

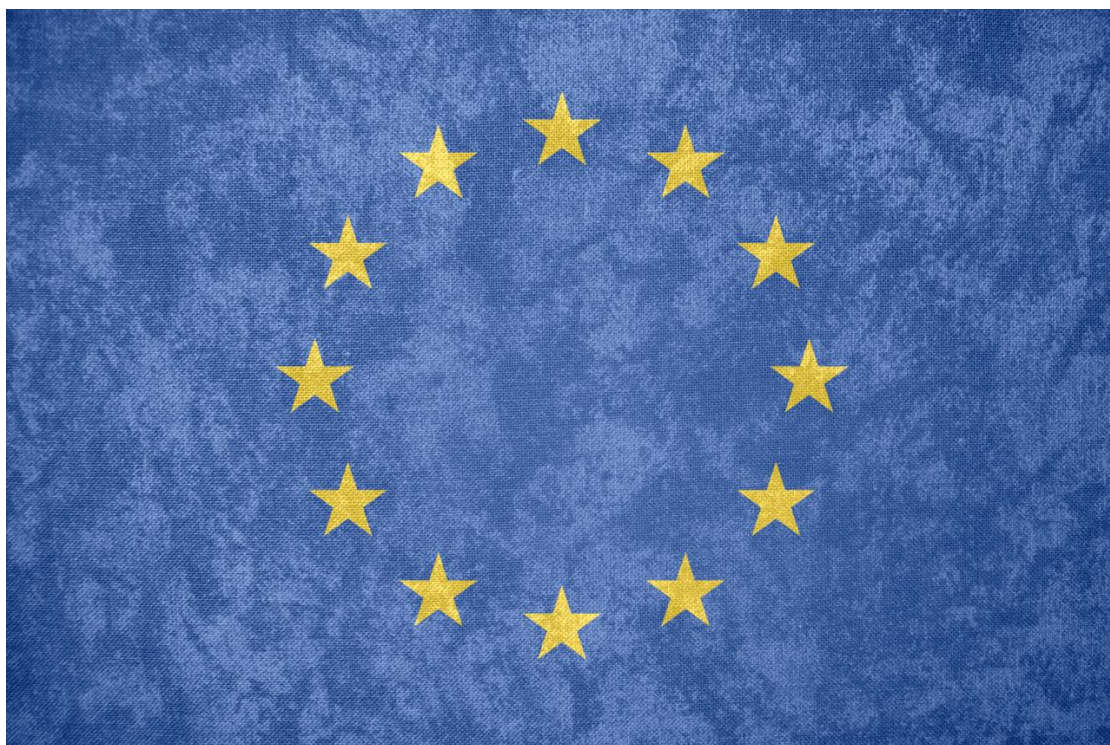
EUropa.S. 2022

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INSTITUTE OF RESEARCH
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ON EUROPEAN AFFAIRS



EUropa.S. 2022
Council of the European
Union

Study Guide
Topic: *“European Green
Deal: Accessing the new
Opportunities, Threats and
Risks for the Environment”*

EUropa.S. 2022
**Council of the European Union, “European Green Deal: Accessing the
new Opportunities, Threats and Risks for the Environment”**
Study Guide

Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
Greeting of the Board	3
Introduction to the Council of the European Union	3
Introduction to the Topic	4
Key Terms and Definitions	5
Historical Background	7
Legal Framework	8
Topic Analysis	12
Conclusion	21
Questions Raised	21
Bibliography	22
Further Reading	29
Useful Links	29

EUropa.S. 2022
**Council of the European Union, “European Green Deal: Accessing the
new Opportunities, Threats and Risks for the Environment”**
Study Guide

Greeting of the Board

Distinguished Ministers,

We are delighted to welcome you to Europa.S. 2022 in which we will have the honor of serving as members of the Board. We are excited for the discussions that the future holds for our committee as the topic that we have as well as the ENVI configuration is bound to provide space for interesting accord and constructive discord. The European Green Deal is a very ambitious plan that will make our sessions all the more promising since the environmental policy that EU member states follow will largely determine how the world will look like in twenty or thirty years.

We are looking forward to seeing how you will represent your states but also not forget that what differentiates the Council from simple multilateral negotiations is the fact that it is an EU institution and as a result the ministers should not forget to understand the situation of the state of every speaker and try to reach a solution that is acceptable for the EU as a whole. We hope this guide will serve as a starting point for your own research that might lead you to discover many interesting aspects of the member states you will be representing. Nevertheless, this effort is not exhaustive, and we rely on you to find intriguing questions and points that will make the conference even better.

On behalf of the Board, we would like to thank you for being a part of Europa.S. 2022 and we are looking forward to seeing you in April. Until then farewell and may you have an enjoyable researching experience.

Kind Regards,

The Board of the Council of the European Union

EUropa.S. 2022

Council of the European Union, “European Green Deal: Accessing the new Opportunities, Threats and Risks for the Environment”

Study Guide

Introduction to the Council of the European Union

The Council of the European Union is an EU institution that is composed of ministers of the 27 member-states. Depending on the issues under discussion the Council organizes its sessions in different configurations¹. This practice is followed so that the ministers discussing and deciding upon the subject matter are relevant to it and have authority over it in their respective states. In this year’s CoEU we will be simulating and hold our discussion under the ENVI configuration, meaning that all the participants will be Ministers of Environment². The Council is imbued with a number of responsibilities. Namely it co-decides with the European Parliament for the laws that will constitute the *acquis Communautaire* of the EU, it brings together state officials with a view to understanding what room for cooperation still exists and what could be more efficiently accomplished through a harmonization of policies. Moreover, the CoEU is a central player in the formation of the EU’s Foreign and Security Policy, has an important role in the conclusion of international treaties and is also responsible for adopting the budget of the EU along with the European Parliament. From this assortment of responsibilities, the simulation will follow something more similar to an attempt at coordination of the policies of the 27 member states. The Ministers of Environment will gather to discuss how they experience the European Green Deal in their respective states and what opportunities and challenges are created in return. Following this discussion there will be an effort to create a resolution, including the common positions agreed upon by the 27 Ministers³.

¹ Council of the European Union (2021). *What does the Council of the EU do?* [online] The Council of the EU. Available at: [The Council of the European Union - Consilium \(europa.eu\)](https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/what-does-the-council-of-the-eu-do/) [Accessed 6 December 2021]

² Council of the European Union (2021). *Council Configurations*. [online] The Council of the EU. Available at: [Council configurations - Consilium \(europa.eu\)](https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/council-configurations/) [Accessed 6 December 2021]

³ Council of the European Union (2021). *Environmental Council Configuration (ENVI)*. [online] Council Configurations. Available at: [Environment Council configuration \(ENVI\) - Consilium \(europa.eu\)](https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/environment-council-configuration-envi/) [Accessed 6 December 2021]

EUropa.S. 2022
**Council of the European Union, “European Green Deal: Accessing the
new Opportunities, Threats and Risks for the Environment”**
Study Guide

Introduction to the Topic

Implementing the European Green Deal constitutes a highly necessary goal for the EU institutions and especially for the Council of the European Union. More specifically, the Environment Council Configuration (ENVI) has set the aforementioned issue at the top of its agenda⁴. The Council under the auspices of its Configurations has repeatedly attempted to bring the member states of the EU in a common direction with regards to eco-friendly and sustainable policies. Thus, it is considered of paramount importance that states conduct their environmental policies in a cooperative manner as well as assisting their citizens understand the crucial priority of caring for the environment. The European Green Deal sets the blueprint for this transformational change. All 27 EU Member States have committed to turning the EU into the first climate neutral continent by 2050⁵. To get there, they have pledged to reduce emissions by at least 55% by 2030, compared to 1990 levels⁶. Therefore, the question that needs to be answered throughout this edition’s EUropa.S. sessions is how the European Union, and its Members States will cooperate regarding the implementation of the European Green Deal and respond to incidents that damage the environmental sector and violate Europe's fundamental rights.

Key Terms and Definitions

Climate Neutrality refers to the process where the CO₂ emissions are reduced to a minimum and all the remaining emissions are offset with climate protection measures. If climate damaging greenhouse gases are completely avoided or if gases that have already been emitted are saved elsewhere, this is referred as climate-neutral⁷.

⁴ European Commission (2021). *European Green Deal* [online] European Commission. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/clima/eu-action/european-green-deal_en [Accessed 6 December 2021]

⁵ European Commission (2021). *Delivering the European Green Deal* [online] European Commission. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/clima/eu-action/european-green-deal/delivering-european-green-deal_en [Accessed 6 December 2021]

⁶ European Commission (2021). *Increasing the ambition of EU emissions trading* [online]. European Commission. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/clima/eu-action/european-green-deal/delivering-european-green-deal/increasing-ambition-eu-emissions-trading_en [Accessed 6 December 2021]

⁷ Myclimate (2021). *What is climate neutrality* [online] Myclimate. Available at: <https://www.myclimate.org/information/faq/faq-detail/what-is-climate-neutrality/> [Accessed 6 December 2021]

EUropa.S. 2022
**Council of the European Union, “European Green Deal: Accessing the
new Opportunities, Threats and Risks for the Environment”**
Study Guide

Energy Efficiency constitutes the necessary measures that promote the use of less energy to perform the same task, simply by eliminating energy waste. Energy efficiency brings a variety of benefits to both the economy and the environment and is sought after by most states in the world⁸.

Circular Economy is a model of production and consumption, which involves leasing, reusing, refurbishing, and recycling existing materials and products for as long as possible. This can be achieved by eliminating waste and pollution, circulating products and materials and the regeneration of nature⁹.

Food Sustainability refers to the process where a food system provides healthy food to people and creates a sustainable environmental, economic, and social system that surrounds the food sector. Food sustainability starts with the development of viable agriculture practices and the promotion of healthy food distribution systems¹⁰.

Toxicity constitutes the degree to which a chemical substance can damage an organism. Toxicity can be described as an effect on a whole organism as well as an effect on the substructure of various organisms¹¹.

Natura 2000 is a network of nature protection areas within the boundaries of the European Union. The network includes both terrestrial and marine protected areas across EU member states¹².

Degradation refers to the deterioration of the environment through the depletion of resources such as but not limited to air, water, and soil. These also include the destruction of ecosystems and habitats and the systematic extinction of wildlife.

⁸ Environmental and Energy Study Institute (2021). *Energy Efficiency* [online] Environmental and Energy Study Institute. Available at: <https://www.eesi.org/topics/energy-efficiency/description> [Accessed 6 December 2021]

⁹ Ellen MacArthur Foundation (2021). *What is circular economy* [online] Ellen MacArthur Foundation. Available at: <https://ellenmacarthurfoundation.org/topics/circular-economy-introduction/overview> [Accessed 6 December 2021]

¹⁰ Eco and Beyond (2021). *What does food sustainability really mean* [online] Eco and Beyond. Available at: <https://www.ecoandbeyond.co/articles/food-sustainability/> [Accessed 6 December 2021]

¹¹ Rxlist (2021). *Definition of toxicity* [online] Rxlist. Available at: <https://www.rxlist.com/toxicity/definition.htm> [Accessed 6 December 2021]

¹² European Commission (2021). *Natura 2000* [online] European Commission. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/index_en.htm [Accessed 6 December 2021]

EUropa.S. 2022
**Council of the European Union, “European Green Deal: Accessing the
new Opportunities, Threats and Risks for the Environment”**
Study Guide

Taxonomy constitutes a scheme of classification, with aspects of hierarchy, in which things are organized into groups or types.

Historical Background

In order to understand the European Green Deal today, it is necessary to take a dive into the history of the environmental policy of the EU. The said policy first formally appeared in 1981 in the Single European Act, the first revision of the Treaty of Rome, which formed the European Economic Community¹³. This policy is the object of the joint responsibility of the member-states and the EU. Up until the present it has been guided towards a more sustainable coexistence of people with nature by a set of principles. These are Sustainability, which implies that people should not produce and expand their activities at the expense of nature so that the planet remains habitable, Preventive Action, precaution and prevention, meaning that the relevant authorities should take steps to avoid environmental degradation and not only limit themselves to countering problems after they have caused damage, The one polluting has to pay a fine, ideally equal to the cost of the reconstitution of the environmental damage. The division of responsibility of the several levels of governance, meaning that each level should be responsible for the environmental matters is most effective at tackling and is in turn held accountable for problems arising from the field of its jurisdiction. Finally, the principle of taking into account the environmental repercussions of any decision on all matters which is the principle of integration. This makes this particular policy a horizontal one as it intersects with all other policies. This final principle is perhaps the most important one as it makes sustainability a consideration for all policymakers¹⁴. These principles have led to the adoption of a significant amount of EU legal texts with environmental considerations and even more court cases being tried with the protection

¹³ Eur-Lex (2021). *The Single European Act* [Online] Eur-Lex. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM%3Axy0027> [Accessed 6 December 2021]

¹⁴ European Parliament (2021). *Environment policy: general principles and basic framework* [Online] European Parliament. Available at: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/71/περιβαλλοντικη-πολιτικη-γενικες-αρχες-και-βασικο-πλαισιο> [Accessed 6 December 2021]

EUropa.S. 2022
**Council of the European Union, “European Green Deal: Accessing the
new Opportunities, Threats and Risks for the Environment”**
Study Guide

of the environment in mind¹⁵. Apart from that, the Environmental Policy of the EU is implemented in 10-year action plans that set the priorities of the European Union and of the member states and provide guidelines for creating a more sustainable world.

These plans started from the time when environmental policy first entered the EU’s agenda, in the late 70s, and currently we are going through the 10th one. Another important parameter is the existence of the Millennium Goals, revised as the Sustainable Development Goals, also known as SDGs of the United Nations, as they provide a global compass for the future that European policies also take into account. In addition to those initiatives there are also European Horizontal Strategies with European objectives with regards to the environment. The European Green Deal is a relatively new development as it was born in 2019¹⁶. Its contents will be better analysed in the next chapter, but for now, it can be simply explained as an expansion of the principle of integration combined with a funding mechanism and with a series of horizontal strategies. In other words, it is a *suis generis* initiative that attempts to take action on a wide variety of fields related to the environment with the aim of achieving the SDGs of the United Nations as well as European targets for the environment.

Legal Framework

Many legal documents have been adopted towards implementing the European Green Deal as well as instilling a sense of cooperation in this issue among the various member states. To that direction, the EU institutions have taken steps that deal with different aspects of this agenda, always bearing in mind the difficult handicap of combining

¹⁵ European Commission (2021). *Environment Action Programme to 2030* [Online] European Commission. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/environment/strategy/environment-action-programme-2030_en [Accessed 6 December 2021]

¹⁶ Eur-lex (2021). *Search results: environment, EU legal texts, legal acts, in force* [Online] Eur-lex. Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/search.html?VV=true&SUBDOM_INIT=LEGISLATION&DTS_SUBDOM=LEGISLATION&DTS_DOM=EU_LAW&lang=en&type=advanced&qid=1639077611411 [Accessed 6 December 2021]

EUropa.S. 2022
**Council of the European Union, “European Green Deal: Accessing the
new Opportunities, Threats and Risks for the Environment”**
Study Guide

national policies with European directives. These legislative measures have multiple aims, from protecting the environmental sector in its entirety across the European continent to securing favorable alliances across states with the purpose of creating state-wide eco-friendly policies and initiatives. Without a doubt however, some states and even some EU officials have stated their scepticism towards the need of environmental policies in such a troubled period. This particular study guide will attempt to acquaint the participants with the most significant legislative measures that constitute the European endeavour for sustainable economies and cleaner energy policies.

Paris Agreement

The Paris Agreement is the first ever universal, legal binding global climate change agreement, adopted at the Paris Climate Conference in December 2015. The EU and its member states are among the close to 190 Parties to the Agreement. The EU formally ratified the agreement on 5 October 2016, thus enabling its entry into force on 4 November 2016. For the Agreement to enter into force, at least 55 countries representing at least 55% of global emissions had to deposit their instruments for ratification. As a contribution to the objectives of the Agreement, countries have submitted comprehensive national climate action plans. The aforementioned objectives are focused on the reduction of emissions, the enhancement of transparency, the implementation of adaptive policies and the understanding of the importance of cities, regions, and local authorities¹⁷.

The European Climate Law

The European Climate Law writes into law the goal set out in the European Green Deal for Europe’s economy and society to become climate neutral by 2050. The Law also sets out the intermediate target of reducing net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030, compared to 1990 levels. Climate neutrality by 2050 means achieving net zero greenhouse gas emissions for EU countries as a whole, mainly by cutting

¹⁷ European Commission (2021). Paris Agreement [online] European Commission. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/clima/eu-action/international-action-climate-change/climate-negotiations/paris-agreement_el [Accessed 7 December 2021]

EUropa.S. 2022
**Council of the European Union, “European Green Deal: Accessing the
new Opportunities, Threats and Risks for the Environment”**
Study Guide

emissions, investing in green technologies, and protecting the natural environment. The Law aims to ensure that all EU policies contribute to this goal and that all sectors of the economy and the society play their respective part¹⁸.

The European Green Deal Investment Plan

The European Green Deal Investment Plan is a plan proposed by the EU in order to mobilize funding and create an enabling framework to facilitate the public and private investments that are required for the transition to a climate neutral, competitive, and inclusive economy. The Investment plan is based on two important dimensions. The first one covers issues of financing and aims for a greater share of spending on climate and environmental action from the EU budget with a key role to be played by the European Investment Bank. The second one promotes the provision of incentives to unlock and redirect public and private investment. The EU essentially will provide investors with the necessary tools that will facilitate a sustainable investment by the public authorities. The public authorities in return will design ways to approve state aid for just transition across European regions¹⁹.

The Just Transition Mechanism

The Just Transition Mechanism is a key tool to ensure that the transition towards a climate-neutral economy happens in a fair way without excluding any state or any economy. While all regions will require funding and the European Green Deal Investment Plan caters for that, the Mechanism will attempt to provide targeted support to help mobilize the necessary funds over the period 2021-2027 in the most affected European regions, with the aim of alleviating the socioeconomic impact of the transition. The Mechanism will also create the necessary investment to help workers

¹⁸ European Commission (2021). European Climate Law [online]. European Commission. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/clima/eu-action/european-green-deal/european-climate-law_en [Accessed 7 December 2021]

¹⁹ European Commission (2021). The European Green Deal Investment Plan and Just Transition Mechanism explained [online] European Commission. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_20_24 [Accessed 7 December 2021]

EUropa.S. 2022
**Council of the European Union, “European Green Deal: Accessing the
new Opportunities, Threats and Risks for the Environment”**
Study Guide

and entire communities which rely on the fossil fuel value chain. It will come in addition to the substantial contribution of the EU’s budget through all instruments directly relevant to the transition.

The Renewable Energy Directive (Directive 2018/2001/EU)

The Renewable Energy Directive is the legal framework for the development of renewable energy across all sectors of the EU economy. It establishes common principles and rules to remove barriers, stimulate investments and drive cost reductions in renewable energy technologies, and empowers citizens, consumers, and businesses to participate in the clean energy transformation²⁰.

The Energy Efficiency Directive (Directive 2018/2002/EU)

The European Commission has revised the Energy Efficiency Directive, together with other EU energy and climate rules, to ensure that the new 2030 target of reducing greenhouse gas emission by at least 55% can be met²¹.

The Land Use and Forestry Regulation (Regulation 2018/841/EU)

The Regulation sets a binding commitment for each member state to ensure that accounted emissions from land use are entirely compensated by an equivalent accounted removal of CO₂ from the atmosphere through action in the sector²².

²⁰ European Parliament (2021). Renewable Energy Directive [online] European Parliament. Available at:

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/662619/EPRS_BRI\(2021\)662619_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2021/662619/EPRS_BRI(2021)662619_EN.pdf) [Accessed 7 December 2021]

²¹ European Commission (2021). Energy Efficiency Directive [online] European Commission. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/energy/topics/energy-efficiency/targets-directive-and-rules/energy-efficiency-directive_en [Accessed 7 December 2021]

²² European Commission (2021). Land use and Forestry Regulation [online] European Commission. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/clima/eu-action/forests-and-agriculture/land-use-and-forestry-regulation-2021-2030_en [Accessed 7 December 2021]

EUropa.S. 2022
**Council of the European Union, “European Green Deal: Accessing the
new Opportunities, Threats and Risks for the Environment”**
Study Guide

The Energy Performance of Buildings Directive (Directive 2010/31/EU)

To boost the energy performance of buildings, the EU has established a legislative framework that includes the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive. This Directive aims to promote policies that will help create a stable environment for investment decisions and enable consumers and businesses to make more informed choices to save energy and resources²³.

Topic Analysis

Achieving Clean Energy

The ultimate goal for the European Green Deal is to achieve climate neutrality by the year of 2050. Thus, for the EU to reach this target, the step of decarbonizing the energy system is of vital and crucial importance. According to the European Commission’s timetable regarding the above aim, in 2023 the member states are required to update their respective national climate and energy strategies to be able to adhere to the EU climate and energy goal for 2030. These particular strategies and plans should implement the necessary core values that constitute the overall European climate policy direction²⁴. The prioritization of energy efficiency is perhaps the most important aspect of this goal. By the proper use of energy resources, member states should be able to embark on a safe and stable transition in climate neutral results. The development of power sectors based largely on renewable resources also signals the general direction which the EU hopes to follow in the near future. Also crucial to the aforementioned initiative is the establishment of an affordable EU energy supply, distributed equally among the European member states. A just and transparent energy distribution reduces the chances for smaller countries to be left behind in this common European initiative. Last but not least, the European Commission has unveiled its comprehensive strategy

²³ European Commission (2021). Energy Performance of Buildings Directive [online] European Commission. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/energy/topics/energy-efficiency/energy-efficient-buildings/energy-performance-buildings-directive_en [Accessed 7 December 2021]

²⁴ European Commission (2021). Clean Energy for all Europeans [online] European Commission. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/energy/topics/energy-strategy/clean-energy-all-europeans_en [Accessed 8 December 2021]

EUropa.S. 2022
**Council of the European Union, “European Green Deal: Accessing the
new Opportunities, Threats and Risks for the Environment”**
Study Guide

for a cleaner and more viable energy future. The EU Strategy for Energy System Integration currently serves as a framework for a stable energy transition which will comprise measures to achieve a rather more circular energy system as well as measures to implement greater and direct electrification and also cleaner fuel resources²⁵. More specifically these measures include the establishment of interconnected energy systems and better integrated and renewable energy sources to the grid. Adding to that, the Commission plans to promote innovative technologies and modern infrastructure in addition to the promotion of EU energy standards and technologies at a global level²⁶. All the above goals constitute the overall aim of the EU to finally decarbonize the European energy system which is critical for the accomplishment of the climate objectives as they were set in the European Green Deal.

Moving Towards Sustainable Industry

Another significant aspect of the Green Deal is creating a sustainable industry. The main argument of this initiative is that the way humanity produces, meaning the business and decision-making models it makes use of should be reformed so that they don't cause more harm to the environment. This is achieved through a lot of planning, with a particular focus on achieving a Circular Economy. All these efforts are based on digitalization, modernization, innovation and in investing and are being financed by investors²⁷. Asserting certainty and retaining competitiveness are crucial while the industry will be becoming more sustainable it will have to sacrifice a part of its competitiveness for the short term²⁸. Achieving the EU's climate and environmental goals requires a new industrial policy based on the Circular Economy. The adopted industrial policy will support the green transformation and bring the EU closer to its

²⁵ European Commission (2021). Renewable Energy [online] European Commission. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/energy/topics/renewable-energy_en [Accessed 8 December 2021]

²⁶ European Commission (2021). EU Renewable Energy Financing Mechanism [online] European Commission. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/energy/topics/renewable-energy/eu-renewable-energy-financing-mechanism_en [Accessed 8 December 2021]

²⁷ European Commission. (2019). *Sustainable Industry: The European Green Deal*. [Online]. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/fs_19_6724 [Accessed 12 December 2021]

²⁸ Ulmann L. (2020). *A Green Deal for a Sustainable & Competitive Industry*. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.europeanfiles.eu/environment/a-green-deal-for-a-sustainable-competitive-industry> [Accessed 12 December 2021]

EUropa.S. 2022
**Council of the European Union, “European Green Deal: Accessing the
new Opportunities, Threats and Risks for the Environment”**
Study Guide

goals. This particular policy includes the promotion of incentives that will assist industries to modernize and exploit opportunities both domestically and globally. It also dictates that the key aim will be to stimulate the development of new markets for climate neutral and circular products. These sustainable products will be used in prioritizing the reduction and reuse of materials before the process of recycling. Minimum requirements will also be set to prevent environmentally harmful products from being placed on the EU market and detect false green claims that need to be tackled.

Enhancing Renovation Wave

A sustainable world needs to be energy efficient. However, that is difficult to achieve when building all around the EU are not maximizing heating and cooling with the least number of necessary resources. To that end the EU has launched a Renovation_wave to make Europe Fit for 55²⁹. This objective is also tied with alleviating energy poverty as well as creating jobs and making buildings smart ready. This initiative is the product of consultations, strategies, and roadmap, ambitiously aims to overhaul 220 million buildings by 2050 and is being implemented through a variety of programs funding this change³⁰. At the same time as all this planning has been taking place the literature has also been active on the matter. More specifically there exist concerns that the current rate of renovations is insufficient to reach the goals set for 2030 and 2050. Moreover, it points to a need for a better framework that will facilitate and complement all the material efforts. It also points to the necessity of involving people as a prerequisite for success³¹. In that direction the EU has decided to put forth its Renovation Wave Strategy which aims to improve the energy performance of buildings. The main pillar of this Strategy is to enhance the quality of life for people using the buildings and also

²⁹ European Commission. *Renovation wave*. [Online]. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/fs_19_6724 [Accessed 12 December 2021]

³⁰ Rochet A. and Guertler P. (2021). *Why the renovation wave matters more than the EU knows*. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy/opinion/why-the-renovation-wave-matters-more-than-the-eu-knows/> [Accessed 12 December 2021]

³¹ Vandebussche, T. (2021). *Is the EU's building renovation wave 'fit for 55'*. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.epc.eu/en/publications/Is-the-EUs-building-renovation-wave-fit-for-55-40d990> [Accessed 12 December 2021]

EUropa.S. 2022
**Council of the European Union, “European Green Deal: Accessing the
new Opportunities, Threats and Risks for the Environment”**
Study Guide

to foster digitalization and improve the recycling of materials. With nearly 34 million Europeans unable to afford keeping their homes heated, public policies and initiatives to promote energy efficient renovation are also a comprehensive response to the phenomenon of energy poverty which requires the support for health and the wellbeing of human lives.

Implementing Farm to Fork

Farm to Fork is an initiative of the Green Deal that relates to making the process of producing, consuming, and disposing of food and has been set out in the Commission’s Farm to Fork Strategy and its supporting documents³². The aforementioned objective relates not only to limiting environmental degradation but also to enhancing food security, in a world that has been through food scares and has felt the danger of having its supply lines disrupted during the pandemic of COVID-19. This initiative much like its name is a fork in the sense it has four prongs: it takes into account a series of fields in which sustainability needs to increase, it provides the funding for technology and innovation that can build towards that goal, it creates a network of intelligence and expertise sharing in the field of agriculture and it has a global angle in the sense that it tries to promote cooperation outside the European Union. Nevertheless, every approach has its faults. Thankfully the literature around the subject raises a series of important points that the EU member states will need to address if they want to have a successful Farm to Fork, illuminating the problems and making a few proposals of its own in the process. Namely, an important parameter for the discourse is that there are not enough provisions for the social and structural aspects of the initiative. In a similar line of thought, there is the question of the degree to which the change that the initiative will bring to the supply side of food products will impact its competitiveness inside the EU and internationally³³. That could be potentially countered by close cooperation with all

³² Schebesta, H. and Candel, J.J.L. (2020). Game-changing potential of the EU’s Farm to Fork Strategy. *Nature Food*. [Online] 1. p.586-588. Available at: <https://www.nature.com/articles/s43016-020-00166-9> [Accessed 12 December 2021]

³³ European Commission. (2020a). Farm to Fork Strategy [Online]. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/food/horizontal-topics/farm-fork-strategy_en#Strategy [Accessed 12 December 2021]

EUropa.S. 2022
**Council of the European Union, “European Green Deal: Accessing the
new Opportunities, Threats and Risks for the Environment”**
Study Guide

the stakeholders but there are doubts on whether the present extent of such efforts is sufficient³⁴. Apart from the above, when it comes to knowledge sharing the comprehensiveness of said strategy is challenged in the sense that it is related only to agriculture. As regards the more theoretical and at the same time practical aspects the literature seems to view food sustainability as ambiguous and calls attention to the possible problem that unclear definition of responsibilities among institutions as well as the question of how realistic the set time frame is could prove problematic³⁵.

Eliminating Pollution

Pollution harms our health and our environment. It is the largest environmental cause of multiple mental and physical diseases and of premature deaths, especially among children, people with certain medical conditions and the elderly. In addition to affecting people’s health, pollution is one of the main reasons for the loss of biodiversity. It seriously reduces the capabilities of ecosystems to provide services such as but not limited to decontamination and sequestration³⁶. Thus, the EU has set its gaze towards combating and eliminating pollution through some initiatives and frameworks. More specifically the Zero Pollution Vision for 2050 is for air, water, and soil pollution to be reduced to levels no longer considered harmful to health and natural ecosystems, that respect the boundaries with which our planet can cope, thereby creating a toxic free and viable environment. The Vision has many particular targets which include the improvement of air quality and the reduction of premature deaths caused by air pollution. Also, it includes the improvement of water and soil quality by the reduction of waste and nutrient losses respectively. The aforementioned Vision is part of a general action plan called “Towards a Zero Pollution for Air, Water and Soil, that aims to

³⁴ European Commission. (2020b). *Farm to Fork Strategy: For a fair, healthy and environmentally friendly food-system*. [Online]. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/food/system/files/2020-05/f2f_action-plan_2020_strategy-info_en.pdf [Accessed 12 December 2021]

³⁵ Beckman, J., Ivanic, M. and Jelliffe, J. (2021). *Market impacts of Farm to Fork: Reducing agricultural input usage. Applied Economic Perspectives and Policy*. [Online] Wiley Online Library, Online Version of Record before inclusion in an issue. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1002/aep.13176> [Accessed 12 December 2021]

³⁶ European Commission (2021). Zero Pollution Action Plan [online] European Commission. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/environment/strategy/zero-pollution-action-plan_el [Accessed 9 December 2021]

EUropa.S. 2022
**Council of the European Union, “European Green Deal: Accessing the
new Opportunities, Threats and Risks for the Environment”**
Study Guide

strengthen the EU green, digital and economic leadership, whilst creating a healthier and socially fairer European Union³⁷. It also provides a compass to mainstream pollution prevention in all the relevant EU policies in order to accelerate implementation of the also Relevant EU legislation and to identify possible gaps in the framework³⁸.

Protecting Biodiversity

Protecting biodiversity is one of the main principles of the European Green Deal. In that direction, the EU has implemented the Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 which is a comprehensive, ambitious, and long-term plan to protect nature and reverse the degradation of ecosystems. The Strategy aims to put Europe’s biodiversity on a path to recovery by 2030 and contains specific actions as well as commitments. The Biodiversity Strategy aims to build our societies’ resilience to future threats such as the serious impacts of climate change, the catastrophic consequences of forest fires, issues derived from food insecurities and disease outbreaks. The aforementioned Strategy also contains several other goals aiming at protecting European biodiversity. This includes the establishment of a larger EU wide network of protected areas on land and at sea, that will result in the EU enlarging the already existing Natura 2000 areas, with strict protection of areas of very high biodiversity and climate value³⁹. Adding to that, the EU has launched a Nature Restoration Plan that will aim to restore degraded ecosystems by 2030 and manage them sustainably, addressing the key drivers of biodiversity loss. These measures will demonstrate that the EU is ready to lead by example to address the global biodiversity crisis⁴⁰. In particular, working towards the successful adoption of

³⁷ Eur-lex (2021). EU Action Plan: Towards a Zero Pollution for Air, Water and Soil [online] Eur-lex. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52021DC0400&qid=1623311742827> [Accessed 9 December 2021]

³⁸ European Commission (2021). Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy [online] European Commission. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/law/better-regulation/have-your-say/initiatives/12438-Sustainable-and-Smart-Mobility-Strategy_en [Accessed 9 December 2021]

³⁹ European Commission (2021). Natura 2000 Data and Maps [online] European Commission. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/data/index_en.htm [Accessed 10 December 2021]

⁴⁰ European Environment Agency (2021). EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 [online] European Environment Agency. Available at: <https://www.eea.europa.eu/policy-documents/eu-biodiversity-strategy-for-2030-1> [Accessed 10 December 2021]

an ambitious global biodiversity framework under the Convention on Biological Diversity. All the above measures attempt to be aligned with the 30 by 30 initiative. This initiative is a worldwide attempt by governments to designate 30% of Earth’s land and ocean areas as protected areas by 2030. More than 50 countries have agreed to the initiative and recently this number has expanded to more than 70⁴¹. The European Union is a frontrunner in this initiative and has systematically tried to align its own strategy with this particular attempt.

Promoting Sustainable Finance

Sustainable finance refers to the process of taking environmental, social and governance considerations into account when making certain investment decisions in the financial sector, with the aim of attracting more long-term investments in sustainable economic activities and projects. Environmental considerations might include climate change mitigation and adaptation, and other measures such as for instance the preservation of biodiversity, the reduction of pollution and the promotion of circular economy policies. The social aspect of this endeavour also includes issues of inequality, inclusiveness, labour relations, investment in human capital and human rights issues⁴². The proper governance of public and private institutions plays a pivotal role in ensuring the inclusion of social and environmental considerations in the decision-making process. Sustainable finance has a key role to play in delivering in the policy objectives under the European Green Deal as well as the EU’s international commitments on climate objectives. It accomplishes this by channelling private investment into the stable transition to a climate neutral environment and fairer economic cycles, as a complement to public finances. The resilience of an economy takes exemplary precedence in the troubled times that the EU is facing today. Recently the EU has revised its already effective Strategy for Financing the Transition to a Sustainable Economy by considering the extension of the EU taxonomy framework and

⁴¹ Convention on Biological Diversity (2021). The Convention on Biological Diversity [online]. Available at: <https://www.cbd.int/convention/> [Accessed 10 December 2021]

⁴² European Commission (2021). What is Sustainable Finance [online]. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/business-economy-euro/banking-and-finance/sustainable-finance/overview-sustainable-finance_en [Accessed 10 December 2021]

EUropa.S. 2022
**Council of the European Union, “European Green Deal: Accessing the
new Opportunities, Threats and Risks for the Environment”**
Study Guide

sustainable finance standards with the aim of recognizing the transition efforts by the member states. It also stresses the importance of providing the right tools and incentives to access transition finance, and also of exploring proper ways of exploiting the opportunities that are offered by the innovative digital technologies. Finally, the Strategy presents the EU international approach that includes work on global convergence on standard setting, such as on taxonomy measures and various disclosures. have been issued to finance the green recovery of the EU⁴³. Moreover, the literature directs attention to the importance of ensuring that even investments not linked with the environment are not harming it. As regards the problems that the academic and media discourse recognizes, there is always the question of how the investments will be made in order to be truly beneficial for the achievement of the objectives of the Green Deal⁴⁴. In addition to that another concern of the literature is the gap between pledges for funding and actual investment.

Recent Developments

Climate change and environmental degradation present an existential threat to Europe and to the world. To overcome this challenge, the European Union needs a new growth strategy that transforms itself into a modern, self-sufficient, and competitive economy where there are no net emissions of greenhouse gases and where economic growth is decoupled from resource use in general. The EU already has a strong track record in reducing its emissions of greenhouse gases while also keeping in balance its economic growth. Many more steps however need to be taken in order to create a greener and more inclusive economy. The European Green Deal sets the path for action in the following months and years ahead. These particular future endeavours need to be guided by the public demands for decisive action and by the undeniable scientific

⁴³ European Commission. (2019). *The European Green Deal sets out how to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent by 2050, boosting the economy, improving people's health and quality of life, caring for nature, and leaving no one behind*. [Online]. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_19_6691 [Accessed 12 December 2021]

⁴⁴ European Commission. (n.d.a). *Environment Action Programme to 2030*. [Online]. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/environment/strategy/environment-action-programme-2030_en [Accessed 12 December 2021]

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**Council of the European Union, “European Green Deal: Accessing the
new Opportunities, Threats and Risks for the Environment”**
Study Guide

evidence as it has been demonstrated extensively in the later years⁴⁵. One such initiative is the NextGenerationEU. This endeavour is much more than a recovery plan. It is a crucial initiative by the European Union to emerge stronger from the pandemic, to transform entire economies and societies and design a more adaptive and working Europe for its member states. Europe is on track to become the first climate neutral continent by 2050. With NextGenerationEU, the EU will attempt to invest in environmentally friendly technologies, to roll out greener vehicles and public transport and to make public and private building and spaces more energy efficient. Other goals of the aforementioned initiative are the improvement of water quality in rivers and seas as well as the reduction of waste and the planting of sufficient trees in European soil. Also, the creation of green spaces in many cities and the extended use of renewable energies are pivotal to the initiative⁴⁶. Another goal is transformation of farms into green havens so that food resources become healthier and safer for the EU citizens. Without a doubt, the pandemic has affected all of us in one way or another both physically and mentally. With NextGenerationEU, the European Union has set its target to invest more in research and innovation in order to develop new vaccines and treatments, for many new and rising diseases. Thus, the modernization of health systems is deeply associated with implementing the European Green Deal and all its contents. Safer and more viable environment also means safer and more sufficient health for all the citizens on the planet. Another initiative is the Green Recovery which is one of the pylons of the NextGenerationEU investment plan⁴⁷. It posits that along with economic resilience and the need to remedy all the problems that the pandemic caused and reinforce health systems the environment also has a central role. That notion is further proven by the fact that so called “green bonds” have been issued to finance

⁴⁵ Eur-lex. (n.d.b) *Search results: environment, EU legal texts, legal acts, in force*. [Online]. Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/search.html?VV=true&SUBDOM_INIT=LEGISLATION&DTS_SUBDOM=LEGISLATION&DTS_DOM=EU_LAW&lang=en&type=advanced&qid=1639077611411 [Accessed 12 December 2021]

⁴⁶ European Parliament. (2021). *Environment policy: general principles and basic framework*. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/71/περιβαλλοντική-πολιτική-γενικές-αρχές-και-βασικό-πλαίσιο> [Accessed 12 December 2021]

⁴⁷ European Commission. *NextGenerationEU Green Bonds*. [Online]. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/eu-budget/eu-borrower-investor-relations/nextgenerationeu-green-bonds_en [Accessed 12 December 2021]

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**Council of the European Union, “European Green Deal: Accessing the
new Opportunities, Threats and Risks for the Environment”**
Study Guide

the green recovery of the EU⁴⁸. Moreover, the literature directs attention to the importance of ensuring that even investments not linked with the environment are not harming it⁴⁹. As regards to the problems that the academic and media discourse recognizes, there is always the question of how the investments will be made in order to be truly beneficial for the achievement of the objectives of the Green Deal. In addition to that another concern of the literature is the gap between pledges for funding and actual investment.

Conclusion

The European Union has made many crucial leaps towards implementing climate neutral policies across its member states. However, some countries have not fully comprehended the importance of the European Green Deal and its necessity regarding the future of the European continent. Therefore, it is a substantial challenge for the European Union to promote the aforementioned endeavour while also addressing all the vital aspects of the environmental sector that require strong cooperation and decisive political action. Regardless of the various arguments, the main problem exists today in our everyday lives, and we have to face it together now more than ever.

Questions Raised

1. How can the EU in cooperation with its Member States achieve adequate levels of clean energy in their respective economies?
2. How will the European Industrial Sector retain its competitiveness while at the same time trying to become more sustainable?

⁴⁸ Rochedo, P. R. R., Fragkos, P. et al. (2021). *Is Green Recovery Enough? Analyzing the Impacts of Post-COVID-19 Economic Packages. Energies*. [Online]. MDPI 14(17). Available at: <https://www.mdpi.com/1996-1073/14/17/5567> [Accessed 12 December 2021]

⁴⁹ Abnett, K. and Green M. (2020). *EU makes world's biggest 'green recovery' pledge- but will it hit the mark?*. [Online]. Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-eu-summit-climate-change-idUSKCN24N231> [Accessed 12 December 2021]

EUropa.S. 2022

Council of the European Union, “European Green Deal: Accessing the new Opportunities, Threats and Risks for the Environment”

Study Guide

3. In which ways can the EU and its member states boost renovation with regards to the goal set for 2050? Can the Fit for 55 plans be implemented according to the European schedule?
4. How can the EU assure that social and structural aspects of food sustainability be taken into account?
5. What actions could be taken in response to the matter of pollution? Could the EU effectively eliminate pollution and its dangerous consequences?
6. In which ways can the European transport sector become carbon-neutral and at the same time retain and enhance its overall efficiency?
7. How can the EU sufficiently protect biodiversity along with its distinctive and unique ecosystems?
8. In which ways can the economies of the European Union become more sustainable and circular? Is it possible for the Member States to cope with the rhythm of the European Green Deal?
9. How could the EU utilize the NextGenerationEU initiative to its full potential?
10. What environmental reforms can be proposed to recover lost ground in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic?

EUropa.S. 2022
**Council of the European Union, “European Green Deal: Accessing the
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