



The hegemony of green growth in the European Green Deal

A critical analysis of the European Commission's discourse on economic growth

BY

Petrini Loris

A thesis submitted for the Joint Master degree in

EU Trade & Climate Diplomacy (EUDIPLO)

Academic year
2021 – 2022

June 2022

Word count: 19997 words.

Supervisor: Hartmut Marhold

Reviewer: Benedetto Zaccaria

PLAGIARISM STATEMENT

I certify that this thesis is my own work, based on my personal study and/or research and that I have acknowledged all material and sources used in its preparation. I further certify that I have not copied or used any ideas or formulations from any book, article or thesis, in printed or electronic form, without specifically mentioning their origin, and that the complete citations are indicated in quotation marks.

I also certify that this assignment/report has not previously been submitted for assessment in any other unit, except where specific permission has been granted from all unit coordinators involved, and that I have not copied in part or whole or otherwise plagiarized the work of other students and/or persons.

In accordance with the law, failure to comply with these regulations makes me liable to prosecution by the disciplinary commission and the courts of the French Republic for university plagiarism.

Loris PETRINI – 11/06/2022

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I want to express my deepest gratitude to my family and closest friends. I am deeply indebted to my mother and my friend Emma with whom I have been in constant dialogue. I wish to thank them for their invaluable contribution to this work.

The completion of my thesis would also not have been possible without the continuous support of my classmates, especially Carolina, Elodie, Jeanne, Julie, Kim, and Sonia.

I am also extremely grateful to my supervisor, Hartmut Marhold, for all the wise and precious advice he gave me throughout this journey.

Finally, I also wish to thank all scholars involved in research on degrowth, for having sparked my interest in this fascinating academic field.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract.....	5
Glossary of Acronyms.....	6
 Chapter 1: Introduction.....	 7
1.1 The European Green Deal: revolutionary environmental pact or new growth strategy?.....	7
1.2 The political context of its emergence.....	8
1.3 Opportunities for a paradigm shift.....	8
1.4 Research objectives.....	10
 Chapter 2: Theoretical background.....	 13
2.1 Green Growth and Degrowth.....	13
2.1.1 <i>The Limits to Growth v. Our Common Future</i>	13
2.1.2 <i>Green growth</i>	14
2.1.3 <i>Degrowth</i>	15
2.1.4 <i>Beyond the dichotomy: the role of Green New Deals</i>	17
2.2 Green growth in the EU.....	19
2.3 The green growth discursive hegemony.....	21
2.3.1 <i>The power of discourse</i>	21
2.3.2 <i>The establishment of a discursive hegemony</i>	22
 Chapter 3: Research method.....	 25
3.1 CDA as methodology.....	25
3.2 The text selection process.....	26
3.1.1 <i>Communications</i>	26
3.1.2 <i>Speeches from College members</i>	26
3.3 Tools for interpretation.....	27
3.2.1 <i>Speech acts</i>	27
3.2.2 <i>Discourses</i>	28
3.2.3 <i>Narrative</i>	28

Chapter 4: Analysis.....	30
4.1.Change.....	30
4.1.1. <i>Transformational change and paradigm shift</i>	30
4.1.2. <i>Strong sustainability</i>	31
4.1.3. <i>Questioning the existing economic model</i>	33
4.1.4. <i>Sobriety and self-sufficiency</i>	34
4.1.5. <i>Openness</i>	34
4.1.6. <i>The EC's high ambition</i>	35
4.1.7. <i>Socially just and inclusive transition</i>	37
4.1.8. <i>Democratisation and the role of citizens</i>	38
4.2.Status quo.....	39
4.2.1. <i>The EGD as a green growth strategy</i>	40
4.2.2. <i>Achieving absolute decoupling</i>	41
4.2.3. <i>Carbon tunnel vision and market-based instruments</i>	42
4.2.4. <i>Technological solutionism</i>	43
4.2.5. <i>Proximity with the business sector</i>	44
4.2.6. <i>Reliance on private investments</i>	46
4.2.7. <i>Public-private partnerships</i>	47
4.3.Status quo in disguise.....	47
4.3.1. <i>Implicit rejection of change and reproduction of status quo</i>	48
4.3.2. <i>Win-win situations: the unlimited benefits of a green transition</i>	51
4.4.Joint analysis of the three discourses.....	56
4.5.The concrete effects of the Commission's discourse.....	58
4.5.1. <i>Sustaining the hegemony and marginalising alternatives</i>	58
4.5.2. <i>The Commission's strive for power</i>	59
Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations.....	61
5.1 Conclusion: 'Everything must change for everything to remain the same'.....	61
5.1.1 <i>The broken promise of a paradigm shift</i>	61
5.1.2 <i>Limitations</i>	61
5.2 Recommendations: Saving the EGD.....	62
5.2.1 <i>Weaning ourselves off the growth addiction</i>	62
5.2.2 <i>Promising avenues for post-growth in the EU</i>	63
5.2.3 <i>Beyond GDP: decoupling growth from wellbeing</i>	64
Bibliography.....	67
Annexes.....	80

ABSTRACT

Conceived as a journey throughout European growth discourses, this dissertation investigates the European Commission's green growth narrative in the European Green Deal.

The dissertation starts from the assumption that, over the past two decades, green growth and its ideal of complete reconciliation between environmental protection and economic growth has progressively secured its hegemony within European environmental imaginaries. However, the European Green Deal's disruptive essence opens a window of opportunity for the Commission to depart from this traditional green growth discourse. The tension between change and status quo, fully encapsulated in the Commission's approach to the European Green Deal, raises a fundamental question: Does the European Green Deal's discourse represent a subversion of the dominant green growth paradigm or the mere continuation of previous green growth strategies?

To solve this puzzle, the dissertation applies Critical Discourse Analysis on a set of Communications and speeches. The results reveal that the Commission's joint enactment of three discourses: *change*, *status quo* and *status quo in disguise* leads to the emergence of a coherent narrative which conceals the reproduction of status quo behind apparent change, and therefore aligns with existing green growth discourses.

The analysis demonstrates how the constant reassertion of the growth imperative reproduces the discursive hegemony of green growth. In the context of the Commission's long-term quest for environmental leadership, this renewed narrative enables the Commission to reconcile antagonistic interests and secure broad support while preserving existing power structures. However, by refusing to reopen the debate on the limits to growth, the Commission puts the green deal's environmental ambitions at risk. Therefore, it needs to address Europe's unhealthy obsession with GDP growth while systematically including post-growth alternatives in the ecological debate if it wants the European Green Deal to succeed.

GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS

CCS	– Carbon Capture and Storage
CDA	– Critical Discourse Analysis
CEAP	– Circular Economy Action Plan
COM	– Communication
DEAL	– Doughnut Economics Action Lab
EC	– European Commission
EEA	– European Environmental Agency
EEB	– European Environmental Bureau
EGD	- European Green Deal
EKC	– Environmental Kuznets Curve
EP	– European Parliament
EU	– European Union
GDP	– Gross Domestic Product
GND	– Green New Deal
GHG	– Greenhouse gas
IPCC	– Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
JTM	– Just Transition Mechanism
MFF	– Multi Financial Framework
MS	– Member States
NGEU	– Next Generation EU
OECD	– Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
RRF	– Resilience and Recovery Facility
SD	– Sustainable Development
SDGs	– Sustainable Development Goals
UN	– United Nations
VdL	– Von der Leyen (Ursula)

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 The European Green Deal: revolutionary environmental pact or new growth strategy?

The European Green Deal (EGD), announced by President of the European Commission Ursula Von der Leyen in December 2019, has been described by its creator as "Europe's man on the moon moment" as well as "this generation's defining task" (EC 2019). When announcing the EGD, the European Commission (EC) committed itself to turning the European Union (EU) into the world's first carbon-neutral bloc by 2050. This goal, the most central and challenging one, has already been enshrined in the new Climate Law, and complemented by an intermediary target of a 55% emissions reduction by 2030. Since energy use accounts for three quarters of the EU's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, the energy transition is considered a top-priority. Yet, unlike previous plans, the EGD adopted a holistic approach, mainstreaming sustainability within all EU sectoral policies such as transports and agriculture. The EC's high ambitions also manifested in the creation of a Just Transition Mechanism which, for the first time, tackles environmental issues through the lens of social justice.

In this short description, it seems crystal clear that something new, exceptional, revolutionary maybe, is underway. Something so significant that the EC uses hyperbolic language to make sure everyone realises that the EU is about to be substantially changed. However, one can rightly wonder if buzzwords, superlatives, and bombastic expressions imply an equally transformative rhetorical shift in the EU's broader environmental discourse, or only hide the reproduction of a similar narrative. One specific phrase constitutes the starting point of this research and should prompt us to question the disruptive nature of this initiative. Indeed, the EC claims that the EGD is "our new growth strategy". Obviously, it is a *new* growth strategy "that gives more back than it takes away" and "aims to transform the EU into a fair and prosperous society" (EC 2019). But still, the pact is designed first and foremost around *growth*. In an era where GDP growth is recognised as the main driver of environmental destructions, the EC's obsession for a concept stuck in XXth century economics within a so-called revolutionary framework reveals a major paradox. How could the roadmap lead to a green revolution if the growth ideal occupies such a central position among the EGD's theoretical underpinnings? This research will explore this paradox through discourse analysis, targeting the EC's growth narrative in the EGD to assess whether or not economic growth remains its underlying rationale.

1.2 The political context of its emergence

The EGD cannot be detached from the political context of its production. Two specific factors opened a new window of opportunity for environmental action (Bongardt and Torres 2022; Dupont et al. 2020). Firstly, climate issues underwent a progressive politicisation in the EU since the 1990s. But recently, the EU's climate leadership was increasingly challenged. 2019 was marked by a significant rupture due to the growing intensity of grassroots movements and protests led by youth organisations, and this green wave reached the polls as green parties secured major electoral gains. Following record high temperatures as well as catastrophic events throughout the Union's territory, the European Parliament (EP) declared the state of climate emergency in November 2019, thus taking over the movement initiated by citizens.

This sequence of events also prepared the ground for a strong Commission entrepreneurship. Von der Leyen manifested this entrepreneurial spirit early, using her agenda-setting powers to turn the EGD into her signature policy (Dupont et al. 2020). This proactive attitude was a direct consequence of the bargaining process that led to the formation of the new Commission. The EGD has been conceived as an instrument of political legitimisation: Von der Leyen, in an attempt to hold together a fragile coalition and meet approval both in the European Council and the Parliament, needed to come up with a coherent narrative on sustainability (Gaventa 2019). Offering a reconciliation between economic growth and environmental protection was the only viable option to secure transpartisan support. As described in Dupont et al. (2020:1105), "the Commission thus staked its political credibility on the EGD". The fundamental shift promised by Von der Leyen ultimately aimed at asserting the EC's authority over environmental decision-making processes and the deal would help preserving its position as climate leader.

1.3 Opportunities for a paradigm shift

Whereas all political conditions seemed favourable to a paradigm shift, Von der Leyen's ambiguous discourse on growth, stuck between *change* and *status quo*, stood in contrast. Many academics rapidly started interrogating the inner nature of the deal and its ability to bring about transformative change:

"Does the document represent the sort of progress and innovation worthy of the praise and comparison to man's landing on the moon?" (Eckert and Kovalevska 2021:4).

"Is it simply a new green label stuck on top of business-as-usual policies, or a deeper organising principle for European politics?" (Gaventa 2019:4).

"Does the EC indeed have such a revolutionary cultural, economic, and political agenda in mind with its Green Deal? Or is the latter the continuation of a longstanding green growth discourse? Or does the Green Deal instead represent something in-between and thus offer potential new horizons for thinking about a synthesis between green growth and degrowth?" (Ossewaarde and Ossewaarde-Lowtoot 2020:2).

"We argue that there is a need to explore the political frontiers that the Commission draws between reform and radical change to understand what is left out of the EGD" (Samper et al. 2021:9).

The EGDs surely marks a turning point in the EU's rhetoric about growth since the consequences of the ecological crisis are for the very first time prioritised over economic concerns. Realizing the "twofold goal of prosperity for all and of overcoming the anthropogenic condition", the EC breaks with its traditional perspective on green growth" (Ossewaarde and Ossewaarde-Lowtoot 2020). The EGD has even been described as a third building block in the making of the European economic model, together with the Single Market and the European Monetary Union (Bongardt and Torres 2022:170). As the EGD is packed with transformative proposals for green investments, social justice, or emissions reduction targets, it has the potential to be a "game-changer" (Munta 2020) or a "critical juncture" (Dupont et al. 2020) in the development of the EU's climate policy.

Nevertheless, its so-called revolutionary character needs to be questioned too. It might be argued that the project is the mere continuation of the EU's longstanding commitment to tackle climate change under a modernised expression of the green growth discourse (Ossewaarde and Ossewaarde-Lowtoot 2020). Scholars indicated that the EU's rhetoric mostly relies on the imaginary of decoupling¹, which precludes radical change as neither the basic premises of capitalism nor the current human-nature relationship are rejected (Samper et al. 2021; Laurent 2020). Growth remains an end in itself.

A third approach evaluates the EGD's transformative discourse as part of a more pervasive strategy that only labels certain elements as new while refusing to give up on Europe's addiction to growth. For example, Von der Leyen carefully omitted the word 'new' from her 'green deal', and only labelled the EU's 'growth strategy' as something 'new' (DiEM25 2019). By doing so, she turned "a radical vision of

¹ The decoupling hypothesis postulates that it is possible to maintain GDP growth while at the same time reducing environmental pressures. Decoupling is usually measured in relation to either GHG emissions or resource use (Hickel and Kallis 2020). Although decoupling has now been incorporated into EU official discourses, it is contested by most academics (EEB 2019; Hickel and Kallis 2020; Ward et al. 2016). This concept is discussed in-depth in sub-chapters 2.1 and 2.2.

economic, social, and environmental justice [...] into familiar Brussels-speak and a strategy to sustain its status quo" (ibid.:20). Ultimately, novelty aims at pursuing the same growth ideal and *status quo* is disguised behind so-called *change*.

Since the desire for systemic change seems to coexist with the preservation of infinite economic growth, **is the discourse on the EGD mostly building on previous green growth strategies or is it instead a subversion of the dominant green growth paradigm?** As "Green New Deals are not necessarily simply green growth discourses recast" (Ossewaarde and Ossewaarde 2020:7) but have the potential to trigger massive changes, the answer to this research question will mostly depend on what will be regarded as 'paradigm shift'.

At this point, it is thus essential to remind what a paradigm shift entails. The notion, coined by Thomas Kuhn (1970) when referring to fundamental change in the use of scientific concepts and practices, has been transposed in social sciences to describe a profound change in a fundamental social model. A paradigm is a model that determines how things should be done, made, or thought about. Therefore, it also defines the way we think about an issue, which questions can be asked and what is excluded. A paradigm shift implies that the ideational framework upon which political decisions are made also evolve: what changes is not only the way we *do* politics but how we *think about* politics. It requires to not only rethink the use of policy instruments, but to also challenge the underlying assumptions which, until now, were taken for granted. The question of whether the transition from a brown growth to a green growth discourse represents a paradigm shift has already been asked (Bowen and Fankhauser 2011)² and it can easily be argued that the answer is negative, since green growth only seeks to pursue the same objectives through different means and does not question the power structures sustaining capitalism (Wanner 2015). If the EGD is to represent a paradigm shift, the EC's rhetoric would need to be characterized by a high degree of rupture, whereby the hegemony of the green growth model would be called into question.

1.4 Research objectives

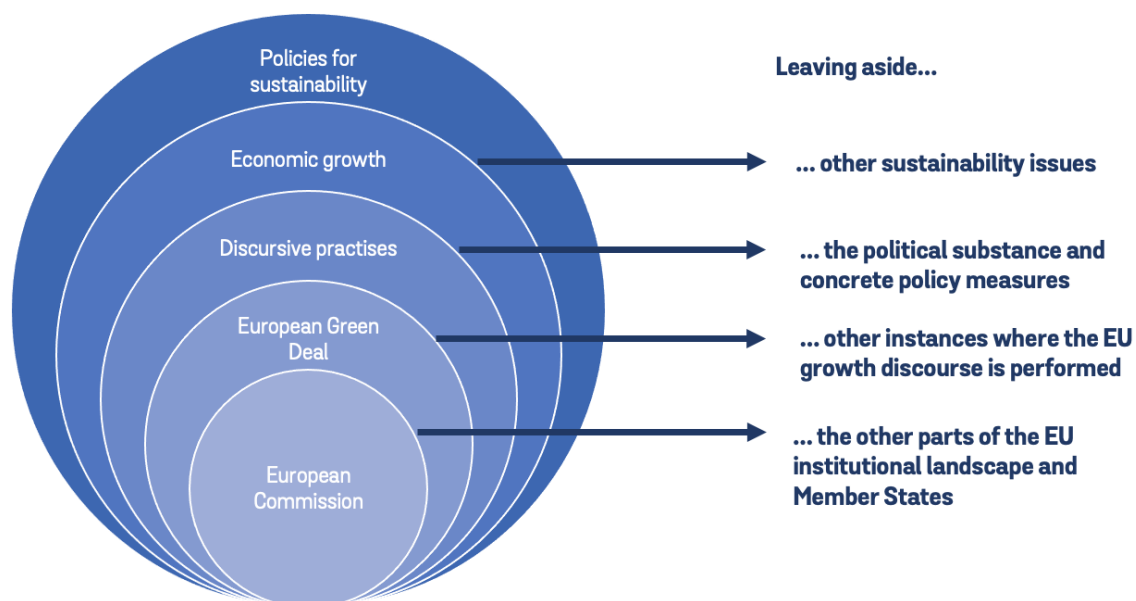
No extensive qualitative discursive analysis of the EC's growth rhetoric, accounting for the tension between *change* and *status quo*, has been conducted yet. Using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

² Unlike in this dissertation, the two authors considered that the green growth discourse introduced major changes, as they recall in the conclusion of their work: "Analytically, green growth applies a new, richer and more diverse set of economic tools to a burning issue" (:1158). Bowen also reasserted this pro-green growth position in Bowen and Hepburn (2014). However, given the abovementioned definition of paradigm shift, this dissertation chooses to argue in the opposite direction, relying instead on Wanner (2015) and Smith (2016).

theory on a comprehensive set of documents, the dissertation explores the EC's discursive practises and unpacks their political implications for the vision of Europe's ecological transition.

Investigating the notion of growth within EU environmental politics requires a certain number of clarifications. This dissertation does not explore the broad concept of sustainability but only the interconnection between the EU's environmental objectives and its growth strategy, with the underlying assumption that the dual objective pursued by the EU³ might result in a paradox. To solve it, the EU has embraced green growth, which allows both potentially competing objectives to be reconciled. Furthermore, it only addresses discursive practises and not the political substance of green growth. Then, the research scope is limited to the example of the EGD, from its announcement in December 2019 and throughout its implementation. Although the project recognises that EU discourses are embedded in a broader historical background, it is not an extensive historical analysis of the EC's growth discourses. Instead, it draws on existing research, and takes the EU's longstanding attachment to GDP growth and its more recent embracement of green growth for granted. Finally, while it recognises that EU discourses are always polyphonic, the dissertation focuses exclusively on the EC due to its pre-eminent position, as both the designer and executor of the EGD. Born from a new EC mandate, the EGD is a product of the EC's strive for political power. A simplified model of the abovementioned choices has been sketched (see Figure 1).

Figure 1: Research scope



³ The dual objective, mentioned earlier as a reconciliation of environmental and economic objectives, is part of the green growth discourse and materialises in the belief that building a competitive economy is compatible with a high level of environmental protection.

Recognising the role of political discourses in bringing a sustainable agenda into fruition (Kambites 2014), we argue that the EC's ability to deliver an ambitious EGD depends on the way the EGD is being talked upon. Discourse analysis is not a mere linguistic exercise but a process that unravels the deeper meanings associated with green growth strategies (Colombo et al. 2019). If the EC's discourse does not change, the great transformation that Europeans were promised will not happen. Under no circumstances should the unsettling nature of discourse analysis be an excuse not to engage with discourse analysis: "Words may be abstract in terms of representing reality, arbitrary in ways they relate to meaning and symbolic of what they represent. But they matter." (Eckert and Kovalevska 2021:19-20). Finally, discourse analysis also contributes to explore alternative pathways and enables new actors to take part in the ecological transition (Colombo et al. 2019).

The remainder of this dissertation will be structured as follows.

Chapter (2) contextualises the historical importance of economic growth in the EU's environmental project, approaching the environment-economy relationship according to the main competing theories, green growth and degrowth, while acknowledging that these two visions represent overly simplified ideal-types in a more complex theoretical landscape. It introduces the central role of discourses in securing the hegemony of growth-oriented theories in the EU and reinforcing the influence of the actors performing such discourses.

Chapter (3) applies Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to the EC's discourse in the EGD, using a set of Communications and speeches from EC officials related to the deal and its implementation.

Chapter (4) presents the main findings by exploring how different categories of speech acts contribute to the three discourses enacted in the EGD: *change*, *status quo*, and *status quo in disguise*. Then, it discusses whether the EC's narrative can be considered as a genuine paradigm shift before evaluating its concrete consequences on the perpetuation of the green growth hegemony and the role of the EC as environmental leader.

Chapter (5) draws general conclusions and formulates recommendations to move beyond the current unhealthy obsession for economic growth by exploring post-growth futures in the EU.

CHAPTER 2

Theoretical Background

2.1 Green Growth and Degrowth

2.1.1 The Limits to Growth v. Our Common Future

The role of growth in environmental policy has been the subject of fierce debates since the early 1970s. The story that opposes efficiency to sufficiency started in 1972, after the publication of *The Limits to Growth* by the Club of Rome (EEB 2019). Published in the earliest stages of global environmental governance, *The Limits to Growth* was the first scientific report which explicitly challenged the political desirability of endless economic growth (Meadows et al. 1972). It alerted the international community about the impossibility for ecosystems to support present rates of economic and population growth beyond the 21st century, even with advanced technology⁴. This situation could only be avoided through forward looking policy, starting as soon as possible. The arguments advanced by the Club of Rome were experienced as an earthquake by neoliberal economists and immediately dismissed as a neo-Malthusian projection of population collapse. Politicians also repudiated both the report's innovative methodology and political message because of its threatening perspective for existing lifestyles. Yet, the publication stimulated for the first time an intense debate on the restriction of economic growth. This debate remained particularly vigorous to this day⁵.

In the following decades, environmentalism was built on the assumption that humanity would need to sacrifice economic growth to thrive. But in 1987, the publication of the equally important report *Our Common Future* by the World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) completely overturned this initial vision. By introducing the concept of sustainable development (SD), it brought a more optimistic vision into the environmental debate⁶. Ecological risks were no longer articulated as

⁴ Randers (2010) rightly describes how the report long remained misunderstood as readers often assimilated it to a pure and simple forecast for the end of economic growth while it was in fact open to many future scenarios: "The only thing that could not happen, said Limits to Growth, was for world society to remain forever in unsustainable territory, using more of nature every year than nature produces during that year" (:1).

⁵ In a follow-up report published 30 years after *The Limits to Growth*, the authors reaffirmed the relevance of their initial ideas (Meadows et al. 2004). And while its model only gives a global outlook and overlooks crucial variables, thus providing only a simplified picture of the impacts of resource consumption, the report's main findings are still considered valid 50 years after the publication (Giraud 2022).

⁶ In the Brundtland report, sustainable development was defined as a model of development "that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" (WCED 1987).

limits to growth but as catalysts for change (Machin 2019). As Wanner (2015) puts it, “the conflict between environmental sustainability and the sustainability of growth [was] seemingly reconciled” (:27). This optimism was perfectly illustrated by Gro Harlem Brundtland, Chair of the WCED: “What is needed now is a new era of economic growth - growth that is forceful and at the same time socially and environmentally sustainable” (WCED 1987). This pioneering report also set the basis for the creation of metrics of sustainability, and helped connecting environmentalism to the imperative of development (Engelman 2013).

Born as a counterclaim to *The Limits to Growth* report (Machin 2019), SD became increasingly connected to the ideal of decoupling (Smith et al. 2010). Indeed, various forms of relative decoupling had occurred as a result of the 1970s oil shocks⁷. Although the expression 'green growth' was only introduced at a later stage, its central tenets had already become part of the sustainability discourse, often under the term 'ecological modernisation' (Hickel and Kallis 2020). Even today, green growth remains tied to its initial lineage, and both concepts operate alongside each other.

2.1.2 Green growth

From the 2000s, green growth was progressively deployed as dominant policy response to climate change (Hickel and Kallis 2020). Decoupling offered the prospect of a continued economic expansion compatible with our planet’s ecological resources (Rosenbaum 2017). This mentality, which was an extension of the older SD discourse (Wanner 2015), was supported by mainstream economics. Indeed, following the Environmental Kuznets Curve (EKC), which predicted an evolution of environmental destructions according to an inverted bell-shaped curve, prolonged growth would eventually solve environmental problems (EEB 2019). Green growth was first adopted officially by an international organisation (IO) in 2001, when it became part of the OECD Environmental Outlook⁸. In the next decade, decoupling was progressively recognized as a major tool to achieve a sustainable development.

⁷ According to Jackson (2009), decoupling is said to be *relative* when we observe a decline in the ecological intensity per unit of economic output (e.g., if the rate of GDP growth is greater than the rate with which the material footprint increases). Usually, ecological intensity is measured with regards to the rate of GHG emissions or the material footprint. On the other hand, decoupling is considered *absolute* if resource use declines in absolute terms (e.g., if GHG emissions decreased while GDP kept increasing).

⁸ In 1999 already, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) had devoted attention to the concept of decoupling. In an OECD review, Yukiko Fukasaku argued that decoupling was a feasible solution to achieve sustainable development: “the experience of the last decades indicates that economic growth and resource consumption and environmental degradation can be decoupled to a considerable extent. The path towards sustainable development entails accelerating this decoupling process.” (Fukasaku 1999). Two years after, in the OECD’s environmental strategy for the first decade of the XXIst century, decoupling environmental degradation from economic growth became as one of the five objectives to achieve a sustainable development (OECD 2001:21).

The OECD's report *Towards Green Growth* represented a milestone in the political acceptance of green growth theories as decoupling was presented as the only viable strategy (OECD 2011; Machin 2019). Within the next year, the United Nations Environment Programme as well as the World Bank had joined the trend and green growth became mainstream, especially following the Rio+20 Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012 (Hickel and Kallis 2020).

This rising commitment to an environment-friendly GDP growth then materialised into various policy preferences. Green growth strategies revolve primarily around innovation, the creation of green markets and profit maximisation (OECD 2011). Its optimism for the future also translates into an increasing reliance on technological solutionism (Ossewaarde and Ossewaarde-Lowtoot 2020). While the private sector occupies a privileged position, the role of public authorities is more ambiguous (Machin 2019). Their action is necessary to trigger structural change especially through green investments. But the state is no longer a pilot, and only acts as an enabler facilitating industrial progress and promoting market instruments. The interaction between public and private actors should ultimately create economic incentives for businesses to generate greater profits.

Among all policy tools developed in green growth governance, the most central one surely is carbon pricing. The creation of carbon markets combines cap-and-trade and carbon offset schemes to achieve progress towards emissions reduction without questioning the basis of modern life or sacrificing other policy goals (Bailey et al. 2011; Stuart et al. 2019). Hence, as Newell and Paterson (2009) argue, “climate politics is increasingly conducted by, through and for markets” (:80). The deployment of such market-based instruments also accelerates the commodification of nature, as natural ecosystems are being given a price on the market (Stuart et al. 2019).

Due to the appealing outlook they offer, and their commitment to preserve the Western ideology of technological progress (Ossewaarde and Ossewaarde-Lowtoot 2020), green growth theories gathered large support from both public and private actors (Stuart et al. 2019).

2.1.3 Degrowth

The word degrowth, in French *décroissance*, was first mentioned by André Gorz in 1972, who asked: "Is the earth's balance, for which no-growth – or even degrowth - of material production is a necessary condition, compatible with the survival of the capitalist system?". In the follow up to *The Limits to Growth* report, many debates on resource constraints emerged. However, the global rise of neoliberalism prevented degrowth from flourishing. The real development of degrowth only started in the early 2000s

in reaction to the growing hegemony of sustainable development⁹. In parallel, degrowth developed as a social movement: activists gathered around the concept, and their protest progressively spread from France to the rest of Europe (Demaria et al. 2013). Degrowth reached the academic sphere, and its conceptual foundations were progressively laid with the establishment of the collective 'Research & Degrowth', and a series of international conferences organised on the topic.

Degrowth is a political project that plans to abolish economic growth as a social objective. Degrowth critiques developed around a triple axis dismissing economic growth as no longer possible, plausible, nor desirable (Parrique 2019:i). By pointing at the rebound effect triggered by greater energy efficiency, the impossibility to reach full circularity, or even the insufficient rate of technological change, proponents of degrowth warn that absolute decoupling is highly unlikely to be attained (Haberl et al. 2020; Ward et al. 2016). As an anti-capitalist critique of the current economic system, it also fiercely opposes GDP as a measure of development. Although the reduction of GDP is a likely impact of degrowth policies, it is not an objective *per se*, but rather an inevitable step to secure the wellbeing of all¹⁰. Unlike recessions, degrowth would result in a carefully planned economic contraction. In this new equilibrium, socially desirable sectors such as education or healthcare will rise while the polluting and extractive activities will shrink. In addition, degrowth activists combat the increasing commodification¹¹ of nature and conceptualise degrowth precisely as "a reversal of this institutional arrangement" which places "non-commodities as privileged compared to commodities" (Parrique 2019:289). Hence, degrowth appears to be "a deliberately subversive slogan" (D'Alisa et al. 2015:34).

However, degrowth has come to encompass a new worldview as well. Economic systems should be replaced by regenerative structures powered by the imaginary of simplicity, conviviality, and care instead of profit and productivity. Degrowthers argue that the seed for such mentalities, called "southern thought", already exists in many locations across the globe, where the influence of growth is increasingly opposed (Kallis et al. 2022). One of the core tenets of degrowth is the repoliticisation of the ecological debate¹². While the adoption of market-based approaches makes environmental issues look like technical

⁹ For instance, French anthropologist Serge Latouche, who is occasionally regarded as the "pope of degrowth" (Boucaud-Victoire 2019) and universally recognised as a pioneer in the discipline (Parrique 2019), considered the underlying reconciliation of ecology and economy under the concept of sustainable development as a pure oxymoron. As an ecological economist, he developed a comprehensive critique of economic growth and promoted degrowth as a "decolonization of the social imaginary from economic growth" (Latouche 2009).

¹⁰ Degrowth is defined as "a downscaling of production and consumption that increases human well-being and enhances ecological conditions and equity on the planet" (R&D 2022).

¹¹ Some degrowth academics like Parrique (2019), refer to the process under its active form *commoditisation* to emphasise that the ongoing nature of a man-made process.

¹² The crucial question, according to Latour (1998, in D'Alisa et al. 2015) is whether "to modernize or to ecologize". But under green growth strategies, "politics have been reduced to the search for technocratic solutions". By promising win-win solutions and the reconciliation between economy and ecology, green growth entirely dilutes the political nature of environmental strategies (D'Alisa et al. 2014:38).

problems, degrowth puts ideology back at the centre. Finally, it is also a decolonial approach which "will liberate ecological space for growth in the South" by addressing overconsumption in highly industrialised nations while simultaneously liberating "conceptual space" for Southern countries to avoid following the destructive development path laid out by the West (D'Alisa et al. 2015:34).

2.1.4 Beyond the dichotomy: the role of Green New Deals

Early green growth policies consolidated existing neoliberal economic practises and were criticised for their lack of effectiveness in addressing climate problems (Stuart et al. 2019). Therefore, this first model is being progressively replaced with a more ambitious variant of green growth (Bowen and Hepburn 2014), marked by the growing influence of strong sustainability discourses. Its proponents are usually more sceptical about the substitutability between natural capital and other forms of capital (Colombo et al. 2019; EEA 2021a). They also recognize the existence of planetary boundaries which humanity is expected to exceed (Rosenbaum 2017:4). Several IOs thus recently rejected the EKC hypothesis and stressed the need for a more inclusive growth model (Ferguson 2015). Discourses move towards the more comprehensive concept of 'green economy', which recognises the extent of the problems caused by conventional growth models¹³. This vision, however, still relies on absolute decoupling.

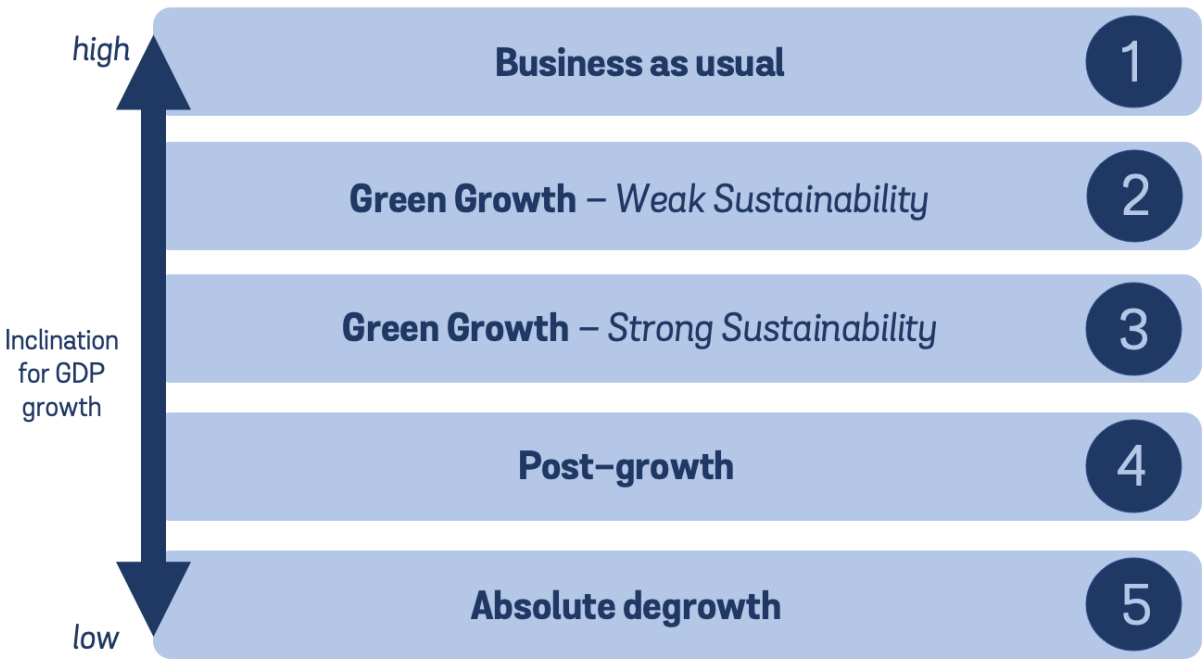
Some scholars said green growth, regardless of its latest mutation, was not radical enough as it did not engage with revolutionary reforms of the existing socio-economic order. Between green growth concealing the reproduction of brown growth (Ossewaarde and Ossewaarde-Lowtoot 2020), and degrowth whose political feasibility is called into question (Ferguson 2015; Pollin 2019), a range of nuanced proposals have been formulated. Many ecological economists, while purportedly avoiding the potentially disempowering effect of the pro- or anti-growth binary, contributed to dismantle the growth ideal. Raworth (2015) argued for a macroeconomic remodelling: "We have an economy that needs to grow, whether or not it makes us thrive. We need an economy that makes us thrive, whether or not it grows". Therefore, she recently launched *doughnut economics* to operationalise sustainability through the creation of a *safe and just space* articulating planetary boundaries with human needs. This approach somewhat resembles the proposal advanced by Jackson (2009) in his book *Prosperity without Growth* which intends to spread a more meaningful and less materialistic sense of prosperity, founded exclusively on social and ecological needs. Furthermore, the Keynesian tradition that once gave rise to the New Deal could even be completely reoriented towards the delivery of a *zero-growth economy* (Custers 2010). Even the older concept of steady-state economy used by Daly (1991) to advocate for

¹³ The *green economy* discourse especially stresses the need to achieve a massive decarbonisation of the economy and turn the current linear model into a fully circular one.

governmental restrictions on all resource use, shares some features with contemporary ecological economics¹⁴.

The complexity of each initiative can be simplified in a *growth spectrum* (see Figure 2, and detailed spectrum in Annex A).

*Figure 2: The growth spectrum*¹⁵



¹⁴ Nevertheless, Smith (2016) criticises Daly's position as being intrinsically incoherent, since capitalism cannot work without growth. The belief that a steady-state economy could align with ambitious environmental goals without questioning capitalism itself should be viewed as a pure fantasy.

¹⁵ Business-as-usual scenarios in category 1 recall the experience of environmental policies under unregulated neoliberalism. Categories 2 and 5 represent green growth and degrowth as described in sub-chapters 2.1.2 and 2.1.3. Categories 2 and 3 separate the traditional green growth narrative from its newest evolution and are inspired by the distinction between weak and strong variants of ecological modernisation in Christoff's (1996) ecological modernisation spectrum. Post-growth scenarios, mentioned in category 4, refer to the range of proposals that do not properly fall in the degrowth category but are agnostic about GDP and explicitly articulate limits to growth. In this spectrum can be distinguished two opposing groups. The first three categories largely reproduce capitalist power structures, and although the intensity of their attachment to growth differs, even a stronger green growth model (category 3) remains tied to GDP growth. Thus, moving in between them does not represent a paradigm shift. Conversely, categories 4 and 5 are anti-growth in their essence, and implementing them would signify a major paradigm shift away from GDP-centred policies.

Following similar lines, proposals to operationalise these various models of development have been made, often under the form of Green New Deals (GNDs). GNDs offer a relevant perspective to break the green growth-degrowth binary¹⁶. Although Pollin (2019) clearly inserts GNDs within green growth strategies, Mastini et al. (2021) prefers to establish a typology of GNDs in order to identify possible synergies with degrowth theories¹⁷. In their typology, the 'GND 1.0' model describes the earliest models, such as the agenda formulated by Thomas Friedman in 2007 (Mastini et al. 2021). This model advanced realistic environmental plans which fully embraced the technocratic green growth discourse and were operationalized through market-friendly regulations. However, the financial crisis brought economic orthodoxy back to the fore, thus obscuring such proposals. GNDs lately made their come-back under a more radical version '2.0'. Rejecting the primacy of market-based instruments, this narrative addresses social justice through redistributive policies, and displays a higher environmental ambition, pursued through state interventionism and massive investments in low-carbon solutions. An illustration of the 'GND 2.0' is Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez's proposal for a GND, which, to a certain extent, developed a counter-hegemonic discourse in US climate politics (Mastini et al. 2021). Nevertheless, GNDs '2.0' are the mere expression of green Keynesianism and remain largely supportive of green growth. A third type of GND, coined by Mastini and his colleagues, is named 'GND without growth'. This model seeks to democratise environmental policy and implement ecological economics by formally ditching GDP growth. Its social component is also far more elaborate, as it promotes job guarantees, universal access to public services, resource caps, and explicitly combats environmental injustices. Exploiting the synergies between 'GND 2.0' models and degrowth movements, the model provides an alternative to market-based strategies. These three types of GNDs have been represented on the spectrum (see Annex A).

2.2 Green growth in the EU

Where does the EU stand in this complex picture? The EU has been unanimously recognised as global climate leader, and environmental policies have always played an important part in the European integration project due to the transboundary nature of environmental problems, which created barriers to free trade (Machin 2019). Nevertheless, the EU was born as a liberal project aiming to establish a single market. Since the 1980s, the neoliberal philosophy has even been embraced in the EU polity (Schmidt 2016).

¹⁶ O'Neill (2020) describes GNDs as policy packages which comprise measures inspired both from green growth and degrowth theories. According to the degree of political overlap with one of the two dominant model, GNDs can lean towards either degrowth or green growth. This tridimensional model has first been used in D'Alessandro et al. (2020) to create macrosimulation models.

¹⁷ Dale (2019) also investigated the proximity between the degrowth movement and potential GNDs, arguing that both proposals could converge around a powerful opposition to GDP-oriented environmental policies.

When green growth emerged, the EU found this sustainability discourse particularly appealing because it did not contradict its existing economic agenda. Decoupling has therefore been part of the EC's environmental discourse since the 2000s (Samper et al. 2021). From 2001, the 6th EAP called to “break the old link between economic growth and environmental damage” (EC 2001:3). This strategy has been constantly reaffirmed ever since, first in the Energy Roadmap 2050¹⁸, and then in the 7th EAP (EEB 2019). The endorsement of green growth discourses was rapidly followed by the adoption of carbon pricing instruments: as soon as 2005, the EU created its own Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS). By turning its ETS into its flagship climate policy, it chose to promote “market-based solutions for market-based problems” (Carton 2014:1008). Bailey et al. (2011) and Stuart et al. (2019) revealed how the EU's pioneering spirit was then exploited to present carbon markets at the best solution to the environmental crisis. Guided by its faith in technological progress, the EU reframed emissions reduction as a business opportunity.

‘Growth strategies’ reflect even more faithfully the Union's approach to the growth ideal. The Lisbon Strategy, adopted in 2000, partially embraced the green growth discourse as it promoted an economy based on the three pillars of sustainability. But it was adopted first and foremost as a growth strategy to make the EU the most competitive economy in the world, and environmental objectives were entirely subordinated to the maximisation of profit (Laurent 2020). As the Lisbon strategy promoted a business-as-usual scenario, it proved inconsistent with the EU's ambitious climate objectives. Thus, a follow-up strategy named Europe 2020 was adopted in the midst of the financial crisis and the EU's economic objectives were re-oriented towards “smart, sustainable and inclusive growth” (Renda 2021)¹⁹. This time, the ecology-economy compatibility was explicitly acknowledged: “the greening of the European economy was conceived as being conducive to growth” (Ossewaarde and Ossewaarde-Lowtoo 2020:3). Green growth had taken root in Europe's intellectual landscape.

This retrospective revealed how the EU reorganised its environmental discourse around the endorsement of green growth (Pèlegri 2019). The key message remained the same over time: environmental policies and green innovations should reduce GHG emissions without hampering GDP growth. Today, the EU counts among the most fervent defenders of decoupling and the green growth ideology has become a “substantial part of modern European identity” (Eckert and Kovalevska 2021:16).

2.3 Hegemony of green growth discourse

¹⁸ “Less energy wastage and lower fossil fuel imports strengthen our economy. Early action saves money later” (EC 2012:1).

¹⁹ Zito et al. (2019) argue however that, despite the financial crisis, the re-orientation of the EU's environmental strategy did not disrupt the progressive adoption of a green growth strategy, nor provoked a real change in the EU's growth discourse.

2.3.1 The power of discourse

Recognising the growing role of discourse in the study of environmental politics (Colombo et al. 2019), the dissertation explores the linguistic turn in social sciences through the example of green growth discourses. Foucault's work as conducted on the control of discourse production constitutes a relevant starting point to better understand how language constructs reality (Foucault 1984; Rydin 1999). In a Foucauldian perspective, discourse is conceptualised as "a way of making things happen in the world rather than a mere description and representation of it" (Colombo et al. 2019:654). Discourses do not refer to a simple articulation of words but to "an ensemble of ideas, concepts and categories through which meaning is given to phenomena and which is produced and reproduced through an identifiable set of practises" (Hajer 2005:303). Policy and discourse are intertwined as policy making processes are deeply communicative, and result from a constant discursive struggle (Fischer and Forester 1993). But above all, discourses shape and delimit a given range of policy options.

In environmental politics, even ideas such as 'the environment' are socially constructed through discourses (Colombo et al. 2019). Rydin (1999) looks at how "the twin terms sustainability and sustainable development [...] are constructed" (:468) and argues that these concepts only become mainstream once their compliance with dominant ways of thinking has been secured and if they do not challenge existing fundamental interests. Ideas can only enter the Panoptican²⁰ once they have been disciplined. Legitimate sustainability issues are then distinguished from illegitimate ones.

This process echoes with Hajer's (1995) 'storyline', who refers to the emergence of a common and simplified narrative relying on common assumptions, concepts and analyses. A storyline becomes dominant when its assumptions are so widely accepted that they do not need to be repeated anymore. Some claims have already been accepted before the actor even speaks. To influence policymaking, actors often use discursive practises to position themselves as experts on the topic and exclude other voices promoting far-reaching change. One storyline is therefore promoted by a 'discursive coalition' that makes other groups lose credibility (Rydin 1999). The promotion of alternative storylines becomes increasingly difficult as it requires dismantling the existing one by "confronting the interests who were able to achieve prominence for their claims and viewpoint" (ibid.:472).

²⁰ Rydin (1999) refers to Foucault's concept of Panoptican, which describes "the ideal model of a prison where a centrally located warder can observe prisoners, without prisoners in separate wings seeing each other" as a metaphor (:471). The Panoptican alludes to the control exercised by the institutions controlling discourse production and defining which discourses are considered legitimate or not.

2.3.2 *The establishment of a discursive hegemony*

The control over discourses deemed legitimate can be such that actors exercising it may impose a discursive hegemony (Hajer 1995). The notion of 'hegemony' is largely inherited from Gramsci, who described the establishment of a dominant ideology as a process which cements diverse interests, ensures the consent of subordinate groups, and consolidates the hegemony of a dominant class (Gramsci 1999). Two conditions are required for a discourse to become hegemonic (Ferguson 2015). Firstly, referring to this discourse becomes the only credible way for actors to intervene on a particular issue. Secondly, the basic premises of this discourse have to be translated into competent institutional practices within particular 'communities of practice', like the EC²¹.

The 'green growth' hegemony should be approached as a product of the pre-existing 'neoliberal' hegemony. Schmidt (2016) explains the resilience of neoliberalism in Europe by assimilating the neoliberal ideology to a background idea. Background ideas, unlike programmatic ideas which are debated on a regular basis, are "the unquestioned assumptions of a polity"²². When a philosophical principle becomes a background idea, it can exercise a "seemingly incontrovertible hold on the ideas and discourse of European political economies over a long period of time in a wide range of institutional contexts" (ibid.). Such ideas can be so widely accepted that their very existence can be forgotten. They evolve through agents' unconscious use of them and end up structuring people's thoughts without them realising it. Schmidt argues that neoliberalism now constitutes the core background idea of European political economies²³.

Drawing on Gramsci, Samper et al. (2021) investigate the role of discourses in establishing this neoliberal hegemonic formation. They consider that neoliberalism has emerged as an all-encompassing and depoliticising ideology. The neoliberal hegemonic formation is a discursive operation attempting "to totalize meanings that were previously contested" (ibid.:9). Using discourse, actors draw political frontiers that exclude certain groups or issues, while at the same time denying the political character of such frontiers. Policy entrepreneurs, such as the EC, played a major role in controlling this discursive legitimation of neoliberalism. In Europe, the EC acts a community of practise denying the political and

²¹ Communities of practice can be defined as like-minded groups of practitioners bound by a shared interest in learning and applying a common practice (Adler 2008; Hajer 1995). In our example, we assume that the hegemonisation of green growth emerges from the integration of green growth within the EC's own institutional practices.

²² In the article Schmidt (2016) describes these unquestioned assumptions using a more detailed list. Background ideas have a wider meaning as they are "the deep philosophical approaches that serve to guide action, the unconscious frames or lenses through which people see the world, and/or the meaning constellations by which people make sense of the world" (:320).

²³ Schmidt's claim is aligned with the description of the European neoliberal hegemony made by Van Apeldoorn et al. (2009): "Embedded neoliberalism is here seen as a *hegemonic* project inasmuch as it seeks to advance neoliberalism through a strategy of incorporating, and ideologically neutralizing, rival projects" (:22).

antagonistic character of counter-hegemonic positions to tighten the neoliberal hegemonic formation (Samper et al. 2021; Stegemann and Ossewaarde 2018).

To sustain dominant background ideas, they sometimes need to be slightly adjusted in a way that makes them compatible with other important values, such as social-democratic principles (Schmidt 2016; Van Apeldoorn et al. 2009). Green growth could arguably be perceived as the latest reformulation of the same neoliberal hegemonic discourse. Many scholars focused on green growth (or ecological modernisation)²⁴ as a 'policy discourse' deployed to reconcile environmental protection and economic development and assessed the extent to which it had become hegemonic (Ferguson 2015; Machin 2019).

At first sight, the adoption of green growth opens a new economic paradigm as its goal "is to supersede fossil-fuel-driven 'business-as-usual' economic growth because of its ecological unsustainability" (Wanner 2015:27). The EC, through discourses constructed a new socially attractive narrative or storyline, which was progressively accepted, rearticulated, and sedimented until the support for green growth became common sense (Machin 2019). Nevertheless, the return of optimism and faith in technological progress meant that it was no longer necessary to question the basis of modern life: economic growth. Applying a neo-Gramscian perspective, Wanner (2015) argues that the green growth discourse is no more than a form of "passive revolution where neoliberal capitalism adjusts to crises arising from contradictions within itself" (:23). Such passive revolution, according to him, occurs when counter-hegemonic challenges are neutralised through concessions. This shift is a mechanism that fully maintains the hegemony of the existing capitalist order by "counteracting environmentalist demands for limits to growth" (ibid.:24). Meanwhile, the Washington consensus is protected. The growth ideal, only slightly refashioned to fit within green growth theories, has secured its hegemony²⁵.

The hegemonisation of green growth in the EU results in a post-political condition where the ecological debate is doubly depoliticised (Machin 2019).

Firstly, environmental decisions are now driven by principles of economic rationality, and politics are rendered unnecessary by the market's ability to deliver a solution: "political dissent is smoothed over by economic rationality" (ibid.:209). Market-based approaches to climate governance, which are a direct consequence of the victory of neoliberal principles appear as a "neutral solution" while the state becomes the "politicised problem" (Schmidt 2016). Although these solutions suffer from a strong lack of accountability, legitimacy and participation, the hegemony of green growth serves to "exclude and

²⁴ In this section, the two words will be considered as synonyms. It can be argued that the green growth discourse is a more recent evolution of the ecological modernisation (EM) discourse.

²⁵ Hence, the 'neoliberalising' of nature that dominated brown growth strategies is likely to continue under green growth strategies (Wanner 2015:23).

neglect adequate consideration of other ways of addressing climate change which may be equally or more effective” (Bailey et al. 2011:684).

Secondly, by creating new opportunities for growth, and claiming that everyone will benefit from climate action, the hegemonic group wins the consent of other actors while delegitimising alternative discourses (Bailey et al 2011). Once green growth is perceived as a matter of common sense, post growth discourses are automatically made much less visible: “the articulation of divergent, conflicting, and alternative trajectories of future environmental possibilities” is forestalled (Swyngedouw 2013:5). The reconciliation of the economy and the environment is “creating a hegemony that empowers and legitimises pragmatists who are willing to compromise in their search for politically viable ways forward, whilst simultaneously marginalising and disempowering the radicals who hold that such compromises will merely prolong the life of an economic system that needs deeper and more fundamental change if it is to become sustainable” (Gibbs 2009 in Bailey et al 2011). This phenomenon clearly takes place in the EU, where the green growth hegemony is enacted in a way that neutralizes opposition²⁶.

²⁶ Stegemann and Ossewaarde (2018) looked at the effects of the green growth hegemonic discourse in the EU and argued that “by enacting the discursive myth of the 'sustainable energy transformation', the EU reconciles opposite positions within the historical bloc: the myth enables the EU to harmonize the environment and the economy on the one hand and it enables the EU to reconcile the interests of a variety of energy political actors through the associated 'energy mix'” (:31).

CHAPTER 3

Research method

3.1 CDA as methodology

The work conducted by Fairclough (1992; 2012) is one of the most extensive contributions to the definition of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). However, since CDA is a transdisciplinary strand of research which can be tackled from multiple points of entry, it should be remembered that this methodology is only one among many others.

Fairclough (2012) postulates that social realities are "conceptually mediated", meaning that discourses, or how people represent, interpret, and conceptualise reality, are also part of reality. CDA also embraces the normative character of research in social sciences and evaluates rather than describes social phenomena. It starts from the assumption that social realities sometimes reduce human wellbeing and increase suffering. For example, by developing a normative critique of Thatcher's rhetoric, CDA unveil discourses' contribution the perpetuation of an unjust and inequitable socio-economic order (ibid.). But the purely normative critique is insufficient. Therefore, critical discourse analysis also explains why social reality has come to be the way it is. In other words, it helps understanding the drivers or causes of social problems.

This dissertation takes its inspiration from the four methodological steps of CDA outlined by Fairclough (ibid.). The first step identifies a 'social wrong', an aspect of social reality which is detrimental to human well-being. In this dissertation, unsustainable patterns of economic growth are regarded as the 'social wrong'. The second step identifies obstacles to addressing the social wrong by analysing a selection of texts, here Communications and speeches from EU officials, in relation to the social reality in which they are embedded. The third step evaluates whether the problem identified is "inherent to the social order, whether it can be addressed within it or it can only be addressed by changing it" (ibid.:15). With regards to the EGD, it determines if tackling environmental problems within the limits of capitalism could be sufficient or if only a profound modification of this social order is necessary. The fourth step explores possibilities to move from a negative to a positive critique by contesting the dominant discourse and replacing it by others. The last chapter will thus investigate the emergence of post-growth discourses within the EU.

3.2 The text selection process

This section presents the research design adopted to analyse the Commission's green growth discourse in the most adequate way. It consists in a qualitative text analysis of communications and speeches. While the method was built specifically for the purpose of this research, it is inspired by various CDA methodologies previously applied onto the EC's discourses or the EGD (Thomas and Turnbull 2017; Eckert and Kovalevska 2021; Samper et al. 2021).

3.2.1 *Communications*

Since discourse is both about *writing* and *speaking*, the selection process addresses these two dimensions. To examine how the Commission is *writing*, attention must be paid to Communications, which are non-legislative acts that the EC writes to present its agenda to other actors²⁷. They usually are short summaries of future policies, setting broad targets and indicating a political direction. Communications thus contrast with regulations, directives, or decisions for they have a more political character but no legally binding effect²⁸.

The selection has been conducted on the 'Advanced Search' tool from EUR-Lex (n.d.), filtering EU documents by 'institution', 'type of document', 'date', and 'keywords'. Of all the texts published by the EC, only the Communications published from December 2019, and which contained the word “green deal” were retained. The final selection is composed of ten Communications touching upon the EGD's core measures (see Annex B).

3.2.2 *Speeches from College members*

Communications express the views of the Commission as a unified body speaking with one voice. However, the EC is not a monolith but an institution composed of politicians with distinct backgrounds and sometimes diverging views. Communications will therefore be complemented with speeches from EU Commissioners. Although Commissioners are *speaking* on behalf of the EC, their interventions sometimes contain informal language and reflect personal sensitivities, thus enhancing the visibility of relevant linguistic constructions and recurrent patterns.

²⁷ Among the actors that the EC targets in Communications, the other EU institutions come first as they need to be informed about the EC's intentions. But Commissions are also addressed to the entire sphere of national and European stakeholders who might have an interest in the EGD.

²⁸ The exclusion of legally binding documents from the scope of this research aligns with the idea that power is not exercised only through concrete policies but also through words.

The selection of the most relevant speeches has been conducted on the 'Press Corner' of the Commission website (EC n.d.). The documents have been filtered by 'date', 'college member', 'document type', 'policy area', and 'keywords'. All texts have been published between December 2019 and March 2022, and among the 27 college members, four actors were retained: Ursula Von der Leyen, Frans Timmermans, Kadri Simson, and Virginijus Sinkevičius²⁹. Then, the search was restricted to the three most relevant types of statements: press releases, statement, and speeches³⁰. Regarding the choice of a given policy area, the online selection tool used the option titled 'European Green Deal' to filter all affiliated documents. Finally, selecting specific keywords such as 'growth' helped narrowing down the results obtained initially. The final selection, presented in Annex C, includes 22 speeches³¹.

It must be noted that both types of texts are interconnected. Communications mark important milestones in the implementation of the EGD, so their publication is usually followed by speeches at the occasion of press conferences on the same topic.

3.3 Tools for interpretation

The next stage consists in finding the most relevant tools to interpret these texts. Following a structure adapted from a CDA methodology (Fairclough 1992:73), a tridimensional analysis (represented in Annex D) will be performed.

3.3.1 *Speech acts*

The first step identifies *speech acts*, which represent all discursive patterns and linguistic constructions that convey a specific idea about the EGD. The analysis will be conducted using the Excel sheet in

²⁹ The choice of the two first names seems obvious since the President of the Commission and her Executive Vice-President in charge of the European Green Deal form a high-profile and media-friendly duo. They repeatedly dedicated entire speeches to the EGD and, jointly, they bear the political responsibility for its implementation. In addition to the two central protagonists, speeches from Kadri Simson, Commissioner for Energy, and Virginijus Sinkevičius, Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries, have also been included. DG Energy (ENER) and DG Environment (ENVI) belong to the Commission's 'Green Deal' cluster and embody two sectoral policies that long evolved separately and started to work in closer cooperation more recently, to jointly deliver on the EGD. Since each DG has a distinct political tradition, the comparison between these two actors can help uncover eventual contrasting views on the growth ideal within the EGD.

³⁰ Although the three types will later be referred to as *speeches*, their content and length are slightly different. Moreover, they were not all produced in the same context: some were delivered at a press conference, others in front of the EP, or even at conferences abroad.

³¹ Among the 22 speeches can be found 9 speeches from Timmermans, 7 from Von der Leyen, 3 from Simson, and 3 from Sinkevičius. While some are long, broad, and highly symbolic policy speeches (such as the traditional State of the Union address pronounced each year by the President in front of the EP), others are addressed to a narrower audience and cover a narrower scope, thus using more technical language.

Annex E, which forms a corpus of all relevant discursive practices. To navigate in an ocean of words, an effective solution consists in grouping similar *speech acts* under common titles and form sub-categories. Since many expressions and discursive strategies are repeated several times, it is necessary to collect only the most striking illustrations of the phenomenon that needs to be explained³².

3.3.2 Discourses

The second step clusters all sub-categories of discursive practices (*speech acts*) under three larger categories, representing the three *discourses* performed by the EC. It is necessary to identify common meanings shared among several sub-categories in order to understand how networks of discursive practises reinforce the same broader idea, thus contributing to the production of specific discourses about growth. For example, all strategies referring to absolute decoupling, pushing for new business models, or emphasising economic opportunities, contribute to defend existing green growth strategies.

Three types of discourses can be identified in the EGD. All discursive practices that emphasise *change* form a first type of discourse which includes all elements linking the EGD to a deep transformation of the growth paradigm. The second type of discourse, named *status quo*, is the antagonist of the first type. *Status quo* refers here to the reproduction of traditional green growth discourses, characterised by a strong attachment to GDP growth, a domination of the economic dimension of sustainability and a preservation of existing power structures. A third type of discourse, identified under the term *status quo in disguise*, can be observed when the EC conceals a broader continuation of green growth discourses behind apparent commitments to change to satisfy both the supporters of change and the defenders of status quo. This threefold structure forms the backbone of chapter 4.

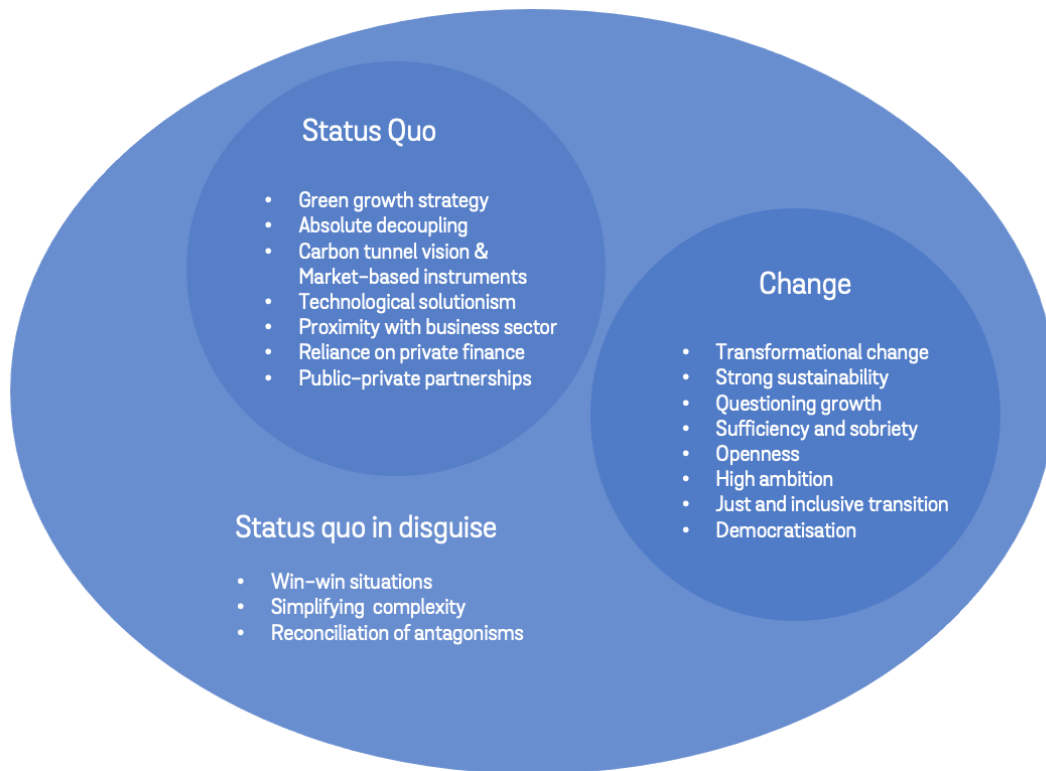
3.3.3 Narrative

The last step of the analysis evaluates how the combination of these three *discourses* lead to the emergence of a coherent *narrative* on the EGD. It synthesises the findings, looks at the interconnection between *change* and *status quo*, and articulates all three categories to answer the research question: does the EGD's transformative dimension weight more than the preservation of the green growth discourse? Finally, this last stage looks at the political intention behind the EGD and the concrete impact of the EC's narrative on the emergence of alternatives to green growth.

³² This step is the most prone to normative bias, as the selection of relevant speech acts is decided by the researcher individually. To mitigate this risk, it is essential to establish reliable categories based on objective features. In this dissertation, the sub-categories were modelled on the characteristics of green growth and degrowth discourses discussed in sub-chapters 2.1.2 and 2.1.3.

The EC's strategy works as a combination of all three discourses and can be mapped as shown on the graph below.

Figure 3: The EC's narrative as a triple discourse strategy



CHAPTER 4

Analysis

4.1 Change

The EGD is by essence disrupting and transformative. Conceptually, the pact redefines the European political landscape around environmental concerns. Practically, it is a huge political puzzle whose numerous pieces are made of individual policy proposals. It is legitimate to wonder whether, in rhetoric terms, its strength is such that the narrative produced around the EGD has the potential to overturn the dominant green growth discourse.

This part directly looks at the notion of *paradigm shift* by reviewing all the elements in the EC's discourse that depart from traditional green growth models. Yet, *change* also unfolds through other practises when the EC strengthens the environmental components of sustainability, replaces competitiveness or profit by wellbeing, embraces a wider array of issues instead of focusing on climate change exclusively, or even addresses flaws of the current capitalistic system. Finally, *change* can be embedded in measures in favour of democratisation and social justice.

4.1.1 Transformational change and paradigm shift

The easiest way to study a hypothetical paradigm shift naturally consists in analysing whether this perspective is explicitly mentioned by the EC. While it hardly uses the expression "paradigm shift", the EC refers to the isolated notion of "shift"³³ and even more to the notion of "transformation" or "transformative change" to push for far-reaching modifications of its environmental policy. Change can also be hidden behind more indirect phrases like "turning point", "transform the global narrative" or "different direction"³⁴. It must first be noted that change is deemed "necessary" and has to "happen as a matter of urgency"³⁵. For Timmermans, change "is going to happen whether we like it or not, whether we do something about it or not"³⁶. In other words, the EU is forced to face it: "there is no turning away from this transition"³⁷. Change is described as "unprecedented", "major" and "massive"³⁸. In speeches,

³³ COM n°1 'EGD' and n°10 'Growth model'

³⁴ Speech n°5 'Make-or-break' VdL; COM n°8 'Fit for 55'; Speech n°8 'COP25', Timmermans

³⁵ COM n°5 'Emissions targets'; Speech n°5 'Make-or-break', VdL

³⁶ Speeches n°8 'COP25' and n°9 'EP debate on EGD', Timmermans

³⁷ Speech n°12 'Katowice', Timmermans; COM n°1 'EGD'

³⁸ COM n°10 'Growth Model'; Speech n°9 'EP debate on EGD', Timmermans

its magnitude has almost no limits as change "encompasses the whole world"³⁹. Change "will affect everything, (...) the way we move, the way we eat, the way we produce"⁴⁰ and in that respect, "upturn the entirety of the world's economy"⁴¹. Of all Commissioners, Simson undoubtedly adopts the strongest wording, mentioning the term "revolution"⁴².

Difficulties will necessarily arise, thus forcing European actors to truly welcome change and start planning it now in order to "be masters (...) of this paradigm shift"⁴³. To do so, Europe must learn from past mistakes, it stayed inactive and had less available options to act⁴⁴. Furthermore, embracing change also implies rejecting *status quo*. Even if "backsliding into business as usual" would be faster and easier, it "just isn't an option", because "it would be wasteful and even irresponsible"⁴⁵. Building against *status quo*, the EGD itself is the "blueprint" to "make that transformation"⁴⁶.

4.1.2 Strong sustainability

This part explores how the supremacy of the economic pillar of SD is sidelined, and the two other pillars granted more importance. The EGD fully embraces sustainability and directly places its principles at the heart of the new model that is supposed to replace the old one^{47,48}. Its three pillars are also sometimes spread implicitly throughout Communications and speeches⁴⁹. For instance, in COM n°9 'Carbon Cycles', carbon, the word at the centre of the proposal, is placed at their intersection: "carbon is the atom of life, of our societies and economies".

The EGD tries to pursue a new type of sustainability. Timmermans openly rejects past approaches to SD because they have not helped achieving greater sustainability: "For too long, different policies to boost sustainability had been uncoordinated or worse: at odds with each other"⁵⁰. EC officials thus decide to adjust the way each of the three pillars are balanced, regularly moving away from economic concerns to strengthen the two others⁵¹. The EGD shall not be reduced to a mere economic project but

³⁹ Speech n°14 'Irish Summit', Timmermans

⁴⁰ Speech n°5 'Make-or-break', VdL

⁴¹ Speech n°8 'COP25'

⁴² Speech n°18 'Delivering the EGD', Simson

⁴³ In Speech n°9 'EP debate on EGD', Timmermans uses for once the term paradigm shift itself, while liking it to the necessity to embrace change swiftly.

⁴⁴ Speeches n°2 'EP debate on EGD', VdL and n°12 'Katowice', Timmermans

⁴⁵ Speeches n°8 'COP25' and n°11 'Bruegel', Timmermans

⁴⁶ Speech n°4 '2020 State of the Union', VdL

⁴⁷ Speech n°20 'CEAP', Sinkevičius

⁴⁸ For example, in Speech n°1 'Bruegel', Timmermans makes several references to sustainability and describes the EGD as "a strategy where environmental, economic and social sustainability go hand-in-hand".

⁴⁹ The three SD pillars appear clearly when Sinkevičius, in Speech n°21 'Blue Economy', defends Marine Protected Areas, for they "lead to increased biodiversity and larger fish stocks, but also to economic diversification and thriving coastal communities".

⁵⁰ Speech n°11 'Bruegel', Timmermans

⁵¹ COM n°7 'Blue economy'

turned into a "new cultural project for Europe"^{52,53}. Three times in the same speech, Timmermans excludes the economic pillar from his sustainable vision for Europe's future, using instead "healthier", "fairer", "greener", or "brighter"⁵⁴. Sustainability can thus contribute to relegate economic growth as a secondary objective and helps embedding it within socio-ecological criteria.

Wellbeing too counts among the priority objectives of the EC and illustrates how the EGD is leaning towards the social and environmental components of SD. Not only is climate action necessary for our planet to stay healthy, but it also helps achieving higher wellbeing. The EGD must therefore "combine the reduction of emissions, with measures to preserve nature, and (...) put jobs and social balance at the heart of this transformation"⁵⁵. But this transition towards wellbeing must be achieved in the long run too⁵⁶.

The EC's multiple references to the concept of "planetary boundaries", based on wellbeing instead of growth, clearly demonstrates that it embraces a model closer to that of a 'GND without growth'⁵⁷. Under this notion, environmental impacts and the EU's consumption footprint should be reduced to ensure that "the use of various natural resources does not exceed certain local, regional or global thresholds"⁵⁸. Furthermore, respecting such planetary boundaries will necessarily drive transformative changes⁵⁹. Overall, these speech acts convey a less anthropocentric view: humans are now expected to give nature "the space it needs"⁶⁰.

Finally, the EC also displays greater proximity to nature. The EGD should foster closer-to-nature practices and respect ecological principles. In contrast with usual productivist discourses in the agricultural sector, COM n°4 'Farm to Fork' calls for the inclusion of ecological practises and localism in sustainable food systems through the development of "organic farming" and "shorter supply chains". To introduce greater proximity, Timmermans also refers to nature as "Mother Earth" and attaches emotions to his argument, explaining that the planet is "fed up" while also using the pronoun *her* to personify nature^{61,62}.

⁵² Speech n°4 '2020 State of the Union, VdL

⁵³ In Speech n°21 'Blue Economy', Sinkevičius also declares that oceans value "cannot just be measured by turnover or jobs or value added" because "they also produce half of the global oxygen and are one of the main natural carbon sinks".

⁵⁴ Speech n°11 'Bruegel', Timmermans

⁵⁵ Speech n°6 'Delivering the EGD', VdL

⁵⁶ In the same speech, Von der Leyen also wishes to insist on this long-term perspective, arguing that the EU should secure the wellbeing "not only of our generation, but also of our children and of our grandchildren".

⁵⁷ In COM n°2 'CEAP', the equivalent notion of "Safe Operating Space" is also mentioned by the EC.

⁵⁸ COM n°2 'CEAP'; Speech n°15 'Delivering the EGD', Timmermans

⁵⁹ In Speech n°14 'Irish Summit', Timmermans states: "The fundamental issue we need to tackle is that we need to learn, as humanity, to live within the boundaries that our planet sets us and that means changing almost everything".

⁶⁰ COM n°3 'Biodiversity'

⁶¹ Speeches n°8 'COP25' and n°9 'EP debate on EGD', Timmermans

⁶² In his Speech n°22 'Forest strategy', Sinkevičius extends this idea and uses various metaphors to personify forests, which are given human features ("our planet's lungs") and are even said to be "the cradle of biodiversity". This conveys the idea that nature directly supports human life.

4.1.3 Questioning the existing economic model

In some cases, the EC assumes that the EGD entails such significant transformations that even the economic model on which it stands needs to be called into question. The EU generally admits that the current model "out of touch with our planet"⁶³. This movement recently accelerated as the pandemic brought "into sharper focus the planetary fragility" and exposed "how delicate life could be"⁶⁴. Timmermans, quoting Hamlet, even declares that "the time is out of joint" to express the degree of disruption caused by our collective incapacity to live in harmony with our planet⁶⁵. This model has created "a toxic cocktail that permeates our societies and our politics at all levels" and has become "untenable" as it relies "on the ever-increasing use of a dwindling set of resources" while exacerbating "social injustices"⁶⁶. Sinkevičius also openly criticises the linearity of the current *take-make-use-discard* economy⁶⁷. Thus, by pointing at the danger of "going back to status quo and favouring a brown recovery based on fossil-fuels", the EC also expresses its desire to "turn the page on fossil fuels" and reinvent its energy policy⁶⁸.

The shape of the system that should replace it, however, remains relatively undefined. Against politicians' natural tendency to compartmentalise issues should be opposed a more holistic approach to considerably improve the interplay between economic and ecological issue⁶⁹. Firstly, the "organisation of the economic and fiscal European policies needs to be reformed to integrate a stronger sustainability dimension"⁷⁰. Significant changes in "production procedures" should also help building a "climate-friendly economy" based on "nature growth"⁷¹. In this new model, growth could therefore become a secondary objective⁷². The EC rejects growth *per se* and seems ready to pursue a different kind of growth, characterised as "more caring" and "not consuming"⁷³. An even more promising avenue is opened as the EC confirms its intention to measure growth "well-being beyond GDP"⁷⁴.

⁶³ Speech n°1 'Press remarks on EGD', VdL

⁶⁴ Speech n°4 '2020 State of the Union', VdL

⁶⁵ Speech n°15 'Delivering the EGD', Timmermans

⁶⁶ Speech n°11 'Bruegel', Timmermans

⁶⁷ Speech n°20 'CEAP'

⁶⁸ Speeches n°10 'ENVI meeting' and n°15 'Delivering the EGD', Timmermans

⁶⁹ Speech n°8 'COP25', Timmermans

⁷⁰ COM n°2 'CEAP'

⁷¹ COM n°3 'Biodiversity'; Speeches n°2 'EP debate on ED' and n°5 'Make-or-break', VdL

⁷² Speeches n°4 '2020 State of the Union', VdL; n°9 'EP debate on EGD', Timmermans; and n°14 'Irish Summit', Timmermans

⁷³ Speech n°2 'EP debate on EGD', VdL

⁷⁴ COM n°2 'CEAP'

4.1.4 Sobriety and self-sufficiency

As the EGD sometimes departs from traditional discourses, does it also endorse certain features of the degrowth discourse? Since degrowth is entirely absent from the EGD, the concept can only be approached indirectly. This section looks especially at the modification of consumption patterns and the reduction of demand as they are core measures of a degrowth agenda (Parrique 2022a). In some rare cases, the EC tackles the problem of overconsumption. Unsustainable consumption patterns need to be solved at its root⁷⁵. The transition towards full circularity should ensure "that no waste is produced in the first place"⁷⁶. Now turning to food systems, the EC recognises the existence excessive meat consumption and the need to move "to a more plant-based diet with less red and processed meat"⁷⁷. The EC also adopts a bold stance on its root causes as it indirectly criticises the power of meat lobbies: "for example, marketing campaigns advertising meat at very low prices must be avoided"⁷⁸. Finally, with regards to energy consumption, Simson argues that effective climate action be "very difficult if we do not reduce the amount of energy we consume"⁷⁹.

4.1.5 Openness

The EGD is a broad roadmap that widens the scope of the issues usually discussed and "involves much more than cutting emissions"⁸⁰. The traditional carbon tunnel vision disappears as Von der Leyen explains that the EGD should mainstream environmentalism in all policy areas: "we will tackle everything from hazardous chemicals to deforestation to pollution"⁸¹. For example, the EGD fully recognises biodiversity loss as a "major threat"⁸². The climate and the biodiversity crisis overlap, creating manifold environmental consequences on issues like desertification, food security, water shortages, rising sea levels or invasive species^{83,84}. All of them are clearly identified as additional challenges for the EU and some solutions able to tackle both crises, such as organic farming and

⁷⁵ Alluding to consumption patterns, Von der Leyen says in Speech n°4 '2020 State of the Union': "We need to change how we treat nature, how we produce and consume, live and work, eat and heat, travel and transport".

⁷⁶ COM n°2 'CEAP'

⁷⁷ COM n°4 'Farm to Fork'

⁷⁸ COM n°4 'Farm to Fork'

⁷⁹ Speech n°18 'Delivering the EGD', Simson

⁸⁰ Speech n°4 '2020 State of the Union', VdL

⁸¹ Speech n°1 'Press remarks on EGD', VdL

⁸² This idea, found in COM n°7 'Blue economy', illustrates that although the EU's plan for biodiversity has its own communication (COM n°3 'Biodiversity'), biodiversity issues also permeate several other texts.

⁸³ COM n°3 'Biodiversity', n°6 'Adaptation', and n°7 'Blue economy'

⁸⁴ Recognising the multiplicity of environmental problems, current environmental problems are considered from the broader perspective of a "nature crisis" by Von der Leyen in Speech n°7 '2021 State of the Union'. This contrasts with the usual and more restrictive expression 'climate change'.

agroecology, are even raised⁸⁵. The EC also connects the EGD's external dimension with fundamental international issues that are often sidelined in global climate governance, "such as human rights, gender, and peace and security"⁸⁶. Finally, the shift from mitigation to adaptation also constitutes an interesting sign of greater openness⁸⁷. Commissioners also add their own personal touch to the EGD by raising certain issues as priorities. Timmermans grants a central role to the Renovation Wave, which he presents enthusiastically and sets as a top-priority⁸⁸. Sinkevičius also innovatively connects the blue economy to a variety of topics usually overlooked, such as education and gender equality"⁸⁹.

4.1.6 The EC's high ambition

Beyond the EGD's transformative measures, there is also something very ambitious about the EC's approach to the climate crisis. EC officials' speeches often start by highlighting the urgency, which forces the EC to act now, as recalled in the title of the introduction of COM n°6 'Adaptation'. Indeed, the current generation is the "last generation that can still act in time" and the 2020s are a "make-or-break decade"⁹⁰. What convinces the EC that "it is high time to act"⁹¹ is the acceleration of extreme weather events, which make climate change clearly visible to everyone. Climate change is happening locally (in Greenland, on the Mont Blanc, or in Romania), but also across Europe, and even globally⁹². Moreover, EC officials consider climate action as a matter of "survival for humanity"⁹³. While the planet "was able to exist for millennia without human beings" and "will be able to exist for millennia", it will soon or later "get rid of us, because we do too much harm"⁹⁴. The EGD is absolutely vital if we want to "continue to exist as human beings"⁹⁵. Finally, EC officials point at the enormous cost of inaction to emphasise urgency. Timmermans appeals to "the moral cost of not acting" as, only last year, "400,000 people in Europe died premature deaths because of poor air quality"⁹⁶. In a nutshell, the nature crisis should become Europe's number one concern: "There is no more urgent need for acceleration than when it comes to the future of our fragile planet"⁹⁷.

⁸⁵ COM n°4 'Farm to Fork'

⁸⁶ COM n°4 'Farm to Fork'

⁸⁷ COM n°6 'Adaptation'

⁸⁸ In Speech n°13 'Climate Neutral', Timmermans, who discusses new Fit for 55 proposals among which the Renovation Wave, enthusiastically declares: "I am really excited about this" before giving further detail about building renovations.

⁸⁹ Speech n°21 'Blue economy', Sinkevičius

⁹⁰ COM n°8 'Fit for 55'

⁹¹ Speech n°3 'Climate Law', VdL

⁹² Speeches n°3 'Climate Law and n°4 '2020 State of the Union', VdL

⁹³ Speech n°8 'COP25', Timmermans

⁹⁴ Speech n°9 'EP debate on EGD', Timmermans

⁹⁵ Speech n°9 'EP debate on EGD', Timmermans

⁹⁶ Speech n°8 'COP25', Timmermans

⁹⁷ Speech n°4 '2020 State of the Union', VdL

Faced with these horrifying facts, the EC also wishes to follow the scientific guidelines provided by the IPCC⁹⁸ and uses itself a number of crucial scientific concepts such as the notion of "tipping points"⁹⁹. Since climate change is man-made, policymakers now bear a huge responsibility to fight it¹⁰⁰. With such a compelling responsibility, climate action becomes "an obligation" for the EU¹⁰¹. Many elements in the EC's rhetoric also appeal to the moral values of its audience. For instance, Timmermans directly addresses the EP to express this feeling of responsibility: "you do not have the luxury to ignore the facts"¹⁰². Europe has no other choice but showing leadership¹⁰³. Therefore, the EC stands "ready to do more" and "act fast" in order to lead by example and be "at the forefront" of global climate action¹⁰⁴. Hence, the EGD and especially its legislative package Fit for 55 should "[cement] the EU's global leadership"¹⁰⁵. A last sign of heightened ambition is the EGD's forward-looking nature. Assuming that "climate neutrality is our European destiny", the EC wishes to prepare the future of the continent¹⁰⁶. And with climate neutrality as main target, the EGD is exactly what can "propel Europe forward to the world of tomorrow"¹⁰⁷.

But how will the EC approach policymaking to put these intentions into practise? Both the EGD's magnitude and method are supposed to help achieving higher ambitions, as the EC will put forward a "whole-of-government approach"¹⁰⁸. Concerning environmental rules, the EU will have to "introduce more stringent (...) standards" and fully comply with the principles of "zero-tolerance" and "zero-pollution"¹⁰⁹. The EC will especially try to turn its strong "political aspiration" into a "binding legal obligation"^{110,111}. This project is the spirit of the Climate Law, designed to jump from paper to practise swiftly and create an "enabling framework to bring the ambition to life"¹¹².

⁹⁸ Speech n°3 'Climate Law', VdL Speech n°7 '2021 State of the Union', VdL

⁹⁹ Speech n°10 'ENVI Meeting', Timmermans

¹⁰⁰ Part of Von der Leyen's Speech n°3 'Climate Law' revolves around the EC's sense of responsibility: "Climate change is caused by us, so in other words, it is up to us to make the turnaround".

¹⁰¹ Speeches n°4 'State of the Union', VdL and n°15 'Delivering the EGD', Timmermans

¹⁰² Speech n°9 'EP debate on EGD', Timmermans

¹⁰³ COM n°6 'Adaptation'

¹⁰⁴ COM n°8 'Fit for 55'; Speeches n°7 '2021 State of the Union', VdL and n°10 'ENVI meeting', Timmermans

¹⁰⁵ COM n°8 'Fit for 55'

¹⁰⁶ Speech n°3 'Climate Law', VdL

¹⁰⁷ Speech n°4 '2020 State of the Union', VdL

¹⁰⁸ Speech n°6 'Delivering the EGD', VdL

¹⁰⁹ Speech n°14 'Irish Summit', Timmermans; COM n°2 'CEAP' and n°3 'Biodiversity'

¹¹⁰ Speech n°3 'Climate Law' and n°6 'Delivering the EGD', VdL

¹¹¹ In addition, the EU pledges to stay loyal to its "green oath", by fully aligning its legal framework with its ambitious rhetoric and mainstreaming the do no harm principle in EU law.

¹¹² COM n°1 'EGD'; Speech n°12 'Katowice', Timmermans

4.1.7 Socially just and inclusive transition

The most innovative approach pursued by the EGD is its the social component, as the green deal is meant to trigger a socially just and inclusive transition. Learning from the failures of past experiences, which were unable to "distribute the benefits of our growth fairly" and created greater "social injustices"¹¹³, the Commission decided to "put fairness at the heart of its policies"¹¹⁴. In the EGD, the three key terms just, inclusive and fair are sometimes enacted in a same sentence¹¹⁵. The new plan even dares to "tackle inequities" and the EC seeks to promotes inclusiveness to make sure that "current crises do not permanently widen injustices"¹¹⁶.

The ideal of inclusiveness is often conditioned to the ability to bring all citizens on board. It is of paramount importance for the EC to "convince everybody to go down this path" and make "sure that no one is left behind"¹¹⁷. The survival of the EGD itself is conditioned to inclusiveness, as this strategy "will either be working for all and be just, or it will not work at all"¹¹⁸.

Yet, the EC alternates between a wider and a more restricted audience. Specific attention should be paid to the most vulnerable groups as well as the most affected areas¹¹⁹, because without fairness, the transition would create "a small group of incredible winners and a huge group of incredible losers"¹²⁰. Thus, the EGD should specifically be directed towards citizens living in rural areas¹²¹ and specific regions dependent on fossil fuel industries¹²². Finally, with regards to EU Member States (MS), it needs to "take different starting points into account, and still make sure everyone carries their fair share"¹²³. The unequal distribution of risks arising from the green transition calls for greater solidarity "across and within Member States" but also towards developing countries¹²⁴. Solidarity is therefore repeatedly mentioned as an "imperative" and as a "defining principle" for EU's actions¹²⁵.

¹¹³ Speech n°11 'Bruegel', Timmermans

¹¹⁴ COM n°10 'Growth model'

¹¹⁵ COM n°3 'Biodiversity'

¹¹⁶ Speech n°11 'Bruegel', Timmermans

¹¹⁷ Speeches n°1 'Press remarks on EGD'; n°3 'Climate Law', VdL

¹¹⁸ Speech n°1 'Press remarks on EGD', VdL

¹¹⁹ According to COM n°6 'Adaptation', the adverse consequences of an uncontrolled transition include, among others, "job losses, issues of gender inequality, social marginalisation". To take a concrete example from Timmermans' Speech n°16 'Energy proposals', unfair energy policies could have a "disproportionate impact on vulnerable households".

¹²⁰ Speech n°8 'COP25', Timmermans

¹²¹ COM n°4 'Farm to Fork'

¹²² Speech n°12 'Katowice', Timmermans

¹²³ Speech n°15 'Delivering the EGD', Timmermans

¹²⁴ COM n°6 'Adaptation'; Speech n°14 'Irish Summit', Timmermans

¹²⁵ Speech n°11 'Bruegel', Timmermans; COM n°8 'Fit for 55'

The shift towards social justice is exemplified by the Just Transition Mechanism (JTM), whose rhetorical foundations are embedded in the ideal of inclusiveness and innovatively articulated with other sustainability dimensions (Gaventa 2019; Ossewaarde and Ossewaarde-Lowtoo 2020). The JTM is described as a tool to support inclusive change in "the regions that have a bigger and more costly change to make"¹²⁶. In the words of Timmermans, it is stated as the EC's "top priority"^{127,128}.

4.1.8 Democratisation and the role of citizens

The desire to actively include citizens also goes hand-in-hand with a renewed democratic project that encourages citizens to participate in decision-making processes. The concept of democratisation itself is absent, but the democratic ideal promoted by the EC revolves around citizens, said to be the "driving force of the transition"¹²⁹.

To assert its democratic legitimacy, the EC refers to the huge proportion of Europeans concerned with climate change and considers that climate ambition matches their desires¹³⁰. In particular, the EC focuses on younger and future generations, perceived as "agents of change". As more young people "call on governments and the EU to act decisively and without delay to protect the climate and environment for next generations", their role is becoming more central¹³¹. Younger generations are one of Von der Leyen's main motivations because they "push the EC to go further and faster to tackle the climate crisis"^{132,133}. Timmermans often includes himself and the EC in a collective *we* that represents the current generation of policymakers, arguing for instance that *we* are responsible "before our kids" and "accountable to them"^{134,135}. For Von der Leyen, this intergenerational mission is of utmost importance: "there is no greater and no more noble task than that"¹³⁶.

Besides young people, it is essential that all citizens benefit from the green transition. The EC should safeguard their prosperity while protecting them from potential unfair effects. And not only should the

¹²⁶ Speech n°4 '2020 State of the Union, VdL

¹²⁷ Speech n°12 'Katowice', Timmermans

¹²⁸ Other instruments, like the Social Climate Fund whose goal is to "support income" and "cut bills for vulnerable households and small businesses", also go hand-in-hand with the JTM as reminded by Von der Leyen in Speech n°6 'Delivering the EGD'.

¹²⁹ COM n°1 'EGD'

¹³⁰ COM n°5 'Emissions targets' and n°6 'Adaptation'

¹³¹ COM n°8 'Fit for 55'

¹³² Speech n°6 'Delivering the EGD', VdL

¹³³ Among all these sources of inspiration, Greta Thunberg, who "speaks for many of her generation", is specifically mentioned as an inspirational guide for the youth by Von der Leyen in Speech n°3 'Climate Law'.

¹³⁴ Speeches n°9 'EP debate on EGD' and n°11 'Bruegel', Timmermans

¹³⁵ In Speeches n°10 'ENVI meeting' and n°15 'Delivering the EGD', Timmermans follows the same logic: *we* should act for *them*, "so that there will be jobs for our kids, sustainable jobs"¹³⁵. But if *we* postpone climate action "we would fail our children and our grandchildren", and *we* would "abandon" them "to a future that would look very bleak".

¹³⁶ Speech n°5 'Make-or-break', VdL

EGD protect citizens, but "it must unite all groups and sectors around a common vision"^{137,138}. In other words, Europe should work "together, as a Union" towards the implementation of the EGD¹³⁹.

Beyond mere inclusiveness, the EGD also intends to allow active citizen participation and seeks to "empower individual citizens"¹⁴⁰. Recognising that their role should be active and not passive, Von der Leyen subscribes to this rhetoric¹⁴¹. The active modes of participation promoted by the EC should support both "citizen engagement" and "grassroot initiatives"¹⁴².

EU governance must be made less technocratic and become more "open to people"¹⁴³, essentially through public consultations and debates^{144,145}. But consultations remain a very conventional instrument, so the EGD will also establish more innovative citizen dialogues and assemblies as part of the Climate Pact¹⁴⁶. On top of such regular dialogues, the EGD will become a topic for the "discussion on the future of Europe"¹⁴⁷. Finally, the EU will also need to improve transparency and access to justice on environmental matters through the Aarhus Convention¹⁴⁸. If the EGD constitutes a genuine attempt to build a democratic experience in cooperation with citizens, democracy should still be fostered within the EU polity itself. Therefore, the EC wants to ensure that the EP "has a leading role"¹⁴⁹.

4.2 Status quo

Whereas this first part has proven the existence of a strong transformative dimension in the EGD, the EC also develops an alternative discourse which aims at preventing changes from undermining the existing economic model. Here, *status quo* is not a label for conservatism but rather a sign of rhetorical continuity vis à vis the growth model promoted in Europe up until now. In this part, what is portrayed

¹³⁷ COM n°7 'Blue economy'

¹³⁸ In addition, democratic participation and inclusion of minorities or vulnerable groups are intertwined: 'there should be an inclusive approach with participation of all stakeholders, including women, youth, civil society, local authorities, the private sector, academia and scientific institutions.' – COM n°3 'Biodiversity'

¹³⁹ Speech n°2 'EP debate on EGD', VdL

¹⁴⁰ COM n°6 'Adaptation'

¹⁴¹ In Speech n°2 'EP debate on EGD', Von der Leyen applies the rhetoric of democratisation to the education sector: 'Let us work with teachers and educators, because our children are not passive spectators. They are very active players in this endeavour'.

¹⁴² COM n°6 'Adaptation'; Speech n°22, 'Forest strategy', Sinkevičius

¹⁴³ Speech n°8 'COP25', Timmermans

¹⁴⁴ COM n°4 'Farm to Fork' and n°7 'Blue economy'

¹⁴⁵ Furthermore, such consultation processes should not remain locked within European institutions, and need to expand to "national, regional and local assemblies", according to COM n°4 'Farm to Fork'.

¹⁴⁶ COM n°1 'EGD' and n°8 'Fit for 55'

¹⁴⁷ COM n°2 'CEAP' and n°5 'Emissions targets'

¹⁴⁸ COM n°3 'Biodiversity'

¹⁴⁹ Speech n°9 'EP debate on EGD', Timmermans

In addition, the EGD can only work democratically if collaboration is successfully established 'across different levels of government and across party lines', as reminded by Timmermans in Speech n°12 'Katowice'.

as *status quo* is no more than the set of discursive practises that supports green growth as an optimal strategy. The discussion begins with an analysis of the perceived role of economic growth and the EC's intention to make it greener. It then examines the EC's assumption that absolute decoupling can be achieved swiftly and at a large scale. To achieve this, the EC's green growth paradigm supports the development of business-friendly solutions and market-based instruments strengthening competitiveness. The EU's unwavering faith in technological progress also plays a pivotal role in securing *status quo*. Finally, the omnipotence of the private sector leads to an increased reliance on private funding and the creation of public-private partnerships.

4.2.1 The EGD as a green growth strategy

Before digging deeper into more tangential elements, the analysis starts with explicit references to economic growth. The growth objective is present in all Communications, either directly, when the EGD is referred to as "a new, sustainable and inclusive growth strategy"¹⁵⁰, or more implicitly, when environmental goals are subjected to the growth imperative¹⁵¹.

Overall, the growth ideal is far more present in the three broader Communications dealing with general environmental objectives¹⁵² than in those addressing specific policy areas. Growth thus remains in the background, as a principle guiding the overall implementation rather than as a criterion to be applied for each measure. Moreover, by repeatedly associating the term "future" or "long-term" to growth, it even appears as an ultimate objective that needs to be projected beyond short-term concerns¹⁵³. In their speeches, EC officials promote a renewed and original growth model, that "gives more back than it takes away"¹⁵⁴. Yet, it is in many ways identical to the existing green growth model since it should help building the "low-carbon and resource-efficient economy of the future", where green sectors have primacy over brown ones¹⁵⁵. This green growth discourse is well articulated with specific policies such as the Renovation Wave¹⁵⁶, the CEAP¹⁵⁷, or the Forest Strategy¹⁵⁸.

¹⁵⁰ COM n°1 'EGD' and n°4 'Farm to Fork'

¹⁵¹ For instance, what motivates the preservation of forests in COM n°3 'Biodiversity' is the need to "support a more resilient economy" and provide a "major economic boost" for specific sectors. Twice in COM n°5 'Emissions Targets', it is also argued that an "increased climate ambition (...) can have positive impacts on GDP".

¹⁵² COM n°1 'EGD', n°5 'Emissions Targets', and n°8 'Fit for 55'

¹⁵³ Unsurprisingly, COM n°10 'Growth Strategy' displays the most intense concentration of occurrences for the term growth. In this Communication more than in the others, growth offers a vision of the Union's future.

¹⁵⁴ Speech n°1, 'EP debate on EGD', VdL

¹⁵⁵ Speech n°17 'Climate Neutral', Simson

¹⁵⁶ Simson, in Speech n°19 'Energy proposals', explains for instance that "improving our buildings also drives green growth".

¹⁵⁷ In Speech n°20 'CEAP', Sinkevičius considers the CEAP as the "economic heart of the Green Deal", as circularity is expected to "strengthen the immunity of our economy".

¹⁵⁸ Sinkevičius again, in Speech n°22 'Forest Strategy', emphasises that "healthy and resilient forests are key to (...) securing sustainable growth".

The first word in 'green growth' is of paramount importance too, as *green* has become a holophrastic term which now encompasses a complex of ideas. Intense variations in the use of the word and its equivalents such as "greening" or "greener" can be noted¹⁵⁹. "Green" is often put next to "transition" or "recovery", thus highlighting a conceptual shift whereby all large-scale transformations happening at EU level should now become green¹⁶⁰. Moreover, traditional green growth objectives appear when central elements of the capitalistic system such as "markets", "investments", "bonds", "recovery" or "finance" are to be made greener¹⁶¹. While green growth itself is rarely mentioned, it has been replaced by the broader notion of "green economy", whose meaning remains ambiguous¹⁶². In COM n°5 'Emissions targets' this goal is bluntly exposed: "the greening of our economy", "a modern and green economy", "modernisation towards a green economy". Repeated references to the green economy intend to demonstrate how environmental principles are now better integrated into existing economic logics. However, by implying that the same economic processes can just be made greener, the EC perpetuates similar patterns with minimal adjustments, thus securing *status quo* (Fairclough and Fairclough 2012:7).

4.2.2 *Achieving absolute decoupling*

Among all subcategories, the one on decoupling covers the fewest but also the most meaningful contributions. For the EC, achieving absolute decoupling is deemed feasible since it happens in Europe already¹⁶³. Timmermans exhibits a similar reasoning: "I think we're one of the very few places in the world where this has been demonstrated"¹⁶⁴. In the long run, GDP should not only be decoupled from GHG emissions but also from resource use¹⁶⁵. On top of references to past achievements, the EC thus claims that future decoupling plans are backed by scientific data¹⁶⁶. Decoupling sometimes appears as a general guideline, as it must be achieved in full compatibility with other EGD policies¹⁶⁷.

The argument is also conveyed in a more pervasive way when the EC suggests that the EGD can "reconcile economic activities with nature growth"¹⁶⁸. In the EC's vision, our economies are not

¹⁵⁹ In COM n°3 'Biodiversity' the word appears massively (32 times), while it is only present in three sentences within Communication n°9 'Carbon Cycles'.

¹⁶⁰ Similarly other political concepts such as "alliances", "initiatives", "priorities" or even "claims" will be green under the EGD.

¹⁶¹ Speeches n°5 'Make-or-break', VdL; n°19 'Energy Proposals', Simson; and n°20 'CEAP', Sinkevičius

¹⁶² As recalled by Ferguson (2015): "The institutional embrace of the green economy agenda clearly indicates a move to some extent away from conventional growth. However, it does not as yet presage a more fundamental shift towards a post-growth economy" (:24).

¹⁶³ In COM n°8 'Fit for 55', it is mentioned for instance that the economy grew "by over 62% since 1990 with emissions falling by 24% over the same period, thus clearly decoupling growth from CO2 emissions".

¹⁶⁴ Speech n°14 'Irish Summit'

¹⁶⁵ COM n°2 'CEAP'

¹⁶⁶ COM n°5 'Emissions targets'

¹⁶⁷ Speech n°20 'CEAP', Sinkevičius

¹⁶⁸ COM n°2 'CEAP'

inherently bad for the environment¹⁶⁹, so presenting the economy and the environment as antithetical seems "outdated". Instead, both notions are now "intrinsically linked". Thus, arguments stressing potential limits to growth can be ignored by the defenders of decoupling. The green growth discourse has historically been built on the belief that absolute decoupling could be achieved (Hickel and Kallis 2020). The EC, by presenting such strategy as "the only way ahead", decided to stick to this tradition¹⁷⁰.

4.2.3 Carbon tunnel vision and market-based instruments

Recent pledges to reach carbon neutrality gave energy policies a prominent position among other environmental issues. Despite their multidimensionality, decarbonisation strategies can leave aside the interconnected nature of environmental problems. The EU gets trapped in a carbon tunnel vision¹⁷¹ and tends to overlook other issues such as poverty, overconsumption, or biodiversity loss. In the EGD, all proposals eventually pursue the same goal: lowering the amount of CO₂ emissions¹⁷². This carbon tunnel vision is also exemplified by the great importance voluntarily attributed to energy policies, "as this sector has the highest potential for delivering reductions"¹⁷³.

Historically, the EC mainly promoted emissions reductions through carbon pricing mechanisms¹⁷⁴. COM n°5 'Emissions targets' adequately refers to the upcoming expansion of the ETS as the core measure to "deliver in an economically efficient manner an increased climate ambition of 55% greenhouse gas emissions reductions". The ETS is even perceived as the "center to all our efforts"¹⁷⁵. To justify an increased role, EC discourses seek to demonstrate its effectiveness: "Our existing Emissions Trading System has already helped significantly to reduce emissions in industry and in power generation"¹⁷⁶. More generally, all forms of environmental taxation are deemed necessary because "emission of CO₂ must have a price"^{177,178}. The defence of carbon markets is a deliberate choice, and so is the EGD's reliance on market-based tools: "We chose carbon pricing as a clear guiding and market-

¹⁶⁹ The EC asserts in COM n°3 'Biodiversity' that "Industry and business have an impact on nature, but they also produce the important innovations, partnerships and expertise that can help address biodiversity loss".

¹⁷⁰ Speech n°20 'CEAP', Sinkevičius

¹⁷¹ The excessive focus on carbon emissions has been illustrated under the concept of carbon tunnel by Jan Konietzko (Jensen 2021).

¹⁷² COM n°5 'Emissions targets' and n°8 'Fit for 55'; Speech n°3, VdL

¹⁷³ Speech n°16 'Energy proposals', Timmermans

¹⁷⁴ As recalled in sub-chapter 2.2, the Emissions Trading System (ETS) launched in 2005, was rapidly perceived as the EU's flagship policy (Bailey et al. 2011; Dupont et al. 2020).

¹⁷⁵ Speech n°15 'Delivering the EGD', Timmermans

¹⁷⁶ Speech n°6 'Delivering the EGD', VdL

¹⁷⁷ Speech n°6 'Delivering the EGD', VdL

¹⁷⁸ On top of the ETS, the EC also intends to put a price on carbon through other means, for example through the implementation of a Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) to avoid carbon leakage. This project is mentioned in COM n°8 'Fit for 55'.

based instrument with a social compensation"¹⁷⁹. Finally, the EU's carbon toolbox is complemented by the implementation of Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) strategies¹⁸⁰. Upscaling CCS and mainstreaming carbon farming initiatives is said to be "indispensable to climate neutrality"¹⁸¹. Since the EU should at the same time put a price on carbon and put a premium on decarbonising, actors implementing carbon farming will be rewarded economically¹⁸².

Decarbonisation must also be conducted in a "cost-effective" manner and support "modernisation" objectives¹⁸³. Market-based solutions to reduce emissions are therefore presented as the way forward to ensure economic prosperity. Economic players can save money by adjusting to environmental objectives: "the cleaner their fuels, the less they pay"¹⁸⁴. All potential drawbacks of this strategy are eclipsed by the market advantages generated: "It gives a price signal to industry to switch to cleaner production, it drives innovation, and it generates revenues for redistribution and reinvestment"¹⁸⁵. Although the EU is committed to correct market failures, it aligns with green growth discourses as environmental regulation adjusts to the functioning of markets. This idea is embedded in a broader rhetoric of commodification whereby nature is being given a price (Stuart et al. 2019). When referring to "ecosystem services" or "natural capital", the EC indirectly attributes a value to nature and measures the success of its environmental policy through money¹⁸⁶.

The EC regularly invokes carbon-related instruments as a way to address other sustainability issues such as energy poverty and mobility challenges for the vulnerable¹⁸⁷. But as long as this low-carbon discourse serve as primary justification for the EGD, its holistic essence loses in strength.

4.2.4 Technological solutionism

Technological solutionism is a typical green growth strategy that relies on technological progress to achieve environmental objectives (Ossewaarde and Ossewaarde-Lowtoo 2020). For the EC, innovative technologies such as smart grids, hydrogen networks and carbon removals "are critical to achieve the objectives of the European Green Deal"¹⁸⁸. Technologies are repeatedly said to be enabler of a green

¹⁷⁹ Speech n°6 'Delivering the EGD', VdL

¹⁸⁰ Besides COM n°9 'Carbon cycles', which is dedicated to this goal, the willingness to develop carbon farming is also mentioned over 10 times in COM n°2 'CEAP' and repeated in COM n°4 'Farm to Fork' where carbon markets and carbon capture go hand-in-hand.

¹⁸¹ COM n°9 'Carbon cycles'

¹⁸² Speech n°15 'Delivering the EGD', Timmermans

¹⁸³ COM n°1 'EGD'

¹⁸⁴ Following the quote extracted from Timmermans' Speech n°15 'Delivering the EGD', environmental protection is once again embedded in an economic logic. Thus, market solutions will be voluntarily embraced by economic players, as reminded in COM n°9 'Carbon cycles'.

¹⁸⁵ COM n°9 'Carbon cycles'

¹⁸⁶ COM n°3 'Biodiversity' and n°7 'Blue economy'

¹⁸⁷ COM n°8 'Fit for 55'

¹⁸⁸ COM n°1 'EGD and n°9 'Carbon Cycles'

transition, which, if fully exploited, can contribute to "build a healthier, greener society"¹⁸⁹. They occupy a pivotal role in articulating the dual green and digital transitions, as they help achieving both simultaneously¹⁹⁰. This digital-green nexus is pushed at the extreme in COM n°7 'Blue economy' as the EGD should improve the "digitalisation of the ocean".

Technological development should not remain uncontrolled, and only "low-carbon", "clean", or "green" technologies should be upscaled^{191,192}. Such innovative technologies have potential in greening traditionally polluting sector such as fisheries or tourism¹⁹³. To convince its audience, the EC therefore displays recent successful example of low-carbon technologies, arguing that this model is already "outperforming the conventional energy technologies"¹⁹⁴. Emphasis is generally placed on "less mature" innovations, whose costs should be brought down and market-entries accelerated¹⁹⁵. Nevertheless, green technologies ultimately aim at preserving existing lifestyles¹⁹⁶. Technological progress should first and foremost happen in a cost-efficient way: the EU must "develop new technologies and ensure their costs come down within a time frame where we can still benefit from them"¹⁹⁷. It is even portrayed as a pillar of the future growth model: technologies "will enable the green transformation and EU's future growth"¹⁹⁸. Reliance on technological progress is thus necessary and inevitable¹⁹⁹.

4.2.5 Proximity with the business sector

For the EC, it is its own duty to provide institutional clarity to businesses, because private actors are "ready" and "willing to adjust"²⁰⁰ but need protection to achieve sufficient change²⁰¹. Specific attention should be paid to the conditions applied on SMEs, who have "a huge part to play in this" transformation²⁰². The EC's responsibility towards the industry also expands to the issue of institutional clarity. Whether framed as offering "clear rules", "transparency", "rigor", or "predictability", the EGD

¹⁸⁹ Speeches n°4 '2020 State of the Union' and n°5 'Make-or-break', VdL

¹⁹⁰ Speeches n° 2 'EP Debate on EGD', VdL and n°10 'ENVI Meeting', Timmermans

¹⁹¹ COM n°5 'Emissions targets' and n°9 'Carbon cycles'

¹⁹² Both in COM n°4 'Farm to Fork' and n°7 'Blue Economy', the EC introduces the key-term 'biotechnology', using the prefix *bio-* which means *life* to bridge the gap between natural sciences and engineering, thus promoting technologies inspired from the functioning of natural ecosystems.

¹⁹³ COM n°7 'Blue Economy'

¹⁹⁴ Speeches n°4 '2020 State of the Union', VdL and n°17 'Climate Neutral', Simson

¹⁹⁵ COM n°7 'Blue Economy'

¹⁹⁶ Speech n°7 '2021 State of the Union', VdL

¹⁹⁷ Speech n°11 'Bruegel', Timmermans

¹⁹⁸ COM n°10 'Growth Model'

¹⁹⁹ COM n°5 'Emissions targets'

²⁰⁰ Speeches n°4 '2020 State of the Union', VdL and n°8 'COP25', Timmermans

²⁰¹ Speeches n°3 'Climate Law', VdL; n°4 '2020 State of the Union', VdL and n°11 'Bruegel', Timmermans

²⁰² Speech n°8 'COP25'

is always projected as a forward-looking regulatory framework²⁰³. The reasons behind this choice are simple: "that is what the market and investors are asking for". Without certainty, "businesses will simply wait and not invest"²⁰⁴.

Furthermore, all EGD's policies are designed to foster innovation²⁰⁵. Climate and innovation policies are mutually reinforcing as effective environmental measures spur innovation, which in turns helps creating economic dynamism. Von der Leyen portrays Europe as a "continent of innovators" and "of pioneers and entrepreneurs"²⁰⁶. Using cheerful vocabulary, she even describes the EU's "ideas", "ingenuity" and "innovative power" as "the most precious renewable resource in the world"²⁰⁷. The EGD creates momentum to scale-up this entrepreneurial spirit: as new low-carbon projects "are finally becoming reality", Europe should further invest in its "potential for innovation" to maximise economic benefits²⁰⁸.

Then, an economically healthy EGD should favour the emergence of new business models²⁰⁹. Various speech acts assimilate its announcement to the launch of a new business project: the EU is meant to become a "frontrunner", which needs to "kick-start" carbon removals and "get the best projects to be upscaled"²¹⁰. With this entrepreneurial speech or political marketing strategy, the EU becomes a start-up selling the EGD as its last product.

Directly built on the interests of the business sector, the EGD's primary objective clearly remains economic development²¹¹. The threefold objective to support technology, innovation, and new business strategies is key to make the EGD not only environmentally friendly but also economically sustainable²¹². Europe wants to be in the position to claim "leadership in the markets of tomorrow", and thus positions competitiveness as "the central goal" of the EGD, together with fighting climate change²¹³. To do so, the EC intends to bring costs down and improve cost-effectiveness, in particular with regards to the development of renewable energy sources²¹⁴. Then, the EC should establish relevant economic incentives for consumers, producers, and innovators to choose clean technologies²¹⁵. Finally, the EU's

²⁰³ Speeches n°2 'EP debate on EGD', VdL; n°3 'Climate Law', VdL; n°8 'COP25', Timmermans; and n°11 'Bruegel', Timmermans

²⁰⁴ Speech n°11 'Bruegel', Timmermans

²⁰⁵ COM n°1 'EGD' and n°6 'Adaptation'; Speech n°15 'Delivering the EGD', Timmermans

²⁰⁶ Speech 3 'Climate Law' and n°6 'Delivering the EGD', VdL

²⁰⁷ Speech n°6 'Delivering the EGD', VdL

²⁰⁸ Speeches n°2 'EP debate on EGD', VdL and n°12, 'Katowice', Timmermans

²⁰⁹ COM n°10 'Growth model'; Speech n°6 'Delivering the EGD', VdL

²¹⁰ Speech n°1 'Press remarks on EGD', VdL; COM n°9 'Carbon cycles'; Speech n°13 'Climate Neutral', Timmermans

²¹¹ COM n°5 'Emissions targets'; Speech n°4 '2020 State of the Union', VdL

²¹² Speech n°15 'Delivering the EGD', Timmermans

²¹³ Speech n°5, VdL and n°11 'Bruegel', Timmermans

²¹⁴ For both Timmermans (Speech n°16 'Energy proposals') T and Simson (Speech n°17 'Climate Neutral'), speaking respectively of hydrogen and methane, cutting costs, and establishing competitive green markets contributes to protect the environment while allowing Europe to be economically prosperous.

²¹⁵ Speech n°6 'Delivering the EGD', VdL

longstanding project of market liberalisation must continue, since green products should see their "cross-border tariffs" removed²¹⁶.

Overall, it can be argued that the EU's rhetoric is deeply rooted in the ideal of continued growth²¹⁷. The EGD truly acts as the EC's "growth and competitiveness strategy"²¹⁸.

4.2.6 Reliance on private finance

In green growth discourses, funding dedicated to the ecological transition mainly originates from the private sector (Samper et al. 2021). The EGD innovated by suggesting unprecedented levels of public investments which will be raised through the Multi Financial Framework (MFF), the NextGenerationEU recovery plan, and support from the EIB²¹⁹. By rebooting its own investment policy following green criteria, the EU wants to take "green financing to the next level"²²⁰. Yet, this financial strategy is aligned with previous one for it relies primarily on private investors. Von der Leyen directly calls for an "investment revolution that goes well beyond the public sector to catch the green opportunities of the 2020s"²²¹. The new financial framework should be established "in cooperation with private and public financial institutions"^{222,223}. Nevertheless, this complementarity rests on an unequal contribution, as the final objective is minimising the use of public funds to respect healthy public finances while maximising the trigger effect on private investments²²⁴. A sustainable financial model would rest primarily on private investments and then be complemented by a targeted use of public funds²²⁵. The logic of economic growth eventually determines the EC's approach to the preferred investment model: "successful debt reduction strategies should focus on (...) promoting growth"²²⁶.

One final element highlighting continuity is the EC's conception of finance. According to Timmermans, "finance used to be the problem [but] in the 2020 crises, finance can help us find the solution"²²⁷. The EC's position strengthens the role of financial capitalism in advancing environmental solutions through

²¹⁶ Speech n°11 'Bruegel', Timmermans

²¹⁷ COM n°8 'Fit for 55'

²¹⁸ COM n°8 'Fit for 55'

²¹⁹ Speech n°5 'Make-or-break', VdL

²²⁰ Speech n°4 '2020 State of the Union', VdL

²²¹ Speech n°5 'Make-or-break', VdL

²²² COM n°7 'Blue economy'

²²³ A relevant example is given by Timmermans in Speech n°12 'Katowice', when he mentions that public-private cooperation is enshrined in the structure of the Just Transition Mechanism through its second and third pillars, dedicated to the delivery of affordable credits for private investors and the creation of a new public sector loan facility.

²²⁴ COM n°5 'Emissions targets' and n°9 'Carbon Cycles'

²²⁵ Indeed, public spending should never consist in "throwing money out of the window" but needs to "crowd in" private investments", as reminded in COM n°10 'Growth Model' and Speech n°16 'Energy Proposals' (Timmermans).

²²⁶ COM n°10 'Growth model'

²²⁷ Speech n°11 'Bruegel', Timmermans

green investments. Its sensitivity to the demands expressed by private investors is fully consistent with a green growth strategy²²⁸.

4.2.7 Public-private partnerships

Directly connected to the previous category, the strength of public-private partnerships also displays elements from the traditional green growth discourse. Discourse analysis confirms that the power of governmental authorities is counterbalanced by the stronger role granted to private actors as the public and private sectors work in tandem on issues as diverse as data sharing, finance, or carbon farming initiatives. The EC's construction of sentences usually brings together "public authorities" and "private bodies"²²⁹, and COM n°6 'Adaptation' even repeatedly mentions the concrete term "public-private partnerships". As the EC's vision is reduced to the interplay between these two types of actors, the third sector - which usually comprises NGOs, community associations or cooperatives – is eclipsed (Colombo et al. 2019). When public-private partnerships are supposedly enriched by the inclusion of other actors, these new actors often belong themselves to the two existing categories. The EC only looks towards "small and medium-sized enterprises", "progressive businesses" or "investors"²³⁰, all part of the private sector already; and "regional and local authorities" such as cities or rural communities within the public sector²³¹.

4.3 Status quo in disguise

The coexistence of *change* and *status quo* at the heart of the EC's rhetoric raises a major issue: how can EC officials claim that the EGD will lead to systemic disruptions and, at the same time, keep promoting economic growth as ultimate goal? The answer is provided in this third part: for the EC, all upcoming transformations are fully compatible with the continuation of its traditional green growth agenda. The idea of *status quo in disguise* expresses how discursive tactics can make the EGD look like a catalyst for *change* where it in reality reasserts *status quo*. This discourse is performed through two distinct modes. Firstly, the EC simulates change but softens several of the EGD's most radical elements or advocates for a new economic model that implicitly reinforces *status quo*. Secondly, the EC attempts to secure broad political support by presenting win-win situations in which environmental change exclusively create benefits for Europe's economy.

²²⁸ For instance, in Speech n°2 'EP debate on EGD', Von der Leyen portrays the financial sector as an influential actor, whose expectations partly motivated the EC's decision to propose an ambitious green investment framework.

²²⁹ This is exemplified in COM n°10 'Growth Model': "public authorities at EU level and in the Member States need to work together in a consistent manner with private industry actors across all sectors to bolster competitive sustainability".

²³⁰ COM n°7 'Blue economy'; Speech n°20 'CEAP', Sinkevičius

²³¹ COM n°5 'Emissions targets'

4.3.1 Implicit rejection of change and reproduction of status quo

Although the EC uses hyperbolic language to emphasise change, it refuses to attach a radical meaning to this change²³². The word "shift" serves to connect upcoming changes to the ideal of a fast economic recovery with rapid GDP growth²³³. In addition, analysing the occurrences of certain terms proves that the EC always prefers the term transition to the more radical word "transformation"²³⁴. Furthermore, this transition should be "smooth" and "progressive" in order to help Europe finding "the right balance"²³⁵. The EU chooses to respond with a "detailed and realistic agenda" rather than designing a revolutionary plan²³⁶. This pragmatism is also confirmed by the repeated use of "prudent" and "credible"²³⁷. Finally, today's ambition will eventually allow Europe to change less radically and grow faster in the long run²³⁸. Similarly, not all environmental commitments are as ambitious as the EC presents them. The EC is often reluctant to ban or prohibit harmful practises and favours small-scale changes, such as "adjustments" or "gradual emissions reductions"²³⁹. For instance, its zero-tolerance policy is often mitigated by the presence of vague or more moderated expressions such as "at minimum when avoidable"²⁴⁰. It is said that the by-catch of species must be "eliminated" but should only be "minimised" "where this is not possible"²⁴¹. What is considered avoidable thus remains open to interpretation. Similarly, in COM n°4 'Farm to Fork', while "reduce", "prevent" or "decrease" are omnipresent, the more radical notions of 'elimination', 'stop', 'ban' or 'phase-out' are not referenced. This contradiction between ambition and pragmatism is constant in the EC's discourse²⁴². If too brutal or radical, such changes could prevent society from accommodating and the transition's "political feasibility" would be put at risk²⁴³.

Then, the ideal image of inclusiveness, democratisation, and openness projected by the EC is often misleading. By putting inclusiveness at its heart, the new model essentially helps ensuring economic success²⁴⁴. Instead of radically changing its approach to social equality, Europe only needs to keep its

²³² The adoption of transformative changes has already been discussed in sub-chapter 4.1.1.

²³³ COM n°5 'Emissions targets'

²³⁴ COM n°4: 'Farm to Fork'

²³⁵ COM n°2 'CEAP', n°3 'Biodiversity' and n°8 'Fit for 55'

²³⁶ COM n°7 'Blue economy'

²³⁷ Speeches n°2 'EP debate on EGD', VdL and n°16 'Energy proposals', Timmermans

²³⁸ In COM n°5 'Emissions targets', it is expected that "GDP will increase due to the investment stemming from increased climate ambition". In addition, a higher ambition enables a more balanced transition, based on "a more gradual emissions reduction path".

²³⁹ COM n°3 'Biodiversity'

²⁴⁰ COM n°3 'Biodiversity'

²⁴¹ COM n°3 'Biodiversity'

²⁴² In Speech n°18 'Delivering the EGD' for example, Simson opposes pragmatic expressions like 'progressive phase-out' with more ambitious wording such as "bans" or "slashing emissions from methane".

²⁴³ Speeches n°11 'Bruegel', n°13 'Climate neutral' and n°14 'Irish Summit', Timmermans

²⁴⁴ COM n°1 'EGD', n°2 'CEAP' and n°10 'Growth model'

tradition of "social market economy" alive by combining "market-driven measures with the right social balance"²⁴⁵. Finally, the JTM's high level of ambition should not hide many uncertainties regarding its lack of sufficient funding and of genuine commitments to tackle environmental inequities (Laurent 2020).

The overall democratic strength of the project is equally weak and besides traditional consultation processes, the EC's democratic vision remains vague²⁴⁶. Only mentioning the goal of "co-responsibility and co-ownership by all relevant actors" in its new governance framework, the EC gives no concrete indication about how democratic practises should be improved²⁴⁷. As in Eckert and Kovalevska (2021), the analysis demonstrates that the EC's rhetoric demands very little inclusion and does not raise any significant expectations for social transformation.

Another proof that the EGD is still attached to previous green growth experiences is given by the EC's massive use of the word "stakeholders" to refer to citizens²⁴⁸. By assimilating all individuals to this unified and amorphous category, inherited from the business and finance sectors, the EC refuses to differentiate the different types of actors and interests involved in environmental politics. Similarly, citizens are repeatedly reduced to their position as "consumers" who "should be empowered" to "make green choices and participate in the market"²⁴⁹.

Lastly, openness remains limited too as Energy Commissioner Kadri Simson unsurprisingly fails to broaden the debate and reproduces the EU's traditional carbon tunnel vision by presenting energy as "the dashing protagonist" of the Green Deal or "the unsung hero without whom nothing would get done"²⁵⁰.

Not only is the EC watering down some of its most disruptive proposals but it also reaffirms its devotion to the traditional growth ideal when it seemed to be breaking away from it²⁵¹. While the EC is disposed to criticise the current growth model, it essentially describes the shift towards a new model as a market-driven process²⁵². Although consumption patterns are meant to evolve, the economic system in place will keep making us desire things we would not have desired otherwise²⁵³. Growth is brought to the fore

²⁴⁵ Speech n°6 'Delivering the EGD', VdL

²⁴⁶ For instance, in COM n°3 'Biodiversity', the EC only commits to "stakeholder dialogue, and participatory governance at different levels".

²⁴⁷ COM n°3 'Biodiversity'

²⁴⁸ COM n°1 'EGD' and n°7 'Blue economy'; Speech n°9 'EP debate on EGD', Timmermans

²⁴⁹ COM n°4 'Farm to Fork' and n°8 'Fit for 55'; Speech n°19 'Energy proposals', Simson

²⁵⁰ Speech n°19 'Energy proposals', Simson

²⁵¹ A thorough analysis of the ways through which the current model is called into question in the EGD can be found in sub-chapter 4.1.4.

²⁵² Speech n°12 'Katowice', Timmermans

²⁵³ Using an analogy with the digital revolution from the 1980s, when 'we started to desire things that did not even exist before', the Commission explains that 'a similar transformation is now happening again since 'Europeans are discovering new needs' – Speech n°5 'Make-or-break', VdL

once again in COM n°7 'Blue economy', as all nature-based solutions, regardless of their level of ambition, eventually aim at strengthening "the coastal regions' economy"²⁵⁴.

At odds with the strong sustainability vision that was gaining ground²⁵⁵, sustainability is still primarily applied onto economic notions²⁵⁶. While the three dimensions are interlinked, economic prosperity remains the driving force behind the two other pillars²⁵⁷. The EC's focus on wellbeing it is not detached either from economic growth: "strengthening socio-economic resilience" is a crucial step "to safeguard the prosperity and wellbeing" of EU citizens²⁵⁸. In addition, the word sustainability has become so abundantly used that it is now just as vague and unquantifiable as the term green itself (Engelman 2013). And in the EGD too, the audience is confronted with an overdose of references to "sustainable" and "sustainability"²⁵⁹.

Furthermore, most of the texts analysed in this research do not even address the problem of overconsumption²⁶⁰. Instead, the EGD, as centrepiece of Europe's new environmental model, should contribute to "boost demand"²⁶¹. Rather than advocating for meat-free diets, the EC promotes "carbon-efficient methods of livestock production", or "meat substitutes"²⁶². Similarly, agroecology is always connected to idea of innovative markets for agriculture, rather than viewed as an opportunity to promote traditional knowledge more respectful of nature. Then, while emissions in the transport sectors need to be cut sharply, massive electrification seeks to "stimulate the production of electric vehicles" and "make sure the amount of production increases"²⁶³. The risks of overfishing are acknowledged too, but current harmful practises should be replaced by responsible ones, not by an overall reduction in the quantities of fisheries²⁶⁴. In all these examples, the EU looks at technology to avoid changing consumer lifestyles and business habits too radically.

The Covid-19 crisis only exposed the EU's commitment to growth. When the green agenda was put at risk by the pandemic, it would have been "understandable to just drop everything on the spot, throw our green ambitions out the window"²⁶⁵. Instead, the EU has shown perseverance as it is "not just

²⁵⁴ In COM n°10 'Growth model' too, it is mentioned that 'economic structures and the regulatory framework should support the economic transformation and be conducive to investment'.

²⁵⁵ The EC's 'strong sustainability' rhetoric has been discussed in sub-chapter 4.1.2

²⁵⁶ For example, in COM n°10 'Growth Strategy' or in Speech n°6 'Delivering the EGD' (VdL), the EC says the EGD specifically aims at building a "sustainable economy", "making our financial system more sustainable" and "promoting sustainable investments".

²⁵⁷ COM n°3 'Biodiversity'

²⁵⁸ COM n°3 'Biodiversity' and n°10 Growth strategy

²⁵⁹ For instance, these two terms can be found 137 times in COM n°4 'Farm to Fork'.

²⁶⁰ This part reflects on elements mentioned in sub-chapter 4.1.4, which is dedicated to the way through which the EGD embraces features from the degrowth discourse.

²⁶¹ Speech n°20 'CEAP', Sinkevičius

²⁶² COM n°4 'Farm to Fork'

²⁶³ Speech n°14, 'Irish Summit', Timmermans

²⁶⁴ COM n°7 'Blue economy'

²⁶⁵ Speech n°11 'Bruegel', Timmermans

maintaining" its ambitions, "but doubling down"²⁶⁶. But while maintaining the EGD might indicate that environmental objectives gained priority over other concerns, the reality is quite different. The EGD certainly envisions a greener format for the European economy but the willingness to restore growth following the Covid-19 pandemic is almost obsessional: "We put out the Green Deal to change the direction of growth in the long term, but the virus turned growth negative in the shortest of terms"; "it was our growth strategy, and now it is also our roadmap out of this crisis"²⁶⁷. The EGD remained on track because its environmental standards did not jeopardise a fast economic recovery.

Lastly, a discursive analysis should always account for silences and omissions. And when it comes to challenging the current economic model, many Communications remain completely quiet²⁶⁸. While the EGD introduces progressive notions like "resilience" or "regenerative growth", post-growth terminology such as "sobriety" or "sufficiency" is always avoided^{269,270}. If the degrowth agenda is carefully sidelined and the EC chooses to limit itself to the critique of fossil fuels-based growth without challenging capitalism more broadly, it is primarily because it firmly believes in green capitalism.

4.3.2 *Win-win situations: the unlimited benefits of a green transition*

Part of the discourse *status quo in disguise* also presents the implementation of the EGD as a win-win scenario whereby ambitious climate action generates countless opportunities in other sectors. The EC acknowledges the multidimensional character of environmental challenges but considers that the simplicity of its green strategy will be sufficient to address them. For the EC, the EGD naturally reduces potential conflicts and reconciles the longstanding opposition between economic growth and environmental protection. Hence, the EGD is turned into the magic bullet that fixes all sustainability problems.

The EC first presents the benefits of environmental action through the lens of *win-win* situations. It starts by describing potential opportunities, using countless hyperbolic adjectives: Timmermans uses "tremendous", while Simson chooses "unprecedented"²⁷¹. On the other hand, inaction would be damaging

²⁶⁶ Speech n°11 'Bruegel', Timmermans

²⁶⁷ Speech n° 11 'Bruegel', Timmermans

²⁶⁸ COM n°6 'Adaptation' and n°9 'Carbon cycles'

²⁶⁹ COM n°2 'CEAP', n°6 'Adaptation' and n°10 'Growth model'

²⁷⁰ This finding is consistent with long-term trends on the exclusion of sufficiency measures from EU environmental policies (Zell-Ziegler et al. 2021).

²⁷¹ Speeches n°14 'Irish Summit', Timmermans and n°17 'Climate neutral', Simson

as it would create additional costs²⁷². The EGD should therefore be shaped in a way that maximises benefits and minimises burdens to give the EU a "first mover" advantage²⁷³.

First and foremost, the green transition is an opportunity to foster competitiveness as climate action and economic leadership are two sides of the same coin²⁷⁴. This same idea is also framed in a more subtle way when the EU's *heart* and *mind* are brought together: climate action "is a moral imperative and a matter of economic good sense"^{275,276}. Timmermans even explicitly mentions the win-win strategy: "a real win-win for climate, biodiversity and also for new business and job opportunities"²⁷⁷. Concretely, the EU needs to seize "market" or "economic" opportunities in green sectors to generate profit while helping achieving decarbonisation targets²⁷⁸. For instance, acting on biodiversity by "conserving marine stocks could increase annual profits of the seafood industry by more than €49 billion"^{279,280}.

A second facet of this win-win rhetoric materialises into the integrated approach linking technologies to ecological measures: "the internet of things, big data, blockchain and artificial intelligence, will not only accelerate circularity but also the dematerialisation of our economy"²⁸¹. Finally, the EC's pro-innovation bias manifests itself through many initiatives seeking to combine societal pull and technology push to the benefit of consumers and society²⁸².

A third type of win-win strategy also connects economic prosperity with social benefits. Exploiting new economic opportunities can reinforce the EGD's social ambition and help "to safeguard the prosperity and wellbeing of its citizens"²⁸³. Beyond this, social inclusiveness itself a powerful enabler of growth as a fair transition will boost innovation and productivity while offering new job opportunities for EU citizens²⁸⁴.

²⁷² Speech n°18 'Delivering the EGD', Simson

²⁷³ COM n°2 'CEAP' and n°4 'Farm to Fork'; Speech n°3 'Climate Law', VdL

²⁷⁴ COM n°1 'EGD'; Speech n°5 'Make-or-break', VdL

²⁷⁵ Speech n°11 'Bruegel, Timmermans

²⁷⁶ Commissioners adopt a similar stance on this topic. Von der Leyen, in Speech n°3 'Climate Law', perceives sustainability and competitiveness as being joint objectives while Simson describes the Fit for 55 package as having both an environmental and an economic logic in Speech n°18 'Delivering the EGD'. Meanwhile, in Speech n°14 'Irish Summit', Timmermans wants "to embrace the opportunities that the industrial revolution is offering us and at the same time confront the climate crisis and the risk of ecocide, all wrapped into one".

²⁷⁷ Speech n°14 'Irish Summit', Timmermans

²⁷⁸ COM n°1 'EGD', n°3 'Biodiversity', n°7 'Blue economy', and n°10 'Growth model'

²⁷⁹ COM n°3 'Biodiversity'

²⁸⁰ One additional illustration, found in COM n°1 'EGD' is the EU's CEAP, which not only pursues a zero-waste target but should also be used to help modernise the EU's economy and stimulate the development of lead markets for climate neutral and circular products.

²⁸¹ COM n°2 'CEAP'

²⁸² COM n°1 'EGD'

²⁸³ The entire quote, extracted from COM n°10 'Growth model' reveals the strong interconnectedness between economic and social prosperity: "To safeguard the prosperity and wellbeing of its citizens, the EU needs to accomplish a fair and inclusive transition towards a greener and more digital future while strengthening socio-economic resilience in an unstable world".

²⁸⁴ COM n°10 'Growth model'

These many opportunities are spread across society and the EGD is "good for us all"²⁸⁵. Timmermans subscribes to this rhetoric, stating that "nobody loses in this and everybody wins" and appealing to common sense to describe the inclusive nature of potential benefits: "everyone knows that it's in their own self-interest to move"²⁸⁶. Finally, opportunities are present on multiple temporalities, as the green transition represents "a short-term win and a long-term win combined into one"²⁸⁷.

The usual win-win situation is sometimes even morphing into a triple-win bridging all three pillars of SD. COM n°6 'Adaptation' mentions a "triple dividend": "avoiding future human, natural and material losses; generating economic benefits by reducing risks, increasing productivity, and stimulating innovation; and the social, environmental, and cultural benefits". Similarly, COM n°9 'Carbon cycles' claims that carbon farming creates "win-win-win situations for climate action, biodiversity and the bioeconomy". Among all EC officials, Timmermans is the one that most often uses the triple-win rhetoric, as in Speech n°16 'Energy proposals' when he mentions carbon farming under the following terms: "So that it is good for climate, good for nature and good for the income of farmers and foresters [so] it's three wins".

The second strategy used by the EC is reconciliation. While different goals might be considered very distinct and perhaps even incompatible at first sight, the EGD can pursue all of them simultaneously.

The language of reconciliation is overwhelmingly present: the EGD, through absolute decoupling, has the potential to "do two things at the same time"²⁸⁸. The word "reconcile" itself is also actively used: the EU's wishes "to reconcile the economy with our planet, to reconcile the way we produce and the way we consume with our planet and to make it work for our people"²⁸⁹. Timmermans also fiercely rejects the contradiction between economic and environmental goals, introduced by the industry, and which he characterises as entirely "false"²⁹⁰.

Following the EC's triple-win rhetoric mentioned above, the EGD can even solve all problems at the same time by pursuing the three pillars of SD, which form the true essence of the EGD²⁹¹. In COM n°4 'Farm to Fork', the EGD is presented as a blended model where economic growth and wellbeing coexist. The reconciliation between notions once incompatible is even elevated to the status of "ultimate goal"²⁹².

²⁸⁵ Speech n°4 '2020 State of the Union', VdL

²⁸⁶ Speeches n°13 'Climate neutral' and n°15 'Delivering the EGD', Timmermans

²⁸⁷ In Speech n°13 'Climate Neutral', Timmermans explains that the benefits of green transition can be felt immediately. The prospect of obtaining immediate results might indeed convince reluctant actors prioritising their short-term interests to engage in this transition.

²⁸⁸ Speech n°15 'Delivering the EGD', Timmermans

²⁸⁹ Speeches n°1 'Press remarks on EGD' and n°2 'EP debate on EGD', VdL

²⁹⁰ Speech n°14 'Irish Summit', Timmermans

²⁹¹ Speech n°17 'Climate neutral', Simson

²⁹² Speech n°19 'Energy proposals', Simson

All individual measures eventually converge towards an absolute reconciliation, such as the Renovation Wave, which "combines the number of goals we want to achieve"²⁹³.

Lastly, the EGD has the potential to solve conflicts that may arise due to the incompatibility between economic and environmental objectives. Therefore, it can reconcile antagonistic views and "develop synergies, for example between fishing and renewables"^{294,295}. By assuming the consensual nature of the transformations while neglecting the risk of environmental conflicts, the green transition is depoliticised (Rydin 1999; Wanner 2015).

One final way of emphasising the benefits of a green transition consists in acknowledging the magnitude of the challenge ahead, while deploying the EGD immediately after as a perfect solution to all potential problems. EC officials almost always start with very realistic and pragmatic approaches²⁹⁶ recognising that the interconnected nature of environmental problems raises "existential challenges" for the EU²⁹⁷. In addition, many specific elements within the EGD itself face "a number of challenging technical issues" and solving them will "not happen overnight"²⁹⁸. Efforts must be sustained as it "will take more than a generation to reach that goal"²⁹⁹. Many ingredients have to be combined for the transition to be successful: "this transition will also need time, support and solidarity"³⁰⁰. Thus, the EU is fully aware that it has purposely refused the easiest option and that is now engaging on a "bumpy road"^{301,302}. Timmermans expresses this idea more informally ("it's going to be bloody hard"³⁰³) and refers to his personal knowledge so the audience would not suspect him of downplaying the task that lies ahead ("I know how difficult it is to manage a transition such as this successfully", "I certainly would not underestimate the challenges"³⁰⁴).

²⁹³ Speech n°13 'Climate neutral', Timmermans

²⁹⁴ Speech n°21 'Blue economy', Sinkevičius

²⁹⁵ Furthermore, the joint development of "agro-ecological approaches" and "digital technologies" in COM n°4 'Farm to Fork' highlights the compatibility between two ideas that could be considered antagonistic at first sight²⁹⁵.

²⁹⁶ Speeches n°2 'EP debate on EGD', VdL; n°4 '2020 State of the Union, VdL and n°10 'ENVI meeting', Timmermans

²⁹⁷ Speech n°11 'Bruegel', Timmermans

²⁹⁸ COM n°9 'Carbon cycles'; Speech n°16 'Energy proposals', Timmermans

²⁹⁹ COM n°10 'Growth model'; Speech n°2 'EP debate on EGD', VdL

³⁰⁰ Speech n°2 'EP debate on EGD', VdL

³⁰¹ Speech n°2 'EP debate on EGD', VdL

³⁰² In Speeches n°11 'Bruegel' and n°15 'Delivering the EGD', Timmermans recognises that the EC has chosen complexity over simplicity: "It would be so much easier to just look away and avoid doing hard things" whereas "it is more difficult to do something we don't know yet".

³⁰³ Speech n°15 'Delivering the EGD', Timmermans

³⁰⁴ Speeches n°12 'Katowice' and n°14 'Irish Summit', Timmermans

However, optimism quickly oversteps realism³⁰⁵. Throughout various speeches, the EC develops a motivational and empowering speech, where climate change "must unite" and "encourage us"³⁰⁶. This position relies on the assumption that the transition remains feasible³⁰⁷. Since climate change is a man-made problem, it has its own man-made solutions, so Europe can fix it³⁰⁸. But the EC goes beyond and obscures complexity by making the audience think that its strategy is easily achievable. For Von der Leyen, the answer Europe needs "is actually rather short and it is rather simple"³⁰⁹. According to Timmermans, Europe already has all necessary ingredients for conducting a successful societal transformation³¹⁰, the most important being its unique motivation: "That challenge is one that we are willing to accept. One we are unwilling to postpone [and] one which we intend to win"³¹¹.

In the third and last discursive step, the EGD is presented as the perfect solution to bridge complex challenges with simple answers. Timmermans unifies complexity and simplification to defend his strategy: "the choice we make today (...) is a difficult one", "but in terms of policy, it's very simple"³¹². The EGD becomes "our answer to those combined challenges"³¹³. Simson successfully introduces a similar problem-solving rhetoric as her policy proposals are "putting together" "three pieces of the giant climate and energy puzzle"³¹⁴. Where the contrasting notions of risks and benefits evolve in parallel, benefits eventually gain primacy: "While any structural changes will pose challenges, the analysis shows that overall the economy and citizens will benefit from these investments"³¹⁵. The EGD's ability to solve major challenges very easily is exactly what makes it special³¹⁶. This argument is applied on the risk of job losses in COM n°7 'Blue economy': While job losses might "triple by 2030" because of the transition, the European Skills Agenda and the Blue Career Programme's contribution to the EGD, effective through job "upskilling and reskilling", will eliminate this risk.

³⁰⁵ Von der Leyen, in Speech n°6 'Delivering the EGD', explicitly recognises this rhetorical shift: "this generational change is not only realistic but also optimistic".

³⁰⁶ Speech n°2 'EP debate on EGD', VdL

³⁰⁷ Speeches n°2 'EP debate on EGD' and n°4 '2020 State of the Union', VdL

³⁰⁸ Speech n°7 '2021 State of the Union', VdL

³⁰⁹ Speech n°3 'Climate Law', VdL

³¹⁰ Speech n°11 'Bruegel', Timmermans

³¹¹ Speech n°9 'EP debate on EGD'

³¹² Speech n°15 'Delivering the EGD', Timmermans

³¹³ Speech n°14 'Irish Summit', Timmermans

³¹⁴ Speech n°17 'Climate neutral', Simson

³¹⁵ Speech n°15 'Delivering the EGD', Timmermans

³¹⁶ In COM n°5 'Emissions targets', the EC resents the EGD as a tool for overcoming challenges: "Without underestimating the challenge of mobilising significant additional investments in the coming decade and promoting a just transition, it offers the opportunity for sustainable growth".

4.4 Joint analysis of the three discourses

Before examining the three discourses jointly, it is worth asking whether the findings can be exploited as part of a single set of results by ruling out the possibility that some texts might clash. While not all Communications adopt an identical stance on the role of economic growth³¹⁷, the overall analysis has shown no major difference and the EC's narrative appears to be coherent. When it comes to speeches, the discourses performed by the four commissioners differ slightly³¹⁸. Still, the four officials hardly contradict each other, and often borrow from the same discursive toolbox, making an extensive use of the three types of discourses. This indicates a great degree of internal coherence within the EC, which succeeds in presenting a coherent vision for the EGD *via* different personalities.

It must be noted that all three discourses are enacted simultaneously as they are fully compatible with each other. Since they are three strands of the same approach, it cannot be argued that one discourse outweighs the others. Where *change* and *status quo* might conflict, the introduction of *status quo in disguise* helps solving the inherent tension between the two first types: in the EC's rhetoric, the EGD both introduces major changes and reaffirms the EU's traditional attachment to economic growth. Each type also blends into the two others and it is not rare to find illustrations of all three discourses within a few lines. Their coexistence gives the EC's discursive tactic greater consistency.

This new narrative describes the EGD as a turning point for the European growth model, since significant transformations should make it truly sustainable. But this fresh start should remain perfectly aligned with the principles guiding green growth. Despite many innovations that pave the way for social and democratic conceptions of sustainability, it still seeks to develop market- and technology-friendly systems enabling Europe to keep growing. Behind its so-called transformational and revolutionary character, the EGD merely replicates past discourses on green capitalism. **The tension between *change* and *status quo* could be summarised as follows: the *EGD* should offer a sustainable pathway helping Europe to *stay within planetary boundaries* but, to do so, it must *imperatively stimulate economic growth*.**

³¹⁷ Some Communications are entirely green growth compatible while others confront the adverse effects of economic growth more directly. On the one hand, COM n°10 'Growth model' contains a strong bias in favour of growth as its structure entirely relies on growth objectives. Similarly, COM n°5 'Emissions targets' presents the strongest argument in support of absolute decoupling. On the other hand, COM n°2 'CEAP', n°3 'Biodiversity' and n°4 'Farm to Fork' have a more restricted scope and promote the EU's most innovative proposals. They also address overconsumption more directly.

³¹⁸ For instance, Timmermans displays greater enthusiasm than the others, and tends to embrace radical change more openly and systematically, especially in Speeches n°8 'COP25', n°11 'Bruegel', n°13 and n°14 'Irish Summit'. In addition, Sinkevičius discusses about change in a more holistic and open manner than his colleague Simson, for whom competitiveness remains the priority. However, this can be easily explained by their different political portfolio and the long-lasting effects of the previous internal divide between energy and environmental policies in the EC.

The EGD can therefore be located in the *green growth* categories of the growth spectrum (see Annex A). By displaying unconditional faith in technology and carbon pricing instruments, the EC subscribes to weak sustainability discourses (Mastini et al. 2021). It sometimes even defends neo-liberal solutions especially regarding the prevention of high levels of public debt³¹⁹. Once again, the EC assumes that markets could address climate change only through "minor tinkering" (Machin 2019). Nevertheless, the EGD sometimes comes closer to the *strong sustainability* version of a green growth model, thus moving from category 2 to 3 on the spectrum and upgrading its status from 'GND 1.0' to 'GND 2.0'. When it recognises the imperative need to question the role of GDP, live within planetary boundaries, or tackle adverse effects of our economic model, it even embraces elements from *post-growth* models (category 4). Yet, the fuzziness with which transformative issues are addressed, as opposed to the clarity with which the growth project is reiterated, prevents the EGD from falling into the fourth (or even the third) category. The constant reiteration of the *status quo in disguise* discourse confirms the results of previous research on the EGD³²⁰. Overall, it is far from being agnostic about growth and is much closer from a 'GND 1.0' than a 'GND without growth'.

To the question: 'Is there a paradigm shift in the role of growth in the ecological transition?', the answer is relative. In the introduction, paradigm shift was conceptualised as a movement redefining not only the policy instruments but also the underlying theoretical assumptions upon which politics are built. Bongardt and Torres (2022) describe the way the EGD applies an overarching sustainability lens as a paradigm change. But mainstreaming strong sustainability remains insignificant if the role of growth is not challenged. This position cannot be reasonably held as the EGD is not a strategy to branch out into post-growth but to slightly deviate towards green growth. Other discourses analyses identified a number of elements that might make it a third way between green growth and degrowth³²¹, but confirmed the overall absence of radical change³²². The EGD operates entirely within the boundaries of capitalism, regardless of how green capitalism may become. The unprecedented changes it entails help safeguarding

³¹⁹ This phenomenon, particularly striking in COM n°10 'Growth model', has been assessed in sub-chapter 4.2.6.

³²⁰ When analysing the EGD's discourse, Samper et al. (2021) described it as an attempt "to articulate climate politics using a 'GND 2.0' discourse without fully incorporating the necessary changes" (:14).

³²¹ In Ossewaarde and Ossewaarde-Lowtoot (2020) especially, four transformative features have been identified: the EGD's inclination to protect ecological commons against private appropriation; its critique of traditional industrial resource extractivism; its emphasis placed on the need for an inclusive transition; and its suggestion to foster democratisation and resist technocratic decision-making.

³²² Following their own discursive analysis, Ossewaarde and Ossewaarde-Lowtoot (2020) conclude: "It would be far-fetched to suggest that the European Green Deal communicates an integral transition that involves a radical critique of an ecologically harmful culture and represents a resolution to go beyond green capitalism" (:11). In their final assessment, Eckert and Kovalevska (2021) fold a similar position: "We agree that the Green Deal has missed the opportunity to call for an imminent social change" (:14).

the goals Europe has always strived for. **This research thus concludes that the EGD's discourse does not represent a genuine paradigm shift.**

4.5 The political effects of the EC's discursive strategy

The previous section described how the green growth model was perpetrated instead of being overturned. Building on these results, this sub-chapter connects the realm of speeches to the wider realm of social and political realities. The first section analyses how the reproduction of similar discourses on economic growth reinforces the hegemony of this ideology, thus preventing the emergence of post-growth theories. The second section looks at the political motivations behind the EC's support for this hegemony.

4.5.1 Sustaining the hegemony and marginalising alternatives

Aligned with existing literature on the green growth hegemony, this thesis argues that the EGD's discourse further reinforces this hegemony. The Commission's unhealthy focus on economic growth depoliticizes climate politics and perpetuates the neoliberal hegemonic formation through green growth. With its technical approach to the ecological transition, focusing on emissions reduction and energy policies, the EGD denies the deeply political aspects of climate change. Despite a more holistic perspective on the transition, the EC's commitments are too vague and imprecise to trigger a genuine re-politicisation of climate politics. Even when it tries to redefine sustainability in stronger terms, "chains of equivalence are permitted to exist between climate politics and the neoliberal hegemonic formation" (Samper et al. 2021:14)

The green growth hegemony is also secured through the reassertion of existing power structures³²³. The lack of democratic commitments, combined with the stronger inclusion of private actors and the deference to global markets are striking signs of the EC's great tolerance towards the main socio-economic and political structures responsible for the ecological crisis³²⁴. The primacy of consumerist lifestyles and competitiveness goals is never called into question as the interests of political and economic elites are preserved.

The reproduction of the green growth hegemony results in the exclusion of all alternatives. The CDA methodology applied for this research revealed that the EC failed to bring post-growth perspectives into

³²³ In this regard, the results of this dissertation are complementary to those obtained by Ossewaarde and Ossewaarde-Lowtoo (2020) as well as Eckert and Kovalevska (2021).

³²⁴ These issues have been discussed in sub-chapters 4.2.5, 4.2.6, and 4.2.7.

play³²⁵. EC officials simply feign openness and inclusiveness to mask their strong reluctance to reopen the discussion on the limits to growth. By maintaining the illusion of reconciliation, it fails to address the “fundamental contradiction between an economic model fostering unlimited growth rates, and environmental and human resources which are by definition limited” (Lietaert 2008:68).

This strategy is successful because the green growth ideology has become so widely accepted that certain claims are not contested anymore. Green growth, when hegemonic, is “disempowering its critics and locking out approaches that could lead to deeper change” (Bailey et al. 2011:700). And the EGD illustrates this perfectly as the very emergence of alternatives is entirely obstructed³²⁶. The EC's win-win rhetoric absorbs all counter-hegemonic proposals to eliminate them (Samper et al. 2021). Since the EGD is expected to solve all sustainability issues without frustrating anyone's interests, the radicals are automatically disempowered. This marginalisation of alternative pathways is exemplified by the hegemonic position of market-based instruments such as the EU ETS³²⁷. This strategy is dangerous in the long run as depoliticisation “precludes the expression of differences” (Machin 2019:224). Ultimately, the EGD thus risks delaying the implementation of necessary transformations. Samper et al. (2021) describe the current trajectory for European climate politics as a post-Gramscian tragedy: “the old climate politics are dying and the new cannot be born” (ibid.:14).

4.5.2 The EC's strive for power

Why is the EC so committed to sustaining the hegemony of green growth? In this dissertation, the EGD has been introduced as the result of a political compromise, obtained by Von der Leyen to secure a fragile coalition. The rhetoric of reconciliation that the EGD offers is a confirmation that the EC not only seeks to convince others during the announcement phase but throughout the implementation phase too. The EC created a coherent narrative to seduce growth-addicted politicians and businesses. If the EGD had supported more agnostic views about growth, it certainly would not have convinced a majority of political groups, nor a majority of MS, let alone businesses. Most influential actors in the EU polity prioritise immediate concerns, depending on either electoral cycles or profit maximisation prospects. To be rapidly embraced by businesses and build a coalition of partners that transcends party lines as well as geographical divisions, the EGD had to follow the footsteps of existing green growth discourses

³²⁵ Further information about the weakness of post-growth in the EGD can be obtained by comparing sub-chapters 4.1.4 and 4.3.1.

³²⁶ For a long time now, it has been widely acknowledged that certain environmental perspectives can be delegitimised by being labelled as extreme or 'on the lunatic fringe' (Rydin 1999:472). But here, the EC does not even need to label degrowth as extreme. In fact, it does not even mention serious alternatives to green growth at all.

³²⁷ The reliance on carbon markets in the EGD, reviewed in sub-chapter 4.2.3, is embedded in a broader movement described by Stuart et al. 2019). Carbon pricing are now described as an acceptable solution for everyone, whereas its flaws are entirely neglected: the possibility to contest them has disappeared.

(Ossewaarde and Ossewaarde-Lowtoot 2020). Creating the illusion of change while refusing to hijack power structures helps spreading enthusiasm across society while reassuring the sceptics. All actors subscribing to the EGD's narrative can build a very appealing story where they tell people how they found a solution to climate change while ensuring that the transition will happen under their control and will not contradict anyone's interests.

A second explanation for this rhetorical strategy can be found in the EC's broader quest for long-term leadership vis-à-vis the other European institutions³²⁸. The EC already used its agenda-setting power to exploit a new window of opportunity and impose its plan. But since the EC cannot act alone in the EU's institutional complex, it needs to employ the more indirect power of ideas and discourse. In this struggle, the ability to control how sustainability issues are being talked upon is a considerable advantage. This hypothesis was confirmed in the literature. According to Knill et al. (2020), the EC acted as a 'hypocritical entrepreneur' in the aftermath of the financial crisis. To preserve its reputation as environmental leader but please MS, it kept promoting new sustainability ideas but was more hesitant to engage in ambitious policymaking. Commissioners too make extensive use of rhetorical framing to demobilise antagonists while persuading adherents to support the EU (Thomas and Turnbull 2017). An analogy can be made with the green growth discourse in the context of the EGD. The EC turns the ambiguous meaning of sustainability to its own advantage in order to control public discourses on sustainability (Eckert and Kovalevska 2021). The EC's misleading rhetoric, based on the appealing concept of decoupling, seeks to position the audience to support the EU, because everyone wants to grow while becoming greener³²⁹. In this new story line, "economic and environmental goals are no longer pitted against each other, but rather are neatly reconcilable" (Machin 2019:208). By doing so, EC officials shape the beliefs of the public opinion and promote their own knowledge across the EU. The EC can therefore offer a happy ending: on the one hand, simulating change through discourses helps maintaining its position as Europe's green policy entrepreneur; and on the other hand, the sustained promise of unlimited growth does not frustrate the interests of the powerful elites, who can manifest adhesion to the EC's action while knowing that they will benefit from the transition.

³²⁸ The thesis postulates that the EC acts as a policy entrepreneur in the field of environmental politics. Drawing on Rietig (2019), the analysis starts from the assumption that the EC has the potential to shape Europe's climate change strategies, seizing external opportunities and compatible beliefs to pursue its own environmental objectives, often more ambitious than those of the MS. Applied onto discursive analysis, the EC's entrepreneurial spirit can be observed in how EC officials use speech acts to impose their own vision of the ecological transition. However, according to Steinebach and Knill (2017) the EC's entrepreneurial spirit faded away following the financial crisis. The EGD could represent an attempt to regain its past environmental leadership.

³²⁹ This idea echoes with sub-chapter 4.3 dedicated to the *status quo in disguise* discourse.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusion: 'Everything must change for everything to remain the same'

5.1.1 The broken promise of a paradigm shift

The EGD's rhetoric undeniably embraces transformational change, especially compared to previous growth strategies. The term *paradigm shift* might be accepted to qualify parts of the EC's discourse that recognise the need to live within planetary boundaries, thus shaking up fundamental elements of the EU's traditional environmental discourse. Yet, the definition of paradigm shift introduced in this research required to question the current economic model and its underlying rationale: the ideal of infinite growth. The EGD's rhetorical basis, however, still rest on the dream of a green capitalistic model that does not harm economic competitiveness or prospects of future wealth creation. The EC uses a revised green growth narrative to create the illusion of change but misses the opportunity to actually change. This narrative reinforces the current growth paradigm, prevents the emergence of alternatives and helps the EC securing political support. This disguised preservation of status quo is risky as it could lead the EU to further damage the environment and accelerate global warming. The EC would head Europe straight into the wall if it decided to measure the success of its green deal through GDP.

5.1.2 Limitations

Now that I summarised what the research *says*, it is essential to specify what it *does not say*. It must first be kept in mind that the research design purely relies on qualitative analysis. In addition, CDA methodologies have been criticised due to their difficulty in establishing reliable safeguards against excessive normative biases³³⁰. While the findings presented in the analysis align with existing research, they could only be generalised if a denser literature was established on various political settings, and with other methods.

³³⁰ This aspect is not however exclusive to CDA methodologies (Taylor 2013:83). While the researcher indeed needs to be aware about the preconceptions he or she brings to the research, the interpretive nature of CDA is not uncommon among other methods used in social sciences, and is not, in that sense, less reliable than other approaches.

I voluntarily chose to focus on words instead of actions, with the underlying assumption that rhetoric directly impacts political decisions. Under no circumstances can it be concluded that rhetorical continuity will necessarily lead to a reduced ambition at implementation level³³¹. The absence of paradigm shift *on paper* does not condemn the EGD to align with previous green growth policies *in practise*³³².

Finally, the reduction in scope, imposed by time and format constraints, prevented this dissertation from moving beyond negative criticism and develop alternative models to green growth³³³. CDA often helps uncovering problems but struggles to solve them (Eckert and Kovalevska 2021). However, the project's main weakness could be turned into a strength as it opens new research avenues. This last chapter constitutes a steppingstone for any research suggesting proposals to dismantle the current hegemony and tackle our obsession towards growth at its root. Therefore, I decided to formulate some recommendations which could serve as a basis for my future PhD project.

5.2 Recommendations: Saving the EGD

5.2.1 Weaning ourselves off our growth addiction

This dissertation is a wake-up call for its readers to become aware of the uncertainties surrounding green growth and the deceptive nature of European growth discourses. Green growth rests on unproven technology, whose processes are, through discourses, often hidden from public scrutiny or not disclosed (Ossewaarde and Ossewaarde-Lowtoo 2020). It should not be presented as anything other than a minor alteration of capitalism.

"Anyone who believes that exponential growth can go on forever in a finite world is either a madman or an economist", said US economist Kenneth Boulding right after the publication of *The Limits to Growth* report (Jackson and Victor 2019). Fifty years later, the IPCC itself clearly underlined that green

³³¹ The literature shows that when it comes to policymaking, the EC often adopts a more ambitious position than Member States, and its entrepreneurship can be a key driver in fostering environmental policy integration (Rietig 2019).

³³² On the contrary, it is possible that other political circumstances will make the plan even more transformative. The dissertation did not examine how the Covid-19 pandemic had impacted the EU's environmental policy sphere. While I observed a strong continuity between growth discourses performed before and after the different epidemic waves, it can be expected that the pandemic introduced changes that have not been observed in detail in this research. However, these elements were not considered in this research.

³³³ This corresponds to the fourth stage to apply in a CDA methodology suggested in Fairclough (2012:15) and titled "Identify possible ways past the obstacles". Due to the limited length of the work, it was decided not to discuss in detail the solutions to address economic growth, the social wrong in question in this research.

growth strategies will not be sufficient to respect the Paris Agreement³³⁴. Yet, the EC behaves like a neoliberal economist from the 1970s and goes in the opposite direction. Why, when most citizens agree that environmental and social wellbeing should be prioritized over profit (Taylor 2019; Lock 2020), does the EU keep orienting its economy towards the endless and ever-increasing production of wealth? Why has it never stopped chasing endless economic growth?

The explanation lies in the seductive power of growth. Economic growth is a siren call, a captivating economic mythology to which it seems impossible to resist (Laurent 2019; Parrique 2022b). Saying goodbye to growth is the hardest change we must undertake because the “culture of growth is hardwired into society's discourses, rules, institutions and behavioural norms” (EEA 2021a:25). We are not living in the 'Anthropocene', but rather in the 'Growthocene'³³⁵; and citizens are currently locked in a growth engine that maintains their “insatiable appetite” to consume beyond their needs (Jackson 2010). If green growth still looks so seductive, regardless of its feasibility, it is largely because of its (hollow) promise of happy ending.

As a result, degrowth still belong to the realm of the politically unthinkable. While the corpus of values it promotes have been embraced within the EU, all concrete policy proposals formulated by its advocates are dismissed as unrealistic. Our obsession for growth has been so widely accepted that the fundamental principles guiding our economies towards the accumulation of wealth seem impossible to challenge. The hegemony of economic growth, whether it is framed as a brown or green growth, has made other alternatives not only practically unattainable but also theoretically unthinkable (Bailey 2020).

5.2.2 Promising avenues for post-growth in the EU

This research primarily looked at the highest political level and concluded that a-growth scenarios still had not found their way up to the top of the European policymaking hierarchy. It explained the absence of post-growth by the lasting and powerful anchoring of growth in our economic imaginaries. Nevertheless, the EC's dedication to secure the hegemony of growth happens exactly when alternative discourses challenging growth start emerging in the EU (Eckert and Kovalevska 2021).

The meaning of GDP growth is now challenged within the heart of Europe's scientific organisations. The European Environmental Agency now openly questions the likelihood of Europe succeeding only by relying on the decoupling hypothesis (EEA 2021b). Their result is unequivocal: global-scale, long-

³³⁴ The IPCC dedicated a part to decoupling in the Chapter II of its last report (IPCC Report AR6 WGIII), where it found that absolute decoupling was unlikely to happen (Parrique 2022c).

³³⁵ As opposed to the term 'Anthropocene', which describes the current geological era marked by the significant impact of human activities on the Earth's ecosystems, Chertkovskaya and Paulsson (2016) use the term 'Growthocene'. By doing so, they insist on the overwhelming role of the human obsession with economic growth in perpetuating the destruction of natural ecosystems.

lasting and absolute decoupling may be unrealistic. Hence, new scholarly fields such as ecological economics should be developed to create "a knowledge system capable of supporting the needed economic transformation" (EEA 2021a:49). Yet, the main challenge lies in bringing new insights into mainstream policy processes.

Post-growth also recently infiltrated official EU discourses. In the EP, the European Greens raised their opposition to the CEAP, which reinforces a culture of endless consumption. Attention should be especially drawn to a specific speech, delivered by Jean-Éric Paquet, Director General of DG Research & Innovation (DEAL 2022). While refusing to break entirely with the current economic model, he stated during a webinar organised on post-growth futures in the EU that "the case for a post-growth model (...) is won"³³⁶, thus opening the door for discussions on a new set of alternatives rejecting growth. This type of discourse, still confined to lower political levels, is a promising sign that some EU officials are exploring options to move beyond Europe's growth dependence.

5.2.3 Beyond GDP: decoupling growth from wellbeing

Due to the weakness with which alternative discourses are deployed in the EU institutions, the possibility that the EGD will trigger system change still remains a remote prospect. If the EGD is to succeed, a wider and more radical movement will have to emerge outside of the institutions. Following Rydin's (1999) idea that environmental discourses reflect structures of power but also have the potential to change them, it can be said that EU citizens and activists are not powerless when confronted to hegemonic positions. There is still hope that post-growth movements will hijack the EGD and turn it into a revolutionary project (Mastini et al. 2021; Dale 2019). GNDs still offer possible horizons beyond green capitalism but these horizons need to be sketched against growth-centric mindsets (Ossewaarde and Ossewaarde 2020). Degrowth activists need to recognise as they are currently designed, GNDs help maintaining the Washington consensus (McCarthy 2015). But they should also acknowledge that, "as the most promising piece of social and environmental legislation [GNDs are] worth fighting for" (Heron 2019).

To save the EGD, the EU imperatively needs to engage with reforms that stretch the limits of capitalist system until progress towards social and environmental justice replaces the quest for infinite economic growth (The Guardian 2018; Degrowth Vienna 2020). Jackson (2010) accurately summarised the need

³³⁶ During a webinar organised by the Doughnut Economics Action Lab, he said: "The question is not so much whether we need to re-invent a post-growth model (...) The case for a post-growth model, I think, is won. The question for me now is much more: how do we do that? And in how far does the traditional legacy of the growth model still interacts with the post-growth model?" (DEAL 2022).

for radical measures in a growth dilemma: 'crash the system or crash the planet'. But how should the system be crashed?

Many post-growth environmentalists and scholars now wish to reopen the debate on infinite growth. For them, the EU should start practicing another kind of decoupling by decoupling well-being from GDP growth (Jackson and Victor 2019). This would create a society that no longer uses growth as synonym for economic value and moves away from GDP as a measure of growth (ibid.). This perspective is already infusing the EC's ongoing work to move 'Beyond GDP' (Terzi 2021; EC 2022a). Abandoning growth as we know it implies to reimagine our ideal of development. However, as of today, two trends coexist with regards to the type of post-growth strategy that needs to be adopted.

The first strategy consists in radically re-routing the system but without referring to degrowth³³⁷. Indeed, the power of green growth is difficult to overthrow if compared with the vocabulary of degrowth, which is often overly simplified and framed in terms of constraint and recession (Hickel 2020), thus evoking "fearful images of loss and less" (Ossewaarde and Ossewaarde-Lowtoo 2020). Raworth (2015; 2017) rejects the term, deemed confusing and ineffective to overturn the dominance of growth-centric principles. The pro- or anti-growth debate "has assumed almost religious contours" which she opposes with a form of pragmatic agnosticism (Renda 2018). Focusing on the criticism of economic orthodoxy rather than growth *per se*, she chooses to replace the missile word 'degrowth' by the umbrella term 'doughnut'. According to Ferguson (2015), degrowth theories are also unlikely to obtain sufficient political purchase and are prone to marginalization. What should be done instead is pushing for post-growth rearticulatory strategies (ibid.) Ferguson argues that the smart use of *green economy* as 'pivot discourse' could be a catalyst for far-reaching change. But the rearticulation needs to be subversive: its proponents must appear neutral about growth. They should first criticize conventional growth by attaching ideals of wellbeing to growth itself. Only when this less radical pivot discourse becomes dominant, post-growth movements will be able to destroy the previous pro- and anti-growth binary. An effective transitional strategy could thus exploit 'GND without growth' models to ultimately trigger greater convergence towards degrowth (Mastini et al. 2021; Parrique 2019).

A second strategy consists instead in the direct promotion of degrowth³³⁸. Kallis, in response to Raworth, argues instead that using 'degrowth' helps deactivating the idea of 'growth' (Barca 2018). Moreover, degrowth potentially offers greater clarity, as it has well-identified ideological foundations, and assumes to be rooted in left-wing political thought. This ideological strength has been confirmed by the recent rapprochement between degrowth and eco-socialism (Löwy 2020; Löwy et al. 2022). In addition,

³³⁷ This strategy which could be named 'post-growth' is represented in category 4 of the growth spectrum (see Annex A).

³³⁸ This strategy would instead be aligned on the category 5 of the growth spectrum: 'absolute degrowth' (see Annex A).

degrowth has become a structured strand of economics, with its own vocabulary and policy proposals. Extending far beyond the simple reduction of GDP, it can potentially pressure the EU to fight for the protection of global commons, the establishment of job guarantees, and fair systems of income redistribution. Additional signs show that degrowth is ready to be spread out. When green growth advocates enter into frontal opposition with degrowth, their claims are almost immediately debunked (Hickel 2020; Parrique 2022d). As degrowth theories are progressively gaining ground, mainstream economists are becoming increasingly silent. Degrowth had first been criticised for being unable to offer any viable stabilisation framework (Pollin 2019), but its feasibility has now been proven (D'Alessandro et al. 2020). Degrowth strategies can achieve faster emissions reductions than green growth scenarios, this while considerably reducing social inequalities³³⁹.

Whether the movement uses the word 'degrowth' or not does not matter, as long as radical changes are undertaken. Different categories of post-growth concepts should coexist³⁴⁰. Regardless of the approach that is retained, the ecological debate should uncover the catastrophic consequences of economic growth while making degrowth more appealing. The re-politicisation of climate action needs to become a new imperative. The urgency now is to force a conceptual confrontation between several models. But policymaking should also be opened-up to contestation between conflicting strategies (Machin 2019). Europe should become an experimental lab on post-growth, both for thoughts and actions. Peter Kalmus (2022) accurately describes degrowth as a "switch in the goal of the economic system". While our model is currently powered by the accumulation of capital, it could be reoriented towards the "flourishing of everyone and all life on the planet". I believe this is exactly the type of paradigm shift that we must implement collectively.

Borrowing John Bellamy Foster's (2010) expression, I picture only two potential outcomes: either we degrow, or we die.

³³⁹ However, degrowth entails certain trade-offs, as these social and environmental goals can only be achieved at the expense of fiscal health (D'Alessandro et al. 2020). As GDP shrinks but public investments increase, the debt-to-GDP ratio automatically increases. Degrowthers will nevertheless argue that fiscal health does not make sense in a post-growth economy since the notions of deficit and public debt are tied to economic orthodoxy.

³⁴⁰ Post-development models are so diverse that they require their own dictionary. *Pluriverse*, published by Kothari et al. (2019) summarises many alternatives and maps the multiplicity of social movements and cultural traditions that oppose capitalism's destructiveness. I argue that the book constitutes a relevant starting point to create synergies between various approaches.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary sources

- European Commission (2001) *Environment 2010: Our Future, Our Choice, 6th EU Environment Action Programme 2001-2010*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Available at https://ec.europa.eu/environment/air/pdf/6eapbooklet_en.pdf (Accessed: 28 April 2022).
- (2012) *Energy roadmap 2050*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/energy/sites/ener/files/documents/2012_energy_roadmap_2050_en_0.pdf (Accessed: 28 April 2022).
- (2019) *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions – The European Green Deal*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52019DC0640&qid=1646907274913> (Accessed: 28 April 2022).
- (2020a) *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - A new Circular Economy Action Plan, For a cleaner and more competitive Europe*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1583933814386&uri=COM:2020:98:FIN> (Accessed: 28 April 2022).
- (2020b) *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, Bringing nature back into our lives*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1590574123338&uri=CELEX:52020DC0380> (Accessed: 28 April 2022).
- (2020c) *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - A Farm to Fork Strategy, for a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0381&qid=1647344727664> (Accessed: 28 April 2022).
- (2020d) *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - Stepping up Europe's 2030 climate ambition, Investing in a climate-neutral future for the benefit of our people*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020DC0562&qid=1647344819823> (Accessed: 28 April 2022).

- (2021a) *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on a new approach for a sustainable blue economy in the EU - Transforming the EU's Blue Economy for a Sustainable Future*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM:2021:240:FIN> (Accessed: 28 April 2022).
- (2021b) *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - 'Fit for 55': delivering the EU's 2030 Climate Target on the way to climate neutrality*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52021DC0550> (Accessed: 28 April 2022).
- (2021c) *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - Forging a climate-resilient Europe, the new EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52021DC0082&qid=1647344504684> (Accessed: 28 April 2022).
- (2021d) *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council - Sustainable Carbon Cycles*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/clima/system/files/2021-12/com_2021_800_en_0.pdf (Accessed: 28 April 2022).
- (2022a) *Beyond GDP*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. https://ec.europa.eu/environment/beyond_gdp/index_en.html
- (2022b) *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions - Towards a green, digital and resilient economy: our European Growth Model*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/default/files/economy-finance/com_2022_83_1_en_act_part1_v5_0.pdf (Accessed: 28 April 2022).
- (n.d.) *Advanced Search – Press Corner* [online]. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/advancedsearch/e%20n>. (Accessed: 28 April 2022).
- EUR-Lex (n.d.) *Expert search* [online] Available at: https://eur-lex.europa.eu/search.html?name=browse-by%3Aeu-commission-com-documents&FM_CODED=COMMUNIC&type=named&qid=1654071795606 (Accessed: 28 April 2022).
- Simson, K. (2020) *Opening remarks by Executive Vice-President Timmermans and Commissioner Simson at the press conference Building a Climate Neutral Europe*. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_20_1912 (Accessed: 31 May 2022).

- Simson, K. (2021) *Statement by Commissioner Simson on delivering the European Green Deal*. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_21_3709 (Accessed: 31 May 2022).
- Simson, K. (2021) *Opening remarks by Frans Timmermans and Kadri Simson at Press Conference on new European Green Deal proposals for more energy efficiency, increased carbon removals and a framework to decarbonise the gas market*. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_21_6910 (Accessed: 31 May 2022).
- Sinkevičius, V. (2020) *Press statement by Commissioner Virginijus Sinkevičius on the new Circular Economy Action Plan*. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_20_446 (Accessed: 31 May 2022).
- Sinkevičius, V. (2021) *Statement by Commissioner Virginijus Sinkevičius on a new approach for a sustainable blue economy in the EU*. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_21_2524 (Accessed: 31 May 2022).
- Sinkevičius, V. (2021) *Statement delivered by Commissioner Sinkevičius during the press conference on EU Forest Strategy*. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_21_3744 (Accessed: 31 May 2022).
- Timmermans, F. (2019) *Executive Vice-President Frans Timmermans at the COP25 Chile in Madrid*. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jutb3UukuLA> (Accessed: 31 May 2022).
- Timmermans, F. (2019) *Closing statement by Frans Timmermans, Executive Vice-President of the European Commission*. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_19_6753 (Accessed: 31 May 2022).
- Timmermans, F. (2020) *Frans Timmermans on the European Green Deal as a growth strategy at the Bruegel Annual Meetings*. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_20_1551. (Accessed: 17 April 2022)
- Timmermans, F. (2020) *Remarks by Frans Timmermans at the meeting of Environment Ministers*. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement_20_1182 (Accessed: 31 May 2022).
- Timmermans, F. (2020) *Frans Timmermans on the European Green Deal as a growth strategy at the Bruegel Annual Meetings*. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_20_1551 (Accessed: 31 May 2022).
- Timmermans, F. (2020) *Frans Timmermans in discussion panel at the Katowice European Economic Congress*. Available at:

- https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_20_1560 (Accessed: 31 May 2022).
- Timmermans, F. (2020) *Opening remarks by Executive Vice-President Timmermans and Commissioner Simson at the press conference Building a Climate Neutral Europe*. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_20_1912 (Accessed: 31 May 2022).
- Timmermans, F. (2021) *Frans Timmermans' statement at the Irish Climate Summit 2021*. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/2019-2024/timmermans/announcements/frans-timmermans-statement-irish-climate-summit-2021_en (Accessed: 31 May 2022).
- Timmermans, F. (2021) *Statement by Executive Vice-President Timmermans on delivering the European Green Deal*. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_21_3722 (Accessed: 31 May 2022).
- Timmermans, F. (2021) *Opening remarks by Frans Timmermans and Kadri Simson at Press Conference on new European Green Deal proposals for more energy efficiency, increased carbon removals and a framework to decarbonise the gas market*. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_21_6910 (Accessed: 31 May 2022).
- Von der Leyen, U. (2019) *Press remarks by President von der Leyen on the occasion of the adoption of the European Green Deal Communication*. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_19_6749 (Accessed: 31 May 2022).
- Von der Leyen, U. (2019) *Speech by President von der Leyen in the Plenary of the European Parliament at the debate on the European Green Deal*. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_19_6751 (Accessed: 31 May 2022).
- Von der Leyen, U. (2020) *Press remarks by President von der Leyen on the occasion of the adoption of the European Climate Law*. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement_20_381 (Accessed: 31 May 2022).
- Von der Leyen, U. (2020) *2020 State of the Union Address by President von der Leyen at the European Parliament Plenary*. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_20_1655 (Accessed: 31 May 2022).
- Von der Leyen, U. (2021) *Speech by President von der Leyen at the Opening of the High-Level Conference 'Investing in climate action: The Make-or-Break Decade', in cooperation with the EIB*. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_21_1361 (Accessed: 31 May 2022).

Von der Leyen, U. (2021) *Statement by President von der Leyen on delivering the European Green Deal*. Available at:
https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/STATEMENT_21_3701 (Accessed: 31 May 2022).

Von der Leyen, U. (2021) *2021 State of the Union Address by President von der Leyen*. Available at:
https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_21_4701 (Accessed: 31 May 2022).

Secondary sources

General books

D'Alisa, G., Demaria, F. and Kallis, G. (eds) (2015) *Degrowth: a vocabulary for a new era*. New York; London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

Daly, H.E. (1991) *Steady-state economics*. 2nd ed., with new essays. Washington, D.C: Island Press

Fairclough, N. (1992) *Discourse and social change*. Cambridge, UK ; Cambridge, MA: Polity Press.

— (1995) *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language*. Essex: Longman.

Fischer, F. and Forester, J. (eds) (1993) *The Argumentative Turn in Policy Analysis and Planning*. Duke University Press.

Gibbs D (2009) *Climate Change, Resource Pressures and the Future for Regional Development Policies*. Northern Way Turning Points Paper, Centre for Urban and Regional Development Studies. Newcastle: University of Newcastle.

Gramsci, A. (1999). *Selections from the prison notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*. London: The Electronic Book Company Ltd.

Hajer, M.A. (1995) *The politics of environmental discourse: ecological modernization and the policy process*. Oxford : New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press.

Jackson, T. (2009) *Prosperity without growth: economics for a finite planet*. London ; Sterling, VA: Earthscan

Kothari, A. et al. (eds) (2019) *Pluriverse: a post-development dictionary*. New Delhi: Tulika Books and Authorsupfront.

Kuhn, T.S. (1970) *The structure of scientific revolutions*. [2d ed., enl. Chicago: University of Chicago Press (International encyclopedia of unified science. Foundations of the unity of science, v. 2, no. 2).

Latouche, S. (2009) *Farewell to growth*. Cambridge; Malden, MA: Polity.

Laurent, É. (2019) *Sortir de la croissance, mode d'emploi*. Paris: Éditions les Liens qui libèrent.

- Parrique, T. (2019) *The political economy of degrowth*. Université Clermont; Stockholms universitet : HAL - tel-02499463.
- Raworth, K. (2017) *Doughnut economics: seven ways to think like a 21st-century economist*. London: Random House Business Books
- Smith, R. (2016). *Green capitalism: The god that failed*. College Publications. World Economics Association.
- Taylor, S. (2013) *What is discourse analysis?* Bloomsbury Academic.
- Van Apeldoorn, B., Drahokoupil, J. and Horn, L. (eds) (2009) *Contradictions and limits of neoliberal European governance: from Lisbon to Lisbon*. Basingstoke [England]; New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Academic journals, articles and book chapters

- Adler, E. (2008) 'The spread of security communities: communities of practice, self-restraint, and NATO's post—cold war transformation', *European Journal of International Relations*, 14(2), pp. 195–230.
- Bailey, I., Gouldson, A. and Newell, P. (2011) 'Ecological modernisation and the governance of carbon: a critical analysis', *Antipode*, 43(3), pp. 682–703.
- Bailey, D. (2020) 'Re-thinking the fiscal and monetary political economy of the green state', *New Political Economy*, 25(1), pp. 5-17.
- Barca, S. (2018) 'In defense of degrowth. Opinions and minifestos - Doughnut economics. Seven ways to think like a 21st century economist', *Local Environment*, 23(3), pp. 378–381.
- Bongardt, A. and Torres, F. (2022) 'The European Green Deal: more than an exit strategy to the pandemic crisis, a building block of a sustainable European economic model', *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 60(1), pp. 170–185.
- Bowen, A. and Fankhauser, S. (2011) 'The green growth narrative: Paradigm shift or just spin?', *Global Environmental Change*, 21(4), pp. 1157–1159.
- Bowen, A. and Hepburn, C. (2014) 'Green growth: an assessment', *Oxford Review of Economic Policy*, 30(3), pp. 407–422.
- Carton, W. (2014) 'Environmental protection as market pathology? : carbon trading and the dialectics of the “double movement”', *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 32(6), pp. 1002–1018.
- Christoff, P. (1996) 'Ecological modernisation, ecological modernities', *Environmental Politics*, 5(3), pp. 476–500.

- Colombo, L.A., Pansera, M. and Owen, R. (2019) 'The discourse of eco-innovation in the European Union: an analysis of the Eco-innovation Action Plan and Horizon 2020', *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 214, pp. 653–665.
- Custers, P. (2010) 'The tasks of Keynesianism today: Green New Deals as transition towards a zero growth economy?', *New Political Science*, 32(2), pp. 173–191.
- D'Alessandro, S. et al. (2020) 'Feasible alternatives to green growth', *Nature Sustainability*, 3(4), pp. 329–335.
- Demaria, F. et al. (2013) 'What is degrowth? From an activist slogan to a social movement', *Environmental Values*, 22(2), pp. 191–215.
- Dupont, C., Oberthür, S. and von Homeyer, I. (2020) 'The Covid-19 Crisis: A Critical Juncture for EU Climate Policy Development?' *Journal of European Integration*, Vol. 42, No. 8, pp. 1095–110.
- Eckert, E. and Kovalevska, O. (2021) 'Sustainability in the European Union: Analyzing the discourse of the European Green Deal', *Journal of Risk and Financial Management*, 14(2), p. 80.
- Engelman, R. (2013) 'Beyond sustainability' in Worldwatch Institute (ed.) *State of the World 2013*. Washington, DC: Island Press/Center for Resource Economics, pp. 3–16.
- Fairclough, N. (2012) 'Critical Discourse Analysis' in Gee, J. P., & Handford, M. (Eds.). *The Routledge Handbook of Discourse Analysis*. Taylor & Francis Group, pp. 9-20.
- Ferguson, P. (2015) 'The green economy agenda: business as usual or transformational discourse?', *Environmental Politics*, 24(1), pp. 17–37.
- Foucault, M. (1984) 'The order of discourse', in Shapiro, M.J. (ed.) *Language and Politics*. Basil Blackwell, Oxford, pp. 108–139.
- Fukasaku, Y. (1999) 'Stimulating environmental innovation', *The STI Review*, 25(2), OECD, Paris, pp.57-64.
- Gaventa, J. (2019) 'How the European Green Deal will Succeed or Fail', *E3G*.
- Haberl, H. et al. (2020) 'A systematic review of the evidence on decoupling of GDP, resource use and GHG emissions, part II: synthesizing the insights', *Environmental Research Letters*, 15(6), p. 065003.
- Hajer, M.A. (2005) 'Coalitions, Practices, and Meaning in Environmental Politics: from Acid rain to BSE' in Howarth, D. and Torfing, J. (eds) *Discourse Theory in European Politics*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, pp. 297–315.
- Hickel, J. and Kallis, G. (2020) 'Is green growth possible?', *New Political Economy*, 25(4), pp. 469–486.
- Jackson, T. and Victor, P.A. (2019) 'Unraveling the claims for (and against) green growth', *Science*, 366(6468), pp. 950–951.

- Kallis, G., Varvarousis, A. and Petridis, P. (2022) 'Southern thought, islandness and real-existing degrowth in the Mediterranean', *World Development*, 157, p. 105957.
- Kambites, C.J. (2014) "'Sustainable development': the 'unsustainable' development of a concept in political discourse: the 'unsustainable' development of a concept", *Sustainable Development*, 22(5), pp. 336–348.
- Knill, C., Steinebach, Y. and Fernández-i-Marín, X. (2020) 'Hypocrisy as a crisis response? Assessing changes in talk, decisions, and actions of the European Commission in EU environmental policy', *Public Administration*, 98(2), pp. 363–377.
- Latour, B. (1998) 'To Modernize or to Ecologize? That's the Question', in Castree, N. and Willems-Braun, B. (Eds) *Remaking Reality: Nature at the Millenium*, London: Routledge.
- Laurent, E. (2020) 'The European Green Deal: bring back the new', *OFCE Policy Brief*, 63.
- Lietaert, M. (2008) 'Struggling for a social europe: neoliberal globalization and the birth of a european social movement – by a. Mathers', *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies*, 46(3), pp. 726–727.
- Machin, A. (2019) 'Changing the story? The discourse of ecological modernisation in the European Union', *Environmental Politics*, 28(2), pp. 208–227.
- Mastini, R., Kallis, G. and Hickel, J. (2021) 'A Green New Deal without growth?', *Ecological Economics*, 179, p. 106832.
- McCarthy, J. (2015) 'A socioecological fix to capitalist crisis and climate change? The possibilities and limits of renewable energy', *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, 47(12), pp. 2485–2502.
- Munta, M. (2020) 'The European Green Deal: A game changer or simply a buzzword?', *Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung*.
- Newell, P. and Paterson, M. (2009) 'The politics of the carbon economy', in Boykoff, M. (ed) *The Politics of Climate Change: A Survey*, London: Routledge, pp 80–99.
- Nightingale, A.J. et al. (2020) 'Beyond Technical Fixes: climate solutions and the great derangement', *Climate and Development*, 12(4), pp. 343–352.
- O'Neill, D.W. (2020) 'Beyond green growth', *Nature Sustainability*, 3(4), pp. 260–261.
- O'Neill, D.W. et al. (2018) 'A good life for all within planetary boundaries', *Nature Sustainability*, 1(2), pp. 88–95.
- Ossewaarde, M. & Ossewaarde-Lowtoo, R.,(2020) 'The EU's Green Deal: A Third Alternative to Green Growth and Degrowth?' *Sustainability*, 12(23), p.9825.
- Pollin, R. (2019) 'Advancing a viable global climate stabilization project: degrowth versus the Green New Deal', *Review of Radical Political Economics*, 51(2), pp. 311–319.
- Randers, J. (2010) 'What was the message of Limits to Growth?', *Ask Force*.

- Raworth, K. (2017) 'Why it's time for Doughnut Economics', *IPPR Progressive Review*, 24(3), pp. 216–222.
- Renda, A. (2021) 'The EU industrial strategy: towards a post-growth agenda?', *Intereconomics*, 56(3), pp. 133–138.
- Rietig, K. (2019) 'Shifting modes of European climate governance? The European commission's role in reviving climate policy integration in times of multiple economic and security crises', *Environmental Politics*, 28 (2).
- Rosenbaum, E. (2017) 'Green growth—magic bullet or damp squib?', *Sustainability*, 9(7), p. 1092.
- Rydin, Y. (1999) 'Can we talk ourselves into sustainability? The role of discourse in the environmental policy process', *Environmental Values*, 8(4), pp. 467–484. Available at:
- Samper, J.A., Schockling, A. and Islar, M. (2021) 'Climate politics in Green Deals: exposing the political frontiers of the European Green Deal', *Politics and Governance*, 9(2), pp. 8–16.
- Schmidt, V.A. (2016). 'The roots of neo-liberal resilience: Explaining continuity and change in background ideas in Europe's political economy', *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 18(2), pp. 318–334
- Schokkaert, E. (2019) 'Doughnut Economics', *Erasmus Journal for Philosophy and Economics*, vol. 12, no. 1, pp. 125–132.
- Siddi, M. (2020) 'The European Green Deal: Assessing Its Current State and Future Implementation', *Helsinki: The Finnish Institute of International Affairs*.
- Steinebach, Y. and Knill, C. (2017) 'Still an entrepreneur? The changing role of the European Commission in EU environmental policy-making', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 24(3), pp. 429–446.
- Stegemann, L. and Ossewaarde, M. (2018) 'A sustainable myth: A neo-Gramscian perspective on the populist and post-truth tendencies of the European green growth discourse', *Energy Research & Social Science*, 43, pp. 25–32.
- Stuart, D., Gunderson, R. and Petersen, B. (2019) 'Climate change and the Polanyian counter-movement: carbon markets or degrowth?', *New Political Economy*, 24(1), pp. 89–102.
- Swyngedouw, E. (2013). 'The non-political politics of climate change', *ACME*, 12(1), pp.1–8
- Thomas, R. and Turnbull, P. (2017) 'Talking up a storm? Using language to activate adherents and demobilize detractors of European Commission policy frames', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 24(7), pp. 931–950.
- Wanner, T. (2015) 'The new "passive revolution" of the green economy and growth discourse: maintaining the "sustainable development" of neoliberal capitalism', *New Political Economy*, 20(1), pp. 21–41.

Ward, J.D. et al. (2016) 'Is decoupling GDP growth from environmental impact possible?', *PLOS ONE*. Edited by D.E. Naya, 11(10).

Zell-Ziegler, C. et al. (2021) 'Enough? The role of sufficiency in European energy and climate plans', *Energy Policy*, 157, p. 112483.

Zito, A.R., Burns, C. and Lenschow, A. (2019) 'Is the trajectory of European Union environmental policy less certain?', *Environmental Politics*, 28(2), pp. 187–207.

Websites and online sources

Aglietta, M. (2019) 'Croissance contre finance : pour un capitalisme soutenable', *Le Grand Continent*, 24 January. Available at: <https://legrandcontinent.eu/fr/2019/01/24/croissance-contre-finance-pour-un-capitalisme-soutenable/> (Accessed: 7 February 2022).

Boucaud-Victoire, K. (2019) 'Serge Latouche: "La décroissance implique de sortir de la modernité."', *Marianne*, 15 March. Available at: <https://www.marianne.net/debattons/entretiens/serge-latouche-la-decroissance-implique-de-sortir-de-la-modernite.> (Accessed 2 June 2022).

Chertkovskaya, E. and Paulsson (2016) 'The growthocene - uneven earth', *Uneven Earth*, 3 March. Available at: <http://unevenearth.org/2016/03/the-growthocene/> (Accessed: 2 February 2022).

Dale, G. (2019) 'Degrowth and the Green New Deal', *The Ecologist*, 28 October. Available at: <https://theecologist.org/2019/oct/28/degrowth-and-green-new-deal> (Accessed 2 June 2022).

Degrowth Vienna 2020 (2020) 'Degrowth and European Politics 1: How do we deal with the European Green Deal?', *Youtube*, 30 May. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ZIG78A7lD8> (Accessed: 2 February 2022).

Doughnut Economics Action Lab. (2022) 'Exploring post-growth futures in the EU'. Available at : <https://doughnuteconomics.org/stories/151> (Accessed: 17 February 2022).

European Council on Foreign Relations. (2019) 'A majority of Europe's voters do not consider migration to be the most important issue, according to major new poll', *ECFR*, 1 April. Available at: https://ecfr.eu/article/european_voters_do_not_consider_migration_most_important_election/ (Accessed: 15 March 2022).

Giraud, G. (2022). 'Meadows, un rapport explosif – Podcast', *Gael Giraud Blog*, 17 March. Available at: <https://gael-giraud.fr/gael-giraud-meadows-un-rapport-explosif-podcast/> (Accessed: 8 May 2022).

Foster, J. B. (2010) 'Degrow or die?', *Red Pepper*, 30 November. Available at: <https://www.redpepper.org.uk/degrow-or-die/> (Accessed: 8 June 2022).

- Gorz, A. (as Michel Bosquet) (1972) 'Si on permet aux grands monopoles de la «récupérer», la lutte contre la pollution peut conduire au despotisme', *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 397 (19-25 juin), Supplément spéciale : Le débat du club de « L'Obs », Écologie et révolution, IV.
- Heron, K. (2019) 'Capitalists Fear the Green New Deal — And for Good Reason', *ROAR*, 8 May. Available at: <https://roarmag.org/essays/capitalists-fear-the-green-new-deal-and-for-good-reason/>.
- Hickel, J. (2020) 'A reponse to McAfee: no the “Environmental Kuznets Curve” won’t save us’, 10 October. Available at: <https://www.jasonhickel.org/blog/2020/10/9/response-to-mcafee> (Accessed: 8 March 2022).
- Jackson, T. (2010) 'An economic reality check', *TED*, 15 July. Available at: https://www.ted.com/talks/tim_jackson_an_economic_reality_check (Accessed: 1 March 2022).
- Jensen, T. N. (2021) 'Avoiding carbon tunnel vision: action on climate change needs an inter-connected response', *Global Reporting Initiative*, 8 November. Available at: <https://globalreportinginitiative.medium.com/avoiding-carbon-tunnel-vision-action-on-climate-change-needs-an-inter-connected-response-98115b29b51d> (Accessed: 19 May 2022).
- Kalmus, P. (2022) 'Interview - Peter Kalmus: ‘As a species, we’re on autopilot, not making the right decisions’, *The Guardian*, 21 May. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/may/21/peter-kalmus-nasa-scientist-climate-protest-interview>. (Accessed: 24 May 2022)
- Lock, H. (2020). 'Most Brits Want to Prioritise Well-Being Over Economic Growth Amid COVID-19 Crisis: Poll', *Global Citizen*, 11 May. Available at: <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/majority-of-brits-want-to-prioritise-wellbeing-ove/> (Accessed: 28 May 2022).
- Lowy, M. (2020). 'Eco-socialism and/or de-growth', *Mr online*. Available at: <https://mronline.org/2020/10/07/eco-socialism-and-or-de-growth/> (Accessed: 22 February 2022).
- Löwy, M. et al. (2022) 'For an ecosocialist degrowth', *Monthly Review*, 1 April. Available at: <https://monthlyreview.org/2022/04/01/for-an-ecosocialist-degrowth/> (Accessed: 30 May 2022).
- Meadows, D., Randers, J. and Meadows, D. (2004) 'A synopsis: limits to growth: the 30-year update', *The Academy for Systems Change*. Available at: <https://donellameadows.org/archives/a-synopsis-limits-to-growth-the-30-year-update/> (Accessed: 7 April 2022).
- Meadows, D. (2022) 'Dennis Meadows : 'Il faut mettre fin à la croissance incontrôlée, le cancer de la société'', *LeMonde.fr*, 8 April. Available at: https://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2022/04/08/dennis-meadows-il-faut-mettre-fin-a-la-croissance-incontrolee-le-cancer-de-la-societe_6121114_3232.html (Accessed: 8 April 2022).
- Parrique, T. (2022a) 'Sufficiency means degrowth', *Timothée Parrique*. Available at: <https://timotheeparrique.com/sufficiency-means-degrowth/> (Accessed: 21 May 2022)

- (2022b) [Twitter] 28 May. Available at:
<https://twitter.com/timparrique/status/1530443759787327489?s=21&t=Z9hwgNliYnYslifalhCgg> (Accessed: 28 May 2022).
- (2022c) 'Degrowth in the IPCC AR6 WGIII', *Timothée Parrique*. Available at:
<https://timotheeparrique.com/decoupling-in-the-ipcc-ar6-wgiii/> (Accessed: 21 May 2022)
- (2022d) 'A response to William Rinehart: Why lizards love degrowth', *Timothée Parrique*. Available at: <https://timotheeparrique.com/a-response-to-william-rinehart-why-lizards-love-degrowth/> (Accessed: 21 May 2022)
- Pèlerin C. (2019) 'Écologie ou croissance : faut-il choisir ?', *Le Grand Continent*, 1 November. Available at: <https://legrandcontinent.eu/fr/2019/11/01/ecologie-ou-croissance-faut-il-choisir/> (Accessed: 7 February 2022).
- Raworth, K. (2015) 'Why Degrowth has out-grown its own name', *Oxfam FP2P*. Available at: <https://oxfamapps.org/fp2p/why-degrowth-has-out-grown-its-own-name-guest-post-by-kate-raworth/> (Accessed: 2 February 2022)
- Research and Degrowth (2022) 'Definition', *R&D*. Available at: <https://degrowth.org/definition/>. (Accessed: 28 May 2022).
- Taylor, M. (2019) 'Climate crisis seen as 'most important issue' by public, poll shows', *The Guardian*, 18 September. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/sep/18/climate-crisis-seen-as-most-important-issue-by-public-poll-shows> (Accessed: 28 May 2022).
- The Guardian. (2018) 'The EU needs a stability and wellbeing pact, not more growth', *The Guardian*, 16 September. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/sep/16/the-eu-needs-a-stability-and-wellbeing-pact-not-more-growth> (Accessed: 15 March 2022).

Scientific and policy reports

- DiEM25 (2019) 'A blueprint for Europe's just transition', *Green New Deal for Europe*. Available at: <https://report.gndforeurope.com/> (Accessed: 17 April 2022).
- European Environment Agency (2021a) 'Reflecting on green growth – Creating a resilient economy within environmental limits', *EEA*. Available at: <https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/reflecting-on-green-growth> (Accessed: 9 March 2022)
- European Environment Agency (2021b) 'Growth without economic growth – Briefing', *EEA*. Available at: <https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/growth-without-economic-growth> (Accessed: 9 March 2022)
- European Environmental Bureau. (2019) 'Decoupling debunked – Evidence and arguments against green growth as a sole strategy for sustainability', *EEB*. Available at: <https://eeb.org/library/decoupling-debunked/> (Accessed: 12 February 2022).

- Meadows, D.H., Club of Rome, and Potomac Associates (1972) 'The limits to growth: a report for the Club of Rome's project on the predicament of mankind'. London: Earth Island. Available at: <https://www.clubofrome.org/publication/the-limits-to-growth/> (Accessed: 12 February 2022).
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2001) 'OECD environmental outlook', *OECD*. Available at: https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/fr/environment/oecd-environmental-outlook_9789264188563-en (Accessed: 12 February 2022).
- Terzi, A. (2021) Economic policy-making beyond GDP an introduction, European Commission Discussion Paper. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.2765/166310> (Accessed: 30 May 2022).
- World Commission on Environment and Development (ed.) (1987) 'Our common future'. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press (Oxford paperbacks). Available at: <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/5987our-common-future.pdf> (Accessed: 12 February 2022).

ANNEXES

Annex A: Growth spectrum

	Position towards economic growth	Objective for GDP	Economic model	Keywords	Examples of preferred policy tools	Operationalisation in plans and strategies
1. Business as usual	Favourable (at all costs)	Positive (exponentially high)	Neoliberal capitalism	Profit, market freedom, minimal state	Deregulation, privatisation, commodification of natural resources	Post-financial crisis recovery
2. Green Growth <i>Weak sustainability</i>	Favourable (fervent advocate)	Positive (exponentially high)	Regulated capitalism	Innovation, technology, modernisation, market based solutions, efficiency	Carbon pricing, green taxes, CCS	GND 1.0
3. Green Growth <i>Strong sustainability</i>	Favourable under certain conditions (cautious advocate)	Positive (within planetary boundaries)	Regulated capitalism Green Keynesianism	Decarbonisation, clean energy transition, circular economy	Green public procurement, investments in green energy sources and infrastructures	GND 2.0
4. Post-growth	Agnostic	Stationary close to 0	Ecological economics Doughnut economics	Wellbeing, socially just transition, development, distributive and regenerative economies	Job guarantees, reduced energy demand, resource use caps	GND without growth
5. Absolute degrowth	Opposed	Negative	Ecological economics Degrowth economics	Sobriety, social justice, consumption-based solutions	Job guarantees, working time reductions, minimum income	GND without growth (eventually)

Explanatory note: This detailed version of the growth spectrum presented in sub-chapter 2.1.4 establishes a more extensive classification of different proposals according to their degree of commitment to economic growth. In addition, the table includes, from left to right, information on their position towards GDP; their economic foundations; some keywords that often help identifying them; a number of policy instruments they tend to favour; and types of environmental plans that have been developed to operationalise them. The bolder line separating categories 1 to 3 from categories 4 and 5 corresponds to the border drawn between the strategies that seek to adjust capitalism and those that explicitly seek to dismantle capitalism. Due to the radical position of categories 4 and 5, any environmental plan that would be aligned with them would be considered a paradigm shift.

Annex B: List of Selected Communications

Explanatory Note: To offer greater clarity in the 'Analysis' section of the thesis, Communications will be referred to according to their number, ranked in chronological order of publication. A shortened name will also be used to make direct references to the Communications more readable.

	Full name	Short name	Document number	Date	Topic	Access
1	Communication from the Commission – The European Green Deal	'EGD'	COM/2019/640	11/12/19	EGD	>link<
2	Communication from the Commission – A new Circular Economy Action Plan: for a cleaner and more competitive Europe	'CEAP'	COM/2020/98	11/03/20	Circular Economy	>link<
3	Communication from the Commission – EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030: bringing nature back into our lives	'Biodiversity'	COM/2020/380	20/05/20	Biodiversity	>link<
4	Communication from the Commission – A Farm to Fork Strategy: for a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system	'Farm to Fork'	COM/2020/381	20/05/20	Food and Agriculture	>link<
5	Communication from the Commission – Stepping up Europe's 2030 climate ambition: Investing in a climate-neutral future for the benefit of our people	'Emissions targets'	COM/2020/562	17/09/20	Climate policy	>link<
6	Communication from the Commission – Forging a climate-resilient Europe – the new EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change	'Adaptation'	COM/2021/82	24/02/21	Climate policy, adaptation	>link<
7	Communication from the Commission – on a new approach for a sustainable blue economy in the EU: transforming the EU's Blue Economy for a Sustainable Future	'Blue economy'	COM/2021/240	15/05/21	Oceans and Fisheries	>link<
8	Communication from the Commission – 'Fit for 55': delivering the EU's 2030 Climate Target on the way to climate neutrality	'Fit for 55'	COM/2021/550	14/07/21	Climate Policy, EGD	>link<
9	Communication from the Commission – Sustainable Carbon Cycles	'Carbon Cycles'	COM/2021/800	15/12/21	Climate Policy	>link<
10	Communication from the Commission – Towards a green, digital, and resilient economy: Our European Growth Model	'Growth Model'	COM/2022/83	02/03/22	Economic policy	>link<

Example: The Communication named 'A new Circular Economy Action Plan: for a cleaner and more competitive Europe', COM/2020/98 will be referred to as Commission n°2 'CEAP'.

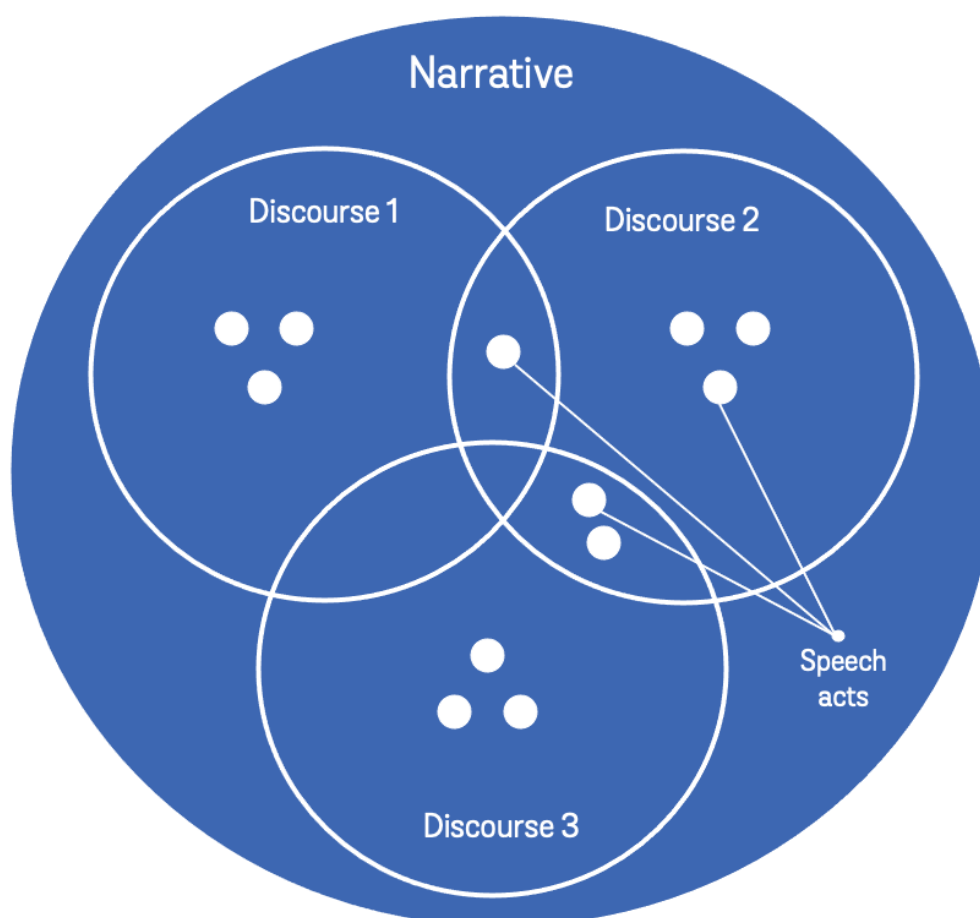
Annex C: List of Selected Speeches

	Name	Short Name	EC Official	Date	Type	Topic	Online access
1	Press remarks by President von der Leyen on the occasion of the adoption of the European Green Deal Communication	'Press remarks on EGD'	Von der Leyen	11/12/2019	Press Conference	EGD	>links
2	Speech by President von der Leyen in the Plenary of the European Parliament at the debate on the European Green Deal	'EP debate on EGD'		11/12/2019	Speech in the EP	EGD	>links
3	Press remarks by President von der Leyen on the occasion of the adoption of the European Climate Law	'Climate Law'		04/03/2020	Press Conference	Climate policy	>links
4	2020 State of the Union Address by President von der Leyen at the European Parliament Plenary	'2020 State of the Union'		16/09/2020	Speech in the EP	General policy	>links
5	Speech by President von der Leyen at the Opening of the High-Level Conference 'Investing in climate action: The Make-or-Break Decade ', in cooperation with the EIB	'Make or Break'		24/03/2021	European Conference	Investments	>links
6	Statement by President von der Leyen on delivering the European Green Deal	'Delivering the EGD'		14/07/2021	Press Conference	Climate policy, EGD	>links
7	2021 State of the Union Address by President von der Leyen	'2021 State of the Union'		15/09/2021	Speech in the EP	General policy	>links
8	Executive Vice-President Frans Timmermans at the COP25 Chile in Madrid	'COP25'	Timmermans	10/12/2019	International Conference	EGD, External Action	>links
9	Closing statement by Frans Timmermans, Executive Vice-President of the European Commission	'EP debate on EGD'		11/12/2019	Speech in the EP	EGD	>links
10	Remarks by Frans Timmermans at the meeting of Environment Ministers	'ENVI Meeting'		23/06/2020	Council Meeting	Investments, Climate policy	>links
11	Frans Timmermans on the European Green Deal as a growth strategy at the Bruegel Annual Meetings	'Bruegel'		01/09/2020	European Conference	Economic policy	>links
12	Frans Timmermans in discussion panel at the Katowice European Economic Congress	'Katowice'		03/09/2020	International Conference	Just Transition, Economic policy	>links
13	Opening remarks by Executive Vice-President Timmermans and Commissioner Simson at the press conference Building a Climate Neutral Europe	'Climate Neutral'		14/10/2020	Press Conference	Climate and energy policy	>links
14	Frans Timmermans' statement at the Irish Climate Summit 2021	'Irish Summit'		30/04/2021	International Conference	Climate policy, EGD	>links
15	Statement by Executive Vice-President Timmermans on delivering the European Green Deal	'Delivering the EGD'		14/07/2021	Press Conference	Climate policy, EGD	>links
16	Opening remarks by Frans Timmermans and Kadri Simson at Press Conference on new European Green Deal proposals for more energy efficiency, increased carbon removals and a framework to decarbonise the gas market	'Energy proposals'		15/12/2021	Press Conference	Energy policy	>links
17	Opening remarks by Executive Vice-President Timmermans and Commissioner Simson at the press conference Building a Climate Neutral Europe	'Climate Neutral'	Simson	14/10/2020	Press Conference	Climate and energy policy	>links
18	Statement by Commissioner Simson on delivering the European Green Deal	'Delivering the EGD'		14/07/2021	Press Conference	Climate policy, EGD	>links
19	Opening remarks by Frans Timmermans and Kadri Simson at Press Conference on new European Green Deal proposals for more energy efficiency, increased carbon removals and a framework to decarbonise the gas market	'Energy proposals'		15/12/2021	Press Conference	Energy policy	>links
20	Press statement by Commissioner Virginijus Sinkevičius on the new Circular Economy Action Plan	'CEAP'	Sinkevičius	11/03/2020	Press Conference	Circular economy	>links
21	Statement by Commissioner Virginijus Sinkevičius on a new approach for a sustainable blue economy in the EU	'Blue economy'		17/05/2021	Press Conference	Oceans and fisheries	>links
22	Statement delivered by Commissioner Sinkevičius during the press conference on EU Forest Strategy	'Forest strategy'		16/07/2021	Press Conference	Biodiversity	>links

Explanatory Note: In line with the annotation method used for Annex A, speeches will also be referred to according to their number and shortened name. In addition, and since some speeches have the same name as they have been delivered during the same event, the name of the speaker will be indicated as follows: 'VdL' for Ursula von der Leyen; 'Timmermans' for Frans Timmermans; 'Simson' for Kadri Simson; and 'Sinkevičius' for Virginijus Sinkevičius.

Example: The speech named 'Frans Timmermans on the European Green Deal as a growth strategy at the Bruegel Annual Meeting' will be referred to as 'Speech n°11 'Bruegel', Timmermans'.

Annex D: A tridimensional analytical model



Explanatory note: This model represents the EC's discursive strategy through in three dimensions. The first layer corresponds to speech acts. This level is the closest to the original text as it corresponds to the different discursive practices and linguistic expressions that are deployed throughout the Communications and speeches. The second layer corresponds to discourses. This broader term corresponds to the general idea that is communicated by the EC, through various speech acts. In this research, they correspond to change, status quo and status quo in disguise. As shown in the model, certain categories of speech acts sometimes have a dual or triple effect as they contribute to reinforce several discourses simultaneously. The third layer corresponds to the EC's narrative. A narrative is created by the combined enactment of several discourses. In our example, the EGD's growth narrative is created when the EC combines the discourses of change, status quo and status quo in disguise to convey a coherent vision about its growth ideal.

Annex E: Excel Sheet – Text analysis

Online access:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1VJIt2rQ4eVhBqB0ddyfbpehhuo4SW6VNA2mIYE-Z620/edit?usp=sharing>

Explanatory note: To ensure greater coherence, enable comparisons between several texts, and avoid splitting the findings into several documents, all findings were put in a single document. This document can either be accessed online through the abovementioned link or opened in Microsoft Excel through the document named 'Text_Analysis.xlsx' attached to the dissertation itself.

The file should be read as follows. The first sheet is dedicated to the text analysis of Communications, while the second sheet is dedicated to the text analysis of speeches. For each sheet, a column corresponds to one text, and a line corresponds to one cluster of speech acts (called sub-category in the dissertation). In the example below, Box E9 of the first sheet (highlighted in blue), shows the elements in COM n°3 'Biodiversity' that fall in the sub-category 'The EC's high ambitions'. Therefore, all discursive practises and speech acts that the EC deploys in this text to testify about its high environmental ambition are listed in this box. The content of this box contributes to the reinforcement of the discourse on change.

Example:

E9 — Agitating fears to mobilise audience: 'collapse', 'one of the biggest threats'					
A	B	C	D	E	F
Discourses	Speech acts				
1	Title	1. 'EGD'	2. 'CEAP'	3. 'Biodiversity'	4. 'Farm to Fork'
CHANGE / PARADIGM SHIFT	Sobriety & Self-sufficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nothing, does not appeal to lower consumption or modified patterns Changes aim at securing the growth objective and not at disrupting the economy: transition to a sustainable model of inclusive growth 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Major economic changes: 'transform consumption patterns so that no waste is produced in the first place' Changing patterns of dependency: 'make Europe less dependent on primary materials.' Moving beyond GDP: 'It foresees the further development of a sound monitoring framework contributing to measuring well-being beyond GDP' Progressive idea of a 'regenerative growth model' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not address overconsumption or promote sufficiency BUT the EU needs not only for a better protection but also to make 'efforts to reduce wildlife trade and consumption' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Food waste: 'It is essential to take action to change consumption pattern waste' Recognition excessive meat consumption: 'While in the EU, average intake of red meat, sugar, salt and fats continue to exceed recommendations, consumption of grain cereals, fruit and vegetables, legumes and nuts is insufficient', 'lower plant-based diet with less red and processed meat' Criticises the role of meat lobbies indirectly: 'For example, marketing car advertising meat at very low prices must be avoided' BUT rather than advocating for meat-free diets, the EC promotes 'various methods of livestock production', or 'meat substitutes' and looks for a 'profit from environmental problems as it also does not mention key elements like' On agroecology, the notion is always connected to the idea of innovating agriculture instead of being viewed as a traditional knowledge respectful o
	Openness	X	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Biodiversity objectives, stop biodiversity loss 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discusses the impacts of biodiversity loss on health issues (pandemic), invasive species, urban planning, food security, desertification Mentions organic farming for healthier diets: 'Agroecology can provide healthy food' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Biodiversity mentioned 18x Cooperation with third partners includes 'transversal objectives such as i gender, and peace and security' Inclusion of fundamental issues that are often sidelined
	The EC's high ambition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> EU should be a 'leader', and 'at the forefront' of climate action Word 'ambition' repeatedly emphasised: the EGD should have a 'higher climate/environmental ambition' 'conventional approaches will not be sufficient' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Idea of a 'comprehensive' strategy (46) or approach to circularity The EGD is a 'nature-oriented agenda', no CSAP has a 'zero pollution ambition' Sub-chapter titled 'a green oath: do no harm' to ensure that all EU legislation is in line with EGD objectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agitating fears to mobilise audience: 'collapse', 'one of the biggest threats' Need to 'live up to the expectations of the EGD', by designing a strategy that 'is in line with the ambitions and commitment set out' 'Whole-of-society approach' + some 'ambition' 420 (e.g., EU 'ready to show ambition', enabling framework to bring the ambition to life', there must be zero-tolerance for (illegal practices), 'nature cannot afford any half measures or lack of ambition') BUT strong commitments mitigated immediately by 'when avoidable' as the definition of what is avoidable is open to interpretation: 'As part of this, the world should commit to no human-induced extinction of species, at minimum where avoidable' Mitigates ambition again: 'the by-catch of other species 45 must be eliminated or, where this is not possible, minimised so as not to threaten their conservation status' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'Ambition' 45, far less present than in other texts Change is not only in agriculture but also elsewhere: 'in parallel to changing agriculture, the shift to sustainable fish and seafood production must also be' Idea of 'boosting' ecosystems such as 'agroecology', 'agro-forestry' BUT mitigating ambitions by refusing to phase-out biggest pollutants or most environmentally toxic substances in agriculture: 'reduce and optimise t (e.g. pesticides, fertilisers)', 'reducing the risks linked to pesticides' No mention of 'eliminate', 'stop', 'ban' or 'phase-out' while 'reduce' is s (often about food waste) Using 'prevent' 47 or 'reducing the risks linked to pesticides': the EGD a
		EGD favours 'inclusive growth' & 'transition', but the word inclusive is not so present (46)			Inclusiveness throughout the value chain: 'inclusive food systems from pr