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Call for Papers "The European Green Deal: moving to action
Opportunities and challenges for the European citizens"

THE EUROPEAN GREEN DEAL AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR DEMOCRACY
recommendations for facilitating a just and fair transition

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This Research Paper was elaborated on the basis of independent research. The opinions expressed here are those of the Contractor and do not represent the point of view of the Institute of European Democrats.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The European Green Deal has set the framework for the European Union to become the first climate neutral continent by 2050. With this ambitious target we need to ask if we can achieve climate neutrality without hindering the quality of the European democracies given the mass-scale transformations in society and economy. This paper aims to tackle the connection between climate action and democracy by looking for correlations between citizens' support for the reduction of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and the citizens describing the EU as democratic. In the last part, this paper explores five recommendations for facilitating a just and fair transition that does not undermine the quality of the European democracies.

Social Media summary

Can we achieve climate neutrality in Europe without hindering the quality of European democracies? Is there a correlation between people's support for GHG emissions reduction and the share of population that sees the EU as democratic? This paper shows that citizens who view the EU, in a larger share, as democratic tend to have a higher support for climate action.

Keywords

#climateaction #democracy #greentransition #climatesupport #energydemocratisation

Short bio

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1. **Introduction**

This paper aims to address the connection between climate action and democracy, focused on the European Union (EU). In late 2019, the EU launched the European Green Deal (EGD) as a regional action plan to materialise the commitments made through the Paris Agreement. The expected outcome of the EGD is to achieve climate neutrality by 2050 by reaching a net-zero level of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. The Deal was followed by two legislative plans, the European Climate Law, and Fit for 55, which include legally binding targets and proposals for updated regulations. The member states have submitted National Climate and Energy Plans (NCEPs) that cover the period 2021 to 2030. Based on the individual assessments done by the European Commission, we looked at the just and fair transition measures and identified vulnerabilities that can lead to public discontent. We argue that a just and fair transition can contribute to achieving climate neutrality without hindering the quality of the European democracies.

In relation to this paper, we sought to identify connections between corruption perception and government effectiveness in the EU member states, and between support for climate action and people's view of the EU as democratic. In this sense, we examined statistics related to corruption perception, government effectiveness, perception of EU member states governments' actions related to climate action, preferences for reducing GHG emissions in the EU and the connection between the EU and its democratic characteristic (as viewed by the respondents to public surveys). The data utilized have been retrieved from Transparency International, World Bank and European Commission.

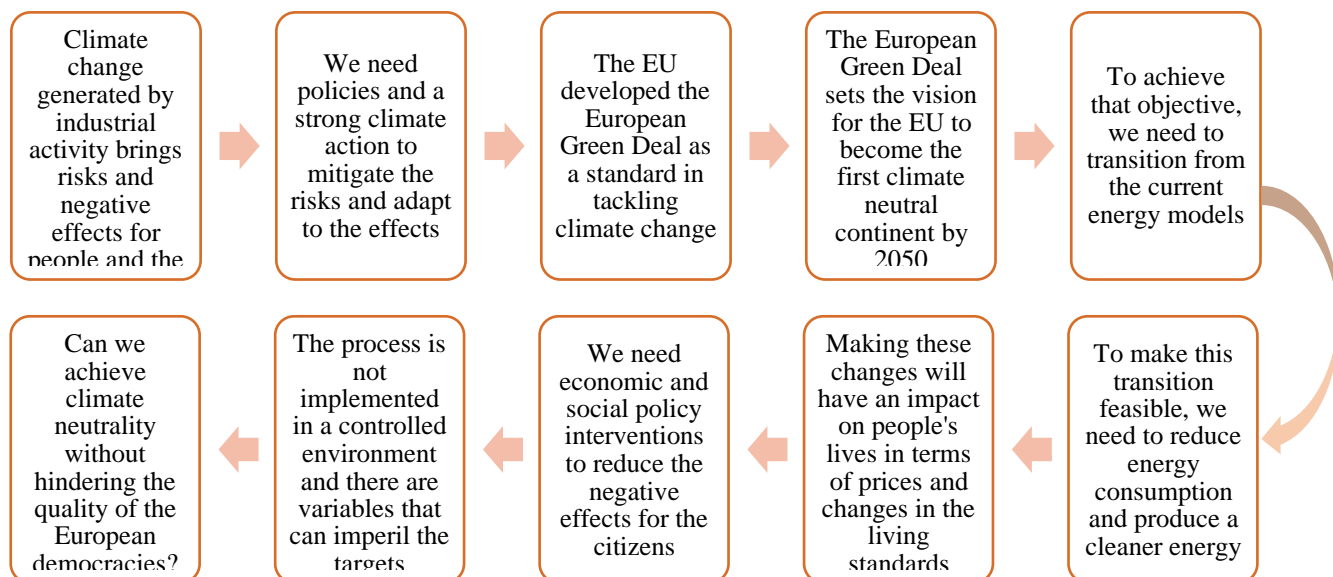## 2. **The climate change paradigm and the European Green Deal related legislation**

We share the assertion that climate change has been determined by anthropogenic activity and we need policy interventions to mitigate its effects and to halt the environmental decline. Due to intense industrial action, GHG emissions generate a temperature increase that cannot sustain our way of life and endangers the living conditions of the future generations. The latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, 2021) report shows that 'Global surface temperature will continue to increase until at least the mid-century under all emissions scenarios considered. Global warming of 1.5°C and 2°C will be exceeded during the 21st century unless deep reductions in carbon dioxide (CO_2) and other greenhouse gas emissions occur in the coming decades.' People and the environment are at risk and there is a stringent need to adopt viable policies that can mitigate the negative effects deriving from climate change. Humanity is no longer in a place where it can reverse climate change, however it has the driving forces to reduce the negative impact and create conditions for adapting to the new reality.

The European Union has been a front-runner on this issue and has proposed the European Green Deal with the aim to achieve climate neutrality by 2050. Climate neutrality implies net-zero greenhouse gas emissions, which will be achieved mainly by lowering the volume of emissions and increasing the volume of carbon sequestration and carbon removal. The EU has added milestones for 2030, when we should see a 55% cut in emissions and the outcomes of the first phase of the energy transition. To understand the process, we propose *Figure 1* as a conceptual

framework. Against this background we tie climate action to democracy and raise the question if we can achieve climate neutrality without hindering the quality of our democracies.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework to understand the connection between climate action and democracy in the European Union

Climate change generated by industrial activity brings risks and negative effects for people and the	We need policies and a strong climate action to mitigate the risks and adapt to the effects	The EU developed the European Green Deal as a standard in tackling climate change	The European Green Deal sets the vision for the EU to become the first climate neutral continent by 2050	To achieve that objective, we need to transition from the current energy models
Can we achieve climate neutrality without hindering the quality of the European democracies?	The process is not implemented in a controlled environment and there are variables that can imperil the targets	We need economic and social policy interventions to reduce the negative effects for the citizens	Making these changes will have an impact on people's lives in terms of prices and changes in the living standards	To make this transition feasible, we need to reduce energy consumption and produce a cleaner energy

Source: author's proposal based on European legislation.

In the absence of a European Green Deal, the current policies would only reduce the GHG emissions by 36% until 2030 and 60% until 2050 (European Environment Agency, 2021). Therefore, new, and stringent measures had to be proposed to meet the climate neutrality objective and to adapt to the unavoidable impacts of climate change. The European Union was the first international actor to make such a bold move, even though it ranks 3rd as GHG emitter (producing 7.52% of the global emissions). While China (26.1%) and the United States (12.67%) are the largest world GHG emitters, the European configuration can start a domino effect and set standards on climate action the way it managed to do so with the Emissions Trading System and with the first carbon market.

To better understand the underlying needs for sectoral measures, we had a look at the areas that contribute the most to GHG emissions released by European Union (World Resources Institute, 2020). On the first place we have electricity and heat (producing up to 2.33% of the global GHG emissions), followed by transportation (1.7%), building (0.92%), agriculture (0.83%) and manufacture (0.8%). We will mostly refer to the energy transition as the main pillar to achieve climate neutrality.

The European Green Deal puts a strong emphasis on energy, given that it accounts for more than 75% of total EU-27's greenhouse gas emissions. It also aims to decouple economic growth from the use of resources (here the circular economy plays an important role) and it seeks to build a just and fair transition leaving no one behind leveraging a dedicated climate fund (World Economic Forum, 2021). The initial criticism for the European Green Deal endorsed the idea that targets which sound good were set without designing concrete steps. To this, the European Climate Law was approved in 2020.

The Climate Law foresees setting the long-term direction for meeting the 2050 climate neutrality objective through all policies, in a socially fair and cost-efficient manner; establishing a more ambitious EU 2030 target; creating a system for monitoring progress; providing predictability for investors and other economic actors; ensure that the transition to climate neutrality is irreversible (European Commission, 2021). Moreover, a series of sectoral regulations and amendments were proposed in mid-2021 in the framework of Fit for 55. The key areas of action included: GHG removals by carbon sinks; GHG emissions cuts from all economic sectors (industry, transport, energy, agriculture, and waste); developing renewable energies; increasing energy efficiency; funding and supporting just transition; energy taxation; introducing alternative fuels and making more charging stations for electric vehicles (Council of the European Union, 2021).

Even with all the measures put in place and with the positive effects foreseen, many analysts claim that the 'EU is standing at a crossroads' (Climate Change Performance Index, 2021) and one of the major issues lies in pursuing greenwashing instead of green recovery or the inadequate implementation of European Green Deal instruments. In addition to this, it is considered that the policies adopted are insufficient and more needs to be done in terms of climate finance and the fair share target (Climate Action Tracker, 2021). Also, one of the initial criticisms the European Green Deal received was that it fails to name the vulnerable populations and the socio-demographical groups that will likely be more affected by the energy transition (Brayton Noll, Marula Tsagkari, 2021).

2.1. The national energy and climate plans (NCEPs) and the just and fair transition

We consider that a just and fair transition can help achieve climate neutrality without hindering the quality of the European democracies. If vulnerable citizens don't feel they are supported during the transition, this can backfire against the decision-makers and lead to increased tensions in the society, polarization, and decreased levels of trust in democracies. Therefore, we chose to look at the individual assessments done by the European Commission on the integrated national energy and climate plans (NECPs) for the period from 2021 to 2030 to spot vulnerabilities related to just and fair transition (European Commission, 2020):

- **Austria** - the plan shares information on the just and fair transition but offers limited information on social, employment and skills impacts of a transition to a climate neutral economy. For the energy poverty, Austria presents the number of households affected by it and the measures associated.

    o **Possible issues of social discontent:** measures related to the social, employment and skills impact of the transition.

- **Belgium** - the plan gives information on social, employment and skills impacts of a transition to a climate neutral economy, but it doesn't offer information on how many jobs will be created. While it addresses the need for up- and reskilling and the development of new trainings for those that are already in employment as well as for young people, associated measures are not presented nor is information on reaching disadvantaged groups.

    o **Possible issues of social discontent:** the impact of the transition for the disadvantaged groups; the scale of jobs to be created in the transition period.

- **Bulgaria** - the plan provides information on the social, employment and skills impacts of a transition to a carbon-neutral economy, and it identifies the regions where the impact of

decarbonisation on employment will be most significant. An assessment of energy poverty is lacking (no estimate of the number of energy-poor households) and there isn't any definition of energy-poor households.

- o **Possible issues of social discontent:** the scale of energy poverty and the transition burden of costs for the citizens.

- **Croatia** - the plan offers information on the social, employment and skills impacts of transitioning to a climate-neutral economy. A separate analysis included in the plan estimates that 40-80 000 additional jobs could be created, but it's not clear how. While the plan includes aspects of energy poverty, it does not offer details.

  - o **Possible issues of social discontent:** the jobs created in the transition period and issues related to energy poverty.

- **Cyprus** - the plan offers information on the social, employment, and skills impacts of the transition to a climate-neutral economy. On energy poverty, Cyprus reported that 23 593 inhabitants (corresponding to 2.62% of the population) meet the criteria to benefit from specific measures.

  - o **Possible issues of social discontent:** have not been identified.

- **Czech Republic** - while the plan presents the RESTART programme, aiming at supporting the restructuring of Czechia's coal regions, it does not provide information on the assessment of the social, economic and skills impacts of the transitions.

  - o **Possible issues of social discontent:** measures related to the social, employment and skills impact of the transition.

- **Denmark** - the plan offers information on the social, employment and skills impacts of the transition to a climate-neutral economy and includes details about the need for skills and employment in the energy sector and in clean transition industries.

  - o **Possible issues of social discontent:** have not been detected.

- **Estonia** - the plan lacks aspects related to the just and fair transition, while more information is needed on the social, employment and skills impacts of the transition to a carbon neutral economy.

  - o **Possible issues of social discontent:** the costs of the just and fair transition, the measures related to the social, employment and skills impact of the transition.

- **Finland** - the just and fair transition dimension is seen as a 'guiding theme of climate policy', and the plan offers some estimates of the impact of economic growth and employment.

  - o **Possible issues of social discontent:** the costs of the just and fair transition, the measures related to the social, employment and skills impact of the transition.

- **France**- the plan provides information on social, employment and skills impacts of a transition to a climate neutral economy (e.g., employment in carbon intensive industries and green jobs, transportation and logistics, energy poverty and implied distributional impacts of envisaged measures in housing), as well as skill needs, and skill mismatches based on strategic sector analysis.

- o **Possible issues of social discontent:** while it is not included in the plan, based on the public discontent with the carbon tax, we argue that the costs of the just and fair transition can represent possible issues of social discontent.

- **Germany** - the plan offers details on the expected social, employment and skills impacts of making the transition to a climate neutral economy. Germany is planning to create 185 000 additional jobs by 2030. The plan does not assess the level of energy poverty and does not include specific measures for this area.

  - o **Possible issues of social discontent:** the scale of energy poverty and the transition burden of costs for the citizens.

- **Greece** - the plan offers information on the social, employment and skills impacts of a transition to a carbon-neutral economy. The development of transition plans for regions affected by the phase-out of lignite is presented. Greece foresees creating more than over 60 000 jobs by expanding renewable energy sources and implementing energy saving measures policies.

  - o **Possible issues of social discontent:** while it is not mentioned in the plan, we argue that the development of renewable energy projects close to tourist areas will generate tensions and discontent from the locals.

- **Hungary** - the plan lists qualitative objectives associated with the labour market dimension without identifying specific policies or measures. Little information is offered on the social, employment or skills impacts of any policies, apart from a description of the socioeconomic impact associated with the activity of the single lignite power plant and of possible workforce shortages in the energy industry.

  - o **Possible issues of social discontent:** the costs of the just and fair transition, the measures related to the social, employment and skills impact of the transition.

- **Ireland** - the plan includes information on the specific needs of workers and communities affected by the move away from fossil fuels; issues related to the supply and demand of certain skills; there is no specific information on the on the number of households affected by energy poverty.

  - o **Possible issues of social discontent:** the energy poverty.

- **Italy** - the plan offers an analysis of the expected socioeconomic impact, focusing on the phase-out of coal and possible impacts on occupation and skills. Italy estimates that it will create 117 000 additional jobs annually by 2030. The plan provides information on the professions that will be affected most by the energy transition, how these can be re-skilled, and future jobs.

  - o **Possible issues of social discontent:** while this can be partially viewed in the context of just and fair transition, we argue that 'youth-washing' situations as the ones observed in Milan in September 2021 can reoccur (AP News, 2021).

- **Latvia** - the plan gives an overview on the social, employment and skills impacts of a transition to a climate-neutral economy, including in relation to renewables and energy efficiency. Latvia reports the number of households at risk of energy poverty and sets an objective to reduce it to less than 7.5% by 2030.

  - o **Possible issues of social discontent:** the energy poverty and the energy transition cost; there is to mention that Latvia has one of the highest energy expenditures to

income ratio and that 'households in Latvia consume twice more energy than the average in Europe to achieve the same welfare level' (Powerpoor, n.a)

- **Lithuania** - the plan offers information on the social, employment and skills impacts of the transition to a climate-neutral economy, especially in relation to tackling energy poverty and the creation of new jobs due to changing energy market trends. The plan reports that the climate transition will have a positive employment impact (1.56% increase for 2020-2030).

  o **Possible issues of social discontent:** have not been identified.

- **Luxembourg** - the plan gives information on the social, employment and skills impacts of a transition to a climate neutral economy. The Commission assesses that the just transition could have been better integrated throughout the plan, especially in relation to steel industry. On energy poverty, Luxembourg shares the number of households affected and presents measures to reduce energy poverty.

  o **Possible issues of social discontent:** have not been identified.

- **Malta** - the plan partially includes aspects related to just and fair transition. It focuses on criteria such as the policies' economic impact, technical constraints, social acceptability, legal and regulatory barriers, and impact on quality of life. The assessment of skills is very limited.

  o **Possible issues of social discontent:** the costs of the just and fair transition, the measures related to the social, employment and skills impact of the transition.

- **Netherlands** - the plan shares information on the social, employment and skills impacts of a transition to a climate-neutral economy at a macro level. The Netherlands reports low numbers of consumers affected by energy poverty and does not consider the need for a specific policy.

  o **Possible issues of social discontent:** some authors stress the need to talk about energy vulnerability in the Netherlands and the opportunity to 'to plug energy poverty into just energy transitions policy developments' (Feenstra et al., 2021)

- **Poland** - the plan does not offer sufficient information on the just and fair transition aspects, and it does not offer details about the impacts of the transition in coal and carbon-intensive regions. It offers some details on the energy poverty levels, but policies with specific objectives are not presented.

  o **Possible issues of social discontent:** the costs of the just and fair transition, the measures related to the social, employment and skills impact of the transition, the energy poverty.

- **Portugal** - the plan shares information on the social, employment and skills impacts of a transition to a climate neutral economy, such as for example employment and skills in green and energy intensive sectors. However, it does not include information on the number households in energy poverty or specific objectives to tackle this issue.

  o **Possible issues of social discontent:** energy poverty aspects.

- **Romania** - the plan includes details regarding the impacts that the transition to a greener economy may have on employment in the areas concerned, particularly in the country's coal-mining regions. Regarding energy poverty, a methodology is provided and two

indicators to measure energy poverty are presented, but the plan does not include any specific and measurable objective for reducing energy poverty.

- o **Possible issues of social discontent:** the costs of the just and fair transition, the energy poverty.

- **Slovakia** - the plan lacks information about effects on skills, and employment impacts are taken into consideration after 2040, with limited analysis or measures planned for the coming period. There is no analysis on the skills needs or on related measures. In terms of energy poverty, no information is offered for the number of households affected or about the mitigation measures.

  - o **Possible issues of social discontent:** the costs of the just and fair transition, the measures related to the social, employment and skills impact of the transition, the energy poverty.

- **Slovenia** - the plan shares information on expected social, employment and skills impacts of the transition to a climate neutral economy, but it does not address the implications in the coal regions, which will be the most affected by the transition. On energy poverty, no details are offered about the number of households affected by the transition, but the plan includes a timetable by which Slovenia will introduce a legal definition of energy poverty.

  - o **Possible issues of social discontent:** the costs of the just and fair transition for people living in coal regions, the energy poverty.

- **Spain** - the final shares information on social, employment and skills impacts of a transition to a climate neutral economy, and it mentions that 348 000 jobs will be created by 2030. The number of households affected by energy poverty is reported and a definition of energy poverty accompanied by indicators is presented. The assessment concludes that the plan overlooks potential negative social effects other than energy poverty.

  - o **Possible issues of social discontent:** social effects generated by the changes in the labour market or from taxation policies to increase the use of electrical vehicles.

- **Sweden** - the plan shares limited information on social and employment impacts of the transition to a climate-neutral economy, such as employment in carbon-intensive industries and in low-emission sectors. The impact of transition to a climate neutral economy for skills is not mentioned. The number of households in energy poverty are not reported, this being considered a part of the broader social policy.

  - o **Possible issues of social discontent:** re/up skilling needs; while this is not mentioned in the context of the plan, we argue that a challenge for Sweden will be that of climate migration flows.

The main vulnerabilities identified in the context of just and fair transition are related to: inadequate/insufficient measures related to the social, employment and skills impact of the transition; the overlooked impact of the transition for the disadvantaged groups; the scale of jobs to be created in the transition period; the scale of energy poverty and the transition burden of costs for the citizens; the social effects generated by the changes in the labour market; the taxation changes to increase the use of different products and services that have lower emissions; increased climate migration flows.

2.2. Challenges and opportunities for democracy in relation to the European climate action

By looking at the implications of the European Green Deal related legislation for democracy and the issues related to the just and fair transition, we identified a couple of challenges and opportunities. Among **the opportunities for democracy** we can mention: if people's needs (e.g., having access to cleaner energy) are addressed by decision-makers this can lead in time to increased levels of public trust (the citizens feel they are listed to by their representatives); green ambitions can lead to a modernised political class (who leaves behind old political patterns); the potential introduction of new public consultations mechanisms can foster the development of deliberative democracy; the young people who are stronger supporters of climate action will feel more represented by the decision-makers when related-policies will be adopted.

In terms of **challenges for democracy**, we should be aware of: policies that disadvantage those that cannot afford to pay the price of clean energy; the wrong/insufficient implementation of green objectives can lead to protests if citizens feel they have to pay the price of climate action; there is a risk to see extremist green political agendas that polarize the citizens who wish to support stronger climate actions and those who are against it; we might experience an increased risk for government corruption and investments in green projects that only bring short term gains; decision-makers should pay attention to change resistance from different socio-economic categories who are traditionally more conservative; given the disinformation warfare during the Covid-19 pandemic, there is a high risk for this situation to replicate in the case of climate agenda and new forms of fake news to diminish the trust in democratic institutions.

3. **Literature check on democracy and climate change**

Recent research shows that democracies outperform autocracies in climate action and setting higher goals. V-Dem Institute (2021) highlights that 'democracies produce more ambitious climate policies – the difference between closed autocracies and democratic equals a difference in the Paris Agreement reduction policy targets of 1.6°C' and that 'each new climate policy reduces CO2 emissions by 1.79% within three years'. Richard Youngs (2021) argues that 'it is not clear […] whether advanced Western economies have the most ambitious climate commitments because they are democratic or because they are wealthy and more post-industrial than other societies'. Furthermore, he presents data published in 2021 revealing that 'democracies appear to be no more beneficial to the environment than autocracies'.

Building on these ideas, we argue that **democracies have an intrinsic capacity to tackle climate change issues, if some basic conditions are met**. It is important that citizens recognize climate change as an important issue. Secondly, they need to trust the judgement of their decision-makers and to be able to offer inputs. Thirdly, if the decision-making entities have a low perception of corruption, they will be seen as more effective, which ultimately will lead to the thinking that they are doing enough to take hold of climate issues.

In support of these premises, we identified a couple of studies that reached similar conclusions:

- Carbon prices, an important policy tool for climate action, are implemented in 'jurisdictions featuring well-governed political institutions and a population aware of the human causes of global warming' (Levi, Flachsland and Jakob, 2020).

- There is a connection between addressing climate change issues and the level of public trust as shown by Smith and Mayer (2018) - 'public concern about climate change is unlikely to elicit a response if trust is low'.

- If the citizens don't perceive environmental policies as being effective, fair, and non-intrusive, their support for change will be reduced (Huber, Wicki and Bernauer, 2020).

- In a study investigating the French perception regarding carbon taxation, the authors have concluded that people 'overestimate the negative impact on their purchasing power, wrongly think the scheme is regressive, and do not perceive it as environmentally effective' and propose to correct these biases to increase the public acceptance (Douenne, Fabre, 2019).

4. <u>**The connection between climate action and democracy in the European Union**</u>

Aiming to apply the theory on the European case, we selected a couple of indicators related to government effectiveness, corruption, support for climate action and democracy. We analysed the data and found pairs of strong correlations that show why climate action and democracy should be seen in a close relationship. This analysis has helped us to identify the liaison between government effectiveness and corruption perception (when countries score more on government effectiveness, their corruption perception is lower). Starting from this analysis, we assembled data related to government effectiveness and the citizens' perception that a country is doing enough on climate change. We found a strong correlation and we moved forward. The third analysis was to see if in the countries where citizens associate more the idea of democracy with the European Union are the countries where citizens support more the reduction of GHG emissions. By this model, explained in the following steps, we managed to find a strong correlation between the support for reducing GHG emissions and citizens' view of the EU as democratic. We argue **that this model can represent an argument in policymaking because it shows a clear link between the democratic image of the European Union and the support for climate action**.

In the first case, we retrieved data from the 2020 Corruption Perception Index[1] (Transparency International) and the 2020 Government Effectiveness Index[2] (World Bank). The information was collected for EU-27 member states. The reason for choosing these two elements resides in the assumption that a **well-functioning democracy requires effective institutions and a low level of corruption perception**. For the EU member states (*Figure 2*) we found a strong correlation, with countries that have a higher level of government effectiveness registering low levels of corruption perception. In this case, at the bottom of the list, we found Romania and Bulgaria with low levels for government effectiveness and high levels for corruption perception. At the end of the spectrum, we found the Nordic countries (with Denmark in top).

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[1] The Index ranks countries and territories by their perceived levels of public sector corruption, according to experts and businesspeople. A higher score means a lower level of corruption perception.

[2] According to the World Bank, 'Government effectiveness captures perceptions of the quality of public services, the quality of the civil service and the degree of its independence from political pressures, the quality of policy formulation and implementation, and the credibility of the government's commitment to such policies. A higher score means a higher level of government effectiveness.

Figure 2. High correlation between corruption perception and government effectiveness in EU-27
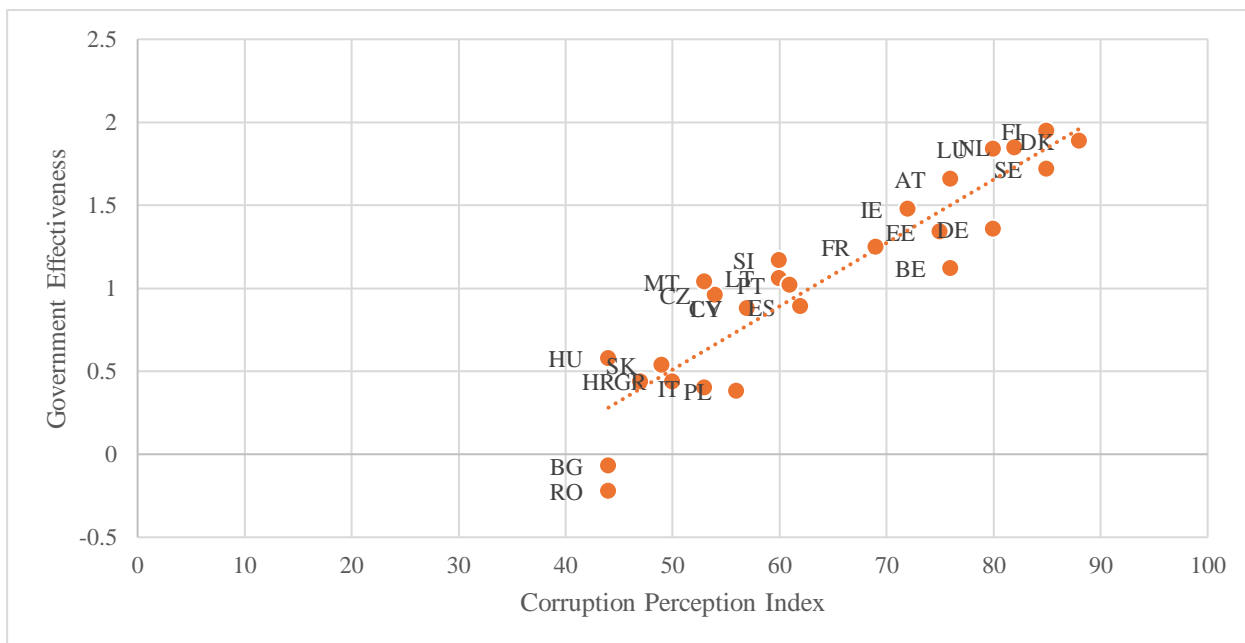
Source: author's calculations based on Transparency International and World Bank data.

The next analysis was made to identify a possible **correlation between government effectiveness (in general) and the citizens' perception of the governments' actions regarding climate action (in particular)**. For this situation, we used the same indicator for government effectiveness as in the previous analysis and we paired it with data retrieved from the Special Eurobarometer 513 March-April 2021. We took the positive answers (doing enough) from the question 'Do you think that the (nationality) government is doing enough, not enough or too much to tackle climate change?' (*Figure 3*).

Figure 3. High correlation between perceptions of government doing enough and government effectiveness in EU-27
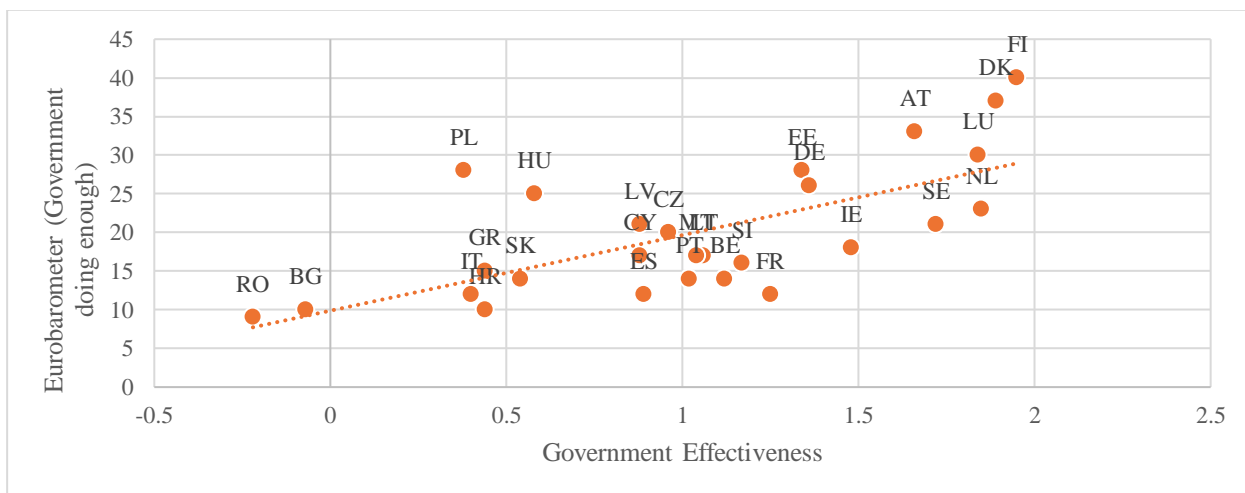
Source: author's calculations based on World Bank and Eurobarometer data.

We found a strong **correlation between the general perception of government effectiveness and the perception of governments doing enough on climate change**. This analysis has helped us to understand that when citizens have a strong positive perception on government effectiveness it can also lead to an increased perception that the government is doing enough to tackle climate issues. However, we wish to highlight that 'doing enough' was the 2nd answer as percentage in the question addressed and only Finland (40%), Denmark (37%), Austria (33%) and Luxembourg (30%) had scores equal or higher to 30%.

Next, we searched for **connections between the support for reducing GHG emissions and the democratic understanding of the EU**. In this case, we took the answers (totally agree) from the question 'To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: We should reduce greenhouse gas emissions to a minimum while offsetting the remaining emissions, for instance by increasing forested areas, to make the EU economy climate-neutral by 2050.' from Special Eurobarometer 513 March-April 2021 and paired it with the answer 'fairly well' to the question 'Please tell for each of the following words if it describes very well, fairly well, fairly badly or very badly the idea you might have of the EU. Democratic (%)' from Standard Eurobarometer 95 Spring 2021.

As *Figure 4* shows, we found a strong correlation between those who say that we should reduce the GHG emissions and those who associate fairly well the European Union with the democratic idea. We believe this to be the key to our research as it validates the idea that a stronger view of the EU as democratic is highly corelated with increased ambitions for climate action. It's worth mentioning the Portuguese case where high scores have been registered both for climate ambitions and the EU and its democratic characteristic. At the other end of the spectrum, we had Poland with lower climate ambitions and lower levels of associations between the EU and its democratic characteristic. One limitation of this analysis is that it cannot be used to characterise the whole process of supporting climate action by the European citizens (the question is focused on the reduction of GHG emissions). Another way to see this analysis is that of the middle part, where most of the countries are located. If we want to move from a medium support to climate ambitious, maybe one of the keys to this search lies in people's view of the European Union. We can argue that **when the citizens perceive more the EU as being democratic, they will also show a stronger support for climate targets**.

If more efforts are put in communicating the European Union as democratic, the citizens might respond with a stronger support for climate action. **The whole of idea of democracy in the framework of climate neutrality should not be ignored**, but rather seen as an important pillar to achieve an historical objective with the support of the people. If citizens will be seen as part of the solution, they might feel more eager to get engaged in climate policies and share ideas that can lead to new forms of democratic deliberation.

Figure 4. High correlation between ambitions for GHG emissions and the level of association of the European Union with the democratic idea
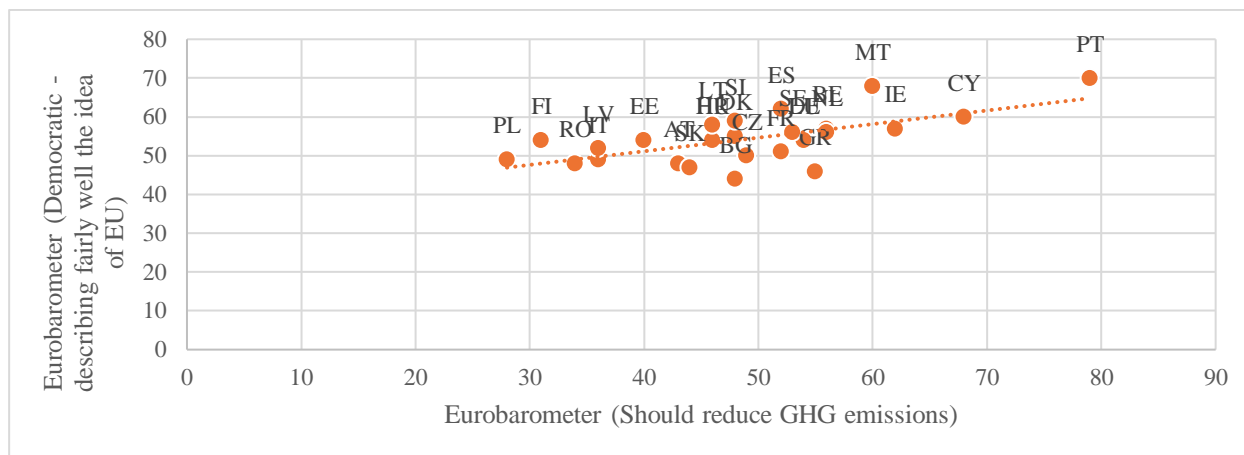
Source: author's calculations based on Eurobarometer data.

5. **Policy recommendations**

In this framework, we aim to present a series of 5 concrete recommendations without an extensive analysis, for implementing a just and fair transition that does not harm the quality of the European democracies. The suggestions offered can be applied both by European institutions, but also by local authorities who aim to involve more the citizens in the democratic process and in the architecture of a just and fair transition.

1. Bottom-up solutions, piloting micro, full implementing macro

− The policymakers should be aware of people's resistance to change; therefore, some measures should be piloted micro and if successful this can represent evidence that the solution can be scaled-up.

− Another important step in this direction is to look at what the others are doing; a strong cooperation between different local authorities from various member states can lead to a better judgment of the policy effects and possible exit measures.

2. Citizen input through data collection

− Given the current times, when access to technology and internet has increased, decision makers should use data collection tools as ways to gather citizen input on proposed measures or for identifying needs in communities; this can also be used as a warning signal for policies that have negative effects on people's life and contribute to more efficient measures.

3. Open monitoring of implementation and public reports (resolving issues that can further lead to protests)

− As seen in the literature review, but also in practice, when citizens feel that they do not have a say on the implementation, public discontent might fracture policy implementation; especially in a transition such as the one for climate neutrality, open monitoring and public reports should be made available for the citizens.

4. European Youth Year and climate agenda

- With 2022, as the European Youth Year, climate agenda can be modelled by public deliberations where young people are part of the solutions. In this sense, we share the view of the European Youth Forum 'The EU decision-makers should ensure quality involvement of democratic and youth-led youth organisations such as the European Youth Forum in the development, implementation and follow-up of different mechanisms for structured youth engagement on climate and sustainability in the EU decision-making processes. It will help to create engagement that fosters young people's creativity and ideas at the same time making sure that these ideas translate into concrete policies.' (European Youth Forum, 2020)

5. Legislative changes adopted through public consultations and citizen participation

- Given the huge impact the transition will have on people's lives, legislators should foresee public consultations and increased citizen participation (also to better inform on the policies' expected impacts and to mitigate potential disinformation campaigns); if this will not be considered, public discontent and the feeling of being left out of the solution will spur among citizens.

Other suggestions to be considered are connected to:

- the green political agendas and not political greenwashing (there is an increased risk to perceive green political agendas as more effective than the others just because they are labelled this way).

- sharing transition cost-burden between citizens (this one can represent a complicate issue because there is to see how exactly the costs of transition can be equitably split between various actors; it is likely possible that new forms of taxation will emerge).

- access to clean energy guaranteed by law.

- creating a climate market that could represent a virtual meeting place for the EU citizens actively taking part in the transition (this can be connected to the European Climate Pact).

- creating digital twins of cities/villages in which different policy solutions can be tested and present the results to the citizens (this idea can be correlated with the first recommendation).

Lastly, one recommendation we can make is that of paying increased attention to climate finance and avoiding investments that might bring short term gains but represent a peril for the long terms' objectives.

6. **Conclusions**

We started this paper by looking at the European legislation and measures adopted for achieving climate neutrality by 2050. Our research quest was to find connections between European Green Deal and democracy. The first step was to identify the vulnerabilities that lie in the National Climate and Energy Plans (NCEPs) and to frame the just and fair transition in the context of keeping the quality of the European democracies. In the 2nd part of our research, we applied the theory and looked for correlations between democracy and climate action. The first step was to look at government effectiveness and corruption perception indicators, the second step was to see the connection between government effectiveness and the citizens' perception of countries doing

enough to tackle climate change, while the 3rd step offered us a direct link between the democratic view of the European Union and the support to reduce GHG emissions.

In the last part of our research, we offered a series of recommendations to be applied for building a just and fair transition. These suggestions have a direct link to democracy, as we stress the need to think more about the link between citizens' view of the European Union as democratic and their support for climate action. We argue that a just and fair transition can be pursued, but only if the quality of the European democracies is not hindered in the process. Climate neutrality should be achieved in the European Union by sticking to the core value of democracy.

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Annex 1 - Statistical data used

Country code	Country	Corruption Perception Index (score)	Government Effectiveness (value)	Eurobarometer (Should reduce GHG emissions) (%)	Eurobarometer (Government doing enough) (%)	Eurobarometer (Democratic - describing fairly well the idea of EU) (%)
AT	Austria	76	1,66	43	33	48
BE	Belgium	76	1,12	56	14	57
BG	Bulgaria	44	-0,07	48	10	44
HR	Croatia	47	0,44	46	10	54
CY	Cyprus	57	0,88	68	17	60
CZ	Czech Republic	54	0,96	49	20	50
DK	Denmark	88	1,89	48	37	55
EE	Estonia	75	1,34	40	28	54
FI	Finland	85	1,95	31	40	54
FR	France	69	1,25	52	12	51
DE	Germany	80	1,36	54	26	54
GR	Greece	50	0,44	55	15	46
HU	Hungary	44	0,58	46	25	54
IE	Ireland	72	1,48	62	18	57
IT	Italy	53	0,4	36	12	49
LV	Latvia	57	0,88	36	21	52
LT	Lithuania	60	1,06	46	17	58
LU	Luxembourg	80	1,84	54	30	54
MT	Malta	53	1,04	60	17	68
NL	Netherlands	82	1,85	56	23	56
PL	Poland	56	0,38	28	28	49
PT	Portugal	61	1,02	79	14	70
RO	Romania	44	-0,22	34	9	48
SK	Slovakia	49	0,54	44	14	47
SI	Slovenia	60	1,17	48	16	59
ES	Spain	62	0,89	52	12	62
SE	Sweden	85	1,72	53	21	56

Source: Transparency International, World Bank and European Commission (2020 and 2021)