



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Global Environmental Change

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/gloenvcha

Politicization of climate change and Central and Eastern European countries' stance towards the European Green Deal

Baiba Witajewska-Baltvilka^{a, *}, Florenta-Elena Helepciuc^c, Diana Mangalagiu^a, Arpad Todor^b

^a Nioma Business School, France

^b Faculty of Political Science, National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Romania

^c Institute of Biology, Romanian Academy, Romania

^d Global Climate Forum, Germany

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

European green deal
Energy transition
Politicization
Policy implementation
Party politics
Climate change
Fossil fuel dependency

ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the factors that led to the national adoption of the European Green Deal (EGD) in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and shows how politicization affects national governments' positions and commitments. Using a comparative analysis of Hungary, Poland, and Romania, our study shows that while issues of public opinion ideological leaning, fossil fuel dependency, economic context, and parties' ideological leaning all contribute to the national position on the EGD, the influence of these factors is mediated and shaped by the politicization of climate change issues. Our analysis unveils the process and actors of climate change politicization and shows the non-linearity of this process. This study sheds light on the highly intricate mechanisms between climate change and climate change action at the national level and underlines the importance of understanding the political mechanisms through which international regulation can be operationalized through national-level policies and strategies.

1. Introduction

The initial resistance to the European Green Deal (EGD) has been noteworthy in Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries, especially in Poland and Hungary. Referring to the strong dependence on coal and the current stage of socio-economic development, the government in Poland declared that it can only reach climate neutrality at its own pace and with financial support "adequate to the scale of challenges" (Morawiecki, 2019). Hungary's stance was even more critical, with Orbán arguing that Hungary cannot sign a 'blank cheque' and setting several conditions for supporting the EGD (Zsíros, 2019). Although not among the loudest critics, Romania also pointed to the need for more funding of the EGD and a clear roadmap for national governments (Simon, 2020).

The implementation of 'green policies' heavily relies on the environmental and climate change stances taken by national governments (Knill and Debus, 2010), as they influence the negotiation phase and the implementation of EU-level policies. In democratic systems, political parties are crucial in shaping the government's politics and influencing public opinion (Matsubayashi, 2013; Slothuus and Bisgaard, 2021).

Understanding party positions on climate change policies is important to understanding national governments' positions on the EGD, policy commitments, and spending allocations of both EU and national funds. Nevertheless, within the context of EU negotiations on the EGD, the potential for opposition against committing ambitious national goals within the EGD is synergized when climate change issues are also politicized (Fig. 1).

The scholarly literature has identified several factors potentially explaining political parties' positions on climate change. The dynamics of political party positioning, given their ideological leaning on policy scales (Spoon et al., 2013) and the ideological leaning of public opinion (Hobolt and Klemmensen, 2007), are among the most important explanatory factors. Next come fossil fuel or carbon dependency (Lachapelle and Paterson, 2013) and economic conditions (Ezrow, 2007; Steenbergen et al., 2007; Adams et al., 2009; Carter et al., 2014). However, the four above factors cannot fully explain the variability and the nature of the early EGD commitments across the CEE countries. For example, the Romanian successive governments and the President had positive rhetoric towards the EGD despite its least favorable economic conditions, potential to explore offshore gas deposits, and skeptical

The article is available on the SCIENCE DIRECT platform to which SNSPA has subscription.