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THE INTERNATIONAL DIMENSIONS OF THE EUROPEAN GREEN DEAL

The EU as a leader of the climate change diplomacy?

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Green Deal is an effort to transform the European economy and the European consumption patterns. However, because it consists of a fundamental change of the European energy system and because it ranks highly on the EU policy agenda, it will also have consequences on the relationships between the EU and its partners as well as it will have a serious impact on Europe's global policy priorities. This article presents the major international dimensions of the European Green Deal while examining the European Union's climate change leadership in the contemporary international system.

Social Media summary

The European Green Deal is one of the most ambitious projects in contemporary European integration. The question is will the EGD have a positive impact on the European Union's energy security and on its climate change global leadership?

Keywords

#European Green Deal #Climate change diplomacy #global leadership #energy resources

Short bio

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Table of acronyms

CBAM: Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism

COP: Conference of the parties

EC: European Commission

EGD: European Green Deal

EU: European Union

GDP: Gross Domestic Product

UN: United Nations

USA: United States of America

WTO: World Trade Organisation

WW2: Second World War

1. Introduction

In December 2019, the European Commission introduced the European Green Deal, an ambitious policy initiative in order to make the European Union's economy more sustainable, resource-efficient and competitive. The deal contained policy measures aimed at cutting sources of pollution while increasing investment in environmentally friendly technologies and energy resources. According to the EC, the fundamental goal of the EGD is to make the EU's climate, energy, transport and taxation policies fit with the reduction of the greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030, compared to 1990 levels (European Commission, 2020).

The European Green Deal stands on decarbonization and digitalization as the two legs of the transformation of the European economy and the society as a whole. By going virtual and being more technologically and energy efficient, the EU aims to decouple its economic footprint from the natural world, thereby ensuring GDP growth and economic progress while reducing its environmental impact (Lazard, 2021).

To achieve its 2030 emissions targets, the European Commission estimates that annual investments of 260 billion euros will be needed. In total the EU aims to mobilize at least trillion of euros in sustainable development investments through international carbon markets, the revision of the European emissions trading system and the carbon adjustment mechanism (European Commission, 2020).

The international dimensions of the European Green Deal are expected to be complex and extended. According to the European ambitions, the reduction of the emissions in these levels will transform Europe into the world's first climate-neutral continent by 2050 and make the European Green Deal a global positive example which will led major international partners to set their own target for achieving climate neutrality. The EU will share these proposals with its international partners at the UN's Cop26 Climate Change Conference in order to promote the European Green Deal as the forefront project of the international climate change agenda. The promotion of the EGD in the international agenda will be the continuation of the presence of the EU as a leader in the global fight against the climate change.

The implementation of the European Green Deal will be also crucial for the transformation of the European Union's energy security in the next decades. Given the fact that the EU is one of the major energy consumers in the global economy, the transformation of European energy security is expected to have significant geopolitical and geoeconomic implications for the global energy markets.

2. *Climate change diplomacy: A new dimension of the diplomatic competition in the international arena*

The modern ecological crisis is marked by a serious increase in the range, scale and seriousness of environmental problems around the world, which have emerged mainly in the second half of the XXth century. The long period of economic boom following WW2 produced a great number of produced goods but also plenty of ecological problems.

The proliferation of new technologies and the rising population generated increasing energy and resource consumption, rapid erosion of the Earth's biodiversity and rising levels of consumption. International concern over environmental problems was heightened in the 1980's with the discovery of the hole in the ozone layer and the problem of global warming (Eckersley, 2012).

Nowadays, the issue of climate change is no longer simply a subject of research but has an influence on how an economy runs and even how interests are split and the new landscape of climate geopolitics becomes a focal point in international relations. Driven by international politics, the conflict of interest concerning climate change is translating into fierce international competition, and the geopolitical impact of climate change has captured much attention (Ladislaw *et al.*, 2014).

In the post-Cold War era, international rules kept evolving within the framework established by the United Nations and the WTO. The 1992 Earth Summit marked the high-water mark of international environmental concern in the XXth century. The end of the Cold War had prompted considerable speculation about the possibility of a new world order that would be not only peaceful but also ecologically sustainable (Newell, 2012).

It seems likely that climate change is here to stay as an issue on the global political agenda. How high a place on that agenda it occupies will depend on the extent to which and ways in which it is linked to other issues of high politics such as trade and security and its ties to key resources such as energy, water and land (Newell, 2012).

Climate change involves energy issues in many aspects and has an impact in development governance. An industrial revolution marked by green energy and technology is taking shape worldwide. It will deeply affect economic activities and bring a series of reforms in the global economy. In the context of tight resource constraints, severe environmental pollution and ecosystem degradation worldwide, pursuing green development is an inevitable choice and renewable energy will come to play a leading role and renewable energy will play a leading role in the energy system (Wang & Liu, 2015).

As the climate change regime broadens to address new areas, enrol new actors and develop novel policy instruments, theoretical and empirical approaches face fresh challenges to their assumptions and actions. Increasingly climate politics is conducted by and for markets. Whether it is the use of emissions trading (as in the EU), the Clean Development Mechanism or the growth of voluntary carbon markets alongside the regime, the marketization of climate governance, as with other areas of the environment is a notable trend (Newell, 2008).

3. EU as global leader in environmental and climate change diplomacy in the contemporary international system. From Kyoto to the Paris Agreement.

A review of the literature suggests that the performance and the influence of the European Union in the international climate change regime has varied since the early 1990s (Gupta & Grubb, 2000; Deketelaere & Peeters, 2006; Damro & MacKenzie, 2008; Oberthur & Pallemarts, 2010). The EU's ability to achieve its climate policy goals in international negotiations has increased considerably since the beginning of international climate diplomacy. The EU has also been the international leader in seeking the creation of a legally binding international climate regime.

In the international negotiations leading to the adoption of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change in 1992, the EU unsuccessfully pushed for a binding commitment for all industrialised countries to stabilise their emissions at 1990 levels by the year 2000. The EU was

more successful in pushing for binding greenhouse gas mitigation targets in the negotiations on the 1997 Kyoto Protocol. Having presented the most ambitious proposal, a 15% reduction by 2010, the EU eventually succeeded in other developed countries accepting differentiated quantitative emissions targets (Oberthur, 2011).

The transatlantic cleavage would play out at COP6 in the Hague in 2000, where the negotiations collapsed because of the disagreement between the EU and the US on the role of the flexible mechanisms (Newell, 2012).

The EU was the major driving force saving the Kyoto Protocol in the face of the US withdrawal from the Kyoto process. After a major diplomatic campaign, the EU was able to secure international agreement on the implementing rules of the Kyoto Protocol known as the Marrakesh Accords in 2001. The EU had to accept a weakening of the environmental integrity of the Kyoto Protocol to secure the agreement of other industrialised countries, in particular Japan, Canada and Russia (Ott, 2002; Vrolijk, 2002). Moreover, in exchange for concessions concerning Russia's bid for WTO membership, the EU convinced Russia to ratify and bring the Protocol into force (Damro, 2006).

The EU strategy in the climate change diplomacy is mainly guided by the principles of multilateralism, sustainable development and by the adherence to scientific evidence, linked to the precautionary principle (van Schaik & Schunz, 2012). Enjoying its reputation as a protagonist on climate change, the EU is a staunch supporter of effective multilateralism and of the UN system (Smith & Elgstom, 2012).

The EU has been consistent in fighting climate change through multilateralism rather than through smaller forums such bilateral agreements or 'coalition of willing' interstate formations (Victor, 2011). The EU thus questioned the US-initiated Asia-Pacific Partnership on Clean Development and Climate that was seen as a competitor to the climate regime (McGee & Taplin, 2006). The EU also criticized the Major Economic Process on Energy Security and Climate Change, which was launched by the Bush administration in 2007 that would lead to a weakening of climate multilateralism (Backstrand & Elgstom, 2013).

The EU fulfilled its major goal when parties to the UNFCCC launched negotiations on the framework for international climate protection in Bali in 2007. Although the agreed negotiating basis didn't fully match to EU preferences, the Bali Action Plan set a specific time limit as the deadline for concluding the negotiations (Oberthur & Pallemaerts 2010b, pp. 44-46). In 2007, the EU in pursuit of a comprehensive treaty to succeed the Kyoto Protocol, announced its aspiration of "leading global action against climate change to 2020 and beyond" (Council of the European Union 2007, p. 10-11). In 2008 the EU proved it was able to back its bid for leadership with concrete policy measures as it passed the world's ambitious climate legislative package which included the "20-20-20" targets.

To summarize, the EU was an undisputed leader in the negotiations from the creation of the Kyoto Protocol to Bali. Leadership was exercised by moving the process forward, and by unilaterally setting standards and examples (Kilian & Elgstom, 2010). To ensure the ratification of the Kyoto Protocol it engaged in repeated interaction with other parties, acting as a bridge builder.

Despite the success in Bali, EU goal achievement on the way towards and at the Copenhagen summit was relatively low. The EU clearly lacked the diplomatic clout to pull other actors along and was side-lined because other industrial powers didn't perceive the need to move towards the EU position to make a deal (Oberthur 2011). This includes that the Copenhagen Accord didn't constitute the legally binding agreement the EU was aiming at. Copenhagen summit was characterised as a backlash for EU international leadership ambitions on climate change (Dimitrov, 2010). Recurrent narratives are that COP15 marked a new geopolitical order, the failure of EU global leadership and a legitimacy crisis for a stagnant UN climate diplomacy (Backstrand, 2011).

The EU was isolated, while the US and other developed countries hammered out a political agreement that would define the post-Copenhagen era.

The Copenhagen Accord signified a new global climate order, where a system of voluntary carbon reduction pledges submitted by countries replaced science-based binding targets and timetables negotiated under the UN (Aldy & Stavins, 2010; Victor, 2011).

Some have argued that the EU was unable to lead by example as its unilateral promises weren't sufficiently environmentally ambitious (Parker *et al.*, 2012; Spencer *et al.*, 2010). Others claim that its pledges weren't credible, due to the internal disunity of the Union, with some member states openly questioning the targets set by the Commission (Roberts, 2011). A third explanation was that the EU's strategy was too normative and politically naive, disregarding the dynamics of the negotiation context, permeated by short-sighted economic self-interests (van Schaik & Schunz, 2012).

Furthermore, the EU was accused by developing countries of attempting to replace the Kyoto Protocol by advocating a single legally binding treaty to replace it (Wu, 2012). The EU's strategy of proposing a one-track negotiation process towards a protocol including all developed and developing countries spurred suspicion among developed countries including major developing countries (South Africa, Brazil, Mexico) that were opened up for reduction targets under the convention track.

However this setback didn't mean the end to the EU's leadership aspirations. The EU's ambition to lead was reaffirmed by the EU Commission president who argued that "the world needs an EU that leads the fight against climate change" (European Commission, 2012, p. 11). The EU continued to work hard to provide leadership in the run-up to the Paris summit with the explicit goal of reaching an ambitious, durable, internationally legally-binding agreement.

Several commentators claim that Durban was a triumph for European climate diplomacy and a recovery of the EU's leadership after Copenhagen (Harvey, 2011; Tollefson, 2011; Wu, 2012). As Backstrand and Elgstrom argued, the EU shifted from a directional and ideational leadership, based on normative aspirations, to a more realistic and structural leadership. It downsized its objectives and became a bridge builder between the major emitters (Backstrand & Elgstrom, 2013). The EU entered the negotiations with a clear strategy. It made its acceptance of a renewed Kyoto Protocol II conditional on the simultaneous signing of a roadmap towards a legally binding agreement that included all major emitters. At the same time, the EU forged a new progressive alliance with African countries and the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS). This EU-led alliance demanded an extension of the Kyoto Protocol, an operationalization of the Green Climate Fund and a roadmap to negotiate a new legal instrument. The pressure from the EU-led coalition was effective especially against the leaders of the developing countries such as China and India and paved the way for the Durban Platform.

The Paris Agreement (2015) is considered to be a success for European climate diplomacy and a second recovery of the EU's leadership after Copenhagen's failure. The Paris Agreement was the first-ever universal, legally binding climate change agreement. As in Durban, in Paris EU was proved quite successful becoming a bridge builder between the major emitters and while pressing the more cautious global partners to accept the content of the Paris Platform. A big part of the EU's success at COP21 can be attributed to its instrumental leadership in building the 'High Ambition Coalition'. After the success in achieving the Durban Platform, the EU tried to build a coalition of developed and developing countries to pursue the common goal of applying pressure on the large emitters (Canete, 2015). The pressure from the EU-led coalition (81 member states at

the summit, including the U.S.¹) was effective in pushing a long-term agreement with 5 year reviews, a common set of transparency and accountability rules and fair deal on climate finance and support (Canete, 2015). The support of the coalition played a key role in the EU's efforts to prevent China and India from watering down the transparency and accountability issues.

In its attempt to establish itself as a climate change leader the EU has in fact been utilizing four models of leadership. The EU as it did when Russia was persuaded to ratify Kyoto has at times successfully exercised structural leadership. The EU less successfully tried to employ structural leadership prior to Copenhagen by offering incentives to developing countries in the forms of funding for actions to mitigate and adapt to climate change in exchange for supporting a binding climate agreement (Council of the European Union; 2009, pp. 6 - 7). After the Copenhagen agreement where the EU was side-lined while the US agreed on the blueprint for the Copenhagen Accord, the EU has come to rely more on instrumental leadership. The Union has been working hard to form coalitions and build bridges both with the least developed countries and the US and China (Backstrand & Elgstrom, 2013; Oberthur & Groen; 2015).

The international situation has altered significantly since European negotiators were first involved in the climate regime in ways that have served to bring the political structure more into line with the pattern of actual and future emissions. The opportunities available to the Union in the years preceding Kyoto were extensive. However, in the post 2012 situation China and India have begun to play a role which goes well beyond that of interested bystanders. Moreover the US abdication of global environmental policy leadership enabled the activities of the EU and the establishment of the Union's special identity in contradistinction to the USA (Vogler, 2011).

The EU's share of global emissions is 14%(van Schaik & Schunz, 2012), rendering it, according to many observers, a medium-sized power in climate politics (Oberthur, 2011) while the US and China the so called 'carbon titans' are the countries that really matter in any lasting climate solution (Egenhofer & Georgiev, 2010). In climate negotiations, there is an increasing perception that geopolitical power has tilted towards emerging major developing countries such as China, India, South Africa and Brazil (Hurrell & Sengupta 2012).

The EU takes a regulatory approach to climate change, viewing the problem as stemming from negative externalities. This has led to policies that internalize such externalities. For example, the European Emissions Trading System, the world's first carbon market, aims to cap and put a price on carbon missions across the union. The European Green Deal, the EU's decarbonization megaproject, aims to redesign the economic incentive systems underpinning individual sectors (Goldthau, 2021).

4. The international dimensions of the European Green Deal

The Green Deal is an effort to transform the European economy and European consumption patterns. However because it entails a fundamental change of the European energy system and because it ranks highly on the EU policy agenda, it will also have consequences on the relationships between the EU and its partners as well as it will redefine Europe's global policy priorities (Leonard *et al.*, 2021).

Oil dominates the EU energy mix (with a share of 35%), followed by natural gas (24%) and coal (13.5%). Renewables are growing in share but their role remains limited (15%). The situation will

¹ As an indication of the US's ephemeral support of the Paris agreement, and climate change regimes in general, any progress that was made under the Obama presidency quickly unravelled once Trump took office.

change completely by 2050 if the European Green Deal is successful. According to European Commission projections, fossil fuels will provide about half of the EU’s energy in 2030 (European Commission, 2020).

Firstly, the European Green Deal will alter European trade and investment patterns. In 2019, the EU imported more than 320 billion worth of energy products in 2019, and more than 60% of EU imports from Russia were energy products. A massive reduction in this flow will restructure EU relationships with key energy suppliers. Energy partners including Russia, Algeria, Norway, Libya, Egypt will ultimately be deprived of their main export market (Leonard *et al.*, 2021).

In 2019 oil and gas revenues from European imports contributed around 24% of the Russian government’s budget (Eurostat, 2020). A significant reduction of the European oil and gas imports from Russia after 2030 is expected to have a substantial impact in the EU-Russia trade and in the Russian energy revenues. Russia’s most likely political response will be to try to diversify its energy customer base. In 2016, Russia displaced Saudi Arabia as China’s largest crude oil supplier, accounting for more than 25% of Russian oil exports (WTO, 2018). The China-Russia trade is probably the bilateral relationship that the Kremlin expects to replace the losses from the decrease of the EU-Russia’s trade volume.

Algeria is the third largest supplier of natural gas to Europe, most of the country’s energy infrastructure is orientated toward the European market (Eurostat 2019). A significant reduction of the European oil and gas imports from Algeria after 2030 is expected to have a huge impact in the EU-Algeria trade causing formidable challenges to the Algerian economy.

Table 1. Fossil fuel exports to the EU as per cent of total fossil fuel exports

Azerbaijan	72%
Kazakhstan	68%
Libya	63%
Norway	50%
Russia	45%

Egypt	44%
Nigeria	35%

Source: Bruegel/ECFR 2019

The decline in EU imports of oil and gas will have a serious effect in the investments in future fossil fuel infrastructure and in the investments in the existing infrastructure. This will happen even if the EU is expected to keep importing significant oil and natural gas for at least another decade.

A serious increase in trade in green electricity and green hydrogen will be another long-term impact of the European Green Deal on the EU's neighbourhood. As Europe now relies on imports of fossil fuel, in the next decades Europe might rely on imports of solar and wind electricity. For example, the countries of the Middle East and North Africa in particular, might benefit from the European needs from 'green' electricity if they intensify the investments in solar and wind electricity.

Secondly, given the size of the European economy, the European Green Deal is also likely to have consequences for global energy markets. Europe is the world's second-largest net importer of oil, after the Asia-Pacific region. Europe accounts for around 20% of global crude oil imports. The fall in oil demand resulting from Europe's transition to renewables will have an impact on the global oil market by depressing prices and reducing the income of the main exporters (Leonard *et al.*, 2021). Oil producers will be affected differently depending on how their economies are concentrated on oil exports. The main oil producers that will be affected are considered to be Russia, Venezuela, Nigeria while Saudi Arabia and Iraq are going to be less affected.

Being poorly endowed with domestic resources, the EU has to import 87% of the oil and 74% of the natural gas it consumes. Europe's core energy security concern has been until that moment its dependence on Russian natural gas. After the serious Russia-Ukraine-Europe gas crisis, Europe has already implemented a diversification strategy targeting infrastructure and legislation. These efforts have already strengthened the security of supply for natural gas imports. The European Green Deal by reducing EU's gas import requirements will greatly improve Europe's energy security as well as have positive impact in the European economies (Leonard et al 2021).

Table 2. EU imports of natural gas by main trading partner 2019

Russia	49%
Norway	27%
Algeria	25%
Qatar	5%

Source: Eurostat 2020

However, a greener Europe will be more dependent on imports of products and raw materials that serve as inputs for clean energy and clean technologies. While some of these minerals and metals

are widely available, others are geographically concentrated in a few resource-rich countries. Europe itself has no significant mining and processing capacities for these raw materials. It produces only 3% of the overall raw materials required in specific manufacturing procedures (Lazard, 2021). China is the leading producer and user of most critical raw materials. China has already managed to leverage its critical role in the production of the raw materials in its economic development and geo-economics strategies. The import of rare earths from China is probably the most critical issue in this area, because Europe has no mining activity for these important materials. For the European Union, dependence on China will further increase as demand for green technologies increases (Leonard *et al.*, 2021).²

Fourthly, the Green Deal will have an impact on Europe's international competitiveness. If European firms take on regulation-related costs that their foreign competitors don't bear, they will become less competitive both domestically and abroad (Leonard *et al.*, 2021). To level the playing field for European industries competing against outside competitors that face lower climate policy pressure, the European Commission had proposed a carbon adjustment for imported goods and services at the EU borders, known as the Border Carbon Adjustment Mechanism (Goldthau, 2021).

Last but not least, the Green Deal is a foreign policy option for the EU because climate change is a global problem. A transition away from carbon that would only focus on Europe wouldn't do much to mitigate global warming, as Europe accounts for less than 15% of global greenhouse-gas emissions (Lazard, 2021). If the Green Deal simply displaces Europe's greenhouse-gas emissions to its trading partners, it will have no significant impact on climate change. The EU has the obligation to push very hard for ambitious, enforceable multilateral agreements on containing global warming in order the EGD has a real impact on the fight against climate change (Leonard *et al.*, 2021).

The EU's decarbonization efforts need to be understood through a regulatory lens. The EU has an extensive regulatory toolbox, which is core to both the EU's domestic and international power. As Goldthau mentioned properly, the EU needs to determine how to effectively use its geo-economic and regulatory powers when implementing climate, trade, and foreign economic policies in order to deal with the (above mentioned) severe external economic and political impacts of decarbonization (Goldthau, 2021).

All these factors imply the EU will need to develop new trade and investment agreements, new models of financial and technical assistance and more generally, a new approach to international diplomacy that will encourage sustainable investment and development.

5. Policy recommendations

- The EU needs to understand the linkages among geopolitical competition, climate-related risks before formulating a broader approach to ecological security. Moreover, the Union needs to appreciate the ecological and security implications of its current economic models and transition policies (Lazard, 2021).
- The EU should become a global reference point on the socio-economic implications of decarbonisation. Being at the forefront of global decarbonisation efforts, the EU is among the first to deal with its socio-economic impact. The aim of the European Green Deal is to

² China was the main supplier to the EU of critical raw materials. Around 65% of the European imports were from China (European Commission, 2020).

promote decarbonisation by tackling the distributional effects of the economic and industrial transformation in the European economies (Leonard *et al.*, 2021).

- The EU should establish a global coalition for Co2 emissions removal aimed at promoting international cooperation in the field. The coalition should include countries, companies and international organizations willing to invest in eco-friendly activities protecting forests and other precious eco-systems (Leonard *et al.*, 2021). The EU needs to redesign its international partnerships to help countries build and empower their economies without endangering the ecological integrity of key ecosystems.
- Green industrial policy and green investments are key to seize the industrial opportunities of decarbonisation, reinforce employment and promote sustainable and viable economic growth in the European economies.
- Decarbonisation is a necessary step towards tackling climate change, however it is just one element of a broader response. There is a need for a system-level approach to EU external climate relations in order to move forward to a more sophisticated ecological diplomacy. Reconsidering the competencies of the European Green Deal and integrating policy approaches could help the EU to tackle the political, environmental, distributional consequences of the EGD.
- The EU should diversify supply chains for the materials necessary for decarbonization and digital transition in order to ensure energy and technological security by reducing the dependence on Chinese exports.
- A focus on the design of the EU's proposed CBAM will be important for measuring the environmental impact of investments in Europe and preventing carbon leakage to other regions. This focus could lead to a global valuation system for all investments in the global economy.
- The above actions would provide foreign policy support of the European Green Deal. The EU can strengthen even more its position as a norm and standard-setter for the global energy transition, promoting transparent cooperation on technical and regulatory matters in different fields (Leonard *et al.*, 2021). The EU should reinforce especially the bilateral relationships with the Neighbourhood's countries (North African and Central Asian countries) strengthening its economic and political influence in the respective geographical regions.

6. Conclusion

The European Green Deal is one of the most ambitious projects in contemporary European integration. It entails a complete transformation of the European energy system, the European economy and the European consumption patterns. It comprises seven detailed policy areas (biodiversity, clean energy, farm to fork, critical raw materials, sustainable agriculture, sustainable development, European Green Deal) as well as a European Climate Pact and a European Climate Law. Because it ranks highly on the EU policy agenda, it will also have consequences on the relationships between the EU and its partners as well as it will have a serious impact on Europe's global policy priorities.

The EU has been the undisputed leader in the climate change negotiations from the creation of the Kyoto Protocol to the Paris Agreement. Especially the Durban and the Paris Agreements were the main successes for European climate diplomacy and a serious recovery of the EU's leadership in

the climate change diplomacy after Copenhagen's failure. The promotion of the EGD in the international agenda will be the continuation of the presence of the EU as a leader in the global fight against climate change.

The international dimensions of the European Green Deal are expected to be complex and extended. The implementation of European Green Deal policies will necessarily spill over into relationships with the United States and China, which have their own views on how to promote sustainable development and manage international climate negotiations. Relationships with other countries will be directly affected, including the Gulf States, Russia and the Maghreb states, namely the main energy partners of the EU.

The implementation of the European Green Deal will be also crucial for the transformation of the European Union's energy security in the next decades. Given the fact that the EU is one of the major energy consumers in the global economy, the transformation of European energy security is expected to have significant geopolitical and geo-economic implications for the global energy markets.

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