An Open Access Journal
• ISSN: 10683844

Multicultural Education

Research Article

Homepage: www.MC-caddogap.com

The Green Deal, National Energy and Climate Plans in Europe: Member States' Compliance and Strategies

Georgios Maris and Floros Flouros
Department of the Mediterranean Studies, University of the Aegean, 85132 Rhodes, Greece
Department of History, Politics and International Studies, Neapolis University, 8042 Pafos, Cyprus;

A B S T R A C T

This paper analyses the EU's policies for energy and climate, using Börzel's theoretical framework on Europeanisation, and examines Member States' Green Deal responses, strategies, and compliance. As expressed in their final NECPs, although Member States' responses vary, most of the critical components were partially addressed, while the others were largely addressed. We observe a considerable variation in Member States' strategies. Member States classified as foot-dragging beforehand are fence-sitting now, while those previously categorised as fence-sitting are now either foot-dragging or pace-setting. The root cause of these classification changes for the Member States within the EU can be traced back to their internal environments in which the involved stakeholders each have a different response pace regarding environment, climate, and energy. We present and analyse our theoretical context, discuss the EU's energy policies and the NECPs, examine Member States' responses and compliance with this new framework, and propose several challenges.

A R T I C L E I N F O

Keywords:
European Union; energy; environment; compliance; Green Deal; NECP; strategy

Article History:
Received: 29 June 2021
Accepted: 20 July 2021

1. INTRODUCTION

Energy policies, involving considerations of energy autonomy and environmental impacts, are a crucial issue for world economies and state governments. Recently, the International Energy Agency published an energy policy report confirming COVID-19js tremendous impact on the energy sector and forecasting an annual energy demand decline of six per cent in 2020 (International Energy Agency2020). Due to the drastic COVID-19 government policies, this reduction will have an impact on both global CO2 emissions and incomes, although only temporarily because it is not related to the structural transformation of economic and energy systems, and both governments and production sectors would prefer to postpone the Green Deal targets and limit emission standards (Le Quéré et al.2020). The role of energy in climate change is challenging economies and lifestyles, being perceived as a catalyst for a second energy revolution that strives for a low carbon future, and the present situation's urgency has increased due to the recent pandemic (Yergin2020). The European Union (EU) has also recognised energy and environmental issues as key and critical components, which resulted in the European Commission's 2020 decision to move forward with an unprecedented step that will lead to a so-called "zero-carbon" economy. In this context, we must consider Member States' alignment with the National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP), given the European Commission's general directions, as well as the limitations related to their compliance. This paper is the first to examine this topic or the first to analyse this topic using this particular framework. The main purpose and main contribution of this study is to conduct an up-to-date research on the design and adoption of EU Member States' policies on common European policy and integration issues. One of them concerns the issue of energy and climate policy, but also the Green Agreement in general, which was recently announced and which is expected to have the greatest impact on European policy in the next period 2021–2027. Methodologically, in this context we analyse and evaluate the behaviour of the Member States using the data from the NECPs, trying in parallel to decode their strategies throughBörzel's (2002) theoretical framework. Thus, this paper analyses the EU's policies for energy

and climate, usingBörzel's (2002) theoretical framework on Europeanisation, and examines Member States' Green Deal re- sponses, strategies, and compliance. As expressed in their final NECPs, although Member States' responses vary, most of the critical components were partially addressed, while the others were largely addressed. When comparing these responses with Börzel's categorisa- tions, some countries classified as foot-dragging beforehand are fence-sitting now, while those previously categorised as fence-sitting are now either foot-dragging or pace-setting. The root cause of these classification changes for the 27 Member States within the EU can be traced back to their internal environments in which the involved stakeholders each have a different response pace regarding environment, climate, and energy. To fulfil this paper's aim, we present and analyse our theoretical context (the Europeanisation process), discuss the EU's energy policies and the NECPs, examine Member States' responses and compliance with this new framework, and propose several challenges.

2. THE EUROPEANISATION PROCESS: A THEORETICAL CONTEXT

Although the multi-faceted process of Europeanisation does not provide the dynamics or complexities of European transformation (Olsen2002), it can be a helpful research tool for providing information on the interactions between European and domestic ac- tors (Radaelli2004). To avoid several methodological issues that may affect our analy- sis (Exadaktylos and Radaelli2009;Haverland2006) , we usedBörzel's (2002) theoretical framework to examine Member States' responses to Europeanisation, and the main actors' strategies and compliance with regard to the Green Deal and NECPs. In other words, this framework can help us to examine how the Member States both shape and adapt to these European policies.Börzel(2002) developed a theoretical framework that analyses three different strategies (pace-setting, foot-dragging, and fence-sitting), which repre- sent differences in preferences and action capacities, in order to conceptually connect the two opposite dimensions of Europeanisation (bottom-up and top-down). According to Börzel(2002, p. 194) the three strategies are differentiated as: "pace-setting, i.e., actively pushing policies at the European level, which reflect a Member State's policy preference and minimise implementation costs; foot-dragging, i.e., blocking or delaying costly policies in order to prevent them altogether or achieve at least some compensation for implemen- tation costs; and fence-sitting, i.e., neither systematically pushing policies nor trying to block them at the European level but building tactical coalitions with both pace-setters and foot-draggers". In this regard, energy-rich and climate-sensitive EU Member States, with energy intensive industries, actively push their policy preferences to the EU (pace-setting). On the other hand, foot-dragging is generally not a primary choice for Member States, because the NECP is not binding, and finally fence-sitting is mostly linked with national priority setting, as is the case in Southern European countries that are more concerned with guiding specific actions to deal with climate issues, such as fires, floods, and environ- mental catastrophes (Aggestam and Pülzl2020). Although almost 20 years have passed since it was first introduced, this framework continues to enable us to separate Member States' compliance with the various environmental and energy issues through its clear and concise categorisation that is provided to the researchers. In this paper, we will provide an up-to-date categorisation of the Member State's behavior and strategies for the Green Deal evaluating the NECP's data.

Recently, more up to date literature has also been used to analyse other issues, for example the Council's leadership and Member States' behavior for environmental dynam- ics in the EU (see,Wurzel et al.2019). Other scholars have used Börzel's framework to analyse and evaluate various topics, such as determining medium Member States' roles in the creation of the European Monetary Union (Maes and Verdun2005), identifying leaders and laggards in environmental policy (Liefferink et al.2009), explaining the French policy on the EU's "gouvernement économique" (Howarth2007), etc. However, even more recently,Micallef Grimaud(2018) used this framework to examine the EU's legisla- tive decision-making processes, with regard to governmental power and influence, and Stegmann McCallion (2020) tested whether the EU's contemporary transformation became more inter-governmental. In addition,Coman(2020) analysed the Romanian rotating EU council presidency, andZaun(2020) examined the differences in the negotiation dynam- ics of the EU's asylum policies and its post-2016 reform deadlock. Other scholars used a slightly different theoretical context to examine leadership laggards, pioneers, push- ers, and leaders with regard to the EU's environmental policies and climate governance (Jänicke and Wurzel2018;Liefferink and Wurzel2017;Wurzel et al.2018).

In the past few years, scholars have also analysed Europeanisation's impact on en- vironmental and energy politics, as well as state capacity and compliance. For example, Torney and O'Gorman(2019) assessed the EU's membership restrictions on Ireland's cli- mate change and environmental policy. Others have investigated EU and Member States' in- teractions in shaping the EU's renewable energy policy (Solorio Sandoval and Jörgens2017). In this regard,Avrami and Sprinz(2018) discovered that the Member States found many ways to escape the EU climate policy's limitations, due to the flexible Kyoto mechanisms and reduction targets. Other scholars have studied the economic crisis' influence on Member States' degrees of implementation (Maris and Sklias2020), arguing that it af- fected them in various ways and that the reduction in environmental rules was con- nected to reductions in economic activity (Melidis and Russel2020). In the same vein, Solorio and Jörgens(2020) believed that during an economic crisis, the Europeanisation of renewable energy policy can stimulate de-Europeanisation and probably a partial in- tegration process withdrawal.

Similarly,Tobin(2017) examined climate policy variations between developed states, finding Austria to be an interesting laggard in climate policy, and Aggestam and Pülzl(2020) assessed the EU's forest action plan, discovering different Europeanisation effects on EU Member States. Furthermore, regarding Brexit's impact on environmental policies, Burns et al.(2019) observed that Europeanisation's influence is so important that even Brexit will not lead to environmental policy reversals. In terms of third countries, Iangbein and Börzel(2013) argued that many factors affect Eastern neighbour- hood countries' influence on EU policy changes, andHofmann et al.(2019) asserted that even third countries such as Switzerland and Norway can shape the EU's energy policies, because of their accession and structural power.

On the other hand, even though the Member States prefer to have control over energy policy issues, especially in times of crises, the European Commission found a way to expand supranational authority with the institutionalisation of new instruments centred on "real-time compliance" (Maltby2013;Thaler and Pakalkaite2020). Indeed, this strategy is closely related to the European Commission's wider institutionalised efforts to prevent non-compliance (Falkner2018;Scholten2017), which still remains a "black box" (Versluis2007). However, energy policy involves both structural and political causes, as well as characteristics that may affect implementation and compliance (Van de Graaf et al.2017). Based onBörzel and Buzog ány(2019), country-specific vari- ables, such as legal culture and administrative traditions, state power and capacity, political systems, and low socio-economic development, are the main causes of EU Member States' non-compliance. Torney and O'Gorman(2019, pp. 577–80) also found several reasons for this non-compliance, including Member States' internal administrative structure fragmen- tation, lacking administrative capacities, weak internal institutions, the existence of "veto players", and internal "political and social activism".

3. EUROPEAN UNION'S POLICIES FOR NECP'S

For many years, energy politics in the EU was a voluntary process that relied on Member States' good will (Behrens et al.2011). For example, during the 1970s, when the famous oil crisis occurred, Member States acted individually to implement energy policies (McGowan2011). It appears that many political factors and perceptions affect Member States' behaviours, as they have been reluctant for several years to disclose any energy security competencies to the European Commission (Pointvogl2009). In the 1980s, even with the internal market's introduction, there was no vision to create a common energy policy, despite its importance for governments, interest groups, and the European Commission (Matlary1997).

However, in the following period, it was envisioned that the EU should be able to tackle several challenges, such as growing imports and the environmental impact of energy production and use (Kanellakis et al.2013). Accordingly, during the European Council meeting on 27 October 2005, the EU decided to officially establish a promising energy policy. Two years later, the European Commission published "An Energy Policy for Europe" communication, which was adopted by the Council and the European Parliament (European Commission2007). Subsequently, article 194 of the Lisbon Treaty included energy policy among the primary issues, mainly because of the liberalisation agenda that occurred within the Community. This evolution improved the EU's international leadership position in energy and environmental issues (Oberthür and Roche Kelly2008; Van Schaik and Schunz2012)

After Eurozone's economic crisis in 2009, the Jean Claude Juncker Commission set EU's energy strategy as a key priority, aimed at establishing an Energy Union that of- fers consumers secure and sustainable energy. As a result, the European Commission issued the energy union strategy on 25 February 2015 (European Commission2015) and thereafter, monitored its proper implementation and Member States' issuance of related progress reports. However, many energy policy issues remained at the national level, as the Europeanisation process in energy policy requires the involvement of and close cooper- ation between Member States. Recently, the European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's political programme seriously considered energy policy and climate change adaptation, declaring an aim to transform Europe into "the first climate-neutral continent" through the recently announced European Green Deal. For that purpose, it is important to provide the conditions to achieve a "just transition for all" that will contribute to social cohesion, long-term growth, and sustainability (von der Leyen2019, pp. 5–6). With regard to adopting climate change actions, Europe recognises several urgent challenges: the av- erage air temperature is globally increasing, while the climate changes annually; 10% to 15% of the Earth's species are already at risk of being extinct; nature and oceans are being contaminated and destroyed; and sea levels are expected to rise, causing more floods and potentially bringing serious unforeseen problems in several geographical areas.

Following this, theEuropean Commission(2019c) acknowledged that the challenges are "complex and interlinked"; suggested that any policy recommendations and decisions should be "bold and comprehensive and seek to maximise benefits for health, quality of life, resilience and competitiveness"; and highlighted the need for "intense coordination to exploit the available synergies across all policy areas". The EU declared that they would like to have "a clean energy transition", which can further support the aims announced in the Paris Agreement (European Commission2019d). In order to meet the agreed targets for 2030, the EU's objectives are

to (1) reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by a minimum of 40% (the GHG reduction target for 2030 has been already revised by the European Commission and the Council where documents now state "at least 55%", and the Council has adopted this target too (see also European Climate Law and the 2030 Climate Target Plan, currently under discussion, which will codify the 2030 target into law), (2) increase the renewable energy sources (RES) quota to a minimum of 32% EU energy use, (3) increase energy efficiency by a minimum of 32.5%, (4) guarantee a minimum of 15% electricity inter-connection levels among neighbouring Member States, and (5) support Research and Innovation (R&I) initiatives through the available financing tools.

In order to reach the recently declared European Union's energy and climate targets until the year 2030, it has been decided that all European Union countries have to design and set up a 10-year integrated NECPs that will be implemented during the period 2021 until 2030. In these NECPs, each European Union Member State needs to analyse, de- sign, propose and implement the way that it will deal with concepts such as greenhouse gas emissions reductions, renewables, energy efficiency, interconnections, research and innovation. To provide further support for achieving the EU targets, each Member State must initially send their NECP, which discloses their process and actions for meeting national targets within 10 years (connected to the Energy Union's five key characteristics), current energy systems, and prevailing policies (European Commission2019d). To achieve a "sustainable low-carbon economy", the European Commission predicted that public and private investment changes are needed, in addition to any incentives across the entire policy range (European Commission2019d). Member State governments had to prepare and provide their final NECPs, which considered the 2030 milestone, by the end of 2019, and weigh the Commission's evaluation and suggestions. They also had to submit biannual progress reports, under the European Commission's supervision, to ensure prompt and successful responses, as well as Member States' alignment with the set targets.

Table 1. Summary of the assessment report on NECPs.

Parameters	EU Assessment	2050 Targets	Scale
GHG emissions	Several countries placed aspiring objectives in areas not included in the EU's emission trading system. Other countries foresaw that the national targets can further reduce GHG emissions more than their Effort Sharing Regulation (ESR) binding targets.	National targets are within the 0–40% range until 2030 vs. 2005 to meet the EU's requirements. Minimum reductions in areas which are not included in the EU's emission trading system.	B
Renewable energy	RES amounts in the EU's total energy mix could meet the 33.1% to 33.7% levels by 2030.	Minimum 32% until 2030.	AA
Energy efficiency	A 29.7% [1176 Mtoe] reduction in primary energy and 29.4% in final energy consumption [885 Mtoe] until 2030.	Difference between the target, equalling to 2.8% primary energy consumption, and the 3.1% final energy consumption.	C
Energy security	Malta, Portugal Luxembourg, France, and Lithuania submitted their targets (internal). Bulgaria, Italy, Estonia, Germany, Poland, Croatia, and Ireland scheduled more Liquid Natural Gas (LNG) capacities to secure gas market supply and/or increase competition (external).	COVID-19 has also affected energy security. More focus is required on the resilience of clean technology supply chains. The design and implementation of important clean technology procurement and logistics requires recovery and resilience plans.	B/C
Internal energy market	Some Member States submitted suggestions and prioritised energy subsidies in their NECPs: 19 countries included content on fossil fuel subsidies, 12 set action plans to eliminate fossil fuels, and six reported a time line to end part of the fossil fuel incentives.	Even if countries adopt separate processes for integration, the EU strategy provides an action plan to adjust energy markets to climate neutrality needs and could be seen as a driver for implementing more resilient energy systems.	B/C
Research & Innovation (R&I)	Little focus on R&I requirements for reaching climate and energy targets. National budgets dedicated to R&I in clean energy technologies are smaller compared to previous years. The national targets, with specific and clear 2030 and 2050 directions, are missing. In most cases, the NECP reports only financially support existing non-energy specific programmes.	A fresh strategic intention for clean energy R&I and rivalry is required to support European economies and assist innovation. This could help economies include innovation and new technologies. For both the EU and national R&I policies, local industrial policies should effectively fit the energy and climate targets.	C

Scale: AA: Excellent; A: Very Good; B: Good; C: Below Target; D: Failure.

Source: The assessment is based on the European Commission (2020a).

To ensure that the Member States received proper detailed guidelines and support, in June 2019, theEuropean Commission(2019a,2019b,2019e) published a communication that included 28 draft NECPs, special recommendations, and comprehensive "Staff Working Documents" (SWD) for each Member State. During NECP preparations, each Member State should publicly consult county authorities in a well-structured

and official way to ensure that the community has enough time to seek information, study, and provide the required feedback. In the next milestone, set for October 2021, the European Commission has scheduled to assess Member States' progress, which should take place every two years, regarding their NECPs' implementation status. The latter includes their progress in achieving the targets, updates on policies and measures, and updated projections for the future.

4. MEMBER STATES' RESPONSES, STRATEGIES AND COMPLIANCE WITH THE NEW FRAMEWORK

International energy collaborations seem to be more effective at the level of inter- national governance, rather than within the internal dimensions of domestic policy co- ordination (Lesage et al.2010;Maris et al.2021). Practically, this means that there are several possible response and compliance perceptions. On the one hand, the availability and even abundance of energy supply urged most Member States to consider energy security issues as low priority (Szulecki and Westphal2014). Accordingly, the foreign policy dimensions of energy security remained a second priority compared to the EU's prominent climate change policies (Youngs2009). Member States were criticised for not understanding that dealing with climate change requires more dedicated and geo-strategic foreign policies, and not only internal energy targets (Pascual and Zambetakis2010). At the same time, several diplomats and politicians raised some concerns with regard to the EU's emphasis on climate change issues, which subsequently affected its overall energy policy (Youngs2009). Member States responded differently to the integration process, due to their internal structural parameters as well as their perceptions of the decision-makers as either a strength or risk for their own countries (Mišík2019;Maris and Flouros2021). Depending on this perception, Member States can either support EU integration and adopt common policies in their national legislation or oppose, delay, and even reject this process.

Table 2. Overall assessment: EU Member States' final NECPs.

	Largely Addressed	Partially Addressed
Austria	√	
Belgium		√
Bulgaria		√
Croatia		√
Cyprus	√	
Czech Republic		√
Denmark		√
Estonia		√
Finland		√
France	√	
Germany	√	
Greece		√
Hungary		√
Italy	√	
Ireland	√	
Latvia		√
Lithuania	√	
Luxembourg		√
Malta		√
Netherlands		√
Poland		√
Portugal	√	
Romania		√
Slovakia		√
Slovenia		√
Spain	√	
Sweden	√	
Total	**10**	**17**

Source: European Commission (2020a).

After the recent SWD publications on 14 October 2020, the European Commission issued recommendations for each Member State and a detailed account of how the previous recommendations were reflected in the final NECPs. The UK is not included, because Brexit is still undergoing negotiations.

Figure1illustrates that 17 out of 27 countries partially addressed the recommendations and 10 largely addressed them. In the following figures, each of the NECP parameters represent the factors in the European Commission's final SWD.

4.1. Methodology of the Empirical Study

The main purpose of this research was to examine the level of adoption of EU Member States' of the new issues of energy and climate policies at their national level and their alignment with the common direction from the European Union. The main research question was to investigate how each country reacts to the central direction set by the EU and consequently how they design their own NECP. In case of similarities and grouping among several Member States, it is also interesting to understand how they are grouped, both in relation to the existing theoretical models and also at an empirical level. This research was based on secondary sources and was conducted during the period February- April 2021, with an extensive search to find the appropriate sources and to locate the necessary information about NECP.

4.2. Evaluation of the Assessment Report

Based on the EU Assessment Report on NECPs, which the European Commission recently published, all Member States have submitted their final NECP plans, after the initial schedule and time line delays, and the lengthy discussions at the national level that involved local stakeholders and concerned groups (European Commission2020a). Such a process is expected to enhance the finally approved NECPs' public acceptance, making implementation easier and more efficient. The following bullet points offer a concise summary for each of the aforementioned NECP parameters and Table1summarises the key points of the assessment report. Based on the data and information contained in each Commission Staff Working Document (SWD) of the final NECP for each member country, we evaluate the data presenting at the same time the results (see also, Table2). The creation and use of figures below were deemed appropriate as they can always offer in a simple and concise way the conclusions of the evaluation of the final NECPs.

Figure 1. Final NECPs: Overall assessment. Source:European Commission(2020a).

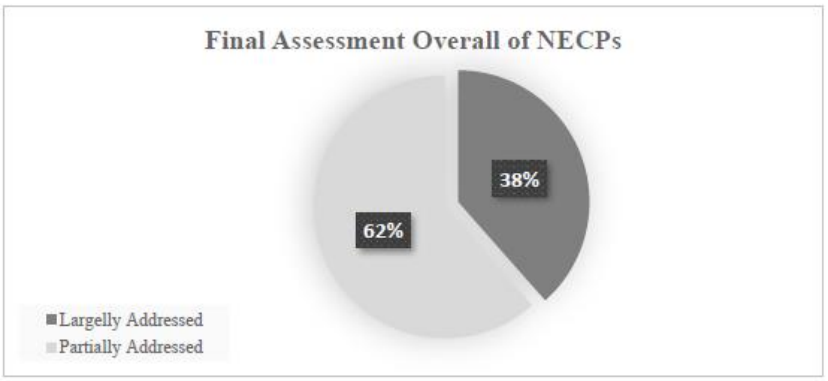

Figure2depicts the final NECPs' decarbonisation-GHG parameter. The 11 Member States that considered this parameter as not applicable or relevant are: Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Romania, Slovakia and Spain. If we also consider that Denmark, Latvia, and Malta did not address this factor, 50% of the countries ignored decarbonisation-GHG. In fact, only Germany fully addressed this recommendation in the final NECP.

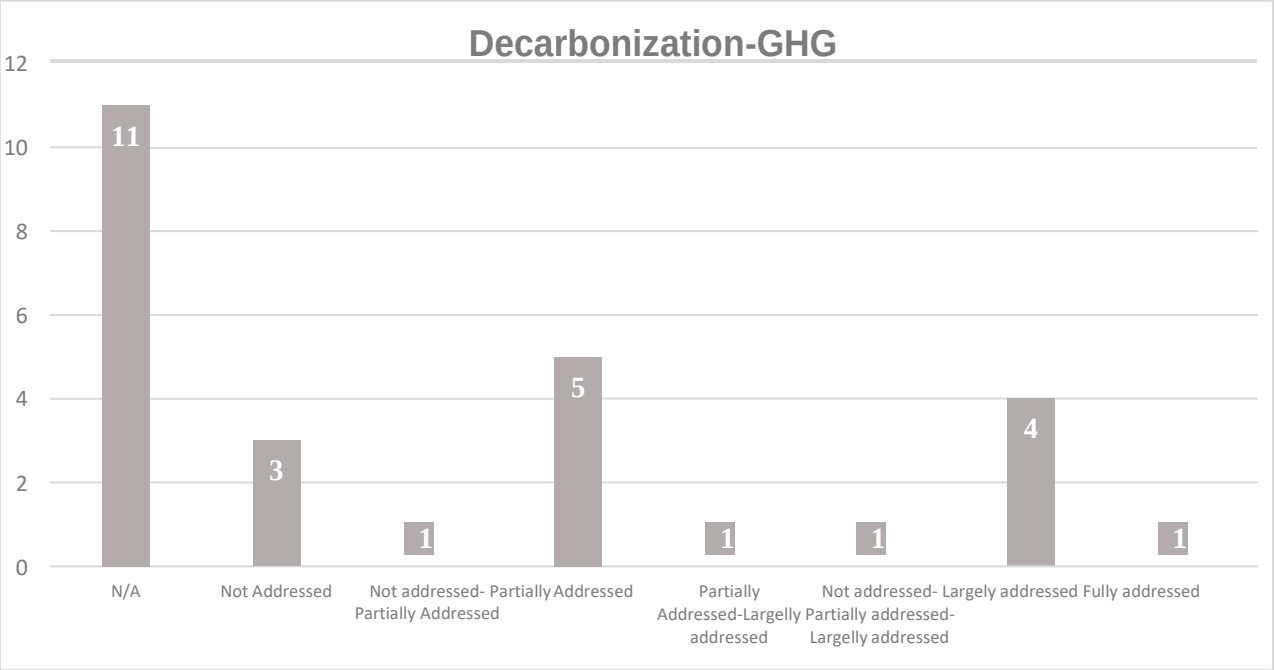

Figure 2. Final NECPs: GHG decarbonisation. Source:European Commission(2020a).

Figure3reveals that nine Member States (Austria, Bulgaria, Finland, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Spain, Slovakia and Sweden) partially and fully addressed the recommendations re- garding decarbonisation-RES, seven countries (Cyprus, Czech Republic, Germany, Greece, Luxembourg, Netherlands, and Slovenia) partially and largely addressed them, and only Lithuania largely and fully addressed them.

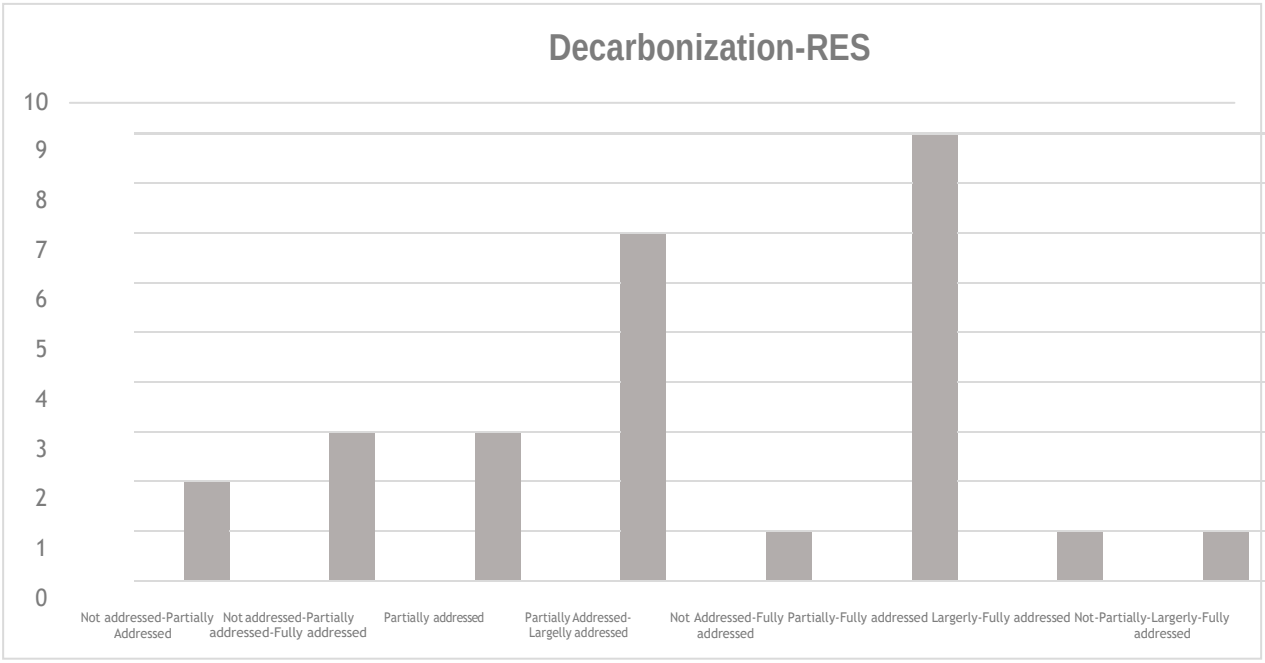

Figure 3. Final NECPs: RES decarbonisation. Source:European Commission(2020a).

As seen in Figure4, 10 out of 27 have not and only partially addressed the recom- mendations on energy efficiency in their NECPs, specifically Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Hungary, and Luxembourg, while only Italy partially and fully addressed them.

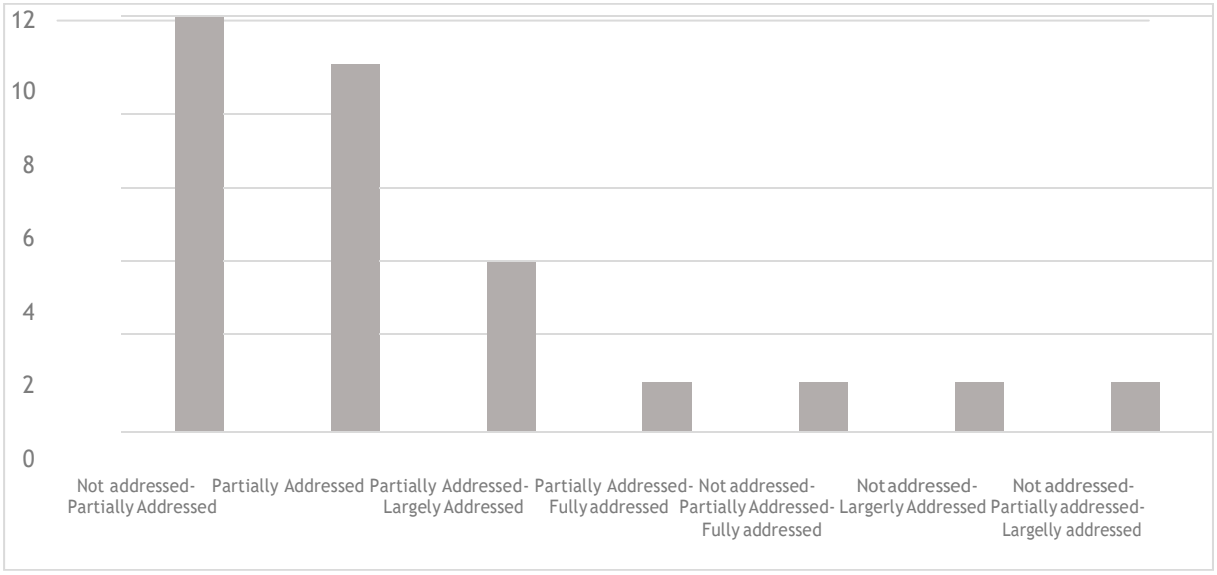

Figure 4. Final NECPs: Energy efficiency. Source:European Commission(2020a).

Figure5shows that 10 out of 27 Member States partially addressed the recommenda- tions on energy security (Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Ireland, Latvia, Malta, Slovakia and the Netherlands), four did not consider them applicable or relevant (Croatia, Denmark, Luxembourg, and Portugal), and only Spain fully addressed them.

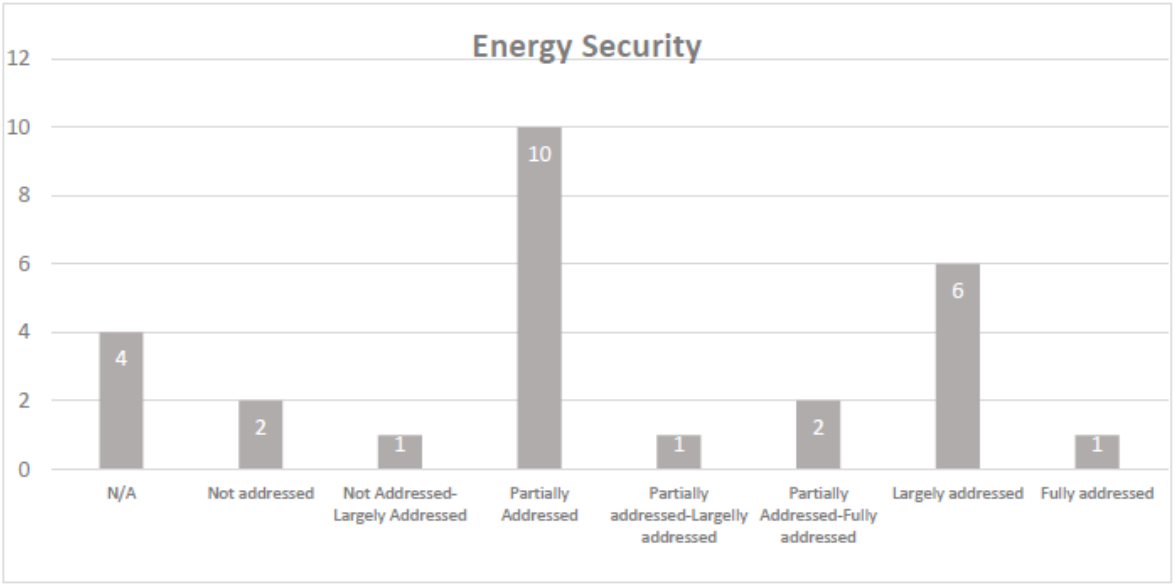

Figure 5. Assessment on the energy security parameter of the final NECPs. Source:European Commission(2020a).

Figure6indicates that 13 out of 27 partially addressed the recommendations on internal energy markets in their NECPs: Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, France,

Hungary, Italy, Ireland, Latvia, Malta, Poland, Portugal and Slovakia. Additionally, Austria, Belgium, Finland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and Sweden did not consider them applicable or relevant.

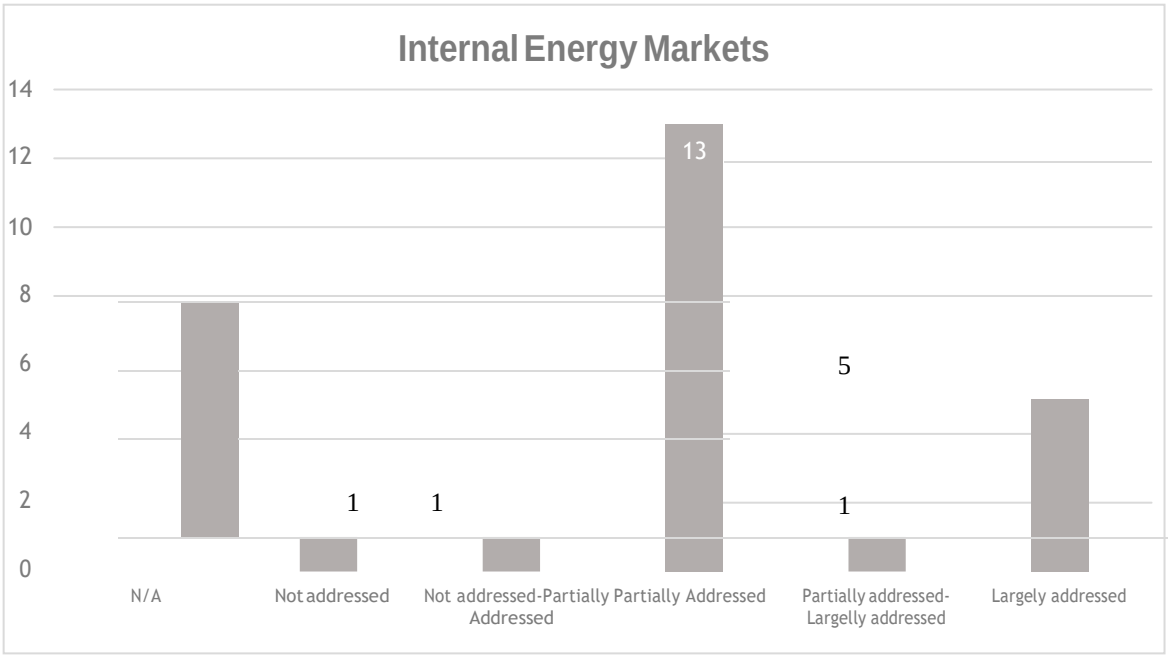

Figure 6. Final NECPs: Internal energy market. Source:European Commission(2020a).

Finally, Figure7represents the R&I and Competitiveness parameter. Most Member States (18 out of 27) partially addressed the recommendations. The countries that are excluded from this group are Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania and Slovakia. However, the Netherlands in fact largely addressed the recommendations.

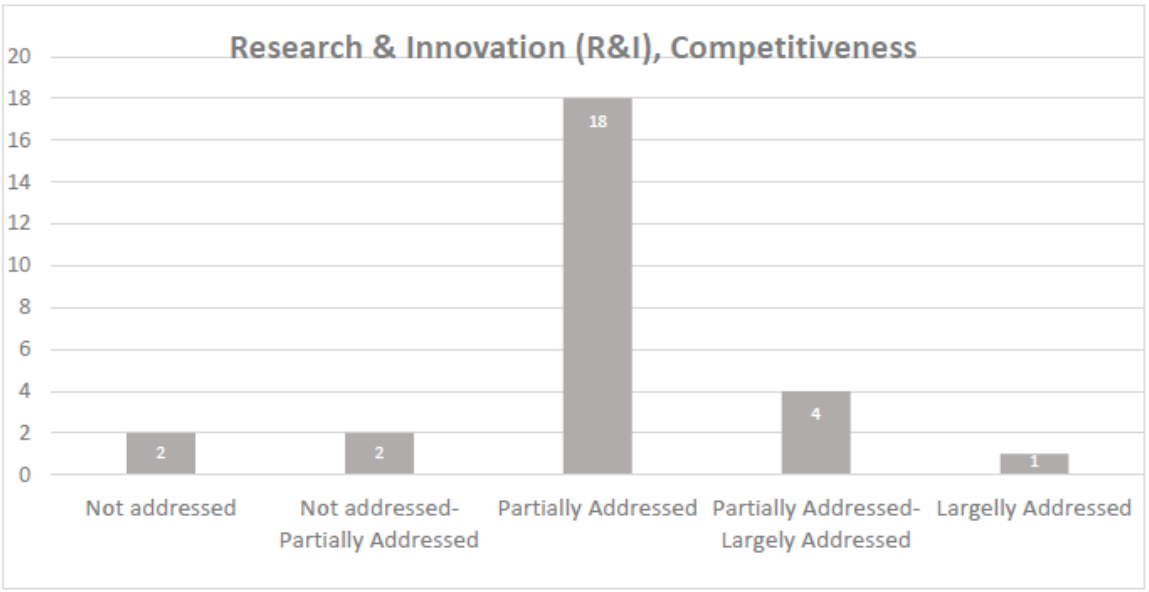

Figure 7. Final NECPs: R&I and competitiveness. Source:European Commission(2020a).

Table3below summarises the results of each Member States' responses and compli- ance with the European Commission's directions and recommendations regarding energy and climate. Based on the European Commission's assessment, each Member State can be classified into one or two categories.

Table 3. EU Member States' compliance based on their final NECPs.

Auditor	Categories				
EU Compliance	N/A	Not	Partially	Largely	Fully
EU Countries	Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, Latvia, Luxembourg, Netherlands		Belgium, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, Slovakia	Austria, Cyprus, France, Germany, Italy, Ireland, Lithuania, Portugal, Spain, Sweden	

4.3. *Member States' Strategies and Compliance and Change*

To assess each Member State's level of compliance with the European Commission's directions and recommendations in their NECPs (see alsoTorney and O'Gorman2019), Table4categorises the EU Member States' energy and climate/environment strategies based on the EU's recommendations (European Commission2020b). The table shows a considerable change in the categorisation of some Member States: Greece, Portugal, and Spain were foot-dragging, but are fence-sitting in their final NECPs; Luxembourg was initially fence-sitting (Börzel2002) but is now foot-dragging; and countries such as France and Italy are pace-setting, based on their NECP responses.

Table 4. EU Member States' long-term strategies in energy and climate (environment).

Strategy	Foot-Dragging	Fence-Sitting	Pace-Setting
Member State Compliance	Bulgaria, Croatia, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, Poland	Belgium, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Lithuania, The Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain	Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Sweden

According to this analysis, Figure8presents a map illustrating the Member States' strategies in energy, climate, and environment policies. Initially, six countries were con- sidered pace-setters: Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark, Austria, Sweden, and Finland (Börzel2002). These countries had been industry leaders in Europe for a while because their governments had implemented environment, climate, and energy restrictions and regulations long ago. Generally, these countries are more likely to be aligned with high European standards, but the assessments on the Netherlands and Denmark revealed that their final NECPs only partially addressed the EU's directions, the 918 and 903 SWDs, respectively (European Commission2020b).

Germany is considered one of the most influential countries within the EU, especially concerning energy related issues. Although it strongly supports initiatives and policies related to RES and climate change, Germany is slow to respond and support some areas, such as energy market liberalisation and achieving a consensus for European energy policy (Birchfield and Duffield2011). Along with Germany, Sweden is a climate leader and prefers adopting an ambitious climate policy, which having a high GDP and EU membership can support (Tobin2017). In addition, Denmark clarified that its NECP is a generic plan in which the criteria set by the Strategic Environmental Assessment Directive do not apply (no. 903) (European Commission2020b). The country has not addressed how it intends to reach its 2030 GHG emissions target, as recommended by the European Commission on 18 June 2019 (no. 903) (European Commission2020b). At the same time, its planned policies and measures are not well described in most of the NECP parameters, despite the fact that after the last general election in 2019, the Social Democrats and their centre-left allies agreed to form a government that finally set on one of the most ambitious climate policies in the world. Nonetheless, after years of budget cuts under the previous Prime Minister Rasmussen, Mette Frederiksen became the country's youngest prime minister, and her administration's green agenda aimed to further support the North Sea offshore wind projects and establish artificial energy island(s). As Denmark has a high GDP, in addition to its EU membership, it is largely compliant with the European Commission's climate and energy directions for the 2030 and 2050 goals as set in the NECPs.

Italy and France have largely addressed the EU recommendations, as per the 911 and 909 SWDs (European Commission2020b), respectively, and could be potentially or actively pace-setting Member States, rather than fence-sitters. Italy's available administrative system to support and assist the country's efforts to comply with the European climate and energy policies appears to be less capable than required, mainly because it is complicated and bureaucratic, while also unequal across the spectrum of technology and its applications (Di Nucci and Russolillo2017). France's situation is unique, as the country was following a "state-centric" energy policy that must change to comply with the latest EU energy policy (Birchfield and Duffield2011). Although the country considers itself a special case and does not include fossil fuels in its energy mix, it finally expressed its desire and willingness to comply with the EU's energy policy, as also described in its latest NECP, which the European Commission characterised as largely compliant and ready to contribute to emissions reduction.

On the other hand, countries seen as foot-draggers are industrial latecomers with less developed regulatory structures, such as Portugal, Greece, and Spain (Börzel2002). Ireland has been trying to "promote a green image" (fence-sitter), while Poland noted its opposition to "the whole idea of a low-carbon economy" in 2014 when the European Commission designed its previous climate and energy package (Skjærseth2014, p. 510). Both democratisation level and internal power separations in a Member State play a significant role in the adoption of environmentally friendly policies that can eventually properly address climate change challenges and be applicable in a more efficient way. Countries such as Bulgaria and Poland are categorised as semi-consolidated. Latvia became a democratic state only after independence in 1991, but corruption remains a

major problem affecting politics and internal institutions. Countries such as Malta and Croatia have a lower GDP than the average EU state, and this important factor can explain their behaviours towards adopting or refusing climate change actions.

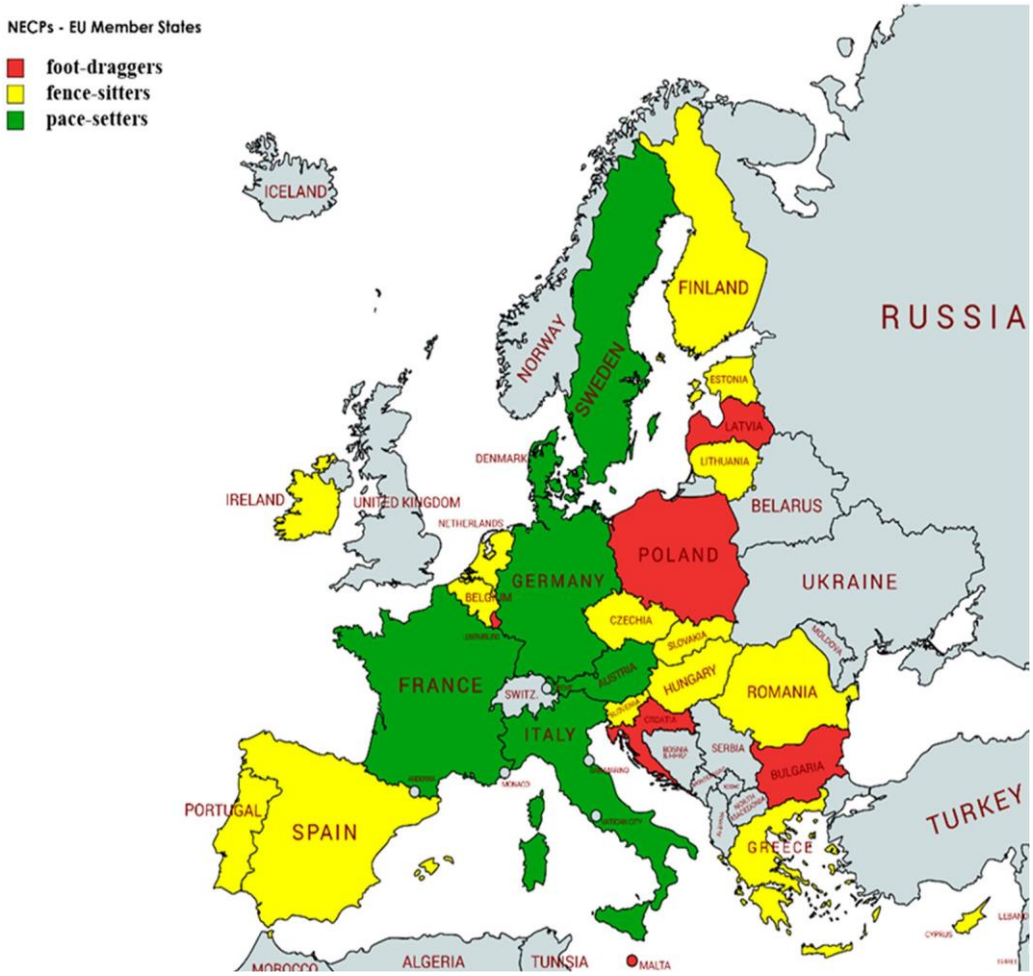

Figure 8. Energy and climate long-term strategies—Member States. Source: Authors.

The retail electricity prices among the European Member States vary immensely, with Denmark's being three times more expensive that Bulgaria's (cheapest price). It is important to consider that the cheapest retail prices are in countries such as Bulgaria, Croatia, Latvia, Luxembourg, Romania, and Hungary, who are also seen as foot-dragging and have only partially addressed the recommendations regarding their internal markets (European Commission2019e).

Countries that are characterised as fence-sitting, which falls between pace-setting and foot-dragging, are considered to hold a more neutral position and usually prefer to build coalitions with others on an ad-hoc basis (Börzel2002). Such countries are Belgium, France, Ireland, Italy, Slovakia and Luxembourg. Ireland largely addressed the EU's directions as per the 911 and 906 SWDs (European Commission2020b), and set a 2030 GHG emission target of 30% compared to their 2005 levels, which was not covered in the EU Emissions Trading System. On the other hand, Italy either partially or largely addressed most of the parameters, except for R&I and competitiveness (no. 911).

At the same time, several countries' policies, identified in the final NECPs, are similar to objectives rather than clear actions (no. 906) (European Commission2020b). For instance, the Netherlands' GHG emission reductions seem to focus on their existing policies and not on presenting a holistic blend of measures. Thus, the 2030 ESR target may not be possible to achieve (no. 918) (European Commission2020b). At the same time, the Netherlands' NECP does not explain how the country can apply energy efficiency's first principle (no. 918) (European Commission2020b). Despite their previous leadership in the design and implementation of complete and thorough environmental policies, the country is recently seen as a laggard, mostly interested in protecting the existing set ups and the needs of their internal industrial stakeholders, rather than complying with the European policies and regulations, especially in the RES (Hoppe and Bueren2017). In Finland, the need for

immediate and accurate compliance with the European environmental and climate policies changed their usual procedure so dramatically that they had to consult with the internal interested stakeholders (Börzel2007).

Although most parties within the political spectrum of a Member State address climate change, the presence of a left-wing government increases the chances of obtaining positive decisions to adopt and follow more ambitious climate and energy policies (Tobin2017). This happened in Portugal, where the Socialists have been in power since 2015, but in the last 2019 election, they obtained a minority government. Furthermore, Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries, in addition to Malta and Cyprus, have shown a much higher degree of readiness and compliance, when compared to the previous accession of Southern countries (Greece, Spain, and Portugal). However, these CEE countries still do not have an adequate administration capacity, mainly due to drawbacks caused by corruption, authoritarianism, poor organisation, and small socio-economic growth. Compliance with the newly imposed EU rules is mostly related to a country's legal and administrative capacity. Another important factor is that the EU has intensified its support to build Member States' capacities for achieving compliance, mostly through various funding programmes' financial and technical assistance (Börzel and Buzogány2019).

Furthermore, although CEE countries' performance and attitudes are not comparable to those of the Southern European countries, during the early stages of the EU's accession (i.e., Greece, Spain, and Portugal), they may still be reluctant to comply and adopt aspiring climate and energy policies. For example, several countries, such as Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic, depend on coal for their energy and are, thus, reluctant to adopt and implement other energy sources, such as renewables (Skjærseth2014). For this reason, these countries have partially addressed the recommendations for Decarbonisation-RES in their NECPs.

The Europeanisation process of Estonian foreign policy took place during the 1990s, made significant progress in EU cohesion policy in the 2000s, and Estonia successfully joined the EU in 2004. Afterwards, the country's externality efforts reduced and delays in the Europeanisation process emerged. Regarding environmental and climate aspects, Estonia reported an overall improving implementation trend in the annual distribution of environmental infringements during the last years, from 19 in 2008 to only 2 in 2015 (Melidis and Russel2020) . However, its NECP partially addressed the recommended targets (Raagmaa et al.2014). Finally, with regard to Slovenia, after its accession to the EU and becoming a full member in 2004, the central government still plays the most critical role, while different stakeholders and local communities are more promising actors for political decentralisation, and assist in the country's compliance with EU rules and regulations (Lindstrom2005).

5. CONCLUSIONS

The European Commission aims to achieve a climate neutral economy by 2050, with energy transformation playing the most critical role. To establish a well-defined framework that will contribute to this aim, Member States have been asked to submit their final NECPs, in which they were required to set detailed national objectives, targets, and contributions, as well as policies and measures to achieve the objectives, especially the 2030 EU energy and climate targets. However, the COVID-19 crisis may have distracted these Member States from the process of properly preparing, designing, and submitting their final NECPs. In other words, this unforeseen pandemic may have derailed Member States from their initial focus and approach towards new priorities that require an immediate response. The main purpose and main contribution of this study is to conduct up-to-date and up- to-date research on the design and adoption of EU Member States' policies on common European policy and integration issues. One of them concerns the issue of energy and climate policy, but also the Green Agreement in general, which was recently announced and which is expected to have the greatest impact on European policy in the next period 2021–2027. UsingBörzel's (2002) categorisation for the Member States, it is observed that there is a significant variation in their strategies and compliance. Some Member States that were initially characterised as foot-dragging, such as Greece, Portugal, and Spain, can now be considered as fence-sitting, and others that were seen as fence-sitting, can now be perceived as either foot-dragging (e.g., Luxembourg) or pace-setting (e.g., France and Italy). Variation can be explained through various reasons, such as domestic players; lacking capacities; and populist governments. There is a large and vivid discussion on these topics in energy and EU studies journals which would help formulating clear-cut expectations (see,Zapletalov á and Komínková 2020). Europeanisation is a multi-faceted and dynamic process, which can be viewed with a top-down and/or bottom-up perspective, that continuously evolves during the long process of adopting a new legislation to a local legal system. Coherence and uniform responses are required in the final NECPs, but this process quite often encounters reactions, delays, partial acceptance, and ultimately, a controversial and incomplete implementation of measures. In the case of NECPs, Member States have different reasons and causes that affected their responses and characterised them as either partially or largely addressing the required commitments in the European Commission's targets for achieving a climate neutral European economy by 2050.

Proposals for further actions at both research and policy level are summarised in key points such as (i) examining in more detail the emerging energy and climate policies, so that the necessary specific measures can be taken and possible. their adoption and implementation by final consumers and society; to continue to have the regular re-examination of each NECP that has been submitted and any need to change or update them. In reality, it looks that there is no clear pattern to predict compliance amongst EU Member States, while in many times the notion of national interests as misaligned against regional efforts.

Conflicts of Interest:

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

1. Aggestam, Filip, and Helga Pülzl. 2020. Downloading Europe: A Regional Comparison in the Uptake of the EU Forest Action Plan. Sustainability 12: 3999.
2. Avrami, Lydia, and Detlef F. Sprinz. 2018. Measuring and Explaining the EU's Effect on National Climate Performance. Environmental Politics 28: 822–46.
3. Behrens, Arno Michel Berthélemy, Christian Egenhofer, Jaap C. Jansen, François Lévêque, and Richard S. J. Tol. 2011. Does Europe need a Comprehensive Energy Policy? Intereconomics 46: 124–42.
4. Birchfield, Vicki, and John S. Duffield, eds. 2011. Toward a Common European Union Energy Policy: Progress, Problems, and Prospects. London Borough of Camden: Palgrave Macmillan.
5. Börzel, T. 2007. Environmental Policy. In Europeanization New Research Agendas. Edited by Paolo Graziano and Maarten Vink. London Borough of Camden: Palgrave McMillan, pp. 226–38.
6. Börzel, Tanja. 2002. Pace-Setting, Foot-Dragging, and Fence-Sitting: Member State Responses to Europeanization. Journal of Common Market Studies 40: 193–214.
7. Börzel, Tanja, and Aron Buzogány. 2019. Compliance with EU Environmental Law. The Iceberg is Melting. Environmental Politics 28: 315–41.
8. Burns, Charlotte, Viviane Gravey, Andrew Jordan, and Anthony Zito. 2019. De-Europeanising or Disengaging? EU Environmental Policy and Brexit. Environmental Politics 28: 271–92.
9. Coman, Ramona. 2020. The Rotating Presidency of the EU Council as a Two-Level Game, or How the "Brussels Model" Neutralises Domestic Political Factors: The Case of Romania. East European Politics 36: 1–17.
10. Di Nucci, Maria Rosaria, and Daniele Russolillo. 2017. The Fuzzy Europeanization of the Italian Renewable Energy Policy: The Paradox of Meeting Targets without Strategic Capacity. In A Guide to EU Renewable Energy Policy: Comparing Europeanization and Domestic Policy Change in EU Member States. Edited by I. Solorio and H. Jörgens. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, pp. 121–40.
11. European Commission. 2007. An Energy Policy for Europe. November 1.
12. European Commission. 2015. A Framework Strategy for a Resilient Energy Union with a Forward-Looking Climate Change Policy. February 25.
13. European Commission. 2019a. Commission Staff Working Document. June 18.
14. European Commission. 2019b. Commission Staff Working Document: Assessment of The National Forestry Accounting Plans. June 18.
15. European Commission. 2019c. The European Green Deal. December 11.
16. European Commission. 2019d. A European Green Deal: Striving to Be the First Climate-Neutral Continent.
17. European Commission. 2019e. The Role of Integrated National Energy and Climate Plans. June 18.
18. European Commission. 2020a. An EU-Wide Assessment of National Energy and Climate Plans. Driving Forward the Green Transition and Promoting Economic Recovery through Integrated Energy and Climate Planning. September 17.
19. European Commission. 2020b. Final Staff Working Documents.

20. Exadaktylos, Theofanis, and Claudio M. Radaelli. 2009. Research Design in European Studies: The Case of Europeanization. JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies 47: 507–30.
21. Falkner, Gerda. 2018. A Causal Loop? The Commission's New Enforcement Approach in the Context of Non-Compliance with EU Law even after CJEU Judgments. Journal of European Integration 40: 769–84.
22. Haverland, Markus. 2006. Does the EU Cause Domestic Developments? Improving Case Selection in Europeanisation Research. West European Politics 29: 134–46.
23. Hofmann, Benjamin, Torbjørg Jevnaker, and Philipp Thaler. 2019. Following, Challenging, or Shaping: Can Third Countries Influence EU Energy Policy? Politics and Governance 7: 152–64.
24. Hoppe, Thomas, and Ellen van Bueren. 2017. From Frontrunner to Laggard: The Netherlands and Europeanization in the Cases of RES-E and Biofuel Stimulation. In A Guide to EU Renewable Energy Policy: Comparing Europeanization and Domestic Policy Change in EU Member States. Edited by I. Solorio and H. Jörgens. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, pp. 65–84.
25. Howarth, David. 2007. Making and Breaking the Rules: French Policy on EU "Gouvernement Économique". Journal of European Public Policy 14: 1061–1078.
26. Iangbein, Julia, and Tanja Börzel. 2013. Introduction: Explaining Policy Change in the European Union's Eastern Neighbourhood. Europe-Asia Studies 65: 571–80.
27. International Energy Agency. 2020. Global Energy Review 2020. The Impacts of the Covid-19 Crisis on Global Energy Demand and CO2 Emissions.
28. Jänicke, Martin, and Rüdiger K. W. Wurzel. 2018. Leadership and Lesson-Drawing in the European Union's Multilevel Climate Governance System. Environmental Politics 28: 22–42.
29. Kanellakis, Marinos, Georgios Martinopoulos, and Theodoros Zachariadis. 2013. European Energy Policy—A Review. Energy Policy 62: 1020–30.
30. Le Quéré, Corinne, Robert B. Jackson, Matthew W. Jones, Adam J. P. Smith, Sam Abernethy, Robbie M. Andrew, Anthony J. De-Gol, David R. Willis, Yuli Shan, Josep G. Canadell, and et al. 2020. Temporary Reduction in Daily Global CO2 Emissions during the COVID-19 Forced Confinement. Nature Climate Change 10: 647–53.
31. Lesage, Dries, Thijs Van de Graaf, and Kirsten Westphal. 2010. G8+5 Collaboration on Energy Efficiency and IPEEC: Shortcut to a Sustainable Future? Energy Policy 38: 6419–27.
32. Liefferink, Duncan, and Rudiger K. W. Wurzel. 2017. Environmental Leaders and Pioneers: Agents of Change? Journal of European Public Policy 24: 951–68.
33. Liefferink, Duncan, Bas Arts, Jelmer Kamstra, and Jeroen Ooijevaar. 2009. Leaders and Laggards in Environmental Policy: A Quantitative Analysis of Domestic Policy Outputs. Journal of European Public Policy 16: 677–700.
34. Lindstrom, Nicole. 2005. Europeanization and Sub-National Governance in Slovenia. Paper presented at the ECPR Joint Sessions of Workshops, Granada, Spain, April 15–19;
35. Maes, Ivo, and Amy Verdun. 2005. Small States and the Creation of EMU: Belgium and the Netherlands, Pace-Setters and Gate-Keepers. Journal of Common Market Studies 43: 327–48.
36. Maltby, Tomas. 2013. European Union Energy Policy Integration: A Case of European Commission Policy Entrepreneurship and Increasing Supranationalism. Energy Policy 55: 435–44. [PubMed]
37. Maris, Georgios, and Floros Flouros. 2021. Economic Crisis, COVID-19 Pandemic, and the Greek Model of Capitalism. Evolutionary and Institutional Economics Review. Forthcoming.
38. Maris, Georgios, and Pantelis Sklias. 2020. European integration and asymmetric power: Dynamics and change in the EMU. European Politics and Society 21: 634–49.
39. Maris, Georgios, Pantelis Sklias, and Napoleon Maravegias. 2021. The political economy of the Greek economic crisis in 2020. European Politics and Society.
40. Matlary, Janne Haaland. 1997. Energy Policy in the European Union. New York: Macmillan.
41. McGowan, Francis. 2011. Putting Energy Insecurity into Historical Context: European Responses to the Energy Crises of the 1970s and 2000s. Geopolitics 16: 486–511.

42. Melidis, Michail, and Duncan J. Russel. 2020. Environmental Policy Implementation during the Economic Crisis: An Analysis of European Member State "Leader-Laggard" Dynamics. Journal of Environmental Policy and Planning 22: 198–210.
43. Micallef Grimaud, Jean. 2018. Conceptualizing Notions of Power and Influence in the EU Legislative Process: Governmental Capacities and Strategies. In Small States and EU Governance: Malta in EU Decision-Making Processes. Edited by J. Micallef Grimaud. New York: Springer International Publishing, pp. 35–55.
44. Mišík, Matúš. 2019. External Energy Security in the European Union. Small Member States' Perspective. Milton Park: Routledge.
45. Oberthür, Sebastian, and Claire Roche Kelly. 2008. EU Leadership in International Climate Policy: Achievements and Challenges. The International Spectator 43: 35–50.
46. Olsen, Johan P. 2002. The Many Faces of Europeanization. Journal of Common Market Studies 40: 921–52.
47. Pascual, Carlos, and Evie Zambetakis. 2010. The Geopolitics of Energy: From Security to Survival. In Energy Security Economics, Politics, Strategies, and Implications. Edited by C. Pascual and J. Elkind. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, pp. 9–36.
48. Pointvogl, Andreas. 2009. Perceptions, Realities, Concession—What is Driving the Integration of European Energy Policies? Energy Policy 37: 5704–16.
49. Raagmaa, Garri, Tarmo Kalvet, and Ragne Kasesalu. 2014. Europeanization and De-Europeanization of Estonian Regional Policy. European Planning Studies 22: 775–95.
50. Radaelli, Claudio. 2004. Europeanisation: Solution or Problem? European Integration Online Papers 8: 1–23.
51. Scholten, Miroslava. 2017. Mind the Trend! Enforcement of EU Law Has Been Moving to "Brussels". Journal of European Public Policy 24: 1348–66.
52. Skjærseth, Jon Birger. 2014. Linking EU Climate and Energy Policies: Policy-Making, Implementation and Reform. International Environmental Agreements: Politics, Law and Economics 16: 509–23.
53. Solorio, Israel, and Helge Jörgens. 2020. Contested Energy Transition? Europeanization and Authority Turns in EU Renewable Energy Policy. Journal of European Integration 42: 77–93.
54. Solorio Sandoval, Israel, and Helge Jörgens, eds. 2017. A Guide to EU Renewable Energy Policy: Comparing Europeanization and Domestic Policy Change in EU Member States. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
55. Stegmann McCallion, Malin. 2020. Europeanisation and the Longevity of the Nation-State: Survival by Transformation? In The European Union and the Return of the Nation State: Interdisciplinary European Studies. Edited by B. Engelbrekt, A. Leijon, K. Michalski and A. L. Oxelheim. New York: Springer International Publishing, pp. 219–39.
56. Szulecki, Kacper, and Kirsten Westphal. 2014. The Cardinal Sins of European Energy Policy: Non governance in an Uncertain Global Landscape. Global Policy 5: 38–51.
57. Thaler, Philipp, and Vija Pakalkaite. 2020. Governance through Real-Time Compliance: The Supranationalisation of European External Energy Policy. Journal of European Public Policy 28: 208–28.
58. Tobin, Paul. 2017. Leaders and Laggards: Climate Policy Ambition in Developed States. Global Environmental Politics 17: 28–47.
59. Torney, Diarmuid, and Roderic O'Gorman. 2019. A Laggard in Good Times and Bad? The Limited Impact of EU Membership on Ireland's Climate Change and Environmental Policy. Irish Political Studies 34: 575–94.
60. Van de Graaf, Thijs, Tim Haesebrouck, and Peter Debaere. 2017. Fractured Politics? The Comparative Regulation of Shale Gas in Europe. Journal of European Public Policy 25: 1276–93.
61. Van Schaik, Louise, and Simon Schunz. 2012. Explaining EU Activism and Impact in Global Climate Politics: Is the Union a Norm- or Interest-Driven Actor? JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies 50: 169–186.
62. Versluis, Esther. 2007. Even Rules, Uneven Practices: Opening the "Black Box" of EU Law in Action. West European Politics 30: 50–67.

63. von der Leyen, Ursula. 2019. A Union that Strives for More: My Agenda for Europe, Political Guidelines for the Next European Commission 2019–2024.

64. Wurzel, Rüdiger K. W., Duncan Liefferink, and Diarmuid Torney. 2018. Pioneers, Leaders and Followers in Multilevel and Polycentric Climate Governance. Environmental Politics 28: 1–21.

65. Wurzel, Rüdiger K. W., Duncan Liefferink, and Maurizio Di Lullo. 2019. The European Council, the council and the member states: Changing environmental leadership dynamics in the European Union. Environmental Politics 28: 70.

66. Yergin, Daniel. 2020. The New Map: Energy, Climate, and the Clash of Nations. London: Penguin Books. Youngs, Richard. 2009. Energy Security: Europe's New Foreign Policy Challenge. Milton Park: Routledge.

67. Zapletalová, Veronika, and Magda Komínková. 2020. Who is fighting against the EU's energy and climate policy in the European Parliament? The contribution of the Visegrad Group. Energy Policy 139.

68. Zaun, Natascha. 2020. Fence-Sitters No More: Southern and Central Eastern European Member States' Role in the Deadlock of the CEAS Reform. Journal of European Public Policy, 1–22.