

Is the Green Deal Still Alive?: The Second von der Leyen Commission amid the Rise of Eurosceptic Far-right Parties

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Introduction

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Introduction

Is the European Green Deal (hereinafter EGD) now backsliding or still resilient? This question is intended to inform the evaluation of the 2nd von der Leyen Commission (hereinafter VDL Commission), the common theme of this session. The paper discusses it by focusing on the following four topics.

1. Preceding studies that consider the EGD as a new growth model, a relaunch of the European Integration project, and a geopolitical strategy
2. Narrative shift between the 1st and 2nd VDL Commission from a “green” to “clean” discourse
3. A possible reproachment between far-right parties and European People’s Party (EPP) towards an anti-EGD
4. Coherence and Resilience of the external dimension of the EGD

The conclusions presented in this paper are provisional, as only one year has passed since the start of the 2nd VDL Commission, making a full academic assessment of its policy achievements nearly impossible. Academic research has still focused on the 1st VDL Commission’s EGD. The paper will selectively review preceding studies of the EGD in order to reaffirm a strong scholarly interest to the EGD, and then examine how the 2nd VDL Commission has shifted its policy narrative. Originally framed as a Green Deal for the total transformation of European society, it is now promoted as a Clean Industrial Deal designed to enhance Europe’s competitiveness in today’s challenging geopolitical and geoeconomic

environment. This shift from “green” to “clean” appears to coincide with the so-called simplification: a potential easing of certain green regulations—such as EUDR, CSDDD, CSRD, SFDR, CBAM, and REACH—even though the GHG reduction targets remain sufficiently ambitious to meet the 2050 carbon-neutral goal.

Based on a review of academic papers and official documents, this paper shows that the EGD has become a primary target of attack by three rapidly rising Eurosceptic and far-right groups in the European Parliament—ECR, PöE, and ESN. Crucially, the EPP, the largest political group, has at times joined forces with these right- and far-right factions, which is sometimes dubbed the “Venezuela majority.”

Finally, the paper argues that, although the 2nd VDL Commission’s EGD shows signs of backsliding, its green policy practices—particularly in EU climate diplomacy—remain resilient. Externally, the EU continues to position itself as a global climate leader, delivering an ambitious message at each year’s UNFCCC COP. Internally there may be signs of retreat, but outwardly the EGD seems to stay robust, even though the term Green Deal is no longer used. This constitutes the paper’s provisional conclusion.

1. What was the EGD? : theoretical implications and political expectation

When von der Leyen unveiled the EGD, she dubbed her Commission the “geopolitical Commission” (von der Leyen 2019). However, she lacked sufficient political support. Baracani and Kassim describe her stepping onto the European political stage as follows:

“Without the powerful mandate associated with the election through the Spitzenkandidaten process, voted into office by a slender majority, and with no substantial experience at the EU level, the 13th and first female President was taking a risk” (Baracani & Kassim 2024: 41).

The Commission’s first female President is undoubtedly “a crisis leader” (*Ibid.*, 48). The EGD was the geopolitical Commission’s primary policy framework for addressing complex crises. Von der Leyen herself stated

“The European Green Deal is our new growth strategy. It will help us cut emissions while creating jobs. At the core of it will be an industrial strategy that enables our businesses—big and small—to innovate and to develop new technologies while creating new markets. We will be global standard setters. This is our competitive advantage. And the best way to ensure a level-playing field. All of this has to serve the European people” (von der Leyen 2019).

This way of understanding seems to resemble the basic aims of the later-adopted Clean Industrial Deal,

however, essential tone is quite different, as will be seen below. Here attention should be paid to the timing of the EGD's adoption. It came just after the Euro crisis and immediately before the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine—events that were followed, respectively, by a severe economic recession and a deepening energy crisis. The preceding studies on the politics surrounding the EGD have characterised it as follows:

1. A new growth model that would enable technological innovation for de-carbonization
2. A policy framework aimed at relaunching the European Integration project
3. An external geopolitical strategy to strengthen EU's material power and ensure European security

The following is a selective literature review of the three research trends.

A New Growth Model

While the policy target of the EGD is to realise carbon-neutral by 2050, it also conceptualises the post-carbon economy that is supported with a circular economy, and this conception is to strengthen the single market (De Vos 2024: 119). De Vos points out the essence of the EGD's political aim as follows:

“The EU's environmental strategy shifts from environmental standards to overall sustainability, which means that Europe is intervening more deeply in the structures and the business models of economic activity itself, forcing transformations to achieve politically determined sustainability goals” (*Ibid.*, 68).

Eckert highlights the EU's regulatory power in this context. The green transition involves shifting from a fossil-fuel-based economic model to a new growth model that leaves no one behind, enabled by an encompassing regulatory agenda (Eckert 2021: 81). This social-value orientation of the 1st VDL Commission deserves attention. It is the regulatory power of the EU that made it possible to ensure a social and green Europe simultaneously. The internal, social value-oriented practice of the transition fuels the political ambition to become a global agenda setter and climate leader (*Ibid.*).

Bloomfield & Steward characterises the EGD as a policy mix innovation (Bloomfield & Steward 2020). As they point out, the setting up of a green new deal in the 2010's was a trend in Western developed countries such as the UK, the USA, and the EU. The especially noteworthy of the EU's practice was to establish a wide-ranging policy mix: spanning energy, buildings, mobility, and food; extending through biodiversity and climate; and encompassing jobs, investment, and finance. Although the EU's green transition within a neoliberal framework—especially its focus on carbon pricing—is notable, the EGD

also exhibits a Keynesian dimension, relying on budgetary measures drawn from Next Generation EU (Bloomfield & Steward 2020: 771, 774). Crucially, Bloomfield and Steward highlight that the EGD is essentially a social-democratic policy project, yet it was championed by a centre-right, conservative leadership: the 1st VDL Commission (*Ibid.*, 774).

In sum, preceding studies have interpreted the EGD as a social value oriented, centre-right political project comprising two competing elements—neoliberalism and Keynesianism. Despite these mutually contradictory orientations, the 1st VDL Commission has certainly pursued a carbon-neutral society built on a circular economy—as a new growth model in which no one leaves behind. This social democratic practice has certainly articulated an ambitious vision for a more integrated European society.

Relaunching the European Integration Project

Bongardt and Torres argue that the EGD has reinvigorated the process of European integration. After the Single Market and the Single Currency—undeniably landmark achievements—the EGD “envisages another qualitative change in European integration” (Bongardt & Torres 2022: 170). Their key point is that, by introducing “climate and environmental mainstreaming” grounded in “long-term thinking,” the EGD’s “wider sustainability perspective” opens new horizons for integration (*Ibid.*, 171). This broad, forward-looking policy framework can be seen as a significant step forward in EU polity-building (McNamara 2023).

How can such a long-term, wide-ranging, fully inclusive policy framework be implemented within the EU’s political system? Puetter and Terranova offer an insightful model of the EU “core executive,” defined as “the ensemble of select actors from the EU’s executive institutions” (Puetter & Terranova 2025: 2). The EGD exemplifies

“a cross-sectoral policy response, where a multiplicity of executive actors in different policy domains and at different levels of government purposefully adjust their policy actions with the aim of achieving a broad, overarching policy objective.” (*Ibid.*, 3)

By defining the concept of the core executive, Puetter and Terranova identify several key elements of the EU political system—strengthened by the EGD as an ensemble of functionally integrated actors—including:

- the presidential role of the European Council in constraining member states
- the Commission President’s oversight of cross-sectoral policy formation
- the steering roles of COREPER in facilitating policy choices

- the rotating presidency in scheduling decision-making

(*Ibid.*, 9–10).

Certainly, among the actors in the core executive, the European Commission has played a significant role. Bürgin identifies the Commission's policy entrepreneurship as a key driver of European integration (Bürgin 2023). The Commission has championed ambitious GHG reduction targets, monitored member states' compliance with EU law, and enhanced coordination with national governments (*Ibid.*, 23). However, the Commission is not the sole actor behind the EGD: the Green Deal demands broad, cross-sectoral coordination that a single institution cannot achieve alone. Puetter and Terranova's arguments are therefore crucial. Euro-polity building under the EGD must be understood as a blend of supranational functionalism and intergovernmental adaptation.

While Puetter and Terranova's conceptual framework is both insightful and valuable, must we then conclude that the EU is merely an executive coalition—an alliance between supranational bodies and intergovernmental actors that lacks democratic legitimacy because there is no direct EU-level general election? In a special issue of *the Journal of European Integration* 47(2), "Democracy and the European Green Deal," Buzogány, Parks and Torney argue that the EGD's participatory and deliberative dimensions deserve greater attention. They conclude:

"... realizing the EU's ambitious climate goals demands not only institutional reforms but also the creation of stronger, more inclusive democratic spaces that empower citizens as active participants in shaping a sustainable and just transition" (Buzogány, Parks and Torney 2025: 149).

As an example of the EGD being recognised as a practice of European democracy, Van Zeben emphasises the linkage between the EGD and the CoFoE (the 2021 Conference for the Future of the Europe), arguing that

"In the context of the GD (Green Deal: inserted by author) and the CoFoE, this polycentric approach points to the need to place specific emphasis on public participation in the sustainability policy and practices of the EU. By ensuring citizen empowerment through citizen assemblies such as the CoFoE, the success and legitimacy of the GD, as a central part of the EU's sustainability agenda, could be strongly amplified" (van Zeben 2021: 318).

In sum, the preceding studies have shown that the EGD has revitalized European integration through its long-term, wide-ranging cross-sectoral policymaking, strengthening the core executive and fostering

representative, participatory, and deliberative democracy. As seen below in section 3 in this paper, however, far-right political parties have strongly criticized the EGD. Yazar and Haarstad explain this anti-green movement, referring to their discursive tactics as follows:

“The politics of backlash against the EU-driven progressive public policies and anti-democratic rhetoric, including xenophobia and national sovereignty discourses are commonly used by these three populist far right parties to mobilize counternarratives against climate change and regional decarbonization” (Yazar & Haarstad 2023: 1).

This anti-green trend has been growing stronger. Pollex remarks that, after the 2024 European Parliament elections, there emerges shared anti-EGD discourses among right and far-right political groups (Pollex 2025: 232), which are ECR, PfiE and ESN as will be seen below. It is noteworthy that a European democracy built around the EGD can also spark an anti-EGD movement.

A Geopolitical Strategy

For considering the EGD as a geopolitical strategy, the research paper by Leonard, Pisani-Ferry, Shapiro, Tagliapietra, and Wolff must be essential reading (Leonard et al. 2021). According to this research, the EGD has two dimensions: one is “action to manage direct geopolitical repercussions” and the other is “action for global leadership” (*Ibid.*, Figure 9).

Action to manage direct geopolitical repercussions

- Manage repercussions on neighbouring oil and gas exporting countries
- Improve the security of critical raw materials supply and decrease dependence on China
- Manage the geopolitical implications of carbon border adjustment

Action for global leadership

- Become a global reference and standard-setter for the energy transition
- Export the European Green Deal
- Promote Global Coalition for Climate Change Mitigation

A coalition for the permafrost

A coalition for CO2 emission removal

- Promote a global platform on the new economics of climate action

Source: Leonard et al 2021: Figure 9.

According to Leonard et al., the European Green Deal encompasses both civilizational tasks for global society and security policy for Europe.

Slightly differently, Tocci emphasises the normative vision of the EGD. An essential element of the EGD is, without doubt, the energy transition. If Europe succeeds in creating the first net-zero economy, it must be embedded into a decarbonized global economy. Consequently, the EGD must also be a global strategy (Tocci 2022: 7, 9, 17). It should always be borne in mind that the geopolitical and normative dimensions of the EGD cannot be separated.

Then how can the EU pursue coherent climate diplomacy across both geopolitical and normative dimensions? As Rayner et al. show, “the EU has tried to act as a leader in international climate policy” since “the early 1990s” (Rayner et al. 2025: 1). However, the EGD has made a real difference thanks to the 2021 Climate Law (Regulation 2021/1119). Rayner et al. highlight the significance of this constitution-like legislation: it imposes legal obligations on the EU and its Member States to mainstream climate policy and to assume a leading role in the global climate arena. The 2021 Climate Law reads that

“The Union is a global leader in the transition towards climate neutrality, and it is determined to help raise global ambition and to strengthen the global response to climate change, using all tools at its disposal, including climate” (Regulation 2021/1119, para.16)

“The Union-wide 2050 climate-neutrality objective should be pursued by all Member States collectively, and Member States, the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission should take the necessary measures to enable its achievement. Measures at Union level will constitute an important part of the measures needed to achieve the objective” (*Ibid.*, para.20).

This 2021 Climate Law provides not only legal-binding reduction targets, but also the principle of policy integration for the EGD. Giuli and Oberthür pay attention to this principle and introduce the concept of climate policy integration (CPI)—“the incorporation of climate policy objectives across policy sectors” (Giuli & Oberthür 2023: 397)—to explain why the EU’s response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine marks a departure from the previous pattern of prioritizing energy security over climate policy (Giuli & Oberthür 2023: 395). They identify the 2021 Climate Law, which establishes a legally binding emissions-reduction target, as a crucial driver of CPI in the EU’s external policy (Giuli & Oberthür 2023: 406). On that legal basis, the 1st VDL Commission has reinforced robust interdepartmental coordination between climate and energy policy (*Ibid.*).

In this way, the 2021 Climate Law legally promotes diplomatic coordination between EU institutions and member states, and exactly this enables coherent narrative of the EU towards the UNFCCC COP processes. Bremberg and Michalski draws attention to coherence of policy narrative in EU’s climate

diplomacy as follows:

“EU climate diplomacy is built in large part on efforts to create narratives to persuade other actors to strengthen their ambitions. The EU Council conclusions adopted ahead of COP21 in 2015 stressed the need ‘to deliver a legally binding agreement applicable to all Parties that is universal, robust, inclusive, dynamic and ambitious, with a strong transparency and accountability framework’” (Bremberg & Michalski: 518. The text enclosed in single quotation marks is quoted from a Council of the EU document).

“The European Green Deal has an explicitly international component, intended to be the ‘organising principle’ for action on EU climate diplomacy”. (*Ibid.*)

Their argument—that the EGD has enabled the EU to present a coherent narrative for ambitious reduction targets especially in an era of intense geopolitical competition—is highly plausible.

Winding-up

As shown above, the preceding studies evaluate the EGD’s significance and implications in very positive terms. It provided a new growth model, relaunched a European integration project and opened up a geopolitical strategy with a normative vision in EU external relations. However, for an overall evaluation of the 1st VDL Commission’s EGD, the nuanced conclusion by Bocquillon deserves attention.

“The Green Deal remains fundamentally a moving political object with blurry boundaries, rather than a ‘done deal’. More likely than its faltering, one can expect a change in its framing and focus – on competitiveness and green industrialisation in particular in the context of domestic politicisation of the climate and energy transition and global geopolitical competition” (Bocquillon 2024: 132).

Indeed, internal politicization and external confrontation are the main themes of the 2nd VDL Commission, in which the policy narrative has shifted from “green” to “clean,” as previously suggested.

2. Different Policy Discourses between the 1st and 2nd VDL Commission

The formation of the 2nd VDL Commission has been accompanied by “the increasing politicisation ... and presidentialisation of the Commission” (Dinan & Russack 2025). Von der Leyen successfully navigated the lead-candidate procedure, the allocation of portfolios in the College’s formation, and the

European Parliament' approval (*Ibid.*, 1), all at a time when the grand coalition saw its strength diminish and the far-right parties gain influence. At precisely this stage in the EU's institutional development, President von der Leyen has begun shifting the policy narrative from the green to the clean. This shift is not merely rhetorical; it entails a fundamental transformation of the EU's policy objectives, moving from a cosmopolitan toward a geopolitical orientation. In what follows, after rereading the EGD policy document, the narrative shift will be clarified in two new policy documents: *Competitiveness Compass* and *the Clean Industrial Deal*.

The strong green message of the 1st VDL Commission was unmistakable:

"I believe that what is good for our planet must be good for our people, our regions and our economy. We will ensure a just transition for all." (von der Leyen 2019a: 6)

This statement even carried a civilizational mission. This value-orientation is still crystal clear in the 2020 speech of State of the Union. She said that

"There is no more urgent need for acceleration than when it comes to the future of our fragile planet" (Von der Leyen 2020: 10)

"The European Green Deal is our blueprint to make that transformation" (*Ibid.*)

The COM Document that introduced the EGD deserves to be reread.

"The atmosphere is warming and the climate is changing with each passing year. One million of the eight million species on the planet are at risk of being lost. Forests and oceans are being polluted and destroyed. The European Green Deal is **a response to these challenges**. It is a new growth strategy that aims to transform the EU into **a fair and prosperous society**, with a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy where there are no net emissions of greenhouse gases in 2050 and where economic growth is decoupled from resource use" (COM (2019) 640: 2).

This value-driven approach has been abandoned in the main policy document of the 2nd VDL Commission: "*The Clean Industrial Deal*" (COM (2025) 85). The focus has now shifted from a civilizational task to the very survival of Europe. In *the State of the Union 2025*, von der Leyen did not use the term "Green Deal". One of main projects is the Clean Industrial Deal, which is explained by the 2nd VDL Commission as follows:

The clean industrial deal aims to lower energy prices, which remain too high for some sectors. It also aims to boost demand for clean products by creating lead markets and promoting their adoption in public procurement. It will support companies in financing their clean transition thanks to an Industrial Decarbonisation Bank aiming to mobilise EUR 100 billion in funding. Finally, it will enhance circularity to source the raw materials that we need. To reinforce the deal, the Commission adopted the clean industrial deal State aid framework in June, which will simplify rules for Member States to provide public support to achieve the deal's objectives (European Commission 2025d: 15).

This new deal is clearly constructed for European businesses. The shift of an essential point from the EGD is very clear. The clean is not always the green in this type of new deal.

The Clean Industrial Deal was announced in the “*A Competitiveness Compass for the EU*” (COM (2025) 30), the main purpose of which is to carry out the recommendations of the 2024 Letta report and the 2024 Draghi report. Now the basic objective of the green transition is the Europe's survival of geopolitical and geoeconomic competition, not the cosmopolitan mission to save the Earth. *The Compass* sets up legislation schedule for promoting decarbonisation as follows (Ibid., 11-12).

A joint roadmap for decarbonisation and competitiveness	Deadline
Clean Industrial Deal and an Action Plan on Affordable Energy	[Q1 2025]
Industrial Decarbonisation Accelerator Act	[Q4 2025]
Electrification Action Plan and European Grids Package	[Q1 2026]
New State Aid Framework	[Q2 2025]
Steel and metals action plan	[2025]
Chemicals industry package	[Q4 2025]
Strategic dialogue on the future of the European automotive industry and Industrial Action Plan	[Q1 2025]
Sustainable Transport Investment Plan	[Q3 2025]
European Port Strategy and Industrial Maritime Strategy	[2025]
High Speed Rail Plan	[2025]
Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism Review	[2025]
Circular Economy Act	[Q4 2026]
Vision for Agriculture and Food	[Q1 2025]
Oceans Pact	[Q2 2025]
Amendment of the Climate Law	[2025]

In “the Clean Industrial Deal”, decarbonisation for climate action and circular economy for collecting rare earth from E-waste are for European competitiveness, not civilisational mission. The COM document that introduced the Clean Industrial Deal states that

“The Clean Industrial Deal brings together climate action and competitiveness under one overarching growth strategy. It is a commitment to accelerate decarbonisation, reindustrialisation and innovation, all at the same time and across the entire continent, also reinforcing Europe’s resilience” (COM (2025) 85: 1).

In the same vein, European Council, held on 23 October 2025, emphasised “a competitive green transition”, and concluded that:

It (European Council –inserted by author) underlines in this context that particular attention should be paid to traditional industries, notably the automotive, shipping, and aviation industries as well as energy-intensive industries, such as steel and metals, chemicals, cement, glass and ceramics, and pulp and paper, so that they remain resilient and competitive in a global market and a challenging geopolitical environment. (European Council 2025: para.42)

European Council reconfirmed that the green transition must take “different national circumstances” into account (*Ibid.*, para.40), and welcomed the letter from the President of the Commission (*Ibid.*, para.46). In this letter, the President von der Leyen suggested that the emission reduction goal proposed for 2040 can be lower than 90%, as long as a similar reduction will internationally be carried out (Porciello 2025). Referring to new clean tech innovation such as the carbon capture storage and advanced biofuels is used as an excuse for softening regulations of ETS2 and Ban on gasoline-powered vehicles (*Ibid.*).

Undoubtedly, the focus is on European business rather than on climate action for the Earth. Exactly in this context, the 2nd VDL Commission has proposed the so-called *simplification* of green regulations, which has been pursued through the *Omnibus Package* as follows:

Omnibus I:

- Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD)
- Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD)
- Taxonomy Delegated Act
- Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM)

Omnibus II:

- Investment Rules

Omnibus III:

Common Agricultural Policy

Omnibus IV:

Small Mid-Cap Companies

Omnibus V:

Defence Readiness

Omnibus VI:

Chemical Industry

Source: European Commission (2025: 5)

For the EGD backsliding, Omnibus I and V are key. Omnibus I focuses on reducing the number of companies subject to reporting requirement, limiting reporting in the value chain, postponing the transposition deadline, and so on. All measures are slated for implementation in 2025.

The backsliding of the EGD is also found in Omnibus V. The 2nd VDL Commission's policy orientation appears to be shifting from the EGD to European defence much more than before. COM Document of this Omnibus V, *Defence Readiness Omnibus*, directly mentions that

“The current regulatory environment of the Union, adopted in peacetime, is not fully adapted to the objective of developing the necessary capabilities and military readiness to credibly deter armed aggression and facilitate the effective and fast deployment of the necessary large investments mentioned above.” (COM (2025) 820: 2).

In order to “accelerate the ramp up of European defence industrial production” (Ibid.),

“The Commission hereby clarifies that Member States can use existing derogations in various Union legislations provided for “overriding public interest”, “public safety” or “crisis” to include defence readiness in their scope, encompassing industrial and governmental defence investments and defence readiness activities” (Ibid., 7).

Environmental instruments the Commission lists up for derogation or exemption are as follows:

The Habitats Directive

Water Framework Directive

Birds Directive

Waste Shipment Regulation

- The Directive on Environmental Impact Assessment
- The Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment
- The Restriction of Hazardous Substances directives
- The Regulation on Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals (REACH)
- The Regulations on Classification, Labelling and Packaging
- The Regulations on the market and use of Biocidal Products
- The Regulation on Persistent Organic Pollutants

Source: COM (2025) 820, 7-9

Although decisions on derogations or exemptions are not predetermined and depend on the circumstances, the 2nd VDL Commission's U-turn is crystal clear. One could say that the EU's environmental governance now faces a serious risk of being weakened. No more "Green Europe"; defense and competitiveness now seem to take precedence over the EGD.

The 2nd Trump administration has prompted this trend of backsliding of the EGD. In *The 2025 Joint Statement on a United States - European Union Framework on an agreement on Reciprocal, Fair and Balanced Trade* (on 21st August), the VDL Commission said that it takes note of "the US concerns related to treatment of US small and medium-sized businesses under the CBAM", and "commits to work to provide additional flexibilities in the CBAM implementation" (*Ibid.*, para.11). Adding to this, the VDL Commission also care for the Trump administration's concerns about the CSDDD and the CSRD, by reducing "administrative burden on businesses", changing "to the requirement for a harmonised civil liability regime for due diligence failures and to climate-transition-related obligations", dealing with "the imposition of CSDDD requirements on companies of non-EU countries with relevant high-quality regulations" (*Ibid.*, para.12). It should be borne in mind that the 2nd VDL Commission has committed to purchasing €650 billion worth of American oil, LNG, or nuclear fuel over three years under the 2nd Trump administration (Le Monde July 31, 2025). The headline of this Le Monde article is that "EU further abandons its Green Deal with pledge to buy US energy".

3. Party Politics over the EGD: the de facto formation of an anti-EGD coalition?

The 2024 European Parliament elections demonstrated that the long-term trend of rising Eurosceptic right-wing parties and declining vote shares for the pro-EU mainstream Grand Coalition persists. While the right-wing parties failed to form a united Eurosceptic political group and have been split into the PfiE, ECR and ESN, these three Euro Parties hold similar policy orientations, one of which is an anti-EGD. Importantly, the EPP, the largest political group in the European Parliament, has, at least on the question of revising the EGD, moved closer to the three Eurosceptic political groups. The number of their seats

are as follows:

Seats in the European Parliament (720 seats)

EPP (European People's Party)	188
PfE (Patriots for the Europe)	84
ECR (European Conservative and Reformists)	78
ESN (Europe for Sovereign Nations)	25
Total	375 (52.1%)

The potential coalition between centre-right and right/far-right forces commands a majority in the European Parliament. While forming such a coalition is not straightforward, the EPP's U-turn on the EGD toward competitiveness closely aligns with the anti-green ideology of the three Eurosceptic right-wing groups. The following table shows this ideology, and then the potential closing of the EPP to the three Eurosceptic political groups.

PfE

Leader Summit in Fontainebleau, 8 June 2025

“While the failed policies pursued by the European Commission, in particular the Green Deal, are harming the European economy, farmers and businesses, Patriots leaders advocate for a competitive economy, a policy of industrial development and energy sovereignty” (PfE 2025b).

Madrid Declaration on Protecting European Prosperity, Competitiveness and Jobs, on 15 October 2025.

“We reiterate that the Commission's repeated promises to cut bureaucracy imposed on businesses by the Green Deal remained largely unfulfilled. We demand a real reduction in the burden on our enterprises, not only cosmetic changes” (PfE 2025a).

ESN

Statutes of the Europe of Sovereign Nations Group in the European Parliament, 17 July 2024.

“Above all, the dogmatic stipulation that climate change was man-made serves the EU to intervene in all areas of life in an imperious regulatory manner. We want to roll back the Green Deal and its planned economy in favour of market principles, enterprise, and scientific progress.” (ESN 2024: 4)

ECR

Bringing Common Sense Back: ECR Group Priorities 2024-2029

“We will review the Green Deal: striking the right balance between climate action and economic prosperity” (ECR 2025: 7).

“The EU has overshot many of its climate targets and placed unrealistically high expectations on its industries” (ECR 2025: 7).

“The ECR will call for a revival of the internal combustion engine.” (*Ibid.*)

“The ECR will protect citizens and businesses from the negative impacts of the Green Deal.” (*Ibid.*, 8).

EPP

It's Time for Europe First, 26 March 2025

“Faced with increasingly hostile global powers, the European Union is finally stepping out of its comfort zone to counter decline and regain influence. The Clean Industrial Deal will be a key asset in this long battle. Far from being a mere semantic evolution of the Green Deal, this new programme paves the way for a true Copernican revolution of the EU, placing industrial competitiveness at the heart of its policies for the first time. This paradigm shift is a welcome change driven by our political group. For years, the EPP Group has championed the need to re-industrialise Europe and has warned against out-of-touch decisions which, on the valid pretext of protecting the environment, end up suffocating our productive forces” (EPP 2025).

It is clear from this quotation of typical anti-EGD arguments that, although an unscientific stance appears especially in ESN, the call to revise the EGD for the sake of European competitiveness is equally strong. A notable joint action by PfiE, ECR and ESN was a written question in the European Parliament criticising the 2nd VDL Commission's EGD revision policy. The MEPs from these three right-/far-right Eurosceptic groups argued that the Commission's proposed revisions to the EGD remain far too weak, as follows:

“The Competitiveness Compass rightly acknowledges the serious challenges the European economy faces, yet it fails to address the core issue: the excessive regulatory burden and skyrocketing energy costs driven by the European Green Deal, which is crippling European industry, driving companies offshore and eroding our strategic autonomy. Meanwhile, our global competitors – the US and China – are prioritising industrial growth and energy security over ideological constraints Europe cannot afford more self-imposed economic decline. We need a radical change of course” (Question for written answer E-000553/2025).

In the same vein, an EPP MEP had already argued in the European Parliament in 2024 that

“Our industries are burdened by multiple taxes and a complex web of regulation. The idea behind the Green Deal remains valid, but we must take a step back to critically and pragmatically reassess the tools we are using.” (Adina Vălean (EPP) : 18 December 2024 – Strasbourg)

This kind of argument—prioritizing European competitiveness over the EGD’s historical mission—has resonated among centre-right and right-wing political groups.

Noteworthy are the following political movements in the first half of the 2025: Jordan Bardella, the president of France’s Rassemblement National and the chairman of Patriots for Europe in the European Parliament, sent a letter to the EPP, the ESN and the ECR, asking to form an anti-EGD coalition and to abolish it; and at least the ECR sent back a reply to say yes (Weise and Camut 2025; Geslin and Bourgerie-Gonse 2025; Grier 2025); and under the background of this movements, Merz and Macron jointly proposed to abolish CSDDD (Leali, De Villepin, Fernyhough 2025).

Although the pro-EGD side—the Left group, S&D, the Greens and Renew Europe—still holds 312 seats in the European Parliament, it is crystal clear that the anti-EGD trend is now becoming mainstream.

4. Is the EGD still Resilient?: Coherence in the EU Climate Diplomacy

As seen in the paper until here, there is a trend of an anti-EGD, and it can be said to be now backsliding in the 2nd VDL Commission, however, a resilient dimension of the EGD also needs to be drawn attention. While the EU has faced an anti-EGD movement internally, it has showed coherence in the pursuing of the EGD externally: the UNFCCC COP processes; the Global Gateway policy; and a TSD model.

COP Processes

In the UNFCCC COP process, the European Commission has consistently sought to act as a global climate leader. To that end, it has continued to convey Europe’s commitment to achieving global reduction targets and to urge other major powers to provide appropriate climate finance to the Global South. In a document outlining the EU’s fundamental stance ahead of COP 30, the 2nd VDL Commission emphasised its political priorities of global partnership.

“...the EU is decarbonising its domestic economy, pursuing a just transition, and supporting the global transition by investing in research and by exporting clean technologies. This fully

echoes the domestic and external dimensions of the European Green Deal and the Clean Industrial Deal of reaching climate neutrality by mid-century while modernising our economies. This is closely linked with our ability to work with partners around the world to support them in their clean transition efforts” (JOIN (2025) 25: 7)

The 2nd VDL Commission has kept in contact with Japan (the EU Japan Summit of 23 July 2025) and with China (24 July 2025) to reconfirm their coordination towards realising the goals of the Paris Agreement. The Paris Agreement remains the EU’s primary driving force in its ongoing pursuit of the European Green Deal.

Global Gateway

In the Global Gateway policy, the EU has supplied infrastructures to global south countries by linking international development aids with promoting public and private clean energy investments. One of policy objectives of this is for instance acceleration of African green energy future. On 9 October 2025, President von der Leyen announces €618 million package to scale up renewables in Africa at Global Gateway Forum. The details are as follows:

African Green Energy Future

Kenya (€55 million):

Green electricity system to support electricity generation and strengthen the transmission network for homes and businesses.

Uganda (€60 million):

Last-mile electrification project to bring electricity to rural areas, benefiting more than 250,000 people.

Democratic Republic of Congo: (€90.14 million) :

Electrification of Kisangani and surrounding green landscapes, securing power supply and boosting local economic activity.

Mauritania (€125 million):

Regional transmission corridor to meet the energy needs of fast-growing populations.

Nigeria (€20 million):

Technical assistance to scale up renewable solutions, supporting farmers and small businesses.

Cabo Verde (€39 million):

Cabeolica wind and storage project to expand wind generation and battery capacity.

Zambia - Tanzania interconnector (€30 million):

Reinforcing the link between Southern and Eastern African power pools,

strengthening drought resilience and regional power exchange.

Togo (€199 million):

Renewable energy and storage project in Kpalimé to increase generation and reliability.

Sources: European Commission 2025e.

A TSD model

All EU trade agreements include “Trade and Sustainable Development (TSD) chapters”, in which trade partners of the EU are required to abide by environmental and social norms of the EU standards. The Commission has tried to strengthen monitoring of this chapters (COM (2022) 409: 4). As of November 2025, trade partner countries holding this TSD chapters are as follows:

In force:	In ratification process:	In ongoing negotiation:
Canada	China	Australia
Central America	Mercosur	Eastern and Southern Africa
Chile	Mexico	India
Colombia, Peru, and Ecuador		Indonesia
Georgia		Thailand
Japan		Philippines
Kenya		
Moldova		
New Zealand		
Singapore		
South Korea		
Ukraine		
United Kingdom		
Vietnam		

Sources: European Commission

https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/development-and-sustainability/sustainable-development/sustainable-development-eu-trade-agreements_en

The geographical reach of these trade agreements and the total share of the global economy are particularly noteworthy. The external dimension of the EGD still remain active.

Political Agenda of the 2nd VDL Commission

Why is this coherent external climate diplomacy possible institutionally? As already reviewed in section 1 of the paper, two preceding studies are insightful and valuable exactly in this research context. One is the concept of Climate policy integration prescribed in the 2021 Climate Law (Giuli & Oberthür 2023) and the other is the concept of the core executive (Puetter and Terranova 2025). Climate policy integration has likely been implemented by the core executive, comprising the European Council, the European Commission, the rotating Presidency, and Coreper. These theoretical insights offer valuable guidance for shaping the near-term political agenda that the 2nd von der Leyen Commission will face. The 2nd VDL Commission must balance the climate policy integration through the core executive with liberal democratic style of the EGD, while simultaneously countering Eurosceptic right/far-right political groups that oppose it. The key political actor in this process is of course the EPP, whose lead candidate was President von der Leyen.

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