

# EU Climate and Energy Security after 24 February 2022

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ABSTRACT

Before 2022, EU conceptions of climate and energy security had begun to converge in a 'virtuous synergy' that supported the Union's continuing attempts at international climate policy leadership. This paper argues that the more orthodox military security problem posed by Russia's invasion of Ukraine coupled with extreme weather events in the same period has profoundly altered both the immediacy and the location of the perceived threats. The Union's responses have been dramatic in terms of a re-orientation of established energy and security policies. Ending the dependence upon Russian gas provides the chance to accelerate the achievement of the European Green Deal and 'Fit for 55' but also involves an immediate quest for alternative gas supplies. The unresolved question is whether the Union can use this opportunity to enhance rather than dissipate its climate security and policy leadership.

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KEYWORDS

European Union, energy, security, climate, leadership

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## INTRODUCTION

There is general agreement that the invasion of Ukraine has de-stabilised the architecture of European security in military and territorial terms but also in the way in which the EU has suddenly engaged in an unprecedented ‘energy war’ with Russia. The implications are likely to be far-reaching. Because energy-related emissions increase the greenhouse effect such implications will involve climate policy. This yields a complex security problem for the Union which may be analysed using three inter-related definitions of security. Energy security – *“access to secure, adequate, reliable and affordable energy supplies”* (BORDOFF ET AL. 2009: 214) – is evidently connected to orthodox conceptions of ‘national security’, the protection of borders and interests, if necessary, by armed force. In the case of a partly supranational entity like the Union it would be more appropriate to speak of ‘hard security’. Prevailing ideas of climate security have been closely linked to these types of security. Environmental change is associated with various conflicts and assaults upon the integrity of states. Such analysis, most prominently expounded by Thomas Homer-Dixon (1999), has framed the Union’s discourse on the security implications of climate change, as it did for most other discussions of the topic within NATO and elsewhere. This maintains an orthodox view of political and territorial security. An alternative, less orthodox, but potentially significant definition places the climate and global ecosystem itself, as opposed to the state, as the referent object, in which security is *“...understood as the maintenance of stable climate conditions as a pre-requisite of all human enterprises”* (TROMBETTA 2008: 595).

Ten years ago it appeared that, in official discourse at least, ideas of climate and energy security had begun to converge in a potentially virtuous ‘synergy’ (VOGLER 2013). Previously they had been both conceptually and institutionally separate. On the one hand, ever since the days of the initial Coal and Steel Community, the Union had vital economic concerns with developing and diversifying its energy supplies while perfecting its fragmented internal market. On the other, environmental policies, emerging rapidly since the 1980s, were often at odds with the apparent requirements of energy security. The relationship came into sharp focus as the Union asserted itself as a leader in international climate policy in the implementation of the 1997 Kyoto Protocol. Rightly or wrongly, the UNFCCC and its Protocol targeted the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions and the

EU responded with an ambitious programme based upon its Emissions Trading Scheme.

For many member states dependent upon coal or imported gas, the Union's atmospheric policies imperilled their energy security, leading to continuing battles within the Council as the Commission and 'progressive' member states struggled to elaborate new reduction targets to sustain the Union's leading role in climate diplomacy. Many saw the necessity to resolve the contradictions between energy and climate policy. As Energy Commissioner Piebalgs (2009) presciently argued, they were necessarily "*two sides of the same coin*". In advance of the 2015 Paris Agreement the EU set new emissions targets and the process of re-orienting the Union's approach to energy and climate policy continued with the Commission's ambitious European Green Deal (EGD) of 2019 and the 'Fit for 55' proposals of 2021. They attempted to provide the detailed underpinning of the pledge (NDC), made before UNFCCC COP 26, to reduce EU carbon emissions by 55% against a 1990 baseline. Major parts of these proposals remained controversial and un-agreed within the Union's legislative procedure. At COP 26 in Glasgow in November 2021 internal divisions were evident. While most member states were supportive of the proposals, other states, namely the coal and gas dependent Central European states, for whom a green transition would be costly, disagreed. These included Poland and the Czech Republic, whose leaders were openly critical of the proposals in the plenary session. One EU prime minister, referring to the EGD, described it as "*...not a deal but an ideology*" involving EU climate policies that were "*dangerous and improper*":

*"Instead of negotiating long-term (gas) contracts with Russia, European politicians are busy blocking the transit capacity of the Nord Stream 2 and Opal pipelines citing worries that the EU will become dependent on Russia. Ladies and Gentlemen, this might seem like news to you, but we are already dependent on Russian natural gas and will be for at least another 20 or 30 years"* (EU

OBSERVER 2021).

The security situation, in all its dimensions, was soon to be transformed by the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Perceptions of threat predicate discussions of security. The argument advanced here is that although some of the critical threats to the EU have been emerging for some time, there have been sudden changes prompted by, but going well beyond, the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The essential point is that whereas climate and security problems were formerly regarded as being largely external and distanced from the Union they were now transformed in their location and immediacy.

The EU was sheltered from immediate ‘hard’ security threats during much of the Cold War and its aftermath but the Russian pressure on Ukraine since 2014 and, most strikingly, the events that unfolded since the 24<sup>th</sup> of February 2022 presented a shocking and immediate threat at the eastern borders of the Union. Energy policy, under the original Steel and Coal Community, provided a means of ensuring that a Franco-German conflict would become ‘materially impossible’ and the early years of the European Economic Community (EEC) were characterised by an abundance of fossil fuels. Subsequently there was vulnerability to the ‘oil price shocks’ of the 1970s and an enlarged Union, dependent upon supplies of Russian gas and oil, struggled with supply interruptions, via Ukraine, in 2006 and 2009. Yet even these events and the crisis of 2014 involving the Russian seizure of Crimea did not entail a fundamental re-think. Germany, having discontinued its nuclear generation and closed its coal mines, continued to enjoy and extend, through the controversial Nordstream pipelines, a mutually beneficial level of dependence upon Russian gas. While Germany relied on Russian supplies for around 30% of its energy needs, other states, locked into Soviet era pipelines, were even more dependent, with the corresponding figures for Lithuania, Slovakia and Hungary being 96.1%, 57.3% and 54.2%, respectively (EUROSTAT 2022). In 2021 more than 40% of the EU’s overall gas consumption came from Russia, amounting to around 155 billion cubic meters of gas (EUROPEAN COMMISSION 2022: FN. 1). The February 2022 invasion of Ukraine served, quite suddenly, to shift the very foundations of EU energy supply as an immediate strategic threat to the Union’s eastern flank rendered the continuation of established relations unthinkable and conjoined a hard security and an energy supply crisis.

Perceptions of the climate change problem were also shifting. Europe (defined as a WMO region rather than as the EU) has warmed at twice the global average rate over the last 30 years, which is more than the rate for

any other WMO region, and with a marked acceleration in the last decade (WMO 2022: 9). There had been extreme weather events before in Europe, for example the 2003 deadly heatwave in France, but until relatively recently their relationship to climate change was still controversial. However, public opinion surveys began to indicate real concern about this issue with 47% of citizens citing climate change as the “*biggest challenge to their lives*” (EIB 2019/20). By 2021 the extent of climate-change-related extreme weather events and the consequent damage (mainly through storms and flooding but also involving droughts and wildfires) in Europe could not be ignored. Apocalyptic events such as Storm Christoph in July 2021 struck at the heart of the EU. In that storm, in Germany at least 189 people died, “*130 km of motorways were closed and 600 km of railway tracks were damaged*”, entailing “*immense economic losses*”. The overall economic damage in Europe was estimated at \$50 billion with 510,000 people directly affected (WMO 2022: 25). Such outcomes may appear less than catastrophic when set against the devastation of Pakistan in the subsequent year, but they seemed both shocking and unprecedented for wealthy and ‘developed’ Europeans. These significant alterations in the location and level of threats have already had significant impact upon EU security policies.

## HARD SECURITY

The most dramatic shift in the EU’s security policy occurred when three days after the Russian invasion, the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs Josep Borrell announced the direct EU financing of lethal aid to the Ukrainian army. In his words “*a taboo has fallen*” as for the first time in its history the EU would be providing lethal equipment to a third country. Military assistance, both lethal and non-lethal, has been provided through the recent (2021), and now somewhat inappropriately named, European Peace Facility (EPF). The EPF is an ‘off budget funding mechanism’ originally designed to provide assistance for ‘crisis management’ and peace support operations. By the end of January 2023 it had disbursed some 3.6 billion Euros (MILLS 2023: 50). When placed alongside the military assistance provided by most member states this is a substantial sum, but its real significance is in the sharp change in the character of the EU as an international actor that it seemed to represent. A foundational characteristic of the European Community (EC) was that it was in itself a ‘peace project’ following the functionalist ideas that had been introduced by

David Mitrany during the Second World War <sup>(MITRANY 1976)</sup>. The EC briefly but unsuccessfully engaged in an attempt to create a European Defence Community during the early 1950s. After 1954 the specifically European dimension of defence policy was the province of the Western European Union and it was NATO that provided the essential US security guarantee defence against the Soviet Union. When the European Union did attempt to develop its own ‘European Defence Identity’ around the turn of the 21st century, the result was the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), which has operated in an intergovernmental and voluntary manner alongside the Common Foreign and Security Policy.

Beset by arguments about ‘strategic autonomy’ and its relationship to NATO, it performed a range of civil and military functions in support of UN peacekeeping operations. Its operations were mainly carried out in Africa but also in the Balkans with an emphasis upon dealing with what were essentially indirect threats and contributing to good global, multi-lateral citizenship. As Jolyon Howarth notes, none of these “*activities subsumed under ‘crisis management intervention’, whether military or civilian, has anything to do with European defence per se*” <sup>(HOWARTH 2023: 313)</sup>. Only time will tell as to the importance of recent changes on the long and uncertain road to EU strategic autonomy or ‘open strategic autonomy,’ as some members would insist. The appearance of a direct military threat to the East did concentrate minds and persuade member states that had previously been unable to agree on the basics of a hard security role for the Union beyond the CSDP. The expansion of the EPF was one result but it still bears some of the hallmarks of the CSDP, which it was originally designed to support, including the provision of opt outs from lethal aid funding for neutral member states. Most immediately, however, an unmissable lesson from the events of 2022 is that the Union remains dependent for its vital defence upon the United States and a re-invigorated NATO.

## ENERGY SECURITY

Security of energy supply is an objective of the Union where competence is shared with Member States. While the Commission shall ensure the functioning of the energy market and promote energy efficiency and interconnection “[s]uch measures shall not affect a Member State’s right to determine the conditions for exploiting its energy resources, its choice between different

*energy sources and the general structure of its energy supply...*" (TFEU: ART. 194). Neither is energy subject to the Union's trade rules. The implication has been a divergence of policy approaches. On the one hand, the Commission has sought to obtain energy security by perfecting the functioning of the internal energy market and extending its provisions to a wider regulatory space in the EU's neighbourhood (the Energy Community) and even at one point attempting to enrol Russia in the Energy Charter Treaty. On the other, Member States have pursued their national energy interests by seeking out alternative sources of supply and building, often competitive, pipeline networks. Although diversification of supply is an EU energy security objective, European-wide policies of liberalisation, privatisation and interdependence were often challenged by energy geopolitics.

Nordstream 1, officially inaugurated by Chancellor Merkel and Russian President Medvedev (along with the then Dutch and French prime ministers) in 2011, and Nordstream 2 contained elements of both approaches. The long-term vision of successive German governments was for the engagement of Russia in a peaceful and mutually beneficial partnership, albeit the resulting partnership was one that caused problems with EU competition rules on separation of ownership and transmission (in the case of Nordstream 2). Opponents of these pipelines saw that they were essentially designed to avoid dependence on the transit of gas through Ukraine and the associated and ongoing disputes between Gazprom and the Ukrainian authorities that had been at the heart of the 2006 and 2008 supply crises. Nordstream 2 commenced construction in May 2018, but in the changed political circumstances following the Russian seizure of Crimea in 2014, the project was already coming under heavy attack from the United States and other allies. The Trump administration imposed extraterritorial sanctions on Nordstream 2 contractors on the grounds that the pipeline undermined Europe's energy security and would lead to a new vulnerability to Russian blackmail. In the light of what was soon to occur, the furious reaction of Germany, France, Austria and the Commission to this presumed assault on Europe's internal commercial affairs and energy independence, has a certain irony. This is especially so in the light of some accusations that the underhand motive of the US was to sell its own LNG to Germany and the EU. Two days before the Russian assault on Ukraine, German Chancellor Scholz moved to terminate Nordstream 2, citing the Russian claims to Donetsk and Luhansk. The pipeline itself, although

completed, never carried any gas. Both Nordstreams were seriously, perhaps fatally, damaged by mysterious explosions in September 2022.

The immediate response by the Commission to Russia's invasion was to outline an emergency change of course for the Union in its RePowerEU proposals (SEE SKJÆRSETH 2023). Alongside a complex of immediate internal measures to tackle the problem of high energy prices and to ensure adequate gas storage for the coming winter, a two thirds reduction in gas imports from Russia by the end of the year was proclaimed with a phasing out of dependence upon all Russian hydrocarbons by 2030. This was to be achieved by “[d]iversifying gas supplies via higher LNG imports and pipeline imports from non-Russian suppliers and higher levels of biomethane and hydrogen” (EUROPEAN COMMISSION 2022: 6). The gas supplies from Russia diminished drastically. This appears to be as much a consequence of the destruction of Nordstream 1 and the Russian retaliation against the sanctions, including demands for payment in roubles, as a consequence of EU action. By the end of November 2022 Russian gas imports had fallen from 42% in January to around 10% of the EU total with the slack being taken up by correspondingly large increases in imports of LNG, primarily from the US but also from Qatar and Nigeria (EUROPEAN COUNCIL 2023). The situation in the ‘energy war’ with Russia was complicated because the very high prices meant that Russian revenues did not fall even though only one pipeline to the West (amazingly enough, through Ukraine) was still operational (FINANCIAL TIMES 2022). Gas prices peaked during August, and then fell back to more normal levels while at the same time EU Member States managed to negotiate a common price cap. In December 2022 an EU embargo on Russian oil and a global price cap were finally implemented. While the energy security map was thus transformed away from Russian imports and towards diversified alternative supplies, the other pillar of the Commission's approach was to push for a full and enhanced implementation of its ‘Fit for 55’ proposals, which was announced on the basis of the European Green Deal of the preceding year and largely achieved by Spring 2023. Their fundamental objective had been to fulfil an EU climate pledge (the Nationally Determined Contribution) for 2030, and thus respond to one definition of climate security.



## CLIMATE SECURITY

As a concept ‘climate security’ has been particularly troublesome. Diverse and politically loaded ‘referent objects’ entail multiple meanings. There can be national, international, human and ecological climate security discourses (MCDONALD 2013). EU policies embrace all of them along with rhetorical moves that are sometimes employed to ‘securitise’ particular projects such as a satellite observation system (VOGLER 2002). An important and defining early statement on climate security was made by High Representative Javier Solana in 2008 (COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION 2008). In it, climate change was framed within an externally oriented hard security concept as a ‘threat multiplier’. This has remained the predominant Union definition oriented towards distanced international security threats (REMLING – BARNHOORN 2021; YOUNGS 2021). Thus, a recent European Council conclusion approved the “*increased climate sensitivity of EU actions on conflict prevention and sustainable security*” while endorsing “*the relevance of climate change for CSDP missions and operations*” (EUROPEAN COUNCIL 2019). Elsewhere, in the Directorate General for International Partnerships for example, there is a more human security-based approach. The shared underlying understanding, according to documentary and interview research, is that “[i]nsecurity is seen to be travelling to the EU via – often not further specified – threats to international stability or unregulated migration flows to Europe. Climate change is therefore framed as a source of instability in the Global South...” (REMLING – BARNHOORN 2020: 8). It may be added that this chimes well with the Union’s self-image in international climate politics as an actor especially attuned to the problems of the developing world. There is some evidence of a growing concern with more localised ‘ecological’ security, but an indicator of the relatively low priority given to the climate threat within Europe may be seen in the under-development of adaptation strategy in terms of “*legally binding targets and specific measures*” (EEB 2021).

The important question is whether the rapid alterations in the nature of threat and perception of local risks can lead to an integrated security concept that fully embraces the evident connection between hard security, reduction in gas and oil dependence, their replacement by renewables and a renewed emphasis on domestic adaptation and resilience. An overarching EU strategy has clearly been lacking in this respect (STANG – DIMSDALE 2017). There is now at least a rhetorical recognition of the gravity

of the problem. The EU external energy policy paper, for example, begins with the acknowledgement of an existential threat <sup>(EUROPEAN COMMISSION 2022B)</sup>. The European Green Deal and ‘Fit for 55’ preceded the invasion and are still wending their way through the legislative process. They involve ETS extensions, an energy tax directive to encourage sustainable fuels, and aviation and maritime emissions reform plus the highly controversial carbon border adjustment measures. An agreed new ‘climate law’ responds to the requirements of the Paris Agreement and IPCC reports, which perhaps provide an operational definition of climate security, and entail being on a path towards staying within the 1.5°C (at best) and 2°C thresholds by 2030 and achieving net zero emissions by 2050.

The Commission’s response to the invasion of Ukraine was to ‘double down’ on these measures and push for more rapid achievement in the introduction of renewables and energy efficiency under RePowerEU and, to an extent, provide an alignment of climate, energy and hard security policy in removing dependence on Russian gas. This has already, as of the beginning of 2023, been substantially achieved <sup>(SKJAERSETH 2023)</sup>. The problem is, of course, that in order to achieve this, highly polluting coal mines have been reopened in Germany and elsewhere and there has been a scramble to acquire new ‘diversified’ supplies of LNG from the US, the Middle East and Africa. There is a danger that the opening of new gas installations and overseas contracts will lock EU energy policy into a path that will miss vital climate targets. At the moment this does not appear to be happening as it was reported in late 2022 that EU carbon emissions had actually fallen <sup>(HARVEY 2022)</sup>. Nonetheless, the road to de-carbonisation is far from easy and internal disagreements over policies such as the ‘taxonomy’ that describes whether nuclear energy or gas can be regarded as a sustainable investment under the EGD, are continuing. Yet the distance already travelled and the speed at which hard security imperatives have overcome obstacles to the abandonment of Russian hydrocarbons would have been unthinkable before 24 February 2022.

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