



**Utrecht  
University**

**MUNI** Masaryk  
University

Double master's degree in *European Governance*

Master thesis

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## **Never waste a good crisis?**

*A thesis research on changes in EU energy policy discourses in the 2022  
Ukrainian war context*

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by

**LORENA GARCÍA LORENZO**

Supervisors:

Utrecht University: Dr. Marij Swinkels

Masaryk University: Mgr. Petra Kuchyňková, Ph.D.

**Utrecht University**

Student ID: 2209519

[l.garcialorenzo@students.uu.nl](mailto:l.garcialorenzo@students.uu.nl)

**Masaryk University**

Student učo: 504730

[504730@mail.muni.cz](mailto:504730@mail.muni.cz)

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17 August, 2022

*People are usually afraid of change because they fear the unknown. But the single greatest constant of history is that everything changes.*

*–Yuval Noah Harari–*

## Abstract

Why do policy-makers often decide it is good timing to change policies deeply right after the start of specific crises or external shocks? This research on discourse analysis focuses on the 2022 Ukrainian war to explore what are the causal logics and mechanisms that are responsible for policy change during critical junctures, and which led to the revolutionary joint belief shift of becoming energy independent from Russia.

With the help of Discourse Network Analysis and semi-structured interviews with EU officials, this paper offers a relevant selection of primary and secondary data sources to comprehensively elucidate how involved actors' discourses and sets of beliefs on EU energy policy have changed over time around the subject. This empirical approximation, therefore, allows to thoroughly map actor's congruence and affiliation networks, with the logic of identifying dominant discourses throughout three phases –from September 2021 to July 2022.

Findings in this research rightfully show that, for the 2022 Ukrainian war, players involved in EU energy policy were capable, in the end, of modifying their beliefs and embracing new and innovative ideas in favour of energy independence from Russia. For this to happen, important political (and symbolic) events and initiatives were needed in order to activate a novel joint belief shift at the heart of the EU. Likewise, these actors successfully convinced more and more players in favour of this, making them to defect from their previous ideas and discourses.

This research, therefore, expands specific knowledge on the causal study of critical junctures, confirming that institutional change is caused if different conditions apart from the external shock itself –critical antecedents, productive conditions, or joint belief shift, among others– are met. In addition, it complements comprehensive studies on EU integration, and supports the general belief that the EU is, as politician J. Monnet once proclaimed in 1976, 'forged in crisis'.

**Keywords:** *EU, Russia, Ukrainian war, gas, energy policy, RePowerEU, critical juncture, institutional change, beliefs, Discourse Network Analysis, semi-structured interviews, discursive institutionalism*

## List of abbreviations

<b>ACER</b>	European Union Agency for the Cooperation of Energy Regulators	<b>IEA</b>	International Energy Agency
<b>ACF</b>	Advocacy Coalition Framework	<b>JRC</b>	Joint Research Centre
<b>CAP</b>	Common Agricultural Policy	<b>LNG</b>	Liquefied Natural Gas
<b>CoR</b>	Committee of Regions	<b>MEP</b>	Member of European Parliament
<b>DI</b>	Discursive Institutionalism	<b>NGO</b>	Non-Governmental Organization
<b>DNA</b>	Discourse Network Analysis	<b>RQ</b>	Research question
<b>EC</b>	European Commission	<b>SSI</b>	Semi-structured interview(s)
<b>EEAS</b>	European External Action Service	<b>S&amp;D</b>	Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament
<b>EGD</b>	European Green Deal	<b>TEG</b>	Financial Expert Group on Sustainable Finance
<b>EP</b>	European Parliament	<b>TFEU</b>	Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
<b>EPP</b>	European People's Party	<b>ToL</b>	Treaty of Lisbon
<b>EU</b>	European Union	<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>F55</b>	'Fit for 55' Package		
<b>GHG</b>	Greenhouse gas (emissions)		
<b>HI</b>	Historical Institutionalism		

## List of figures

- <b>FIGURE 1:</b> <i>Theoretical framework for institutional change (inspired by Swinkels and van Esch, 2022)</i> .....	<b>17</b>
- <b>FIGURE 2:</b> <i>Basic model of Leifield’s DNA and software (2017) (adapted from Leifield, 2017)</i> .....	<b>21</b>
- <b>FIGURE 3:</b> <i>Methodology timespan for the candidate critical juncture: The 2022 Ukrainian war</i> .....	<b>27</b>
- <b>FIGURE 4:</b> <i>Actor congruence networks and affiliation networks in Phase 1</i> .....	<b>34</b>
- <b>FIGURE 5:</b> <i>Frequency of claims/discourses being mentioned by involved actors in Phase 1</i> .....	<b>35</b>
- <b>FIGURE 6:</b> <i>Actor congruence networks and affiliation networks in Phase 2</i> .....	<b>41</b>
- <b>FIGURE 7:</b> <i>Frequency of claims/discourses being mentioned by involved actors in Phase 2</i> .....	<b>42</b>
- <b>FIGURE 8:</b> <i>Actor congruence networks and affiliation networks in Phase 3</i> .....	<b>49</b>
- <b>FIGURE 9:</b> <i>Frequency of claims/discourses being mentioned by involved actors in Phase 3</i> .....	<b>50</b>

## List of tables

- <b>TABLE 1:</b> <i>Main characteristics of Historical and Discursive Institutionalisms (adapted from Schmidt, 2011)</i> .....	<b>15</b>
- <b>TABLE 2:</b> <i>Overview of main political events prior and after the 2022 Ukrainian war</i> .....	<b>29</b>
- <b>TABLE 3:</b> <i>Interconnectedness between case events in energy policy and formulated theoretical framework</i> .....	<b>30</b>
- <b>TABLE 4:</b> <i>Network statistics by phase</i> .....	<b>31</b>
- <b>TABLE 5:</b> <i>Main discourses in the 2022 Ukrainian war candidate critical juncture (subtracted from analysis)</i> .....	<b>52</b>
- <b>TABLE 6:</b> <i>Summary of final testing of expectations</i> .....	<b>59</b>

## Table of contents

<i>Abstract</i> .....	3
<i>List of abbreviations</i> .....	4
<i>List of figures</i> .....	5
<i>List of tables</i> .....	5
<b>1. CHAPTER I: Introduction</b> .....	<b>8</b>
<b>2. CHAPTER II: A comprehensive approach to study policy change</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>2.1. Conceptualizing critical juncture</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>2.2. Conceptualizing policy change</b> .....	<b>13</b>
<b>2.3. Crafting the reality: how to understand institutional change after an external shock</b> .....	<b>14</b>
<b>2.4. Expectations</b> .....	<b>18</b>
<b>3. CHAPTER III: Methods and techniques of investigation</b> .....	<b>19</b>
<b>3.1. Communicative Discourse: The Discourse Network Analysis (DNA)</b> .....	<b>20</b>
<b>3.1.1. The Discourse Network Analyzer Software</b> .....	<b>20</b>
<b>3.1.2. Time period covered</b> .....	<b>23</b>
<b>3.2. Coordinative Discourse: Experts’ semi-structured interviews (SSI)</b> .....	<b>23</b>
<b>3.2.1. Format of the interviews</b> .....	<b>24</b>
<b>3.2.1.1. Related to content</b> .....	<b>24</b>
<b>3.2.1.2. Related to participants</b> .....	<b>25</b>
<b>3.2.1.3. Related to technicalities</b> .....	<b>26</b>
<b>3.2.2. Time period covered</b> .....	<b>26</b>
<b>4. CHAPTER IV: Results and analysis</b> .....	<b>28</b>
<b>4.1. Explaining the discourse change in EU energy policy</b> .....	<b>30</b>
<b>4.1.1. Phase 1: The EU’s energy status quo (September 2021-December 2022)</b> .....	<b>31</b>
<b>4.1.1.1. Political events</b> .....	<b>31</b>
<b>4.1.1.2. Actor constellations and discourses</b> .....	<b>33</b>
<b>4.1.2. Phase 2: Transition and swift in energy policy (January-February 2022)</b> .....	<b>38</b>
<b>4.1.2.1. Political events</b> .....	<b>38</b>
<b>4.1.2.2. Actor constellations and discourses</b> .....	<b>39</b>
<b>4.1.3. Phase 3: Energy change and joint belief shift (March 2022-July 2022)</b> .....	<b>45</b>
<b>4.1.3.1. Political events</b> .....	<b>45</b>
<b>4.1.3.2. Actor constellations and discourses</b> .....	<b>47</b>
<b>4.1.4. Towards a green EU energy policy?</b> .....	<b>54</b>
<b>4.2. Expectations and final assessment</b> .....	<b>55</b>
<b>5. CHAPTER V: Conclusion</b> .....	<b>60</b>
<b>6. CHAPTER VI: Final discussion</b> .....	<b>62</b>
<b>6.1. Now, what?</b> .....	<b>62</b>
<b>6.2. For future research –and researchers</b> .....	<b>63</b>

<i>List of references</i> .....	64
<i>Appendix</i> .....	74
- <b>APPENDIX I:</b> <i>Energy policy as a shared competence in the EU after the Lisbon Treaty: specific provisions</i> .....	74
- <b>APPENDIX II:</b> <i>Energy mix by Member State in the EU in 2020 (%)</i> .....	75
- <b>APPENDIX III:</b> <i>Used DNA sources</i> .....	76
- <b>APPENDIX IV:</b> <i>Crude oil imports by source in the EU (2017)</i> .....	78
- <b>APPENDIX V:</b> <i>Natural gas imports by selected MS in the EU (2017)</i> .....	78
- <b>APPENDIX VI:</b> <i>SSI matrix</i> .....	79
- <b>APPENDIX VII:</b> <i>Transcript of Interview with EU official #1</i> .....	81
- <b>APPENDIX VIII:</b> <i>Transcript of Interview with EU official #2</i> .....	87
- <b>APPENDIX IX:</b> <i>Transcript of Interview with EU official #3</i> .....	93
- <b>APPENDIX X:</b> <i>Transcript of Interview with EU official #4</i> .....	99
- <b>APPENDIX XI:</b> <i>Transcript of Interview with EU official #5</i> .....	104

## **CHAPTER I: Introduction**

*We are witnessing the emergence of a global power in this [Ukrainian] crisis: The European Union. I was confident that a Russian invasion would be a shock to Europe [...] But never would I have predicted the announcements from Germany, EU, and others [...] While I am surprised at the pace and extent of the steps, this also shouldn't have been a huge shock to those watching the EU. Anytime the EU comes under threat, it doesn't wit, instead it fights like hell to defend its Union.*

–Max Bergmann <sup>1</sup>–

As Rahm Emanuel, chief of staff to former US president Obama, once said in 2008, ‘you never want a serious crisis to go to waste. And what I mean by that is, it’s an opportunity to do things you think you could not do before’ (Maley, 2020). When R. Emanuel first pronounced this famous quote more than ten years ago, he of course was not thinking that a possible Russian invasion in Ukraine was going to take place in the upcoming years, and that this will provide a window of opportunity to comprehensively reform and improve the Union’s energy policy to make it more independent, more competitive and more efficient. Instead, Emanuel was thinking about the virtues that a certain crisis period –in this case, the 2008 financial crisis– could bring to implement new (and improved) institutional changes that could make policies work better. Without any doubt, the ability to manoeuvre through political difficulties and be able to come up with new, innovative ideas that could shake and crumble apart previous joint beliefs in favour of institutional change, is a question of political art (Maley, 2020).

In academic literature, crisis periods that trigger institutional change have been defined as *critical junctures* (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007; Rinscheid et al., 2019; Soifer, 2012), and as Capoccia and Kelemen (2007: 342) confirm, this concept “has been invoked rather casually, without a great deal of methodological or conceptual rigor.” Likewise, as Swinkels & van Esch (2022) state, not all crises can be considered critical junctures capable of ‘major policy changes.’ Rather, these ‘ideational drift’ situations are rare, and certain conditions must be met to reach a specific institutional outcome via *causal* mechanisms (Rinscheid et al., 2019). Therefore, critical junctures are *researchable* and *measurable* phenomena (García-Montoya & Mahoney, 2020; Swinkels & van Esch, 2022; Rinscheid et al., 2019) that influence and re-

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<sup>1</sup> Max Bergmann is the director of the Europe programme in the policy research organization *Center for Strategic and International Studies* (CSIS). On the 27<sup>th</sup> of February, 2022, he pronounced on Twitter these words on the 2022 invasion of Ukraine by Russia, and expressed the significant idea that the EU as a whole knows how to efficiently change big beliefs when threatening external shocks try to jeopardize the European project.

define institutional policy-making, and as such, EU integration processes may be subject of study in the theory of critical juncture.

That being said, the current 2022 Ukrainian conflict –and its consequences for the EU energy policy– possesses political characteristics useful for critical junctures research. This is because the conflict has been already labelled as an important *external shock* for the EU (European Commission, 2022a; European Commission, 2022b) because its energy policy-relations are based on an important dependence on external suppliers, especially on Russia, which may have provoked a possible *change of discourse* and, consequently, a new *joint belief shift* in energy policy. The 2022 Ukrainian war started on the 24<sup>th</sup> of February of 2022, when Russia officially entered and invaded Ukrainian territory to protect its political, historical, and strategic interests (Padinger, 2022). Apart from the proximity of the conflict to the European territory, Ukraine is Russia's main gas transit country to the EU (Siddi, 2020), which has had significant consequences for the future development of the EU energy policy.

EU-Russia energy relations are not among equals. A power relationship obviously remains (Kuzemko, 2013; Siddi, 2020; Siddi, 2018), with a clear exporter –Russia– and a clear importer –the EU. In this situation, the EU's dependence on Russian gas looked like a static juncture almost impossible to break. But now, it is observed how the EU is taking giant steps to advance, once and for all, in an energy policy that is much more independent from Russia, and contributing to the general belief that the Union is “forged in crisis” (Monnet, 1976).

To demonstrate –or not– the criticality of this new, bellicose situation, the Ukrainian war will be considered as a *candidate critical juncture* (Rinscheid et al., 2019; Swinkels & van Esch, 2022) which has the potential to become the transformative force that will overcome dependency problems in the EU energy policy. Therefore, it becomes relevant to identify the emergence of a possible new joint belief (Rinscheid et al., 2019; Swinkels & van Esch, 2022) that shall act as the principal agent of change within the EU energy policy. That is why the tracking and thorough research on actors' ideas and discourses becomes crucial in this thesis.

This research contributes to the academic knowledge in two different ways: First, the focus will be connected to the EU energy policy in a new, transformative political context. Even though this policy has been part of the shared competencies compendium within the Union since the coming into force of the ToL in 2009 (TFEU, 2012: 51) (see *Appendix I*), the topic of energy has always been a constant struggle over competences between the EU, Member States and

businesses, since energy has been considered as a *sensitive issue* with important *strategic importance* (Schubert et al., 2016) (See *Appendix II*). Therefore, the objective of this thesis will be to analyse the changes in the EU energy policy since the start of the Ukrainian crisis applying the theory of critical juncture; and further contributing to the studies from Rinscheid et al. (2019) and Swinkels & van Esch (2022), who showed that certain conditions must be met to understand why some crisis periods become critical junctures and others not. This knowledge adds to the common understanding of how the EU is –or may not be– forged in crisis.

This thesis provides, moreover, new insights into the use of Discourse Network Analysis (DNA) as a methodological tool to elucidate relevant changes in EU stakeholders' ideas and discourses able to explain the possible joint belief shift in energy policy. As Swinkels & van Esch (2022: 15) clearly state, DNA methodology “is [...] suited to uncover the interaction between policy actors in a policy discourse”, and it efficiently identifies new possible joint beliefs. This way, this research follows Rinscheid et al. (2019) and Swinkels & van Esch's (2022) recommendations about continue applying the DNA methodology to further contribute to the academic analysis of ideas and discourses.

Likewise, it is also important to highlight that this research has an underlying societal relevance. The comprehensive study of the Ukrainian war as a candidate critical juncture uncovers how energy policy changes are actually unfolded. Within the EU, crisis periods are not the sole condition that triggers a revolutionary institutional change. Rather, the 2022 Ukrainian war is a permissive condition that may be able to change something or not. To talk about a critical juncture situation, crises must be exploited by individuals wanting, advocating and fulfilling the change. In other words, this research is about making the EU citizens aware that crisis moments might be windows of opportunity for EU policy-makers to trigger institutional change (Maley, 2020). However, other important conditions must be of course met as well.

Therefore, the central RQ for this thesis will be:

**How did the 2022 Ukrainian war as a candidate critical juncture affect the EU energy policy discourse in the first months after the start of the crisis?**

To support the answering of the RQ, this will be guided by the following sub-questions, which will be addressed throughout the research:

- 1) *How can policy change be observed and analysed?*

- 2) *What are the methods and techniques that analyse the EU actors' energy discourse prior to the Ukrainian conflict and after the start of the crisis?*
- 3) *Is the EU energy policy field changing as an effect of the Ukrainian conflict?*

In line with hypothesized expectations, I conclude that the 2022 Ukrainian war as a critical juncture has drastically re-shaped (1) the involved actors' ideas and discourses; and (2) the priorities and direction of EU energy policy. More specifically, it has been elucidated that the dominant discourse in the energy field in the supranational arena has clearly shifted prior to and after the external shock, bringing about a powerful joint belief shift in favour of energy independence from Russia compared to the previous 'indifference' situation that ruled EU energy policy-making. Interestingly enough, building upon coalitions' networks via DNA, it was also possible to identify that the vast majority of actors rapidly modified their previous sets of beliefs in favour of energy independence from Russia once the war started. And above all, they put into practice persuasive strategies and empowering solutions that made institutional change appealing to other players, leading them to defect and embrace policy change. This situation proves, once and for all, that the war as an external shock was not the sole condition that brought about the revolutionary shift.

The rest of this research will be divided into the following sections: In Chapter II, a theoretical framework will be crafted with the objective to rationally include all of these ideas of institutional change in a given polity, and how to causally study them; Chapter III will introduce the methods and techniques of investigation in this qualitative research and how to acquire data, via a combination of (1) Discourse Network Analysis and (2) semi-structured interviews; Chapter IV will then present main results after the codification of all relevant data, and how these seem fit for the identification of three main phases in the change of discourses in EU energy policy: (1) the EU's energy status quo; (2) transition and swift in energy policy; and (3) energy change and joint belief shift. Likewise, the final test of expectations –formulated in Chapter III– will be carried out; In Chapter V, concluding remarks will be given, with a presentation of findings, relevance, and policy implications. And finally, Chapter VI will include a final discussion, for now and for the future, including limitations and suggestions for new and fascinating research in the field of EU energy policy and discourse analysis.

## **CHAPTER II: A comprehensive approach to study policy change**

To help with the answering of the RQ, it is deemed necessary to explain the theoretical framework that will guide the entire research on policy change and critical junctures embedded in a discursive context. This way, this second chapter will also give an answer to the first sub-question already introduced: *how can policy change be observed and analysed?*

With the objective of responding to this, this section will centre first on the definition of two relevant concepts for this research –*critical juncture* and *policy change*–, useful for the final drawing of a theoretical framework for the empirical analysis of this research. Once this has been thoroughly crafted and explained, it will be time for the researcher to formulate a series of expectations that will be tested in Chapter IV: *Results and analysis*.

### **2.1. Conceptualizing *critical juncture***

It is necessary to start this analysis with the phenomenon that is the direct consequence of an external shock, better known in the academic world as a *critical juncture* (Swinkels & van Esch, 2022; Rinscheid et al., 2019; Soifer, 2012). Therefore, it is relevant to give a proper definition of this concept.

The study of critical junctures is a concept that is obviously nourishing from the well-known EU integration theory of *Historical Institutionalism*, which focuses on how institutions in a given polity change over time (Pollack, 2005). More specifically, it “sets the temporal unfolding of the stability, creation, and change in institutions center stage” (Emmenegger, 2021: 607), and how these have the potential to change involved actors’ behaviour. That being said, the study of critical junctures was born as a branch, and their contribution was profound to the development of HI. More specifically, the theory focused on the fact that institutions were the ones influencing actors, not the other way around, neglecting this way the famous concept of *agency*<sup>2</sup>. The emergence of critical junctures as an empirical tool to explain why during external shocks institutional change was more plausible, was then crucial to comprehensively understand that actors involved in policy-making advocating for a *fundamental* change in

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<sup>2</sup> This concept centers then on the fact that institutional change was possible because involved actors in a policy had a particular interest in changing ‘how things were done’, actively *advocating* this way for a change in institutions.

institutions were actually the most vital assets <sup>3</sup> (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007; Emmenegger, 2021). This way, these create ‘new path-dependencies’, as historical institutionalism defends.

Therefore, the critical juncture concept has been widely studied in the branch of social sciences as an essential tool for understanding change. The most important thing is then to decide which concept is the one that fits better for the type of research to be conducted. For example, Pierson (2000) defines critical junctures as “episodes or events that set an institution’s development onto a certain path, which then ensures, through self-reinforcing feedback, its own reproduction over time” (Rinscheid et al., 2019). Likewise, Professors D. Collier and G.L. Munck (2017: 2) also gave their proper definition on a critical juncture, stating that it is “a major episode of institutional innovation, occurring in distinct ways, and generating an enduring legacy”.

However, among (very) different sets of definitions on critical junctures, I consider that Capoccia & Kelemen’s (2007: 348) definition is the most accurate one for the kind of research to be carried out since they already introduce that stakeholders’ actions are crucial to set up change into motion: “we define critical junctures as *relatively* short periods of time during which there is a *substantially* heightened probability that agents’ choices will affect the outcome of interest”. Therefore, they state that, before junctures could be considered critical, these are *candidate critical* phenomena that might be able to materialize policy change, or might not (Capoccia & Kelemen, 2007). Therefore, the researcher(s)’ art will be to identify what critical causal factors must be met in order to cause a transformative institutional change.

## **2.2. Conceptualizing *policy change***

Furthermore, this research will be guided not only by a critical juncture conceptualization, but also by the definition of policy change, which will be the second ingredient that brings new and transcendental ideas and beliefs to the bargaining table. In this case, the EU’s.

The understanding of how policy change is causally produced has always been a subject of fascination for many researchers in social sciences, causing the flourishing of different ideas and theories on how this is brought about based on different factors, such as institutions, interests, ideas and networks (Shearer et al., 2016). Therefore, it can be confirmed that there are diverse definitions given to policy change that might significantly vary between each other. Nevertheless, a few of them seem to be relevant for the kind of research to be conducted. For

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<sup>3</sup> This allows to conceptualize agency as ‘entrepreneurship’ (Emmenegger, 2021), as a form of political leadership.

example, Hogwood & Peters (1983) and Polsby (1984) started to refer to policy change when there were incremental refinements in existing policy structures, or new and innovative policies. Likewise, the *advocacy coalition framework* (ACF) –based on Sabatier (1988) and Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith’s (1993) works–emerged with the idea that policy change “occurs through interactions between wide external changes or shocks to the political system and the success of the ideas in the coalitions, which may cause actors in the advocacy coalition to shift coalitions” (Cerna, 2013: 5), producing, in the end, the desired policy change. Nevertheless, weaknesses of the ACF have been thoroughly discussed in the academy world, especially related to its methodological application, where we can find challenges such as its difficulty in determining the beliefs of main stakeholders or the mapping of the advocacy coalitions (Cerna, 2013).

Hence, it has been considered that Swinkels & van Esch’s (2022) definition on institutional change is the one that best fits this research, since they centred on the policy shift per se and also on actors’ interactions within the given polity, designing this way a ‘two-level definition’. For them, the institutional change could be defined as “both the reconfiguration of the governance structure and balance of power in a policy subsystem (*polity-change*), as well as a fundamental realignment of the policy content (*policy-change*)” (Swinkels & van Esch, 2022: 12). Interestingly enough, their research on policy change is largely guided by a methodological approach able to surpass ACF’s weaknesses, which will be discussed later on.

### **2.3. Crafting the reality: how to understand institutional change after an external shock**

Specific conceptualizations of critical juncture and policy change clearly allow a better understanding of the topic. More specifically, it elucidates that despite the undeniable fact that this research clearly nourishes from historical institutionalism as the theoretical basis, this research –and the RQ– clearly offers an innovative perspective incorporating *Discursive Institutionalism*’s notions (Schmidt, 2011; Schmidt, 2010) as a theoretical basis as well.

The idea is the following: Professor V. Schmidt (2011; 2010) created DI with the objective to complement and enrich theories on new institutionalisms in EU integration –rational-choice, sociological and, of course, *historical*. According to her, social science researchers have never centred too much on the power of involved actors advocating for change –*agency*–, or on how powerful can their ideas and discourses become when the adequate opportunity make it to the policy-makers’ bargaining table.

DI’s main idea is then to endogenize change (Schmidt, 2011) as a way of ‘re-injecting agency into Historical Institutionalism’ (Schmidt, 2011: 22). Because of this, V. Schmidt explains in the following table the relation between HI and DI:

Characteristics	Historical Institutionalism	Discursive Institutionalism
<b>Object of explanation</b>	Historical rules and regularities	Ideas and discourses
<b>Logic of explanation</b>	Path-dependency	Communication between actors
<b>Problems of explanation</b>	Historical determinism	Ideational determinism or relativism
<b>Ability to explain (policy) change</b>	Static: continuity through path-dependence	Dynamic: change and continuity through ideas and discursive interaction

**TABLE 1:** *Main characteristics of Historical and Discursive Institutionalisms (adapted from Schmidt, 2011)*

That being said, this research offers then to surpass both institutionalisms’ weaknesses, with the aim to create a framework able to be tested empirically in qualitative investigations. First, Schmidt’s idea on the complementation of Historical and Discursive will be applied to exploit their strengths. Secondly, the proposed theoretical framework will *causally* merge the study of critical junctures from HI and the DI’s notion of actors’ ideas and discourses causing policy change. This way, a satisfactory answer will be given to the RQ.

To analyse the causality that the Ukrainian conflict as a candidate critical juncture has provoked in the EU energy policy, I build upon the Rinscheid et al. (2019) and Swinkels & van Esch’s (2022) academic contributions to the integrative study of critical junctures and institutional change. These authors, as already stated, focus on the basic idea that external shocks are researchable and measurable phenomena that explain why institutions change to better adapt to future similar situations. Hence, involved stakeholders –*agency* (Rinscheid et al., 2019; Schmidt, 2011; Schmidt, 2010; Soifer, 2012)– play a main role inducing the said change to the preferred political direction (Rinscheid et al., 2019; Swinkels & van Esch, 2022).

The Swinkels & van Esch’s (2022) comprehensive framework will then be used to carry out this research. According to their approximation, the 2022 Ukrainian conflict as a *candidate* critical juncture has the potential to trigger institutional change if three *factors* are met:

- 1) First of all, it must be possible to identify the *permissive condition*. This is the external shock that may act as a critical juncture as long as the rest of the factors are met. In other words, the permissive condition simply offers the window of opportunity that might trigger policy change (Swinkels & van Esch, 2022);
- 2) The second set of factors are the *critical antecedents*, or the ‘actors constellations as well as conflict dynamics that characterize the institutional field prior to the critical juncture’ (Swinkels & van Esch, 2022: 13). In short, these are (1) the ideas and the dominant discourse/priorities that already exist in the concrete policy field, and (2) their proclivity to be changed by new, innovative ‘policy designs’. Swinkels & van Esch (2022: 13) thus identify four sub-factors:
  - The *problem-solving ability* of the existing policy regime, or the basic set of values, ideas, and policy propensities of the institutional status quo;
  - The *presence of (alternative) ideas* held by the primary challengers and critical decision-makers;
  - The *resources* –power and legitimacy– of policy actors;
  - And the *interconnectedness of actors* in an existing institutional field.
- 3) Lastly, the third group of factors is the *productive conditions*, which “determine the outcome that emerges from the [candidate] critical juncture” (Soifer, 2012: 1575). This is the initial joint belief shift that (Swinkels & van Esch, 2022: 13-14):
  - First, it is acquired by a small group of EU stakeholders;
  - And after adopted by many key actors, going from an *individual* joint belief shift to a *joint* belief shift, and triggering the reorientation of ideas.

Furthermore, to trigger the ‘turning point’ in the institutional change in a given polity –that is, the *joint belief shift*<sup>4</sup>–, Swinkels & van Esch (2022) identify endogenous and exogenous mechanisms that act as factors able to link the critical antecedents with productive conditions:

- 1) *Endogenous mechanisms* are the environment that surrounding key actors, and the alternative ideas floating around in the given policy regime (Swinkels & van Esch,

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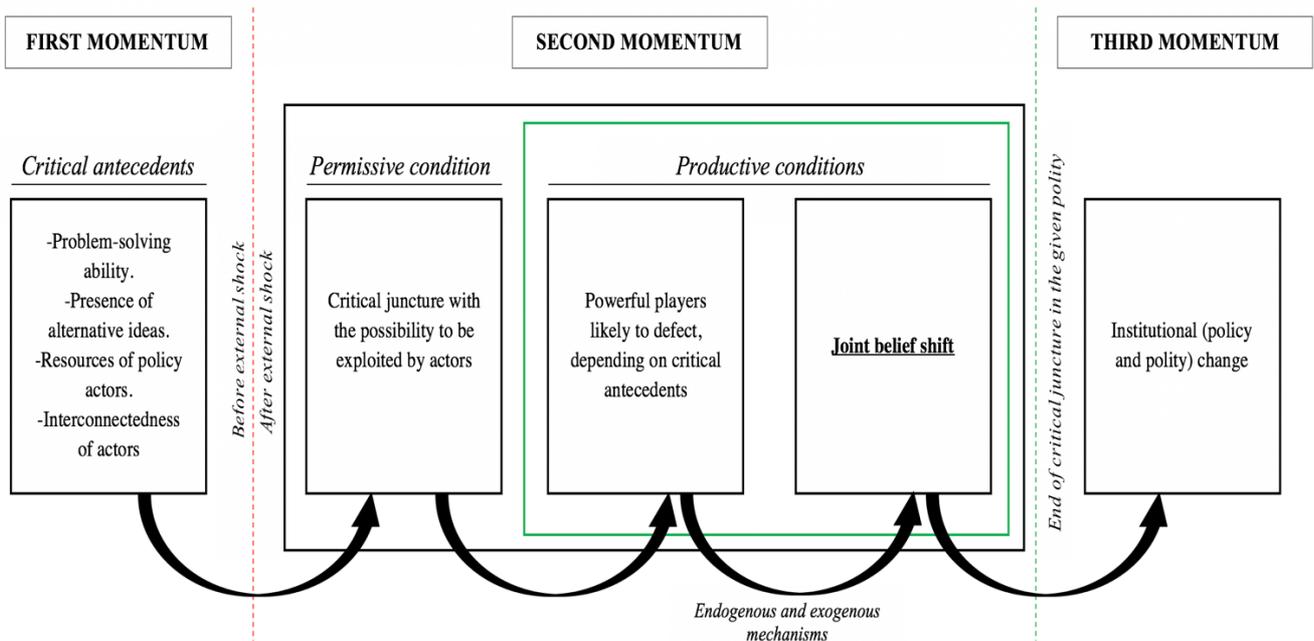
<sup>4</sup> According to Swinkels & van Esch (2022, 13-14), a *joint belief shift* is “a collective reorientation of beliefs about an existing policy problem”. It can be traced back to “single agents that succeed in prompting collective adaptations of beliefs among the other actors in an institutional field” (Rinscheid et al., 2020: 654).

2022). In the case of democratic polities such as the EU, these actors moreover must convince other stakeholders in order to make institutional change feasible.

- 2) For its part, *exogenous mechanisms* “such as power plays or coalition formation can help to render actors with certain beliefs to become more powerful in the decision-making process. [...] The more resources key actors have and the more (inter-) connected key actors are, the more likely that they will be able to incite a joint belief shift” (Swinkels & van Esch, 2022: 14).

The link between these two sets of mechanisms is the one that will end up triggering the final joint belief shift.

From the sets of factors previously mentioned for the study of critical junctures, a visual map of the comprehensive approach to policy change can now be displayed. This scheme will become extremely useful for the rest of the qualitative research.



**FIGURE 1:** Theoretical framework for institutional change (inspired by Swinkels and van Esch, 2022)

Rinscheid et al. (2019) and Swinkels & van Esch’s (2022) works and their search for a parsimonious approach to the critical juncture theory were inspired by V. Schmidt’s (2011: 9) critiques on this subject, who considered that this approach still lacked “a parsimonious theory of when and how actors succeed in altering the trajectory of development” (Rinscheid et al., 2019); and also by Professor H.D. Soifer’s (2012) framework, who carried out the first *causal* study on critical junctures, and who introduced the concepts of permissive condition, critical

antecedents, and productive conditions. In this regard, Rinscheid et al. (2019) as well as Swinkels & van Esch's (2022) approaches better connect the concept of productive conditions with critical antecedents, and place the power of agency –actors' ideas and discourses– in the centre of this innovative causal-logic framework of critical junctures.

This scheme will be helpful then to analyse and explain why, or why not, the 2022 Ukrainian war changed the EU energy policy discourse in the first months after the start of the crisis.

#### **2.4. Expectations**

Taking into consideration this theoretical framework and its practical application for the 2022 Ukrainian case, I can derive then six different expectations after conducting the in-depth analysis, and which I hope to reflect on them as a RQ follow-up discussion in the final part of Chapter IV:

- 1) **E1:** The before-crisis EU energy policy framework, and its high dependence on Russia as an external gas and oil supplier, has proven to be inadequate for EU interests, which has led to important ideas and discourses in favour of a comprehensive energy change even before the start of the crisis.
- 2) **E2:** The 2022 Ukrainian war –and consequent crisis– as a single external shock cannot sufficiently explain the current implemented changes in the EU energy policy. Rather, this 'opportunity' has to be exploited by interested EU players in order to change the status quo and reach a significant level of institutional change.
- 3) **E3:** This emerging energy policy framework is clearly increasing the notion of 'energy governance' among EU actors and within the EU institutional level.
- 4) **E4:** Defecting EU actors in energy policy are more likely to persuade other actors to also defect via the use of new and innovative ideas and discourses, leading this way to a new joint belief.
- 5) **E5:** The main actor advocating for a big change in EU energy policy –and consequently in energy governance– is the European Commission as the institution that represents the EU's interests and supranational power.
- 6) **E6:** And lastly, a joint belief shift proves to be a sufficient condition able to set institutional change into motion.

### **CHAPTER III: Methods and techniques of investigation**

The previously outlined theoretical framework on policy change provides a general overview of how institutional change –in this case, in the EU energy policy– can be set into motion via the identification and examination of different causal mechanisms which shape the policy-change outcome. Consequently, the main purpose of this section will be then to identify and describe what methods and techniques of investigation are the best suited to give a proper answer to the RQ.

In order to do so, the theoretical framework for policy change mentioned in the previous section becomes handy to explain the approach taken in the methodological Chapter, since the research and its analysis will be divided into the identification of three phases for the 2022 Ukrainian war: (1) *critical antecedents*; (2) *permissive condition*; and (3) *productive conditions*. The study will be guided by an analysis of an exhaustive literature review –i.e., policy papers, media sources, or public documents– to identify and better explain the phases of investigation, the state of current research, and the *causal mechanisms* that operate in the candidate critical juncture “2022 Ukrainian war” for the EU energy policy.

This thesis will pursue the methodological approach of both (1) a *discourse analysis* and (2) a series of *experts’ semi-structured interviews*, acquiring this way a combination of relevant primary and secondary data. To carry out these approaches, the main intention is to identify how different actors in the EU publicly expressed their ideas and discourses on the EU energy policy before and after the beginning of hostilities in February 2022, and how much these ideas have changed due to the course of events in Ukraine, identifying this way different ‘political coalitions’ (Schmidt, 2011) with different kinds of policy discourses and leading to a joint belief shift.

As it was said, this research on policy change will moreover have the novelty that it will include different semi-structured interviews carried out at the heart of the European Commission, with the objective to give the ‘insiders’ point of view’ on how EU energy policy is changing (or not), and whether they may consider this situation as a new era in EU energy relations.

Therefore, this Chapter fulfils the given objective enshrined in the second sub-question of this research, which was the identification of the methods and techniques able to analyse actors’ discourse before and after the external shock.

This section will be divided into two sub-sections inspired by Schmidt’s work on Discursive Institutionalism –*Communicative* and *Coordinative* Discourses–, which will further explain the taken methodological approach, and how well these fit the purpose of the investigation. From the combination of these two methods, it is expected to draw valuable answers to the RQ.

### **3.1. Communicative Discourse: The *Discourse Network Analysis* (DNA)**

In her studies of Discursive Institutionalism, Professor V. Schmidt (2011; 2010) refers to Communicative Discourse as the part of the political sphere that covers the interaction between political actors –the EU– and the public –EU citizens, among others. In short, the *vertical* interaction. Here, concepts such as *policy deliberation*, *contestation*, and *legitimation* (Schmidt, 2011; Schmidt, 2010) are essential for understanding how actors involved in policy-making change and advocate ideas over time. Communicative Discourse will then make reference to the central methodology that will identify the changes in actors’ discourses before and after the external shock, and how these changes are made public in a specific time period.

Among different options to analyse discourses that trigger institutional change, such as the previously mentioned Advocacy Coalition Framework proposed by Sabatier (1998) and Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (1993), or the Argumentative Discourse Analysis (Hajer, 1993, 1995), *Discourse Network Analysis* (DNA) has been considered as the most helpful tool to reach sweeping conclusions in this field.

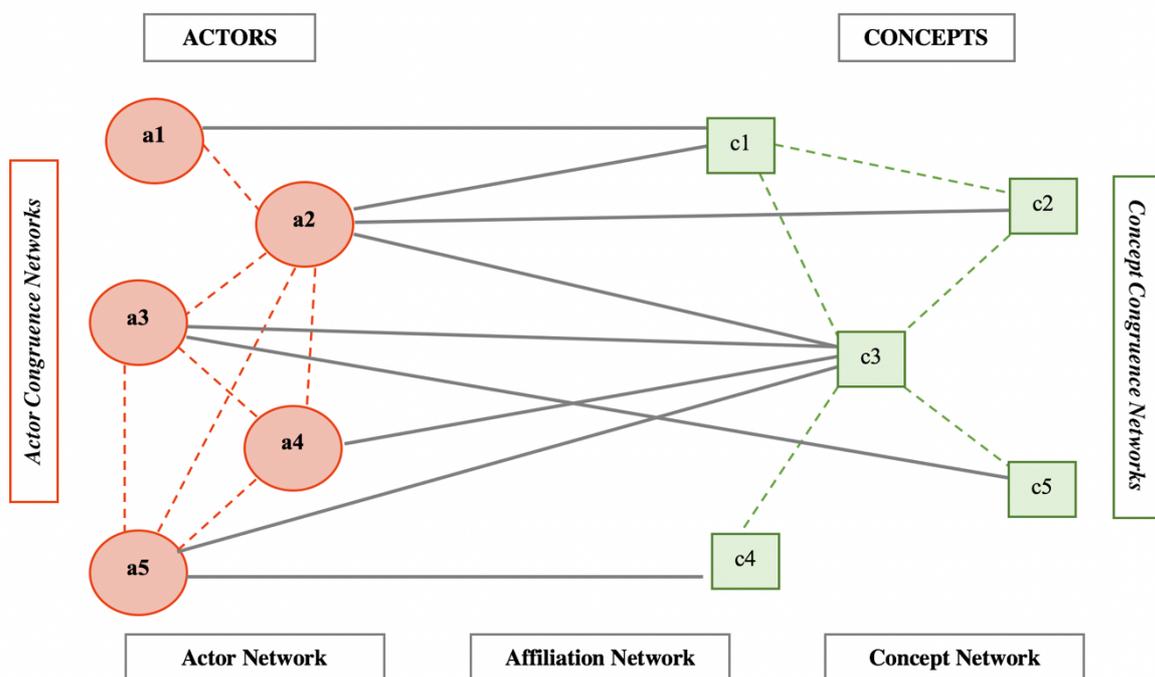
Designed and carried out by Professor P. Leifield (2017), DNA “is a toolbox of research methods for the analysis of actor-based debates, such as policy debates or political discussions” (ECPR, n.d.). It combines “qualitative content-analysis of actor statements and network analysis” (Swinkels & van Esch, 2022: 15), which clearly facilitates uncovering stakeholders’ beliefs in a specific timeframe. Moreover, policy actors and stakeholders within the EU communicate their beliefs and their (new) discourses in the news media, so this is the main reason why DNA is beneficial for this research.

#### **3.1.1. The Discourse Network Analyzer Software**

To construct the discourse networks, Professor P. Leifield developed a software that allows an important level of simplification when coding discourses and policy change: The *Discourse Network Analyzer Software*. This IT tool allows an excellent level of organization and mapping of stakeholders’ beliefs and clusters discourses into different ideational ‘bubbles’.

To make the software useful for the research, two online media sources were selected to identify actors’ discourses: *Euractiv* and *EU Observer*, which were chosen following the “quality press” criterion (Barranco & Wisler, 1999): These “represent general news-oriented papers of high reputation and are known to be politically moderate” (Rinscheid et al., 2019: 6), so there were more possibilities that their articles were more ‘neutral’, avoiding this way as much as possible ideological biases by journalists. Likewise, two other reasons were relevant: These news media have been publishing articles for a few years now, so they already existed when the external shock in February 2022 took place, and they thoroughly documented energy policy-discourses changes before and after the crisis. That being said, they perfectly fitted the time period meant to be covered by the Discourse Network Analyzer Software. In addition, Utrecht University provides students free access to all articles in these online sources.

In the following figure –and to make understanding the Discourse Network Analyzer Software easier to follow–, a simplification of Leiffield’s DNA is displayed. The explanation of how this scheme works can be found in the square right below the figure.



**FIGURE 2:** Basic model of Leiffield’s DNA and software (2017) (adapted from Leiffield, 2017). **Red circles** represent actors, while **green squares** symbolize concepts. The relation and interaction between these two variables explain changes of discourses in a given polity (in this case, the EU) and gives rise to *affiliation networks*. For example, since there is a line that joins a5 with c3, it means that actor 5, at least once, mentioned claim 3. Likewise, discontinuous lines connecting different actors mean that the distance between their set of beliefs and the others’ political held ideas is low, bringing about an *actor congruence network*. If this happens, it therefore means that these actors are more potentially better predisposed to set a joint belief shift into motion. By its part, *concept congruence networks* –discontinuous lines connecting concepts– are then ideas or claims that are interconnected because these have been mentioned by the same actors.

During this research, 120 articles in Euractiv and EU Observer were chosen and introduced in the Discourse Network Analyzer system (*See Appendix III*), taking into account the covered time period as well as the main events that were happening in the EU and in the Member States in the energy policy field. The units of analysis were *statements*<sup>5</sup> made by policy actors. Five variables were important when coding (Rinscheid et al., 2019; Swinkels & van Esch, 2022):

- 1) The *date* when the statement was made;
- 2) The *name* of the actor who said the statement;
- 3) The actor's organizational *affiliation*;
- 4) The *claim/belief* made in the statement;
- 5) And *approval or rejection* of the claim in the statement<sup>6</sup>.

A total of 504 statements were coded, crafting this way a comprehensive data system for the consequent qualitative analysis.

Furthermore, the use of the Discourse Network Analyzer system was supported with *Visone software* (Brandes & Wager, 2004), which allowed the tracing of actors' discourses during a specific timeframe to be conveniently simplified and facilitated the search of a proper response to the RQ. Using the Discourse Network Analyzer Software, different types of networks could be constructed as a tool to uncover the structure of the underlying discourse. In short, Visone allowed to visually show the evolution of energy discourses prior to and after the candidate critical juncture.

Taking into consideration the RQ, I, in addition, relied on actor congruence networks embedded in affiliation networks, which were more densely interconnected if they strongly agreed or disagreed with certain ideas –concepts. For this reason, the main objective was to track down groups of actors in EU energy policy in the context of the 2022 Ukrainian war who shared similar ideas in a way that helped in understanding how a joint belief shift appears in a network. Visone then identified clusters of actors sharing similar ideas on one or more statements, and these were ideologically displayed in illustrative maps on EU energy policy.

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<sup>5</sup> Defined by P. Leiffield (2017: 3) as: ‘‘a verbal or written expression of discontent with a policy or in favor of a policy.’’

<sup>6</sup> It is important to highlight here that actors' statements in favour or against one belief/idea/discourse took place not only during the crisis and the consequent changes in energy policy that are witnessed at the moment. Also, actors' statements were made *before* the crisis, and for this research, the key is to identify whether their statements are maintained, or rather there have been a substantial change. Therefore, if actors do not change their beliefs after the crisis, these ideas are maintained on the present day, prolonging their effect in EU policy-making.

### **3.1.2. Time period covered**

To make the Discourse Network Analyzer tool as accurate as possible for the research of the 2022 Ukrainian war as a candidate critical juncture –and without falling into the trap of going too much back in time–, it was decided to cover the time period right before the start of the crisis –since September 2021–, and after the external shock takes place –from February 2022, the month where hostilities with Russia started, until July 2022–, covering then a total of eleven months of changes in energy discourses, and their DNA analysis.

As it was previously mentioned, three different periods were observed from September 2021 to July 2022: (1) *The EU's energy status quo*; (2) *transition and swift in energy policy*; and (3) *energy change and joint belief shift*.

### **3.2. Coordinative discourse: *Experts' semi-structured interviews (SSI)***

Furthermore, apart from DNA, it was considered that the carrying out of experts' semi-structured interviews (SSI) allowed the conduction of a more thorough research on policy discourses changes. In the end, according to Professor W.C. Adams (2015), SSI are composed by closed- and open-ended questions that allows more room to manoeuvre between the interviewer and the interviewee.

V. Schmidt (2011; 2010) coins the concept of coordinative discourse to represent, in this case, the horizontal discursive interactions among actors in a specific organization. It emphasizes individuals at the centre of policy-making, coming up with new and innovative ideas (Schmidt, 2010); and how they take action to advocate for these new discourses and bring about a new joint belief shift. That being said, SSI will efficiently cover this part of Schmidt's investigation on DI.

The inclusion of SSI in this investigation is a novelty compared to the studies carried out by Rinscheid et al. (2019) or Swinkels & van Esch (2022), who centred their research on the changing of policy discourses in energy policy in different countries, and in monetary policy and the consequent emergence of the Banking Union in the EU, respectively. As it was previously mentioned, these authors made exhaustive use of Discourse Network Analysis to uncover discourses, and also encouraged future researchers to continue using it to expand its scope and its notoriety.

Although the Discourse Network Analyzer Software offers important data for the study of policy discourses, the main objective behind the inclusion of SSI was to contrast the delivered results by the Discourse Network Analyzer Software with the information provided by the experts working in the EU, boosting this way the validity of this research. In addition, the use of SSI with experts working in a daily basis in the field of EU energy policy –in short, *EU officials*– provided this study with an additional depth of knowledge that helped to clarify certain results that might appear even contradictory using only the Discourse Network Analyzer Software. In other words, these interviews were a primary source of data acquisition, and experts' opinions constituted a valuable asset to contextualize Software's findings.

This way, the reader will have a two-level investigation able to fulfil both the external and the internal dimensions of EU energy policy. On the one hand, the Software will offer the *outsider's perspective* on the causal mechanisms that cause the energy policy's discourses to change due to the 2022 Ukrainian war; while on the other, EU officials' SSI will expand the Software's results' scope, also incorporating the *insider's perspective*.

### **3.2.1. Format of the interviews**

Although SSI allow the possibility to manoeuvre and to be as exhaustive as possible without needing to stick too much to a compressed format, organization and structure continue to be important assets to carry out a successful methodology. Three matters on the conducted SSI are worth describing in more detail.

#### **3.2.1.1. Related to content**

Content-specific, the format of the carried out SSI was the following: For the sake of simplicity, the interviews followed a specific structure/matrix that was respected. Since the interview followed a semi-structured format, the interviewer allowed the interviewee the possibility to explain certain concepts better; elaborate on his/her answers; or the inclusion of new, interesting questions and answers that seemed interesting for the follow-up analysis of this research.

Questions were divided into two different thematic blocs (for an overview of the SSI matrix, see *Appendix VI*), which were:

- 1) *Introductory questions*, which touched upon the experts' professional career path in the EU and what kind of work is he/she carrying out at the moment in the field of energy;
- 2) *And topic-specific questions*, which were more related to the EU energy policy *per se*.

Likewise, the SSI allowed the inclusion of a final round of questions where the interviewee was able to raise different doubts and the possibility to keep a more informal interaction between interviewer and interviewee on the topic. The questionnaire was thus given in advance so experts could better prepare the answers. However, new questions were also added throughout the interview to give respondents room for certain spontaneity and further reflection.

### **3.2.1.2. Related to participants**

Considering the answer to be given to the RQ and the analysis of discourses of all actors involved in the 2022 Ukrainian war, the truth is many players could be an interviewee for the SSI –from bottom to top level; at regional, national, or European level; private and/or private actors.

This was an obstacle to be considered with the inclusion of interviews. Nevertheless, despite the possibility of interviewing many diverse actors of different nature, it was decided to focus on one specific EU institution: The European Commission. This was because of three reasons.

The first one was to maintain simplicity. This research is, in the end, subject to deadlines that need to be strictly respected. Interviews are complex and time-consuming activities in a research since there is a basic need to (1) choose suitable interviewees; (2) contact them and wait for their approval; (3) interview them; (4) transcript everything; and (5) analyse their own words and transform it into valuable qualitative data. That being said, it became necessary to comprehensively analyse a rather one *prominent* actor that might be able to agglutinate the most important beliefs and that it served as a connection between all the others actors. For these reasons, the European Commission became the ideal candidate.

Secondly, it was necessary to keep into account that one of the formulated expectations– E5– was the following:

*The main actor advocating for a big change in EU energy policy –and consequently in energy governance– is the European Commission as the institution that represents the EU's interests and supranational power*

Therefore, in order to scientifically accept or reject this expectation in the final section of Chapter IV, it was deemed necessary to precisely assess the European Commission as a dynamic actor in this external shock.

Taking into consideration this, SSI for this research on energy-policy change were all held –as it was previously mentioned– among officials working in the European Commission, the principal EU institution exhaustively working in implementing the new changes in the energy field. This became reason number three.

In total, five EU officials were able to be interviewed, and their relevant insights and experts' knowledge will be discussed in the following Chapter.

### **3.2.1.3. Related to technicalities**

On technical grounds, all interviews were conducted in the month of July in the year 2022. The format of the interviews was in-person meetings in Brussels (Belgium) or an online format via Skype. In the end, out of the five interviews that were carried out, one was online, while the rest were in person.

Before starting the interview, participants were informed of the possibility of maintaining anonymity, and were asked on specific consent to record their answers <sup>7</sup>. Likewise, all interviews were carried out in English to avoid troublesome translations.

Quotes from the SSI will be used alongside the results of the analysis, and the transcripts of all held interviews are available in the Appendix section (See *Appendices VII, VIII, IX, X & XI*) under pseudonyms R ('researcher') and X ('interviewed EU official'). They will appear in the analysis section as EU official # –1, 2, 3, 4, or 5.

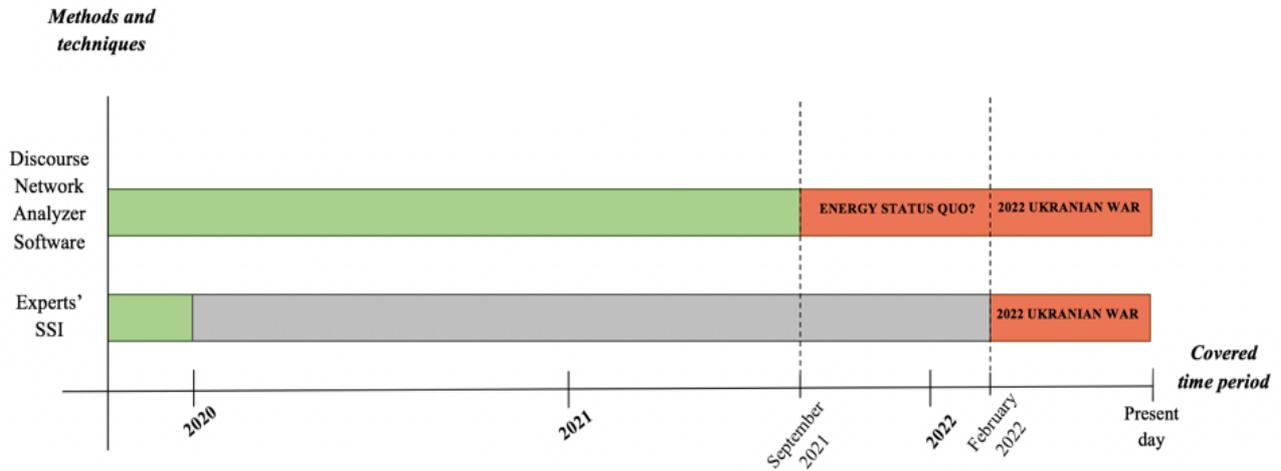
### **3.2.2. Time period covered**

SSI, for their part, was also guided by a specific timeframe for the sake of simplicity. More specifically, experts' interviews were more focused on the current new developments that are taking place right now within the EU energy policy, so questions to European Commission's officials centred more between February 2022 –the starting month of the Ukrainian war– onwards, which some references/questions on the energy policy situation right before the start of the hostilities and how much the (discourse) situation has change in their experts' opinion, going back on time one, or even two years if necessary–this will be called 'the grey zone-period'. This meant that SSI initially covered a time period of six months, with the possibility of extension.

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<sup>7</sup> Moreover, the obtained information is subject to strict rules enshrined by Utrecht University as the leading educational institution.

Figure 3 offers a simplification of the final timespan to be analysed for both the Discourse Network Analyzer Software and SSI’s methodological approaches since it efficiently illustrates the time period to be covered for this research on the candidate critical juncture ‘the 2022 Ukrainian crisis’, and its direct consequences on the formulation of EU energy policy:



**FIGURE 3:** *Methodology timespan for the candidate critical juncture: The 2022 Ukrainian war.* In *green*, not covered period in the study; in *red*, covered period; and in *grey*, the grey zone-period for SSI.

Furthermore, referring to the answering of the RQ, the Discourse Network Analyzer Software and SSI seemed suited for the uncovering of new discourses in the EU energy field and able to accurately identify the possible joint belief shift that it is witnessed at the EU-level policy-making. Consequently, in the next Chapter: *Results and Analysis*, a comprehensive view will be given of Discourse Network Analyzer Software and SSI’s outcomes and what these results show (and teach) about ideas and discourses in EU energy policy.

## **CHAPTER IV: Results and analysis**

This section will then have the objective to empirically show, interpret and analyse the results provided by the Discourse Network Analyzer Software –the independent variable– and by SSI to EU officials in the European Commission –the dependent variable. These results will be in addition displayed jointly. This way, a satisfactory, adequate answer to the RQ will be given.

To avoid confusion, this Chapter will be moreover classified into two main parts. First of all, the principal analysis of the results will be displayed in the following sub-section. These will be divided into three different, contextual phases that may have created the window of opportunity for involved actors in EU energy policy, as it was previously mentioned in the last Chapter, aiming to identify the critical antecedents, the permissive condition, and the productive conditions: (1) *The EU's energy status quo*; (2) *transition and swift in energy policy*; and (3) *energy change and joint belief shift*. In addition, a ‘fourth’ phase will be added to understand what may happen at the EU level in the upcoming months, enriching even more the empirical understanding of discourses change in EU energy policy. In this first section, therefore, a comprehensive answer will be given to the RQ, apart from making clear whether the EU energy policy field is actually changing as an effect of the Ukrainian conflict <sup>8</sup>. In the second part of the Chapter, I will carry out the final test of expectations.

That being said, Table 2 below offers an interesting general overview of all major political and symbolic events that have been happening in the EU energy policy field, from 2020 to 2022, and that are deemed relevant for the proper understanding of the topic at hands. This table will serve as a useful guiding tool while presenting results, and it has been filled in after the analysis of the 120 articles in Euractiv and EU Observer.

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<sup>8</sup> This is the third and last sub-question raised in the introduction of the thesis.

First phase	<p><b>22 June 2020:</b> The (EU) Taxonomy Regulation on the establishment of a framework to facilitate sustainable investment is published in the Official Journal of the European Union.</p> <p><b>14 July 2021:</b> The European Commission presents its Fit for 55 Package (F55), with the main aim of cutting at least 55% of GHG emissions by 2030.</p> <p><b>4 October 2021:</b> The Spanish Government led by Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, together with the French Government, warn about the spike of energy prices, and the necessity to put in place a scheme that would allow the economic alleviation of the energy poor.</p> <p><b>16 December 2021:</b> The European Council in its Summit in Brussels warns Russia that there would be ‘severe consequences’ if a Russian military action takes place in Ukraine.</p>
Second phase	<p><b>1 January 2022:</b> The French Presidency in the Council of the European Union begins, interested in accelerating clean energy transition and in the spike of energy prices, with no mention to the delicate Ukrainian situation (French Presidency of the Council of the European Union, 2022).</p> <p><b>26 January 2022:</b> Germany agrees it will stop Nord Stream 2 if escalation of hostilities with Ukraine by Russia takes place.</p> <p><b>2 February 2022:</b> The European Commission approves a Complementary Climate Delegated Act in EU Taxonomy, including nuclear and gas sources as ‘green’.</p> <p><b>22 February 2022:</b> The German Government halts the Nord Stream 2 project.</p> <p><b>23 February 2022:</b> Russia enters Ukrainian territory by order of President Vladimir Putin.</p> <p><b>24 February 2022:</b> <u>Start of hostilities between Ukraine and Russia.</u></p>
Third phase	<p><b>1 March 2022:</b> The European Parliament holds an Extraordinary Plenary session in Brussels after the Russian aggression against Ukraine. President Volodymyr Zelensky asks for Europe’s unity against Russia.</p> <p><b>8 March 2022:</b> Executive Vice-President, Frans Timmermans, and Commissioner for Energy, Kadri Simson, present the European Commission’s plan to be fully independent from Russia as an external supplier: RePowerEU.</p> <p><b>18 May 2022:</b> The European Commission finally publishes its comprehensive guidelines for the RePowerEU plan.</p> <p><b>24 May 2022:</b> Lithuania drops all Russian energy imports, becoming the first EU state to be fully independent from Russian energy sources.</p> <p><b>30 May 2022:</b> EU leaders agree on a partial Russian oil embargo, after weeks of negotiation with Member States.</p> <p><b>3 June 2022:</b> The EU adopts the sixth package of sanctions against Russia, where important oil restrictions are put into place. Some EU leaders start thinking on the next steps for the seventh package of sanctions.</p> <p><b>26-28 June 2022:</b> The G7 summit takes place, where Ukraine and its pacification becomes the hot topic, and the condemnation of Russia’s actions.</p> <p><b>1 July 2022:</b> The Czech Presidency in the Council of the European Union begins, with a special interest in reaching independence from Russia and boosting security of supply within the Union (Czech Presidency of the Council of the European Union, 2022)</p> <p><b>22 July 2022:</b> The European Commission adopts the “Save gas for a safe winter” plan.</p> <p><b>25 July 2022:</b> The Council adopts new restrictive measures against Russia under the name the ‘maintenance and alignment package’.</p>

**TABLE 2:** *Overview of main political events prior and after the 2022 Ukrainian war*

#### 4.1. Explaining the discourse change in EU energy policy

As it was previously mentioned in the latter Chapter, I will in addition complement the comprehensive analysis of discourses and SSI with in-depth process evidence using primary and secondary data (Rinscheid et al., 2019) to give thorough explanations on not only the results, but also to the context where all these political events take place, and in which involved actors have to manoeuvre. Therefore, each phase will describe two different trends and their development: (1) Political events; and (2) actor constellations and discourses that exist during that specific period. This scheme will offer for each phase a comprehensive image of conflict dynamics between involved actors; at the same time it underlines what were the main worries and hot topics in EU energy policy, bringing about possible permissive and productive conditions in the context of the 2022 Ukrainian war.

Table 3 offers then an interesting display of different event examples that constitute, in each phase, the permissive condition, the critical antecedents, or the productive conditions. This figure does not take into consideration all other important energy policy developments. Nevertheless, these political events will be of course named and thoroughly explained in the subsequent analysis.

<i>Phase</i>	<i>Specific case-event</i>	<i>Moment/time period</i>	<i>What does it illustrate?</i>
Phase 1	Heated discussions on the inclusion of nuclear and gas as ‘green’ sources of energy	September-December 2021	Critical antecedents: presence of (alternative) ideas
Phase 2	Start of the Ukrainian war	24-02-2022	Permissive condition (critical juncture)
Phase 3	Communication on RePowerEU in order to become fully energy-independent from Russia	08-03-2022	Productive condition/joint belief shift

**TABLE 3:** *Interconnectedness between case events in energy policy and formulated theoretical framework*

<i>Phase</i>	<i>Actors</i>	<i>Statements</i>	<i>Nodes</i>	<i>Links</i>
Phase 1	40	68	55	124
Phase 2	39	99	63	129
Phase 3	114	337	170	437

**TABLE 4:** *Network statistics by phase*

#### **4.1.1. Phase 1: The EU’s energy status quo (September 2021-December 2021)**

This phase constitutes the time period when national and European actors involved in energy policy were discussing/more worried on future developments not so related to Russia, but rather on renewables.

Nevertheless, EU energy actors and stakeholders clearly stood in a specific political position in the energy field before the start of the crisis, so it is important to examine here (1) The formal formulation of EU energy policy to understand how it affected actors’ discourses; and (2) the proclivity they had to change their ideas and discourses to produce a policy change.

##### **4.1.1.1. Political events**

The EU energy field is, without any doubt, a *changing* policy (Hafner & Raimondi, 2020; Bocse, 2021; Elbassoussy, 2019; Schubert et al., 2016). Along its long history, energy as a policy field in the EU needed to face and tackle changing conditions. Because of these, EU policy-makers needed to modify energy policy’s priorities and principles every little time so it was able to effectively respond to the population’s necessities of that particular moment (Schubert et al. 2016; Hafner & Raimondi, 2020). This is the main reason why Phase 1’s actors’ claims and priorities will be so different compared to the rest of the time period in this candidate critical juncture, which will be further explained in the following subsections.

In the field of EU studies, different authors defend that the EU is, in energy matters, on the pursuit of a *comprehensive energy security* (Schubert et al., 2016; Cameron, 2007, Szulecki et al., 2016; Aalto & Westphal, 2008; Criqui & Mima, 2012), which ultimately rules and guides any action taken in EU energy policy. In comprehensive energy security, there are three objectives to be fulfilled (Aalto & Westphal, 2008; Schubert et al., 2016):

- *Increase competitiveness*, with the aim to guarantee that energy is affordable for all kinds of customers throughout the EU. It nourishes from one of the strongest sectors of EU integration: The single market;
- *Achieve security of supply*<sup>9</sup> to avoid energy disruptions and shortages from the exterior to the EU;
- And *mitigate climate change* as an attempt to reach environmental sustainability. With the *European Green Deal* (EGD) (European Commission, 2019), published in December 2019, the von der Leyen Commission aims to achieve this via different packages or initiatives.

That being said, among these priorities and before the start of the Ukrainian war, the EU as a whole was more focused on the fulfilment of this latter objective, lagging behind on competitiveness and security of supply matters. And more interestingly, in this context of clean, green energy transition in the EU is where actors were involved right before the start of hostilities between Russia and Ukraine in February 2022.

Two initiatives are in this very moment –September-December 2021– in the spotlight: The *EU Taxonomy* –announced in June 2020– and the *F55 Package* –July 2021. Starting with the latter one, the political discussions on this Package allowed the general consent that protecting the environment and achieving energy transition via the use of renewable sources were the two greatest objectives to be carried out by stakeholders at all levels. The benefits of the use of renewables over pollutant sources were consequently widespread –despite the important grade of fossil fuels dependency from Russia (Eurostat, 2022)–, and efforts to reach the cut of at least 55% of GHG emissions by 2030 were made through the approval of different strategies, communications and meetings of EU27 leaders, with discussions on the CAP, on food security or on forestry, among others (European Council & Council of the EU, 2022a). In this context, only a handful of EU states (or less) showed resistant to energy policies, which will be further discussed in the following sub-section.

In the case of the EU Taxonomy, the situation is more delicate during this period. This strategy was born in 2020 with the objective of creating a “robust classification system at Union level to establish clarity on which activities qualify as *green* or *sustainable*” (Regulation (EU) 2020/852: Recital 5: 14). Nevertheless, despite efforts to achieve an effective clean energy

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<sup>9</sup> Also known simply as *energy security*.

transition, the context of Phase 1 entails important disagreements between political leaders and other groups and associations. During these months until February 2022, the EU witnessed heated discussions on the inclusion of nuclear energy as green, and gas as some kind of ‘transition source’ towards clean transition. Consequently, between September and December 2021, the European Commission found itself in a situation whether it had to rule in favour or against these sources, bringing about different kinds of arguments from a plethora of actors involved in EU policy-making. Interestingly enough, President U. von der Leyen (2021) herself described the following on social media in October 2021: “We also need a stable source, nuclear, and during the transition, gas”.

At the same time F55 and the EU Taxonomy were discussed at EU level, already certain national governments were rising important concerns on the spike of energy prices in national territory. This was the case for Spanish Prime Minister P. Sánchez together with the French Government. Between September and December, these two actors demanded from the EU some kind of ‘pan-European response’ for this increase (“France, Spain urge pan-European response to energy price surge”, 2021), not aware yet of the direct consequences that the upcoming Ukraine crisis would have for European end customers’ households and national businesses.

#### **4.1.1.2. Actor constellations and discourses**

Phase 1 initiates then with heated discourses that were already in the bargaining table at the EU level. When comparing this period with the rest of phases, it is actually clear that the number of actors is low –40–, as well as the number of statements –68–, as Figure 4 visualizes.

As it was previously mentioned, discourses during this phase are not connected yet to the Ukrainian war of 2022. Among all news articles analysed, only two of them directly refer to the situation with Russia, and the necessity to become independent from its fossil fuels as a whole. Nevertheless, according to EU official #3, already in October 2021, the situation with Russia was already heated in the European institutions, and within the European Commission, staff already started making preparations for a possible supplies’ cut from her <sup>10</sup>.

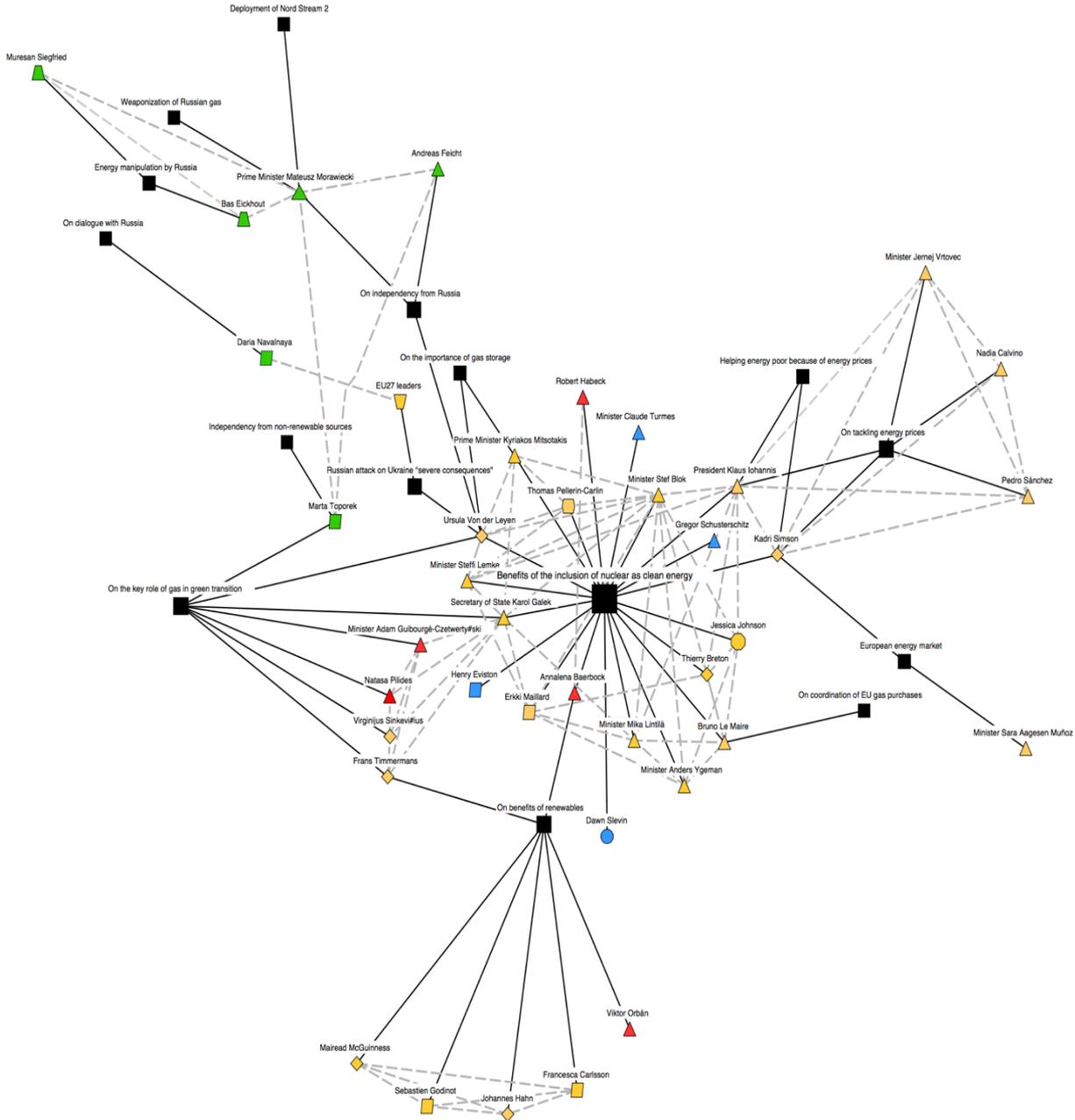
Taking a look now to Figure 5, eleven claims/statements were the most repeated in this period.

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<sup>10</sup> EU official #3: “But when I already started in October it was already quite serious. The situation has changed with the war in Ukraine, but even before that here [in the European Commission] they knew that it was going to happen.”

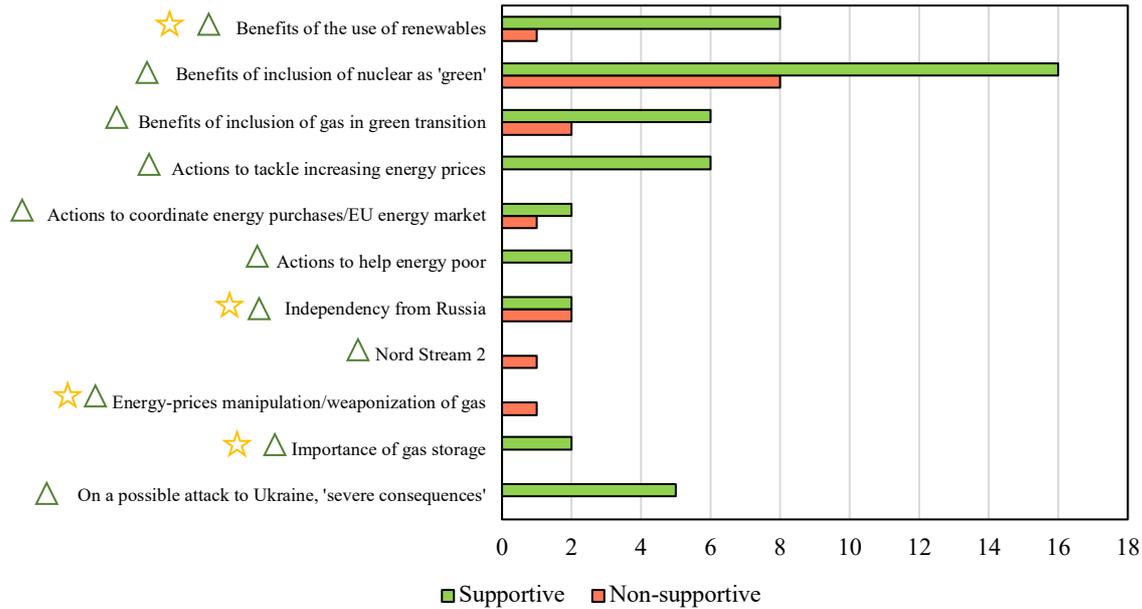
FORMS

- Discourse/claim
- △ National gov.
- ◇ EC
- ▱ EP/MEPs
- ▭ Council/European Council
- TEG
- ◻ Think tank
- ⊖ Industry/trade union
- ▭ NGO/lobby group/association



COLOURS	SIZE
<span style="display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px; background-color: #90EE90; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Actor supporting changing the status quo with Russia	Size indicates frequency of discourses/claims during the phase
<span style="display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px; background-color: #FF0000; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Actor supporting not to change the current status quo with Russia	<b>LINES</b>
<span style="display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px; background-color: #FFD700; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Actor advocating for a 'change' in EU energy policy	— Affiliation Network
<span style="display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px; background-color: #00BFFF; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Non-aligned actor	- - - Actor Congruence Network
<span style="display: inline-block; width: 10px; height: 10px; background-color: #000000; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Discourse/claim fill colour	

**FIGURE 4:** Actor congruence networks and affiliation networks in Phase 1



**FIGURE 5:** Frequency of claims/discourses being mentioned by involved actors in Phase 1

△ represents claims presented in several periods  
★ represents discourses related to the joint belief shift in EU energy policy in 2022

Actors were overall supportive, but most of the time, they do not refer to beliefs directly involving the idea of ‘independence from Russia’. And among these claims, only one clearly stands out: On whether the benefits of the inclusion of nuclear energy would be beneficial as a green fuel in the EU Taxonomy context. In this regard, the majority of involved actors in EU policy-making –16 out of 22– agreed on this. Taking into consideration the importance given in this moment to environmental sustainability, this makes sense. But more importantly, and even despite the fact that statements were not directly connected to the situation with Russia and Ukraine, it shows that the majority of actors here were advocating for some kind of *change* in EU energy policy, moving away little by little from fossil fuels <sup>11</sup>.

This already shows that during Phase 1 there was an inherent predisposition to change. As it was already stated in the previous sub-section, energy policy has been subject of multiple transformations, and the academic literature has clearly outlined many times that the EU’s conception on energy policy “has transformed over time, reflecting the changing debate of the Union’s competences and functions and its theoretical understanding” (Schubert et al., 2016:

<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, this shift is still not total, since an important number of actors –6 out of 8– were convinced on the benefits of allowing gas as a *transition* source.

85). More specifically, researcher A.M. Bocse already realized that energy policy was an appealing and thoroughly-discussed topic within the European institutions. According to Bocse, energy is a fruitful area to study and better understand the impact of advocacy coalitions on policy-making because it is “more prone to accommodating network-like structures of social interaction” (Bocse, 2021: 3). That is why, for example, EU official #4 defends that in only twelve years, she has witnessed huge changes ‘in our energy system’<sup>12</sup>. This clearly proves that foundations for EU energy change settle in fertile ground.

That being said, ideas on energy independence from Russia throughout Phase 1 are latent: They exist, and stakeholders know it. But not everything is still well predisposed, because there are limited or non-existent incentives to activate policy change (yet). Two important things are still missing:

- 1) There are not important actors’ coalitions actively advocating for independence from Russia<sup>13</sup>. Rather, there are single, non-unified actors sporadically claiming that energy dependency and reliance on Russia is bad, without giving alternatives;
- 2) And absence of defecting actors, leaving behind their previous ideas to embrace new, innovative beliefs. These do not create a strong coalition in favour of change.

Taking a look now on actors’ coalitions, it is clear that stakeholders’ interconnectedness is low, and above all, messy. Figure 4 identifies five different clusters where only two of them –1 and 2– are fairly well-connected<sup>14</sup>:

- 1) *Actors in favour of nuclear energy in EU Taxonomy*, which are the majority of national governments, with the clear exemption of the German Government (Rinscheid et al., 2019) –Ministers R. Habeck and A. Baerbock– and other small actors from different associations. Interestingly enough, inclusion of nuclear would make the transition to energy independence from Russia smoother. Because of this, actors in favour of it are

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<sup>12</sup> EU official #4: “Let’s say I started in 2010, and it’s impressively incredible that I didn’t have one single day of boredom. 2010 was when we had the first threat of gas supplies disruptions by Russia, and then I was involved in the trilateral negotiations with Ukraine and Russia already in 2014. So we have been doing a lot of work in terms of diversification, in terms of energy security ever since. But also the whole approach has changed immensely, and now we have re-started again, [...] so it is a huge change, in terms of green transition, and transition to a more decarbonized system. Within 12 years, I’ve seen a huge change in our energy system.”

<sup>13</sup> Actors in favour of this exist, but neither their power nor networks are still strong enough to spark a general interest.

<sup>14</sup> These coalitions are moreover divided into 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 depending on their ‘popularity’. Coalition 1 would be then the most popular claim shared by more actors, while coalition 5 shares marginal ideas.

orange, while the rest are either in red or in blue, depending on whether there were more statements of these actors throughout the analysis of phases <sup>15</sup>;

- 2) *Actors in favour of gas as a transition source*, where interestingly enough, the majority of actors advocating in favour of this are precisely members of the College of Commissioners, indirectly diving this way the continuation of energy dependency in the EU. However, the College is also part of two other clusters: Renewables and non-reliable Russia, so their position is relatively unstable if ‘adequate conditions’ are met;
- 3) *Actors actively advocating the generalized use of renewables*, or in other words, in favour of an efficient and fast clean transition. This also conforms another coalition because, according to EU officials #1, #2 and #3, a direct consequence of the Ukrainian war, the ambitious objective of green transition has been accelerated at EU and national levels, with almost no resistance <sup>16</sup>. Only one actor –the Hungarian government led by V. Orbán– shows resistance to transition, apart from strong ties with Russia;
- 4) *Actors advocating for EU actions because of the spike of energy prices*. This coalition is led by the Spanish and French Governments, defending a EU-level mechanism able to tackle this issue. The rest of actors shows reticence, specially at EU level.
- 5) *And actors declaring that Russia is a non-reliable and conflicting partner*, or the discourse less pronounced in this period. For now, this belief is shared by a small number of actors, coming from small associations, but certain characters from the EU bubble already points this out.

Actors’ coalitions 4 and 5 are, in addition, displayed in the corners of Figure 4, and this is due to the fact that these ideas are marginal in the ‘day-to-day ideology’ in Phase 1.

Reflecting now upon the critical antecedents as a final conclusion on this phase, it can be elucidated then that Phase 1 does not start as a ‘Phase 0’ per se where advocacy for change is practically null. The problem-solving ability during this phase of status quo is not seriously damaged yet, but Figure 4 shows that it is been importantly challenged. The majority of actors

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<sup>15</sup> Ministers R. Habeck and A. Baerbock are in red then because in Phase 1 were clearly in favor of dependency from Russia because of the Nord Stream 2 project (further discussed in Phase 2). But after the halting of the pipeline, they became really vocal against energy dependency from Russia. For the rest of blue actors, their participation in EU energy policy change was less proactive, so reasons to be against nuclear in EU Taxonomy cannot be empirically assessed then.

<sup>16</sup> EU official #1: “I would say that of course the post-context is adding urgency to our decarbonization objectives. We want to phase out even more quickly our dependence from Russia, and especially for certain fuels like coal.”; EU official #2: “when you face a moment of scarcity of resources you have to organize them the best way you can. This clearly accelerated the transition.”; EU official #3: “...And I think it is quite a good mix because it doesn’t lose sight of the decarbonization objective, and actually accelerates it.”

and their plethora of sets of beliefs, are more than ready to cause a real, tangible institutional change, and that is why their colour is mostly orange. The exposure to different discourses in EU energy policy was there, but messy at the same time, as it was stated before. The observed problem here is that the political/societal scene is a melting-pot of different ideas with diverse foundations; but in a nutshell, a strong direction, leadership and entrepreneurship are still missing, creating this way a sense of clear belonging, and making actors to defect. That being said, institutional players which could cause the institutional change are, in fact, ready to defect and advocate for a new change. This is the case of the von der Leyen Commission and other members of the European institutions –MEPs or political leaders. Nevertheless, in Phase 1, there are not too many incentives to change yet. Rather, they are still waiting. For this reason, the candidate critical juncture becomes a relevant *sine qua non* condition for players to start changing, and to really start interconnecting one actor coalition to another.

#### **4.1.2. Phase 2: Transition and swift in energy policy (January-February 2022)**

The period between January and February 2022 constitutes a new start for the EU. Despite this short phase of only two months, the political and symbolic events that took place during this period were incredibly relevant for the change and future development of the EU energy policy. In this phase, the main subject of study will essentially be the 2022 Ukrainian war, which started off on the 24<sup>th</sup> of February, and which clearly constitutes the permissive condition that may allow the changes of actors' discourses and the joint belief shift.

##### **4.1.2.1. Political events**

Despite the war in Ukraine starting in the final days of February, January already witnessed the prelude of the invasion by Russia. During this period, tensions significantly escalated between Ukraine and the West –mainly, the EU and the US with NATO's assistance– against Russia. In January, both blocs started preparations for the war, despite diplomatic talks. While Russia raises concerns that certain 'security demands' have not been met, NATO reinforces its military presence in Central and Eastern European countries. At the same time, Ukrainian President V. Zelensky is rested reassured that he will receive all help from the West if the invasion takes place ('Timeline: How did the recent Ukraine-Russia crisis start?', 2022).

Taking into consideration how difficult the situation was already, it is interesting how France as a EU country tackled the situation. The 1<sup>st</sup> of January, France took over as President of the Council of the EU as part of the six-month rotation presidency policy established a few years

ago under the ToL. During this phase, nevertheless, French priorities in the Council did not respond to the strategic necessities that the EU very much needed, especially in the energy field. France had three ambitions for its presidency: A more sovereign Europe; a new model for growth; and a humane Europe (French Presidency of the Council of the European Union, 2022). The delicate situation in Ukraine –or the simple mention to ‘Ukraine’– is not addressed at all. In the case of Russia, the French government in its priorities only highlights that it will ensure the implementation of the European Council’s strategic position on Russia of June 2021 (Presidency of the Council of the European Union, 2022). Interestingly enough, the European Council’s conclusions touched upon the continuation of the dialogue with Russia, and rather a ‘caution approach’ in EU-Russia relations, always highlighting the need for cooperation between both blocs (European Council, 2021).

That being said, French President E. Macron met with Russian President V. Putin in February in order to discuss the possible attack to Ukraine. As well as the priorities set out in the official document of the French presidency in the Council of the EU, President E. Macron took a more caution approach and acted diplomatically with a role of mediator (‘Timeline: How did the recent Ukraine-Russia crisis start?’, 2022; Faure, 2022). During marathon talks on the 8<sup>th</sup> of February, the French President even assures that he was successful in convincing President V. Putin to not escalate the Ukrainian crisis, fact that the Kremlin denied later (‘Timeline: How did the recent Ukraine-Russia crisis start?’, 2022). Of course, France’s efforts to stop escalation were fruitless when Russia entered Ukraine the 23<sup>rd</sup> of February, and the war started one day later. Therefore, French presidency during Phase 2 plays an interesting role in this regard.

Within the EU, Phase 2 witnessed the approval of a *Complementary Climate Delegated Act* on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February in the EU Taxonomy (Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2022/1214). During Phase 1, almost all discussions and discourses were related on whether or not include nuclear as green energy and gas as a transition source. In Phase 2, the European Commission interestingly approves this, in a period of uncertainty regarding Russia, the most important external gas and oil supplier to the EU (*see Appendices IV & V*) (IEA, 2020).

#### **4.1.2.2. Actor constellations and discourses**

Taking now a look to the actor congruence and affiliation networks displayed in Figure 6, the change becomes more clear. As stated before, despite the fact that the war started in the final days of February, important developments started to unfold at the beginning of 2022. This

allowed substantial changes in how involved actors in EU policy-making were behaving in the supranational arena.

In only two months, actors' statements suffered an important transformation. In Phase 2, 39 different stakeholders were involved, almost the same number of actors as in Phase 1. Nevertheless, a total of 99 claims were publicly made, compared to 68 in the previous period of four months. Here, there are two big differences:

- 1) Discourses being mentioned in Phase 2 are now more related to the tense relation between Russia and Ukraine, as it can be illustrated by Figure 7. This proves that even despite the fact that EU Official #3 defended that they were already making preparations for a possible independence from Russia within the Commission since October 2021, the actual, big change was more or less felt for the rest of involved actors two months later. This led to a reorganization of discourses and actors. This time around, claims in favour of a joint belief shift are in the middle, while marginal ideas are in the corners in Figure 6;
- 2) And more importantly, EU players already start in Phase 2 to not raise arbitrary or isolated concerns. Rather, they genuinely take side with Ukraine in pursuit of 'solidarity and unity', as EU official #5 states several times<sup>17</sup>. For this reason, Figure 6 shows now different sizes for actors, indicating the frequency those claims are repeated by them during Phase 2. The bigger the form gets, it will mean that their statements are more and more repeated, so their beliefs grow stronger, as well as the prominence of actor's discourse in the EU decision-making arena.

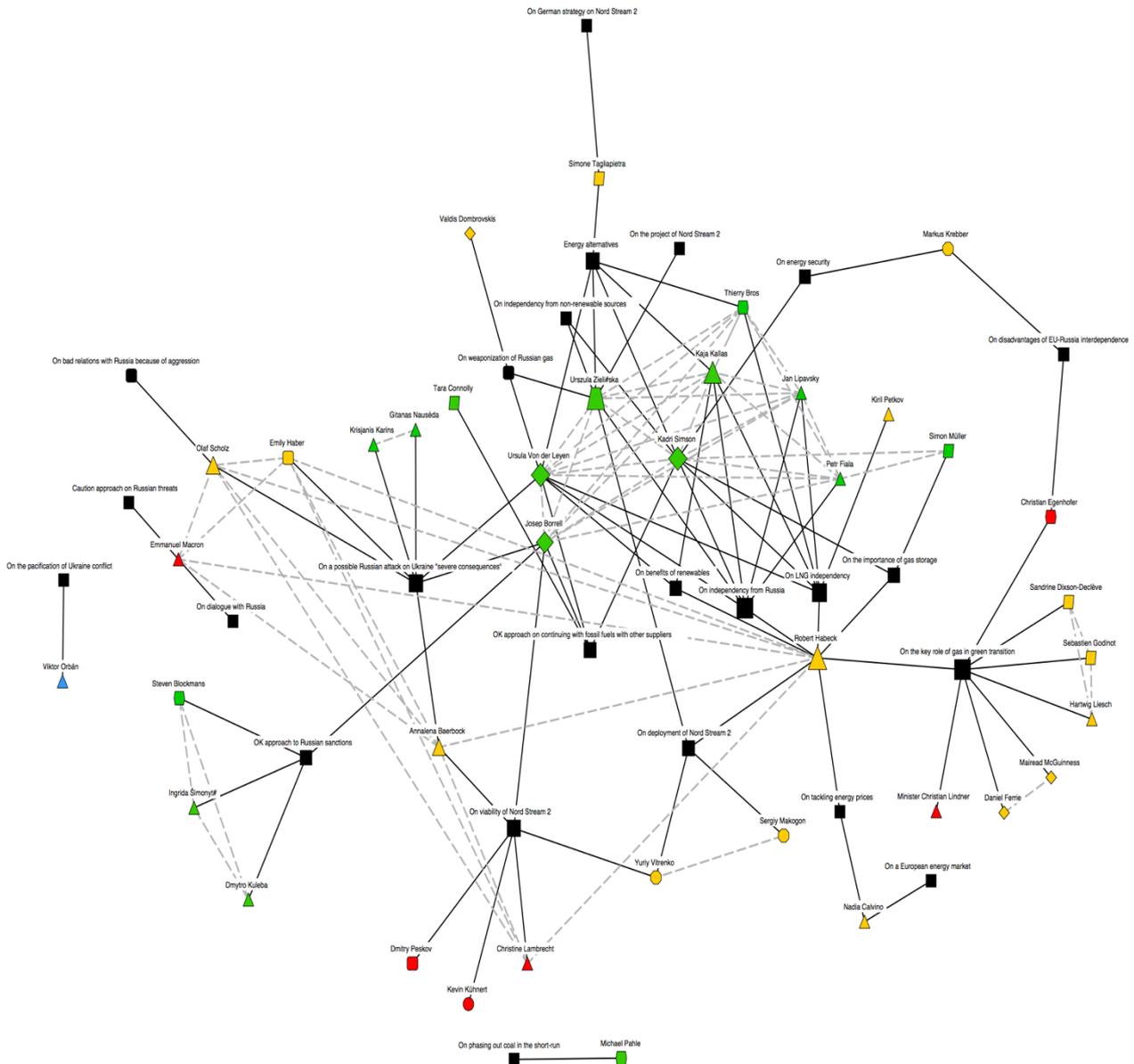
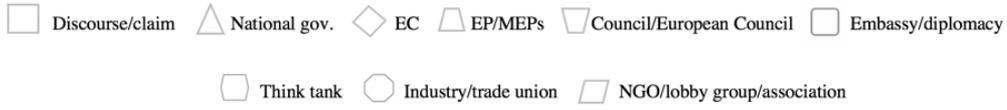
That being said, comparing Figures 4 –Phase 1– and 6 –Phase 2–, it is also clear that the latter displays a more important level of interconnectedness between actors. The urgency of the situation and the fact that the war is imminent in this period favour a relevant level of actor congruence. This time around, the Ukrainian war as a permissive condition<sup>18</sup> allows to make actors realize that the problem-solving ability of the existing energy policy regime is not the most adequate one. As stated in Phase 1, previous awareness on this deficiency was already known and acknowledged because of the changing nature of EU energy policy, and important

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<sup>17</sup> EU official #5: "In general, the current situation is a task for the whole EU as such. Because it is a task for unity, for coordination and also for solidarity".

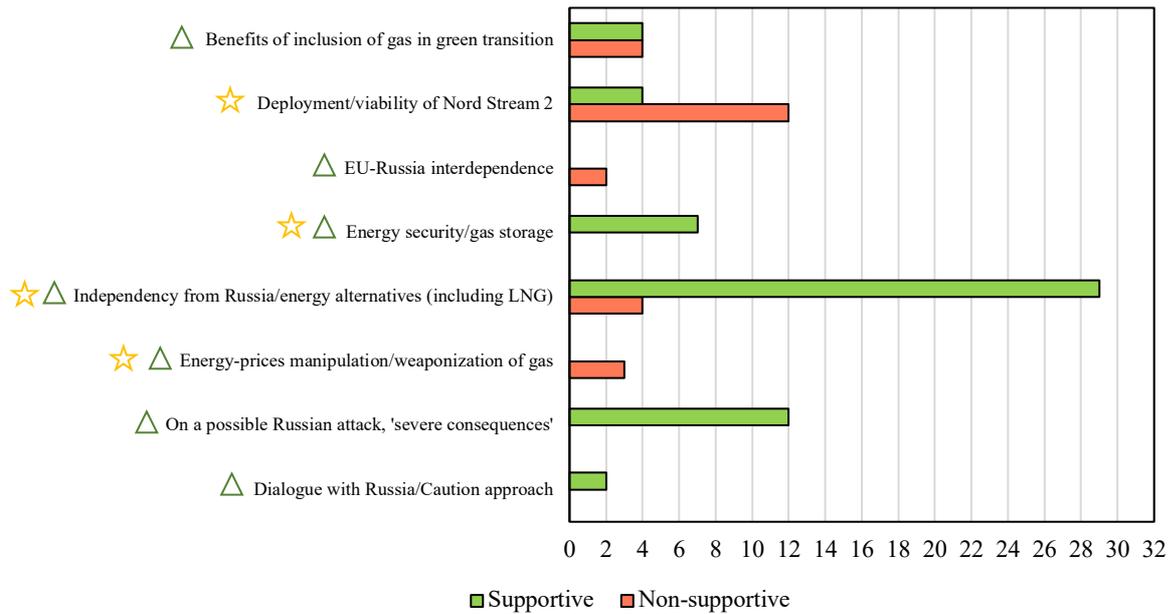
<sup>18</sup> During Phase 2, it is proven that the subject of study 'the 2022 Ukrainian war' is rightfully considered not as a candidate critical juncture, but as a *critical juncture* by all means. For this reason, it becomes the *permissive condition* already mentioned in the theoretical framework in Chapter II.

FORMS



COLOURS	SIZE
<span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #90EE90; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Actor supporting changing the status quo with Russia	Size indicates frequency of discourses/claims during the phase and/or frequency of statements per actor
<span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #FF0000; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Actor supporting not to change the current status quo with Russia	<b>LINES</b>
<span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #FFD700; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Actor advocating for a 'change' in EU energy policy	—— Affiliation Network
<span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #0000FF; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Non-aligned actor	----- Actor Congruence Network
<span style="display: inline-block; width: 15px; height: 15px; background-color: #000000; border: 1px solid black;"></span> Discourse/claim fill colour	

**FIGURE 6:** Actor congruence networks and affiliation networks in Phase 2



**FIGURE 7:** Frequency of claims/discourses being mentioned by involved actors in Phase 2

△ represents claims presented in several periods  
 ☆ represents discourses related to the joint belief shift in EU energy policy in 2022

concerns were already raised against EU’s energy dependency, specially from Russia (Elbassoussy, 2019; Siddi, 2020; Siddi, 2018; Schubert et al, 2016; Kuzemko, 2013; Alvik, 2022). The 2022 Ukrainian war offers then a window of opportunity to finally take the decision to change by EU stakeholders. In this respect, all EU officials agree when they were asked whether they believed that the crisis offered the opportunity to reform, improve or readjust EU energy policy <sup>19</sup>.

Together with a deficient problem-solving ability of the policy, Phase 1 already proved that alternative ideas were there, but not too many incentives to bring about the institutional change. As EU officials #4 and #5 rightfully state, the context now is different because the Ukrainian

<sup>19</sup> EU official #1: “I would say it depends on what exactly you mean by ‘reform’ [...]. So the main implication is an acceleration of the targets, and of course some further reform (or amendment) of our security of supply, embedded in a more difficult context because of the beginning of the Ukrainian war”. EU official #2: “I don’t know if it’s an opportunity to ‘reform’ it. Well, reform is a strong word. I think it doesn’t need to be reformed, it needs to be re-adjusted, complemented by other dimensions”. EU official #3: “Yes, absolutely. Specially with RePowerEU. Of course it is a communication, not a legal document, but it clearly stresses out where are we going. This is something different from the direction we were taking before”. EU official #4: “I believe that if there is any silver lining to this tragedy in Ukraine, it’s that Mr. Putin enabled energy transition in a speed, in an intensity that not even the EGD would have managed”. EU official #5: “ ‘ ‘Is energy used as a geopolitical weapon by Russia?’? I think we know the answer now. In the past, we somehow thought that Gazprom was playing by the market rules and it was a reliable partner. Now we see more concretely that it is used for political reasons, and even aggressively and damaging our unity, our strategic aspects as well, etc.’ ”

crisis was now fully considered as a belligerent situation<sup>20</sup>, which forces involved actors in EU policy-making to activate their political resources as well as their willingness to ‘connect’ with other stakeholders. The result becomes obvious then as it is shown in Figure 6: Players in the EU policy-making game seize the opportunity and start defecting from their previous beliefs<sup>21</sup>. And above all, powerful actors decide to drive this big policy change in the energy field. Phase 2 symbolizes then the start of the joint belief shift in EU energy policy, and how actors work towards it.

The College of Commissioners in the European Commission drastically changes its discourse and raises as a ‘potentiating force’. These ‘dominant’ actors that are now central in the joint belief shift during this phase are President von der Leyen, High Representative Josep Borrell and Commissioner for Energy Kadri Simson. All of these, in addition, share the same range of ideas that are directly connected to policy change (See Figure 7): The necessity to become energy independent from Russia; the importance of gas storage and energy security to face winter 2022; the addressing of energy manipulation by Russia<sup>22</sup>; and the search for energy alternatives and different suppliers, including the use of LNG. All these concerns monopolized the majority of claims done in Phase 2.

This radical changes do not come as a surprise in the academia world. In a research conducted by Professor T. Maltby (2013), he concludes that the institution became in energy policy a powerful *policy entrepreneurship* able to create and influence networks of experts and stakeholders, and effectively decide upon energy issues and implement many proposals, increasing this way supranationalism in energy matters and energy governance.

These players, therefore, boost during Phase 2 their interconnectedness as well as their node size. Likewise, they ‘connect’ with other actors that start thinking and advocating for the same policy change, such as politicians as U. Zielińska, Estonian Prime Minister K. Kallas –who has been extremely vocal in her efforts supporting Ukraine and energy independence in the EU (Kallas, 2022a; Kallas, 2022b)– and Czech Prime Minister P. Fiala. Interestingly enough, already in Phase 2, the European Commission together with actors in Central and Eastern EU

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<sup>20</sup> EU official #4: “we are now in a full-fledged war”. EU official #5: “it is different because we call this ‘a war’. The President of the Commission has been really clear in saying ‘this is not only a war between Russia and Ukraine, but a war with Europe too’ ”.

<sup>21</sup> Or in other words: From joint beliefs in favor of ‘inactivity’ regarding Russia as an unreliable energy partner to claims against EU energy dependency from Russia.

<sup>22</sup> This in addition coincides with certain concerns raised by EU officials #4 and #5, respectively: “Russia has been deliberately using energy and gas supplies as a weapon not only against Ukraine”; “And as I said before, our energy is being used as a weapon in a geopolitical context.”

countries –the most dependent Member States from Russia– are the ones that form a strong like-minded cluster regarding the situation with Ukraine, which will intensify in Phase 3.

The other actors' coalition that gains during this phase important momentum is the one conformed by the German politicians operating at national level, such as Chancellor Olaf Scholz and ministers C. Lambrecht, R. Habeck and A. Baerbock. During Phase 2, the German Government takes a more 'caution approach' regarding Russia, contrary to the situation observed during Phase 1. This means now that Germans make a smooth transition from the previous mindset to the possible new joint belief shift, and that is why these actors –with the exception of Lambrecht– change their colour from red to orange in this period, but not green yet. This is because two important events:

- 1) *The change of ideological position regarding Nord Stream 2*, since throughout Phase 1 and during January 2022, Germany proclaimed the viability of the project as an essential mechanism to deliver to their citizens energy from Russia<sup>23</sup>. In short, the German Government was one of the most vocal players in favour of dependency from Russia. Nevertheless, A. Baerbock on the 27<sup>th</sup> of January proclaimed that Germany will stop Nord Stream 2 if Russia invaded Ukraine in the future (Gotev, 2022). This threat was fulfilled two days before the start of hostilities by Chancellor O. Scholz (Kurmayer & Noyan, 2022). For EU official #1, this constitutes one of the biggest ideational drifts so far<sup>24</sup>;
- 2) But at the same time, they decide to adopt the position taken as well by President E. Macron in the Council (French Presidency), so despite a full-fledged war situation, *Germany considers at the same time that dialogue with Russia is still possible*<sup>25</sup>.

This shows an 'inconsistent' approach by Germany, which will be 'solved' in Phase 3.

Taking into account these developments –and despite the fact that the permissive condition is already in Phase 2–, actors are not yet fully on the same page. But they will in the future phase, once the urgency –and the tragedy– of the crisis fully impacts in players' original mindsets. For

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<sup>23</sup> As it is already well-known, Germany is one of the Member States most energy dependent from Russia (Eddy, 2022). EU official #2, in addition, stated the following: "It is clear today that this situation has led to very different national policies, and some of them became very vulnerable to external shocks, which might have not happened if this situation was dealt from the beginning at the EU level."

<sup>24</sup> EU official #1: "The suspension of Nord Stream 2 is a prime example on this [...]. Germany says now that the project is *caput*, even considering that before the crisis, they did not stopped defending it despite being a geopolitical weapon used by Russia."

<sup>25</sup> Minister R. Habeck, moreover on the 24<sup>th</sup> of February of 2022, stated that "the supply relationship with Russia *has also survived* other crises" (Kurmayer, 2022).

that to happen, persuasion strategies, together with empowering solutions, were necessary, enormously increasing the number of interactions and claims between involved actors.

#### **4.1.3. Phase 3: Energy change and joint belief shift (March 2022-July 2022)**

The upcoming months after the start of the Ukrainian crisis on the 24<sup>th</sup> of February 2022 represent the starting point of the previous-mentioned joint belief shift that takes place at the heart of the EU policy-making. During Phase 3, discourses will suffer a decisive transformation, and most importantly, the final analysed period involves the definitive re-structuring of actors' coalitions thanks to empowering solutions and strong, convincing leaders. This leads to a new pathway in EU energy policy.

##### **4.1.3.1. Political events**

Phase 3 –unlike the first analysed period– is entirely connected to developments happening because of the 2022 Ukrainian war.

Once the crisis started, the EU was fast when it announced its change of policy direction regarding Russia. March-April became hectic months in terms of 'energy independence announcements'. Two were the most important ones: First, the European Parliament held an Extraordinary Plenary session in Brussels as some kind of symbolic event between the EU as a whole and Ukraine –represented by President V. Zelensky. During this session, the Union condemned Russia's actions, apart from small talks on EU's response (European Parliament, 2022).

The rest of the world would have to wait for only one week to know what the EU's strategy in this regard would consist of. As it was previously mentioned, the EU energy field is considered as a changing policy (Hafner & Raimondi, 2020; Bocse, 2021; Elbassoussy, 2019; Schubert et al., 2016) because it has been changed several times with the objective to efficiently address changing objectives that could better fit the necessities of that particular time. The 2022 Ukrainian war was then no different, and the notion of 'importance of green energy transition' was conveniently applicable for the context of this crisis as a permissive condition. In the afternoon of the 8<sup>th</sup> of March of 2022 in Strasbourg –two weeks since Russian aggression on Ukraine started–, Frans Timmermans, Executive Vice-President of the European Commission in charge of the EGD; and Kadri Simson, Commissioner for Energy, delivered the read-out of

the weekly meeting of the College (European Commission, 2022a) where the Ukrainian topic, and its consequences for the future EU energy development, were the main hotspots. During this important press conference –which surely it will be remembered in the future–, Timmermans made the following statement (European Commission, 2022b: 1):

‘In just two weeks, the course of our European history has changed, radically changed [...]. This is about Ukraine, but it is certainly also about Europe. [...] It is abundantly clear that we are too dependent on Russia for our energy needs [...]. The answer to this concern for our security lies in renewable energy and diversification of supply.’

For her part, Simson stated the following (European Commission, 2022b: 2):

‘Putin’s war on Ukraine has made it absolutely clear that we need to move even faster, to reshape the European energy system and end our dangerous dependency on Russian fossil fuels as soon as possible.’

With these words, Timmermans and Simson marked the beginning of a new era in EU energy policy, with the announcement of *RePowerEU* as the European Commission’s main tool to put an end to decades of EU dependence from Russian fossil fuels –including gas– before 2030 (European Commission, 2022b). In short, Russia’s aggression could have made the EU to push forward in climate and energy policies in order to become energy self-sufficient in the long-term. Two months later, the European Commission published its comprehensive guidelines for the *RePowerEU* plan (European Commission, 2022c). The direct consequences of this plan for the RQ will be better analysed in the next sub-section.

In addition, the month of May witnesses the (heated) discussions on the approval of a sixth package of sanctions against Russia. A fifth one was already approved in April, but this one became politically and symbolically important because, for the first time, EU leaders of the 27 Member States started to seriously considered the inclusion of a crude oil embargo from Russia, an important pillar of Russian exports to the EU (*See Appendix IV*), and with direct effects to aggressor’s economy and war machine. Two Member States were notoriously against of these measures –Hungary and Slovakia–, and few others highlighted specific concerns due to high dependency from Russia –Bulgaria, Croatia and Czech Republic (“Slovakia, Hungary will not support EU sanctions on Russian energy”, 2022; European Commission, 2022d). Finally, the sixth package was approved by the Council in June 2022, with an important ban on imports of crude oil and refined petroleum products. A special temporary derogation was in addition

established as a middle-ground solution for Member States with high Russian energy dependency until the end of 2024 (European Commission, 2022d; European Council & Council of the EU, 2022b). This decision, even with the temporary derogation, was not well-received by Slovakia, and specially, by V. Orban’s Hungary.

Nevertheless, March 2022 onwards represents an incredible change of mentality in the whole EU, which allowed relevant new developments in the field of energy with important repercussions for the supranational and national levels. July 2022 also meant an important change of policy direction concerning Russia, since from the 1<sup>st</sup> of July, the French Presidency in the Council –and its notorious ‘caution approach’ regarding Russia– came to an end after six months, and was replaced by the Czech leadership.

This allowed new winds of change, especially in terms of strengthening the notion of energy security –almost non-existing in the previous EU energy policy paradigm–, and giving a new push to energy independence from Russia, leading by example<sup>26</sup> and building priorities for the present and for the future (Czech Presidency of the Council of the European Union, 2022). This symbolic change of direction allowed to introduce not only a new package of restrictive measures –the *maintenance and alignment package*– almost two months after the approval of the sixth package, but also the EU leaders’ desire –such as Estonian Prime Minister K. Kallas– of continuing restricting Russia’s abuses by pushing forward even a seventh package of sanctions in the upcoming months (‘EU leaders downplay chances of rapid Russian gas ban’, 2022).

Likewise, in July 2022, the European Commission publishes the ‘Save gas for a safe winter’ plan, its comprehensive guidelines to face next winter 2022 without the help of Russian sources for the first time ever (European Commission, 2022e).

#### **4.1.3.2. Actor constellations and discourses**

Phase 2 already offered a prelude of what would happen in the next analysed period when the discourse in favour of a strong energy independence from Russia was born, and started gaining supporters –especially in the European institutions– at the same time players started to defect from their old claims and beliefs. With the beginning of March 2022 –which carried along the

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<sup>26</sup> As it was previously mentioned, the Czech Republic is one of the most energy dependent countries in EU27, especially on non-renewable sources. For specific information on the Czech energy mix, see Appendix II.

Extraordinary Plenary session in the European Parliament and RePowerEU–, the above-mentioned discourse monopolized all types of debates on EU energy policy, bringing about this way a new, dominant discursive coalition conformed by: (1) The national governments of the majority of the Member States –excluding Hungary and Slovakia–, leading to a favourable agreement in the Council <sup>27</sup> regarding unreliable Russia; (2) MEPs of the biggest European Parliament’s political groups, who become extremely proactive in favour of energy independence –EPP, S&D, or the Group of the Greens–; (3) international organizations, such as UN; (4) scientific actors and think tanks; (5) associations and NGOs in favour of climate sustainability; and (6) a reduced number of energy businesses operating at national level. All of these working together under the umbrella of the main potentiating force that allowed the biggest change in EU energy policy: (7) The College of Commissioners, led by President U. von der Leyen, with the help of three main commissioners: Executive Vice-President F. Timmermans; Commissioner for Energy K. Simson, and High Representative J. Borrell.

This new, dominant discursive coalition will have important effects for the re-structuring of discourses in Phase 3. Figure 8 offers in the following page a (simplified) version on this. At first glance, it is obvious that a great quantity of new actors appear compared to Phases 1 and 2 –114 players involved, who made a total of 337 statements. These new stakeholders take a position in a certain coalition in the visual map displayed in Figure 8. Nevertheless, as the actor congruence networks in Phase 3 show, the vast majority of old and new players will end up as part of the biggest big actor’s coalition displayed in the central part of the figure. Or in other words, players involved in EU energy policy in Phase 3 will be most likely in favour of energy independence from Russia.

The review on Phase 3’s events offers a plausible explanation for this change. First of all, all EU officials claimed that this situation was now different from other energy crises <sup>28</sup>. Likewise, the analysis of secondary data and interviews shows that players were able to ‘take advantage’

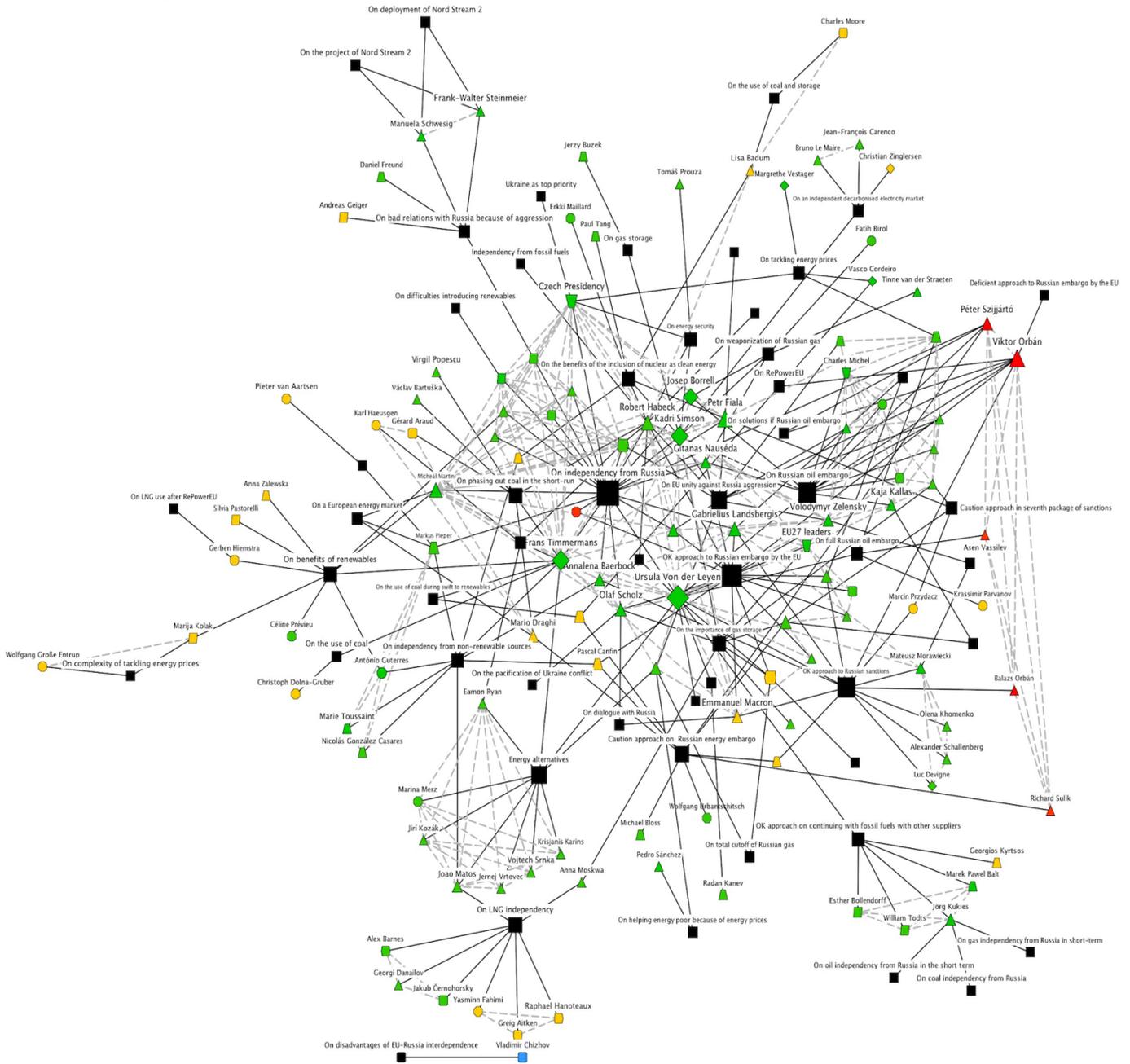
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<sup>27</sup> In Figure 8, the Council is represented as ‘EU27 leaders’.

<sup>28</sup> EU official #1: “we are now taking it to a more serious level of interrupting and closing our ties with the Russian federation [...]. Now, all contacts with Russia, from political to technical level, have been interrupted and suspended since the attack in February 2022.; EU official #2: “There was never a moment in 2014 where it was obvious we would be cut off of gas supplies. And this is the catalyst of change in this situation.”; EU official #3: “I also think what has happened in the meantime is that, partly also because of what happened in Crimea, political minds have changed. A lot more people has warmed up to this idea of getting away for Russia [...]. So I think this situation has made us to be more prepared and get rid of Russian gas.”; EU official #4: “Russia has been deliberately using energy and gas supplies as a weapon not only against Ukraine, which was the case in 2009 and in 2014, but now also against the EU”; EU official #5: “it is not a regional crisis; it is not limited to a certain area as it was before; it is not only an energy crisis; it is not an economic problem like during the pandemic, etc. It is a major crisis, and I think we will read about this in the history books. And also the way, you know, the EU, the European Commission and the Member States will come out from this crisis will define the years to come. So to me it is a turning point.”

FORMS

- Discourse/claim
- △ National gov./parl./adm.
- ◇ EC/CoR/EEAS/ACER
- ▭ EP/MEPs
- ▭ Council/European Council
- IEA/UN
- Think tank
- Industry/trade union
- ▭ NGO/lobby group/association
- Embassy/diplomacy



COLOURS

- Actor supporting changing the status quo with Russia
- Actor supporting not to change the current status quo with Russia
- Actor advocating for a 'change' in EU energy policy
- Non-aligned actor
- Discourse/claim fill colour

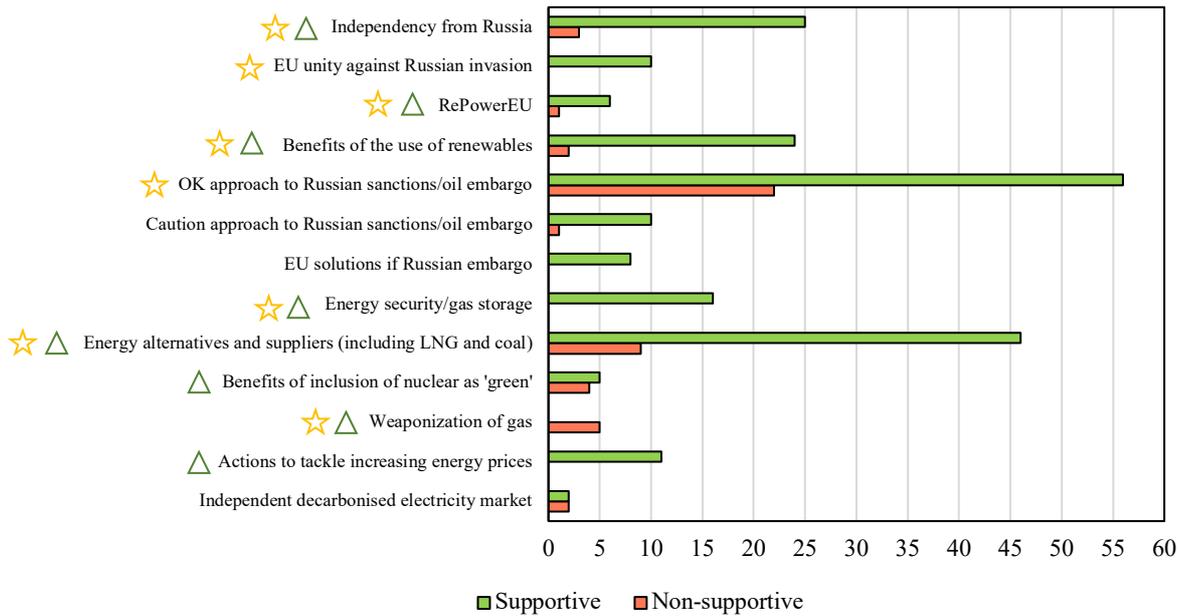
SIZE

Size indicates frequency of discourses/claims during the phase and/or frequency of statements per actor

LINES

- Affiliation Network
- - - Actor Congruence Network

FIGURE 8: Actor congruence networks and affiliation networks in Phase 3



**FIGURE 9:** Frequency of claims/discourses being mentioned by involved actors in Phase 2

△ represents claims presented in several periods  
☆ represents discourses related to the joint belief shift in EU energy policy in 2022

of the situation because the European Commission was fast enough to announce the RePowerEU plan the 8<sup>th</sup> of March of 2022 <sup>29</sup>. After this event, the re-organization of coalitions in favour of RePowerEU was enormous. Therefore, the Commission’s strategy allowed an important level of overall coordination and a sense of meaning in favour of policy change, leading to more normalization (Leifield, 2017) in Phase 3. That being said, there is enough empirical evidence to confirm that RePowerEU became a powerful productive condition that fully activated the joint belief shift at supranational and national levels regarding energy policy.

Implications of RePowerEU in involved actors were many, but overall impacted the same way. The vast majority of players –especially from national governments, and even the ones with important energy dependencies from Russia such as the Czech Republic or Poland (*See Appendix II*)– quickly adopted Commission’s RePowerEU’s guidelines as their own, becoming defecting actors.

<sup>29</sup> EU official #1: “With RePowerEU, we are now in a clear pathway towards phasing out Russian gas from our energy system and diversifying towards other suppliers.”; EU official #5: There’s more realization in Europe that RePowerEU and energy transition are opportunities to move away from fossil fuels and dependency.”

Here the case of the German Government becomes interesting as probably the most indecisive actor's coalition throughout these three phases –which was proven during Phase 2 as a different actor's coalition. But in a nutshell, its experience works perfectly to understand how discourse can change from one extreme –Russia as a reliable partner– to another –energy independence from Russia– in just eight months. Nord Stream 2 immensely changed German Government's mindset on Russia. Nevertheless, German politicians continued its caution approach for the first part of Phase 3 (March-April), together with the Austrians. But this moderate discourse drastically changed with the beginning of May. It could be true that RePowerEU functioned as a powerful productive condition for the vast majority of players here, but for some of them, it was not a sufficient condition. The turning point came in May because it was the time of serious discussions on the sixth package of sanctions against Russia, and whether to include oil or not. Despite Germany decided to take E. Macron's caution approach since the very beginning, it always fought for the full oil embargo in the Council together with Austria. Therefore, discussions on the sixth package –and on *EU solutions* for high-energy-dependent Member States– worked as an empowering productive condition able to eventually puzzle the EU energy policy-making game out. For this reason, German politicians change colour from orange to green in Phase 3.

That being said, Figure 9 moreover offers what kind of discourses were the most popular ones among these actors in favour of independence, which were all related, to a greater or lesser extent, to EU actions against Russia. These are the approach taken for Russian sanctions –caution or full oil embargo–; the search of energy alternatives –renewables or non-renewables– and other external suppliers; or the debate on how to increase energy security and gas storage within Europe for next winter, among others. The discourse in favour of EU unity work as an incentive in Phase 3.

Because of the urgency of the situation, two discourses in addition re-emerged during Phase 3. These are: (1) The debate on the inclusion of nuclear as a green energy source. Because this time around, Member States have to keep into account now that, unlike Phase 1, they cannot rely on Russia as an external supplier of energy; and (2) actions to tackle increasing energy prices, which becomes more popular because of the urgency of the situation, as EU official #5 confirms <sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> EU official #5: “We already started with the high energy prices situation before the war. Just take a look to how many people are checking now their energy bills. They get more aware of the costs and energy they consume.”

Taking into consideration all of these: What were then the most important ideas that could be found in Phase 3? After an exhaustive data analysis, it can be concluded that three, non-dichotomic discourses have been the ones that dominated actors’ claims throughout March until July. In the following table, these are further explained:

<i>Coding</i>	<i>Discourse</i>	<i>Pursued objective</i>	<i>Ideas included</i>	<i>Independence from Russia?</i>
<b>D1</b>	The EU more independent from external suppliers in energy, especially Russia.	Boost the use of renewables within the EU to meet the European energy demand via RePowerEU	-The benefits of RePowerEU. -Increased use of renewables. -The inclusion of a total (oil) embargo from the EU. -Speed up the phasing out of coal. -To tackle the energy prices increase. -To increase gas storage for winter 2022.	Yes
<b>D2</b>	The EU more independent from external suppliers in energy, especially Russia.	A real diversification of external suppliers to continue covering the Europeans’ energy demands	-The search of different natural gas/LNG suppliers. -The debate on nuclear energy. -The (forced) benefits of continuing using coal in the short-term.	Yes
<b>D3</b>	Maintenance of status quo with Russia	Not intending to change anything in the EU energy field (based on a cost-benefit analysis)	-Pessimistic view on the spike of energy prices. -Not in favour of neither sanctions nor oil embargo against Russia. -The necessity to continue using fossil fuels.	No

**TABLE 5:** *Main discourses in the 2022 Ukrainian war candidate critical juncture (subtracted from analysis)*

Among these, D3 is, without any doubt, the one that raises most concerns in EU energy policy. EU officials #1 and #3 considered that nowadays D3 was not heard <sup>31</sup>. Nevertheless, as Figure 8 shows, the most vocal proponent of this has been V. Orbán’s Hungary, together with Slovakia, which consider that independence from Russia is not desirable due to important energy dependency from her. Interestingly enough, whilst it is well-known that Prime Minister V.

<sup>31</sup> [On D3] EU official #1: I think, well, to my observation, it is a statement that it is heard less and less. Even Member States that were more in favour of Russia are not at the moment super vocal on this.”; EU official #3: “...I don’t hear that a lot, no.”

Orbán is the most loyal Putin's follower in the EU (Orenstein & Kelemen, 2017), during this crisis, he has decided to take a more moderate approach on this, probably with the objective to avoid direct confrontation with the rest of Member States with strong arguments in favour of energy independence from Russia. D3 is, therefore, a more marginal discourse in Phase 3, while D1 and D2 have practically monopolized the rest of actors' beliefs and discourses. If these discourses were to be tested during Phase 1, nevertheless, the story would have been completely different.

The rest of 'opposition' comes then on 'how complex energy independence is', especially from energy businesses, which state that this scenario is not a 100% advised. Therefore, they are shown in Figure 8 as dubious orange actors. Other players in Phase 3 –especially NGOs and other organizations–, likewise, raise concerns on finding other non-renewables energy partners, stating that the EU shall in this very moment fully change their energy mix as soon as possible and cover citizens' demands with only renewables sources, with the objective to reach climate sustainability faster. Nowadays, however, this ambitious objective will rather become the long-term pursued objective of RePowerEU, since Phase 3 even proves that certain players mull the use of coal over in the short-term despite important previous EU's phasing out efforts as EU official #1 states<sup>32</sup> –and against what EU official #2 defends<sup>33</sup>.

In a nutshell, it can be concluded from the analysis of phases that political minds in EU energy policy-making have, without any doubt, immensely changed. Players were able not only to modify previous beliefs, but more importantly, defect and join other actor's coalitions in favour of institutional change because of the 2022 Ukrainian crisis. The actor congruence network which was born then shows that EU unity during times of crisis is feasible, and above all, their members showed in Phase 3 a strong ideational congruence against competing coalitions –D3–, dominating this way the core frames of the main conflict at the heart of EU policy-making (Leifield, 2011) regarding energy independence from Russia. This proves, therefore, that an empowered Union was, in this concrete situation, able to manoeuvre through political difficulties and come back even more united.

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<sup>32</sup> EU official #1: "Other point here is that after Russia started interrupting all energy to Europe, we observe Member States reverting back to coal, which of course is not a welcome development, but it is fine if it is a short-term measure to keep the energy system running, but the idea is in the long-term the phasing out of coal in the decarbonization pathway."

<sup>33</sup> EU official #2: "I think these actors have changed their minds, but I don't think it will eventually change much on the coal phase out. There are really not reasons to continue with it, since it is not economic, is very pollutant, more expensive than renewables, etc. I don't understand why they would rely more on it than on renewables in the long-term."

#### 4.1.4. Towards a green EU energy policy?

What are then the lessons learned during the analysis of Phases 1 to 3? Above all, it is more than evident that the EU energy policy is suffering at the moment a deep institutional transformation that will define the years to come for EU27. As EU official #4 rightfully stated as a reflection on the current reality, the things that are happening right now were unimaginable six months ago, and interestingly enough, for her, the most significant moments of change have happened because of big crises such as the 2022 Ukrainian war <sup>34</sup>.

That being said, another major reflection comes from the previous analysis, which is that it is most likely that there is no turning back to the previous status quo with Russia <sup>35</sup>. The analysis of discourse networks from September 2021 to July 2022 shows that it is more than evident that the EU energy policy is, as stated below, passing through a critical joint belief shift, but the full completion of it –and the normalization of actor’s coalitions (Leiffield, 2017) embedded in a new, non-hierarchical energy governance context (Pollack, 2005)– will become the last key element that will eventually lead to the full institutionalization of the idea of ‘energy independence from Russia’. This will happen once all opposing actors –players such as the Hungarian and Slovakian governments, and other national energy businesses– are ‘fully captured into’ this new joint belief (Swinkels & van Esch, 2022; Rinscheid, 2019) and finally accepting it as their own sets of beliefs.

Conditions for this seem to be favourable. As it was stated before, the new Czech priorities for the upcoming six months give proper priority to the pacification of Ukraine and the boosting of energy security and storage within the EU (Czech Presidency of the Council of the European Union, 2022), putting a concrete end to caution approaches regarding Russia as an energy

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<sup>34</sup> EU official #4: ‘it’s terrible, right? But sometimes the biggest changes come with the bigger crises, and it’s a pity that that’s human nature. If you look at the big changes, big transformations that have occurred over a time in history, most of them are triggered by crises.’

<sup>35</sup> [On the return to the previous status quo] EU official #1: “The political and policy framework we have now put into place in the EU makes very difficult to return things to the way they were before [...]. In a few years, we will completely diversify away from Russia in fossil fuels.”; EU official #2: “I think there wouldn’t be a status quo with Russia again. But international relations are really unpredictable to say what will happen in the future. [...] But I don’t think it will be reversed.”; EU official #3: “My first answer would be, quite frankly, that I don’t see that happening. It seems that the vast majority of the Member States are very convinced, so even if the EU in the future doesn’t agree anymore, because maybe there’s no consensus, I think that there are so many countries that have made the actual, proper decision to diversify. So we are not going to return to the status quo.”; EU official #4: “No, I think we’re doing fundamental, structural changes to the energy system, so I doubt that we would coming back to where we were a year ago.”; EU official #5: “I don’t think this will be possible. I would very surprised, because I think they [the Russians] ‘crossed the line’. [...] Russia is not a reliable partner. In this case, it is even an enemy to the EU, to the European project, so I don’t know why we should look back in this current situation.”

partner. Only time will decide whether the RePowerEU strategy and the ‘Save gas for a safe winter’ plan are sufficient conditions to endure winter 2022 as the last major threat to the EU (Simon & Taylor, 2022). This will make energy independence from Russia more plausible and efficient if successful.

The implications for the long-term in EU energy policy would be, consequently, more than positive. Phase 3 already stated that certain players involved in EU energy policy were already advocating for a full shift to renewables, to reach climate sustainability in the EU. According to the RePowerEU plan (2022c), this may actually become a reality in the future, profoundly transforming Member States’ energy mix once and for all in the longer-term. Consequently, if successful in winter 2022, the central question that will therefore arise would be whether the EU is inevitably heading towards a green energy policy (Hafner & Raimondi, 2020) as a direct consequence of independence from Russia.

That being said, this favourable future in EU energy policy will depend on the re-structuring of discourses over time and the full completion of the current joint belief shift. For that to happen, players will have, as stated before, to successfully convince more and more actors to abandon their beliefs to join them in a new era for EU energy policy. In other words –and as a small observation before the concluding remarks in this research–, the discourse analysis empirically shows that actors converging on energy independence from Russia –with the institutionalization of more and more policy changes– will directly mean a brighter future for a green EU energy policy. Moreover, alternative ideas in favour of returning to the previous status quo with Russia –D3– will, inexorably, fade away.

#### **4.2. Expectations and final assessment**

The last thing to be reviewed in this research on discourse analysis will be then to see whether the formulated expectations in Chapter II related to institutional change and critical junctures actually stand, or rather they shall be rejected after the previous thorough analysis of phases. Testing will follow the order enshrined in Chapter II.



**E1:** *The before-crisis EU energy policy framework, and its high dependence on Russia as an external gas and oil supplier, has proven to be inadequate for EU interests, which has led to important ideas and discourses in favour of a comprehensive energy change even before the start of the crisis*

The expectation that highlights that the situation before the start of the 2022 Ukrainian war was propitious to set change into motion has proven to be correct already in Phase 1. E1 was, in short, referencing that EU energy policy possessed significant critical antecedents that made its foundations settle in fertile ground for policy change. The already inclusion of strong alternative ideas –such as the rapid incorporation of renewables into national energy mixes via F55, or the discussions of nuclear energy in the EU Taxonomy–, together with particular, yet not too important, actors advocating for a (green) change –such as MEPs, associations or NGOs– made Phase 1’s problem-solving ability to be already challenged, even before the start of the Ukrainian crisis. For these reasons, once the actual war initiated, actors involved in EU energy policy were rather quick to change their initial beliefs, which was the clear case of, for example, the European Commission.



**E2:** *The 2022 Ukrainian war –and consequent crisis– as a single external shock cannot sufficiently explain the current implemented changes in the EU energy policy. Rather, this ‘opportunity’ has to be exploited by interested EU players in order to change the status quo and reach a significant level of institutional change*

One of the most significant lessons learned throughout this discourse analysis research is precisely that crises are not the sole conditions involved in institutional change. Instead, critical structural shifts occurred in the context of the 2022 Ukrainian war because players in EU energy policy-making played an excellent game changing their beliefs and adopting new and innovative ideas and discourses in favour of energy independence from Russia. This specially occurred during Phases 2 and 3, once players took the drastic but efficient decision to change the energy status quo and the dependency paradigm. For this to happen, EU27’s national governments and the European institutions joined forces in the most efficient way to boost overall supranational and national coordination and increase EU unity. If the crisis per se were the only necessary condition to trigger policy change, it has not been necessary to either hold an Extraordinary Plenary Session by the European Parliament or the announcement of the RePowerEU plan. Nevertheless, these events –and many others that followed later on– turned

out to be not only political statements, but also symbolic moments for EU actors to ‘feel’ the spark for change and actively advocate for it.



**E3:** *This emerging energy policy framework is clearly increasing the notion of ‘energy governance’ among EU actors and within the EU institutional level*

E3 raised an interesting topic that, if adopted, could have meant a relevant side effect for the ‘European integration project’ prospect. The theory here was that, if the 2022 Ukrainian war was a permissive condition able to cause a powerful change in EU energy policy only after a few months, that would mean that EU actors were ‘closer than ever’ in EU affairs, fighting together against threats and bringing about new and fascinating energy dimensions to the bargaining table, boosting this way the concept of ‘energy governance’. Unfortunately, this expectation cannot be either adopted or rejected. The reason behind this is because the concept of governance in EU integration theories touches precisely upon an incredible melting-pot of approaches (Pollack, 2005), supported and retracted by a plethora of authors (Hix, 1998; Jachtenfuchs, 2001; Jachtenfuchs & Kohler-Koch, 2003; Schmitter, 1996). Therefore, during this discourse analysis research, it was not possible to study E3 in-depth. From a preliminary assessment –and considering features enshrined in Pollack’s article (2005: 380)–, it is most likely that this expectation is correct, but this clearly shall be specifically studied beforehand and assessed in the longer-term for this critical juncture.



**E4:** *Defecting EU actors in energy policy are more likely to persuade other actors to also defect via the use of new and innovative ideas and discourses, leading this way to a new joint belief*

Phase 3 showed, in addition, that E4 could also be supported. During the analysis, it was, in addition, assumed that the period between March and July 2022 would witness the emergence of two essential elements: Empowering solutions together with persuasion strategies. These two dimensions therefore entailed that despite new initiatives, for example RePowerEU, it was also crucial the inclusion of persuasive leaders and other actors able to convince other players to abandon their original sets of beliefs in order for them to join a new –yet unknown– joint belief shift in EU energy policy. Interestingly enough, E4 proved to be not only correct, but also empirically valuable for the research on discourse analysis for now and for the future. This is because E4 helped to uncover, in addition, that the 2022 Ukrainian war as a permissive

condition made actors defect in a particular way, in a specific direction: Very fast –because of critical antecedents– towards energy independence from Russia, easily supporting EU initiatives. And secondly, the strongest actors –players more directly involved in EU policy-making, which were the European institutions and EU27 political leaders– were the ones who defected first. Because of their initial and propitious position, it was pretty easy to convince more and more actors to do so too, leading to a significant policy change in only a few months.



**E5:** *The main actor advocating for a big change in EU energy policy –and consequently in energy governance– is the European Commission as the institution that represents the EU's interests and supranational power.*

E5, which states that the European Commission had emerged as the main actor in EU energy policy advocating for a big institutional change, has proven to be, against all odds, not correct. Likewise, because E3 could not be supported, it cannot be confirmed either that the institution is the driving force behind energy governance. First of all, all EU officials except #5 (*See appendices VII, VIII, IX & X*) stated that, although the Commission has proven to be a necessary player in this critical juncture, they also agree that the energy policy change has happened because it was rather a joint effort where different actors intervene –the President of the Commission, the Heads of State, or even national businesses. And secondly, the discourse analysis also shows that the Commission became a *potentiating* force. However, again the efforts performed by multiple actors in the field of energy in Phase 3 –such as Heads of State or other politicians– imply that the Commission had a main role applying entrepreneurship skills, and giving a general ‘sense of meaning’, but not as the leading force advocating for change as E5 states.



**E6:** *A joint belief shift proves to be a sufficient condition able to set institutional change into motion*

Throughout Chapter IV, the notion of ‘joint belief shift’ has flooded the discourse analysis, especially during Phases 2 and 3. That being said, the joint belief shift for the critical juncture ‘the 2022 Ukrainian war’ has been brought about thanks to endogenous –internal political pressures– and exogenous –the context of a full-fledged war– situations. Just once these two dimensions converged, making it possible for players to link and interconnect, the joint belief shift came into existence. Symbolically, this meant for involved actors the last stimulus to understand that institutional change was not only preferable, but also necessary. In short, the

idea of energy independence from Russia became the joint belief shift that pushed actors to act and to persuade other stakeholders to defect. Therefore, E6 is indeed accepted.

Table 6 shows, therefore, a final summary of supported and non-supported expectations:

<i>Coding</i>	<i>Expectation</i>	<i>Yes/No</i>
<b>E1</b>	The before-crisis EU energy policy framework, and its high dependence on Russia as an external gas and oil supplier, has proven to be inadequate for EU interests, which has led to important ideas and discourses in favour of a comprehensive energy change even before the start of the crisis.	Yes
<b>E2</b>	The 2022 Ukrainian war –and consequent crisis– as a single external shock cannot sufficiently explain the current implemented changes in the EU energy policy. Rather, this ‘opportunity’ has to be exploited by interested EU players in order to change the status quo and reach a significant level of institutional change.	Yes
<b>E3</b>	This emerging energy policy framework is clearly increasing the notion of ‘energy governance’ among EU actors and within the EU institutional level.	?
<b>E4</b>	Defecting EU actors in energy policy are more likely to persuade other actors to also defect via the use of new and innovative ideas and discourses, leading this way to a new joint belief.	Yes
<b>E5</b>	The main actor advocating for a big change in EU energy policy –and consequently in energy governance– is the European Commission as the institution that represents the EU’s interests and supranational power.	No
<b>E6</b>	A joint belief shift proves to be a sufficient condition able to set institutional change into motion.	Yes

**TABLE 6:** *Summary of final testing of expectations*

## **CHAPTER V: Conclusion**

This research has had as a main point of focus the causal study of critical junctures via the methodological approach of discourse analysis at the heart of EU policy-making. With the help of a comprehensive theoretical framework perfected by Rinscheid et al. (2019) and later by Swinkels & van Esch (2022) to observe and analyse policy change, I have centred on what elements are empirically relevant for the study of policy –or institutional– change, making clear that for the main subject of study, the 2022 Ukrainian war, critical junctures –or permissive conditions– are drastic events with the possibility to change ‘the course of history’ in a given policy. Likewise, with the use of Discourse Network Analysis (DNA) together with semi-structured interviews (SSI) with EU officials, I made it empirically possible to map involved actors’ ideological networks as well as their ideational drifts around the issue over time.

From the beginning, the basic idea behind this research was that the 2022 Ukrainian war had had important and direct effects on the consequent formulation of EU energy policy. It was believed that the full-fledged war situation had ‘awakened’ players involved in this field to finally realize that the EU’s energy dependency on Russia –especially on oil and gas– was no longer acceptable. This had caused, in these last months, the announcements of different initiatives made by the EU with the objective to reverse this dependency situation. For this reason, the formulated RQ was: How did the 2022 Ukrainian war as a candidate critical juncture affect the EU energy policy discourse in the first months after the start of the crisis? Three sub-questions were in addition formulated: (1) How can policy change be observed and analysed; (2) Which methodology was the best suited to map actors’ discourses over time; and (3) whether the EU energy policy was changing because of the Ukrainian war.

From the empirical analysis, it can be first confirmed that the EU energy policy discourse has drastically changed because of the 2022 Ukrainian war as a critical juncture, thanks to the use of DNA and SSI. This indeed gives a proper answer to the RQ. More specifically, it is clear that Phase 1 witnessed the rise of concerns related to the EU Taxonomy or F55, moving away from concerns over Russia as an unreliable partner but showing that at the heart of EU energy policy-making, there were already important ideas in favour of clean transition and of extended use of renewables. Phase 2 observed the tragic start of the Ukrainian war, which made players in the policy-making game start drifting away from their previous sets of beliefs and embracing new ideas and discourses in favour of energy independence from Russia. This confirmed that the formulation of the EU energy policy was indeed a direct effect of the conflict. Finally, Phase

3 showed an intensive increase of claims and actors in the EU energy policy-making game. During this period, players started to convince others to defect and to converge in the dominant ideological network in favour of energy independence, bringing about efficient initiatives that made a strong and decisive impression on them.

Secondly, it has in addition been subtracted that critical junctures as windows of opportunity to trigger revolutionary policy changes possess different features. The 2022 Ukrainian war as a critical juncture has proven to not only be the sole condition able to explain institutional change. Rather, the war itself must be considered as a *permissive condition* that needs two different sets of variables: (1) *Critical antecedents* able to explain the initial conditions and proclivity of EU energy policy to be changed; and (2) *productive conditions* that are created –by the situation itself or by players– after the start of the critical juncture that brings about a *joint belief shift*, and therefore, sets institutional change into motion. Implications of this are extremely valuable because it has been elucidated that, above all, for candidate critical junctures to become one de facto, it is essential the presence of different types of actors involved in policy-making exploiting the opportunity to its fullest. Only this way, the 2022 Ukrainian war is able to empirically explain how actors' discourses drastically changed once the crisis started, and how these players were capable of convincing more and more stakeholders to defect their previous ideas and discourses and join them in a new and dominant discourse in EU energy policy: Independence from Russia, through different initiatives such as RePowerEU.

And thirdly, the extended use of DNA as a methodological tool to empirically analyse all of these changes and construct the discourse network over time needs to be considered as a pragmatic and tangible way to causally study critical junctures –especially for certain elements that are more difficult to document, such as joint belief shifts– and to finally include actors –the concept of ‘agency’– as powerful assets in policy change. DNA is indeed analytically necessary in order to start filling in the so-called ‘discourse gap’, or researchers’ non-interest in other elements apart from the external shock.

That being said, it can be confirmed then that this research contributes to the academic knowledge in critical junctures and discourse analysis; and offers an important societal implication for the present, which is on how policy changes actually occur –not as spontaneous, out-of-the-blue situations, but rather as *exploitable* opportunities for actors.

## **CHAPTER VI: *Final discussion***

Taking into consideration Chapter V's concluding remarks on this research on critical junctures and on discourse analysis, different comments, for now on this research and for the future, can be made for improving and expanding the scientific knowledge, especially in EU integration studies.

### **6.1. Now, *what?***

The extracted insights on this thesis show a level of empiricism that clearly is in line with results given in Rinscheid et al. (2019) and Swinkels & van Esch's (2022) investigations on the causality of critical junctures. The thesis offers in addition its own personal touch with the inclusion of SSI, which have raised important and powerful points of discussion used as a complement to the results given by the Discourse Network Analyzer Software. Likewise, this research is empirically constructed using important investigations on not only the study of critical junctures –such as Soifer (2012) or Capoccia and Kelemen (2007)– but also keeps into consideration important knowledge on Discursive Institutionalism formulated by Professor V. Schmidt (2010; 2011), whose contributions on the power of ideas and discourses in the process of policy change were always used as a scientific and theoretical basis for this thesis.

The practical application of DNA as a methodological tool has, as stated before, offered valuable insights for the understanding of qualitative analysis on actor congruence and affiliation networks. Naturally, nevertheless, different challenges and limitations were perceived throughout this research. Among these difficulties, I would like to list the most relevant ones which may seem useful for future research.

First of all, the study of the 2022 Ukrainian war is, by itself, a complex situation that entails different outcomes at the heart of EU policy-making. That being said, comprehensive research of an external shock that has not been finished at the moment of writing makes it more difficult to foresee what exactly the future holds for EU energy policy, especially for qualitative investigations with a focus on actors' discourses. These, in the end, might be subjects of change. So questions on what will happen, for example, in winter 2022, are inevitably left without an exact answer.

Secondly, the issue of time and available resources may have had consequences on the perfection and final touches of this research. More specifically, it would have been interesting to interview not only EU officials in the European Commission but also other non-supranational actors involved, such as entrepreneurs or CEOs, or maybe local politicians at the bottom level. Nevertheless, resources were more limited in this regard.

And thirdly, before working with DNA and with SSI, it is necessary to understand that there is an important risk of partiality while selecting and codifying. In the end, it is under the researcher's own responsibility to choose the best suitable articles for DNA, as well as the best semi-structured questions for interviewees. This does not mean that articles or officials were 'wrong', but rather it is in the researcher's hands how to treat the provided information and how to interpret it.

## **6.2. For future research –and researchers**

Therefore: Does it mean that these limitations shall overshadow results? The answer is indeed negative. Humanity's knowledge expands improving already-existing ideas, and research's results are backed up by a plethora of verified sources, so contributions in this thesis count on a solid basis that makes them empirically relevant in the academic world.

For these reasons, my personal recommendations for future research on the causal study of critical junctures and on discourse analysis include: (1) The necessity to continue filling in the already-named 'discourse gap', with the objective to expand the empirical knowledge on the study of actors' ideas and discourses; (2) the continuation of the widespread use of DNA as a reliable methodological tool to understand the institutional change in a critical juncture context; and, of course, (3) testing the validity of these research's results with new and thriving approximations, or with other transboundary crises. From researcher's part, throughout this thesis, it has been elucidated two interesting ideas: The (future) return to this critical juncture once it firmly finishes –especially after winter 2022, which has been pointed out as a critical event in EU's plan to become energy independent from Russia–; and the empirical comparison of this crisis with the one that took place in 2014 with the illegal Russian annexation of Crimea. Despite similarities, during that year, not too many important statements were made in favour of energy independence from Russia, so: What makes the 2022 Ukrainian war so special then? Only empirical studies give, consequently, sense-making explanations for this.

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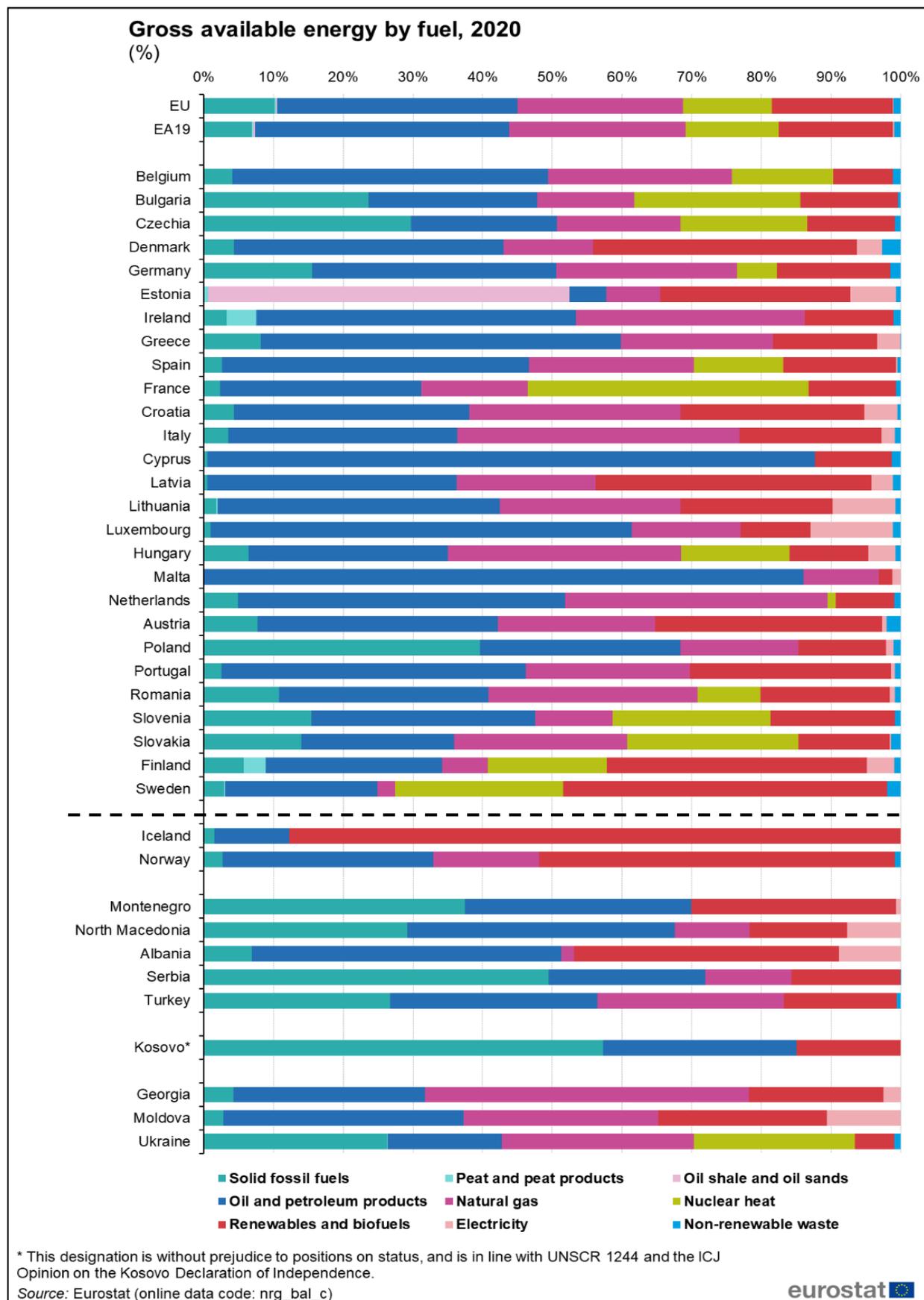
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## Appendix

### *Appendix I. Energy policy as a shared competence in the EU after the Lisbon Treaty: specific provisions*

<i>Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU)</i>	<i>Provisions</i>
<p><b>Article 4</b> <i>Shared competences between EU and Member States</i></p>	<p>1. The Union shall share competence with the Member States where the Treaties confer on it a competence which does not relate to the areas referred to in Articles 3 and 6.</p> <p>2. Shared competence between the Union and the Member States applies in the following principal areas:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">[...]</p> <p style="text-align: center;">(i) energy</p>
<p><b>Article 194</b> <i>Legal basis of energy policy as a shared competence</i></p>	<p>1. In the context of the establishment and functioning of the internal market and with regard for the need to preserve and improve the environment, Union policy on energy shall aim, in a spirit of solidarity between Member States, to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) ensure the functioning of the energy market;</li> <li>b) ensure security of energy supply in the Union;</li> <li>c) promote energy efficiency and energy saving and the development of new and renewable forms of energy; and</li> <li>d) promote the interconnection of energy networks.</li> </ul> <p>2. Without prejudice to the application of other provisions of the Treaties, the European Parliament and the Council, acting in accordance with the ordinary legislative procedure, shall establish the measures necessary to achieve the objectives in paragraph 1. Such measures shall be adopted after consultation of the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions.</p> <p>Such 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, without prejudice to Article 192(2)(c).</p> <p>1. By way of derogation from paragraph 2, the Council, acting in accordance with a special legislative procedure, shall unanimously and after consulting the European Parliament, establish the measures referred to therein when they are primarily of a fiscal nature.</p>
<p><b>Article 122</b> <i>Security of supply</i></p>	<p>1. Without prejudice to any other procedures provided for in the Treaties, the Council, on a proposal from the Commission, may decide, in a spirit of solidarity between Member States, upon the measures appropriate to the economic situation, in particular if severe difficulties arise in the supply of certain products, notably in the area of energy.</p> <p>2. Where a Member State is in difficulties or is seriously threatened with severe difficulties caused by natural disasters or exceptional occurrences beyond its control, the Council, on a proposal from the Commission, may grant, under certain conditions, Union financial assistance to the Member State concerned. The President of the Council shall inform the European Parliament of the decision taken.</p>

*Appendix II. Energy mix by Member State in the EU in 2020 (%) (subtracted from Eurostat, 2022)*

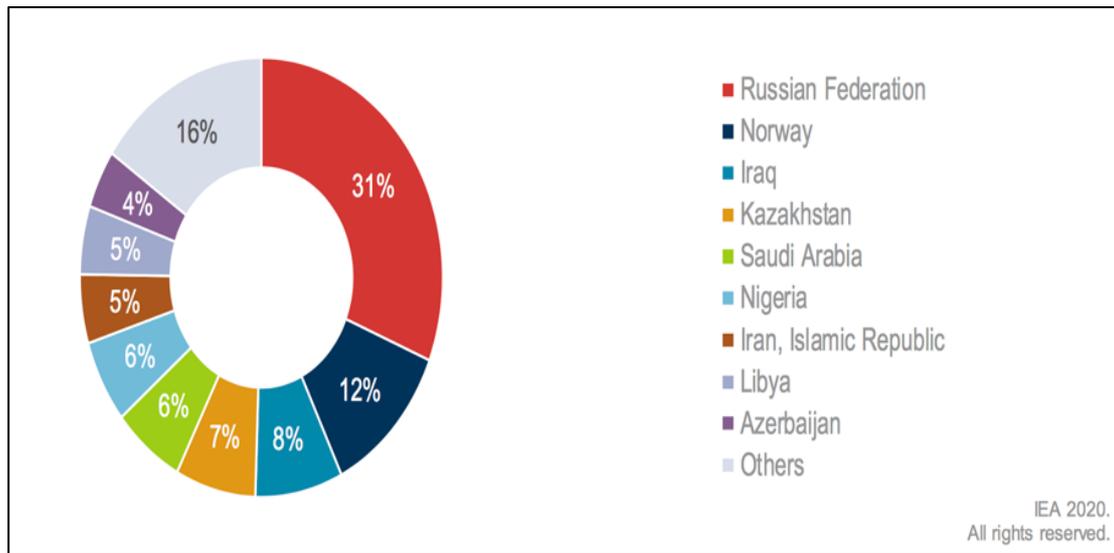


*Appendix III. List of used DNA sources*

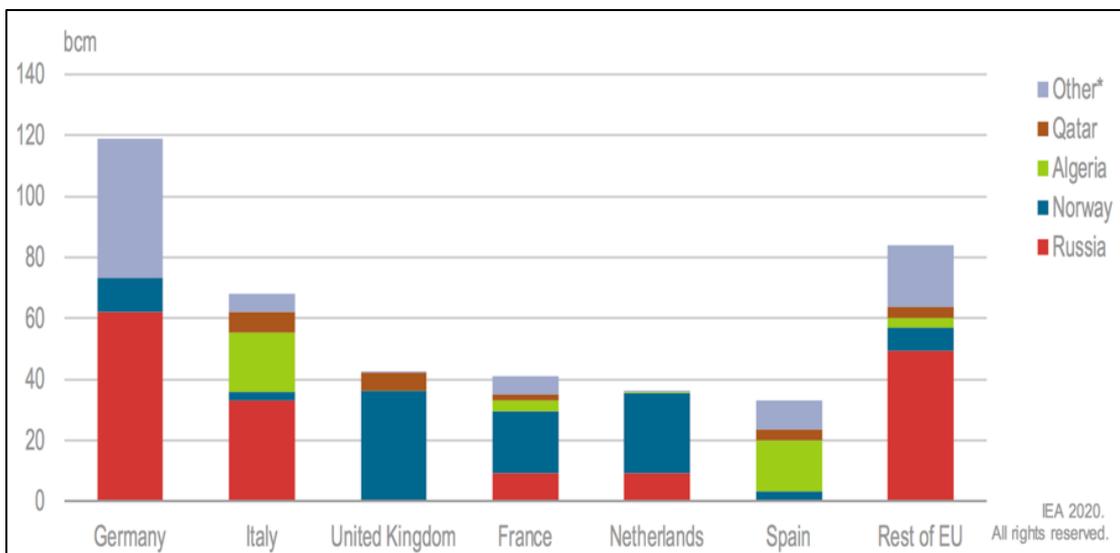
<b>EU Observer</b>	
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<b>Euractiv</b>	
51.	<a href="https://www.euractiv.com/section/emissions-trading-scheme/news/eu-overshoots-2020-climate-target-records-34-drop-in-emissions/">https://www.euractiv.com/section/emissions-trading-scheme/news/eu-overshoots-2020-climate-target-records-34-drop-in-emissions/</a>
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**Appendix IV.** Crude oil imports by source in the EU (2017) (subtracted from IEA, 2020: 270)



**Appendix V.** Natural gas imports by selected MS in the EU (2017) (subtracted from IEA, 2020: 241)



## *Appendix VI. SSI matrix*

### **Introductory questions**

1. Please, state your name and your current job position in the European Commission
  - Job title.
  - Unit.
  - Specific energy field-job.
2. How long have you been working in the field of energy for the European institutions (other options apart from the Commission are valid)?
3. In the chain of your organization, from bottom to top level, to whom you have to keep your work accountable and for who you work for?
4. In general terms –and before the start of the 2022 Ukrainian war–, what was your opinion on the EU energy policy? (**Positive/Negative**)
  - What are in your opinion the top three things where EU energy policy is salient? (*i.e. single energy gas hub market, salient promotion of renewables, etc.*)
  - What are in your opinion the top three things that are deficient/missing in EU energy policy? (*i.e. poor interconnections between MS; high electricity prices; dependency from external suppliers, etc.*)

### **Topic-specific questions**

5. In your expert's opinion, do you think the 2022 Ukrainian war has become a window of opportunity to reform the EU energy policy?
  - If **yes** – Therefore, do you consider this crisis to be any different from other external shocks that the EU has suffered before in the field of energy? (*i.e. 2014 annexation of Crimea, 2009 or 2009 gas disruptions, etc.*)
  - If **no** – Why do you think there is no such thing?
6. Do you reckon that energy discourses in the overall EU have changed because of this new crisis?
  - Who is driving this change according to you in the EU (institutions/politicians/officers/other stakeholders)?
  - Do you think MS, national politicians and/or MEPs have changed their opinions and (energy) ideas at EU level because of this new crisis?
  - Could you please give me some examples of changing energy discourses that you know about and that are happening at the moment?

7. How has the European Commission been coping with this new situation? Do you believe the ‘nature of your work’ has changed?
  - If *yes* – Do you consider that your new responsibilities/tasks/workload fully respond to EU’s necessities in energy right now? Is there something that could be improved?
  - If *no* – Why is it so? Is there a logic explanation for this?
8. Please tell me with what frequency you hear these statements in the European institutions these days (especially, in the European Commission) and from what group of actors:
  - **Statement 1:** ‘‘The EU has to become more independent from external suppliers, especially Russia. For that, we need to diversify supply and increase the use of renewables to meet Europeans’ energy demands via RePowerEU’’.
  - **Statement 2:** ‘‘The EU has to become more independent from external suppliers, especially Russia. For that to happen, it is desirable to start/improve relations with other external suppliers’’.
  - **Statement 3:** ‘‘Despite the 2022 Ukrainian war, we need to maintain the energy status quo with Russia’’.
9. Last but not least: In your expert’s opinion, do you believe the 2022 Ukrainian war entails a new, permanent turning point in EU energy policy, or rather there are possibilities to think that the Union as a whole will in the future return to the previous energy-policy status quo?

### **Final round of questions**

*Free interaction between interviewer and interviewee, raising of non-asked questions, etc.*

*Appendix VII. Transcript of Interview with EU official #1*

**R:** The first part of the questions are the introduction. And first of all I would like to know your name and your position in the Commission.

**X:** I'm ... and I'm an official in the unit in charge of international energy relations in DG ... We recently changed our denomination. Now we are part of the Task Force to basically respond to the new, let's say, 'emergencies' we have now in energy policy in security of supply and in decarbonization, also linked to becoming more independent in energy supply from Russia as a consequence of the war in Ukraine.

Me personally I'm the desk for Ukraine and Russia. Actually, I took charge of Ukraine not so long ago, at the beginning of last year. I would say now that Ukraine is by far my main subject of work.

**R:** Can you please tell me two or three specific tasks that you have in your Task Force?

**X:** The specific task would be to follow and oversee everything which is linked to the energy relation we have (the EU) with Ukraine. In these relations, there are many angles, many ramifications... I don't want to bore you with too many specific things because I suppose there are more interesting questions you want to ask.

Basically, our management, both in the DG, the Commissioner, etc. needs preparation, material for meetings with Ukrainian counterparts. Here is where I provide input.

**R:** The second question would be: For how long have you been working in the field of energy for the European institutions. It doesn't have to be only in the European Commission.

**X:** My work in energy as an EU official started in 2016. I moved from a different DG to this new one, so close to six years I would say.

**R:** So you'll dare say you're now an 'expert in energy topics', right?

**X:** Right now? Yes, I think so, taking into consideration mobility within the Commission.

**R:** In the chain of your organization, from bottom to top level, to whom you have to keep your work accountable and for who you work for?

**X:** I would say it is a hierarchical chain. All of the different layers, I work for all of them. Now, considering the current setup, which it has been created specifically for the situation in Ukraine,

it is deputy-director general ... in the DG, which is the senior manager here in the organization in charge of Ukraine. Also, Commissioner Kadri Simson. I have strong connections with the cabinet too, the team who is with Simson, in order to arrange preparations to whatever meeting vis-à-vis Ukraine in the energy field. Of course, Director-General ..., my Head of Unit in the Task Force, etc., whenever his authorization is needed to proceed. And of course I'm also in contact for management with other DGs involved in Ukraine such as DG ..., EEAS, in order to prepare meetings, or engagements with their Commissioners, or senior management with Ukraine.

**R:** And in general terms –and before the start of the 2022 Ukrainian war–, what was your opinion on the EU energy policy?

**X:** I would say, as an official, I have to keep track of all political and sectoral objectives stated in the European Council and in the energy Council. I have to keep track of the decarbonization of the energy system, accelerate energy efficiency, renewables, findings ways of phasing out as much as possible fossil fuels, and of course security of supply. Basically, power, gas, and other things, for EU citizens. I would say this is our fundamental objective, and our principal duty.

If you want me to talk about the context pre- and post-war, I would say that of course the post-context is adding urgency to our decarbonization objectives. We want to phase out even more quickly our dependence from Russia, and especially for certain fuels like coal. Basically, our essential package, which has been already introduced to end our dependence from Russia. This is pretty urgent in our agenda, and for gas is going to be even more urgent, but we are in a pathway. These I would say these are the main policy concerns: Diversifying supplies from Russia and accelerating decarbonization phasing out fossil fuels in our energy mix. These are the novelties.

**R:** So in your opinion, the EU energy policy is carried out in a more 'positive' way than negative.

**X:** Yes, I think so. Of course, the challenge of getting away from Russia is very hard, and our role is a very difficult, an immense task, which implies a big movement of resources.

**R:** OK. So now if we go to the second set of questions. First of all, I would like to know your expert's opinion. Do you think the Ukrainian crisis has become a window of opportunity to reform the EU energy policy?

**X:** I would say it depends on what exactly you mean by ‘reform’ because if we are looking to regulatory stuff and architecture, I would say this has already been set up before the war, like F55, in an ‘Energy Union’ kind of project. I would say those regulations are already put in place. So now as I said before the challenge will be acceleration and that is why recently some of these directives, regulatory packages, propose now an even more ambitious, more rapid target for clean energy, renewables, energy efficiency. So the main implication is an acceleration of the targets, and of course some further reform (or amendment) of our security of supply, embedded in a more difficult context because of the beginning of the Ukrainian war. For example, the storage regulation introducing more binding targets for all Member States, security of supply... We need to protect ourselves and be better prepared now if any gas disruptions from Russia to the EU happen in the upcoming months.

**R:** So the main thing is that the process in the EU have been accelerated.

**X:** I think so.

**R:** Great. So do you think, considering this and after knowing you have been working on this since 2016 in the DG, is it true you see the difference between this crisis compared to other crises happening in the EU energy policy field, like for example if we put as an example the 2014 annexation of Crimea by Russia?

**X:** In my honest opinion, I think the fundamental change compared to 2014 you just mentioned is that we are now taking it to a more serious level of interrupting and closing our ties with the Russian federation. In 2014, in the energy field and other sectors, the main objective of EU sanctions was targeting things in order to avoid hurting our energy situation as much as possible, and we were not calling for a real interruption of relations with Russia. We were just suspending the export of sensitive technology to Russia for the exploration, unconventional projects. So everything was more ‘targeted’. Now, all contacts with Russia, from political to technical level, have been interrupted and suspended since the attack in February 2022, as well as energy companies communications, in oil, gas, etc. Now, the interruption of energy, contacts, ties, etc. comes from all levels. And we are not done yet, because we want to do the same with gas and oil. With RePowerEU, we are now in a clear pathway towards phasing out Russian gas from our energy system and diversifying towards other suppliers.

**R:** Now we are going to the essential questions. First of all, I would like to know if you know who is driving this change in the EU energy policy. You can say maybe that the driving force

is any kind of institutions, any specific politician, a group of officers, or other stakeholders. Or do you think they are putting all the efforts in the EU jointly?

**X:** I would really say it is a collective effort that involves all levels, all the different policy-makers. From the Council, the leadership of the Member States, but also the leadership of the European Commission, of the President (Ursula von der Leyen) and of the College. Definitely, the main drivers come from the top level. I would say also the industry is important, in particular to say what is feasible from the technical point of view, like in the increase of the use of renewables, but also nuclear technologies, electric mobility, etc. This point is very important when you are not only a policy-maker, but also when you are an official of the public sector or from the institutions, like me. All officials, in other words, translate the political mandate, and we transform it in documents and communications that are readable and clear, thanks to the industry sector. Also, financial assets are important too, allocating huge resources for this effort.

**R:** Can you then see that stakeholders' opinion have changed? Is there a clear difference between now and then?

**X:** I think there might be some differences. Political/policy actors are now driving our current dimension in energy, in terms of phasing out from Russia. If by stakeholders you mean for example industry partners, of course in that case there is more caution. These are actors involved in sensitive matters, such as contracts with Russian companies and others. This is problematic for them. It might create some tension. But in general terms, they fully understand the context and they always comply with new regulations, and their acting is fully consistent with policy directions. Also, they all realize now, even if they work in the oil or gas business, that they have to keep in mind 'the new ways': Renewables, energy efficiency, etc.

**R:** Great. I will tell you now three different statements that I think they are at the moment the most important discourses in this crisis in Ukraine. So I would like to know whether, in the EU, do you hear each one of them quite often, quite rarely, not so regularly, etc.?

The first one would be: "The EU has to become more independent from external suppliers, especially Russia. For that, we need to diversify supply and increase the use of renewables to meet Europeans' energy demands via RePowerEU".

**X:** I hear this one very often lately. All the time.

**R:** The second one is pretty much similar, but the goal changes: ‘‘The EU has to become more independent from external suppliers, especially Russia. For that to happen, it is desirable to start/improve relations with other external suppliers’’.

**X:** I also agree with that one, and I hear that pretty often. I would add here that, in a way, and in the RePowerEU package, Task Forces in the DG were created to fulfil this objective. Because essentially the idea is to reach out to potential suppliers. Of course, we have to understand that there are two dimensions: Ensure security of supply in the short-term, and for that to happen (because we cannot phase fossil fuels out rapidly), we need to find alternative suppliers. But the main objective is to fully decarbonize and become climate-neutral.

**R:** And from whom you hear this statement the most? Because I suppose it doesn’t come only from the European Commission. Maybe from MEPs or other actors, right?

**X:** Yes. Me personally I don’t have many contacts in the Parliament, but in general, this institution is always even more drastic and visionary than the Commission. It always wants to go to the longer-term, to even more ambitious targets in terms of decarbonization and phasing out from Russia. The suspension of Nord Stream 2 is a prime example on this: After the 24<sup>th</sup> of February, the game changed completely. Germany says now that the project is *caput*, even considering that before the crisis, they did not stopped defending it despite being a geopolitical weapon used by Russia.

**R:** Talking about that: When I was taking a look to what was happening before the crisis during the Green Taxonomy, there were a lot of Member States that wanted to put gas as a green source in that scheme. What do you think about that? Has this idea changed after the crisis?

**X:** As far as I know, because I’m not following the Taxonomy, it includes both nuclear and gas. Let’s say, they ‘allow’ them for the transition. The reason is understandable. They didn’t want to look like they were too ambitious. Has this scheme changed now? It looks to me that the Taxonomy has not been re-opened at the moment, so it still includes nuclear and gas. Whether this situation could change, we don’t know, but it doesn’t look like, because the main priority is to phase out from Russia and open the door to new suppliers. I don’t see much change: Gas continues being a transition fuel.

Other point here is that after Russia started interrupting all energy to Europe, we observe Member States reverting back to coal, which of course is not a welcome development, but it is

fine if it is a short-term measure to keep the energy system running, but the idea is in the long-term the phasing out of coal in the decarbonization pathway.

**R:** The last statement is not a usual one, which is: “Despite the 2022 Ukrainian war, we need to maintain the energy status quo with Russia”.

**X:** This is something that I don’t hear many often. I would say very rarely actually.

**R:** Actually, Viktor Orbán would be in favour of this statement. He defends that despite the crisis and that independence from Russia is desirable, Hungary does not have the correct mechanisms put into place to avoid extreme negative consequences of phasing out from Russia.

**X:** I think, well, to my observation, it is a statement that it is heard less and less. Even Member States that were more in favour of Russia are not at the moment super vocal on this. Even in the case of Hungary, they accept the development of events in the EU. But in the end, to me, the chance to start re-hearing this statement again by the Member States is very thin.

**R:** OK. And the last question would be do you consider that the 2022 Ukrainian war entails a new, permanent turning point in EU energy policy, or rather there are possibilities to think that the Union as a whole will in the future return to the previous energy-policy status quo?

**X:** If we are talking about our energy relations with Russia, I would say it’s very difficult to foresee the future, let’s say in five or ten years from now, because the political situation might change, or the war might evolve, there might be some kind of negotiation. As it stands now, it doesn’t look like: The political and policy framework we have now put into place in the EU makes very difficult to return things to the way they were before. The framework predicts different specific outcomes in the end. In a few years, we will completely diversify away from Russia in fossil fuels. In any case and in the longer-term, even though it may be difficult to go back, the fight against climate change is essential, so taking into account that Russia is the biggest country in the world next to the Arctic, of course I imagine that if our relations improve, one of the main subjects where we will try to cooperate more will be climate change, the most urgent challenge. But at the moment, this is unlikely.

**R:** OK, then I think this is it for now. Of course, if you have any questions you can ask anything.

**X:** No, I think you well-explained the objective. Hope I gave you interesting perspectives here.

**R:** Yes, thank you very much.

*Appendix VIII. Transcript of Interview with EU official #2*

**R:** The first thing I want to know is your name and your current job here in the European Commission.

**X:** I'm ... My current position is 'international relations officer' in Task Force ... dedicated to international relations, and I work with international energy files.

**R:** How long have you been working in the field of energy in the European institutions? Doesn't have to be only in the European Commission.

**X:** Four years, since 2018.

**R:** Did you start in the same position as you are now?

**X:** I have changed positions several times, but only once did I change units, right now in June. In my previous unit, I started as a policy officer, then policy coordinator, and team leader. And now I am an international relations officer.

**R:** Great. In the chain of your organization, from bottom to top level, to whom you have to keep your work accountable and for who you work for in your Task Force?

**X:** The Task Force is actually functioning as a Directorate, so it is divided like a unit. I have a Head of Unit and a Director of the Task Force. Ultimately, I respond to the Director-General obviously, like everyone here in the DG. But in my day-to-day work, it would be definitely my Head of Unit and Director.

**R:** Next one: In general terms, and before the start of the 2022 Ukrainian war, what was your overall opinion on the EU energy policy? Good or bad? Or something in-between?

**X:** I have a positive opinion, I would say. Especially in the field I was working on before: Coal phase out and just transition. I think we were doing a good job. Obviously, you work in a limited, specific part of energy policy, and there were times where I wasn't in full agreement. But these points were not at the forefront of EU energy policy objectives. In a way, it was not sufficient for me to develop a bad opinion on this.

**R:** And what are the things you like the most about EU energy policy?

**X:** I feel the Green Deal in general was a very ambitious, very comprehensive package very well-crafted. And there was a good balance between ambition and upgrading what we wanted

to do in renewables, on clean energy, etc., taking into consideration internal difficulties in just transition policy, and putting energy efficiency first. This made the EGD very coherent. I would say this is the positive point in energy policy.

**R:** And what is in your opinion the bad part of the EU energy policy?

**X:** I thought that the external dimension of the energy policy was clearly... I wouldn't say missing, but insufficiently strategic in a way. It was going in a lot of directions, all of them positive, but it missed the sort of overall direction, and I also felt like it really under-played the issue of how vulnerable Europe was to external risks, because we obviously have a problem with Russia, but it could have been other places in the world with which we are too dependent too. Overall, it has always been a bit lacking this more like, let's say, we are very good at promoting our offensive interest abroad, like promoting renewables, and I think this is good, but not so much when it comes to defending our interests internally, which was our overall vulnerability in imports, in fossil fuels as well as in renewables in terms of domestic production.

In the future, we might face another crisis related to this, I wouldn't be surprised. So I think these were the deficiencies.

**R:** Now we are going to the topic-specific questions. The first one now: In your expert's opinion, do you think the 2022 Ukrainian war has become a window of opportunity to reform the EU energy policy?

**X:** Well, I don't know if it's an opportunity to 'reform' it. Well, reform is a strong word. I think it doesn't need to be reformed, it needs to be re-adjusted, complemented by other dimensions. Let's say, it's not only energy, because when you think what is the EU energy policy it is primarily an inward-looking policy because the main objective is to achieve a well-functioning market where energy flows freely between different parts of Europe, guaranteeing it is clean, affordable and secure. And these I think don't need to be extremely reformed. Of course, it prompts a number of reforms, like making our markets more resilient to external shocks, we have to make sure that companies operating in this market are behaving in a way that it avoids the kind of situation we are in today. So it needs to be a bit more forward-looking and protective of their own interests. But again, I think it is the external dimension that needs to be much more revised, and here I think we need to focus on a policy that is much more similar to what countries would have: The idea of Europe having a common responsibility to ensure that there is security of supply in the continent, and that industry is in a way protected, including critical industries

like renewables. Up to now, this was not the common rule. We were focusing on the internal market, but leaving this idea of ‘we need to have energy in the EU’ behind. It is clear today that this situation has led to very different national policies, and some of them became very vulnerable to external shocks, which might have not happened if this situation was dealt from the beginning at the EU level.

**R:** Then do you consider this is a different crisis compared to others that happened like for example the one that happened in 2014 in Crimea? Now you see that things are actually changing...

**X:** Yes. Never in 2014 was a moment where the threat of the EU being cut off of its ultimate supplier was ever reached. It was obviously a very serious conflict, but there was never a moment in 2014 where it was obvious we would be cut off of gas supplies. And this is the catalyst of change in this situation, because when you face a moment of scarcity of resources you have to organize them the best way you can. This clearly accelerated the transition.

**R:** Now we have the specific questions related to the study. So the first one would be whether you think that energy discourses in the EU energy policy field has changed?

**X:** I think that’s a yes.

**R:** Who’s driving this change? Do you think it is a specific actor in the EU bubble or is it a joint effort?

**X:** I think is the President of the Commission is very much going further than any other actor. This is from the Commission side. But more generally, I would say it is the Heads of State. It is not the EU bubble per se, but once they come here they become that in the end. I find that they are the ones that are really making the most radical changes, in a way we talk more about ‘energy’. Overall, there are actors everywhere, but the main drivers are at the very top, which are good news, from both a strategic and democratic point of view. It changes the perspective that the European Union is a bureaucratic/technocratic body. I think in this case it is more the leadership that is in the driving scene.

**R:** Do you think that MS/politicians/MEPs have changed their opinion on energy policy because of this new crisis or have they maintained their status quo mindset?

**X:** I think they have changed their opinion on various aspects. They realize now that energy is a ‘European issue’. Networks are better interconnected, and our market is one. This

understanding was there before, but it became much more obvious. There is something now that makes leaders much more likely to see solutions at the EU level. Prior to that, these common targets in energy, like renewables, was up to the Member States to implement. I think today, there is much more appetite at national level to bring these questions to the EU level.

**R:** Do you think there are specific ideas that have changed, like could you please give me one or two examples maybe?

**X:** I think there might be more realization that energy independence is as much of an objective as net-zero/climate neutrality. The good news is that these are actually compatible. They reinforce each other. This angle that energy transition makes us more independent as well is definitely a positive element for us, geo-politically, economically, etc.

**R:** Because you were talking about phasing out coal, do you feel that Member States are phasing out more coal at the moment, or less than before the crisis?

**X:** I think the goal didn't change, but the strategy on how to do it other thing. Due to the situation in Ukraine, the idea was in some Member States that they were going to replace the baseload provided by coal with gas, and they would progressively implement renewables. This is not something that Member States can think now: Gas as a transition source. Now, there is some sort of alignment. Let's say they think: "No, it is not a good idea to replace coal by gas one-to-one. This cannot be the basis these days". I think these actors have changed their minds, but I don't think it will eventually change much on the coal phase out. There are really not reasons to continue with it, since it is not economic, is very pollutant, more expensive than renewables, etc. I don't understand why they would rely more on it than on renewables in the long-term.

**R:** For example in Germany, because they're so against nuclear, they prefer to continue using coal rather than start using nuclear.

**X:** They won't be needing their coal plants much longer. So I don't think this will be a long-term consequence of this crisis. What we will see next winter will be Member States using their coal plants in order to secure their security of supply, but in the short-term there's absolutely nothing you can do on building new coal plants.

**R:** Has the nature of your work changed after the crisis?

**X:** I think the EU is an imperfect democracy, but a democracy still. And my actions are derived from the political leadership. And I really think the nature of my work has changed. Before, it was to ensure decarbonization in the European energy mix. I had no security of supply objective, neither in my mind nor in my objectives or job description. When the crisis started, this was added de facto to whatever I needed to do. And I think this is good: You cannot only think green, but also on “do we have enough energy?”. Now this is put more in the forefront.

**R:** I would tell you now three statements. These will be the most important ones after a lot of research. The question here would be whether you hear these statements a lot, and whether these statements connect to the tasks you are performing at the moment. The first one is: “The EU has to become more independent from external suppliers, especially Russia. For that, we need to diversify supply and increase the use of renewables to meet Europeans’ energy demands via RePowerEU”.

**X:** I really hear this a lot.

**R:** But it is something you didn’t have before, right?

**X:** Yes, before we didn’t have security of supply. This is a completely new vocabulary.

**R:** The second statement: “The EU has to become more independent from external suppliers, especially Russia. For that to happen, it is desirable to start/improve relations with other external suppliers, like the US or Qatar”.

**X:** I hear that a lot too, expect for the part of Qatar. People go to Qatar and have a handshake with the emir, and whatever. But in the political discourse, you don’t hear: “We need to talk to Qatar”, but rather with the US and Norway.

**R:** But there are other countries that are like potential candidates for external suppliers. Of course you know it. But for what I read, there are a few examples like Qatar or Algeria. These new potential external suppliers are something that came out because of the crisis?

**X:** I wouldn’t know. Maybe some Member States were thinking about these countries. The ones that I follow, definitely no. This may be the southern Member States that have a more ‘Mediterranean vision’.

**R:** So do you hear this statement a lot, ignoring the Qatar part, right?

**X:** Yes, definitely, all the time.

**R:** And the third statement: “Despite the 2022 Ukrainian war, we need to maintain the energy status quo with Russia”. Do you hear this a lot in the European Commission?

**X:** No. I guess in the European Commission, no one would say that, but of course at EU level, there’s one specific Member State, which I think is really easy to guess.

**R:** This Member State officially says that it is not that they don’t want to be independent from Russia, but rather if we want to become independent from her, the problem is that there are no safeguards afterwards, so there would be a spike of energy prices. And also, we need fossil fuels, in order to cover all Europeans’ energy demands. Do you consider this statement has a ‘scientific background’? Is it a plausible explanation?

**X:** Yes, I mean, it’s undisputable that getting rid of Russian energy is painful. But the question here is how much do you value other objectives, such as stability of Europe, the integrity of Ukraine, the spillover effects...or if you care at all about human life.

**R:** The last question would be whether you believe the 2022 Ukrainian war entails a new, permanent turning point in EU energy policy, or rather there are possibilities to think that the Union as a whole will in the future return to the previous energy-policy status quo?

**X:** I think there wouldn’t be a status quo with Russia again. But international relations are really unpredictable to say what will happen in the future. I think if we see a regime change in Russia, the current trend could be changed, but I don’t think it will be reversed. I don’t think we will ever hopefully get ourselves again in a situation where we depend so much on one single supplier. I believe, hope, this is the lesson learned in this crisis, and to be remembered in the future generations. I think this will be remembered if this winter we don’t have power cuts.

**R:** Do you have any questions, or something to add?

**X:** It will be interesting to see how the situation in Norway develops with gas workers trying to exploit the current situation.

**R:** OK, thank you!

*Appendix IX. Transcript of Interview with EU official #3*

**R:** Please state your name and your current position in the European Commission.

**X:** ... and I am a policy officer in energy security and safety matters working on gas security of supply.

**R:** What are your specific tasks here?

**X:** Yes, so I'm working in security of supply, so all the things related to that. One major part of my work were storage proposals and mandatory levels. That was finished a few weeks ago, and now I'm working on demand-reduction plans, in cases of emergencies, so we're preparing for a possible full cut off from Russia if it happens.

**R:** OK. How long have you been working in the field of energy in the European institutions?

**X:** Nearly a year.

**R:** In the chain of your organization, from bottom to top level, to whom you have to keep your work accountable and for who you work for?

**X:** To everyone. Let's say more directly to my Head of Unit and deputy.

**R:** In general terms –and before the start of the 2022 Ukrainian war–, what was your opinion on the EU energy policy? Was it good or bad?

**X:** I think it was good enough. It focused more on decarbonization. That was the main driver. I think it is working, but now I think we are more in a different situation, and security is now more a key driver, let's say. That also brings about different considerations, like what to do for the next winter, which is also for the long-term. I wouldn't say there is a narrative shift, but it has come up as one of the key drivers as well.

**R:** What are the things you like the most about how the EU energy policy is formulated?

**X:** In general, the reason why I'm here is because energy transition, so yes, renewable policy and decarbonization in general. That was mostly what I was interested in. Now of course it's a bit different. My background is in International Relations, so the geopolitical aspect of energy was interesting as well. In that sense I'm in the suitable place here, because one of the things that were missing before in energy policy was that there was no geopolitical component.

**R:** And what are in your opinion the top things that are deficient/missing in EU energy policy?

**X:** Well, it is always easier to talk about the good side. Now looking back, I think no one was talking about security of supply. That's the reality of that. Generally speaking, if there's no bad situation, of course we are not always preparing, but the urgency behind is different, and also the resources. And this has changed too, but at first this was missing a bit. On the other hand, if you place yourself in that position, would you do things differently? Definitely no. There were other priorities in that moment, and therefore you have to choose.

**R:** Do you consider that in general terms the crisis has become a window of opportunity to reform the EU energy policy?

**X:** Yes, absolutely. Specially with RePowerEU. Of course it is a communication, not a legal document, but it clearly stresses out where are we going. This is something different from the direction we were taking before. And I think it is quite a good mix because it doesn't lose sight of the decarbonization objective, and actually accelerates it. But it also says in the short-term what we are going to do in this situation, so in one hand it says how we are going to replace Russian gas, and it does so searching for new external suppliers in the short-term. But also accelerates energy transition, because we don't want to be in the same position. So I think it is a good mix, and a different way to approach it compared to before, which of course has to do with the invasion of Ukraine.

**R:** Of course you have been working for almost a year, so this question might be difficult for you to answer. Do you consider this crisis to be any different from the 2014 annexation of Crimea? Do you consider we have now something we didn't have before?

**X:** The war of Ukraine has definitely not started, but on-going since 2014. I think the boldness and the share of amount of forces that we have right now is different. In that sense, the crisis in 2014 compared to the one we have right now is different: Different skill, different impact, etc. The amount of human suffering, the loss of human life, is a lot more. I also think what has happened in the meantime is that, partly also because of what happened in Crimea, political minds have changed. A lot more people has warmed up to this idea of getting away for Russia, also because of the war. So I think this situation has made us to be more prepared and get rid of Russian gas.

There are some elements that are different, but it is because in 2014 we didn't have the amount of sanctions we have now, and they were not as strict as they were in the current situation, and

I think in general the idea was that never there would be a Russian supply cut. Now, there's a clear demarcation.

**R:** OK, now I'm going to ask you specific questions for the study. First of all, I would like to ask you whether do you feel that working in the European Commission has make you aware that the discourse related to EU energy policy has changed in the last months?

**X:** Well... I've been only working here for a year. But when I already started in October it was already quite serious. The situation has changed with the war in Ukraine, but even before that here [in the European Commission] they knew that it was going to happen. The point here is that you can really prepared for things, but you can only react when they happen, so you don't really know what happens until *it happens*. And this of course has make the discourse to change in the sense that people are quite, let's say, universally in the same page. I think most people generally are in the same march in what should be done.

**R:** OK. Do you think there is a driving force behind all these efforts to change/reform the EU energy policy? Do you think it comes from one specific group at EU or national level?

**X:** I think, especially now, it is a joint effort. The Commission is of course a great driving force, but so is the Council. The Commission cannot bring forward its plans with resistance from other institutions. So yes, it is a joint effort. Also, there is no point in making proposals, if we don't have the back-up of other different stakeholders, and of EU citizens. The point here is: If there is going to be so much resistance, why would you come up with so many different proposals?

**R:** Could you please tell me a specific example that you have seen that something has changed in the EU energy policy? Like for example: One specific Member State that had a discourse, and now it has definitely changed?

**X:** I mean, the easy answer is of course Germany with Nord Stream 2. But generally speaking, the answer would be that everything was more market-focused. Now, due to the circumstances and production being stopped, the approach has definitely changed. Specifically related to the crisis, I think there is a bit more focus on prices as such, and maybe a bit more among society as a whole on how fundamental energy is functioning in society with higher energy prices because of inflation, which is mainly created because of the crisis. I think those considerations are very vocal, especially in the south like in Spain. Maybe those concerns are not new, but the crisis definitely helped to accelerate the mindset

**R:** Because you work in security of supply: While analysing data, you can see that of course the nuclear discourse is very important before the crisis, also gas. But with LNG or coal, I know for a fact these were also really important, but at least in the news they don't talk that much about them before the crisis, but you can see now that they are talking more about this. So when you were working here in October, could you feel there was a big difference between autumn and now?

**X:** So... we don't deal with security of supply in coal, but in general, yes, there is narrative shift regarding those things. These are controversial stuff, of course, but there's more willingness to count on them as possible solutions. So the answer to 'why?' is really simple, and it is because of the situation. At some point, when you are in a bad situation, you have to choose between evils. So you may have to take decisions you would prefer not to take, and that are inherently imperfect, but at some point you have to do something.

**R:** Is it the same with LNG? Some years ago, it gained importance as a possible solution for gas. Of course it is not a green source, but maybe it is less pollutant than gas.

**X:** I wouldn't say so because it is the same gas, with the difference you have to transform it. I think what the main issue with LNG before was that you also have capacity constraints both in the liquefied fraction capacity and also in the gas capacity in the EU. And what you don't want to do is to invest in a lot of terminals that in ten years you're not going to use, so this was a loop we had. All of this infrastructure ready, but there's no gas going into the EU, but we also need to focus on the decarbonization objective, so you don't want to invest in a infrastructure you may not be needing after a few years.

Another concern was also that LNG has extra costs because you need to transform it and afterwards inject it into the pipeline.

**R:** And now, do you think that your workload or your nature of your work have changed in the last months? Did you have the feeling that your unit was focusing more on other stuff before the crisis and now you have specific tasks because the nature of the unit's work has changed after the war?

**X:** It was broadly the same, because in autumn we were very much preparing for the worst case scenario. Of course, now it is more on the ground. It is obvious now that a lot needs to change, but before it was more theoretical with assessments on what's going to happen. Now, we are

more prepared for solutions. So it has changed, but I think in terms of specific subjects, I guess it is the same, but much more intense.

**R:** Great. I'm going to tell you three statements that I think these are like the most important ones in the EU energy policy, and I want you to tell me if you hear these a lot, if these were different compared to the previous situation and to what extent, and from what actors do you think these come the most. The first one would be: "The EU has to become more independent from external suppliers, especially Russia. For that, we need to diversify supply and increase the use of renewables to meet Europeans' energy demands via RePowerEU".

**X:** I hear this a lot. The situation here has changed because of the 'urgency of Russia' after the invasion of Ukraine. Because before, it was not an universal statement, but of course it was something in the forefronts of people's minds. If it happens, that is still a mental shift for a lot of people, and with RePowerEU, this is put tight, committing ourselves. And from who do you hear this the most? I think from everyone.

**R:** OK. The next statement is almost the same, but the goal changes: "The EU has to become more independent from external suppliers, especially Russia. For that to happen, it is desirable to start/improve relations with other external suppliers".

**X:** Yes, yes, you hear that a lot too.

**R:** Especially in your unit?

**X:** I think there are more units more responsible for that, like the Task Forces.

**R:** And the last statement, which you don't hear this a lot, "despite the 2022 Ukrainian war, we need to maintain the energy status quo with Russia".

**X:** ...I don't hear that a lot, no.

**R:** Do you know from who does it come from?

**X:** In my personal view, I haven't heard that since the start of the war. Of course I know who you are talking about, and some Member States are still opened to that, specially Hungary.

**R:** At least what they say is that it is not they don't care. Basically, they defend that even though the Ukrainian war is a tragedy, it is true that we have to act like countries in the end, and basically, they fear about the spike on energy prices if they decide to become independent from

Russia, so most of the time, these countries ask from the EU solutions in order to avoid the spike of energy prices. But in the end, the EU doesn't know how to tackle this.

**X:** It is not necessarily that we don't know it, but also we have to consider other things too. The thing that Spain and Italy are concerned about the spike of energy prices for example, doesn't mean that the other Member States are too. That's an important dimension there. And when it comes from diversifying from Russia, I think it is fair, to a degree. I want to mention nevertheless that the main reason for the spike of prices is not because we necessarily want to diversify, but it is because Russia is slowly cutting gas, which creates a risk, so suppliers are very hesitant, very on a panic mode. There's much coercion in the market. So you have to ask yourself: 'Do you find it worth it?', and some Member States say yes, and others don't.

But it is also the Commission and the EU which can provide tools to Member States, which we do, like state aids. But Member States sometimes have to do something by themselves.

**R:** Now it is the last question: Do you believe the 2022 Ukrainian war entails a new, permanent turning point in EU energy policy, or rather there are possibilities to think that the Union as a whole will in the future return to the previous energy-policy status quo?

**X:** In theory, there's always a possibility. My first answer would be, quite frankly, that I don't see that happening. It seems that the vast majority of the Member States are very convinced, so even if the EU in the future doesn't agree anymore, because maybe there's no consensus, I think that there are so many countries that have made the actual, proper decision to diversify. So we are not going to return to the status quo. I don't see in the short-term that we will return to how things were done, but it depends on what we do now. The honest answer would be if citizens and Member States really care about it.

**R:** Great! This is the end of the interview. Do you have any questions or other things to add?

**X:** I would like to add that whatever happens with Russia and Ukraine, fossil fuels will obviously play a less important role in the upcoming years in Member States. So this is the main reason why it is difficult to return to the status quo.

**R:** Any other notes?

**X:** No.

**R:** OK, thank you very much!

*Appendix X. Transcript of Interview with EU official #4*

**R:** The first thing I would like to ask you is your name and your current job position in the European Commission.

**X:** I'm ..., and I'm a director in the DG ... in the European Commission. I cover different portfolios: Energy efficiency, just transition, research and innovation, competitiveness and a topic that is very topical at the moment which is energy security.

**R:** How long have you been working in the field of energy for the European institutions?

**X:** For energy, it's now twelve years.

**R:** Did you start at the bottom level?

**X:** Actually, when I started working on energy I was working with the Commissioner responsible for energy in that moment, Commissioner Günther Oettinger<sup>36</sup>, so I started at the political level in energy, and then I spent five years with him in the Cabinet and then came to the DG ...

**R:** OK. In the chain of your organization, from bottom to top level, to whom you have to keep your work accountable and for whom you work for?

**X:** I work for the European Commission, right? That's clear, it's what we all do, but of course I'm clearly reporting to my Director-General and also deputy Director-Generals, and to the Commissioner responsible for energy. But we work for the EU, the EU purpose, the EU mission. And we work to implement the vision of the President, in this case President von der Leyen, so we have different types of accountability, but always with the same purpose, which is the EU project.

**R:** OK. In general terms, what was your opinion about the EU energy policy right before the start of the Ukrainian crisis?

**X:** Let's say I started in 2010, and it's impressively incredible that I didn't have one single day of boredom. 2010 was when we had the first threat of gas supplies disruptions by Russia, and then I was involved in the trilateral negotiations with Ukraine and Russia already in 2014. So we have been doing a lot of work in terms of diversification, in terms of energy security ever

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<sup>36</sup> Second Barroso Commission, from 2010 to 2014.

since. But also the whole approach has changed immensely, and now we have re-started again. Back then, the target for renewables was 20% by 2020, the same for energy efficiency. Now, the Parliament would like to go beyond, with 45% renewables, so it is a huge change, in terms of green transition, and transition to a more decarbonized system. Within 12 years, I've seen a huge change in our energy system.

**R:** And what are the things you like the most about how the EU energy policy is formulated?

**X:** Well, the issue is that energy policy touches upon every aspect of society, and that is what is so fascinating about it, right? When you're talking about energy policy, you're talking about something really tangible for EU citizens. We see it, we sense it in our electricity bills, but we also sense it more and more as a possible active, which has been enabled precisely thanks to transition, all the technologies, and now I can produce my own electricity from my solar panels; I have smart meters in my place that allow me to remotely get my washing machine to start, so I can choose when to consume energy, etc.

So that's a very tangible and a very person-related aspect, but you also have the other extreme, which is that energy policy is extremely geopolitical, and we're seeing the extreme use of it as a geo-political tool as we speak in this current situation with the war in Ukraine. It is much more than just a sectoral policy. It touches upon society, it touches upon politics, it touches upon diplomacy, it touches upon power dynamics across the world, etc., and that's what I find so fascinating and that probably explains why I've been so long working in this field.

**R:** And what were the things that you find more deficient or missing in the EU energy policy formulation?

**X:** Well, we're indeed still facing some old obstacles, which is a fully integrated energy system for electricity and for gas. We know de facto that the Iberian Peninsula continues being a little bit isolated, so it is a pity we haven't overcome that. It would have become very handy now too in this crisis with the Ukraine. We made an immense effort in terms of decarbonization of the energy system, so I wouldn't call it a deficiency, but we see now that we could've done more in terms of diversification. It's always easy to judge afterwards, right? I tend to see: "OK, we have done very much. Otherwise, today in the current situation we would be in a much worse situation than it was ten years ago, when there was not such an interconnected energy market".

But of course we still have a lot to do, and we've been doing, and now in terms of really achieving a fully decarbonized system. That's where a lot of work still needs to go. The EGD

shows the way, but a lot of work needs to go there. We also need the technologies of companies that enables this energy transition, so this is also an aspect in energy storage. We do need a ground-breaking technology that allows us to have renewable energy all the time, without the need of a backload. So it is clear we won't get bored neither in the upcoming years, that's for sure.

**R:** And in your expert's opinion, do you think the Ukrainian war has created a window of opportunity to reform the EU energy policy?

**X:** Listen, it's terrible, right? But sometimes the biggest changes come with the bigger crises, and it's a pity that that's human nature. If you look at the big changes, big transformations that have occurred over a time in history, most of them are triggered by crises, and it's a pity. And I believe that if there is any silver lining to this tragedy in Ukraine, it's that Mr. Putin enabled energy transition in a speed, in an intensity that not even the EGD would have managed. So what I've been seeing –and I've been working in energy policy from the beginning– and what I've seen now in terms of plans from the Member States to REALLY diversify and phase out their dependence from Russia is unimaginable, and it wasn't like that half a year ago. So it is a huge change. I don't think that whatever happens, the energy world especially in Europe, would ever be the same.

**R:** About EU Taxonomy: You of course know that before the crisis started, in the EU it was discussed whether to include nuclear energy as a clean source. Do you think this situation will have a main role now after the start of hostilities for the independence from Russia?

**X:** I would put it differently. There have been many heated discussions for almost two years on whether to include nuclear or not in the Taxonomy. And I think the fact that we find ourselves in this context, we may still need at least now a transition source to fall back to non-renewable energy.

**R:** OK, now: Do you think there's someone, specifically talking, that is driving the change that's happening at the moment in EU energy policy, or do you think it is a joint effort?

**X:** Listen, we really set the direction. We have been doing it already for many years, and we have the Energy Union. But this time, under the current Commission, the flagship is the EGD and that's how it started: As a very ambitious vision of the first continent to become climate neutral. We for sure have been driving a lot the narrative in terms of energy policy, but crucially, Member States have been also following, things that were unimaginable even at the level of

leaders of the European Council, which have endorsed the main objectives and aims of the EGD. So it is not just an idea of the European Commission. I think it was crucial in finding a common path, but then the Member States agreed, at different levels of course, and with different levels of enthusiasm. But the fact is that everyone embraced it, so this is the important thing, because all of us are together united in change. And it is a societal change we are speaking about. You need everyone, and it is not just at the level of the policy-makers, such as the Commission, the Council or the European Parliament. You need citizens to also believe in this, to embrace it and to implement it. Otherwise, we won't get there.

**R:** Then I'm going to tell you three different statements that came out after a lot of research on changes in discourses. So I think, right now, there're three discourses. So I just want to know whether do you think you hear these statements a lot, and if you agree with them. The first one would be: "The EU has to become more independent from external suppliers, especially Russia. For that, we need to diversify supply and increase the use of renewables to meet Europeans' energy demands via RePowerEU".

**X:** I fully agree of course. This has been our mantra more than ever, yes.

**R:** Then, I'm going to tell you the second statement, which is almost the same as the first one but the goal changes: "The EU has to become more independent from external suppliers, especially Russia. For that to happen, it is desirable to start/improve relations with other external suppliers".

**X:** Listen, we need to diversify. This has been the mantra already for many years. So, yes. The more diversified suppliers, the better. And ideally, we would be able to do the transition and we won't need as many gas suppliers as in the old days, and we would be able to really make the best use of our resources.

**R:** Then, you would say that fossil fuels and external suppliers are for the short term, right?

**X:** Yes, but then we have the critical raw materials, which will be the new oil and gas of energy security and we have to start thinking about that and be careful not to commit the same mistakes like we did with the traditional fossil fuels. We will need lot of raw materials that we should try to see if this can be diversified to the best extent possible.

**R:** OK. And the last statement would be: "Despite the 2022 Ukrainian war, we need to maintain the energy status quo with Russia". You know, you don't hear this from the Commission at the

moment, but of course the EU is not only this institution, but also national governments and other politicians, and some of them think like this.

**X:** I believe in dialogue, I believe we should always be in dialogue with our counterparts. Now, things have changed with this war, right? It is a different context, so I believe that, yes, at some point dialogue is important, but I think this was a wake-up call to indicate us that it is not a good idea to be too dependent from one single supplier. And we really need, once and for all, to do something about it. Seriously.

And then continue to speak with this hopefully one day again ‘partner’, but not putting ourselves in a situation of vulnerability and dependence.

**R:** And now, the last question would be whether do you think there are possibilities to return to the previous status quo with Russia?

**X:** It is what I replied already. I think that no matter what happens, it won’t never be the same.

**R:** Not even in the longer term or something?

**X:** No, I think we’re doing fundamental, structural changes to the energy system, so I doubt that we would coming back to where we were a year ago.

**R:** Do you think then this crisis is different from the one that happened in 2014?

**X:** It is certainly different, because we are now in a full-fledged war, and Russia has been deliberately using energy and gas supplies as a weapon not only against Ukraine, which was the case in 2009 and in 2014, but now also against the EU, which is clearly a new context.

**R:** OK. I don’t have more questions, but of course if you want to say something else...

**X:** No. thank you again, Lorena. And it is good you’re doing your thesis on this.

**R:** Thanks to you too.

*Appendix XI. Transcript of Interview with EU official #5*

**R:** First of all, I would like you to tell me your name and your current job position in the European Commission.

**X:** My name is ... and my job position is a policy officer in the European Commission, in DG ...

**R:** And what are your specific tasks in your unit?

**X:** So I work on consumers issues, and partially also on some retail issues, especially on the demand-side flexibility. On consumer stuff, I focus in particular on the most vulnerable.

**R:** How long have you been working in the field of energy in the European institutions?

**X:** So almost ten years in energy, in different DGs.

**R:** In what subjects?

**X:** I started in the JRC. And there, I was working on energy transport and on climate issues, but my work was more on the ‘translation’ of scientists’ feedback to recommendations for the policy-making. I was assistant to the Director in these groups of topics.

**R:** And what’s your overall opinion on the EU energy policy before the Ukrainian crisis? Was it good or bad?

**X:** In general, and in the context of subsidiarity that we have to respect while working in the Commission in energy, I think the focus should have been more on the implementation of the current framework and implementation. We still had and have right now a lot of work to do in terms of really monitoring and evaluating what was the last energy package, the Clean Energy Package, and how does this is transposed to national legislation, how this is implemented and issues with that, etc.

**R:** And what were the things you didn’t like that much about the formulation of the EU energy policy?

**X:** Because this is a competence we have with the Member States, there’s still a long way to go to create an internal energy market as we have imagined. And in practical application, we are seeing this now with the lack of interconnections between countries. Also, all the barriers for businesses to enter the energy markets and access to them, and more coordination is needed

between the different Member States. And I think there was a quick swift to address climate issues, but this is also a work in progress for public administrations in different countries. We are seeing this now: There are many ministries that are becoming Euro- and/or climate-ministries all of a sudden because of energy transition. But within the ministry, it looks like there are still two different worlds, so it more bridges need to be built in that respect.

**R:** OK. Do you think the current situation with Ukraine has created like a window of opportunity to reform the EU energy policy?

**X:** In general, the current situation is a task for the whole EU as such. Because it is a task for unity, for coordination and also for solidarity. And this is reflected for me in any policy. Of course, energy is a crucial issue right now. ‘Is energy used as a geopolitical weapon by Russia’? I think we know the answer now. In the past, we somehow thought that Gazprom was playing by the market rules and it was a reliable partner. Now we see more concretely that it is used for political reasons, and even aggressively and damaging our unity, our strategic aspects as well, etc.

So in that respect it is a big test for Europe and energy is considered as a strategic asset by countries. Our personal and economic life depend on that. The situation is very serious. So far, the European Commission and countries seem that they have maintained a certain level of unity despite the different interests and also the different relations we had with Russia.

**R:** Do you think then this crisis is somehow different from the one we had, for example, in 2014?

**X:** Yes, it is different because we call this ‘a war’. The President of the Commission has been really clear in saying ‘this is not only a war between Russia and Ukraine, but a war with Europe too’. Especially with the values we defend and promote. So it is not a regional crisis; it is not limited to a certain area as it was before; it is not only an energy crisis; it is not an economic problem like during the pandemic, etc. It is a major crisis, and I think we will read about this in the history books. And also the way, you know, the EU, the European Commission and the Member States will come out from this crisis will define the years to come. So to me it is a turning point.

**R:** Do you reckon the energy discourses have changed in the EU because of the crisis?

**X:** Yes. We already started with the high energy prices situation before the war. Just take a look to how many people are checking now their energy bills. They get more aware of the costs and energy they consume. And as I said before, our energy is being used as a weapon in a geopolitical context.

In general, EU citizens are now following also the decisions of their governments in terms of energy policies, or here in the EU in Brussels, from the Commission, the Council and the Parliament. Certainly, there is more interest, more attention, and this is also shaping conversations and media coverage around the world, even beyond European borders. So yes, definitely there is a major change.

**R:** Do you think that there is a specific actor in the EU, maybe from the European institutions to national governments, that is driving this change? Or something that comes ‘from everyone’?

**X:** ...For sure the European Commission has been very active in this context. And in certain context, it even somehow anticipated certain situations and certain requests for more coordination that perhaps if these were only left to the Member States, this would lead to people trying to preserve their national interests, and that would be a major damage for the unity of the European project. So in that respect I would say the current President of the Commission –and the Commission as such– are having committed involvement, always active and quick in acting. I’m not saying they have all the answers and responses, but it encourages dialogue with the Member States. In that respect, the role of the European Commission has been more prominent than the European Parliament, or even the national governments. Don’t forget we have had major changes in some big countries in Europe: Germany changed its historical leadership a year after Merkel; Elections in France; Other governments falling apart... So at least the European Commission managed to portrayed itself as a reliable counterpart for dialogue, even in the context of the war. So now all actors can count on this institution, without any doubt.

**R:** So you believe that politicians have changed their discourses prior and after the Ukrainian war, right?

**X:** Yes, especially for non-specialists, on how Russia propaganda has penetrated into some Member states, and in particular, it has been linked to different parties across Europe. In some cases, like Hungary, it went across the entire government, but you can see in other countries how politicians have been reacting towards the war and also the spread of misinformation and propaganda by the Russians. That was channelled by certain European parties or leaders.

Nowadays, it is clear how the influence and manipulation of Russian propaganda is affecting us. I think this is very worrisome. We can already notice that there is a certain fatigue, and certain parts of the population are against ‘Ukrainians invading their national territory’.

**R:** OK. So do you think the nature of your work have changed after the crisis? Do you feel you are now centring on other stuff more than before, or do you have new responsibilities or something?

**X:** I think the major changes is the urgency. We’ve been asked to contribute to the most urgent tasks and working under the constant of urgency, and we have also to be flexible to adapt to what is the urgency of the moment. There has been more awareness on how’s the situation and how dramatic it could be. Also, more attention on how we relate to the outside world and how we interact with our stakeholders, especially those working at the local levels, consumers and general citizens, asking ourselves what the Commission can do now compared to the situation before.

**R:** Great. Now, I’m going to tell you three different statements that I think that are the most important ones at European level. They don’t necessarily come from the European institutions, but also from actors that intervene in the EU decision-making. And I think these are the most prominent statements now. So I want you to listen to them and tell me how important they are at the moment, and whether you agree or disagree with them. The first one would be: “The EU has to become more independent from external suppliers, especially Russia. For that, we need to diversify supply and increase the use of renewables to meet Europeans’ energy demands via RePowerEU”.

**X:** OK. This is very much aligned with the Commission’s objectives. It is true that especially the war in Ukraine, as I said before, has completely changed the image of Gazprom as a reliable supplier. Now, we realize that this has created a dependency from countries that were not our friends. They are actually our enemies, and they are using their energy businesses with political reasons. There’s more realization in Europe that RePowerEU and energy transition are opportunities to move away from fossil fuels and dependency.

**R:** I have a specific question here. Do you think now you are more centred on helping the energy poor because of RePowerEU, or do you consider these concerns were already in your day-to-day work in the European Commission before the start of the crisis?

**X:** There was a problem that we had before. We don't know, and we're trying to understand if this problem expanded because of the war. Now, there are certainly more energy poor. So yes, in that case, the war will definitely change the size of the problem. That's why we should look for solutions for them, in the short-term as well as in the medium- and long-term.

**R:** OK. Now I'm going to tell you the second statement, which is: "The EU has to become more independent from external suppliers, especially Russia. For that to happen, it is desirable to start/improve relations with other external suppliers".

**X:** Yes, this is part of the action in the EU, but also at national level: Finding other reliable partners. I mean, the change of energy policies, especially for countries that have a larger dependency from Russia, will not come overnight. So obviously you will depend from others, hopefully for a limited amount of time, and hopefully from partners that are not profiting or exploiting the current situation, like Norway and others that agree with European values.

**R:** OK. The last statement might sound kind of weird, but it is heard. It is: "Despite the 2022 Ukrainian war, we need to maintain the energy status quo with Russia".

**X:** Yes, it could come from someone from Hungary and others, like Slovakia or even Bulgaria, which has a really pro-Russian President. I mean, this is a statement that it is not acceptable anymore because we are in a war situation. So there're no more justifications for those countries and their energy businesses that are so dependent from Russia. The scenario is something we don't like, which is problematic, but we should've taken this decision of being independent from Russia a long time ago. And I think we don't have any more excuses for not taking the right decision right now. It is not the easiest way, of course, but we have to take it as 'Europe', especially because of our values and principles. There should be a meaning for coming together and do things all together, and the meaning is what we recognize as EU values and principles: Democracy, sovereign of a state and territorial integrity.

**R:** Just to make it clear. You think the last statement is unacceptable, and the search for other external suppliers should be like a short-term solution for the EU.

**X:** Especially if those suppliers are coming from countries which we cannot currently define as democratic regimes, or those which do not respect the values we promote. By the way, we were already in a transformation of the energy system in the EU. This is a war of changes, so the more we're flexible towards those changes, the more we can adapt.

**R:** And the last question: Do you think there are any possibilities on returning to the previous status quo with Russia after the end of the crisis?

**X:** I don't think this will be possible. I would very surprised, because I think they [the Russians] 'crossed the line', something that they didn't even do during the Cold War. And negotiations without any concessions from Russia is unthinkable, and that wouldn't be of any interest from any EU state: To return to the previous situation. Russia is not a reliable partner. In this case, it is even an enemy to the EU, to the European project, so I don't know why we should look back in this current situation.

**R:** So now it is the final round of questions, and I would like to raise something here. I would like to know your opinion on something. Because our main objective is to become energy independent to reach climate sustainability, do you think the EU Taxonomy would have a key role right now after reaching independence from Russia in the upcoming months or years?

**X:** These are guidelines, but I think everything will depend on actors in their investments and whether they will apply these guidelines in their businesses and industries. I mean, in that respect, the proposal has been backed up by scientific evidence. It's not on nuclear, because nuclear is not included in the decarbonization scenario, but I think this will change, because we are changing at the same time as our objectives right now. Also, transition from gas with happen faster.

**R:** OK, so that's my question, but do you have anything else you would like to ask, or maybe do you want to raise something we didn't talk about?

**X:** I hope we can resist the passing of time, because the months to come are full of uncertainty. I don't think I will have to correct what I said about Russia, Europe and the energy policy. Also, I hope we survive the next winter, but as a European project, because there's a big risk for that: To stay united, and try to find a balance between national interest and common interest at EU level. That would be a major task, yes.

**R:** OK, thank you very much.