the effects on biodiversity and establishing the potential remedies.

### *Historical background*

Since the Industrial Revolution, human activities have contributed significantly to the atmospheric release of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases, altering the planet's climate. Since then, human activity has led to an increase in the concentrations of all the major greenhouse gases. The quantities of carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide in the earth's atmosphere are today higher than they have ever been in the previous 800,000 years (National Academy of Sciences). Currently, over 30 billion tons of carbon dioxide are released annually into the atmosphere because of human activity.

Even though emissions have been released into the air for centuries, it wasn't until the 1950s that researchers started taking precise measurements of atmospheric carbon dioxide so that they could demonstrate just how much carbon is being released because of human activity.

Researchers began creating thorough computer models in the 1960s, which have since shed light on the magnitude of the impending changes.

Humans began significantly influencing the atmosphere around the turn of the nineteenth century, when the Industrial Revolution began in Britain. Tons of coal were burned in factories; the steam engine, powered by fossil fuels, revolutionized transportation and other industries, and paved the way for modern machinery. Not much has changed since then, with fossil fuels still being the main source of energy.

The wake-up call came in the 70s. In 1973, the so-called oil or energy crisis occurred, which caused the price of oil to be even tripled due to the obstructionism of exporting countries toward the West considered pro-Israeli resulting from the Israeli reaction toward Egypt and Syria in the Yom Kippur War. It was a result of political conflicts in the Middle East, particularly to the Arab Israeli war of 1973 (McGowan, 2011).

Before the crisis, “sustainability” was a concept specific to the natural sciences and, in ecology, was used to refer to the ability of an ecosystem to endure over time in the absence of major alterations, after it, the need for alternative energy sources arose, and sustainable energy became the focus of the agenda for the future.

The EU's position has significantly changed after the crisis, enabling it to come to agreements and take coordinated action in the face of energy crises as well as develop longer-term strategy and invest in sustainable sources of energy (McGowan, 2011).

Considering the changes our planet is experiencing, the need arose for a regulatory process that controls human activity and creates limits for production and waste that can be generated. The world started to focus more on how to stop the climate crisis and create a better future, one without climate change.

That is how environmental governance was established.

Environmental governance is the most prominent discussion on our planet's future. But what does the term “environmental governance” mean? “Environmental” concerns everything that deals with the natural world and the impact of people on its state, while “governance” refers to the actions of individuals and institutions of governing and exercising control over an affair (Oxford Dictionary). Environmental governance, therefore, comprehends all the policies, norms and regulations that concern the human behaviour and its influence on the environment, while addressing who oversees the adoption of decisions on the environment and the role of individuals and organizations in it (United Nations Environment Programme).



Since the topic of environmental governance is of uttermost importance and urgency, there continues to be a global effort to limit the damages of climate change on our planet. Therefore, we can talk about global environmental governance.

Global environmental governance is the undertaking of climate policy matters by the organizations, instruments, organs, and mechanisms that oversee the processes of global environmental protection (Commission on Global Governance; United Nations).

### *The early phase*

The first step towards a sustainable future was achieved by the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, the first UN conference dedicated to the environment. It was held in Stockholm, and it resulted in the adoption of the Stockholm Declaration on the Human Environment, the pioneering document from which the juridical framework in the field of environmental protection has since developed (UN, 1972).

The Stockholm Declaration is considered the act of birth of modern international law on the environment. It is of relevance because it introduced the term “environment” into the international legal framework for the very first time, which in contrast with the expression “nature conservation” represent a step away from the view of nature as the object of protection and towards the environment as the area of human activity. This way, preserving the environment no longer serves as a goal in and of itself, but rather serves as a tool to meet human needs (Francioni and Bakker, 2013). This view is taken by official title of the Declaration: “Man is both the creature and moulder of his environment, which gives him physical sustenance and affords him the opportunity for intellectual, moral, social and spiritual growth” (UN, 1972). The second important advancement was that of separating environmental law from “private law” and upgrading it to the rank of international public law (Francioni and Bakker, 2013). This means that before the Stockholm Declaration, nature protection was limited to agreements between neighboring countries. The Stockholm Declaration acknowledges that environmental conservation is in the public interest of the whole international community, regardless of the reciprocal relationships and interests of individual governments.

Even though, as mentioned, the concept of sustainable development first emerged in the first half of the 1970s; without a clear indication of the steps to take to achieve a sustainable future the international community found it difficult to see sustainable development as a palpable concept. There was a need for a normative definition that outlined the scope and direction of

acceptable public policies, legal frameworks, and private conduct of citizens to base their future legal framework on (Borowy).

This necessity culminated in the 1987 The World Commission on Environment and Development, now Brundtland Commission, and its subsequent report: "Our common future", presented in by the then Norwegian Prime Minister Gro Harlem Brundtland, chairman of the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED). The report described sustainable development as the "development that meets the needs and aspirations of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own" (UNESCO). This means that it is a development that enables the present generation to meet their own needs without obstructing the ability of future generations to meet theirs. The concept, therefore, is based on two interlinked concepts, the environment, and human responsibility to keep it safe for future generations. The two ideas are inevitably connected, since the "environment" is where we live, and "development" is what we do to improve our conditions in the world we live in (United Nations).

This definition aspires to continue investing in the progress of technological development while actively working towards salvaging the environment.

The Brundtland Commission, or 1987 World Commission on Environment and Development represent the first step towards a collective response to the environmental crisis the world was already facing.

It was the first time the realization came that without cooperation, no progress on the matter can be made. Therefore, it can be claimed that this collaboration represents the birth of global environmental governance.

The World Commission on Environment and Development was responsible of producing a "Global Agenda for Change" (United Nations). Its main objective was that of promoting cooperation between countries, both developing and already established ones. The international community would have to establish common goals that effectively deal with environmental issues while respecting the relationship between people, resources, the environment, and development.

The Stockholm Declaration and the Brundtland Commission shed light on the issue of the environment and the need of collaboration in the international scene. Between the 1970s and now, hundreds of international treaties and agreements were concluded. Apart from these first two, among the most prominent ones we can highlight the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, the

Millennium Summit in New York, and the UN Sustainable Development Summit in New York in September 2015.

### *The major evolution*

At the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit in 1992, to more than 178 nations participated, a comprehensive action plan to create a worldwide partnership for sustainable development to ensure human well-being and safeguard the environment, called “Agenda 21”. It builds on the idea that to achieve these goals, there needs to be stronger cooperation between states. It displays a political commitment at the highest level and a worldwide consensus on cooperation in the fields of development and the environment. Governments are in first and foremost charge of its successful implementation. Responsibility of implementing these objectives falls not only on governments, but on local authorities as well. Encouragement of participation falls on every organ of the state (Lafferty and Eckerberg).

It is composed of several initiatives that propose specific techniques for the implementation of sustainable practices. They range from economic policies to education-based procedures. They are each composed of a basis for action, objectives and means of implementation.

It is divided into four sections. The first one is focused on the social and economic dimensions of sustainable development; the second one on maintaining conservation and management of resources for development; the third section is devoted to strengthening the role of major groups while the fourth section indicates the means of implementation of these targets (United Nations, 1992).

This document specifies that human beings are at the centre of issues pertaining to sustainable development (principle 1) and that the right to development must be achieved through a fair balance between economic needs and the environmental protection needs of both present and future generations (principle 3). With respect to this goal, the action of states must deploy all efforts that are necessary to contribute to its effective reversal. It is therefore a programmatic commitment that guides the action of states and international organizations and is certainly a principle capable of guiding the application of international treaties and national norms (Mondini, 2019).

The earth summit represented the first collective and concrete action towards a more sustainable future.

Its successor, the Millennium Summit, was held at the United Nations Headquarters in New York in September 2000. The Summit was preceded by a two-year global awareness effort that

started in 1998. The campaign's goals were to increase government and civil society collaborations and reinforce the global community's commitment to creating a world where no one is left behind. The Millennium Summit represented the biggest ever assembly of leaders of state and government, 189 Member States to be precise. They all adopted the Millennium Declaration, in which the eight Millennium Development goals were presented. The Millennium Development Goals, or MDGs, represent a significant and successful global mobilization strategy for achieving several crucial socioeconomic priorities globally. They convey the widespread popular concern about issues including gender inequity, environmental degradation, poverty, hunger, and disease (Sachs, 2012). They are as follows:



*Figure 1: UN Graphical Illustration of the 7 MDGs<sup>1</sup>*

The MDGs strive to advance global awareness, political responsibility, and public pressure by creating measurable and time-limited goals, which are meant to be fully achieved in 2015. The wish was that if not all, at least most nations will have significantly made improvements on most of the goals by that year. However, advancement towards the goals would turn out to be complex and time consuming, requiring more than 15 years to complete. Moreover, the objectives set out by the MDGs are of extreme importance and should be further elaborated, particularly those centred on poverty and environmental sustainability. Thus, the need for a new agenda arose.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/graphic.shtml>

### *The UN's 2030 Agenda*

At the three-day New York Summit on Sustainable Development in 2015, more than 150 world leaders convened at the UN headquarters in New York to formally adopt a broad new agenda for sustainable development.

The summit is of extreme relevance because it was the home of the proposal and approval of the 2030 Agenda. The UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, unanimously adopted by all 193 member states between the 25<sup>th</sup> and the 27<sup>th</sup> of September 2015, is an action program enacted to protect the 5 Ps: people, the planet, peace, prosperity, and partnership. Its main objective is that of suppressing poverty in all its forms. The Agenda is based on 17 sustainable development goals and 169 targets which are built on the unachieved Millennium Development Goals. They are based upon the three dimensions of sustainable development: the economic, environmental, and social spheres. Furthermore, there is a fourth dimension: institutional governance.

In terms of people, the main goal is that of ending poverty and hunger in all its forms and guarantee that everyone enjoys the same equality and decency.

For what regards the planet, the objective is to save it from deterioration, with the aid of sustainable production and green consumption, sustainable energy and by taking action to fight climate change.

For prosperity, the target is that of allowing people to live comfortable and satisfactory lives and make sure that technological progress does not damage our world.

Peace includes promoting peaceful and just societies not subject to threats and brutality.

To achieve these goals, there needs to be a partnership between all the member states based on collective action and unanimity and focused on the necessities of the less fortunate, which is also the 17<sup>th</sup> goal.

# SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



*Figure 2: UN Graphical Illustration of the 17 SDGs.<sup>2</sup>*

The goals can be summarized as follows:

1. “End poverty in all its forms everywhere
2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.
3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages
4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls
6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable, and modern energy for all
8. Promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all
9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation
10. Reduce inequality within and among countries

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<sup>2</sup> <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable
12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development
15. Protect, restore, and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss
16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels
17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development” (United Nations, 2015).

### *The main differences between the MDGs and the SDGs*

As already mentioned, the SDGs first arose when there was a need for a new global agenda for sustainability. The Sustainable Development Goals are the “new and improved” Millennium Development Goals. Therefore, they differ from the MDGs in many aspects.

The SDGs are more comprehensive, collective in action, and precise than the MDGs, with a clear message that every country must act if success is to be attained.

Both the MDGs' accomplishments and their shortcomings can help the SDGs. The achievements are noteworthy. The MDGs, in contrast to many UN objectives, are still very much in effect nearly 12 years after their implementation. Even if the need for a new agenda arose, the problems they encountered are still relevant to this day.

The main differences, as highlighted by the UN (2015), are as follows:

The MDGs were developed from the top down. With face-to-face consultations in more than 100 countries and millions of citizen inputs on websites, the SDGs are being developed in one of the most inclusive participatory processes the world has ever seen.

The SDGs have 17 goals with 169 targets, compared to the MDGs' 8 goals, 21 targets, and 63 indicators; they are more since they aim to address more issues, among them Inequalities, Economic growth, Decent jobs, Cities and Human settlements, Industrialization, Oceans, Ecosystems, Energy, Climate change, Sustainable consumption and production, Peace, and Justice. They build on the success and momentum of the MDGs but go deeper into the issues highlighted by them. the SDGs are more comprehensive, they extend beyond poverty to challenges of peace, stability, human rights, and good governance. The SDGs are wider in scope and more ambitious, devolving deeper into the problems of poverty and the need for



development. They cover the three dimensions of sustainable development: economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection; while MDGs have a smaller scope and are more focused on human capital, infrastructure, and social, economic, and political human rights. The SDGs have considerably more ambitious gender goals, increased public participation, and government at every level.

The MDGs were only meant to be implemented in developing countries; while the SDGs are universal and apply to all nations. The MDGs were designed with developing nations in mind and were funded by wealthy nations, while the new goals are aimed to be worked upon by all nations, developed or developing. The new Agenda is universal, meant for all countries and all people.

The Sustainable Development Goals pose strong emphasis on the methods of implementation the mobilization of financial resources, capacity-building, and technology, as well as data and institutions utilized. Although the MDGs were adopted in 2002, baseline data for the year 1990 was used, meaning they have older technology and information to build on, while the new goals' starting point uses estimations from 2015.

The SDGs are the world's first attempt to focus on the quality of education and learning and their role in achieving a more humane world: “education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship, and appreciation of cultural diversity and culture's contribution to sustainable development” (Target 4.7).

The new Goals take into consideration the fact that combating climate change is crucial for our future, for sustainable development and are at the base of eradicating poverty. SDG 13 is the main Goal for solving the environmental crisis, striving to encourage quick action to mitigate the effects of climate change, however, there are other goals that tackle the sustainability and ecological problems, such as Goal 7, Goal 12, Goal 14, and Goal 15. On the other hand, the only MDG which focuses on environmental action is Goal 7: Ensure environmental sustainability.

### *The role of the environment*

Due to a rapid reduction in biodiversity and an increase in gas emissions, environmental sustainability remains a global challenge, and one of the objectives that the Millennium declaration was not able to fully reach.

Goal 7 of the MDGs addresses environmental difficulties, but only briefly, ignoring critical issues for long-term growth.



While certain connections are acknowledged, for example, the relevance of clean drinking water to health, others, such as environmental resource preservation or air quality, are not. Goal 8 covers sustainable development implementation but does not address new kinds of financing, technology, or capacity building (Lomazzi, Borisch and Laaser, 2014).

Comparing the two Agendas we can notice that, as opposed to the one environmental goal set out by the Millennium declaration, the Sustainable Development Goals included the environment far more thoroughly overall. Furthermore, the SDG targets devolve deeper into the environmental problem and are of broader scope, resulting in a more ambitious and wide-ranging programme. (Elder and Olsen, 2019)

The environmental goals are those that specifically mention words such as “environment”, “sustainability”, or “pollution” in their content or whose meaning can be inferred from it. Following this indicator, 73 out of the 169 targets are directly related to the environment. These 73 environmental targets account for more than half (53%) of the targets under SDGs 1 through 15 (excluding the targets related to SDGs 16 and 17, which apply to all goals in principle). In contrast, only 37 out of the 169 targets (around 22%) don't have an obvious connection to the environment. Even while all their aims are, in fact, related to the environment, only SDGs 10, 16, and 17 do not directly or indirectly mention it (Elder and Olsen, 2019).

MDGs (2000–2015)	Corresponding SDGs (2016–2030)	'Pillar'
1. Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger	1. No Poverty	Social
	2. Zero Hunger	Social
2. Universal Primary Education	4. Quality Education	Social
3. Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women	5. Gender Equality	Social
4. Reduce Child Mortality	3. Good Health and Well-being	Social
5. Improve Maternal Health	3. Good Health and Well-being	Social
6. Combat HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Other Diseases	3. Good Health and Well-being	Social
7. Environmental Sustainability	6. Clean Water and Sanitation	Any
	7. Affordable and Clean Energy	Any
	11. Sustainable Cities and Communities	Any
	12. Responsible Consumption and Production	Environmental or Economic
	13. Climate Action	Environmental
	14. Life Below Water	Environmental
	15. Life on Land	Environmental
8. Global Partnership for Development Economy-related	17. Partnerships to Achieve the Goals	N/A
	8. Decent Work and Economic Growth	Economic
	9. Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure	Economic
	10. Reduced Inequality	Economic
Not in MDGs	16. Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions	N/A

**Figure 3:** Comparison of the MDGs and SDGs by Elder and Olsen.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>3</sup> <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1758-5899.12596>

This progress was possible because of two factors: the introduction of environment ministries into the discussion for the creation of the Agenda and the broadening of the organizational framework from 30 to 70 seats dedicated to the Open Working Group (OWG), responsible of negotiating the contents of the SDGs (Chasek and Wagner, 2016).

Due to their participation in the Rio+20 negotiations and the fact that many of them continued working on the SDG discussions, there was a significant amount of continuity. Several negotiators gained significant experience in the SDG themes and process.

Out of them, many expressed the desire of keeping the new Goals at a maximum of 10 for them to be concise and straight to the point (SDSN, 2014), however, since there was the need to add further environmental elements, the goals significantly increased in number.

The large number of objectives and targets inclusion in the SDGs is partly due to the realization that sustainable development requires an integrated strategy that incorporates many interlinked components.

### *Regionalization of environmental governance*

From the emergence of the issue of climate change, everyone understood that it would be a global problem that required cooperation and collaboration on all fronts for it to have a possible solution.

Climate science discloses that climate change is the one global environmental problem, as its effects come from and damage the whole world. This meant that all states were involved in the decisional process behind climate governance. However, since the emergence of the problem, the European states have made it their mission to commit to the problem and reduce their emissions (Falkner, 2013).

The European Union has taken a proactive approach to advancing environmental governance and has developed several initiatives to solve environmental issues.

The necessity of sustainable development and environmental protection has long been recognized by the EU. As defined in its policy framework, the European Green Deal, it seeks to strike a balance between economic growth, social progress, and environmental sustainability.

Environmental challenges have continuously been the main interest of European residents. This popular opinion has compelled EU institutions and member states to place a premium on environmental preservation and sustainability.

The Union also understands the potential economic benefits of being at the forefront of the green transition. The EU hopes to create new jobs, promote innovation, and boost its global

competitiveness in growing green industries by investing in clean technologies, renewable energy, and sustainable practices.

Finally, the EU can exercise influence on the world stage by taking the lead in environmental governance. It can influence worldwide environmental standards, promote its principles and policies, and encourage other countries to do the same.

Europe was the first ever continent to undertake industrialization on substantial scale. This allowed European countries to become one of the most technologically advanced developing states, however, it also means that the European area is one of the most polluted on earth (Selin and VanDeveer, 2015).

To solve the environmental crisis, the European Union established several bodies.

The European Union (EU) has become the world's leading force in international environmental politics over the last 20 years. When environmental issues first emerged, it was the US who self-appointed itself as the pioneer of environmental leadership (Kelemen, 2010). In the past two decades, however, the EU assumed an executive position in global environmental politics, surpassing the US.

The European Union (EU) had no environmental policies, no environmental bureaucracies, and no environmental laws when it was founded in 1957. There were few expectations when the EU started systematically addressing environmental issues in 1973 that the environment would grow into one of the main spheres of shared activity and be one of the main focuses. Contrary to this belief, the EU now boasts some of the most progressive environmental legislation in the world.

In the beginning, it was mainly preoccupied with defending health and removing internal obstacles to the trade of products. With time, their policies became more extensive and inclusive. Among their progress, the environmental action programs are of note.

### *The environmental action programmes*

The first step towards a comprehensive environmental governance was taken by the 1973 Programme of Action on the environment.

Even though some ad hoc environmental measures had already been taken to address chemicals as early as 1967 and that additional measures to address noise and vehicle emissions had been implemented in 1970, the Programme is now largely regarded as the beginning of a coordinated and intentional European environmental policy.

The Programme stated: "to improve the setting and quality of life, and the surroundings and living conditions of the peoples of the Community. It must help to bring expansion into the

service of man [sic] by procuring for him [sic] an environment providing the best conditions of life and reconcile this expansion with the increasingly imperative need to preserve the natural environment" (OJ 1973, page 5).

It set out several auxiliary goals, a set of eleven guiding principles, and a condensed list of urgent activities that included exchanging information, developing impact evaluation methods, and the need for cooperation. Among the goals, there were a number that aimed at to reducing 'pollution and nuisances', the most important ones being: standardising techniques for sampling and measuring pollutants; defining parameters and decision-making procedures to develop environmental quality objectives; "preparing a list of quality objectives for different environmental media; determining standards "which, in certain cases could be provisional", commencing with water pollutants; harmonising the specifications of polluting products; studying particularly polluting sectors in conjunction with member states, commencing with the paper and pulp, iron and steel, and titanium dioxide sectors; investigating means for addressing toxic waste" (OJ, 1973).

The 1977 Environmental action programme, or the second environmental action programme, further developed the issues brought by the first one, it was extremely similar in terms of strategy and goal, with a wider variety of issues to be resolved. Special consideration was given to nature protection and water and air management (Hey, 2005).

Even though the objectives they set out were not as broad and ambitious as the SDGs are today, they represented a major step in environmental governance at the time of their implementation, particularly because it represented a significant turning point in how European integration was envisioned, by recognizing that economic growth was a tool for achieving a more just and environmentally sustainable type of social development rather than a goal in and of itself.

After the Programme, environmental issues seemed to have been completely forgotten about. The Environment and Consumer Protection Service (ECPS), a minor division of the Commission's Industry Directorate founded in 1972, tried to increase the political prominence of environmental issues in Brussels several times with no luck. It was the body charged to implement the Action Programme; however, it was so under resourced that it couldn't keep up with the member state's progress on the matter.

It was not until 1981, eight years after the approval of the programme, that the directorate was recognized full Directorate-General (DG) status and appointed a Commissioner in Brussels

capable of exercising strong leadership and engaging in interdepartmental conflict with other DGs. However, many of their efforts were empty.

The oil crisis of 1973 had resulted in a distrust in political bodies and declining support for integration. Environmental policy was not spared by the atmosphere of uncertainty and suspicion that hung over Europe at the time.

Despite the distrust and limitations, community environmental policy kept growing, slowly at first, then quickly as momentum started to increase (Jordan, 1998).

The third EAP results to be more closely tied to the completion of the Internal Market than its predecessors, showing a significant change in policy orientation. The internal market was its main driver, highlighting the potential risks and benefits of environmental policies to consider before setting forward new policies. Harmonizing environmental emission rules was necessary to prevent harm to industry competitiveness. This was done by drawing on the economic benefits, like positive employment effects, which derived from environmental policies.

The third programme represented the change “from a quality approach to an emission-oriented approach” (Hey, 2005). Moreover, it restated the objectives from the first two EAPs. Its main targets were policies for clean air, and noise and risk management for industrial sites.

1987 was a turning point in EU’s environmental policy. It was the year environmental protection received its own chapter in the Treaty.

The fourth EAP followed, maintaining the economic policies of the third programme and striving for a harmonisation between the goals of the internal market and sustainable development. Its main priority was waste management and pollution control.

It constituted the first time environmental protection was able to be seen as an integral part of the entire production process rather than merely an additive.

The fifth EAP was ground-breaking. Its main goal was sustainable development, per the definition given by the Bruntland Report.

Among its most important policies, there can be found: structural changes in favour of public transportation, energy conservation, and waste minimization; the focus on new tools, particularly market-oriented tools like financial incentives or voluntary ones that support producers and consumers interests in environmental decision-making; the new role given to non-governmental protagonists and local authorities to set forward the interests of the

environment; and finally the determination of short, medium, and long-term goals for reducing particular pollutants, with suggested tools to achieve them (Hey, 2005).

Unfortunately, the fifth agenda was too ambitious and Member States too reluctant and preoccupied with their own interests for some real progress to be made. Thus, the period known as the “roll-back of environmental policies” began, characterized by the unwillingness and resistance of MS of pursuing environmental objectives.

Sustainability remained important but was pushed aside for economic policies to develop. This was until the 90s, which saw a revival of environmental legislation, culminating in the 1997 Treaty of Amsterdam, which centred around environmental governance and sustainable development.

This period was characterised by new framework and target oriented legislation, new directives on environmental issues, new environmental policy instruments and new procedural legislation (Hey, 2005).

The most important innovation, however, was the inclusion of environmental NGOs into the political discourse, now allowed to take part in committees, expert networks and consultation processes.

The sixth EAP is not as ambitious as his predecessor, but it is firm in striving to end the “persistent” environmental problems: climate change, the disappearance of biodiversity and the excess consumption of resources.

The 6th EAP essentially establishes a framework of broad principles and objectives on essential issues, such as resources, recycling, soils, the urban environment, the marine environment, and clean air. Among the top policy concerns for the first ten years of the new millennium are the reform of chemicals policy and initiatives to lower EU greenhouse gas emissions (Hey, 2005). Opposed to the fifth programme, it is more cautious, deciding to delay controversial and monumental environmental policies until the main goals of the other programmes are solved. That is where the 2030 Agenda will come in, the most ambitious and wide-ranging programme the world has faced as of today.

## SECOND CHAPTER

The multi-level environmental governance of the European Union has undergone several changes since the adoption of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. These improvements demonstrate the EU's commitment to align its policies and practices with the Agenda's global environmental goals.

The EU has adopted the SDGs as part of its policy framework, recognizing the importance and connectivity of environmental, social, and economic dimensions of sustainable development. The SDGs serve as a framework for EU policies and activities, affecting decision-making in all levels of governance.

The Union has increased its efforts to tighten its environmental laws and regulations in accordance with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This includes amending existing directives and laws as well as creating new ones to address major environmental issues, including climate change, biodiversity loss, and resource efficiency.

To achieve environmental goals, the EU has encouraged more collaboration and coordination among its member states, agencies, and stakeholders. This entails multi-level governance, with actors at the local, regional, national, and EU levels cooperating to implement environmental policies and projects. It has also increased its participation in international environmental governance, actively participating in global forums and agreements to address environmental concerns. This includes its support for the Paris Climate Agreement and strong participation in international biodiversity projects, as well as its internal projects for climate change. Finally, it has developed the European Green Deal, a comprehensive policy program aimed at transforming the EU into a climate-neutral, sustainable economy, that includes a wide range of methods to transform industries such as energy, transportation, agriculture, and manufacturing. These international agreements and funding projects show the EU's comprehensive and ambitious approach to environmental policy.

### *The literature's position on the EU's implementation of the 2030 Agenda*

A growing collection of literature examines how the multi-level environmental governance of the European Union has changed since the adoption of the UN's 2030 Agenda (Jänicke and Quitzow, 2017; Fernandez et al, 2021). Even though there is no unified opinion on the subject, certain common motifs and insights have been revealed in this literature.

One important finding is that the 2030 Agenda has given the EU a new paradigm for environmental governance because it outlines a thorough and integrated strategy for sustainable development that considers its social, economic, and environmental impacts. The EU's



dedication to tackling issues like climate change, biodiversity loss, and resource depletion has been strengthened by the Agenda (Del Campo et al, 2020).

The literature also recognizes the difficulties that remain in carrying out the 2030 Agenda, such as the need for more ambitious goals and more effective enforcement procedures (Razavi, 2016; MCGranahan, et al, 2016; Hermoso et al, 2022). The potential conflicts between the EU's environmental aims and other policy goals, like economic growth and competitiveness, have also been brought up by some academics (Domenech and Bahn-Walkowiak, 2019).

Overall, the body of research points to continuous changes in the EU's multi-level environmental governance that have occurred since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda. There are still difficulties and uncertainties, but it is generally acknowledged that the EU's environmental policy and administration have been significantly influenced by the 2030 Agenda.

The literature's position on the EU's implementation of the 2030 Agenda is mainly divided into two factions, one that believes the EU is not making enough efforts to implement the Agenda, and one that believes the EU's efforts are sufficient.

The first group feels that Europe urgently needs a new, all-inclusive narrative about its future that appeals to its people and positions the continent as a force for both domestic and international growth that is sustainable (Hackenesch et al, 2016).

As a result of the 2030 Agenda's breadth and universality some believe that its execution necessitates a new level of collaboration, including increased departmental collaboration and whole-of-government strategies that cover all facets of EU internal and external policies, and they are not certain about the EU's ability to address all the goals and targets in their policy framework (Hackenesch et al, 2016).

Other authors believe the European Union is taking major steps in achieving some of the goals, but it is finding it difficult to achieve others, for instance in the goals focused on sustainable consumption and production and the protection of the oceans (Hege, 2019).

On the other hand, some authors support the idea that the EU is making concrete change in their implementation of the goals, for instance the achievement of energy and climate goals (Brodny and Tutak, 2023).

Many authors praise the Union not only for its efforts towards the implementation of the Goals and targets, but also for its support of innovations, comprised into goal 9 of the 2030 agenda (Szopik-Depczyńska et al, 2018).

### *The hypothesis to be demonstrated*

The hypothesis I'm trying to demonstrate is that changes in governance brought about a strengthening of the EU's environmental governance and made space for new policies to be introduced, and I will support it with the use of examples such as projects funded by the EU in the field of climate action, and changes in governance brought about by the 2030 Agenda.

Even though many goals and targets aim at resolving the environmental crisis, in this study I will turn my focus on Goal 13, Climate Action, to be more precise in my analysis.

I will be employing a mixed-methods research design to comprehensively analyze the topic, and in the third chapter I shall use quantitative and qualitative data collection to measure and assess certain indicators of environmental governance, among which there are legislative changes, funding allocations, and progress toward environmental goals by the European Union. To discover major developments, similarities, and differences, I shall compare the EU's environmental governance before and after the adoption of the UN's 2030 Agenda.

Furthermore, I will conduct in-depth case studies on specific policy areas to investigate the implementation and impact of environmental governance initiatives.

In this chapter I shall start with the study of my dependent and of my independent variable.

### *EU governance alignment with the 2030 Agenda*

Climate change has irrevocable consequences on our planet. Among its effects there can be found alterations in precipitation patterns, rising global average sea level, increasing ocean acidity, and increased average worldwide air and ocean temperatures. Because to food and water shortages, its effects may make some regions less liveable and endanger the sustainability of social, environmental, and economic systems.

The EU is actively working towards implementing all the 17 Sustainable Development Goals with different strategies for each. Although climate protection is a global issue, the EU has assumed a leading position, promoting the objectives of the Paris Agreement and assisting global climate initiatives. To solve the issue of climate change, it has implemented a climate adaptation strategy and has strengthened its internal environmental policy framework.

The EU's efforts to align its policies and practices with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) listed in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is the subject of this study's dependent variable, otherwise called "EU governance alignment with the 2030 Agenda." The EU's commitment to implementing the SDGs through institutional and policy changes, as well as its progress toward reaching the SDGs, will be monitored with indicators such as funding programs created towards solving the environmental issues the world is facing. I shall focus on

two programs that target climate action to be more precise in my final evaluation: the LIFE programme and the Horizon Europe programme.

### *The LIFE programme*

The EU has funded several projects towards salvaging the environment through the LIFE program, which supports the circular economy, quality of life, biodiversity, and nature protection across the EU and the EU Overseas Countries and Territories.

Most of the EU's projects aimed at environmental protection, managed by the Directorate-General for Environment's (DG ENV) received funding through the program.

The LIFE Programme has provided funding for a variety of environmental initiatives over the years, mainly aimed at clean energy, waste reduction, sustainable agriculture, and climate change adaptation.

The European Union established the EU LIFE Programme as a means of subsidizing initiatives that tackle environmental and climatic issues.

The program promotes projects involving governance, capacity building, best practice demonstration, coordination, and assistance. This includes large-scale strategic integrated projects, strategic nature projects, programs and strategies created at the regional, multi-regional, or national level, all of which promote the implementation of environmental and climatic goals (European Commission).

The LIFE program is split into two sub-programmes: one for environmental action (which accounts for 75% of the total budget) and one for climate action (which accounts for 25% of the budget), called Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation (CCMA) sub-programme.

For the sake of precision, I shall focus on the programs directed at adapting to climate change. To assist communities and ecosystems adapt to the effects of the environmental crisis, the LIFE Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation sub-programme supports the transition to a resilient, climate-neutral, energy-efficient, and sustainable economy, thereby promoting sustainable development. The climate sub-programme funds initiatives related to agriculture, land use, managing bogs, using renewable energy sources, and energy efficiency (European Commission). As already mentioned, The LIFE Climate Action funding stream focuses on projects that address climate change mitigation and adaptation. It emphasizes the need of taking real steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, boost renewable energy, improve energy efficiency, and build climate resilience.

The LIFE program's current financial cycle, which began in March 2023, spans the years 2021 through 2027. The LIFE CCMA sub-programme is anticipated to allocate a total of €3.4 billion

out of the €5.4 billion given to the whole programme, which are destined to 1,468 projects throughout the European Union during this cycle. This consists of 765 initiatives for climate change adaptation and 703 projects for climate change mitigation. However, if the funding cycle moves on and more initiatives are granted financing, this figure might vary (European Commission).

Among the thousands of initiatives, the program has and continues to fund, five stand out: The LIFE CIRC-PACK initiative, The Zero Cabin Waste project, LIFE URBANPROOF and LIFE TERRACESCAPE, and the LIFE-Brewery initiative.

### *LIFE CIRC-PACK*

The LIFE CIRC-PACK initiative targets the European plastic packaging value chain and is aimed at promoting sustainable plastics for the wrapping of products to lessen the effects of plastic waste on the environment and create new biodegradable alternatives.

The project encouraged the use of reusable and refillable packaging and created new packaging materials from renewable resources.

By balancing out the environmental costs with the help of circular economy strategies, the packaging value chain can achieve a positive balance in terms of greenhouse gas emissions. This can be achieved with high recycling rates coupled with environmentally friendly approaches to value creation and a new bio-based biodegradable plastic which helps make products more circular and is still durable (Karayilan et al, 2021).

### *LIFE Zero Cabin Waste*

The LIFE Zero Cabin Waste project aims at reducing the amount of litter produced by airlines by coming up with creative ways to recycle and use garbage from flights, which is estimated to be 11 billion kg of waste per year (ACI, 2017). Most of the recoverable trash is found in the waste flow and in the tourist flows, therefore the need arose for a more accurate separation in origin. Since very few airlines and catering businesses recycle, and if they do, the waste they collect is often of low quality, the initiative pushes for stricter regulations and supervision of airplane waste.

The project's goal is to develop a sustainable model for reducing, reusing, and recycling garbage gathered in Iberia airplanes at the Madrid-Barajas Airport in Spain and lay the groundwork for other airlines and relevant stakeholders to replicate it in the future. Its main objective is depleting 80% of waste from landfills, almost half from it achieved through recycling, with the remaining amount from energy recovery and composting. All these changes

will be possible with the introduction of a stricter law governing the handling of aircraft garbage by the European Union (Blanca-Alcubilla et al, 2018). Thanks to this project, a circular economy in the aviation industry will be promoted along with a reduction of greenhouse gas emissions caused by the disposal of trash.

### *LIFE URBANPROOF and LIFE TERRACESCAPE*

Two extremely important causes are the LIFE URBANPROOF and LIFE TERRACESCAPE ones. They consist in 24 meteorological stations that have been set up to record meteorological data and climate indices for the assessment of the appropriate adaptation measures as well as the monitoring of the effects of climate change on urban and rural areas. They target natural disasters and harsh weather conditions, like heat waves and floods, to increase metropolitan areas resistance to them while encouraging sustainable land use practices to avoid further hazardous weather disasters.

Starting from the greater municipality of Peristeri, in Athens, Greece, the projects analyse data they have recorded from meteorological stations placed in various urban environments and examine the relative changes in surface temperatures and perceived thermal discomfort. This way, they can identify hot and cool spots at the local level.

The findings provide us with a solid base for comparisons with changes predicted for the future climate, combined with climatic indices that directly or indirectly affect agriculture in the monitoring areas (Lemesios et al, 2021). By creating these tools and procedures for assessing possible climate risks, these initiatives aim at assisting cities in anticipating and planning for adaptation and coping with the effects of climate change.

### *LIFE-Brewery*

Finally, the LIFE-Brewery project seeks to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in the brewing business by creating a new method for brewing beer that uses less energy and water during production. Europe is the second-largest producer of beer in the world, with annual output exceeding 40 billion litres in 2017. The European Union currently has about 8,500 active breweries, with an expected twenty new breweries opening each week (Brewers of Europe statistics, 2017). This means that more and more water is employed in the industry annually.

The initiative seeks to develop an all-inclusive method for utilizing brewery waste as fresh aquaculture feed ingredients. One of its top objectives is the implementation, revision, and advancement of EU environmental and climate legislation and policy.

With a novel drying method, the project is creating low-moisture meal prototypes from brewer's spent grain and yeast that could be employed to feed three different fish species: the sea bream, the Senegalese sole, and the trout.

In addition, substituting the use of ingredients with marine origin, like fishmeal, will help decrease wild catch levels considerably, which will help achieve the objectives outlined in the Marine Strategy Framework Directive, that aims at protecting the marine environment.

The project, by offering new, economically advantageous protein sources that could substitute fish meal, increases the sustainability of aquaculture and stimulates the circular economy model (San Martín et al, 2019).

The LIFE programme is critical in fostering new projects and initiatives that contribute to the EU's environmental and climate goals. It has played an important role in encouraging sustainable development, biodiversity conservation, resource efficiency, and climate action throughout Europe.

The funding of the programme demonstrates that the European Union is making active efforts to address and mitigate climate change. The EU devotes a large percentage of its budget to the LIFE programme, displaying a commitment to investing financial resources in climate change activities.

The LIFE programme funds pilot and demonstration projects that exhibit breakthrough environmental and climate change technology, methods, and approaches. The EU fosters the development and deployment of creative solutions to climate change concerns by subsidizing such projects, thereby boosting the adoption of sustainable and low-carbon practices.

The programme aims to help implement, update, and enhance EU environmental and climate policies and regulations. By funding it, the EU demonstrates its commitment to tackling climate change and creating a better world for everyone.

### *The Horizon Europe programme*

Another extremely important programme funded by the European Union is the Horizon Europe programme.

At the EU level, innovation is recognized as being essential for development and sustainability. The Horizon Europe programme, successor of the Horizon 2020 programme, is the EU's largest research and innovation programme. It addresses climate change, aids in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals of the UN and increases the EU's development and competitiveness (European Commission).

While addressing global challenges, the program fosters cooperation and increases the effect of research and innovation in the development, support, and implementation of EU policies. It encourages the development and expands the application of superior knowledge and innovations.

The programme is focused on five mission areas: adaptation to climate change, including societal transformation; cancer; healthy oceans, seas, coastal and inland waters; climate-neutral and smart cities; and soil health and food.

Regarding climate action, its targets for 2030 are “preparing Europe to deal with climate disruptions; accelerating the transition to a healthy and prosperous future within safe planetary limits; and scaling up resilience solutions that will lead to societal changes” (European Commission, 2020).

After much debate over the size of the overall budget for 2021–2027 and a last-minute boost of €4 billion thanks to the efforts of the European Parliament, a political agreement on Horizon Europe was reached in December 2020. A budget of €95.5 billion will be allocated to the new European initiative for research and innovation from 2021 to 2027 (Ricciardiello et al, 2021). A four-year strategic planning document (Strategic Planning 2021-2024) that identifies funding objectives serves as the foundation of Horizon Europe.

Among the most relevant projects funded by the Horizon Europe programme, we can find the Farm-to-fork strategy, the Clean Hydrogen partnership, and the Mission Starfish 2030.

### *Farm-to-fork*

The farm-to-fork strategy seeks to quicken the transition to sustainable farming and food systems by encouraging the development of organic farming to reach the objective of at least 25% of the EU's agricultural land being used for it by 2030.

Food items with quality labels, like organic and GIs, are typically more costly than their equivalents. As a result, goods with such high-quality labels are more vulnerable to fraud, which can seriously damage quality schemes because it can reduce customer confidence, which hurts farmers and food companies that follow the law. Therefore, the strategy plans to strengthen geographical indications (GIs) by incorporating determined sustainability factors and places a high priority on preventing food fraud throughout the food supply chain. Therefore, the program's final objective is that of both helping to stop food fraud involving goods with high-quality labels, especially organic and GIs; and increasing the sustainability of the economic, social, environmental, and organic food supply networks, especially for organic and GI foods.

They ought to make it easier to move towards the ambitious goal of organic farming set forth in the strategy and improve the GIs program as a result.

It is expected to improve the performance and effectiveness of the control systems in Member States, unlocking the potential of new technologies and other creative approaches suitable for farmers and food businesses, and support traceability and transparency along the supply chains of quality labelled food, particularly those with organic and GIs labels (European Commission).

### *Clean hydrogen*

The Clean Hydrogen Partnership builds on the Horizon 2020 Fuel Cell and Hydrogen Joint Undertaking's achievements, further developing hydrogen technologies from past findings.

It seeks to quicken the advancement and application of clean hydrogen technologies in Europe, helping to create a decarbonized, integrated, and sustainable energy system. To furnish hard-to-decarbonize industries like heavy industries and heavy-duty transportation applications, it will concentrate on producing, distributing, and storing clean hydrogen.

By 2030, its objective is that of producing clean hydrogen at €1.5-3/kg, with an efficiency improvement and lower costs of production. This implies that affordable renewable electricity would be readily available, that it is able to penetrate large markets, and that distribution costs can be scaled down to less than €1/kg of hydrogen.

One billion euros has been destined to the project (European Commission). To ensure complete EU coverage, it will specifically include regions that are not yet hydrogen friendly as targets. The goal is to further connect these nodes through green corridors, whether by pipes, rail, waterways, maritime, or roads, given that transportation is also green. A big number of sub-projects have been introduced for these goals: The European Partnership for Clean Aviation; The European Partnership for transforming Europe's rail system; Zero-emission waterborne transport; Zero-emission Road Transport and many more.

The projects regarding Climate impact of the hydrogen economy have been given a budget of €10 million (European Commission).

### *Mission starfish 2030*

By advancing sustainable aquaculture and developing new technologies and solutions for sustainable ocean management, the Mission starfish 2030 seeks to restore and safeguard the health of European seas and oceans.



Around 75% of the Earth's area is covered by the water cycle, which includes the ocean, seas, coastal, and inland waters. It is essential to all life types and therefore should be protected.

Our ocean and waters are a natural capital that must be seen as being crucial to our success and wellbeing. Life on Earth would not exist without thriving ocean and waters.

The complete water cycle is under pressure now more than ever, “from source to sea”, at every stage. Aquatic ecosystems have been badly damaged by years of pollution and destructive use. While the ocean's ability to control the Earth's climate is essentially threatened, climate change and ocean acidification come as additional, cumulative pressures (European Commission).

The mission takes its name from its five interconnected goals: knowledge, renewal, zero pollution, decarbonization, and governance, which recall the shape of the starfish.

It put forward five main goals for 2030: bridging the information and mental gap; regrowing aquatic and marine environments; zero pollution and decarbonization of our oceans, seas, and waterways; and restructuring government.

These five goals all complement one another. The main goal is to actively safeguard and revitalize ecosystems to regenerate them.

The first step of regeneration is spreading awareness so that each person living in Europe is made a citizen of our oceans and waterways. Engaging, igniting, and motivating citizens to completely appreciate our ocean and waters as a common benefit is in and of itself one of the Mission's goals.

The second one is to completely map, sequence, observe, and forecast our oceans, seas, and rivers. The objective is to enhance the forecasting and climate modelling infrastructures and services already in place and combine all available observation data, initially at the EU level and then globally, into an open-source, easily understandable, matching application, and an interactive platform: a “Digital Twin of the Ocean” (European Commission).

All of this can only be accomplished with the participation and active ownership of all public authorities involved in the Mission's execution, particularly by bringing together new and existing European marine universities and departments, as well as scientific units and organizations dealing with freshwater, to coordinate, support, and carry out unified goals for marine and water science. To create new skill and competency frameworks, collaboration between universities, vocational education and training centres and chambers of commerce should be strengthened at the local level. This will improve local and regional communities' access to employment possibilities and reduce the dangers of social exclusion. Additionally, the mission pushes for collaboration between networks of scientific museums, aquariums, and

between scientists, filmmakers, and artists to create and develop awareness-raising initiatives for the ocean and its waters.

The funding of the Horizon Europe programme is another example that demonstrates that the European Union is actively committed to addressing and mitigating climate change. Horizon Europe devotes a major percentage of its budget to climate-related research and innovation programs. This displays a clear intention to invest financial resources in increasing scientific understanding, developing innovative technology, and finding climate-change solutions.

Horizon Europe comprises specific study areas and goals relating to climate change mitigation, adaptation, and long-term development. The support for these objectives demonstrates the EU's acknowledgement of the critical need to address climate change, as well as the recognition of the role of research and innovation in meeting climate goals.

Horizon Europe promotes international collaboration and cooperation in climate research and development. It allows non-EU researchers, innovators, and organizations to join in initiatives, boosting global partnerships and knowledge exchange to collectively address climate change. The Horizon Europe initiative emphasizes the EU's proactive approach in combating climate change through its financing priorities, research focus, collaborative projects, and emphasis on innovation. It highlights the EU's commitment to using research and innovation as vital drivers for developing sustainable solutions, transitioning to a low-carbon economy, and meeting the climate goals established in international agreements such as the Paris Agreement.

### *First considerations*

Through the funding of the two programs, the EU has demonstrated a strengthening of its environmental policy framework. The implementation of numerous climate action projects and initiatives, the provision of sizeable funding for environmental and climate-related research and development, and the alignment of their policies and strategies with the goals of the 2030 Agenda are all examples of this effort towards a governance that is more aligned with the agenda, in this case, with special regards to goal 13, Climate Action.

Its dedication to enhancing their environmental governance is further evidenced by the setting of specific goals and timetables for achieving them, as well as their cooperation with other international organizations and stakeholders. Furthermore, the number of resources and assistance they have committed to these initiatives is another evidence that they are making every possible effort to halt the effects of climate change.

Moreover, there are multiple other ways through which the EU has tackled the problem of climate change in its governance.

### *Changes in the EU governance*

The independent variable in this research, changes in EU governance, refers to the policy tools and initiatives that the EU has put in place in response to the global environmental agenda set forth by the UN's 2030 Agenda. These policy tools include, among others, the Paris Agreement, the EU Emissions Trading System, the 2030 Climate and Energy Framework, the European Green Deal, and the Circular Economy Package. The EU has been leading international efforts in recent years to combat climate change and environmental degradation, and it has established challenging goals for lowering greenhouse gas pollution, switching to renewable energy sources, and encouraging sustainable development.

Since the UN's 2030 Agenda was adopted, the EU has worked to align its policies and practices with the Agenda's stated global environmental goals, which has resulted in a major evolution of the multilevel environmental governance within the EU. As a result, new policy instruments have been put into place, old policies have been revised, and new frameworks for collaboration and cooperation between various levels of governance within the EU have been developed.

This study is, again, concentrated on Goal 13 of the UN's 2030 Agenda to better understand how these changes in EU governance have impacted how EU policies are aligned with the goal of Climate Action. The focus is on the European Union's environmental governance, therefore policies that seek to solve the climate crisis shall be further examined.

### *The Paris Agreement*

The 2015 Paris agreement is a climate action proposal that targets the strengthening of environmental global governance for a better future.

The Agreement establishes long-term objectives to serve as a guide for all countries, including: significantly reducing global greenhouse gas emissions to keep global temperature rise at a safe level, 2 degrees Celsius, while actively pursuing limiting the increase even further to 1.5 degrees; reviewing countries' efforts every five years; and providing financing to developing nations for mitigating climate change, bolstering resilience, and improving abilities to deal with the effects of climate change and how to adapt to it.

The Agreement is legally binding on the 194 Parties (193 States plus the European Union) that have joined it (United Nations, 2015).

The Paris Agreement offers a robust framework that will direct the international effort for many years to come, pushing for change toward a world with zero emissions. Its implementation is necessary for the fulfilment of the SDGs.

The agreement has been hailed as a victory for the European Union (EU) and its member states as well as for global climate cooperation.

From a European point of view, it has been praised for going above and beyond expectations in terms of ambition to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, and even though it is insufficient to prevent disastrous climate change, it constitutes a major step in the right direction (Oberthür and Groen, 2017)

The EU's key aim for Paris was the reduction of GHG emissions and ensuring transparency on its progression. The EU pursued four primary goals in this regard. First, it promoted the signing of an international agreement that would bind all nations. Second, "fair, ambitious, and quantifiable mitigation commitments by all parties" were to be included in this pact. (EU Council, 2015). Third, the EU requested that the pact include a system for periodic reviews that would pave the way for consistent rises in ambition every five years. This "ambition mechanism" was justified by the fact that parties' collective mitigation efforts were deemed insufficient to keep the rise in the global mean temperature to 2°C over pre-industrial levels. To guarantee openness of and accountability for mitigation activities, the EU insisted on strong standard rules for parties. Additionally, the EU supported "a long-term global mitigation goal in line with the below 2°C objective," while internal disagreement existed over its specific formulation.

The European Union actively supports and participates in the Paris Agreement, indicating its will to take urgent action to combat climate change.

The Paris Agreement asks for periodic reviews and increases in climate ambition. By strengthening emission reduction targets and enacting more stricter climate regulations, the EU has continually proved its commitment to expanding its climate ambition.

The Union is also an active participant in international climate negotiations and diplomatic efforts to boost the Paris Agreement's implementation. It communicates and collaborates with other governments, regions, and stakeholders to promote global cooperation, share best practices, and push for an aggressive climate action strategy.

The EU aligns its domestic policies and legislation with the Paris Agreement's goals and principles. Several EU policies and efforts, including the European Green Deal, the Climate Law, and the Renewable Energy Directive, are intended to assure compliance with the Paris

Agreement's commitments. This underlines the EU's aim to include climate goals into its legislative framework and accelerate the transition to a low-carbon, climate-resilient society. The Paris Agreement also invites governments to adopt long-term policies for low-emission development. For instance, the European Union has created its own long-term strategy, known as the European Green Deal, which lays out a plan for reaching carbon neutrality by 2050. This plan defines the EU's overall approach to transforming its economy, decarbonizing diverse sectors, promoting sustainable behaviours, and fostering innovation to successfully address climate change.

### *The European Green Deal*

The European Green Deal is the major political proposal issued by the European Commission in 2019 and approved in 2020. The green deal is concerned with the problem of environmental protection and climate adaptation. Its main aims are that of transitioning to a more sustainable, low-carbon economy.

The need arose once the realization that only 60% of greenhouse gas emissions will be reduced by 2050 under current policies. The European Green Deal seeks to achieve net zero greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from the EU by 2050 as a response to the worsening of the climate crisis. Additionally, the agreement aims to create a toxic-free environment, provide healthy and sustainable diets, and preserve biodiversity in addition to “protecting the health and well-being of citizens from environment-related risks and impacts” (European Commission, 2019).

Its mission is that of making Europe the first carbon-neutral continent by 2050 and to strengthen European cohesion through it (von der Leyen, 2019).

The Green Deal consists of a broad range of legislative proposals and actions that address numerous facets of the economy and society, including: investing money into renewable energy and energy-saving initiatives to cut back on greenhouse gas emissions; promoting the circular economy by supporting recycling and reuse and minimizing waste; promoting sustainable forests and agriculture; promoting public transit and electric cars to promote sustainable mobility; safeguarding biodiversity and natural habitats; enhancing the climate goals and strategies of the EU to lower greenhouse gas emissions (WEECOP).

The intensive use of low-carbon technologies that are already accessible, still emerging, and not yet on the market will necessitate significant structural changes for the European Green Deal strategy to be implemented (Amoroso et al., 2021).

With a successful Green Deal, the EU will be of example to the whole world in achieving climate targets by 2030.

The European Green Deal includes the "fit for 55" package. The "fit for 55" package, which amends current climate and energy laws to comply with the new EU goal of a minimum 55% reduction in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by 2030, was approved by the European Commission on July 14, 2021. The modification of the Renewable Energy Directive (RED II), which will assist the EU in meeting its new 55% GHG target, is a crucial component of the "fit for 55" package. By 2030, the EU must guarantee that at least 32% of its energy consumption would come from renewable energy sources, per RED II.

The European Green Deal establishes a clear and ambitious goal for the EU to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050. This entails striking a balance between greenhouse gas emissions and removals, effectively removing the EU's net contribution to climate change. The objective demonstrates the EU's resolve to lead the worldwide battle against climate change.

The Green Deal is a collection of policy measures aimed at transforming several sectors of the economy, including energy, transportation, agriculture, industry, and buildings. It outlines strategies for increasing renewable energy production, promoting energy efficiency, developing sustainable mobility, promoting circular economy practices, and enhancing biodiversity protection. These initiatives highlight the EU's active efforts to decarbonize critical sectors and encourage sustainable practices.

The European Green Deal proposes to mobilize substantial financial resources to assist in the transition to a sustainable and climate-neutral economy. Through different financial instruments, such as the European Green Deal Investment Plan and the Sustainable Europe Investment Plan, the EU has committed to generating €1 trillion in sustainable projects over the next decade. This demonstrates the EU's active efforts to harness financial resources and incentivise corporate and governmental investments in environmentally beneficial projects.

This shows the commitment of the Union to a sustainable future and to combat climate change through its policies and funds.

### *The Renewable Energy Directive II*

The European Union has established standards of renewable energy use within the Union through the Renewable Energy Directive 2009/28/EC.

The directive, which amends and repeals the 2001 Directive on the Production of Electricity from Renewable Energy Sources (Directive 2001/77/EC), was released on April 23, 2009. The clauses are strengthened by the updated RED II, which also establishes additional sectoral targets and a new EU aim of a minimum 40% share of RES in final energy consumption by

2030. The Commission is recommending that this RES objective be increased even further, to a 45% share by 2030, as part of the RE-PowerEU plan (May 2022).

The RED's key characteristics are as follows: Plans for national green energy action: Each member state must create a plan detailing how it will meet its renewable energy goals, including strategies to encourage the use of renewable energy in various fields like electricity, heating, and transportation.

A system for issuing and trading guarantees of origin, which attest to the source of electricity generated from green energy sources, is established by the RED.

Biofuels and bioliquids: To guarantee that the use of biofuels and bioliquids does not have a negative effect on the environment, the RED establishes sustainability criteria for their production and use.

Mechanisms for cooperation are included in the RED, which calls for member states to work together to achieve their renewable energy targets (European Commission).

The directive is a crucial policy tool for encouraging the use of renewable energy in the EU and assisting the shift to a low-carbon economy is the RED. It has been crucial in promoting the development of renewable energy technologies and businesses in Europe and assisting in the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions within the EU.

The RED II creates a framework for the promotion of renewable energy in the EU. It establishes binding targets for the share of renewable energy in the EU's final energy consumption. The directive urges member states to establish support mechanisms and remove barriers to renewable energy development, and it promotes the deployment of renewable energy technologies such as wind, solar, and biomass. RED II illustrates the EU's commitment to transitioning away from fossil fuels and toward clean and renewable energy sources.

### *The 2030 Climate and Energy Framework*

The 2030 Climate and Energy Framework is a legal framework that has the objective of significantly increasing the European economy's resource productivity and facilitate the shift to the Circular Economy (CE).

It is an extension of the 2014 circular economy package, which had four main goals: increasing recycling and halting the waste of priceless materials; fostering employment growth and the economy; demonstrating how eco-design, new business models, and industrial collaboration can help us achieve zero waste; and finally diminishing the effects on the climate and greenhouse gas emissions.

Aiming to cover the entire process from design to disposal and recovery/recycling, the new package "Closing the Loop: An EU Action Plan for the Circular Economy" has a greater emphasis on eco-innovation. The revised eco-design directive will include measures to support the reparability, durability, and recyclability in product requirements.

The package includes a legislative proposal to review the waste directives, which includes provisions like a landfill cap of 10% of total waste by 2030, a 65% EU recycling target for municipal waste by 2030, a 75% EU recycling target for packaging waste by 2030, and harmonization of definitions and calculation methods (Domenech, 2019).

The 2030 Climate and Energy Framework lays forth a plan for the EU to achieve its climate and energy goals by 2030. It identifies three main objectives, the first one being decreasing Greenhouse Gas Emissions. This goal highlights the EU's proactive attitude to lowering its carbon footprint and contributing to global emission reduction efforts.

The second objective is Renewable Energy Share. This goal reaffirms the EU's commitment to increase the use of renewable energy sources while decreasing dependency on fossil fuels.

The third goal is Energy Efficiency Improvement. This goal reflects the EU's emphasis on lowering energy use and supporting energy-saving techniques in a variety of sectors.

The 2030 Climate and Energy Framework illustrates the EU's active efforts to set ambitious goals and provide a comprehensive framework to govern its climate and energy policy.

### *The EU Emissions Trading System*

The EU Emissions Trading System (ETS) is a market-based tool created to assist the EU in reducing greenhouse gas emissions from specific industries. It constitutes the biggest global multi-sector greenhouse gas trading system these is (Egenhofer et al, 2011).

The ETS places a price on carbon and enables businesses to exchange pollution permits, which incentivizes companies to cut emissions. The EU's primary legislative tool for addressing climate change is the ETS.

The EU ETS is a tool for distributing carbon emission permits to business (measured in tons of CO<sub>2</sub>). This instrument should offer greater flexibility and cost-efficiency than straightforward emission standards because industry can purchase or trade these allowances as needed.

The EU ETS currently includes over 10,000 installations across 27 EU member states, as well as in Norway, Iceland, and Liechtenstein, in the energy-intensive sectors of power, heat, and steam generation, oil refineries, coke ovens used in the production of iron and steel, mineral



industries, and pulp and paper plants. Thus, the sites are responsible for nearly 50% of the EU's CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and 40% of all its GHG emissions.

The intention under the implementation of the system was that of acting as a forerunner in the fight against climate change, and to reach the GHG goals the EU has implemented (Böhringer, 2013).

For a long time, EU officials have referred to the EU ETS as the cornerstone of the EU's climate strategy, and its success in lowering GHG emissions in Europe will depend on it.

Since more than 1 billion tons of CO<sub>2</sub> were saved between 2008 and 2016 thanks to the EU programme, which at first controlled about 50% of the EU's carbon emissions, primarily from big industrial polluters and energy production, expectations are high (Bayer and Aklin, 2020).

The EU Emissions Trading System is a key policy tool for lowering greenhouse gas emissions in the EU. It creates a market-based cap-and-trade system in which enterprises in high-emission industries must hold permits to cover their emissions. The overall quantity of allowances is steadily lowered over time, providing enterprises with a financial incentive to cut their emissions. The ETS applies to industries like power generation, manufacturing, and aviation. It pushes for them to invest in cleaner technology and minimize their environmental effect by putting a price on carbon emissions and generating economic incentives for emission reductions. Again, demonstrating the efforts made by the EU in reaching its climate goals.

### *The circular economy action plan*

By reducing pollution and optimizing resource use, the Circular Economy Action Plan seeks to advance a more sustainable and circular economy. It consists of actions like improved support for sustainable business models and new product design guidelines as well as a new sustainable products policy framework.

Based on this objective, the Commission adopted the European Union's (EU) action plan on circular economy, which was put forth in 2015, and set forth an ambitious plan to convert the EU economy into a circular one, bringing about significant economic benefits as well as social and environmental incentives (Mhatre et al, 2021)

Up until 2025, the EU can generate €320 billion in value, which includes CE investments in the built environment field (€115 billion), food (€70 billion), and mobility (€135 billion) (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2017).

The EU has been a leader in the development and application of CE, as its member states have jointly started several policies and frameworks that support CE in various businesses,

industries, and services. It has been adopted in a number of sectors but has been crucial in the innovation of the waste management industry.

Sorting garbage into recyclable, biodegradable, high calorific value waste and trash has been a key component of CE strategies. Increased waste incineration or energy production from waste is decreasing reliance on fossil fuels (Tomić and Schneider, 2018).

The principles of minimization of waste and pollution, extending the useful life of goods and materials, and regeneration of natural systems form the foundation of the idea of CE. These premises serve as the basis for the CE concepts of redesign, reduction, reuse, and recycling.

The Circular Economy Action Plan emphasizes the European Union's commitment to combating climate change by moving to a resource-efficient circular economy. It focuses on waste reduction, resource efficiency, material loop closure, sustainable product design, innovation support, and international cooperation. The EU's objective is that of mitigating environmental impacts, cut greenhouse gas emissions, and accelerate sustainable growth by turning away from a linear economy and towards circular practices.

### *Final considerations*

These changes in governance further prove the efforts the EU has been going through to implement and follow environmental standards for its member states and across the globe. The EU seeks to be the leading force in the climate crisis and be an example for others. Various actions have been done by the EU to strengthen its environmental governance, including the undertaking of changes in its legal framework to accommodate climate action efforts and the environmental issues raised by the 2030 agenda.

The EU has demonstrated a strong commitment in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals, and its changes in governance demonstrate the measures it has taken and continues to take to combat climate change.

In conclusion, it can be argued that the EU is putting forward a vast number of instruments to support the 17 SDGs set forward by the 2030 Agenda. This demonstrates an effort from the institution in implementing them and solving the environmental crisis the world is currently facing. Not only is the EU strengthening and broadening its policy framework for environmental matters, but it is also funding projects that would accelerate its completion of the Goals, particularly Goal 13, Climate action.

The Paris Agreement, the EU Emissions Trading System, the 2030 Climate and Energy Framework, the European Green Deal, and the Circular Economy action plan all demonstrate the EU's active efforts to tackle climate change.

Having said the above, to verify the hypothesis regarding the change in EU governance resulting from the EU's adoption as a signatory to the UN 2030 Agenda, it is necessary to analyse the quality of the EU's legislative output and its impact on decisions to be made at the Member State level. This will allow us to see whether there has been a real change in governance with direct and indirect effects on member state actions in terms of improving climate change and mitigation actions. The subject of investigation in the third and final chapter will therefore be the case study, consisting of a review of the documentation produced by the EU for the purpose of analysing the change in the European Union's governance since the adoption of the UN 2030 Agenda.

## THIRD CHAPTER

### *A More Ambitious Union*

The "2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development," unanimously adopted in 2015 by the 193 member countries of the United Nations to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), as already mentioned, consists of 17 goals, or objectives, divided into 169 targets, which were set to identify priorities related to economic and social development, to which each country is called to respond, such as the fight against poverty and hunger, the right to health and education, access to clean water and energy, rights of employment, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, the challenge against climate change and environmental protection, the sustainability of cities, production and consumption patterns, social and gender equality, justice, cooperation and peace.

The goals are articulated on the three dimensions of sustainable development: economic growth, social inclusion, and environmental protection. Also related to them is a fourth dimension, that of unitary institutional governance. The Sustainable Development Goals represent common objectives on a set of important development issues: worth mentioning are combating poverty, eradicating hunger, and combating climate change, to name but a few. "Common goals" means that all people and all countries must strive to achieve them, no one can be excluded from them, and no one should be left behind to push the world towards the path of sustainability.

Because of their universality, the SDGs have the dual potential to address disruptive social drives both within and outside the Union: the SDGs are global goals that apply to all parts of the world, and we must address them as such. "We need to work from an international perspective, leading by example, setting global standards, and inciting countries, industry, and people to join us in this mission. Green growth benefits everyone, producers as well as consumers; it is necessary to make sure that the ecological transition is socially inclusive, just, and equitable as a key measure for public acceptance of the necessary steps and for it to ultimately be a success for all. This must be done within the framework of policy coherence that affects not only the internal level, but also the impact of internal policies on the external dimension, and vice versa. We must make sure that we do not export our ecological footprint or create poverty, inequality, and instability in other parts of the world. As Europeans we are fully aware that negative impacts elsewhere will in turn have a boomerang effect on our economy and society, for example by reinforcing the root causes of migration. Thus, we must consider that climate change and environmental degradation are increasingly a major threat to world peace and security and, in the absence of decisive action, will become an even greater

source of global risks, including forced relocation and migration. The EU must take the lead, including in the strict implementation of the Paris Climate Agreement and in pursuing international efforts to decarbonize the transport sector. The EU could also initiate binding global agreements on the circular economy, resource use and biodiversity. Being forerunners in the transition to a green and inclusive economy, together with the strong momentum in international rulemaking, will enable us to establish a set of globally valid standards and give us a strong competitive advantage in the global marketplace” (European Commission, 2019).<sup>4</sup> All European institutions<sup>5</sup> agree in supporting the 2030 Agenda and ensuring its centrality in all Union policies. It is in this context that the elections of the new European Parliament at the end of May 2019 and the appointment of the new European Commission mature, which, under this impetus, take on the SDGs as the “compass and map” for developing Europe's strategic framework for sustainable development (European Parliament, 2019).

The new President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen presented the guidelines of her 2019-2024 mandate through a document called “A More Ambitious Union - My Agenda for Europe” which is divided into six points:<sup>6</sup>

1. The European Green Deal
2. An economy that works for people
3. A Europe ready for the digital age
4. Protecting our European way of life
5. A stronger Europe in the world
6. A new impetus for European democracy (European Commission, 2019).

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<sup>4</sup> European Commission, Bruxelles 30.1.2019 COM(2019) 22 final-  
<https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regdoc/rep/1/2019/IT/COM-2019-22-F1-IT-MAIN-PART-1.PDF> ;  
Reflection Paper Towards a Sustainable Europe by 2030  
COM/2019/22 final <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52019DC0022>

<sup>5</sup> European Parliament, Resolution of March 14, 2019, in [https://europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2019-0220\\_IT.pdf](https://europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2019-0220_IT.pdf) ;  
European Council, Conclusions of April 9, 2019, in <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-8286-2019-INIT/it/pdf> ;  
Committee of the Regions, Opinion of June 26, 2019, Committee of the Regions ECON-VI/044 - 135th Plenary Session of June 26 and 27, 2019 - OPINION. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): a basis for the long-term EU strategy for a sustainable Europe by 2030; European Economic and Social Committee, Opinion of September 26, 2019, at <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/it/node/66336>;

<sup>6</sup> at [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024\\_EN](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024_EN)

### *The European Green Deal*

The first point of the program, the European Green Deal, is presented by the new President in her opening statement<sup>7</sup>: “Our most pressing challenge is keeping our planet healthy. This is the greatest responsibility and opportunity of our times. I want Europe to become the first climate-neutral continent in the world by 2050. To make this happen, we must take bold steps together. Our current goal of reducing our emissions by 40% by 2030 is not enough. We must go further. We must strive for more. A two-step approach is needed to reduce CO2 emissions by 2030 by 50, if not 55%. The EU will lead international negotiations to increase the level of ambition of other major economies by 2021. Because to achieve real impact, we do not only have to be ambitious at home, we have to do that, yes, but the world has to move together. To make this happen, I will put forward a Green Deal for Europe in my first 100 days in office” (Ursula von der Leyen, 2019).

On December 11, 2019, the Communication from the Commission is released<sup>8</sup>. It addresses the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, and the Committee of the Regions outlining the European Green New Deal Strategy<sup>9</sup>.

The document represents a new growth strategy that aims to transform the European Union and its member states into a modern, resource-efficient, and competitive economy by 2050, with no net greenhouse gas emissions; economic growth decoupled from resource use; and no person or place ignored.

It states: “This Communication sets out a European Green Deal for the European Union (EU) and its citizens. It resets the Commission’s commitment to tackling climate and environmental-related challenges that is this generation’s defining task. The atmosphere is warming, and the climate is changing with each passing year. One million of the eight million species on the

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<sup>7</sup> Opening Statement in the European Parliament Plenary Session by Ursula von der Leyen, Candidate for President of the European Commission, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/es/SPEECH\\_19\\_4230](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/es/SPEECH_19_4230)

<sup>8</sup> Communication from the European Commission, The European Green Deal, COM (2019) 640 final, at [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:b828d165-1c22-11ea-8c1f-01aa75ed71a1.0006.02/DOC\\_1&format=PDF](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/resource.html?uri=cellar:b828d165-1c22-11ea-8c1f-01aa75ed71a1.0006.02/DOC_1&format=PDF)

<sup>9</sup> The choice of the expression is due to a specific reference to the New Deal implemented in the United States by President Franklin Delano Roosevelt between 1933 and 1939 to remedy the effects of the Great Crisis in the 1929-1932 period. This was an economic policy program that "aimed to break the vicious cycle of demand-production-wage-demand recession on the assumption that this could be done only through a strong accentuation of state intervention in the economy, without, however, going so far as to undermine the fundamental principles of the capitalist system" (New deal in Treccani Dictionary of History (2010), [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/new-deal\\_%28Dizionario-di-Storia%29](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/new-deal_%28Dizionario-di-Storia%29)

planet are at risk of being lost. Forests and oceans are being polluted and destroyed. The European Green Deal is a response to these challenges. It is a new growth strategy that aims to transform the EU into a fair and prosperous society, with a modern, resource-efficient, and competitive economy where there are no net emissions of greenhouse gases in 2050 and where economic growth is decoupled from resource use” (European Commission, 2019).

The reason for comparing the New Green Deal and sustainable development stems from the many commonalities between the two approaches or, according to other conceptions, principles. Both can precisely constitute a principle of government action as conceptual reference points for the adoption of certain policies. Again, in analogy with sustainable development, the activities that descend from Deal aim to achieve a balance between two often conflicting but potentially compatible purposes of general relevance: the protection of the environment and the promotion of economic and social development. Finally, both involve several innovations in public regulation, particularly at the extra-national level.

The Green Deal consists of the following macro-objectives<sup>10</sup>:

- I. Make the EU's climate targets more ambitious with an intermediate milestone in 2030 and a final milestone in 2050. By 2030, climate-altering gas emissions are expected to be reduced to -55% based on those emitted in 1990, and by 2050, so-called "net zero" or climate neutrality is expected.
- II. Supply of clean, affordable, and secure energy, consistent with emission reductions, prioritizing energy efficiency, ensuring affordable prices for consumers and businesses, in an interconnected and digitized European market.
- III. An industrial strategy for a clean and circular economy, including a new plan for the letter, the use of digital technologies as a tool for achieving the sustainability goals of the Green Deal.
- IV. Efficient construction and renovation of public and private buildings, addressing the twin challenges of energy efficiency and energy affordability.
- V. Sustainable and smart mobility, in the direction of climate neutrality and reduction of air pollution especially in cities, including through the deployment of alternative fuels.
- VI. A greener common agricultural policy/"Producer-to-consumer" strategy, a fair, healthy, and environmentally friendly food system.

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<sup>10</sup> COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS The European Green Deal COM/2019/640 final <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52019DC0640>

VII. Preservation and protection of biodiversity, defining a new strategy, ensuring that the EU pursues the principle that all its policies contribute to preserving and restoring Europe's natural capital.

VIII. "Zero pollution" goal for a toxic-free environment, with the aim of combining better health and environmental protection, stimulating innovation capacity, and increased global competitiveness.

The goals of the Green Deal are to be realized, integrating sustainability into all policies, through the following cross-cutting measures designed to:

A. Build a renewed sustainable finance strategy to target financial and capital flows green investments, ensuring a just transition, with an Investment Plan for a Sustainable Europe that will include a mechanism and a Just Transition Fund focused on the regions and sectors most affected by the transition, making the European Investment Bank the EU's new climate bank, stipulating that 50 percent of its operations be dedicated to climate action by 2025.

B. "Reverse" national budgets by reorienting public investment, consumption, and taxation towards green priorities, eliminating harmful subsidies, designing with member states fiscal reforms that can stimulate economic growth and improve resilience to climate shocks, contribute to a more equitable society, and support a just transition.

C. Stimulating research and innovation through the Horizon Europe initiative, in alliance with other EU programs, mobilizing national public and private investment and emphasizing experimentation.

D. Leveraging education and training, establishing a European skills framework to help cultivate and assess knowledge, skills and attitudes related to climate change and sustainable development, providing member states with new financial resources with which to make school activities and buildings more sustainable, and using and updating tools such as the European Social Fund Plus and the Youth Skills Development Agenda.

E. "Do no significant harm", meaning do no significant damage to the environment, which translates into the need to anticipate the environmental, social, and economic effects of the legislative proposals that will be presented (European Commission, 2019).

The Green Deal is supported by all European institutions<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> European Parliament resolution of January 15, 2020 on the European Green Deal, at [https://europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2020-0005\\_IT.pdf](https://europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2020-0005_IT.pdf) ; Committee of the Regions resolution "The Green Deal in Partnership with Local and Regional Authorities" discussed at the plenary session on December 4 and 5, 2019 at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/IT/TXT/PDF/?uri=OJ:C:2020:079:FULL&from=ES> ;



### *The Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy 2020*

Following the same sustainability principles the Green Deal is protecting, the Commission issues the annual Sustainable Growth Strategy 2020, COM (2019) 650 final, December 17, 2019<sup>12</sup>.

The document articulates the growth strategy into four pillars:

- Environment
- Productivity
- Equity
- Stability.

The Commission, therefore, assumes the task of ensuring the macroeconomic stability of the Union, leveraging the coordination of national policies, and acting in compliance with the Stability and Growth Pact, a fundamental support for sustaining the proper functioning of the Economic and Monetary Union. It represents the importance of digital innovation for increasing competitiveness and productivity.

The novelty recited in this Communication is the introduction of performance monitoring for the purpose of measuring the annual growth strategy toward the achievement of the SDGs.

In the 2020 reports dedicated to each country, for the first time a section will be reserved to illustrate the performance of the member states in relation to the SDGs and monitor their progressive achievements based on indicators made available by Eurostat. This appears necessary to support the EU and individual member states in the pursuit of the Goals in all economic and employment policies.

In the COM (2020) 150 final of February 26, 2020<sup>13</sup>, indeed, the Commission adopts the country report for each country, including Italy, providing detailed recommendations on the main gaps to be closed for the pursuit of the objectives<sup>14</sup>.

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European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) opinion of January 23, 2020, "The Sustainable Economy We Need" at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/IT/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52019IE2316&from=EN> ;

<sup>12</sup> at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/IT/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52019DC0650&from=EN>

<sup>13</sup> at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/IT/TXT/PDF/?uri=COM:2019:150:FIN&qid=1551777809333&from=EN>

<sup>14</sup> Country reports are the documents with which the European Commission analyzes the economic and social health of the EU member states. These documents, one for each country, are published in March each year and contain analyses of the most relevant macroeconomic and social indicators (growth, consumption levels, employment rates and others).

At the beginning, hopes and expectations were high for a pursuit of the Goals, until the 2020 pandemic and consequent lockdowns came into the picture, and everything teetered. This is why the pandemic is often referred to as a “black swan event”: it was a rare and unpredictable event that appears to have been unavoidable in retrospect and that has a major impact on individuals and societies (Britannica).

The International Monetary Fund has projected the cost of the coronavirus pandemic on the global economy through 2024 to be \$12.5 trillion.

The pandemic has deeply affected the human economic and social fabric of our planet. according to WHO data, since the pandemic began, there have been 763,740,140 confirmed cases of infection and 6,908,554 deaths worldwide (Health Emergency Dashboard, 2023).

The Bank of Italy's 2020 annual report <sup>15</sup>, quoting IMF estimates, reports that “in 2020, world GDP declined by 3.3 percent, the sharpest contraction since World War II; trade, partly as a result of restrictions on the mobility of goods and people, shrank by 8.9 percent.” In 2021, the global pandemic situation improved significantly, mainly due to the more expeditious progress of vaccination campaigns among advanced countries. The resulting easing of restrictions on mobility and overall expansionary economic policies encouraged a faster and more intense than expected recovery in the global demand, particularly the demand for goods. This benefited global growth, which recovered strongly to 6.1 percent, and the dynamics of international trade were improved as well.

The health measures taken to curb the COVID-19 pandemic led to a contraction in the production of products and services, thus less supply. It triggered a disruption in the supply of raw materials and semi-finished goods. Naturally, this also led to a reduction in exports, with the subsequent effect of aggravating production capacities.

This resulted in a “freezing” of the economy of the states that prioritized adopting an expansionary monetary policy, which had the merit of preventing the pandemic crisis from becoming a financial crisis by injecting liquidity into the markets and ensuring, through central banks, access to credit.

The various affected countries also launched financial assistance programs to prevent the collapse of household and corporate income, thus enabling them to contain a widening of the crisis.

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<sup>15</sup> At [https://www.bancaditalia.it/pubblicazioni/relazione-annuale/2020/rel\\_2020.pdf](https://www.bancaditalia.it/pubblicazioni/relazione-annuale/2020/rel_2020.pdf)

Following the consolidation of economic recovery, European authorities intervened, replacing interventions designed to absorb the shock brought about by the pandemic and aimed at maintaining growth potential, with the adoption of macroeconomic policies capable of fostering structural reform programs geared toward the reallocation of capital and labor resources in favor of sectors with greater development opportunities.

The pandemic has, in addition, accelerated the processes of digitization and automation of the production system, favoring the establishment of conditions for changing the labor market.

The lessons learned from the financial crisis have made it clear that austerity programs have not been adequate to counter low growth and that the economy must “adapt” to the new economic environment created by the pandemic, ensuring the efficient allocation of resources among sectors and enterprises.

At the European level, therefore, there has been a growing awareness that the best terrain for reform programs is a growing economy, expecting the need to flank demand-support policies with interventions aimed at stimulating the supply potential of the economy.

As a result, the Commission is forced to update its previous assessments against the scenario determined by COVID-19, with COM (2020) 500 final of May 20, 2020, and adopt new recommendations for each member country, including Italy (see COM (2020) 512 final<sup>16</sup>) shown in full in Box 1 below:

*Box 1: “The recommendations to Italy for the European Semester (2020 Stability Program) [European Commission May 20, 2020 - COM (2020) 512 final and European Council July 20, 2020].*

Pandemic, Fiscal Policies, And Post-Crisis Recovery

1. Implement all necessary measures to effectively address the pandemic and support the economy and subsequent recovery; when economic conditions permit, pursue fiscal policies aimed at achieving prudent medium-term fiscal positions and ensuring debt sustainability, while increasing investment; strengthen health system resilience and capacity in health workers, essential medical products, and infrastructure; and improve coordination between national and regional authorities.

The COVID-19 pandemic has put the national health system under unprecedented pressure, bringing out structural weaknesses and the need to increase preparedness in response to crisis

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<sup>16</sup>at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/IT/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0512&qid=1590479029415&from=EN>

events. Despite healthcare spending being lower than the EU average, the Italian healthcare system is characterized by highly specialized and good quality universal services and has generally managed to provide affordable care. However, especially at the beginning of the pandemic, fragmentation in health system governance and coordination between central and regional authorities slowed the implementation of some containment measures. In addition to improving governance processes and crisis preparedness plans, post-COVID-19 policies should aim to address the lack of public investment in health care. In the medium to long term, the development of a strategic investment plan will be key to improving the resilience of the Italian healthcare system and ensuring continuity in the provision of accessible care services.

2. Provide adequate replacement incomes and access to the social protection system, particularly for atypical workers; mitigate the impact of the crisis on employment, including through flexible working arrangements and active employment support; and strengthen distance learning and skills upgrading, including digital skills.

Taking into account the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences, social safety nets should be strengthened to ensure adequate replacement incomes regardless of the employment status of workers, especially those facing gaps in access to social protection. Strengthening income support and replacement income is particularly relevant for atypical workers and people in vulnerable situations. The provision of services for social and labor market inclusion is also crucial. For the future, in order to promote sustainable and inclusive recovery, the integration of women and inactive youth into the labor market is crucial.

3. Liquidity to the real economy and investment in the green and digital transition. Ensure the effective implementation of measures to provide liquidity to the real economy, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises, innovative businesses, and the self-employed, and avoid payment delays; frontload mature public investment projects and promote private investment to promote economic recovery; and focus investment on the green and digital transition, particularly on clean and efficient energy production and use, research and innovation, sustainable public transport, waste and water management, and a strengthened digital infrastructure to ensure the delivery of essential services; Green transition investments will be particularly relevant to support recovery and increase future resilience. Italy is highly vulnerable to extreme weather events and hydrogeological disasters, including drought and forest fires. Italy's transformation to a climate-neutral economy will require substantial public and private investment over a long period of time. Investment under the Green Deal is also critical to reducing the human health impacts of air pollution in Italian cities, particularly in the Po River Basin. Infrastructure deficits in water and waste management, particularly in southern

regions, generate environmental and health impacts that result in substantial costs and lost revenue for the Italian economy. Climate change resilience is important for all infrastructure, including sanitation, and this requires adaptation strategies. Addressing the challenges associated with the environment, hydrological hazards, climate action, circular economy, and industrial transformation presents an opportunity to improve productivity while avoiding unsustainable practices. At the same time, investing in these types of projects can help create jobs and support post-crisis recovery. The confinement due to the COVID-19 pandemic has also highlighted the importance of investing in the digitization of the economy and demonstrated the centrality of digital infrastructure.

4. Improve the efficiency of the judicial system and the functioning of public administration. Effective public administration is crucial to ensure that measures taken to address the emergency and support economic recovery are not slowed down in their implementation. Disbursement of social benefits, liquidity support measures, investment anticipation, etc. may not be effective if hampered by impediments in the public sector. Effectiveness in preventing and suppressing corruption can play an important role in ensuring Italy's post-crisis recovery. Particularly, transparency in the public sector and the strengthening of controls” (European Commission, 2020).

#### *Next Generation EU in the context of the 2021/2027 Multiannual Financial Framework (EU multiannual budget)*

On May 27 with COM (2020) 442 final<sup>17</sup>”The EU Budget as the Driver of the European Recovery Plan,” the Commission, in response to the crisis brought about by COVID-19, instead of abandoning the Green Deal Growth Strategy, proposes the introduction of an emergency European recovery instrument (“Next Generation EU”) worth 750 billion euros, which goes in the direction of the measures outlined with the Strategy.

In July 2020<sup>18</sup>, at the extraordinary European Council, an agreement is reached on the “package” for recovery. This is an articulated package of 2,018 billion (EUR 1,824 billion in 2018 prices) to which a further 540 billion is added (stemming from the SURE Facility, Support

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<sup>17</sup> COM (2020) 442 final, 27 May 2020 and attached at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0442>

<sup>18</sup> at <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/it/press/press-releases/2020/07/21/european-council-conclusions-17-21-july-2020/>

for Pandemic Crisis Management and ESM/EIB Guarantee Fund for Workers and Enterprises), which, therefore, combines resources:

- of the multiannual financial framework MFF 2021-2027 - amounting to EUR 1,211 billion in current prices (EUR 1,074 billion in 2018 prices) ordinary funds from the European budget and
- of Next Generation EU - NGEU, amounting to 806.9 billion in current prices (750 billion in 2018 prices)
- of SURE and ESM amounting to 540 billion.

NGEU share 806.9 billion (amount expressed in current prices) plus more than 1,200 billion euros, to be used until 2027.

Thirty percent of the multi-year and Next Generation EU budget will be spent on combating climate change. This is the highest share ever, within the largest EU budget ever.

What is completely new is that member states have the option of boosting spending, without it constituting an increase in debt.

To finance Next Generation EU, Europe will issue bonds to finance itself on the capital markets. Under the agreement, the Commission allocates 390 billion of the 750 billion to finance the Recovery and Resilience Facilities; the remainder, 360 billion, is made available to member states in the form of loans.

In order to access the financing measures, member states must prepare tailor-made national recovery plans based on the investment and reform priorities identified under the European Semester (specifically for Italy reported in Box 1), as effectively described in COM (2020) 456 final "Europe's momentum: repairing the damage and preparing the future for the next generation" adopted on May 27, 2020<sup>19</sup>, consistent with national energy and climate plans (NECPs), plans for a just transition, partnership agreements and operational programs.

NGEU is time-limited: it covers the years 2021-2023, during which 70% of the funds must be committed in the 2021-2022 biennium, while the remaining 30% in 2023.

Underlying NGEU is the adoption of the resilience philosophy. "Transformational resilience" is referred to as the ability of a system to "bounce forward" and not backward from its pre-crisis position. "Resilience" refers to the ability not only to withstand and cope with challenges, but also to transform in a sustainable, equitable and democratic way (Asvis, 2020). Considering the COVID-19 crisis and the transition-driven policy agenda, Europe needs to further strengthen its resilience, that is, not just recover but emerge stronger by stepping up these

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<sup>19</sup> at <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/IT/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0456&qid=1591006426096&from=EN>

transitions. The EU must learn lessons from the pandemic, anticipate future developments, and strike the right balance between the well-being of current and future generations<sup>20</sup>.

The European response to the pandemic and the very structure of the Next Generation EU, and in particular the Recovery and Resilience Facility, are rooted in this approach. While the measures put in place by the Commission in the early months of 2020 can be defined as measures to protect against the shock brought about by the health emergency, the European Commission's May 2020 Communication “The EU Budget as the Driver of the European Recovery Plan”<sup>21</sup> sought to envisage a set of promotional and transformative measures designed to lead member countries not only out of the emergency but to set them on a path of transformative resilience.

### *The programs that can be financed under NGEU*

Funds from Next Generation EU are to be invested based on three pillars, through 390 billion euros in grants and 360 billion euros in loans to member states. This is based on the combination of what was proposed by the European Commission in its Communications May 27, COM (2020) 442 final<sup>22</sup> and COM (2020) 456 final<sup>23</sup> and what was corrected in the European Council Conclusions of July 17-21, 2020 “Europe's time: repairing the damage and preparing the future for the next generation”<sup>24</sup>.

### *Pillar one: supporting member states in recovery*

The following instruments are part of this pillar:

1. The Recovery and Resilience Plan with a budget of €560 billion; divided between grants and loans, representing nearly 90 percent of the entire NGEU package. Member states develop national recovery plans to support reforms and investments made by MS with the aim of mitigating the economic and social impact of the coronavirus pandemic and making the economies and societies of European countries more sustainable, resilient, and prepared for the challenges and opportunities of the green and digital transition. The instrument is aimed at

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<sup>20</sup> at <https://asvis.it/rapporto-asvis-2020/> by ASviS, L'Italia e gli Obiettivi di Sviluppo Sostenibile, Report 2020

<sup>21</sup> see note 15

<sup>22</sup> see note 15

<sup>23</sup> see note 17

<sup>24</sup> see note 16

protecting employment, strengthening policies directed at education and training, supporting research and innovation, improving the health sector, and enhancing the efficiency of public administration and the social and economic environment. It is, however, predominantly aimed at accompanying the recovery phase through support for investment and reforms recited in the National Recovery and Resilience Plans (PNRR). In its proposal, the European Commission points out that the instrument is inspired by the implementation of the original objectives, enunciated by the President of the new European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, when she took office, and is therefore predominantly geared toward the pursuit of green transition and digital innovation objectives.

2. A new initiative, REACT-EU, intended to aid regions through an allocation of 55 billion euros. This is complementary support for cohesion, also primarily geared toward pursuing the goals of green transition and digital innovation. The planned availabilities will augment: the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF); the European Social Fund (ESF); and the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD). The additional resources are intended to be disbursed over the period 2021-2022; the REACT-EU allocation for Italy for the year 2021 amounts to approximately EUR 10.7 billion. The resources will be distributed according to a criterion that measures the actual impact of the crisis. This can avoid disruptions in funding for key post-crisis recovery measures and will ensure support for the most affected.

3. Additional funding to the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) with an increase of €8.1 billion in the resources available to the fund to provide support to farmers and rural areas in the structural changes that will be needed to implement the European New Green Deal and to the Fair Transition Fund for €10.9 billion.

### *Pillar two: boosting the economy and encouraging private investment*

The following instruments are part of this pillar:

1. A new Solvency Support Instrument, operational as of 2020, with a 31 billion allocation aimed at mobilizing private resources and urgently supporting European businesses in the hardest-hit regions and sectors with the goal of unlocking more than 300 billion euros in solvency support. This will help to ensure a level playing field for member states that are less able to provide support through state aid and to benefit viable businesses that are dealing with capitalization problems.

2. Boost InvestEU, the EU's flagship investment program, with €6.1 billion by bringing its capacity to more than double to promote private sector investment. This instrument has its predecessor in the EuSEF, the European Fund for Strategic Investments (which it is supposed



to replace and seeks to channel, in cooperation with the EIB Group, investor availability mainly in four areas: sustainable infrastructure; research, innovation and digitization; small and medium-sized enterprises; and social investment and skills, offering the EU budget as a guarantee). In addition, a strategic investment facility will be created under InvestEU that can unlock €150 billion of investment from the €15 billion from Next Generation EU.

### *Pillar three: learning from the crisis*

The following instruments are part of this pillar:

1. The enhancement of RescEU, the Union's civil protection mechanism, and its strategic reserve with additional funding of about two billion euros, which can be used in the form of grants or procurement for emergency response infrastructure, transport capacity and logistics infrastructure.
2. The refinancing of Horizon Europe in the amount of 5.4 billion euros to strengthen research in the areas of health and climate.

In addition to the three pillars of spending through the Recovery Facility, the Commission is also proposing to strengthen a number of additional programs in the EU budget such as the Common Agricultural Policy, the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund, the Single Market Program and programs supporting cooperation in tax and customs, the Connecting Europe Facility, Erasmus+, the Creative Europe Program, the Digital Europe Program, the European Defense Fund, the Internal Security Fund, the Asylum and Migration Fund, the Integrated Border Management Fund, and pre-accession assistance.<sup>25</sup>

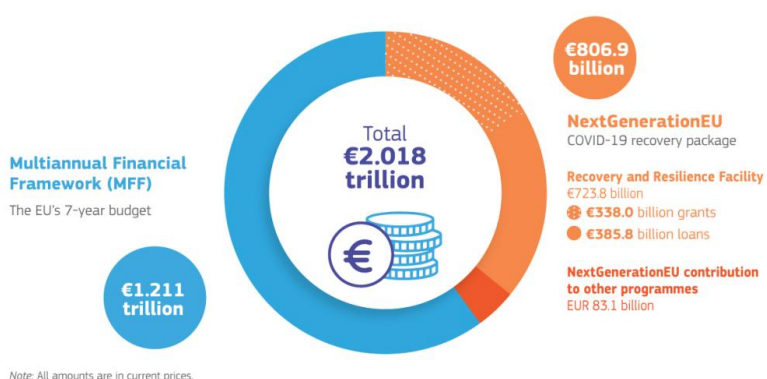


Figure 4: the EU budget for the 2021-2027 cycle, European Commission Website.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS Europe's moment: Repair and Prepare for the Next Generation COM/2020/456 final <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2020%3A456%3AFIN>

<sup>26</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/the-eu-budget/long-term-eu-budget-2021-2027/#sectoral>

As mentioned, the program to which almost 90 percent of the resources are allocated is the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF) of €672.5 billion in 2018 prices (€723.8 billion in current prices), of which concessional loans amounting to €358.5 billion and grants amounting to €314.0 billion. Disbursement of RRF-related resources is conditional on the one hand, on the submission of project proposals under which several conditions must be met (including the introduction of structural state reforms, expenditure control, and compliance with spending conditions); on the other hand, disbursement of the sums occurs only upon the achievement of certain project “stages of progress” (so-called milestones and targets). In addition, funds allocated under the RRF must be executed in the years 2021-23 and the disbursement of resources must take place by the end of 2026.

While for some, including the European Parliament itself, the agreement reached on the NGEU package with the Council conclusions in July 2020 would not be ambitious enough, others reflect on the crucial value that, institutionally, European leaders have managed to achieve, since, in a particularly short time frame, when compared to reforms of such magnitude, they have determined to unanimously approve an unprecedented plan for the recovery of the entire European economy, also providing the mechanism for its financing.

There is thus a sense of renewed confidence among European leaders in the strengthening of institutional cooperation, which is geared toward modernizing their economies through self-financing, and making substantial common resources available. Moreover, if well directed, the program could enable states once and for all to address and resolve their economic and institutional weaknesses.

Thus, the innovation is in the level of European economic governance and is centered on the awareness of the close link between European economies. In addition to this is the confidence that has been placed in an expansive monetary policy that if oriented in the direction outlined by the European institutions could help reduce the differences between strong and more fragile countries, achieving convergence between the various economies by creating the conditions for the strengthening of the common European market as a driver for growth. Not to mention the very high “precedent” value of the model used, which can be resorted to, should another black swan threaten the effectiveness of national policies.

If the challenges of the future given the foreseeable recessionary economic pushes due to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict are addressed considering what has been learned in the wake of the

pandemic, EU member states could rise from the coming crises with a stronger economy and closer political and social cohesion.

It's important to not forget that some funds will be awarded on a competitive basis (for example, through the Horizon Europe scientific research calls), but most are distributed among countries, as in the case of regional, rural, or social development programs. For the latter alone, more than 70 billion euros are foreseen for Italy and its companies, universities, local authorities and associations, until the year 2027. Unlike the PNRR, the disbursement of resources to these programs does not require the achievement of “milestones” and “targets”: the resources are already allocated, it is a matter of programming them, spending them and monitoring them well, according to the procedures delineated by the PNRR.

Finally, it is important to note that the Next Generation EU strategy has a propulsive effect of supporting reforms and allows for meeting the challenge of placing this extraordinary effort in a path of increasing integration, which began after the real Marshall Plan and continued with the single market and economic and monetary union.

### *Focus on Goal 13*

The 2030 Agenda remains the main reference for EU actions through the European Green Deal programme even after the pandemic. The 2030 Agenda and the Paris Climate Agreement are consistently taken as the example of EU external action and multilateralism.

As summarised by the EU Council Conclusions of 22 June 2021<sup>27</sup> called “a comprehensive approach to accelerate the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development - Rebuilding better after the COVID-19 crisis”, the challenges posed by the COVID-19 crisis meant that there was a need to accelerate innovative and decisive joint action and aligning investments towards achieving the SDGs. Undertaking urgent structural reforms and rebuilding with greener solutions proved to no longer be an option but a necessity.

The Council welcomes the Commission staff working document “Achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals: a comprehensive approach” adopted on 18 November 2020<sup>28</sup> and how it summarises the Commission's commitment to mainstream the 2030 Agenda in its various governance instruments, such as the European Semester, the Multiannual Financial Framework and the NextGenerationEU recovery tool. These instruments will be

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<sup>27</sup> <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9850-2021-INIT/en/pdf>

<sup>28</sup> [https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2020-11/delivering\\_on\\_uns\\_sustainable\\_development\\_goals\\_staff\\_working\\_document\\_en.pdf](https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2020-11/delivering_on_uns_sustainable_development_goals_staff_working_document_en.pdf)

employed for ensuring policy coherence, for EU engagement in the world, as tools for regular monitoring and reporting on its internal and external actions and more.

“The 2030 Agenda and its 17 SDGs, the Paris Agreement on climate change, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction and the Convention on Biological Diversity represent the guidelines for the European Commission's actions in the definition of all policies, both internal and external to the Union. Several opportunities in the international field are offered by the COP26 in Glasgow on climate change, the COP15 in Kunming on biodiversity, the UN summit on food systems, and the G20 commitments, including global health aspects, as tools to improve and accelerate the collective implementation of the 2030 Agenda in an integrated and coherent manner” (Asvis, 2020).<sup>29</sup>

Against this backdrop, the 8th Union Environment Action Programme COM (2020) 652 of 14.10.2020<sup>30</sup>, with which the Commission presents its proposal for a European Parliament and Council Decision on a General Programme for Union Environmental Action up to 2030, is maturing. The programme was endorsed by the European Parliament in its plenary session on the 8<sup>th</sup> of July 2021, with strategic directions to enable a systemic shift towards a Union economy that delivers well-being within the planet's limits, with regenerative growth. All of this ensuring that the environmental and climate transition is achieved in a fair and inclusive manner, while still contributing to reducing inequalities.

Furthermore, the “European Climate Regulation” was published on 30.6.2021 as a EU regulation, number 2021/1119 of the Parliament and of the Council<sup>31</sup>. The regulation has the force of law and is directly applicable in each of the member states. Among the new features it introduces a new interim target for 2040 can be found; to be defined within six months after the first global budget under Article 14 of the Paris Agreement, scheduled for 2023.

On 17.7.2021, the European Commission adopted the “Fit for 55” package, defined by the Commission as the centrepiece of the European Green Deal and a decisive step in the definition of the EU's decarbonisation policies to 2030, in the trajectory of climate neutrality by 2050. It consists of a set of measures designed to reduce emissions by 55% compared to 1990 levels by 2030 in view of the 2050 carbon-neutral goal. The Commission's official communiqués identify the decade 2021-2030 as decisive for the history of mankind, calling it the 'make-or-

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<sup>29</sup> Italy and the Sustainable Development Goals, Report 2020, <https://asvis.it/rapporto-asvis-2020/>

<sup>30</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=COM:2020:652:FIN&rid=5>

<sup>31</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32021R1119>

break' decade. The proposals introduce systemic measures: a carbon price is placed on carbon with an expansion of the Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) and energy taxation, making it economically viable to invest in decarbonisation and providing financial resources to support a just transition. The border carbon tax prevents the 2030 targets from being undermined by carbon leakage, i.e. that polluting activities can be relocated outside the EU, damaging the economy and employment levels, without achieving the results. The 'polluter pays' principle laid down in Article 191 of the TFEU is essentially put into practice.

On 24 February 2021 with COM (2021) 82 final<sup>32</sup> the new European strategy for adaptation to climate change was adopted by the Commission, renewing the European adaptation strategy already adopted in 2013. Starting from the premise that even if stopping all greenhouse gas emissions does not prevent the climate impacts that are still ongoing, this new strategy is defined as transversal to all initiatives of the Green Deal, such as the biodiversity strategy, the strategy from farm to fork, the action plans for the circular economy and zero pollution, the forestry strategy and the soil strategy, the restructuring wave, the strategy for smart and sustainable mobility, and the review of the strategy for sustainable finance.

The Commission highlights how economic losses due to more frequent climate-related extreme events are increasing. In the EU, these losses already average more than 12 billion euros per year. Estimates show that the exposure of the current EU economy to a global warming of 3°C above pre-industrial levels would result in an annual loss of at least EUR 170 billion. Particularly critical are the absolute annual losses from droughts in Europe estimated at 40 billion euros a year, with the most severe impacts in the Mediterranean and Atlantic regions. The phenomenon of rising seas will impact the coasts where about 40 per cent of the population lives and where about 40 per cent of the EU's GDP is generated. The strategy builds a framework for the EU and Member States to facilitate decision-making and action in the face of climate uncertainty.

The SDGs and the European Green Deal are indicated as central reference models for adaptation planning in action outside the EU, highlighting the urgent need for financial liquidity for adaptation to climate change, both public and private, and the need for it to be directed towards the most critical and vulnerable situations: it is increasingly recognised that climate change contributes to the framework conditions that foster violent conflict. Adaptation action can be a valuable tool in conflict prevention and mediation.

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<sup>32</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52021DC0082&from=EN>

With the adoption of COM (2020) 788 final on 9 December<sup>33</sup>, the implementation contents of the European Climate Pact, a central participatory initiative of the European Green Deal, are defined. The main stated objective of the Climate Pact is to spread awareness and support action for climate change.

The Commission establishes a secretariat to support the implementation of the pact. To support action and to spread awareness, it envisages the establishment of climate ambassadors with specific accreditation by the Commission via the pact website. Action on the ground will be encouraged by facilitating exchanges through the online platform where participants will declare their commitments and initiatives: pact participants will be able to express interest in the work of others and connect with them to generate further action and momentum in a spirit of community. And in this context, the pact intends to invite young people to continue to bring climate and environmental issues to the top of the global agenda.<sup>34</sup>

In a nutshell, it can be said that it reinforces the appeal of the scientific knowledge base to the centrality of environmental policies for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda Goals with an approach that emphasises how the achievement of environmental and climate-related SDGs aids the achievement of social and economic SDGs, as our societies and economies depend on a healthy biosphere and sustainable development can only take place within the safe operating space of a stable and resilient planet (European Parliament, 2022).

In conclusion, the 2030 Agenda with its 17 SDGs, the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, the New Green Deal, and the many documents that were talked about in this chapter serve as the foundation for the European Commission's actions in defining all internal and external Union policies, especially towards protecting the environment, and will continue to be the basis for action in the future.

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<sup>33</sup> <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0788>

<sup>34</sup> COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS European Climate Pact COM/2020/788 final <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2020%3A788%3AFIN>

## CONCLUSION

The transformation of the European Union's environmental governance since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development has been a crucial and dynamic process. This thesis examined the evolution of the EU's environmental governance since the signing of the 2030 Agenda, analysing key changes, their implications, and the driving forces behind them. By exploring global and European environmental governance, comparing the Millennium Development Goals and the Sustainable Development Goals, examining funding programs financed under the Union, investigating the policy framework, and analysing EU documents related to climate change, we have gained valuable perspectives into the adaptive strategies and progress made by the Union in aligning its governance with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Environmental governance plays a vital role in addressing sustainability challenges effectively. The EU recognized the need to improve its environmental governance practices and policies to achieve sustainable development and the well-being of its citizens, bearing in mind not only the present generation, but also future ones.

Therefore, by lining up its governance with the 2030 Agenda and its principles, the EU aims to guarantee a sustainable future for its member countries and citizens and be an example to the world.

The MDGs served as the foundation for the EU's sustainability efforts, but the shift towards the SDGs demonstrated the EU's strong commitment to resolving the climate issue, since they are more comprehensive and have a broader scope. When the MDGs and SDGs are compared, it is evident that the SDGs are more comprehensive and focus more on the relationship between the social, economic, and environmental components of sustainable development.

The SDGs are aimed, more generally, at building a new growth model based on sustainability and circular economy, therefore, they include more goals and targets aimed at climate adaptation and mitigation.

The EU's funding programs and policy frameworks have played a crucial role in advancing its environmental governance. Initiatives such as Horizon Europe and the LIFE program have provided significant financial support for research, innovation, and environmental conservation projects. These programs enable the EU to drive sustainable development by investing in solutions that tackle environmental challenges effectively.

To accommodate climate action efforts and align with the 2030 Agenda, the EU has made modifications to its legal framework. These changes demonstrate the EU's commitment to environmental standards and sustainability. Key initiatives and drivers include the Paris

Agreement, the European Green Deal, the Renewable Energy Directive II, the 2030 Climate and Energy Framework, the EU Emissions Trading System, and the Circular Economy Action Plan. Through these measures, the EU aims to enforce environmental standards and inspire others to follow suit.

The analysis of EU documents related to climate change of the last chapter adaptation reveals the EU's active efforts to adapt its governance framework to the 2030 Agenda. The European Green Deal, for instance, provides a comprehensive policy framework which has the primary aim of making the EU the world's first climate-neutral continent by 2050. Additionally, the Next Generation EU initiative and the programs implemented under it successfully address the socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic while promoting sustainable recovery. The EU Commission's communication documents on the topic of climate mitigation and adaptation provide guidance and strategies for implementing the 2030 Agenda and addressing climate change challenges.

The EU's environmental governance has undergone significant transformations since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. By recognizing the need for enhanced practices and policies, the EU has shown its commitment to addressing sustainability challenges effectively. Funding programs, policy frameworks, and modifications to its legal framework have further strengthened the EU's environmental governance. The EU's response to international agreements and commitments, along with its active efforts in climate change adaptation and mitigation, demonstrate its commitment to creating a sustainable future for its member countries and becoming a leading force in global environmental issues. By aligning its governance with the 2030 Agenda, the EU aspires to be a model for others and contribute significantly to the achievement of global sustainability.

This is not to say, however, that there are not areas that can't be improved. The EU has showcased its commitment to achieving sustainable development goals by strengthening its governance practices and policy frameworks and aligning them with the principles of the agenda; but that does not mean it has done everything it possibly could to achieve the Goals. Several challenges remain, and constant efforts are needed to ensure the effective implementation and monitoring of the environmental policies implemented towards the achievement of the SDGs.

While changes in governance have brought about a strengthening of the EU's environmental governance, there is a need for ongoing evaluation and adaptation. The implementation of policies and the translation of commitments into tangible actions on the ground require continued attention and monitoring. Additionally, ensuring inclusivity, transparency, and



stakeholder engagement are crucial aspects that need to be further strengthened to achieve relevant environmental governance.

As new challenges and opportunities emerge, the EU must remain active in its governance approach, continuously revisiting and revising policies, frameworks, and strategies to address emerging issues and seize new opportunities for sustainable development.

This thesis has contributed to the understanding of the EU's environmental governance transformation since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda. It has shed light on the evolution of global and European environmental governance, the comparison between the MDGs and SDGs, the EU's funding programs and policy frameworks, and the analysis of key EU documents related to climate change adaptation.

The mixed-methods approach employed in this research has provided a major insight into the EU's adaptive strategies, its commitment to achieving sustainable development goals, and its role as a global leader in environmental governance.

In conclusion, it can be said that the EU's environmental governance has undergone significant changes and advancements since the adoption of the 2030 Agenda. The EU's alignment with the SDGs, the implementation of funding programs and policy frameworks, and the emphasis on climate change adaptation demonstrate this commitment to sustainable development.

However, challenges persist, and further efforts are needed to ensure effective implementation, stakeholder engagement, and the continuous adaptation of governance approaches.

The main actors in driving an effective transition of modern societies towards sustainable systems are institutions rather than private citizens or organizations. The economic resources that will be made available by national and supranational governments, if well allocated, will enable the so-called “leap forward” on the path of sustainable development. This implies a profound change that must concern the role of institutions (supranational, national, and local) which are the main actors in governing and guiding an effective transition towards sustainable systems.

In other words, it is important to put the protection of public and collective interests back at the centre of the system's governance. This is clearly closely linked to a greater involvement of European institutions and the state. This is an arduous challenge, which implies defining a new paradigm for social and economic development, in a scenario that remains very uncertain.

By learning from the past, addressing current challenges, and embracing future opportunities, the EU can continue to be the front-runner in environmental governance and contribute to the achievement of global sustainable development goals.



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## ***Figures***

Figure 1: UN Graphical Illustration of the 7 MDGs,

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## RIASSUNTO IN ITALIANO

Il cambiamento climatico è una delle sfide più rilevanti che dobbiamo affrontare ai nostri giorni. Per farlo non basta l'impegno individuale o delle organizzazioni private, occorre la collaborazione e cooperazione tra governi, organizzazioni internazionali e individui.

L'Unione europea riconosce da tempo la necessità di affrontare le sfide ambientali per garantire uno sviluppo sostenibile e proteggere il benessere dei suoi cittadini.

La definizione di sviluppo sostenibile risale al rapporto Brundtland "Our common future", presentato nel 1987 dall'allora primo ministro norvegese Brundtland, presidente della Commissione mondiale su Ambiente e Sviluppo (World Commission on Environment and Development, WCED) istituita nel 1983, che lo identifica come lo "sviluppo che consente alla generazione presente di soddisfare i propri bisogni senza compromettere la possibilità delle generazioni future di soddisfare i propri". Si tratta dunque di un impegno programmatico che guida l'azione degli Stati e delle organizzazioni internazionali ed è in grado di orientare l'applicazione dei trattati internazionali e delle norme nazionali. L'obiettivo che si propone è il bilanciamento tra le esigenze di sviluppo economico e la tutela ambientale.

Questo obiettivo costituisce anche il tema di fondo dell'Agenda ONU 2030, un programma d'azione per le Persone, il Pianeta, la Prosperità, la Pace e la Partnership (le 5P) adottata all'unanimità dai 193 Paesi membri delle Nazioni Unite nel 2015 per il perseguimento degli Obiettivi di Sviluppo sostenibile (Sustainable Development Goals - SDGs). Gli Stati membri ONU si sono impegnati a raggiungerli entro il 2030. Gli obiettivi, interconnessi tra loro, bilanciano le tre dimensioni dello sviluppo sostenibile: crescita economica, inclusione sociale e tutela dell'ambiente. Gli Obiettivi per lo Sviluppo sostenibile rappresentano obiettivi comuni su un insieme di questioni importanti per lo sviluppo, tra i quali il contrasto al cambiamento climatico. 'Obiettivi comuni' indica che essi riguardano tutti i Paesi e tutti gli individui: nessuno ne è escluso, né deve essere lasciato indietro lungo il cammino necessario per portare il mondo sulla strada della sostenibilità.

La presente ricerca si concentra in particolare sull'attuazione dell'Obiettivo 13, l'Azione per il clima, nel quadro politico europeo. Lo scopo che ci si prefigge è esaminare l'evoluzione della governance ambientale multilivello dell'UE dopo l'adozione dell'Agenda 2030, facendo luce sui cambiamenti significativi che ha subito, sulle loro implicazioni e sulle forze trainanti che li hanno determinati.

La variabile dipendente di questo studio è la valutazione dei progressi della governance ambientale dell'UE ai fini del perseguimento degli obiettivi stabiliti dall'Agenda 2030 per lo sviluppo sostenibile. Questa variabile serve a misurare l'efficacia e la capacità di risposta del quadro di governance ambientale dell'UE.

La variabile indipendente esplorata in questo studio è rappresentata dai cambiamenti nella governance europea. Essa comprende le varie modifiche, riforme e adattamenti intrapresi dall'UE nelle sue pratiche di governance ambientale. La variabile mira ad analizzare la portata e la natura dei cambiamenti attuati all'interno del quadro di governance dell'UE e a valutare il loro impatto sull'allineamento con l'Agenda 2030.

L'ipotesi che si vuole dimostrare con questa ricerca è che i cambiamenti nella governance hanno portato ad un rafforzamento della governance ambientale dell'UE e hanno creato uno spazio significativo per l'introduzione di nuove politiche sul clima.

La tesi realizza che gli sforzi dell'UE per adattare il proprio quadro di governance in risposta all'Agenda 2030 hanno portato a un miglioramento delle pratiche di governance ambientale e alla capacità di introdurre politiche innovative che si allineano agli obiettivi di sostenibilità stabiliti dall'Agenda.

Il Capitolo 1 introduce la governance ambientale globale ed europea e analizza le analogie e le differenze tra gli Obiettivi di Sviluppo del Millennio e gli Obiettivi di Sviluppo Sostenibile. In questo capitolo si esplora il contesto più ampio della governance ambientale globale, compresi gli sforzi internazionali per affrontare le sfide della sostenibilità. Si esamina altresì l'evoluzione delle agende e delle iniziative globali, come gli Obiettivi di Sviluppo del Millennio (OSM) e la successiva transizione verso i più completi Obiettivi di Sviluppo Sostenibile (SDGs). Confrontando gli OSM e gli SDGs, si mette in evidenza i cambiamenti di focus, obiettivi e approcci e si valutano le lezioni apprese dalla UE.

Il Capitolo 2 esplora i programmi di finanziamento e le politiche europee, con particolare attenzione a quelli più rilevanti per il clima, nell'ottica di evidenziare l'impegno e la volontà dell'UE di implementare le proprie politiche di governance ambientale. Si analizzano iniziative chiave come Horizon Europe e il programma LIFE, che forniscono sostegno finanziario a progetti di ricerca, innovazione e conservazione ambientale. Questi programmi di finanziamento dimostrano l'impegno dell'UE nel promuovere lo sviluppo sostenibile attraverso i progressi scientifici e le iniziative verdi. Inoltre, si esaminano la risposta e l'impegno dell'UE nei confronti di accordi e quadri internazionali, tra cui l'Accordo di Parigi, il Green Deal

Europeo, la Direttiva RED II, il Quadro 2030 per il clima e l'energia, il Sistema di scambio di emissioni dell'UE e il Piano d'azione per l'economia circolare. I programmi esaminati dimostrano gli sforzi dell'UE nell'allineare la propria governance ambientale agli obiettivi di sostenibilità dell'Agenda ONU e l'impegno costante a porsi in prima linea per il perseguimento degli obiettivi di sviluppo sostenibile e nell'azione per la lotta al cambiamento climatico sulla scena mondiale.

Il Capitolo 3 analizza i documenti ufficiali della Commissione e il modo in cui perseguono la mitigazione del clima e l'adattamento ai cambiamenti climatici. Tramite l'esame di questi documenti vengono dimostrati gli sforzi dell'Unione europea per adattare la sua governance ambientale al perseguimento degli obiettivi dell'Agenda 2030, esplorando l'emanazione di direttive che delineano gli obiettivi, i principi e gli standard dell'UE per la regolamentazione ambientale. Si analizzano l'European Green New Deal, un programma politico completo che mira a rendere l'UE il primo continente climaticamente neutro entro il 2050; l'iniziativa Next Generation EU, progettata per affrontare gli impatti socioeconomici della pandemia COVID-19 promuovendo al contempo una ripresa sostenibile, nonché i programmi che possono essere finanziati nell'ambito di tale iniziativa. Inoltre, si esaminano i documenti della Commissione e le decisioni del Consiglio dell'UE che forniscono orientamenti e strategie per l'attuazione dell'Agenda 2030 e per affrontare le sfide del cambiamento climatico al suo interno.

Questa tesi adotta un approccio misto, che combina analisi qualitativa e ricerca empirica. Metodi qualitativi come l'analisi dei documenti, l'esame delle politiche adottate e lo studio dei singoli casi vengono utilizzati come strumento principale per verificare l'evoluzione della governance ambientale globale ed europea, confrontare gli OSM e gli SDGs ed esplorare i documenti della Commissione europea che affrontano il cambiamento climatico. Inoltre, i dati quantitativi e l'analisi statistica vengono utilizzati per misurare l'impatto dei programmi di finanziamento, valutare l'efficacia delle politiche adottate e analizzare i progressi verso gli SDGs, con particolare attenzione all'Obiettivo 13. La ricerca si avvale inoltre di una revisione completa della letteratura pertinente, dei documenti ufficiali, dei rapporti e dei dati statistici per fornire un'analisi approfondita della trasformazione della governance ambientale dell'UE nel contesto dell'Agenda 2030.

La conclusione cui si giunge è che la trasformazione della governance ambientale dell'Unione europea dopo l'adozione dell'Agenda 2030 per lo sviluppo sostenibile rappresenta un processo

cruciale e dinamico. Esplorando la governance ambientale globale ed europea, confrontando gli Obiettivi di Sviluppo del Millennio e gli Obiettivi di Sviluppo Sostenibile, esaminando i programmi di finanziamento finanziati dall'Unione, studiando il quadro politico e analizzando i documenti dell'UE relativi al cambiamento climatico si sono acquisite preziose prospettive sulle strategie di adattamento e sui progressi compiuti dall'Unione nell'allineare la propria governance all'Agenda 2030 per lo Sviluppo Sostenibile.

La governance ambientale svolge un ruolo fondamentale nell'affrontare efficacemente le sfide della sostenibilità. L'UE ha riconosciuto la necessità di migliorare le proprie pratiche e politiche di governance ambientale ai fini del perseguimento dello sviluppo sostenibile e del benessere dei propri cittadini, tenendo conto non solo delle esigenze della generazione attuale, ma anche di quelle delle future generazioni.

Gli Obiettivi di Sviluppo del Millennio sono stati il fondamento degli sforzi dell'UE in materia di sostenibilità, ma nel passaggio agli Obiettivi di Sviluppo Sostenibile si evince il forte impegno dell'UE a tentare di risolvere la questione climatica, poiché sono più completi e hanno una portata più ampia rispetto ai precedenti in quanto coniugano in misura maggiore la relazione tra le dimensioni sociali, economiche e ambientali dello sviluppo sostenibile.

Gli SDGs mirano, più in generale, a costruire un nuovo modello di crescita basato sulla sostenibilità e sull'economia circolare; pertanto, includono un maggior numero di obiettivi e traguardi finalizzati all'adattamento ai cambiamenti climatici e alla mitigazione del clima.

I programmi di finanziamento e le politiche dell'UE hanno svolto un ruolo cruciale nell'avanzamento della sua governance ambientale. Iniziative come Horizon Europe e il programma LIFE hanno fornito un significativo sostegno finanziario a progetti di ricerca, innovazione e conservazione ambientale. Questi programmi consentono all'UE di promuovere lo sviluppo sostenibile investendo in soluzioni che affrontano efficacemente le sfide ambientali.

Per adeguarsi agli sforzi di azione per il clima e allinearsi all'Agenda 2030, l'UE ha apportato modifiche al proprio quadro giuridico. Queste modifiche dimostrano l'impegno dell'UE nei confronti degli standard ambientali e della sostenibilità. Tra le iniziative e i fattori chiave figurano, come detto in precedenza, l'Accordo di Parigi, il Green Deal europeo, la Direttiva sulle energie rinnovabili II, il Quadro 2030 per il clima e l'energia, il Sistema di scambio delle quote di emissione dell'UE e il Piano d'azione per l'economia circolare. Attraverso queste misure, l'UE mira a far rispettare gli standard ambientali e a ispirare gli altri a seguirne l'esempio.



La risposta dell'UE agli accordi e agli impegni internazionali, insieme ai suoi sforzi attivi nell'adattamento ai cambiamenti climatici e nella mitigazione del clima, dimostrano il suo impegno a creare un futuro sostenibile per i suoi Paesi membri e a diventare una forza trainante nelle questioni ambientali globali. Allineando la propria governance all'Agenda 2030, l'UE aspira ad essere un modello per gli altri e a contribuire in modo significativo al raggiungimento della sostenibilità globale.

Ciò non significa, tuttavia, che non vi siano aree che non possano essere migliorate.

Rimangono diverse sfide e sono necessari sforzi costanti per garantire l'effettiva attuazione e il monitoraggio delle politiche ambientali attuate per il raggiungimento degli SDGs.

Sebbene i cambiamenti sopra citati abbiano portato a un rafforzamento della governance ambientale dell'UE, sono necessari una valutazione e un adattamento continui per la traduzione degli impegni in azioni tangibili sul campo. Inoltre, garantire l'inclusività, la trasparenza e il coinvolgimento delle parti interessate sono aspetti cruciali che devono essere ulteriormente rafforzati per ottenere una governance ambientale pertinente.

Con l'emergere di nuove sfide e opportunità, l'UE deve rimanere attiva nel suo approccio alla governance, rivedendo e rielaborando continuamente politiche e strategie per affrontare le questioni emergenti e cogliere le nuove opportunità di sviluppo sostenibile.

In conclusione, si può affermare che la governance ambientale dell'UE abbia subito cambiamenti e progressi significativi dall'adozione dell'Agenda 2030. L'allineamento dell'UE agli SDGs, l'attuazione di programmi di finanziamento, l'adozione di politiche orientate allo sviluppo sostenibile nonché l'enfasi sull'adattamento ai cambiamenti climatici e la mitigazione del clima ne sono la dimostrazione.

Le sfide in campo ambientale sono sempre più complesse e si rendono necessari ulteriori sforzi per garantire un'attuazione efficace, il coinvolgimento delle parti interessate e il continuo adattamento degli approcci di governance. I principali attori nel guidare un'efficace transizione delle società moderne verso sistemi sostenibili sono le istituzioni piuttosto che i privati cittadini o le organizzazioni. Le risorse economiche che saranno rese disponibili dai governi nazionali e sovranazionali, se ben allocate, consentiranno il cosiddetto "salto in avanti" sulla strada dello sviluppo sostenibile. Ciò implica un profondo cambiamento che deve riguardare il ruolo delle istituzioni (sovranazionali, nazionali e locali) che sono i principali attori nel governare e guidare un'efficace transizione verso sistemi sostenibili.

In altre parole, è importante riportare la tutela degli interessi pubblici e collettivi al centro della governance del sistema. Ciò è chiaramente strettamente legato a un maggiore coinvolgimento delle istituzioni europee e dello Stato. Si tratta di una sfida ardua, che implica la definizione di un nuovo paradigma di sviluppo sociale ed economico, in uno scenario che rimane molto incerto.

Imparando dal passato, affrontando le sfide attuali e cogliendo le opportunità future, l'UE può continuare a porsi all'avanguardia nella governance ambientale e contribuire al raggiungimento degli obiettivi globali di sviluppo sostenibile.