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Escalation of the Ukraine Crisis and Rise of a Green Power Europe: Green Transition as a New Norm

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Abstract: The escalation of the Ukraine Crisis highlights energy security as a non-traditional security issue to European countries that deeply rely on Russian export, promoting the securitisation of energy on the agenda of the European Union. In response, the substantial, systematic process of green energy transition formulates 'a green power Europe.' 'A green power Europe' indicates a new norm of green transition in the EU, and echoes the existing principles by promoting energy equality as well as energy-related social justice. New mechanisms and inter-governmental cooperation during the green transition will also promote European integration. The EU's journey toward 'a green power Europe' reflects its adaptability and commitment to addressing contemporary global challenges. More importantly, 'a green power Europe' strengthens the EU's image as a role model in the international society, helping the EU to achieve its foreign policy goals.

The escalation of the Ukrainian crisis has not only caused waves on the international political stage, but also had a profound impact on the global energy landscape. This crisis has exposed Europe's high dependence on Russian energy, prompting European countries to re-examine the relationship between their energy security and sustainable development. In this context, the rise of green power has become a focus of attention in Europe and even globally. Green transformation, as a comprehensive strategy to address climate change and energy crisis, is gradually becoming the new norm for policy-making in various countries.

1. Introduction

Energy policy is obviously critical for a country or a region, attempting to meet the 'energy trilemma': energy security, environmental sustainability, and energy equity. [1] The escalation of the Ukraine Crisis has put an end to the 'geopolitical holiday' of Europe[2] and an exclamation mark on energy security. One fundamental facet of Europe's sanctions against Russia has centred on the commitment to gradually eliminate imports of Russian oil and natural gas. Concurrently, Russia has curtailed or reduced its gas supplies to several European nations, including Poland, Bulgaria, Finland, Latvia, and the Netherlands, and indefinitely suspended the Nord Stream 1 pipeline on September 2, 2022. This geopolitical energy supply crisis has given rise to intricate and dynamically evolving political initiatives, which, under normal circumstances, would be unlikely to be pursued. These initiatives aim to reduce Europe's reliance on Russian fossil fuels. Furthermore, this crisis has shed light on two uncomfortable realities: despite ongoing transitions towards sustainable energy systems,

fossil fuels continue to serve as the predominant energy source in Europe, and notwithstanding prior gas transit disputes between Russia and Ukraine, as well as Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea, the European Union (EU) has upheld considerable dependence on Russian natural resources. Adding to the political complexity, Europe was already grappling with sharp increases in consumer energy prices prior to the invasion. Commitments to phase out Russian imports have exacerbated concerns regarding the cost of living and apprehensions over energy affordability and accessibility during the upcoming winter season.

The EU's response is firm and clear: developing clean energy alternatives while promoting energy security.[3] In Europe, there has been a notable policy shift towards accelerating the transition to clean energy. The REPowerEU strategy, a key framework, centres on two pillars: accelerating clean energy and energy savings. The European Commission has raised the 2030 renewables target to 45%, committed to doubling solar energy capacity by 2025, and initiated measures to simplify permitting for major renewable projects. Several European countries have also made significant commitments to renewable energy projects. Germany, for example, aims for 100% renewable electricity by 2035, while Denmark, the Netherlands, the UK, France, and Italy have announced plans to accelerate renewable deployments. Norway's ambitious windfarm project targets a capacity of 30GW by 2040. Heat pumps are identified as a technology winner, with the goal of installing 10 million new heat pumps in Europe in the next five years. Support packages for heat pumps have been announced by France, Denmark, the UK, and Italy, signaling a shift towards electrification of heating. Renewable hydrogen is another focus, with plans to develop infrastructure, storage, and port capacities.

2. Theory and Concept

The EU, as the most integrated regional organization among nations, is obviously special. It has evolved into "a hybrid of supranational and international forms of governance which transcends Westphalian norms." [4] The debate on what kind of power the EU is has lasted for decades. Generally, scholars in China recognize it as "an economic power, a governance power and a cultural power" (Zhou, 2008). But another more widely recognized identity of the EU may be 'a normative power Europe' raised by Ian Manner and accepted by the EU officially in the early 21st century[5].

"A normative power Europe" believes that the EU should maintain its poise as a model of goodness by adhering and promoting certain norms. These norms are developed ever since the founding of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) through treaties, declarations and various forms of agreement. Ian Manner argues that

The EU is founded on and has as its foreign and development policy objectives the consolidation of democracy, rule of law, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms (TEU, art. 6, art. 11, and TEC, art. 177). Furthermore, it is committed to pursuing these norms in accordance with the ECHR (TEU, art. 6) and 'the principles of the United Nations Charter' (TEU, art. 11, preamble to TEC).[5]

This forms the value basis for the EU to become "a normative power". And since these norms, the principles of democracy, rule of law, social justice and respect for human rights, which were first made explicit in the 1973 Copenhagen Declaration on European identity, are still accepted as universal values in most countries as well as the United Nations, the EU would still be able to perform its normative power.

These norms are, essentially, values that sustain European solidarity. They are generated from the two tragic European wars and the post-war need to achieve long-time peace. The first European community, the ECSC, starts with the philosophy that "world peace can be safeguarded only by creative efforts commensurate with the dangers that threaten it."[6] When it comes to the Treaty on European Union, which symbolizes the transformation of the EEC to a political league, "the

principles of liberty, democracy and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and of the rule of law" are reassured (preamble to TEU). With these norms, Ian Manner and politicians of the EU are making "a narrative power Europe" an instrument to implement the EU's foreign policy and strategy.

Now the norms, or values, are changing due to the rising trend of green transition. The EU "played a key role in brokering today's historic agreement in Paris, where 195 countries adopted a new universal, legally binding global climate deal." (Press corner 2023) The European Green Deal (EGD) and the European Climate Pact (ECP) reaffirm the EU's determination to accelerate its member states' green transition. Developing renewable energy, the priority of green transition, is also one of the EU's top concerns. The Renewable Energy Directive sets rules for the EU to achieve its 32% renewables target by 2030. (Renewable energy 2023) After the escalation of the Ukraine Crisis, the EU, in response, initiated the REPowerEU Plan to save energy, produce clean energy, and diversify its energy supplies.[7]

3. Analysis and Examination

'A green power Europe' is legitimized by the European consensus of green transition and extended by various green policies. And the power is projected by the EU's acting as a role model of the green transition. The energy policy response to the escalation of the Ukraine Crisis starts the EU's systematic, collective green transition in the energy sector. These policies can be classified into three sessions: (1) achieving environmental sustainability; (2) improving energy equity; (3) building energy-related social justice. (Russia's war on Ukraine, European energy policy responses & implications for sustainable transformations)

1) Achieving Environmental Sustainability

Within the realm of environmental sustainability, substantial policy changes have been witnessed, particularly in the context of decarbonization efforts. This section can be divided into three key aspects of sustainable energy policy: the development of cleaner energy options, strategies for managing energy demand, and the gradual phasing out of high-carbon energy sources.

The acceleration of clean energy adoption in Europe reflects a clear acknowledgment of the interconnected relationship between energy security and climate concerns. Notably, the REPowerEU strategy, comprising two of its central pillars—expediting the transition to clean energy and achieving energy savings—revolves around sustainable energy. As part of the initiative to expedite clean energy transitions, the EU has replaced a substantial portion of gas imports with renewables. Now the EU countries are "generating, for the first time, more electricity from wind and solar sources than from gas." [7] To achieve this, the EU has raised its 2030 renewables target from 40% to 45% (European Parliament backs 45% renewable energy goal for 2030 2022) and has committed to doubling solar energy capacity by 2025 (Press corner 2022a). Additionally, there have been efforts to simplify the permitting process for major renewable projects and to establish renewable energy as a matter of overriding public interest through an amendment to the Renewable Energy Directive. (Repowereu: Council agrees on accelerated permitting rules ... - consilium 2022) Correspondingly, there will be a supplementary investment of €29 billion in Projects of Common Interest (PCIs), such as cross-border interconnected grid infrastructure, to stabilize grids that are becoming increasingly variable. (Press corner 2022b)

Heat pumps have emerged as a promising technology for decarbonizing heat. Under the REPowerEU strategy, there is a commitment to increasing heat decarbonization through electrification, with a goal of installing 10 million new heat pumps within the next five years (Strengthening confidence of end-users to accelerate heat pump ... - cordis 2022). Several countries, including France, Denmark, the UK, and Italy, have introduced support packages for heat pumps.

While some countries, such as Denmark, the Netherlands, and Germany, are continuing existing policy directions, many others are embracing the electrification of heat, which has introduced measures like zero-rating VAT on heat pumps, incentives to shift from gas boilers to heat pumps, investments in locally made pumps, and cost-rebalancing for energy bills to promote electrification.

A 'Hydrogen Accelerator' plan, part of the REPowerEU initiative, involves a commitment to develop integrated infrastructure, storage facilities, and port capacities for renewable hydrogen. In addition to the 5 million tons of renewable hydrogen already planned, the EU envisions the development of an additional 5 million tons within its borders and the importation of 10 million tons from various sources. (Hydrogen 2022) At the national level, Germany has intensified its production and supply chain partnership for green hydrogen with Australia.

2) Improving Energy Equity

REPowerEU emphasizes the importance of fairness and solidarity within the European Green Deal. This principle, coupled with rising household energy costs and cost-of-living challenges, has led to numerous policy commitments. Initially, the EU introduced measures like temporary windfall taxes on energy company profits, energy subsidies, tax cuts, and strategies to prevent electricity and gas disconnections. They have also proposed a solidarity contribution from oil and gas companies and a cap on revenues from low-cost electricity.

At the national level, several European countries have taken steps to support consumers. Poland, for instance, has intervened multiple times since late 2021. Spain, Portugal, and Greece have introduced rules to cap natural gas prices, while France has limited increases in electricity and gas prices. Belgium has measures in place to assist consumers with energy bills, and Romania and Germany have legally obligated power suppliers to lower consumer bills. To fund support measures, countries like Germany, Italy, and Spain plan to impose windfall taxes on energy companies. By mid-August 2022, EU governments had allocated €280 billion to alleviate the impact of the energy crisis (European Governments Spend $278 Billion to Cushion Energy Crisis 2022), not including Germany's €65 billion rescue package announced in September[8]. These initiatives recognize the growing disparities between vulnerable households and large energy corporations, highlighting the need to address energy affordability and access.

However, these interventions, primarily offering short-term relief through mechanisms like price caps, do not provide long-term solutions to address affordability and access challenges. Energy efficiency, an often-underplayed alternative, could significantly protect citizens from high energy costs and reduce the need for future social spending. A comprehensive Europe-wide expansion of energy efficiency programs for residential and commercial buildings could be particularly effective.

Europe's responses to energy equity concerns extend beyond its borders, as these issues are central to UNFCCC negotiations. Developing and transitioning countries consider their rights to economic development and access to affordable energy just as crucial as transitioning to clean energy. Additionally, many developing countries assert their right to access their own fossil fuel reserves. However, European responses to the energy crisis have complicated this global equity scenario.

The competition for gas has placed European countries in direct competition with other markets, particularly in Asia and Latin America, leaving millions without access to electricity and heating. This has resulted in pressure on import-dependent economies, electricity shortages, and short- to medium-term spikes in energy prices, affecting those with limited means. Some developing economies, such as Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Sri Lanka, had increased their reliance on LNG to reduce the need for fuel oil and coal imports. However, recent challenges in securing LNG access have forced countries like Pakistan to import more coal from Afghanistan to meet their electricity demands, with the energy crisis contributing to the removal of the Pakistani Prime Minister in April 2022. Pakistan's struggle to secure LNG access is exemplified by a recent tender that received no bids. India, on the other hand, turned to Gazprom for LNG and invested in coal production to address

electricity fuel shortages during a summer heatwave.

European actions, particularly the uncoordinated rush to secure LNG, further complicate efforts to phase out fossil fuels in transitioning and developing nations. This indirectly incentivizes investment in coal, gas, and their supply chains. Algeria, for instance, is continuing to support its gas industry to secure long-term contracts with European importers, despite the EU discouragement of African countries from burning their own gas within UN COP negotiations. While European countries are rapidly pursuing gas deals, there are still few new international partnerships focused on renewables or other clean energy sources.

3) Building Energy-Related Social Justice

Energy policy has long been a subject of interest for scholars in the field of political economy due to its profound social implications. Central to this discussion are questions about the governance of energy, who holds the decision-making power, and whose voices are prioritized in energy policy debates. The concept of energy social justice highlights the disparities in access to energy policymaking. Additionally, a renewed focus on geopolitical energy security could potentially strengthen centralized energy governance systems. In this context, the heightened emphasis on energy security during the recent crisis has marginalized decentralized energy solutions, which have the potential to address inequalities in energy wealth and governance.

While the EU had previously acknowledged the significance of distributed energy by incorporating support for community energy in its 2019 legislation titled ‘Clean Energy for All,’ recent policies seem to favor large-scale players, approaches, and technologies. While consumers are being safeguarded through mechanisms such as price limits and payments, they are not being empowered through enhancements in efficiency and ownership. Local actors within increasingly distributed electricity systems are not receiving due recognition or support. Although REPowerEU mentions the importance of regions and cities in developing energy-saving measures and permitting renewable energy projects, it merely hints at member states supporting and collaborating with local governments. This represents a missed opportunity and perpetuates the gap between local roles and formal energy responsibilities.

The geopolitical framing of energy has broader implications for questions concerning governance and representation. The role of the state in energy governance has been a subject of contention. While market actors played more prominent roles in energy during the 1980s and 1990s, recent developments, including the liberalization of gas and electricity markets, the EU’s commitment to market-based policies, and Competition Law, have introduced a more intricate landscape. Events like the 2006/2009 gas transit disputes, EU energy ‘solidarity,’ and policies involving direct investment in new gas pipelines have further blurred the lines. This shift is also evident in discussions about the need for state intervention to support sustainable energy transitions. Examples include the development of green industrial policies, the European Battery Alliance (EBA), and the EU’s Critical Raw Materials Alliance as responses to China’s dominance in critical minerals.

The response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine has accelerated the trend of state intervention in energy matters. The EU has committed to increased public financing of clean energy projects, simplifying permission processes for renewables, and introducing Power Purchasing Agreements (PPAs). Germany’s Climate and Transformation Fund and Transition Fund acknowledge the need for state investment and the redistribution of costs and benefits within energy transitions. Similarly, the revival of nuclear energy in and France also involves significant state participation.

4. Conclusion

The Ukraine Crisis pushes the EU to speed up its green transition by adopting the REPowerEU initiative and a series of new projects, mechanisms, and investments, unveiling ‘a green power

Europe.' 'A green power Europe' emphasizes the new norm of green transition and works over the global need for ecological preservation.

As we claim in the theoretical session, 'a green power Europe' is not a replacement of 'a normative power Europe' but an extension. On one hand, it indicates a new principle of the EU – supporting and accelerating the green transition. The EU has been playing a leading role in the world's green transition against climate change and other ecological challenges. But it was not until the escalation of the Ukraine Crisis does the EU started a systematic, large-scale green transition in the energy sector. Findings show that the EU has reached unprecedented achievements in green energy transition since the outbreak of the Ukraine War. These achievements pave the way to further green transition in other areas. And the green transition of energy is essential and critical for fighting global challenges like climate change.[9] It strengthens the EU's model role in leading the world's sustainability building.

On the other hand, 'a green power Europe' echoes the existing norms of the EU, especially equality and social justice. We find that the approach of green energy transition in response to the war lays emphasis on energy equality and energy-related social justice. And through the transition, there are mechanisms that promote European integrity, including new platforms to guarantee energy affordability and collective efforts to develop renewable energy.

Since the world is suffering from ecological disasters, 'a green power Europe' will strengthen the EU's image as a role model in the international society, helping the EU to achieve its foreign policy goals. The EU's capability to project influence in the international arena is raised. To this extent, 'a green power Europe' contributes to Europe as a normative power.

Future research may focus on the evaluation. It seems that the confrontation between Europe and Russia is forcing the EU to evolve into 'a geopolitical Europe.' (Europe in the interregnum: Our geopolitical awakening after Ukraine 2022) Interrupted by geopolitical issues, the effectiveness of 'a green power Europe' could be compromised. However, after the Biden administration returned to the Paris Agreement and the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, the world's green transition process seems to be back on track. The effectiveness and function of 'a green power Europe' is to be evaluated in future global environmental governance.

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