

Introduction

Scope of Work

“What humans do over the next 50 years will determine the fate of all life on the planet”

— Sir David Attenborough

In today’s world, nobody can deny that climate change is a reality, and what used to be a topic reserved for international organizations, NGO’s and activists is becoming a top priority on the agendas of governments and multinational companies.

As temperatures rise, extreme weather events like heatwaves and floods, multiply in recurrence and seriousness. What’s more, severe threats are foreseen for habitable lands, for example, droughts and rising ocean levels escalate, and biodiversity is disappearing at an alarming rate.¹ Humankind is facing one of its most significant challenges so far, and we know by now that highly polluting fossil fuel-based technology – coal, oil and to a lesser extent, gas – needs to be replaced progressively and without delay by low carbon and sustainable forms of energy – a process called “the energy transition”. To that extent, the fight against climate change and the energy policies are extremely interconnected.

In a nutshell, we need to find a way to achieve growth and development without destroying the planet in the process, what is known as decoupling growth from the Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions.² Unfortunately, in the past 3 decades there has been little progress in tackling climate change, in spite of high-level forum meetings and numerous attempts of bringing the matter to public attention. The slow progress is mainly due to the unpredictability of international negotiation that involves a variety of players and conflicting interests,³ but other factors as well that will be discussed in this thesis.

The literature on the subject is diverse and in continuous evolution as new investigations and discoveries are being made. Most of them agree that implications of global warming are numerous and complex for all aspects of life as we know it, comprising dangerous risks for human life. Temperature change is just one indicator among many others, such as land degradation, biodiversity loss, air, land, or water pollution, and all are closely related. McKinsey consultancy has identified the main socio-economic aspects at risk, in its recent study: liveability and workability, food systems, physical assets, infrastructure services, physical and natural capital.⁴

Beyond natural and socioeconomic factors of risk, we also have essential geopolitical⁵ ones that are less visible but are more likely to affect the way we deal with the challenge of climate change and are currently coming more into focus. For the first time in its history, the World Economic Forum (WEF) Global Risk

1 WORLD METEOROLOGICAL ORGANIZATION. Statement on the State of the Global Climate in 2019 [Online]. March 10th, 2020 [Consulted 10 March 2020]. Retrieved from: <https://public.wmo.int/en/media/press-release/multi-agency-report-highlights-increasing-signs-and-impacts-of-climate-change>; IPCC. Global warming of 1.5°C. An IPCC Special Report on the impacts of global warming of 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels and related global greenhouse gas emission pathways, in the context of strengthening the global response to the threat of climate change, sustainable development, and efforts to eradicate poverty [Online]. V. Masson-Delmotte, *et al.* 2018 [Consulted 23 January 2020]. ISBN 978-92-9169-151-7. Retrieved from: <https://www.ipcc.ch/sr15/>

2 SMIL, V. Energy and Civilization: A History. Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2017, pp. 344-351. ISBN 978-1-78074-151-2.

3 ROSE, G., *et al.* Climate Wars: Policy, Politics and the Environment. Climate Anthology 1987-2017. *Foreign Affairs* [Online]. July 2017, pp. 292-300 [Consulted 23 January 2020]. Retrieved from: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/anthologies/2017-07-17/climate-wars>; STARKEY, B.; BOYER, M.A.; WILKENFELD, J. International Negotiation in a Complex World (New Millennium Books in International Studies). Updated Fourth Edition. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2016, p. 10-20. ISBN-10: 1442276711.

4 WOETZEL, J., *et al.* Climate Risk and Response Physical Hazards and Socioeconomic Impacts [Online]. McKinsey Global Institute, January 2020 [Consulted 26 January 2020]. Retrieved from: <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/sustainability/our-insights/climate-risk-and-response-physical-hazards-and-socioeconomic-impacts>

5 REAL INSTITUTO ELCANO. A Think Tank Statement. The New Geopolitics of Climate Governance: Distributing Leadership for Enhanced Ambition [Online]. IDDRI. 11 December 2019 [Consulted 12 December 2019]. Retrieved from: http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano_es/prensavista?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_es/prensa/notas/geopolitics-climate-governance-distributing-leadership-for-enhanced-ambition; BBC SOUNDS Podcast. In: Will Humans Become Extinct by the End of the Century? [Online]. The Enquiry. January 2nd, 2020. Retrieved from: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/w3csyth5>

Report 2020 places environmental risks as the top 5 long term global threats by likelihood, and three among the highest five risks categorized by impact are also environmental.⁶

Although this threat and its debate are not new, concern about environmental issues has been growing in the world, with the United Nations providing a forum for the debate⁷ and most significantly with the extensive implication of the European Union (EU) in recent years, empowered by its citizens. The 2019 Eurobarometer data⁸ in this area is conclusive: 93% of EU citizens consider climate change to be a serious problem and 92% of respondents support a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions to a minimum and offset the remaining emissions, in order to achieve neutrality by 2050.

In this regard, the EU has become a significant driver for climate and energy policies. Basically, all the related regulation of the Member States is affected by or stems from the EU. Some examples that we will also discuss in this paper are the European Green Deal together with the European Climate Law and the European Climate Pact, EU Emission Trading Scheme (ETS), the Effort Sharing, the European Energy Security Strategy (EESS), Clean Energy for All Europeans, etc., are key components of EU climate and energy policy, which provide successful examples for the entire world. The EU has been instrumental for making generally ambitious policies across Member States. An added advantage is that, once established, the baseline of EU policies changes rather rarely – which makes for more prominent consistency over time.⁹

Therefore, the EU has been a leader for climate and energy policies, and a concrete proof of the idea that multilateralism can work including in politically tricky areas as climate change – which has abstract benefits like “making the planet safer for future generations”, while the costs can involve unpopular measures such as plant closings, job losses or new taxes.¹⁰ In this context, it is likely that a crisis in the European Union, which may constrain capacities for acting, would have negative effects – firstly on EU climate and energy policies and by extension on the global fight against climate change. Concretely, it could affect the EU’s ability to pursue the European Green Deal and its commitments made under the Paris Agreement, which are the main topics that we will focus on in this work.

To name some of the reasons that are creating an environment of uncertainty – Brexit is one of them, where negotiations are slow and rather disappointing for everyone.¹¹ Another would be what the EU (and the world) is facing with the health pandemic of COVID-19. A challenge of a different nature, gravity and unprecedented global scale. The various crises apparently weaken the EU’s capacity to shape climate and energy policies, at the same time creating strain within the EU and emboldening political groups that are not only critical of the EU but of climate policies in general.

Given the complexity of the different challenges, it is difficult to anticipate the full implications on EU climate and energy policies. Many consequences have yet to unfold. Still, despite these uncertainties, we believe that the impact of the EU’s current state of affairs on climate and energy policies will, by and large, provide an opportunity to change in a good way. Possible positive effects – such as using the crisis as a new start for the European project, with inclusive, green growth and low carbon energy sources as the engine for such a revival – are beginning to shape up and seem to have a real chance at succeeding.¹²

6 WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM. The Global Risks Report 2020 [Online]. 15th edition, 15 January 2020, fig.1, p. 1 [Consulted 26 January 2020]. ISBN 978-1-944835-15-6. Retrieved from: <https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-global-risks-report-2020>

7 BEST, A., *et al.* *International History of the Twentieth Century and Beyond*. 3rd ed. London: Routledge, 2015, pp. 354-357. ISBN 978-0-415-65642-9.

8 Apoyo de los ciudadanos a la acción por el clima: Sondeo 2019 [Online]. European Commission, 2019 [Consulted 30 April 2020]. Retrieved from: https://ec.europa.eu/clima/citizens/support_es

9 MEYER-OHLENDORF, N.; GÖRLACH, B. The EU in Turbulence: What are the Implications for EU Climate and Energy Policy? [Online]. 15 October 2016 pp. 7-15 [Consulted 2 March 2020]. Retrieved from: <https://www.ecologic.eu/13875>

10 STARKEY, *loc. cit.*, footnote 3.

11 ADLER, K. Stand-off or stalemate: EU-UK Brexit trade talks in trouble. *BBC* [Online]. 15 May 2020 [Consulted 15 May 2020]. Retrieved from: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-52686959>

12 Europe’s moment: Repair and prepare for the next generation [Online]. European Commission, 27 May 2020 [Consulted 30 May 2020]. Retrieved from: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_20_940 ; MEYER-OHLENDORF, *op. cit.*, footnote 9, pp. 3-4.

Various authors, International Organizations and think tanks herein cited have already started analysing the different effects of Brexit and COVID-19 on the EU climate and energy related actions, like the European Green Deal or the European Internal Energy Market (IEM). However, there are still many gaps as we are facing unprecedented situations and new information is being generated on a daily basis. Moreover, the general political attention, especially in the cases of Brexit and COVID-19, has not been particularly focused on climate change or the energy transition – for the evident reason of their different primary nature – so we seek to fill in the gap with an analysis of the present crisis including all these aspects. Our thesis is focused on the EU while keeping in mind the global context, providing a description of the commitments EU made to fighting climate change, and the obstacles encountered. This report, then, intends to address the following question: **What are the implications of the current crisis on the EU's climate and energy policies?** The broader topics of climate and energy policies will be restricted mainly in relation to the European Green Deal and the EU commitments made under the Paris Agreement. In response to this question we propose the following hypotheses:

1. The way EU deals with COVID-19 may provide a roadmap and an opportunity for dealing with the climate crisis.
2. The current tensions between the North and the South of Europe can have negative implications on financing climate actions bearing in mind that in the face of climate change and the energy transition the joint efforts will have to be even greater.
3. The presence of EU sceptical sentiment and anti-climate policy agendas does not easily lead to an optimistic outlook into the future, courage to tackle great changes, or acceptance of short-term costs in exchange for a longer-term benefit. This is incompatible with the transformation narrative of climate policies promoted by the EU and can lead to unfavourable effects.
4. Brexit will create additional strain on the EU and its institutions therefore having a negative impact on its ability to pursue its climate and energy policies.

Methodology

This study will analyse the EU's commitments to climate action among the different crises that it's going through. Given that the EU has declared an official policy on climate action and energy transition, we will analyse official texts to identify key themes of these policies. In order to determine the crisis effects on the EU's commitments in a context of uncertainty, we will use the deductive method. By analysing the EU's goals and how they are being planned or fulfilled in spite of the challenges, we will be able to deduce the extent of the potential impacts.

Sources Used

For this study, it was necessary to analyse a variety of sources, including books, reports, legislation, official texts, academic articles, journalistic articles, and websites. It is important to note that the ongoing and changing nature of the topic of study, that is constantly being updated, as well as the COVID-19 crisis, complicated the search for sources to some degree. For these reasons, we were obligated to resort to mostly electronic sources. Often, the most up-to-date information regarding a new report or decree was on the concerned entity's website; other times, a quote from a politician or from a climate activist was only retrieved from a journalistic source. The following section presents an overview of the most important resources used, arranged into primary and secondary sources.