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Externalisation of the EU's Just Transition Agenda: An Evolving Journey Approaching a Crossroads

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About the Author

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Abstract

This paper addresses the question of how the external Just Transition agenda of the European Union (EU) has evolved since the Paris Agreement in 2015 and what factors have shaped this process. Over this period, external EU policy regarding Just Transition – that is, an energy transition that aims to be socially fair and just – has evolved in an episodic manner. Three overlapping policy phases can be observed: emergence; amplification; and diffusion. These episodes, in a relatively short timeframe, illustrate the challenge of externalising internal policy in a world in flux. EU cognisance of the geopolitical implications of internationally promoting a Just Transition has at times seemed partial, despite the concept's interrelationship with policies beyond climate and energy, such as development and human rights, and its potential challenge to vested interests and incumbent elites. Additionally, over time, a degree of paradox has emerged between the evolution of Just Transition in the internal and external policy domains. For the EU to further its role as a vital agent of Just Transition globally, a reappraisal of the approach may be timely.

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Introduction: A Just Transition or just a Transition

Since the inclusion of Just Transition in the preamble of the landmark Paris Agreement¹ of December 2015, the concept has been promoted by the European Union (EU) as central to its internal energy transition and its promotion of global energy transition through external action. Given that the Agreement is based on parties voluntarily committing to emission reductions through Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), with no penalties for non-achievement, incentivising and de-risking energy transition by promoting and supporting a Just Transition, that is, an energy transition that aims to be socially fair and just, has a compelling logic. At the United Nations (UN) climate regime's Conference of the Parties (COP) 26 in Glasgow in 2021, the EU remained a leading advocate of Just Transition and a signatory to related declarations and statements.

For a relatively novel actor on the global stage,² the EU's international activity regarding Just Transition represents a significant new task and nexus between internal and external policy. In assuming this task of joining environmental and social objectives, the EU is commendably promoting a twin goal that will be difficult to achieve. Yet, given that Europe is historically a significant contributor to global warming, encouraging poorer countries to undergo energy transitions which may jeopardise their development ambitions risks the EU being cast as a disingenuous global actor. Moreover, several energy and industrial transitions of recent centuries have arguably not been equitable. All this has not stopped the Union from positioning itself as a critical actor in determining whether global energy transformation is perceived as a Just Transition or just a transition. Thus, meaningful EU external action on Just Transition will be critical for promoting it as a credible global force for collective well-being.

Significantly, Just Transition remains a contested concept, which is prone to metamorphosis in differing contexts. This taxonomic elasticity creates a tension between definitions which accommodate bottom-up socially inclusive and empowering agendas, and ones that are more top-down and technocratic in nature. Moreover, while the global implications of the wider European Green Deal (EGD) – the

¹ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, *Paris Agreement*, 12 December 2015.

² Damro, Chad, Sieglinde Gstöhl and Simon Schunz (eds), *The European Union's Evolving External Engagement*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2018.

EU's socio-economic transformation agenda to attain net-zero emissions by mid-century – are increasingly interpreted in a geopolitical framework,³ such a perspective has been less apparent in relation to Just Transition. This may seem paradoxical given the concept's interrelationship with policies beyond climate and energy, such as development and human rights, and its inherent potential to challenge vested interests and incumbent elites.

More recently, an effort to inject this geopolitical perspective has been made in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, with the European Commission publishing 'EU external energy engagement in a changing world', a communication which stated the EU's continuing commitment to the international promotion of Just Transition.⁴ However, the contingent nature of policy externalisation has led to perceptible paradox in the pursuit of Just Transition in the internal and external policy domains. Given the impending COP27, scheduled for November 2022 in Egypt, it is an opportune time to review the externalisation of the EU's Just Transition agenda since COP21's Paris Agreement and resulting policy progress and discordance.

The paper thus addresses the following research question: *How has the EU's external Just Transition agenda evolved since the Paris Agreement and what factors have shaped this evolution?*

The paper briefly explores the definitional parameters of Just Transition, prior to establishing an analytical framework to structure the enquiry. This framework, in turn, facilitates explanation and assessment of the observed evolution of the EU's external Just Transition agenda since the Paris Agreement over three distinct policy phases from 2015 to today: emergence, amplification, and diffusion. To further consider the research question in the specificities of differing policy contexts, two cases of EU external engagement are examined. The first case is selected from the EU neighbourhood and relates to the Western Balkans and Ukraine Coal Regions in Transition Initiative; and the second focuses on the Global South and relates to the Just Energy Transition Partnerships. The paper ends by offering conclusions relating to the research question.

³ Vanheukelen, Marc, "EU Climate Diplomacy: Projecting Green Global Leadership", *EU Diplomacy Paper*, no. 6, Bruges: College of Europe, 2021; Varrenti, Mario, "What the European Green Deal Means for EU External Action", *College of Europe Policy Brief*, no. 1.20, 2020.

⁴ European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, "EU external energy engagement in a changing world", JOIN(2022) 23, Brussels, 18 May 2022.

Analytical Framework

This section opens by considering the challenge of defining the meaning of Just Transition, a pervasive but slippery concept. It then introduces an analytical framework for exploring the externalisation of EU policy before explaining the research methodology that will inform the subsequent analysis.

Despite global attention to the topic, there is no universally accepted definition of Just Transition. Narrow definitions focus on managing the direct impacts of energy transition policies on fossil fuel workers, especially in the coal sector, within existing socio-economic systems; more expansive definitions address wider impacts on a broader set of subjects – such as communities and disadvantaged groups – and transformation of socio-economic systems. This elasticity is a product of differing conceptual framing by different actor groups, including governments, organised labour and civil society.

Some definitions have a more ethical disposition, linking the concept to various conceptions of justice, such as distributive justice (mitigating impacts and delivering opportunities for affected individuals), procedural justice (ensuring involvement and empowerment of those affected) and cosmopolitan justice (addressing affected individuals' needs globally, regardless of circumstance). Other definitions are more thematic in character, elevating energy and environmental equity. Although there are popular definitions, such as the one of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the term's innate fluidity allows different actors to accommodate the concept within their own normative positions. This paper does not privilege one definition, recognising both co-existence and overlap, which it documents as part of the empirical analysis.

An analytical framework was developed to provide a conceptual orientation to guide the consideration of the above research question and enable inference to the best explanation.⁵ Central to it is the notion of actorness, defined as the capacity to behave actively and deliberately in relation to other actors in the international system.⁶ It is informed by Bretherton and Vogler's identification of three factors which determine the EU's ability to purposefully act in an external policy domain that was formerly internal.⁷ These are: opportunity; presence; and capability. In addition, the

⁵ Lipton, Peter, *Inference to the Best Explanation*, London: Routledge, 1993.

⁶ Sjöstedt, Gunnar, *The External Role of the European Community*, Westmead: Saxon House, 1977.

⁷ Bretherton, Charlotte and John Vogler, *The European Union as a Global Actor*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2006.

paper utilises a supplementary factor proposed by Schunz and Damro to more fully account for EU external action, namely agency (see Table 1 below).⁸

Table 1: Factors shaping EU external action on Just Transition: actorness and agency

Opportunity	External events, paradigms and norms which constitute the structural context in which EU action can occur (e.g. decarbonisation to meet NDCs)
Presence	Internal capacities and competences that allow the EU to project influence externally (e.g. EU's Coal Regions in Transition Initiative)
Capability	Internal context that shapes the ability of the EU to respond to an external opportunity and utilise its presence (e.g. institutional coherence and means)
Agency	Internal ability of policy entrepreneurs to set agendas and develop new policies, instruments and practices (e.g. problematising and shaping a fair energy transition)

Source: author's compilation.

In this enquiry, the interaction of opportunity and presence shapes the 'policy window' for EU action in terms of Just Transition, whilst the interaction of capability and agency shapes 'policy formation'. The analysis assumes a symbiotic relationship between the policy window and policy formation: the former incentivises the mobilisation of actors and coalitions to engender and legitimise policy formation and institutional and resource realignment; the latter frames and moderates the nature and interpretation of the policy window via the interaction of agency and institutional dynamics, including coherence and path dependence, that is, the notion that historical contingency and self-reinforcing dynamics determine institutional evolutionary change.⁹ This interplay between policy window and policy formation determines the nature of the EU's external engagement (see Figure 1 below).

The framework implicitly assumes that the EU's engagement with a world in flux – one that is "more connected, contested and complex"¹⁰ – influences not only the policy window and policy formation but also the EU's internal agenda. To reflect the dynamic

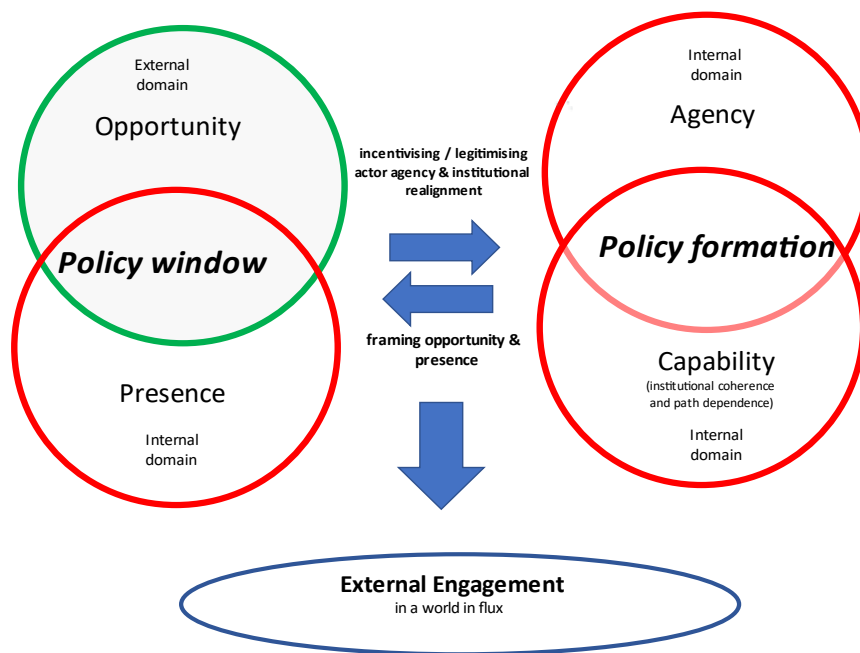
⁸ Schunz, Simon and Chad Damro, "Expanding Actorness to Explain EU External Engagement in Originally Internal Policy Areas", *Journal of European Public Policy* 27, no. 1 (2020): 122-140.

⁹ David, Paul, "Why Are Institutions Carriers of History? Path Dependence and the Evolution of Conventions, Organisations and Institutions", *Structural Change and Economic Dynamics* 5, no. 2 (1994): 205-220.

¹⁰ EEAS, "Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe, A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy", June 2016. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eugs_review_web_0.pdf

nature of policy evolution over time, the framework is applied to three episodes of policy development between 2015 and 2022, further explained below: emergence (2015-2019); amplification (2019-21); and diffusion (2021-today).

Figure 1: Framework for explaining and assessing the internationalisation of the EU's Just Transition agenda



Source: author's compilation.

Based on these conceptual considerations, the paper identifies, for each of the three episodes, the policy window and policy formation process, before considering the interplay between these two and considering these evolutionary policy dynamics of Just Transition in two specific contexts: the EU's neighbourhood and the Global South.

The paper is based on and informed by qualitative research involving document analysis of EU and international sources as well as twenty semi-structured interviews undertaken between May and June 2022, either in-person or online, with relevant actors. Interviewees were drawn from: the European Commission; the European External Action Service (EEAS); the ILO; research bodies; non-governmental organisations (NGOs); and the trade union movement. It also draws on the expanding (grey) literature on Just Transition in the EU context.

The Evolving Externalisation of the EU's Just Transition Agenda

This section analyses the evolution of EU external Just Transition policy since the Paris Agreement over three sequential, overlapping policy episodes:

1. *Emergence* (2015-2019): During this period, Just Transition emerged as a tenet of energy transition in the EU, especially in coal regions, and was promoted internationally by the EU via mechanisms such as the COP framework and the 'Platform for Coal Regions in Transition', later known as the EU Initiative for Coal Regions in Transition;
2. *Amplification* (2019-2021): During this phase, Just Transition became central to the EU's landmark European Green Deal, and was amplified accordingly on the international stage; in addition, a new instrument dedicated to transition in the EU neighbourhood was launched;
3. *Diffusion* (2021-today): In this period, Just Transition has become a notable dimension of EU external engagement, particularly in a multilateral context; however, the meaning of diffusion is equivocal, potentially implying either dissemination or dissipation.

Emergence (2015-2019)

Policy Window

The **opportunity** for EU policy activism became pronounced in December 2015 when the preamble to the Paris Agreement noted that efforts to address climate change should take account of "the imperatives of a just transition of the workforce and the creation of decent work in accordance with nationally defined development priorities".¹¹ This proviso was one of a number in the preamble to incentivise and de-risk attainment of NDCs, that is parties' domestic plans to cut emissions to limit global warming. Notably, the emphasis on workers mirrored the Guidelines for a Just Transition that had just been drafted by the ILO,¹² whilst the allusion to development priorities aligned Just Transition with the UN's broader Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted three months before and their central, transformative promise 'to leave no

¹¹ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, *Paris Agreement*, 12 December 2015.

¹² ILO, "Guidelines for a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all", 2015. https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_emp/@emp_ent/documents/publication/wcms_432859.pdf

one behind'.¹³ Furthermore, the preamble's recognition of "the intrinsic relationship of climate change actions with equitable access to sustainable development and eradication of poverty" accentuated a tri-partite association between climate action, Just Transition and social development.¹⁴

In the wake of the agreement, the abatement of coal use, the largest anthropogenic source of carbon dioxide, became a collective focus for diverse international actors, including NGOs, research bodies, multi-actor alliances and inter-governmental organisations such as Bankwatch, the World Wildlife Foundation, Climate Strategies, E3G, the Powering Past Coal Alliance and the World Bank. Although these actors linked coal abatement with a Just Transition, tellingly, no one definition united them. NGOs often adopted expansive definitions relating to distributive and procedural justices, whilst other actors focused on narrower definitions addressing the immediate energy and labour market consequences of coal phase-out.

In 2018, COP 24's 'Solidarity and Just Transition Silesia Declaration'¹⁵ reiterated the challenges for workers and communities affected by decarbonisation in the context of the ILO guidelines. Simultaneously, it accommodated more eclectic perspectives, noting that the attainment of SDGs required joined-up solutions to environmental, social and economic problems. Significantly, the Declaration emphasised the importance of participatory and representative processes involving social partners, thereby elevating the bottom-up and inclusive dimensions of Just Transition.

In this initial phase, an opportunity had therefore emerged for EU external action, even if the Just Transition concept remained – both in terms of outcome and process – imprecise and unbounded, in part because of its explicit alignment with other contemporary policy ambitions on the global stage.

In terms of the EU's **presence** to engage with and influence the emergent international Just Transition agenda, this was premised on a combination of competences based on its legal *acquis*. Article 191 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU) encourages the Union's policymakers to "promote measures at international level to deal with regional or worldwide environmental problems, and in particular combating

¹³ United Nations, "Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", 2015. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/post2015/transformingourworld/publication>

¹⁴ United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, *Paris Agreement*, 12 December 2015.

¹⁵ COP24, "Solidarity and Just Transition Silesia Declaration", Katowice, 2018. <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-14545-2018-REV-1/en/pdf>

climate change". In addition, articles 174 and 175 TFEU give the EU powers in the economic, social and territorial spheres required for supporting a Just Transition internally. Altogether, these capacities in conjunction with a strong secondary legal *acquis* in the areas of environmental, regional and – to some extent – social policies, gave the EU the ability to lead by example on the global stage by sharing lessons gained internally.

More specifically, the launch of the EU's Platform for Coal Regions in Transition in late 2017 represented a new instrument to promote Just Transition in EU coal regions through the provision of events, guidance and technical assistance. Therefore, the EU had policies and practices relating to coal phase-out that were of interest outside its borders and an enabling mandate to share its experience and knowledge. Tellingly, the Platform soon became a vehicle for engaging countries in the EU neighbourhood and the Global South (such as Ukraine and South Africa), and international organisations, including the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the World Bank. However, the EU's presence was a product of deep-rooted institutional circumstances and conventions informed by internal necessity and historic precedent, relating to EU integration and not the external context. In short, its presence exhibited a path-dependent character.

Altogether, between 2015 and 2019, a significant but somewhat ambiguous policy window opened for the European Union in terms of Just Transition. Although the EU had the presence to engage with this external opportunity, its institutional disposition was internally focused. While coal abatement provided a unifying policy focus for disparate international actors, no unifying definition was evident for Just Transition, both outside and inside the EU. Rather, the term had emerged as compound and contingent on the values and preferences of the user. To explain how such inconsistency was accommodated, there is a need to understand the policy window's interaction with policy formation, discussed next.

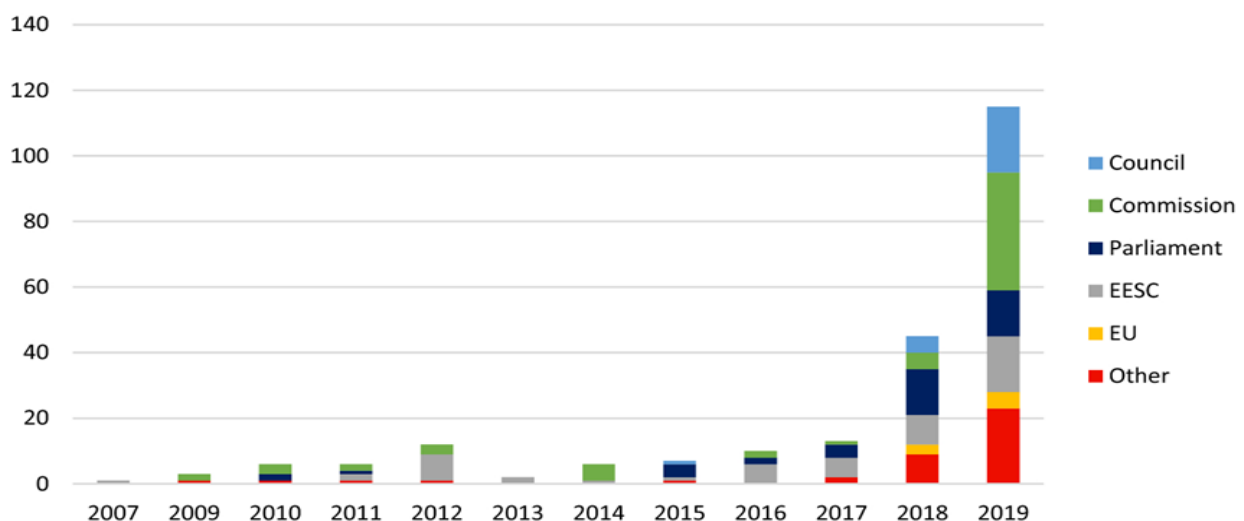
Policy Formation

The emergence of the EU's Just Transition agenda was dependent on the **agency** of Members of the European Parliament (MEPs), especially those from eastern Member States where coal was a significant economic sector. MEPs, recognising the requirement for coal abatement if not phase-out to meet climate targets, advanced the concept of Just Transition to secure mitigating investment in affected EU regions.

As early as 2015, the European Parliament along with other EU actors proposed that Emissions Trading Scheme revenues should be used for enabling a Just Transition in impacted territories and communities.¹⁶ As Figure 2 demonstrates, between 2015 and 2019, the number of EU documents mentioning Just Transition rose rapidly and the European Parliament played a critical role in the elevation of the topic, prior to the European Commission's evident embrace of the concept as of 2019. In turn, the increasing activism of the European Parliament opened the space for the Commission's Directorate-General for Energy (DG ENER), in close co-ordination with its Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO), to create an innovative internal instrument, the Coal Regions in Transition Platform, which emerged as a global exemplar.

The emphasis placed on territorial intervention by the European Parliament and, in turn, the European Commission led to a significant role for DG REGIO in the emergent Just Transition policy domain, thereby linking the concept with existing internal EU cohesion policy and its principles of regional concentration, programming and partnership. Such a territorial policy lens arguably marginalised other potential policy frameworks for interpreting and addressing Just Transition, such as the broader framing of techno-industrial systems change.

Figure 2: Number of EU documents mentioning “just transition”, 2007-2019



Source: Kyriazi and Miró (2022)¹⁷

¹⁶ Theodosiou, Ioanna and Nikos Mantzaris, *Just Transition: History, Development and Challenges in Greece and Europe*, Athens: The Green Tank, 2020.

¹⁷ Kyriazi, Anna and Joan Miró, "Towards a Socially Fair Green Transition in the EU? An Analysis of the Just Transition Fund Using the Multiple Streams Framework", *Comparative European Politics* (2022), <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41295-022-00304-6>

In this period, internal vertical and horizontal institutional dynamics enhanced the EU's **capability** to respond to the opportunity and utilise its presence. Member States were increasingly aware of the decarbonisation implications of NDCs and parallel evolution of EU policy (e.g., National Energy and Climate Plans¹⁸). Despite having differing positions on coal phase-out, all were drawn into the policy debate. For example, Poland, which was uncommitted to coal phase-out, used its Presidency of COP 24 at Katowice in 2018 to ensure that the issue of a Just Transition, and by implication its funding, was advanced on a global stage by promoting the Silesia Declaration, along with other Member States with a significant coal sector, such as Bulgaria, Czechia, Germany, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain. Institutional coherence was also exhibited across EU bodies as the European Commission embraced the Just Transition agenda initiated by the Parliament. As observed, DG REGIO's significant role in the development of DG ENER's EU Coal Regions in Transition Platform ensured that the initiative had a regional focus and an emphasis on inclusive horizontal and vertical partnership and social dialogue, in line with DG REGIO's existing principles.

In synthesis, policy formation between 2015 and 2019 was strongly impacted by the European Parliament's agency on EU Just Transition policy. Although the Parliament was unsuccessful in securing funding for affected territories, its activism led to the policy space and momentum for the creation by the European Commission of the Coal Regions in Transition Platform. Notwithstanding the absence of a unifying EU position on coal phase-out, there was broad unanimity in affected Member States that EU funds were required to support regional socio-economic adjustment. Just Transition represented an emergent global paradigm to further the case for this funding. COP24 was used to advance an internal political ambition by promoting Just Transition on a global stage via the Silesia Declaration. Additionally, and in relation to the precise way in which Just Transition was advanced within the EU, the Commission's emergent policy disposition was internally focused and informed by embedded principles and practices.

The Inter-relationship of the Policy Window and Policy Formulation

During this period, a broad coalition of international actors emerged advocating coal phase-out. This overarching common goal accommodated the actors' differing definitions of Just Transition. To facilitate and legitimise EU policy formation and the

¹⁸ European Commission, "Clean Energy for All Europeans", 2019. https://energy.ec.europa.eu/topics/energy-strategy/clean-energy-all-europeans-package_en

alignment of institutional and resource arrangements, this global movement was harnessed by EU actors. In doing so, the EU implicitly accepted accompanying definitional ambiguity about the meaning of Just Transition. In turn, internal policy formation informed the external policy domain through EU participation in the UN climate regime and the EU's external promotion of its internally focused coal phase-out initiative. This symbiotic relationship between internal and external policy domains would become more pronounced as of 2019.

Amplification (2019-2021)

Policy Window

During this period from early 2019 to COP26 in late 2021, Just Transition, especially regarding coal phase-out, represented a significant **opportunity** for external EU policy activism. COP25, which was held in Madrid in 2019, elevated the urgency for the concept's global adoption and the need for multilateral action but created limited tangible outcomes. This led the ITUC and NGOs to call for collective, detailed international planning and implementation for a Just Transition.¹⁹ However, such pleas were quickly overshadowed by the Covid-19 pandemic and a refocusing of global public policy.

Despite this unforeseen challenge, the coalition of diverse actors that had evolved after the Paris Agreement, particularly in the context of coal phase-out, ensured that the concept remained at the forefront of policy debate via on-line events and publications. Moreover, a collective sense of mission was buoyed by a 4% decline in global coal use in 2020.²⁰ Nevertheless, a review of policy documents from this period reveals the concept's ongoing definitional elasticity; from a means of securing labour rights to a vehicle for social development in the Global South.²¹ Notably, in this second phase, the EU promoted a short but ambitious definition of Just Transition in the context of the European Green Deal, which would have immediate traction in the EU and beyond, arguing that no person and no place should be left behind.²²

¹⁹ ITUC, "Climate ambition and Just Transition plans urgently required to tackle climate crisis", 2 December 2019. <https://www.ituc-csi.org/COP25>

²⁰ The fall in 2020 was attributed to the pandemic and a decline in natural gas prices.

²¹ Climate Strategies, "Incorporating just transition strategies into developing countries NDCs", 2021. <https://climatestrategies.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Incorporating-just-transition-strategies-into-developing-countries-NDCs-and-Covid-19-responses.pdf>

²² European Commission, "The European Green Deal", COM(2019) 640, Brussels, 11 December 2019. https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en

During this period, the EU's **presence** on the global stage was amplified by the launch of the EGD in December 2019. At COP25, a few days prior to its unveiling, Kadri Simson, the new European Commissioner for Energy, caught the world's attention by stating that the EU would "lead the way to becoming the first carbon neutral continent by 2050".²³ The EGD's broad aims – encompassing climate neutrality, decoupling of economic growth from resource use, and no person and no place left behind – were heralded by the new Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, as "Europe's man on the moon moment".²⁴ A section of the EGD communication dedicated to 'The EU as a Global Leader' represented an unambiguous expression of the EU's desire to further enhance its global presence.

Subsequently, a series of rapid announcements, such as those related to the creation of the Just Transition Mechanism and the Recovery and Resilience Facility, underscored the EU as a unique geopolitical actor of intent. Moreover, the 'European Climate Law' that entered into force in July 2021 and the 'Fit for 55 Package' proposed by the Commission in the same month, committing the EU to cutting emissions by 55% by 2030, represented the most notable example of regulatory climate action by a major global economy. For comparison, in April 2021, the new US administration under President Biden would also propose ambitious targets (50-52% reductions from 2005 levels by 2030) but would subsequently make limited progress with its 'Build Back Better' legislative framework, scaled down from over 2 trillion USD in 'green investments' to only a portion of the 739 billion USD 'Inflation Reduction Act' adopted in August 2022. The von der Leyen Commission had thus unequivocally set the global agenda.

Despite a mixed picture on coal phase-out timelines across Member States, the EU's Coal Regions in Transition Platform was progressively perceived as global good practice. In turn, this internally focused policy initiative inspired the creation of a similar 'sister initiative' for the Western Balkans and Ukraine in December 2020, further discussed below. In short, a combination of ambitious policy intent coupled with bold policy action was ensuring that EU presence was magnified internationally.

Overall, the evolution of the Just Transition policy window in this period was driven by the same disparate coalition of actors that had created the policy window following

²³ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P4prCSk_olA

²⁴ <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/news/article/europes-man-on-the-moon-moment-von-der-leyen-unveils-eu-green-deal#:~:text=Von%20der%20Leyen%20said%20she,man%20on%20the%20moon%20moment.>

the Paris Agreement. Without detailed planning and implementation, as called for by actors such as the ITUC, the diversity of definitions could co-exist, the tension visible but latent. However, calls for multilateral joined-up approaches and a broader policy focus, inspired by the EGD, which went beyond the unifying goal of coal phase-out, had the potential to make these inconsistencies harder to ignore. Simultaneously, through its ground-breaking ambition and range of competences, the EU had advanced its presence on the global stage and had greater license to shape the policy window. Yet within months of the EGD's announcement, this opportunity was circumscribed by the global pandemic.

Policy Formation

During this period, the **agency** of the European Commission set the EU agenda regarding Just Transition. In December 2019, the Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, in her mission letter to Frans Timmermans, the Executive Vice President for the EGD, noted that: "This will be a Geopolitical Commission".²⁵ The launch of the EGD in the same month (and the related notification of global leadership) was ample evidence of this ambition, radically expanding the international debate on energy transition beyond the phasing-out of fossil fuels to the phasing-in of green technologies and the decarbonisation of economic systems, and by default international trading relationships. Moreover, the Commission's internal commitment to leaving no person and place behind had a direct, captivating immediacy on the international stage.

The EGD's emphasis on broader decarbonisation shaped the creation of the EU's internal Just Transition Mechanism²⁶ and its focus on carbon intensive regions and their industries. As the fund was being channelled through DG REGIO, Just Transition was further associated with place-based cohesion policy (aligning with the commitment to leave no place behind) and the principles of regional targeting, programming and partnership. Thus, policy delivery was further embedded in internal precedent at a time when the Commission was framing the agenda in a global context. This seeming paradox was discernible in the Council of the European Union's 'Conclusions on Climate and Energy Diplomacy – Delivering on the External Dimension of the European

²⁵ European Commission, *Mission letter from Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission to Executive Vice-President for the European Green Deal, Frans Timmermans*, 1 December 2019. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/sites/default/files/commissioner_mission_letters/mission-letter-frans-timmermans-2019_en.pdf

²⁶ The Just Transition Mechanism was accompanied by the creation of a multi-stakeholder Just Transition Platform to assist EU regions progress implementation of related activities.

Green Deal', published in early 2021.²⁷ In this document, the Council stated that the geopolitical challenges created by the EGD can be mitigated "by promoting as well as supporting the development of socially just economic and energy diversification plans. The EU will share its experience of pursuing a socially just and inclusive energy transition, including through tools such as the Coal Regions in Transition Initiative and the Just Transition Mechanism".²⁸ As such, an internal model of transition, exhibiting path-dependent characteristics, was being advanced for external example. Also, a potential equivocation regarding leadership was discernible. Was the EU assuming a global leadership role, as indicated by the Commission, or was the sharing of internal good practice to facilitate external change, as advocated by the Council, the preference? Although not mutually exclusive, further clarity would have been beneficial.

The Council's call for further dissemination of EU experience and the appeals at COP25 for a more multilateralist approach were reflected in the establishment of the Initiative for Coal Regions in Transition in the Western Balkans and Ukraine, which was launched in December 2020.²⁹ The initiative, which brought together the Commission and six international partners, including the World Bank, the Energy Community Secretariat and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), was created to emulate its EU 'sister initiative' in terms of providing a platform for multi-stakeholder engagement and the sharing of knowledge and good practice.

In this period, horizontal coherence across EU institutions regarding internal implementation of the EGD enabled amplification of EU **capability**. In the European Commission, co-ordination of the internal Just Transition Fund was given to Vice-President Timmermans' office and its implementation to DG REGIO. Also, additional EU actors became more prominent in the promotion of a Just Transition. For example, the European Investment Bank (EIB) promoted its expertise and services in EU coal regions and in its neighbourhood via the new coal initiative for the Western Balkans and Ukraine. Despite such coherence, policy research actors, such as the European Council on Foreign Relations, the College of Europe and the German Development

²⁷ Council of the European Union, "Council conclusions on climate and energy diplomacy, delivering the external dimension of the European Green Deal", 25 January 2021. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/48057/st05263-en21.pdf>

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

²⁹ See https://energy.ec.europa.eu/topics/oil-gas-and-coal/coal-regions-western-balkans-and-ukraine/initiative-coal-regions-transition-western-balkans-and-ukraine_en

Institute,³⁰ observed that insufficient attention was being given to the geopolitical implications of the EGD, and by default Just Transition, and its interplay with other EU policy areas such as international development, security and trade. Despite Just Transition's framing as an inclusive and bottom-up process and implicit challenge to vested interests and entrenched elites, the geopolitical consequences of the concept seemed obscured.

Finally, regarding vertical institutional alignment, the picture was seemingly ambiguous. Although numerous Member States were committed to coal phase-out, some demonstrated less urgency (Germany identified a 2039 phase-out date) and other significant coal users, such as Poland and Bulgaria, made no firm commitments. Below the pan-EU surface and discourse, the intra-EU reality did not always suggest global leadership.

Overall, EU policy formation regarding Just Transition evolved significantly in this period with the launch of the trailblazing EGD and resulting legislation and policies. Additionally, the creation of the Initiative for Coal Regions in Transition in the Western Balkans and Ukraine represented a notable example of external multilateral action enabled by the EU. Even so, an imbalance between internal past practice and externally oriented foresight in shaping policy arguably existed. Such a tension meant that new policy did not wholly align with the realities and specificities of the external environment or fully recognise the geopolitical consequences of promoting Just Transition. Finally, despite evident policy amplification and a desire for a leading role on the global stage, the nature of the EU's leadership in the external domain remained open to interpretation.

The Inter-relationship of the Policy Window and Policy Formulation

During this period, the external policy window expanded markedly for the EU, largely because of the international reverberations of its own EGD. Thus, the policy window evolved beyond a principal focus on coal to the broader socio-economic agenda of decarbonisation and the phasing-in of greener energy technologies, thereby further complicating the attribution of meaning to Just Transition. Despite the EU's international ambitions, an emphasis on internal agency and innovation, predicated

³⁰ Pisani-Ferry, Jean, Guntram B. Wolff, Simone Tagliapietra, Jeremy Shapiro, and Mark Leonard, "The Geopolitics of the European Green Deal", Policy Contribution 04/21, Brussels: Bruegel; Koch, Svea and Niels Keijzer, "The External Dimensions of the European Green Deal", Bonn: German Development Institute, 2021.

on its own unique institutional circumstances, inferred a degree of misalignment between policy formation for its external action and the external policy window. However, to quote a former British Prime Minister, “events, dear boy, events”³¹ ensured that such anomalies went unaddressed. The pandemic understandably put many things on hold.

Diffusion (2021-today)

Policy Window

In regard to **opportunity**, the declaration ‘Supporting the Conditions for a Just Transition Internationally at COP 26’, in late 2021, reiterated the need to “support communities and regions that are particularly vulnerable to the economic, employment and social effects of a global transition”.³² In addition to its support for affected workers and places, the declaration recognised the requirement for inclusive approaches based on multi-stakeholder engagement, and the advancement of human rights. Notably, its reference to “new and emerging supply chains required for the clean transition” accentuated the duality between phasing-out and phasing-in of energy technologies. Despite this broader agenda, the earlier prediction of coal’s global demise had been premature. In 2021, coal consumption surged, hitting a new annual global record (see Figure 3).³³ The world’s biggest source of anthropogenic carbon dioxide emissions was unabated, while the international policy focus on Just Transition was widening. This seeming policy paradox was underscored by COP26 only committing to the global ‘phase-down’ rather than the ‘phase-out’ of coal.³⁴

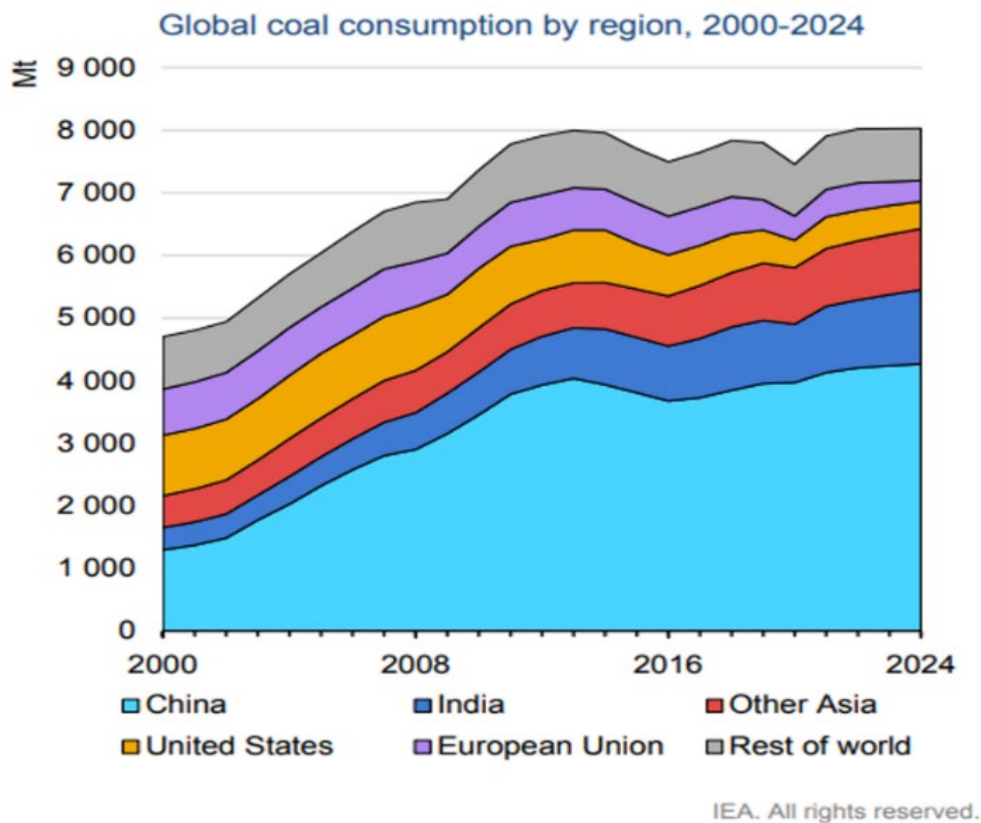
³¹ Attributed to Harold Macmillan, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, 1957-1963.

³² UK Government, “Supporting the conditions for a just transition internationally”, 4 November 2021, <https://ukcop26.org/supporting-the-conditions-for-a-just-transition-internationally>

³³ International Energy Agency, “Global CO2 emissions rebound to their highest level in history in 2021”, *Press release*, 8 March 2022. <https://www.iea.org/news/global-co2-emissions-rebounded-to-their-highest-level-in-history-in-2021>

³⁴ Singh, Shivani, Aaron Sheldrick and Noah Browning, “‘Down’ and ‘out’? COP26 wording clouds way ahead on climate”, *Reuters*, 15 November 2021. <https://www.reuters.com/business/cop/business-usual-global-fossil-fuel-firms-now-after-un-climate-deal-2021-11-15>

Figure 3: The king is dead? Coal makes a comeback



Source: International Energy Agency (2022)³⁵

Despite this reversal, COP26 saw the launch of the Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP) with South Africa by the G7 countries and the EU. Subsequently, this emergent multilateral model was advanced for other large coal-dependent economies in the Global South, namely India, Indonesia and Vietnam.

As in the previous period, an unanticipated event, this time Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the related global energy shock, complicated the phase-out of coal and other fossil fuels, particularly natural gas, and, by default, the advancement of Just Transition. A pressing need for energy security raised a pragmatic question about the nature of transition. Did an ordered energy transition take precedence over a fair and inclusive one? The JETPs' seeming prioritisation of energy security over procedural justice (in terms of inclusive bottom-up processes) and accommodation of countries with poor human rights records, and the hasty creation of bilateral, fossil fuel-based energy partnerships to diversify away from Russia as key supplier in 2022, with countries such as Egypt and Azerbaijan, indicated that an answer was emerging. Yet, such pragmatism sat uncomfortably with the EU's commitment to a Just Transition, from Paris

³⁵ International Energy Agency, "Global CO₂ emissions rebound to their highest level in history in 2021", Press release, 8 March 2022.

in 2015 to Glasgow in 2021, and Vice President Timmermans' statement in Jakarta in 2021 that "boundaries are the same in the developing world as in the developed world: we should leave no one behind",³⁶ which had suggested EU support for cosmopolitan justice.

Finally, during this period, the EU's **presence** assumed a more multilateralist character. The EU used this disposition to shape the design of the new G7 JETP instrument, whilst the competences of the EEAS and EU Delegations coordinated engagement and intelligence in the potential recipient countries. As the policy focus of Just Transition broadened to the Global South, 30% of the EU's development aid was harnessed for external climate action, along with the EU's Global Gateway initiative. As noted, the EU also used its powers to develop bilateral energy relationships with several nearby countries to promote energy security. Moreover, extending its presence, the EU's internal Coal Regions in Transition Initiative in 2022 was given the additional undertaking to "engage with international partners and initiatives". In short, EU presence in the external domain was more evident than ever before.

In sum, the Just Transition policy window during this period was becoming increasingly fluid and contingent. Although coal remained the primary (and even growing) source of carbon dioxide emissions, the sectoral focus of Just Transition was rapidly shifting. Such breadth increased the level of complexity for policy debate and prescription and represented an impediment to the creation of multi-actor coalitions, like that promoting a coal phase-out. Significantly, the new JETPs and EU bilateral energy partnerships were engaging with countries where inclusive and fair processes, commonly accepted features of a Just Transition, were often absent. Critically, the evolution of the policy window was again distorted by unforeseen geopolitical shocks. In short, the concept's inherent elasticity was, if anything, increasing not decreasing, conditioned by a dynamic, uncertain global environment.

Policy Formation

In May 2022, a recalibration of European Commission policy **agency** was evidenced by the publication of its REPowerEU Plan in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.³⁷

³⁶ AP News, "EU commissioner on climate action: Leave no one behind", 19 October 2021. <https://apnews.com/article/climate-change-technology-science-business-environment-and-nature-f4c906c5f494ce62ecbe891d48242f65>

³⁷ European Commission, "REPowerEU Plan", COM(2022) 230, Brussels, 18 May 2022. https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal/repower-eu-affordable-secure-and-sustainable-energy-europe_en

This policy refocusing maintained commitment to a just and fair transition, whilst accepting that Member States' coal phase-out timelines could flex. The REPowerEU Plan was also accompanied by a supporting communication on external energy engagement by the European Commission and EEAS which recognised the EU's role in 'leading' a global just energy transition.³⁸ This latter document stressed that "social aspects of reshaping energy systems must be central to transition" and that the biggest coal-consuming countries should be the focus of external policy.³⁹ Tactically, the document positioned EU global engagement in a multilateral context (through flagship instruments such as the JETPs, the Western Balkans and Ukraine Coal Regions in Transition Initiative and climate change mitigation finance) and situated the EU's understanding of Just Transition alongside the ILO and International Energy Agency's (IEA), reflecting the declaration issued at COP26 several months before.

Although the communication on external energy engagement represented a clarification of intent and means, potential tensions were perceptible. The document framed EU intervention as primarily a technocratic process, sidestepping the politically orientated, procedural nature of Just Transition and its innate challenge to vested interests and embedded elites (echoing the emergent positioning of the JETP instrument). Additionally, the document's creditable focus on Just Transition in the context of coal phase-out did not readily align with the outcome of the African Union - European Union summit in February 2022, which signaled the potential development of JET Partnerships in countries with limited coal dependence, such as Senegal, and EU backing for African hydrogen production linked to Just Transition in the context of SDGs.⁴⁰

Finally, in terms of **capability**, policy coherence across a range of EC Directorate-Generals (such as CLIMA, ENER and INTPA (International Partnerships)) and the EEAS was notable in this period, especially in the context of the JETPs with joint missions to

³⁸ European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, "EU External Energy Engagement in a Changing World", JOIN(2022) 23, Brussels, 18 May 2022.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁴⁰ Medinilla, Alfonso and Hanne Knaepen, "After the EU-AU Summit: Inching towards just transition in Africa", *ECDPM Commentary*, 21 February 2022. <https://ecdpm.org/talking-points/after-the-eu-au-summit-inching-towards-just-transition-in-africa>; Kurmayer, Nikolaus J., "EU aims to make Africa a world champion in hydrogen exports", *Euractiv*, 15 February 2022. <https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy/news/eu-aims-to-make-africa-a-world-champion-in-hydrogen-exports>

candidate countries and regular inter-Cabinet dialogue.⁴¹ Previous criticisms that the EGD's geopolitical implications went unacknowledged were now less relevant. In a speech prior to COP26, Marc Vanheukelen, Ambassador at Large for Climate Diplomacy at the EEAS, observed that managing the geopolitics of decarbonisation represented a first-order priority for EU external action.⁴² However, vertical coherence remained relatively equivocal. Through the auspices of the G7, Germany and France were instrumental in selecting JETP countries, though their positions were arguably more guided by national preferences and G7 dynamics than EU discourse. France advocated the inclusion of multiple African countries in the roll-out of the JETP model and Germany linked relations with the Global South to natural gas and hydrogen potential.⁴³ Furthermore, the EU's overall coal phase-out programme remained uncertain. The mid-century target date identified by Poland, the EU's largest coal producer, seemed intangibly distant, whilst coal consumption was forecast to increase in Europe's largest economy, Germany.⁴⁴

In synthesis, the communication on external energy engagement reaffirmed the EU's commitment to Just Transition at a time of profound flux and threat. Despite its emphasis on a Just Transition in the context of coal phase-out, the concept's increasing association with varied policy priorities, such as hydrogen production in Africa and energy security in the Global South, indicated that policy parameters remained fluid. Additionally, the communication's reference to EU global leadership was open to interpretation, although a duality in engagement was perhaps emerging: involvement in the JETPs in the Global South was multilateralist in character, whilst relations with nearby countries, such as Azerbaijan and Egypt, were bilaterally orientated. Given the volatile policy window, a degree of anomaly was probably an

⁴¹ European External Action Service, "Media Talk about the EU Green Deal and its Implication for Vietnam's Growth Strategy", *Press release*, 27 April 2022. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/vietnam/media-talk-about-eu-green-deal-and-its-implications-vietnam%E2%80%99s-growth-strategy_en

⁴² United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, *Paris Agreement*, 12 December 2015.

⁴³ Elysée, "Just Energy Transition Partnerships in Africa", *Press release*, 18 February 2022. <https://www.elysee.fr/en/emmanuel-macron/2022/02/18/just-energy-transition-partnerships-in-africa>; Nweke-Eze, Chigozie and Rainer Quitzow, "The Promise of African Clean Hydrogen Exports: Potentials and Pitfalls", Brookings Institution, 10 May 2022. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/africa-in-focus/2022/05/10/the-promise-of-african-clean-hydrogen-exports-potentials-and-pitfalls>

⁴⁴ Argus, "German utilities expect higher coal burn", 25 February 2022. <https://www.argusmedia.com/en/news/2305304-german-utilities-expect-higher-coal-burn-correction>

acceptable inevitability in the short term, even if it could damage global authority in the longer term.

The Inter-relationship of the Policy Window and Policy Formation

During this final period, mutability in EU coal phase-out timelines and rapid change to Europe's projected energy mix reflected uncertainty in the external environment. This unstable policy window seemingly privileged pragmatic policy formation, based on energy security, over broader notions of distributional and procedural justice. In turn, the promotion by the EU and Member States of new technologies, such as hydrogen, widened the Just Transition policy window beyond coal. A more hazardous context was heightening tensions in EU policy which could lead to its dissipation. The EU seemed to be reaching a crossroads regarding its interface with the policy window and management of the internal and external policy nexus.

Summary: The Evolution of the EU's External Agenda

Three evolutionary episodes of EU external Just Transition policy can be observed: emergence; amplification; and diffusion. In the first two periods, the policy window was notably shaped by the EU's own agenda, whilst policy formation was often derivative in nature, shaped by EU internal processes and practices. More recently, the EU's external activities were framed in a multilateralist context, which encouraged the EU to act in a less path-dependent manner. Such collaboration, especially in the context of the JETPs, and the recent EU recalibration of energy policy have meant that tenets of the EU's internal policy, such as social dialogue and inclusive bottom-up approaches, have become less pronounced in the external domain, risking decoupling of EU policy from an intrinsic aspect of the concept.

The evolution of EU policy formation has been profoundly shaped by unanticipated exogenous shocks that have rapidly reconfigured the policy window, namely the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine. The latter was the trigger for the EU communication on external energy engagement which seemingly framed Just Transition as primarily technical and technocratic in nature with limited allusion to its political essence, which is markedly geopolitical given the external context. This relationship between Just Transition and geopolitics is further explored below.

EU External Engagement in Specific International Contexts

In this section, two cases of EU engagement will be examined in greater detail to ground the research in the specificities of contrasting international contexts. The first concerns the EU neighbourhood and the related Coal Regions in Transition Initiative; the second focuses on the roll-out of JETPs in the Global South.

EU Neighbourhood: The Example of the Initiative for Coal Regions in Transition

Since December 2020, the Initiative for Coal Regions in Transition in the Western Balkans and Ukraine has aimed to assist Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Ukraine progress coal phase-out in a manner that engenders a Just Transition. The initiative, which is managed by the European Commission and six partner organisations, provides a platform for multi-stakeholder dialogue and the exchange of experience and knowledge between the coal regions in the selected countries and also with EU counterparts.

In terms of the initiative's policy window, in the year of its launch, the 16 coal-fired power plants in the Western Balkans produced more emissions than the circa 250 coal power plants in the EU.⁴⁵ Moreover, the countries within the scope of the initiative had no detailed plans or definitive timelines for coal phase-out. Notably, institutional and political conditions for a Just Transition varied amongst the target countries and with the EU. For example, coal-based electricity generation provided significant revenues for several of the national governments and the capacity to facilitate transition at a sub-national level was markedly less evident than in the EU. Critically, as observed by Ademmer et al.,⁴⁶ rather than constituting a simple benign bilateral association, the opportunity in the area was informed by a profound, if at times implicit, triangular relationship involving Russia. This reality was to become explicit in 2022 with Russia's invasion of Ukraine and its multi-dimensional policy repercussions; abruptly demonstrating that Just Transition is enfolded in wider geopolitical considerations, including security.

⁴⁵ Simon, Frédéric, "Western Balkan countries are milking coal power plants until the bitter end", *Euractiv*, 10 June 2021. <https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy/interview/official-western-balkan-countries-are-milking-coal-power-plants-until-the-bitter-end>

⁴⁶ Ademmer, Esther, Laure Delcour and Katarzyna Wolczuk, "Beyond geopolitics: exploring the impact of the EU and Russia in the 'contested neighborhood'", *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 57, no. 1 (2012): 1-18.

In terms of policy formation, DG ENER and DG NEAR (Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations) took inspiration from the EU's pre-existing Coal Regions in Transition Initiative. In doing so, the European Commission was seeking to externally disseminate an internal model,⁴⁷ thereby encouraging change in accordance with the EU's internal policy and regulatory norms and agendas.⁴⁸ To create a broad institutional coalition, in line with international calls for multilateralism, the European Commission convened a novel partnership.⁴⁹ However, the absence of a dedicated financial instrument, similar to the Just Transition Mechanism, to incentivise and de-risk transition was highlighted as a shortcoming by NGOs.⁵⁰ It arguably contributed to the deferment of requisite national reforms such as carbon pricing and participation in the EU Emissions Trading Scheme. The initiative's power was primarily based on its ability to influence through the exchange of knowledge and good practice, and the lending of the differing partner banks.

The initiative's design was premised on technocratic and tactical considerations relating to energy transition and was, therefore, only partially embedded in the broader context of EU foreign policy interests. Thus, at the outset, its framing was insufficiently cognisant of the area's inherent triangular relationship with Russia. Following the EU's energy policy reset of May 2022, the initiative now co-exists with new policy goals, including the rebuilding of the Ukrainian energy system and the proposed integration of the Western Balkans into the EU's internal electricity market.

To summarise, despite an innovative multilateralist approach, the initial framing of the policy opportunity as one relating to the transfer of normatively conditioned advice and support to enable energy transition arguably masked geopolitical contingencies. Moreover, institutional factors underpinning the success of the EU 'sister initiative' were often absent in the target countries, making the initiative's operationalisation challenging, especially at the regional and local levels. In the absence of a financial 'bazooka' that could mitigate the socio-economic consequences of decarbonisation, arguably too much is expected from a policy troika of persuasion, example and lending to facilitate change. Overnight, the initiative found itself

⁴⁷ Schimmelfennig, Frank. "Europeanization Beyond Europe", *Living Reviews in European Governance* 7 (2012).

⁴⁸ Damro, Chad, "Market Power Europe", *Journal of European Public Policy* 19, no. 5 (2012): 682-699.

⁴⁹ College of Europe, EBRD, EIB, Energy Community Secretariat, National Fund for Environment, World Bank.

⁵⁰ Bankwatch and The Green Tank, "A Just Transition Fund for the Western Balkan countries", 2021.

operating in a transformed neighbourhood with Just Transition sitting alongside other geopolitical priorities.

Global South: The Example of the Just Energy Transition Partnership

At COP26 in November 2021, a Just Energy Transition Partnership for South Africa was announced by the G7 and the European Union. The new multilateral model aimed to mobilise USD 8.5 billion to accelerate decarbonisation of South Africa's electricity system. The intention of rolling out further JETPs for Vietnam, Indonesia and India was identified in the recent EU communication on external energy engagement.

A key concept informing the JETPs' policy window is that of 'Common but Differentiated Responsibilities' – the precept that all countries are responsible for addressing global climate change, but they are not equally responsible. This has led to recognition that large emitters or historical ones should play a greater role in achieving emissions reductions. This paradigm shaped G7 policy considerations prior to the Glasgow COP in 2021, leading it to progress a partnership with South Africa, the most coal-intensive G20 economy. This multilateralist approach by G7 members, including the EU, can be viewed as a revived convergence of interests, ideas and agency after the acrimonious Trump years.

However, ambiguity regarding the type of Just Transition that the new instrument was aiming to promote was evident in its formative months. In G7 communiqués prior to COP26, references to achieving net-zero emissions in a just way and the attainment of SDGs overlapped.⁵¹ This was emphasised by a French Government press release noting that a key aim of the JETP instrument was the delivery of the SDGs.⁵² Additionally, although the large coal-consuming countries India, Indonesia and Vietnam were identified as probable JET partners, the model was also proposed for non-coal-dependent countries, such as Senegal.⁵³ Finally, President Macron's ambition to create "multiple such strategic financing examples between now and COP27",⁵⁴ illuminated the need to clarify the instrument's focus and its long-term

⁵¹ UK Government, "G7 Climate and Environment Ministers' Communiqué", London, 21 May 2021.

⁵² United Nations, "Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development", 2015.

⁵³ Kurmayer, Nikolaus J., "Energy tops Scholz's agenda in Senegal and South Africa", *Euractiv*, 25 May 2022. <https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy/news/energy-tops-scholz-agenda-in-senegal-and-south-africa>

⁵⁴ Medinilla, Alfonso and Hanne Knaepen, "After the EU-AU Summit: Inching towards just transition in Africa", *ECDPM Commentary*, 21 February 2022.

funding model. Were JETPs to be underpinned by fresh donor grants or loans from international banks which would increase sovereign debt of recipients?

Recent developments are revealing the JETP instrument to have an emphasis on the adoption of greener energy technologies, regulatory reform, supply and resilience, and cost.⁵⁵ Given the urgency of this practical agenda and its ability to forge consensus between politically diverse partners in the Global North and South, distributive and procedural issues are in danger of marginalisation. The G7 is engaging with governments with divergent human rights records and international interests, as exemplified by their UN voting records regarding the Ukraine war. Arguably, a liberal intergovernmental political forum is thus pursuing a normative agenda in an increasingly contested world with uncertain financial incentive.

In terms of policy formation, the JETP, like the coal initiative in the Western Balkans and Ukraine, has emerged as an instrument that exhibits novelty in its multilateral complexion but promotes adoption of normative policy, regulatory and technical agendas, arguably at the expense of radical policy co-creation with recipients. An asymmetry in Global North and Global South partner relations as observed in the formation of EU aid programmes has seemingly carried over to the JETPs.⁵⁶ This has led to the South African Government questioning the composition and conditions of the 8.5 billion USD finance package months after its announcement and stakeholders in the country, such as trade unions and subnational actors, seeking involvement.⁵⁷

While there are evident linkages with broader EU foreign policy objectives, such as security and trade,⁵⁸ these seem somewhat obscured, as is the potential role of EU-based corporations and their technologies in shaping the delivery of the JETPs. Although the geopolitical implications of the EGD are now commonly debated, those

⁵⁵ Lin, Max Tingyao, "Indonesia, Vietnam show ambition in coal phaseouts but face strong challenges in electricity reforms", *IHS Markit*, 18 November 2021; EEAS, "Media Talk about the EU Green Deal and its Implication for Vietnam's Growth Strategy", *Press release*, 27 April 2022. https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/vietnam/media-talk-about-eu-green-deal-and-its-implications-vietnam%E2%80%99s-growth-strategy_en

⁵⁶ Mackie, James, "Lomé to Cotonou: What happened to the 'Spirit of Lomé' in EU development Co-operation", *EU Diplomacy Paper*, no. 7, 2021, Bruges: College of Europe.

⁵⁷ Thomson Reuters Foundation, "Global aid deals to end coal urged to prioritise workers, transparency", 21 January 2022 <https://www.reuters.com/markets/commodities/global-aid-deals-end-coal-urged-prioritise-workers-transparency-2022-01-21>; International Trade Union Confederation, "A Just Transition energy partnership for South Africa", 18 March 2022. <https://www.ituc-csi.org/a-Just-Transition-energy-partnership-for-South-Africa>

⁵⁸ For example, the four selected countries have notable reserves of critical raw materials and rare earth minerals.

of the JETP instrument remain less so, notwithstanding the potential challenge to incumbent interests and elites in recipient countries.

In terms of institutional coherence in the EU, the JETP instrument has successfully mobilised a range of Commission Services and the diplomatic capacities of the EEAS. Policy formation has been pursued in a collegiate fashion via inter-Cabinet and inter-service co-ordination and country missions, utilising the in-country expertise and resources of EU delegations. However, as noted, the need for alignment with EU G7 countries, particularly France and Germany, has been brought into focus by their pursuit of national interests in Asia and Africa and their power to set the G7 agenda (a forum in which most EU states have limited direct influence).

To summarise, the JETP instrument may circumscribe the notion of Just Transition by promoting a narrower technical meaning, less aligned with the wider concept commonly used by the broad global coalition for coal phase-out. Although energy transition can be top-down, Just Transition, according to common sentiment, requires the mainstreaming of bottom-up and inclusive processes. Such processes will be hard to replicate in the JETP countries without challenging their political cultures. The current target countries are large, dynamic economies with shifting geopolitical interests. The future credibility of the EU and its G7 partners in the Global South will be informed by them providing relevant assistance responsive to the ambitions of the target countries, backed by adequate financial incentive and access to new technologies and private investment. By focusing on a small number of coal-dependent economies, the EU and the G7 may marshal their finite resources to achieve a notable policy result in a contested world. However, the outcome may exemplify a transition in which fairness and inclusion are less apparent.

Cross-case Comparison

In both cases, the EU is attempting to transfer its increasingly rich but unique knowledge of Just Transition to countries that do not reflect the institutional features on which internal EU action is contingent, such as sub-national capacity and inclusive political cultures. Moreover, partial geopolitical framing is perceptible. In the case of the Western Balkans and Ukraine, this insufficiency was exposed by Russian aggression. The emergent multilateralist model in both the EU neighbourhood and Global South, if not accompanied by co-creative approaches with recipients and adequate resourcing, risks the magnification of varying normative perspectives and, in turn, inadequate policy prescription.

Conclusion: Policy Ambition, Evolution and Paradox in a World in Flux

This paper addressed the question of how the EU's external Just Transition agenda has evolved since the Paris Agreement and what factors have shaped this process. This concluding section summarises the observed nature of the externalisation of EU Just Transition policy and then identifies endogenous and exogenous determinants of this evolution.⁵⁹

The research has shown that since 2015, the EU has been a notable advocate of Just Transition on the global stage. Over this period, external EU policy regarding Just Transition has evolved in an episodic manner. Each episode has notable features in terms of the EU's conceptual positioning, aims and policy modality vis-à-vis Just Transition in the external domain (see Table 2). These episodes, in a relatively short timeframe, infer the challenge of externalising and framing internal policy in a world in flux shaped by multiple actors, relationships and events. During the last seven years, a contingent and dynamic association between the policy window and policy formation is observable, changing from a comparatively benign relationship to one more complex and hazardous, exposing the innate but, until recently, overlooked geopolitical character of Just Transition in the external domain. The contingent nature of policy externalisation has engendered a paradox between the internal and external requiring resolution or management. The EU is arguably approaching a policy crossroads.

Table 2: Key features of the three evolutionary phases

Phase	Notable features
<i>Emergence</i> 2015–19	EU actors, including Member States and MEPs, actively advance Just Transition in the EU and internationally, for example via Poland's Presidency of COP24 and the promotion of the Silesia Declaration, to secure finance and support for affected EU coal regions. The EU's position reflects broad notions of distributive and procedural justice common in the global coalition for coal phase-out. The Commission's emergent internal response is based on institutional precedent, particularly territorially focused cohesion policy, thereby limiting the external transferability.

⁵⁹ For a detailed discussion of the policy implications of these findings, see Pollock, Robert, "Facing a critical juncture – The externalisation of the EU's Just Transition agenda", *College of Europe Policy Brief*, no. 2, Bruges: College of Europe, 2022.

<i>Amplification</i> 2019-21	The unparalleled policy intent of the EGD makes the Commission the leading global actor on energy transition. Yet, its aims to leave no person and place behind whilst decarbonising the economic system underscores Just Transition's conceptual mutability. Limited attention is given to the concept's geopolitical nature, despite the Commission promoting its innately radical message externally, informed by the notion of cosmopolitan justice. While the Commission identifies itself as a Global Leader, the European Council concludes that transference of good practice and expertise should be the principal means of global engagement.
<i>Diffusion</i> 2021– October 2022	At COP26, the EU supports a widening of Just Transition's scope to include phasing-in of energy technologies, paradoxically at a time when coal remains the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions. Although procedural justice remains central to the EU's internal agenda, its place in external action is equivocal. This change is evident in the JETPs seeming elevation of energy justice over inclusive and participatory goals, and the external energy engagement communication's marginalisation of procedural and cosmopolitan justice. In terms of leadership, the EU's role is progressively moderated through multilateral forums (and instruments) in which large Member States have notable influence.

Source: author's compilation.

Endogenous Determinants of the EU's Evolving Just Transition Agenda

The EU's internal policy intent, competences and resources, and unparalleled experience of coal phase-out have permitted its evolution as a central actor regarding Just Transition globally. Additionally, four other endogenous determinants have shaped this manifestation: positionality of actors; path dependence; conceptual framing; and a limited strategic framework.

The positionality of differing EU actors, such as the European Parliament, the European Commission, the European Council and Member States, has led to variance regarding the externalisation of the EU's Just Transition agenda, for example in terms of policy framing and intent. Alignment across these actors over time has varied which in turn has contributed to the observed episodic nature of EU policy evolution.

The path-dependent nature of EU actors' behaviour has led to policy formulation reflecting the internal norms of the EU, especially in relation to cohesion policy. Although such a disposition is to be expected, it makes subsequent external policy transference problematic. Path-dependent behaviours and processes have thus impacted, and at times hindered, creative policy making for the external domain.

The EU's framing of Just Transition has occurred in a somewhat organic, inclusive manner, simultaneously embracing notions of distributive, procedural, cosmopolitan and energy justices, and the phasing-out and phasing-in of energy technologies, with limited explicit configuration and prioritisation of these positions. This approach has contributed to key aspects of external policy, such as geopolitical consequence, resource implications or measurement of impact, being inadequately articulated.

An underdeveloped strategic framework to organise external intention and action with other EU priorities is leading to a paradox and an uncertain policy narrative, as seen in the divergence between external and internal meaning and modality. In its place, a set of tactical instruments and managerial arrangements have emerged. The REPowerEU Plan's communication on external energy engagement laudably attempted to manage multiple policy dilemmas in a compressed timescale, including the externalisation of Just Transition, but strategic disparities remained.

Exogenous Determinants of the EU's Evolving Just Transition Agenda

In addition to internal determinants, the evolution of the external agenda has also been shaped and mediated by several observed external determinants: unanticipated external shocks; heterogeneous national contexts; conceptual framing by external actors; and multilateralist approaches.

External Just Transition policy has evolved in a world in flux. The time and space to refine the EU's position and its approach to the concept's internationalisation after the launch of the landmark EGD was constrained by the global pandemic and, subsequently, the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The journey from policy intent to policy delivery is usually difficult; but in such existential, dynamic circumstances maintaining direction, momentum and coherence is extremely challenging.

A significant interdependent relationship between policy development and the context of its application has been observed. In both its neighbourhood and the Global South, the EU is attempting to transfer its increasingly rich but contingent knowledge of Just Transition to countries that do not possess the EU's institutional features. Moreover, the geopolitical circumstances of these countries require the concept's alignment with broader policy goals, thus leading to potential trade-offs.

Differing external actors hold varying conceptual perspectives on Just Transition. Although a broad coalition exists for coal phase-out, this is sustained by a relatively loose interpretation of the concept's meaning that accommodates the differing

normative positionality of diverse stakeholder groups, such as organised labour and NGOs. Therefore, a desire to maintain the cohesion of this eclectic coalition encourages international actors, including the EU, to maintain definitional flexibility; even if such flexibility compromises policy prescription.

Multilateralism is progressively defining EU external action. The evidence of the benefits of this approach in the EU neighbourhood and Global South is emergent. Multilateral action can ensure that the 'whole is greater than the sum of the parts', but it can also favour normative consensual positions that lead to derivative policy prescription and compromise. The EU is still to reveal and pursue its future bearing in these partnerships. A combination of roles is possible: a *primus-inter-pares* agenda-setter; an enabling technocrat offering expertise; a mediating conscience promoting global well-being; a source of inspiration and example.⁶⁰

To lead internationally the EU needs followers, whether these be external organisations or states. If the EGD is the EU's 'man on the moon moment' and, to paraphrase NASA, failure is not an option, the EU should redouble its efforts to be the critical agent of global Just Transition. A more strategic approach that scopes and directs the EU's principles, aims and methods in the external domain, and acknowledges interdependencies with other policy areas, such as development, human rights and security, will provide a coordinating mechanism for EU actors operating in a world in flux. Moreover, such an approach will assist in resolving or managing the inevitable paradoxes of concurrently designing and progressing internal and external policy agendas.

⁶⁰ See Pollock, Robert, "Facing a critical juncture – The externalisation of the EU's Just Transition agenda", College of Europe Policy Brief, no. 2, Bruges: College of Europe, 2022.

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