



# European Green Deal

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# Assessing the Impact of EU Policies on Danish Climate Governance



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Participant: Nishani Amarasingam (20194351)

Supervisor: Anita Nissen

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## **Abstract**

This study examines how Denmark harmonize between its national climate policies and those of the European Green Deal (EGD). Through a content analysis by incorporating Europeanisation theory, the study explores Denmark's engagement as a leader in renewable energy and sustainability, its alignment with EU climate policies, the challenges encountered in harmonization, and the impact of the EGD. The findings indicate that Denmark strategically combine proactive measures with adaptation efforts to align with the EGD, demonstrating its leadership in sustainable development within the EU. Despite challenges, Denmark's approach emphasises the importance of balancing EU directives with national priorities in order to collaborate and solve the climate challenges. This study does not only enhance the understanding of Denmark's climate policy landscape but also offer valuable insights into the broader aspect climate governance within European union.

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## List of abbreviations

EU	European Union
EGD	European Green Deal
CDEU	Central Denmark EU office
SDGs	Sustainability Development Goals

# 1. Introduction

Climate change and environmental degradation is a global challenge, also affecting Europe. The temperature of the earth's surface has been increasing by 0.75°C year to year from 1995-2006 and predicted to rise again to 2°C- 5°C in 2100. The increase is significantly influenced by the dependency on fossil fuels in several countries (Tyas & Prakoso, 2022). However, a general believe among people is climate change mainly encompasses warmer temperatures, but that is only half of the story. As the earth is a connected system, change in one area can influence in other areas. Among others, the consequences of climate change consist of “*intense droughts, water scarcity, severe fires, rising sea levels, flooding, melting polar ice, catastrophic storms and declining biodiversity*” (UN, 2024). One of the important actors responding to climate change and committed to step up by taking action towards climate neutrality is the European Union (EU). In the recent decades EU has cut its net greenhouse gas emissions almost by one third, and at the same time nurturing economic prosperity. The initial data for 2022 is highlighting that the total net greenhouse gas emissions is decreased by 31% compared to 1990, especially within sectors like energy supply and energy- intensive industries (European Environment Agency, 2023).

In response to these challenges, The European Green Deal (EGD) is a comprehensive policy package aiming to guide the EU towards a green transition, with the goal of achieving climate neutrality by 2050. This plan seek to transform the EU into a fair and prosperous society, characterised by a modern and competitive economy. It emphasises a holistic and cross- sectoral approach, ensuring that all relevant policy areas—climate, environment, energy, transport, industry, agriculture, and sustainable finance—contribute to the overarching climate goals (European Council, 2024).

A key component of the EGD is the Fit for 55 package, which aims to translate the EGD climate ambitions into law. This package includes proposals to revise existing climate energy and transport legislation and introduce new initiatives that align EU laws with the EU climate targets. These proposals establish a comprehensive and balanced framework aimed at:

- Ensuring an equitable and socially just transition.

- Sustaining and boosting innovation and competitiveness within EU industry while ensuring fair competition with economic operators from third countries.
- Enhancing the EU's role as a leader in the global effort to combat climate change. (European Council, 2024)

At the core of the EGD is the European Climate law, which formalises the EU's commitment to achieve climate neutrality by 2050. This law requires the EU and its member states to reduce net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030 compared to 1990 levels, establishing this target legally binding, based on an impact assessment conducted by the Commission. By adopting these initiatives, the EU demonstrates its dedication to a sustainable future, balancing economic growth with environmental leadership, and setting a global standard in the fight against climate change (European Council, 2024).

To advance these climate and environmental ambitions, the commission will also introduce the biodiversity strategy for 2030, the new Industrial Strategy and Circular Economy Action Plan, the Farm to Fork Strategy for sustainable food and proposals for pollution-free Europe. The immediate work will be starting to enhance Europe's 2030 emissions targets establishing a realistic path for the 2050 goal. In order to meet achieve the current 2030 climate and energy targets, it is estimated to require an additional annual investment of €260 billion, which represents about 1,5 % of the 2018 GDP. Mobilizing this investment will require contribution from both the public and private sectors. The commission has already revealed its intention to present an impact- assessed plan to improve the EU's climate ambition for 2030, emphasising the need for additional investments in order to achieve the broader environmental and social objectives outlined by the EU (European Commission , 2020).

The first step of the EGD was the presentation of a new investment strategy and the Just Transition Mechanism. On the one hand the investment strategy should facilitate sustainable social development by channelling EU funds and resources from the European investment Bank into accelerating the green transition. On the other hand, the foundation for Just Transition aims to reallocate certain EU funds to support the green transition in economically weak and high CO<sub>2</sub> - heavy regions. The next step was the first European climate Act and a proposal for a European Climate Pact. The aim of the Climate Act is to commit the European Commission and

member states to the goal of climate neutrality in 2050 and the way to get there. The Climate Pact is an initiative aimed at engaging and consulting the European public in the journey towards achieving climate neutrality. Moreover, EGD is sought to be integrated into as many of the EU's policies as possible. An example is the EU's new industrial strategy published on March 10, 2020 and is presented as a green growth and industrial strategy. However recent tendencies are highlighting a slow progress in decreasing the emissions covered by the Member States within a shared legislation and areas like agriculture, transport, and buildings. In the current rate of progress, it is predicted that it is not enough to achieve the climate and energy targets for 2023 and 2050 (Loonela, Rietdorf, & Parrondo, 2019).

## **1.1 Background**

As a member state of the EU, Denmark is committed to the goals of the EGD. Denmark has a long history of being regarded as a pioneer in renewable energy, sustainability, and climate action, with a strong track record of implementing progressive environmental policies. The Danish government has consistently set ambitious targets for emissions reduction, renewable energy deployment and energy efficiency improvement. Denmark's active position in addressing global climate change issues is intertwined with its implementation of domestic policies focusing on environmental protection. One of its medium-term objectives is to reduce domestic carbon emissions by 70% by 2030, compared to emission levels recorded in 1990. Looking at Denmark's greenhouse gas emissions it has decreased from 78.4 million tonnes of CO<sub>2e</sub> in 1990 (the UN's base year under the Paris Agreement) to 46.2 million tonnes of CO<sub>2e</sub> in 2021, marking a 41 percent reduction. Moreover, emissions are predicted to decline further to 39.7 million tonnes of CO<sub>2e</sub> by 2025 and 28.9 million tonnes by 2030 (Klima-, Energi- og Forsyningsministeriet, 2023). Denmark's achievement cannot be separated from the issue of its large carbon production in 2011, highlighted by Albert Osei-Owus et.al. According to their findings large cities like Copenhagen, Aalborg, Odense, and Rhus contributed to the largest carbon emissions up to 41% (28 MtCO<sub>2e</sub>) and 31% (27 MtCO<sub>2e</sub>) and resulted from food production and consumption (Tyas & Prakoso, 2022). It should be emphasized that Denmark's efforts to reduce global carbon emissions originated from successful implementation of domestic policies, which were subsequently extended to the international arena in order to address the increasing global issue of climate change. The existence of such issue has made



Denmark develop significant ecological and climate-based policies that have been implemented since 2008. Notably a carbon tax since 1992 has been enforced by Denmark, introduced in several packages in 1993 and 1996 to reduce domestic carbon emissions. Recognized as a country with considerable success and experience in combatting climate change, Denmark wants to achieve this goal even further by 2050. In the following section a progression of climate policy will be given. The timeframe starting in 2008 is chosen as it has an influence in shaping similar policies in the future (Tyas & Prakoso, 2022).

Denmark has implemented a policy to fight the issues of climate change in 2008, which is called law on the Promotion of Renewable Energy (RES), to reduce carbon emissions and other greenhouse gases 40% by 2020. This policy is focusing on reducing the reliance on fossil fuels and simultaneously make the energy transition to renewable energy. Moreover, Denmark aims to increase the share of national energy consumption derived from renewable sources. This policy is implemented by increasing the infrastructure of renewable energy, particularly the advancement of wind turbines and the utilization of water as an alternative energy source (Tyas & Prakoso, 2022). Hereafter in 2012 the policy is followed by the enactment of Energy Agreement 2012-2020, which has been targeting to improve energy efficiency by transitioning to green energy and possibly reduce Denmark's domestic carbon emissions. The agreement has been aiming for national energy requirements to be covered from 35% green and renewable energy sources by 2020 and 100% by 2050. This goal is supported by the expansion of wind power, increasing from 25% (2012) to 50 % (2020), and the increased utilization of other energy sources (wave, solar, and geothermal). The 2012-2020 Energy Agreement can be perceived as an effort to bolster the reduction of carbon numbers and accelerating the energy transition process so it can become self-reliant and reduce the dependency on fossil fuel import. However, the policy only outlines a roadmap until 2020 and lacking a detailed long-term planning to 2050 (Tyas & Prakoso, 2022). Both policies were followed by the enactment of the climate Act 2014 and represents a major milestone in shaping the direction of Denmark's environmental policy from medium to long-term aiming for a low emission society. Under the climate act, Denmark is targeting a 40% reduction in carbon and greenhouse emissions by 2020, followed by a reduction on 70% in 2030 and carbon neutral in 2050, which is above the EU objective. This policy is aiming to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement in order to prevent the earths temperature from reaching 1.5 degree Celsius. The Climate act also establish the

formation of the Danish council on climate change, serving as a climate policy- making institution and based on academic principles in the decision-making process. Denmark's new climate act 2020 constitutes an update of the 2014 Climate Act. In this policy the former greenhouse gas emission reduction target is updated to 70%, in order to demonstrate a strong commitment to achieving climate neutrality by 2050. It is also representing a new direction for Danish climate policy, that focuses not only on domestic greenhouse gas reduction but also on an international level. For example, Denmark as a member state makes various efforts to support the commitments to reduce carbon emissions in Europe. within Denmark there is a distinctive national force driving the government's climate strategy. One example is related to Denmark's pioneering role in wind energy. Global companies like Orsted and Vestas are helping to advance the transition to sustainable energy. Therefore, political identity and economic imperatives is the driver for the national climate effort. The private sector is regarding EU as essential on the climate issues due to the significance of the single market to most major Danish businesses. Denmark's growth of sustainable energy industry heavily relies on exports, while many Danish companies is leading the market on energy efficiency. However, hesitancy towards climate issues tend to be exhibited by heavy industries and politically influential sectors in Denmark. Greenhouse gas emissions in Denmark come from especially three sectors: energy production, agriculture, and transportation. For example, in 2013 these sectors accounted for over 75% of Denmark's total greenhouse gas emissions. In the energy and transport sector emissions mainly comes from combustion of fossil fuels such as coal, oil and natural gas. These fuels are used for space heating, electricity production, and transportation. In agriculture, emissions primarily come from livestock digestion and the use of nitrogen-containing fertilizers (Danish Energy Agency, 2021).

Focusing on the Danish media, it is claimed to cover the EU's role in climate action to a limited extent and the coverage has even declined due to the covid-19 crisis. When it is covered, mostly it is about Denmark's domestic emissions-reduction goals. Climate action remains a top political concern for Danish voters. While mainly national politicians are criticised for inactivity on climate issues, many also state dissatisfaction with the EU's lack of action on climate change. However, Denmark is a small, open economy that lacks diversification and depends heavily on European and global export markets. Some Danish policymakers and diplomats are therefore exhibiting political concerns about climate policy, particularly concerning the EU's

proposed carbon border adjustment mechanism. Fearing it could jeopardize free trade and harming Danish exports and jobs (Nissen, 2021).

Denmark has committed to fulfil several national climate targets and obligations regarding climate and energy through EU legislation as outlined in table 1. The Danish government aims to achieve climate neutrality by 2045 and has set a new target of a 110% reduction in emissions by 2050 compared to 1990 levels. Table 1 includes the national climate obligations established by law, however it should be emphasised that it does not include commitments or objectives established at the global level or the overall objectives of EU (Klima-, Energi- og Forsyningsministeriet, 2023).

Table 1: Denmark's national and European climate commitments	
National commitments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indicative sub-goals target of 50-54 per cent. reduction in 2025 compared to 1990</li> <li>• 70% reduction of greenhouse gas emissions in 2030 compared to 1990</li> <li>• Denmark must be climate neutral by 2050 at the latest.</li> <li>• Reduction target for the agricultural and forestry sector of 55-65%, In 2030 compared to 1990</li> </ul>
EU-commitments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With the burden-sharing agreement, Denmark must reduce emissions in non-quota-covered sectors by 50%. in 2030 compared to 2005.</li> <li>• In the period 2021-2025, Denmark must ensure that the carbon balance in the LULUCF sector does not deteriorate. In the period 2026-2030, Denmark must comply with two separate obligations: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) the net emissions in the LULUCF sector must be reduced by 0.44 million tonnes of CO<sub>2e</sub> in 2030 compared to the average level for the reference period 2016-2018</li> <li>2) meet a national budget target for 2026-2029, which set by the Commission in 2025 based on the most recent emissions statement.</li> </ol> </li> <li>• Ambitious contribution to the EU's common renewable energy target of 32%. Gathered</li> <li>• 14% RE- share in transport in 2030</li> <li>• Minimum requirements for advanced biofuels in transport: Min. 0.2% in 2022, 1.0% in 2025 and 3.5%. in 2030</li> <li>• Annual increase of 1.1 percentage points in the RE- share in heating and process energy</li> <li>• 0.8% annual energy savings in the period 2021-2023 and 1.49% annual energy savings in the period 2024-2030.</li> </ul>

*Table 1 Note: It also applies to Denmark's EU obligations that they have generally been adjusted upwards as part of the EU's Fit for 55 package, cf. chapter 6. In the table, however, it is only the EU obligations under the burden-sharing agreement and the LULUCF sector appear to have been adjusted upwards. The other EU obligations are indicated by their previous obligations level, as the upward adjustment has not taken effect yet.*

*Source: Ministry of Climate, Energy and Supply*

The success of reducing its carbon emission has been resulting in Denmark taking efforts in reducing global carbon emissions at the bilateral and international level. On the bilateral level, Denmark is operating “the Green frontline mission program through the Danish embassies across different countries. The objective of this program is to promote the green agenda and facilitate a global green transition. On the international and multilateral level Denmark is actively engaged in various forums. Denmark’s initiatives aimed at reducing global carbon emissions on a regional level is encouraging European Union to enact carbon emission reduction policies. Denmark’s influence on the European union’s carbon emission reduction policy is evident in the formulation of the Green Deal. The goal of the green deal is to realize the EU's objective of achieving climate neutrality by 2050. Denmark has played a major role in shaping the EU's carbon emission target by urging the EU to set more ambitious goals for emission reduction by 2030. Supported by 11 other EU countries including France, Austria, Italy, Netherlands, Sweden, Finland, Latvia, Luxembourg, Slovenia, and Spain, Denmark’s proposal has been accepted and resulted in the EU's carbon emission target initially set at 40% for 2030, eventually raised to 55%. Moreover, at the multilateral level, Denmark was selected as the lead country of COP26, which is a conference serving as a global platform for discussing the reduction of global carbon emissions. Denmark was chosen for its good achievements in reducing carbon emission and serving as a positive example for other nations. Denmark’s leadership during the implementation of COP26 has led to the formation agreements that shaped the Glasgow climate pact. Denmark is also one of the founding nations of the international organization Beyond Oil & Gas (BOGA) (Tyas & Prakoso, 2022).

## **1.2 Research objectives and research question**

The aim of this study is to provide an answer to the following research question: ***How does Denmark harmonise between the climate policy of the European green deal and those of Denmark?*** Specifically, the aim is to address this question through the perspective of Europeanisation theory, as detailed further in chapter 2.

This study aims to explore how Denmark is balancing between national interest and the implementation of EU’s climate policies, with a particular emphasis on the challenges and

opportunities arising by the EGD. Through investigating the strategies and approaches implemented by Danish policymakers the goal is to offer insights into the dynamics influencing the interaction between EU climate objectives and national considerations in Denmark. The EGD represent a transformative policy framework and implement comprehensive measures across various sectors. It aims to enhance economic growth, creating jobs and at the same time ensure a just transition for all regions and sectors. Examining Denmark's approach to integrating the EGD into its national policies will shed light on the broader implications of EU climate governance and the practicalities of achieving ambitious climate targets. This study contributes to the understanding of how EU member states can align their national policies with EU's climate objectives ensuring a unified and effective response to the global climate crisis.

This study aims to explore Denmark's history of environmental policy initiatives, conducting a detailed examination of its strategies, challenges and successes. Denmark has consistently been recognised as a frontrunner in sustainability efforts, implementing innovative policies and programs aimed at addressing environmental issues. By examining Denmark's experiences, this study can uncover the complexities of its approach, and explore the various factors that have contributed to its effectiveness in driving environmental action. Moreover this study aims to highlight valuable lessons and good practices that can be applied by other EU member states facing similar challenges in balancing the complexities of environmental governance and climate policy implementation.

### **1.3 Literature review**

This section provides a review of scholarly works and empirical studies that gives an understanding of how EU climate policies are shaped and implemented, and how they influence member states, particularly Denmark's involvement in the EGD.

The evolution EU climate policy has been extensively analysed by scholars. For instance, the development from the early stages of environmental policy integration, insights in policy instruments and the process of decision making that shapes EU climate governance and the climate goals set under the EUG is given in the work by Rayner, Tim ; Szulecki, Kacper ; Jordan , Andrew ; Oberthür, Sebastian (2023) and Oberthür and Roche Kelly (2008). The studies are providing an overview of EU's multi-level system of climate governance, by

emphasizing the interaction between supranational institutions, national governments, and subnational actors in shaping climate policies. The complexity of the decision-making process in the EU and challenges such as achieving coherence because of increasing external challenges and persistent internal policy divergences is also emphasized by examining the influence of the institutions, policy instruments and discourses. Moreover, the advancement of EU climate policy accelerated after the adoption of the Kyoto Protocol in 1997 and the Marrakech Accords in 2000. The EU Emissions Trading System (EU ETS) establishes emission limits for large installations which collectively contribute to approximately 40 percent of the EU's CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Moreover, crucial component of EU climate policy consists of common and coordinated climate policies, domestic measures by individual EU member states. These measures are directed by, which allocates the responsibility for achieving the EU's collective emission reduction target of eight percent under the Kyoto Protocol among member states. However, the coordination of the external climate policy of EU among member states and the European commission prior to and during international negotiation sessions, demanding considerable time and effort which constrains EU's ability to engage in outreach activities effectively (Oberthur & Roche Kelly, 2008). The interplay of influence among member states within the EU has also been examined by scholars. Haas (1992) has introduced a concept about "negotiating the environment" in order to explain how states advance their interest in EU environmental policymaking by leveraging on alliances, bargaining tactics, and strategic positioning. Studies investigating the national responses to EU climate policies offers a valuable perspective on how member states manage the implementation of EU climate objectives into their national context. Kern and Bulkeley (2009) has been investigating the influence of politics, transnational networks, and policy entrepreneurship in shaping the impact on EU climate policy by the member states. Emphasising the importance of domestic factors, such as political leadership, administrative capacity, and stakeholder engagement in mediating the influence of EU policies.

Focusing on the case of Denmark, scholars have investigated the Danish engagement with EU climate policies and its implications national climate governance and the complexities of assessing national climate leadership and the efficiency of emission reduction targets within the context of global climate goals. In a study by Batini, Parry, and Wingender (2020), Denmark's climate mitigation policy framework is analysed, highlighting Denmark's potential as a model

for other countries. The research investigates the effectiveness of carbon pricing mechanisms complementary initiatives in achieving Danish objectives for emission reduction. Another study by Tilsted and Bjørn (2023) have examined Denmark's climate leadership narrative and challenges the “green frontrunner” perception of Denmark. By conducting an analysis of Denmark’s emission reduction targets in relation to the 1.5° temperature goal in the Paris Agreement, the differences between the Danish policy claims and the actual efficiency of its targets are emphasised.

Based on the literature review a foundation on EU climate governance and the EGD is provided. However, a potential gap that exist is the lack of research focusing on how Denmark is navigating the implementation of EU’s climate policies, specially related to the EGD, while considering national circumstances and priorities at the same time. There is a gap in the research that deeply explores Danish strategies, challenges, and success in aligning its domestic climate policies with EU climate objectives. Getting insights of the process through which Denmark balances its obligations to EU climate objectives with its national interest, could give a better understanding of EU climate governance and member state interactions. The existing research often focus on short- term policy development and lacking the exploration of long-term implications of EGD regarding how the danish climate policy align with the EU goals. Future research can could fill this gap by conducting in-depth case studies, interviews, or surveys in order to investigate Denmark’s approach in implementing EU climate policies focusing on the EGD.

## **1.4 Structure of the project**

This study is organized as follows. First the theoretical framework of Europeanisation is discussed. Then the methodological approach is presented, detailing the research design which employs a qualitative methodology, especially content analysis to answer the research question. Limitations of the research design are also outlined in the methodology chapter. The findings of the analysis are then presented and discussed through the lens of the theoretical framework, focusing on 4 key themes. Finally the conclusion draws together the findings presented in the analysis, summarizing the insights gained from examining these themes.

## 2. Theory

Europeanisation theory is crucial in order to understand the influence of EU on national policies, including Danish climate policy, which is the focus of the study. The theory examines how EU processes, policies and institutions influence national policies, practices, and identities. By using this approach, an opportunity to shed light on the dynamics behind EU's influence on Danish climate policy while also looking at Denmark's preferences and identify opportunities and challenges in this process.

An early conceptualization of the term is presented by Ladrech (1994), where Europeanization is defined as “ *an incremental process re-orienting the direction and shape of politics to the degree that [EU] political and economic dynamics become part of the organizational logic of national politics and policy-making*” (Raunio & Wiberg, 2009). While this definition addresses the core question of the extent to which national parliaments adjust their activities due to European integration, it seems better suited for institutional analysis than decision-making studies, given its emphasis on organizational logic rather than the broader spectrum of political actors' behaviour. Another definition given by Radaelli, also needs to be taken into account. He describes Europeanisation as “*a process involving a) construction, b) diffusion and c) institutionalisation of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, 'ways of doing things' and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the EU policy process and then incorporated in the logic of domestic (national and subnational) discourse, political structures and public choices*”(Radaelli 2003). Radaelli's definition is similar to Ladrech's definition but adds more focus on cultural, attitudinal or informal aspects of domestic politics. With this definition it is possible to explore whether participating in the EU's policy process changes the way domestic legislatures operate or their political cultures. Moumoutzis (2011) revised Radaelli's definition by including discourse as a concept. According to him, Europeanisation is the “*process of incorporation in the logic of domestic (national and sub-national) discourse, political structures and public policies of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, 'ways of doing things' and shared beliefs and norms that are first defined in the EU policy processes*”. Other significant definitions of Europeanization include Börzel (1999): “a process by which domestic policy areas become increasingly subject to European policy-making” and Risse, Cowles and Caporaso (2001): “the



emergence and development at the European level of distinct structures of governance, that is, of political, legal and social institutions associated with political problem solving that formalizes interactions among the actors, and of policy networks specializing in the creation of authoritative European rules” (Bandov & Kolman, 2018). Additionally, Dyson and Goetz (2003) introduced a circular concept of Europeanization, characterizing it as a “top-down and bottom-up process whereby domestic polity, politics, and public policies are influenced by European integration, and domestic actors utilize European integration to influence the domestic sphere. This process can lead to either continuity or change, resulting in diverse and contingent outcomes.

The Europeanisation studies shows that although EU- legislation is binding and must be implemented by the member states, and EU law has priority and direct effect, this does not automatically mean that EU integration has an immediate effect at the national level. There are a number of supranational and national processes, actors and institutions that also play a role for what comes out as the EU's output. The Europeanization approach has had an eye for adaptation pressure exerted by the EU, varies from member state to member state and thus also the degree of change. A central concept in this approach was the "goodness of fit" hypothesis. This hypothesis argued that the degree of correspondence between EU regulation and a member state's national institutions determines the level of adaptation pressure against the state, and thus also the degree of change caused by the EU (Risse, Cowles og Caporaso 2001; Kallestrup 2005). If a member states' institution is in harmony (fit) with the EU's norms and regulations, there will be no pressure to adapt, and thus no changes. Contrarily, if there is a significant degree of inconsistency (misfit) between the EU's norms and regulations and the national institutions, the adaptation pressure will be correspondingly great, and significant changes will occur due to the EU's influence (Risse, Cowles and Caporaso , 2001; Kallestrup, 2005). The 'goodness of fit' hypothesis has been criticized for building on an assumption of a too straightforward relationship between adaptation pressure and effect. Knill and Lemkuhl point out that the effect also depends on the national context, which acts as a mediator for the EU's influence (Knill and Lemkuhl, 2002). According to their research, a decisive factor is whether the national context supports or opposes the change, and whether the national actors who either support or oppose have sufficient power and resources to advance their interests (Martinsen, 2011).

In both political and scientific discussions, there is considerable disagreement regarding the extent of the EU's influence on the national level. Some argue that the EU undermines national sovereignty significantly (Rhodes, 1997; Ferrera, 2005), while others assert that politics remains primarily a national affair (Blom-Hansen and Christensen, 2004), suggesting that the EU's influence is therefore less decisive (Martinsen, 2011). According to Article 4 in the Lisbon treaty, the member states are responsible for the implementation process. Nationally, It has been chosen to keep the basic competence to decide how supranational decisions are implemented nationally and locally. It has therefore been argued that when the implementation process starts, the member states get a "come back" and can win back some of the autonomy that has been given up in the council's decision-making process (Martinsen, 2011).

According to Tallberg (2002), EU is an unique supranational governance system that combines centralised enforcement mechanisms with decentralised management mechanisms. The centralised enforcement mechanisms include the commission's power to bring treaty violation procedure against member states (as described in Article 258 of the Lisbon Treaty) as well as the possibility to refer preliminary questions to the Court of Justice (as described in Article 267 of the Lisbon Treaty) (Martinsen, 2011). When the Commission is informed of or discovers itself a suspicion that a Member State is not fulfilling its EU obligations, it can start a treaty violation procedure by sending a letter of formal notice to the Member State. If the Member State does not satisfactorily explain or corrects the deficit of implementation the Commission can take the next step by sending a reasoned statement and eventually bring the matter before the EU Court of Justice as a Treaty violation case. This involves three steps in the governance process, where the responsible national authority has the opportunity to cooperate with the Commission and resolve the situation before it becomes a case at the Court of Justice (Martinsen, 2011). Another important governance mechanism in the EU system is the possibility for national courts to request preliminary references from the EU court. The number of such cases has generally increased, although there is considerable variation between national courts, some of them request for preliminary references while others refrain from doing so. The Commission and the Court of Justice of the European union play a crucial role in the enforcement and management of EU decisions. They evaluate whether member states comply with their EU obligations. But they also depend on national actors or organization approaching

them and reporting non-compliance with the EU's goals and means. The system itself does not have sufficient resources to patrol national laws and practices (Martinsen, 2011). The decentralised management mechanism therefore becomes crucial as a supplement to the central management mechanisms. The effectiveness of the system depends on national actors and organisation pointing out non-compliance at the supranational level. The European parliament or EU agencies can also take on this role. As a governance system, the EU constitutes an overlap of decentralised and central mechanisms that combine cooperation and coercion and, according to Tallberg, this makes non-compliance a temporary phenomenon: *"This twinning of cooperative and coercive instruments in a "management-enforcement ladder" makes the EU exceedingly effective in combating detected violations, thereby reducing non-compliance to a temporal phenomenon"* (Tallberg 2002). Effective and correct implementation can not only be ensured through good intentions, but also requires a follow-up with evaluation and enforcement. National actors and organizations play a decisive role as contributing factors in the implementation process, but this does not mean that power will return entirely to the national level. These aspects are followed up by the enforcement mechanisms described (Martinsen, 2011).

Europeanisation theory examines how EU process, policies and institutions influence national policies, practices, and identities. Focusing on the EGD and its impact on Danish climate policy, it can be used to understand how the EU's initiatives and goals in the climate area are integrated into Danish policy. Moreover, it can also be used to analyse how Danish politicians and stakeholders react to the EU's climate policy agenda and adaptations. This includes examining how EU legislation and policies are implemented in Danish law, how Danish politicians participate in EU decision-making processes, and how Danish political institutions and actors adapt to the EU's climate policy objectives. In addition, Europeanization theory can be used to investigate how EU membership and participation in EU cooperation affect Danish attitudes, norms and political preferences in the climate area. This may include examining changes in public discourses, political coalitions, and political actions as a result of EU influence. It will strengthen the analysis and contribute to a more nuanced understand of the relationship between the EU and Denmark in the climate area.

## **2.1 Critique**

Europeanization theory is not without criticism. One key issue of Europeanisation literature is focusing too much on the importance of “Europe”, when explaining domestic change. When examining policy shifts at national level, it is crucial to distinguish Europeanization from broader globalising trends, highlighted by Graziano 2003 (Graziano & Vink, 2013). Additionally, we must consider alternative explanations for domestic changes, which may stem from internal processes within national political systems, rather than attaching them to European pressures. Vink (2005) emphasises that a change in government could offer a better explanation for adjustments in for example in immigration policy, rather than relying on the concept of “fortress Europe”. In the case of Denmark, factors like political culture, public opinion and institutional structures within Denmark could have significant influence on the reception and implementation of EU climate initiatives, which may not be sufficiently addressed by Europeanisation theory alone. With other words Europeanisation may sometimes fail to acknowledge significant variations in political systems, administrative practices, and pre-existing national policies among member states. This “one- size- fits all” approach might not grasp the complexities of how EU policies are put into practice in individual countries. The theory overlooks the differing degrees of national dedication to European integration which can impact the willingness of to embrace EU policies. Moreover the theory is primarily focusing on the influence of EU institutions and policies on national governments, but doesn’t focus on the role of non- state actors like civil society organizations, businesses, and subnational governments. In this context of climate policy, these actors is playing a crucial role in shaping implementation strategies and outcomes, which might not me captured by the Europeanisation theory. Additionally, Europeanisation theory has an assumption of linear and uniform process of European integration, across time and space, however the impact of EU policies may vary temporally and spatially in reality. The critique suggests that the influence of EU initiatives as the EGD might be manifested differently in different regions of Denmark or at different points in time, which is not captured by Europeanization theory's broad generalizations.

## **3. Methodology**

### **3.1 Research design**

The research design of this study consists of a case study approach, which offers an empirical in-depth investigation of how Denmark balance between the implementation of EU's green deal objectives and the consideration of national conditions and interests. Moreover, it provides the opportunity to gain a deep understanding of the specific strategies, policies and actions that are used by Danish politicians (Seha & Müller-Rommel, 2016). The study focuses on the period from 2019 to present, as it is aligning with the initiation of the EGD in 2019. The selected time frame is giving the opportunity to cover recent developments and provide an up-to-date analysis.

### **3.1.1 Provisional argument**

Based on the preliminary research and the objectives of the project, three assumptions have been formulated to guide the study. the aim is to prove or disprove the following statements:

- 1) Denmark has established itself as a frontrunner in renewable energy, sustainability, and climate action.
- 2) Denmark demonstrates a high degree of harmonisation with the EU's climate policies.
- 3) The lack of harmonisation creates adaptation pressure.

The study is based on the presumption that Denmark functions as a frontrunner in the green transition by adopting EU climate policies with greater speed and ambition. It commits to cutting CO2 emissions by 70% by 2030 and reaching climate neutrality by 2050. Denmark has a widespread political agreement on this goal, and actively engages globally to advance climate action and share expertise. Its dedication to international initiatives like EUG reinforces its reputation as a model for successful climate policy and sustainable development. Denmark demonstrates a high degree of harmonization with the EU's climate policies. Denmark demonstrates a high degree of harmonisation with the EU's climate policies, particularly when there's domestic political support. This leads to a flexible implementation of the EU's climate goals and a general agreement between Danish and European climate policy. However Non-alignment generates political and economic adaptation pressures. When misfit arise between EU climate policies and Denmark's national priorities, it strains the balance between political and economic stability and EU compliance. So, Denmark faces a dilemma of Denmark wanting to

remain an active and responsible EU member and partner by supporting the EU's climate initiatives while also ensuring that its national economic interest and industries are protected and supported.

### **3.1.2 Unit of analysis**

Denmark is serving as the focus in the study. It has been chosen as the unit of analysis because as a member state Denmark has established a reputation of being the frontrunner in renewable energy and climate action as mentioned in the chapter of introduction. As it has ambitious targets of reducing greenhouse gas emissions and transforming to renewable energy sources, it is an interesting case for exploring how a country balances national interests with EU climate policies. Denmark is also an interesting case because while it is strongly committed to climate action, it is also concerned about potential economic impacts on certain industries. How Denmark is navigating these dilemmas, including the strategies it is adopting to mitigate economic impacts along with advancing climate goals, could also provide insight into the broader challenges that is faced by countries pursuing climate action. While generalizing directly to all member states is challenging due to the different geographical, political, social situations, the findings and insights from the study can be valuable to get an understanding of similar dynamics in other member states. An examination of Denmark's efforts to implement EU climate policies can provide valuable insights for other countries facing *similar* challenges. A successful implementation in Denmark could enlighten possible paths for other member states to balance national interests with the Green Deal's goals.

## **3.2 Research method**

### **3.2.1 Data collection**

The analysis uses a qualitative method approach that integrates both primary and secondary data sources to fulfil the research objectives. The qualitative data used in the study is expert interviews in order to get perspectives on how the interviewees is addressing how Denmark is aligning its national climate policies and the EGD. An expert interview is chosen because they have special knowledge or expertise, due to their professional role and degree of influence. Expert interviews are valuable for providing a broader perspective as they provide information

relevant to a larger group (Ingemann , Kjeldsen , Nørup, & Rasmussen , 2018). The interviews were conducted with a political adviser in the parliament, a climate policy advisor in The Green Left (Socialistisk folkeparti), an EU special consultant at CDEU (Central Denmark EU Office), and an EU chief consultant at CDEU. The political adviser in the parliament is chosen because he is an assistant to a Danish MEP, which provides him with extensive knowledge about EU climate policies and objectives. His position provides a comprehensive understanding of the broader EU framework and the specific regulations that member states, including Denmark, must follow. However, it is important to note that his insights may not always reflect a purely Danish perspective, as his primary role involves working within the context of the EU. This dual perspective is valuable, as it helps to highlight the interplay between national interests and EU directives, offering a nuanced understanding of how Denmark can harmonize its climate policies with those of the EGD. The climate policy adviser in the green left has been chosen for the deep understanding and expertise in climate policy. As a member of a political party that prioritises environmental issues he provides insights into the part's stance on climate issues, the challenges of aligning national policies with EU directives, and the strategies employed to promote sustainable practices within Denmark. This perspective is essential a comprehensive analysis of how Denmark harmonises its national and EU climate objectives. An EU special consultant at CDEU (Central Denmark EU Office) and an EU chief consultant at CDEU are chosen because their position provides them with in-depth knowledge and expertise regarding EU policies, especially because they are working for green transition. Moreover, their roles involve providing strategic advice and guidance to stakeholders, making their expertise essential for informing decisions and actions related to climate policy at both the national and EU levels. When interviewing experts, certain challenges can arise. Establishing contact and securing participation from these individuals is often a complicated process (Ingemann , Kjeldsen , Nørup, & Rasmussen , 2018). After long email correspondences with numerous secretaries from several parties and ministries, contact was successfully established with these interviewees, who agreed to participate in the interviews. To further ensure a robust analysis, the research examines information through various methods, the researcher can validate conclusions across various data sets, thereby mitigating the influence of potential biases inherent in a single study. Therefore, policy documents, news articles, reports and publications, official statements or press releases, and scholarly articles, as well as relevant political documents like EU directives,

national climate strategies, and government reports, will be analysed to identify political decisions and actions related to climate policy.

### **3.2.2 Interview guide**

In the extension of why Denmark was chosen, and the interviewees selected, it is relevant to look at the interview guide (Appendix 1). As mentioned earlier the qualitative study will be conducted through expert interviews and one of the central elements in this process is the development of an interview guide. This guide serves as the question framework used during the interviews and acts as the primary tool for facilitating the interview person (Ingemann , Kjeldsen , Nørup, & Rasmussen , 2018). The preparation for the interviews is based on a semi-structured format with an emphasis on open- ended questions. This approach enables a deeper understanding of the interviewees' perspectives, allowing the interviewer to explore topics more deeper based on their response. At the same time a thematic structure in the interview guide ensures that the desired information is collected and that the interview remains focused (Ingemann , Kjeldsen , Nørup, & Rasmussen , 2018). The thematic interview guide helps to achieve both width and depth in the interviews, ensuring that the connection between the selected interviewees and a well- developed guide supports the goal of reaching the sufficient point (Ingemann , Kjeldsen , Nørup, & Rasmussen , 2018). The importance of these theoretical themes in shaping the interview guide will facilitate a structured analysis, with coding focused on the study's theoretical framework after data collection.

In this study, the questions for the interviewees are based on the structure outlined by Ingemann, Kjeldsen, Nørup, & Rasmussen, (2018). This structure includes a briefing prior to the interview in order to align expectations between the interviewer and interviewee. The guide starts with introductory factual questions to establish a comfortable environment for the interviewee. The following questions, holding greater research relevance, are organised into thematic sections. Finally, a debriefing ensures that no additional comments are left out and that the interviewee consents to the use of their statements for further analysis (Ingemann , Kjeldsen , Nørup, & Rasmussen , 2018).



### 3.2.3 Transcription

After the interviews were conducted, they were transcribed. Since the interviews have been conducted in Danish, the transcription process was also carried out in Danish. This ensures that the nuances of the original language, in the interviews, are maintained. However, the quotes used in the assignment have been translated into English. This is not without consequences and will be addressed later in the chapter. The process of transcription is crucial for a detailed analysis allowing for a thorough examination of the interview content. It also supports the coding process allowing for the identification and analysis of key themes and patterns in alignment with the research objectives (Ingemann, Kjeldsen, Nørup, & Rasmussen, 2018).

### 3.2.4 Data analysis and operationalisation

Based on the Europeanisation theory described in the theory chapter, qualitative content analysis has been selected as the methodological approach for the study. This method enables the identification of underlying themes within the materials being examined (Bryman A., 2012). Within the framework of the study, investigating Denmark's approach to EU climate policies, content analysis emerges as a crucial tool for extracting valuable insights from qualitative data. This methodology is aimed at producing findings that are both valid and replicable, shedding light on the broader contexts that shape Denmark's policy decisions and actions within the EU climate framework (Krippendorff, 2004).

In order to uncover Denmark's alignment with its domestic climate policies with EU climate objectives, thematic coding has been used as a tool for conducting the analysis. A coding scheme has been created involving themes relevant to the related set of provisional arguments. Specifically, the analysis focuses on identifying and examining relevant passages and data within 4 primary thematic areas.

1. ***Denmark's engagement as a frontrunner in renewable energy, sustainability, and climate action:*** This theme involves seeking out and analysing evidence that highlights Denmark's active role as a leader in the EU and internationally. Which for example include Carbon emission reduction, green initiatives, green investments, involvement in international

climate agreements, partnerships, and initiatives underscores its dedication to collaborating globally on climate action.

2. ***Denmark's Alignment with EU's Climate Policies:*** This theme contains the investigation and analysis of data that indicates Denmark's alignment with EU's climate policies, which could include adaptation and implementation of EU directives and regulations related to climate change, renewable energy targets, and reductions of greenhouse gas emissions demonstrate its alignment with EU climate policies.
3. ***Adaptation pressure due to lack of harmonization:*** This theme includes the search and analysis of data that indicates signs of adaptation pressure which for example could involve Inconsistencies between Denmark's national climate policies and EU directives, regulations, or goals and may create adaptation pressure as Denmark seeks to balance conflicting priorities and objectives.
4. ***Impact of the European Green Deal:*** This theme incorporates the search and analysis of data that describes the impact of the EGD. This could involve legislative changes, economic impact, environmental outcomes, or societal responses resulting from the EUG initiatives.

In order to get relevant data about Denmark's climate policies and their alignment with EU directives like EGD, each transcript and document is carefully manually examined. The coding system, based on the established themes, is making it easier to organise and analyse data. By analysing relevant quotes and data within the established themes, this study sheds light on the dynamics between Denmark's national climate policies and the EGD, especially focusing on their alignment and any emerging conflicts. The qualitative analysis provides deep insights into the motivations, strategies and impacts of Denmark's approach to harmonizing with EU climate directives.

### **3.2.5 Reliability**

Reliability concerns the consistency and replicability of the research findings. It focuses on the extent to which the study's results can be reproduced under similar conditions. As Bryman

(2016) defines it: “*Reliability is concerned with the question of whether the results of the study are repeatable*” (Bryman A. , 2016). To ensure reliability in this study, it can be argued that the use of a structured interview guide and a thematic coding enhances the reliability of data collection and analysis. The interview guide enables a standardised framework for conducting interviews, ensuring that all participants are asked the same questions in a consistent manner.

However, interviews can be prone to response bias, which occurs when there is a tendency among respondents to answer questions in a way that deviates from the truth or their actual attitudes. This can affect the reliability of the collected data and thus results of the analysis. Respondents may be prone to give answers that they believe will be seen more favourably or acceptable by the interviewer or society. Or there might be a possibility that the interviewer and respondent may not align in their interpretation of words (Bryman A. , 2012). It is recognised that the researcher’s perspectives and priorities will always have an influence on the design of the interviews. To mitigate this, the interviews are structured with detailed preparation of questions.

Moreover, interviews and the transcription process are conducted in Danish, to maintain the nuances of the statements that has been given. However translating these interviews into English for analysis and reporting, several challenges arise that could affect the accuracy and reliability of the data. Certain words or phrases may have meanings that depend on the context, and the translation might not fully capture the intended emphasis or nuance that the interviewee conveyed in Danish, resulting in inaccuracies or misinterpretations. Direct translations may result in unclear English and interpretive translations risk deviating from the original meaning. In order to prevent this, extra caution has been taken when translating the quotes.

### **3.2.6 Validity**

In relation to the study on how Denmark harmonises between the climate policy of the EGD and its own national policies, the concept of validity is crucial. Validity evaluates whether the conclusions drawn from a study are trustworthy and credible. It ensures that the research accurately addresses the problem statement and that the findings genuinely reflect the phenomena under investigation. Validity is defined as "*the integrity of the conclusions*

*generated from a piece of research"* (Bryman, 2016). Validity contains four types: measurement, external, internal, and ecological validity.

Focusing on external validity, it relates to the extent to which the study's results can be generalised beyond the specific research context (Bryman, 2016). Relating it to this study about how Denmark harmonizes its climate policies with those of the EUG, it can be argued that it is important to be cautious when applying these conclusions to other regions or situations. Each context may have distinct challenges, have different priorities and limitations that could affect the success of policy alignment. Despite these limitations, the findings of this study can still contribute to the broader conversation on climate policy alignment, both within the European union and globally. Through an exploration of Denmark's experiences and strategies in navigating the complexities of aligning national and EU objectives, this study provides valuable insights that can enhance conversations and efforts aimed at promoting coherence and cooperation in climate policy at the international level.

### **3.3 Limitations of research**

In order to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the study's scope and boundaries, it is essential to acknowledge the potential limitations of the study.

One limitation is related to the availability of relevant and reliable data from Danish politicians regarding their decision-making and strategies to the EU's climate policy goals and may be due to several factors. Political decisions and strategies might not always be publicly available or documented. Internal meetings and discussions that are not shared externally is limiting the availability of data retrievability. It might be related to sensitive or confidential information, which is why it is not shared with researchers or the public. For instance, it could be ministerial notes, private conversations, or strategic plans. Even when data are available there may be restrictions on how they can be used by researchers. Some data might necessitate special permits or approvals from related authorities, which may be challenging or time- consuming. To sum up, Yin (1994) has pointed out, intentional barriers may prevent access to documents (Bowen, 2009). The researcher can include alternative methods of data collection, which is interviews in this study, or the use of available public documents and reports. In this study, the interviews conducted will be used to gain insight and public documents and reports will be used

so it can provide valuable information that complements the data collected through interviews. By combining these methods, the study can achieve a more nuanced understanding of how Denmark navigates in relation to the EU's climate goals.

Another limitation of the study has been securing participation from key political figures and experts. High-ranking officials, advisors, and experts often have busy schedules and may be unavailable for interviews. This can restrict the diversity of perspectives included in the study. For example members in the Danish ministry of climate energy and utility has been contacted in email but unfortunately they were not available. Their insights could have provided valuable firsthand information on Denmark's climate policies and strategies, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of Denmark's approach. The views of a few interviewees might not fully represent the broader political landscape or diverse factions within Denmark's political system. In order to resolve this the interviews have been supplemented with additional data sources like policy documents, press releases, official statements, and media reports. These sources can offer additional context help verify the information obtained from interviews.

## **4. Analysis**

The analysis aims to answer the research question: How does Denmark harmonise between the climate policy of the EGD and its own national policies? This investigation is conducted through a thematic coding process, like described in the methodology chapter. The coding process was initiated by predefining four overarching themes.

**Theme 1:** Denmark's engagement as a frontrunner in renewable energy, sustainability, and climate action

**Theme 2:** Denmark's Alignment with EU's Climate Policies

**Theme 3:** Denmark's adaptation pressure due to lack of harmonization

**Theme 4:** Impact of the European Green Deal

A detailed analysis of the coded data is available in Annex 3. Following chapters will delve into a thorough interpretation of the findings utilizing Europeanisation theory. Each theme under investigation will be analysed separately, conducting a detailed analysis of its implications.

#### **4.1 Theme 1: Denmark's engagement as a frontrunner in renewable energy, sustainability, and climate action**

In connection with Denmark's role as a leader in renewable energy and climate action, it is relevant for this study to examine how the Europeanisation process affects Denmark's self-perception in these areas. As mentioned in the background chapter, Denmark is recognized as one of the pioneers of producing renewable energy, especially wind energy, and has been actively engaged in the development and implementation of climate policies at both the national and international levels. Denmark's self-identification as one of the forefront nations in climate policy is evident in its long-standing dedication to tackling environmental challenges. As stated by the Danish political advisor in the EU parliament, in the following quote: "*Climate policy is a big topic in Denmark, and an important priority. We describe ourselves as a leading country when it comes to this*" (Annex 3 - Danish Political advisor in the EU parliament, p. 27). This statement emphasizes the importance of climate policy within Denmark's political agenda, indicating an understanding of the urgent need to tackle climate change. Regarding Denmark's leadership in renewable energy, it is connected to its successful tech industry and advancements in sectors such as wind energy. Its expertise in wind turbine technology is emphasized by the Danish Political advisor in the EU parliament, in the following quote: "*We have been good and innovative, especially in wind turbines, the construction of them and the production of them, and we still are*" (Annex 3 - Political advisor in the EU parliament, p. 27).

Denmark's achievements in offshore wind farms, energy efficiency, and district heating are highlighted. And its technological capability and industrial leadership in renewable energy are also emphasised. The early investment in offshore wind technology, is illustrated by the installation of its first commercial offshore wind farm 30 years ago and has positioned Denmark as a global leader in the wind industry. This leadership has created export opportunities for Danish wind turbine manufacturers such as Vestas and Siemens Gamesa, contributing significantly to the country's export economy (Danish Ministry of Climate, Energy and Utilities, 2019)

Additionally, its effective promotion of energy efficiency measures, particularly in the industrial sector demonstrates its commitment to maintaining competitiveness. By adopting ambitious energy efficiency practices, Danish companies have maintained their competitive edge, and at the same time contributing to national emission reduction targets (Danish Ministry of Climate, Energy and Utilities, 2019). Denmark's success in for instance wind energy is not only contributing to its transition green energy but also promote economic growth and employment opportunities. Moreover, industries such as manufacturing, transportation and services experiences a growing demand, because of the expansion of renewable energy projects. This multiplier effect sparks the economic activity and supports local businesses and enhancing economic growth and stability (Danish Ministry of Climate, Energy and Utilities, 2019). Beyond creating jobs and economic growth, renewable energy initiatives present opportunities for long-term cost savings and energy security. The shift towards renewable energy sources reduces the dependence on imported fossil fuels and unstable energy markets, thereby enhancing energy independence and resilience while mitigating risks linked to fossil fuel dependency.

Denmark's innovative strategies in renewable energy and sustainability establishes its position as a global leader in climate action. This is emphasized by Denmark's Minister of Climate, Energy and Utilities, Lars Aagaard, in an interview in the following quote: *"Denmark must be a pioneering country. We must show how to carry out a successful green transition, and that model must then be exported to other countries"* (Clausen , 2023). This statement underscores Denmark's ambition to share its green transition model with other countries, highlighting its position as a leader in the global fight against climate change. Additionally, Denmark serves as a catalyst for global cooperation and knowledge sharing on sustainable solutions. By creating international partnerships, capacity-building initiatives, and engaging in multilateral forums, Denmark shares best practices, expertise, and innovative solutions with countries facing similar challenges. Which is also resulting in Denmark contributing to the global effort to achieve the sustainable development goals (SDGs), and tackling pressing environmental and social issues (Clausen , 2023).

Denmark's active engagement in renewable energy and climate action extends beyond its national borders and does not only have significant influence on the global agenda, but also on EU climate policy. According to Europeanisation theory, national policies are influenced by European

integration. Where Member states influence EU policies through their own initiatives and experiences, as introduced in the theory chapter, drawing on Dyson and Goetz's (2003) circular concept of the "top-down and bottom-up process." There are several indicators that are highlighted of Denmark's influential role in driving ambitious climate policies within the EU. For instance, Denmark's engagement in renewable energy and climate targets has positioned it as a promoter for raising EU ambitions. This is emphasised by an EU special advisor in CDEU, who highlights Denmark's push for more ambitious EU climate goals, its commitment to global leadership, and its promotion of collective action on climate change in the following quote:

*Denmark is one of the countries that has the greatest interest in, EU raising its ambitions on energy and climate targets. That we reduce as much as possible and as quickly as possible, because Denmark has business interests in green transition in general"* (Annex 3 - EU special advisor in CDEU, p. 30).

The interaction between national (Denmark) and supranational (EU) actors is crucial for understanding Denmark's influence on climate policy. To fully grasp Denmark's impact, it is essential to analyse both its domestic policies and its role within the EU. Denmark's historical contributions to EU climate initiatives has been highlighted through referencing to people like Connie Hedegaard and through Denmark's focus on energy efficiency and renewable energy by the Deputy Director and EU Special Adviser in CDEU in following quote:

*"Connie Hedegaard was very much involved in setting the agenda in the EU from 15-20 years ago, , by taking the Danish priorities, one might say, to Brussels"* (Annex 3 - Deputy Director and EU Special Adviser in CDEU p. 32).

This emphasises Denmark's longstanding influence on EU climate policy. By establishing strategic alliances and building coalitions, Denmark has promoted its progressive climate agenda at the European level, and thereby shaped the broader EU climate agenda. Danish Climate Minister Dan Jørgensen has been noted for "*building coalitions of ambitious allies to force the agenda*"(Politico, 2023). Denmark's proactive approach is also reflected in its support for stringent standards and targets within the EU. By defending the Energy Efficiency Directive, Denmark has pushed for



ambitious requirements intending to reduce energy consumption and promote energy savings across member states. As noted by the Deputy Director and EU Special Adviser in CDEU:

*“We are on the stringent side in the EU. We do. The Energy Efficiency Directive, which came into being in 2012, it was largely Denmark, that made very high demands on how much energy we should save in the EU and thus also in the individual countries. So I would think we are on the stringent side”* (Annex 3 - Deputy Director and EU Special Adviser in CDEU, p. 33).

This quote points at Denmark's leadership in stringent energy-saving measures within the EU, especially through its significant contribution to the Energy Efficiency Directive. Moreover, Denmark acknowledges its position within the EU as a significant player on the global stage. The EU provides a platform for Denmark to engage in international climate diplomacy and support the global effort to combat climate change. Denmark understands that without the EU, individual countries might lack the collective push and accountability required for effective climate action. Moreover, EU membership enhances Denmark's influence and strengthens its voice in global climate negotiations (Annex 2 - Political advisor in the green left, p. 12).

#### **4.2 Theme 2: Alignment with EU's Climate Policies**

The EU has played a crucial role in advancing ambitious climate goals and setting stringent regulations to combat climate change (Annex 3 - Deputy Director and EU Special Adviser in CDEU, p. 33). Denmark's climate legislation has closely aligned with EU directives, indicated by its commitment to upholding European standards and supporting collective climate efforts. Historically, Denmark has shown a strong dedication in implementing EU legislation in accordance with its intentions. This proactive stance towards EU climate goals stems from its historical commitment and tradition in implementing EU legislation. It has been argued that the Danish policymakers have shown dedication to upholding EU laws in a diligent manner, establishing Denmark as a reliable partner in advancing the European climate agenda. This is reflected in the following quote, describing Denmark as a “duksedreng”, regarding compliance with EU regulations. “Duksedreng” means a hard-working boy or man who behaves (too) politely and does what is expected of him (ordnet):

*“Denmark is traditionally one of the countries that is most responsive in terms of implementing EU legislation in line with the intention in the legislation, we are a do-gooder, to say, in this area here, and we are too, I think, we will also be on the climate part. Also because we are one of those who are very progressive compared to many other countries.” (Annex 2 - Danish Political advisor in the EU parliament, p.5)*

This dedication extends across different policy areas, including climate action, where it is said that Denmark has positioned itself as a progressive leader compared to other countries. Moreover, Danish policymakers and officials recognize the importance of maintaining Denmark’s reputation as a country that faithfully implements EU legislation. Therefore, it is argued that Denmark does not only guarantee compliance but also maintain its reputation as a responsible member state within the EU. As it is viewed that this reputation enhances Denmark’s credibility and influence in EU decision-making processes, enabling effective advocacy for its interests while supporting the overarching goals of the EU.

The Danish government acknowledges the significance of aligning its climate efforts with the EU’s overall goals and policies. This alignment is underscored in another statement: *“What is clear, is that if EU law already has covered it, we can use EU law, implement the law in a way that helps us with this or gets us there, where our political goals are”* (Annex 2 - Climate policy advisor in green left (SF), p.13). The interviewee emphasizes Denmark’s approach of utilizing EU regulations as tools to strengthen and complement national climate efforts, contributing to the achievement of national objectives and at the same time aligning with the EU’s comprehensive climate agenda. It is also highlighted that Danish climate laws often reflect the principles outlined in the Paris agreement and EU directives. This supports the incitation of a harmonisation between Danish and EU climate goals, with the Danish legislation reflecting the broader framework established by the EU (Annex 2 - Climate policy advisor in green left (SF), p.13).

Additionally, the expressed position suggests that Denmark sees commitment to EU laws, as an indicator of good governance and progressive policymaking. Denmark’s alignment with EU climate goals is not just a matter of compliance, it is the recognition of the Danish policymakers about the urgency of the climate crisis and the necessity for coordinated action both domestically and EU levels to mitigate its impacts. Moreover, Denmark’s active approach to EU climate policies is

evident in its efforts to not only meet but also surpass EU targets. For instance, Denmark has already reached the EU's goal of reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 55% by 2030, indicating its effectiveness in implementing EU directives related to climate action. This is emphasized in the following quote:

*"You can say that the EU's goal of reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 55 percent in 2030, there you can say that we have Denmark's goal of 70 percent, and then the EU goal there, in relation to reducing, we have redeemed already, basically at home" " (Annex 2 - Danish Political advisor in the EU parliament p. 5).*

It has been argued that Denmark's ambitious climate objective of reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by 70 percent by 2030 represents a notable achievement in the country's journey towards sustainability.

By exceeding the EU emission reduction goal and making substantial progress towards achieving its own target, By exceeding the EU emission reduction goal and making substantial progress towards achieving its own target, Denmark is seen as a model for other countries to follow, demonstrating that ambitious climate action is both essential and attainable through political will, innovation, and collective effort. However, the Danish Council on Climate Change, in their status outlook for 2024, has argued that the Danish government's plan for reaching the 2030 target contains significant risks, which may result in reductions not being realized on time. These risks include:

- Agriculture, where several measures do not seem to have the expected effect.
- Emission factors for carbon-rich soils, which are expected to be adjusted upward.
- Industry, where the effect of the Danish CO<sub>2</sub> tax is likely overestimated.
- Investments in carbon capture and storage, where time schedules are tight (Danish Council on Climate Change, 2024)

These two positions highlight a contradiction, regarding the climate objective of reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. On one hand Denmark is praised for its ambitious goals and early achievements. On the other hand, significant concerns are raised about practicability and realisability of the Danish government's plans to achieve its 2030 targets. This contradiction points out the adaptation pressure Denmark can be facing, as the national targets require adjustment and improvements in policy

implementation to align with both national ambitions and EU expectations. This will be further discussed in the next section.

Moreover, it is claimed that Denmark's support for ambitious initiatives like the EGD emphasises its active engagement in shaping EU climate policies. This perspective is highlighted in the following quote:

*“And we have been very supportive of the entire Green Deal project from the Danish side, and the objectives are there, and we are also some of those who have pushed to make it as ambitious as possible...” (Annex 2 – Danish Political advisor in the EU parliament p. 6)*

Denmark has embraced the principles and aims of the EGD, recognizing its capacity to drive transformative change. The Danish government has actively incorporated EGD goals into its national policies, harmonising them with its own ambitious climate targets. This integration is evident in Denmark's recovery and resilience plan, which corresponds with the objectives outlined in the EGD, focusing on decarbonisation, the expansion of renewable energy, biodiversity promotion, and sustainable agriculture (European Commission , 2023). With Denmark's active involvement, the EGD, has the potential to shape the future of global climate governance. Through demonstrating the practicality and benefits of the climate initiatives, the EU sets an example for other nations to follow. Through collaborative efforts and diplomatic engagements, Denmark and the EU advance the goals of the EGD, leading the way for a more sustainable and resilient future on a global scale (European Commission , 2023).

Danish policies often serve as good examples within the EU, shaping the formulation of EU-wide directives. The reference to Denmark's national circular waste management plan, developed in alignment with the EGD, demonstrates Denmark's role in translating EU frameworks into actionable national policies. In short collaboration and diplomacy are essential in advancing the goals of the EGD and shaping the future of global climate governance. However, Denmark acknowledges the hurdles created by EU legislation while recognizing the opportunities it brings. EU laws on energy efficiency, building renovations, and phasing out fossil-fuel vehicles pose challenges but also encourage innovation and investment. Denmark perceives EU regulation not

only as a constraint but also as a driver of positive change and economic growth (Annex 3 – *Danish Political advisor in the EU parliament*, p. 28).

Furthermore, Europeanisation theory emphasizes the mutual influence between EU institutions and member states, as they shape and adapt to each other's policies and priorities. Denmark's active engagement in EU decision-making processes, along with its efforts to influence EU climate policies, illustrates this dynamic interaction between the national and supranational levels. Denmark's alignment with EU climate policies can be viewed in the lens of Europeanisation, where its adaptation of EU norms and regulations reflects its commitment to European integration and cooperation. This alignment not only strengthens Denmark's ties with the EU but also contributes to the collective effort to tackle the global challenge of climate change.

#### **4.3 Theme 3: Adaptation pressure due to lack of harmonization:**

The EU establishes ambitious environmental directives and targets that member states like Denmark are expected to follow. However, aligning Danish environmental policies with these EU directives presents significant challenges. This is indicated by the detailed examples provided in the conducted interviews, highlighting Denmark's struggles with EU environmental goals due to its intensive agriculture, economic costs, and lack of suitable land for renewable energy projects. These challenges will be discussed in detail below. The tensions that are highlighted indicate difference between Danish national priorities and the objectives set by the EU. For instance, Denmark's dependence on agriculture conflicts with EU directives aimed at preserving nature and reducing carbon emissions. Similarly, economic considerations, such as the impact on industries like farming and manufacturing might conflict with environmental goals outlined by the EU.

In Denmark's pursuit of EU environmental compliance, the agricultural sector becomes a central area of dispute. Denmark's intensive agricultural practices, covering 60% of its land area, conflict with EU directives aimed at preserving natural habitats. This is expressed in the following quote:

*“And the way we conduct agriculture today, is not, in my opinion, particularly compatible with the objectives we set in the Green Deal, at least parts of it in the environmental field, but also in terms*

*of CO2 reduction. So that will be a challenge there, clearly"* (Annex 2 – Danish Political advisor in the parliament, p. 6)

This concern highlights, that the methods utilised in the Danish agriculture are not aligned with the environmental goals outlined in the EGD, particularly regarding the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. This misalignment presents a clear challenge, indicating the necessity for significant changes or reforms within the agricultural sector to ensure better alignment with the environmental and climate targets set by the EU" (Annex 2 – Danish Political advisor in the parliament, p. 6). The intensive agricultural practices in Denmark also contribute to harming the biodiversity and soil degradation. Dependence on farming methods like intensive pesticide use undermines efforts to promote sustainable agriculture and protect ecosystems. The resistance from the agricultural lobby against strict regulations, especially regarding carbon emissions and land management practices, presents a significant obstacle. Moreover, the economic consequences of transitioning to more sustainable farming methods, including the costs to renovating infrastructure or implementing carbon taxes, add complexity to the situation. This conflict between intensifying agriculture and environment underscores the necessity for nuanced policies that harmonise competing interests (Annex 2 - Danish Political advisor in the parliament, p.6)

A Danish politician Niels Fuglsang, serving as a Member of the European Parliament (MEP), emphasised the victories and progress achieved with the EGD but warned of the significant challenges ahead. He points out that the EU still needs to reform agriculture and accelerate the green transition, and the right-wing parties and industrial lobbyists are actively resisting and hindering the process (Reimer, 2024). These policy disagreements are argued to be evident in negotiations, lobbying and sometimes legal challenges within EU institutions. Denmark's conflict to some of the EU's agricultural directives highlights the ongoing struggle to harmonise national policies with broader EU objectives while protecting its economic and political interest. This situation illustrates the pressures Denmark faces, in order to fit EU standards and regulations, demonstrating the extent to which Europeanisation impact its decision- making and policy outcomes. This situation can be categorised as adaptational pressure, which is mentioned in the methodology chapter.

Another area facing disputes is Denmark's commitment to reducing CO2 emissions. Denmark's economy relies on certain carbon-intensive industries, such as manufacturing, transportation, and energy production. Transitioning away from these carbon-intensive practices poses significant economic and logistical challenges. For instance, Denmark has historically been depended on fossil fuels for energy production, and transitioning to renewable sources requires investment in infrastructure and technology. There are expressed doubts regarding Denmark's capacity to achieve its targets, especially as the deadline is nearing, from the following quote.

*"It is actually not so certain that Denmark can meet its own climate goals by 2030 because it has relied heavily on a few technologies that were believed to achieve substantial reductions by 2030, and now it's almost 2030" (Annex 2 - EU special advisor, p.19)*

This quote underscores Denmark's need to reevaluate its climate strategies, exploring alternative approaches or technologies if current ones prove insufficient. It emphasizes the importance of adaptability and flexibility in responding to changing conditions ensuring meaningful progress in combating climate change. The transition to renewable energy sources represents not only technological challenges but also socio-economic ones. It involves retraining the workforce, managing potential job displacement in carbon-intensive industries, and ensuring a just transition for affected communities. Additionally, there are geopolitical considerations, as Denmark's energy security could be compromised by its dependency on imported fossil fuels. This is emphasised in following quote:

*And what I think I want to say when I also have another thing that is quite crucial, that is also manpower, lack of manpower. You can say that getting buildings insulated, district heating installed, heat pumps installed, wind turbines built etc., requires qualified labour. And that is a problem" (Annex 3 – Danish Political advisor in the parliament, p. 28).*

This quote highlights the significance of qualified labour in executing diverse environmental initiatives, such as the mentioned in the quote. The lack of skilled manpower presents a significant challenge to these efforts. Without enough qualified workers to carry out these tasks, speed and efficacy of environmental initiatives may be hindered. This emphasises the need for investment in workforce training and development to address the manpower shortage and ensure the successful

execution environmental policies and initiatives. has a reach beyond national borders and encourages collective action.

It is highlighted that even though Denmark is viewed as a pioneer, it is facing some challenges associated with implementing renewable energy, especially concerning wind and solar power. Since Denmark is a small geographical size, there is limited suitable locations for infrastructure installation such as wind turbines and creating obstacles in achieving renewable energy targets. Moreover, securing the necessary permits and approvals for the construction of renewable energy facilities can be complex and time- consuming, adding further delays to the execution of renewable energy initiatives. This is indicated in following quote:

*“And there are also some challenges, which we are particularly seeing right now, with getting the wind turbines and solar cells that are required. It is difficult because we are not such a big country and there are not that many suitable places for it in reality”* (Annex 2 – Danish Political advisor in the parliament, p. 6).

The statement by the Danish Political advisor in the parliament underscores the challenges Denmark is facing in expanding its renewable energy capacity. The limited availability of suitable locations for wind turbines and solar panels, combined with the country's small size, emphasises the need for innovative solutions and strategic planning to overcome these obstacles and accelerate the transition to a sustainable energy future.

The economic consequences of environmental regulations are a significant concern. Financial costs associated with measures like renovating buildings for energy efficiency and implementing carbon taxes on agricultural production are emphasized. Moreover, the economic impact on industries and competitiveness due to EU policies, such as the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism, is also highlighted. This mechanism aims to reduce carbon emission and promote fair competition, but it raises concerns among Danish policymakers regarding its impact on free trade and the competitiveness of Danish exports. There is a concern that such policies could undermine the economic stability of Denmark’s export-reliant economy, it is evident in following quote.



*"but obviously there are some immediate financial costs associated with it, because it costs money to renovate and insulate a house, for example. So I guess someone is going to get a bill immediately"* (Annex 2 – Danish Political advisor in the parliament, p. 6).

By highlighting this example, this quote underscores the practical and financial challenges that can occur from implementing environmental policies. It has been pointed out that although these policies are beneficial in the long term for the environment, they can pose immediate financial difficulties for those who need to comply with them. There is a concern that such policies could undermine the economic stability of Danish economy, that is open and reliant on export. Therefore while the push for environmental sustainability is essential, the financial implications and competitive pressures cannot be overlooked (Nissen, 2021).

In the context of Europeanisation theory, Denmark's challenges in aligning its environmental policies with EU directives reveal challenges in domestic adaptation and harmonization. The EU's ambitious environmental directives and targets apply pressure member states like Denmark to adapt their national policies to comply with EU standards. However, this adaptation pressure arises due to differences in national context, economic structure, and political priorities. Additionally political priorities play a crucial role in shaping the adaptation process. National governments must balance their domestic agendas and electoral consideration with the demands of EU membership. Political resistance from certain sectors, like the agricultural lobby can hinder the implementation of EU directives at the national level. Similarly conflicting political ideologies can hinder efforts to achieve consensus on environmental policies. This is illustrated by the following quote:

*But if the opinion polls are to be believed, then the right-wing populist parties in Europe are going to fill up somewhat more in the parliament after the election. Whether they get a majority or not depends a little on which opinion polls you read and when. So I don't quite know yet. But there will clearly be greater representation in the European Parliament. And it has already become so in the council, i.e. in the Netherlands for example, by parties that are, if not climate sceptical, at least have a different balance on the real economy and economy and competitiveness than climate, than the majority that has been up to now, which has come to a direction that will drag the ambitions down.*(Annex 2 - Political advisor in the green left (SF), p.13).

In this quote, it is highlighted that, the increased representation of right-wing populist parties may lead to more debates and potential conflicts over prioritising economic growth versus environmental sustainability. Moreover, this shift could slow down or weaken the implementation of climate policies supported by the current majority. This highlights the adaptive challenges and integration processes central to Europeanisation.

#### **4.4 Theme 4: Impact of the European Green Deal**

The legislative framework of the EGD, including the EU climate law and the fit for 55 packages, has played a crucial role in shaping environmental policies across Europe. It is emphasised that these laws have made significant differences at the EU level, influencing sectors such as energy, environment, and nature conservation, among others. This framework is regarded as setting a significant legislative example within the EU, pushing member states, including Denmark towards more sustainable practices. This is emphasised in following quote:

*“A lot has been carried out, and you can say that the EU's climate act and the Fit for the 55 part, are part of the Green Deal, and fairly landmarking legislation at EU level, has made a big difference, and so all the concrete elements in the Green Deal in the area of energy and in the area of the environment and in the area of nature have in the area of animal welfare, which unfortunately has been slightly under-prioritised, but which is nevertheless also part of the Green Deal”* (Annex 2 - Eu special advisor in CDEU, p. 18).

The quote illustrates the EGD's transformative potential through its legislative framework, which drives significant progress across multiple sectors. However there appears to be a indication of a gap between EU- level initiatives and national-level regarding the awareness of the EGD. Danish politicians and the public may not be fully aware of the specifics of the EGD. This suggests that while the EGD provides a crucial framework, national policies and approaches often dominate, as indicated in the following quote:

*"I'm not sure, but I don't think that Danish politicians know much about the European Green Deal. It's not something you hear much about in the media, and it's not something that's talked about*

*much among politicians, I think. Because Denmark has very much its own way of doing things, and we have come a long way” (Annex 2 - EU special advisor in CDEU, p. 18)*

Although the EGD establishes ambitious objectives and provides a comprehensive framework for sustainability, it is the impression that its impact on Danish policies seems subdued. While Danish politicians may acknowledge the significance of the EGD, especially when engaging with EU counterparts. However, its integration into domestic policymaking seems very slow. That could be due to various factors, including Denmark’s historical commitment to environmental issues and its pre-existing green initiatives prior to the EGD’s introduction, and many factors that has to be considered.

Additionally, the broader objective of the EGD align with Denmark’s economic strategies, especially in promoting sustainable energy exports. For the Danish economy, sustainable energy is a significant and growing market. Denmark hopes that Europe’s transition to green energy will generate more economic opportunities, emphasised in following quote:

*“The objectives of the European Green Deal must be the backbone of the EU’s recovery plan for a more sustainable and resilient Europe and together with a 'Europe fit for the digital age' remain central strategic priorities in both short and long-term stimulating the economy and creating jobs whilst taking into consideration the need for a just transition” (Europaudvalget, 2019).*

Moreover, Denmark’s specific needs and priorities such as the development of a hydrogen economy have significantly influenced its response to the EGD, as stated in the following quote:

*“I definitely believe in hydrogen, that Denmark has waited a lot, for what will come from the EU on that agenda, because it was a very immature technology. And the EU also has a lot to do with the infrastructure that needs to be built across Europe with pipes and wires that need to be laid through the European countries. So Denmark has of course waited and awaited the legislation that comes from the EU” (Annex 2 -Eu special advisor in CDEU, p. 18).*

This emphasises how Denmark relies on EU initiatives for certain advanced technologies, while maintaining its autonomy in other areas. This strategic alignment with the EU enables Denmark to

benefit from shared knowledge, funding, and market integration, which are important for advancing emerging technologies like hydrogen. Denmark can align its national policies with broader European goals, ensuring unity and enhancing the impact of its environmental initiatives. Overall, the alignment of Denmark's economic strategies with the EGD not only supports domestic growth, but also strengthens Denmark's contribution to the EU's sustainability goals. This balance of collaboration and autonomy enables Denmark to leverage the benefits of the EGD while maintaining to lead in sectors where it has established expertise and infrastructure.

Denmark's effort to transition away from fossil fuels and align with EGD's objectives of phasing out fossil fuel- powered vehicles. The country is already taking steps towards this goal, supported by EU directives that aim to end the sale of fossil fuel vehicles by 2030, which is described in following quote:

*"And then there's something with the phasing out of fossil cars, which we are also partially implementing in Denmark, and we have an EU directive that after 2030 no fossil cars will be sold in the EU"* (Annex 2 - Eu special advisor in CDEU, p. 18)

The statement regarding the phasing out of fossil fuel- powered cars underscores Denmark's commitment to reducing carbon emissions and transitioning towards sustainable transport solutions. Aligned with EU's directive, Denmark is harmonising the goal of banning the sale of fossil fuel vehicles across the EU by 2030. In consistent with its climate goals, Denmark is investing in electric vehicle infrastructure, including charging stations and incentives to encourage the adoption of electric cars. Furthermore, the government is collaborating closely with industry stakeholders to develop supportive policies and regulatory frameworks that promote the adoption of zero- emission vehicles.

As indicated, there is an interest in the EU's strategies to reduce dependency on fossil fuels, especially following geopolitical events like the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The EU Repower EU plan, aimed at achieving energy independence and enhancing domestic production of energy, materials and technology, aligns well with Denmark's business interests, as stated in the following quote:

*"As I mentioned, and then in the energy area, the whole REPowerEU, plan that came in 2022 after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, was the EU's strategy for quickly becoming free of gas and oil from Russia, but also from the rest of the world. We need to be self-sufficient, we need to produce ourselves, and it's not just fuel, it's also materials and technology and digitization. We need to be better at producing everything in Europe, and in the energy area, it is interesting for Denmark because we see it as a business case" (Annex 2, EU special advisor, p. 19).*

For Denmark, the REPowerEU plan presents a significant business opportunity. The plan is seen as a “business case”, indicating that Denmark views the transition towards self-sufficiency and enhanced production capabilities aligns well with its economic interests. Denmark likely anticipates that its expertise in renewable energy and related technologies will give it a competitive edge within this new framework (Annex 2, EU special advisor in CDEU, p. 19).

In the case of Denmark, the EGD serves as a powerful driver of Europeanisation, influencing national policymaking. The legislative framework of the EGD, including directives like the EU climate law and the first 55 packages, establishes ambitious targets and standards for environmental sustainability across Europe. As a member state of EU Denmark is obliged to follow these directives and must align its domestic policies and practices accordingly. From a Europeanisation perspective, Denmark’s response to the EGD demonstrates a combination of adaptation and initiatives. On one side, Denmark adapts its policies and practices to meet EU directives and align with broader European goals. This is evident in Denmark’s effort to incorporate EGD priorities into its national environmental agenda. On the other side Denmark is also shaping the implementation and interpretation of EGD to suit its unique context and priorities.

## **5. Discussion**

The findings of this study provide insight about how Denmark’s proactive approach to renewable energy and sustainability serves as a model for integrating ambitious climate goals with national policies. It can be argued that the strengths of Denmark’s approach are found in its comprehensive and forward-thinking strategies, which combines technological innovation, policy frameworks, and international cooperation. Denmark’s significant investment in renewable energy technologies like wind and solar power has positioned it as a global leader in the field. Additionally, Denmark’s

proactive stance in EU climate negotiations ensures that its priorities are effectively represented in broader policy discussion. However, this leadership role also involves weaknesses and challenges. The pressure to maintain high standards and continuous innovation can strain resources and create economic vulnerabilities. Balancing national interest with EU directives requires constant negotiation and adaptation, can be politically and administratively demanding. National interest and EU directives may sometimes conflict and requires ongoing negotiation to find common ground. Additionally, adapting to EU directives often involves implementing changes at the national level, a process that can be politically sensitive and administratively complex. Therefore, handling this process requires effort and expertise from both political and administrative perspective. For instance, politically encouraging greater dialog and collaboration can help the alignment of the objectives and develop more joined strategies. Moreover, involving the public and stakeholders in transparent communication and participatory decision-making processes, broader backing for climate policies can be supported. This approach ensures that diverse perspective is considered in the policy-making process. Additionally transparent communication builds trust and accountability, which enhances the acceptance and implementation of climate policies.

EU membership has significantly strengthened Denmark's environmental policies by providing a broader framework of legislation, funding and collaborative opportunities. The EGD along with its comprehensive legislative packages like the EU climate law and the Fit for 55 initiatives, provide a robust structure that Denmark can align and build upon. Additionally, the collective push towards innovation exemplified by the development of a hydrogen economy, enabling Denmark to leverage EU support while advancing its technological capabilities and infrastructure. However this impact also highlights Denmark's dependency on EU directives, with national initiatives often awaiting EU guidelines and funding, resulting in implementation delays

Denmark's presidency of the EU council in 2025 will be a crucial opportunity to address these challenges on a larger stage. The presidency of the council rotates among EU member states every six months. During this period, the presidency leads sessions and meetings at all levels of the Council, aiding to ensure continuity in the EU's work (Det Europæiske Råd , 2024). By prioritizing policies that support a just transition across all sectors and promoting inclusive stakeholder engagement, Denmark can contribute to a more resilient and adaptive EU climate policy framework. This presidency can provide an opportunity to not only showcase Denmark's successes

but also address its weaknesses by promoting a balanced approach that considers both high-level goals and local need. As Denmark prepares for the EU presidency in 2025, it becomes evident that success in this role requires more than just political insight. It necessitates an in-depth understanding and the ability to apply cross- cultural communication and leadership.

A key focus during Denmark's EU presidency is predicted to be energy security by the EU special advisor in CDEU (Annex 2 - EU special advisor in CDEU, p.17). It is argued that Denmark is to an agenda that emphasizes the importance of energy security, renewable energy production, and sustainability. This emphasis aligns with broader EU objective of reducing dependence on fossil fuels and enhancing energy independence, particularly in response to geopolitical events like the Russian invasion Ukraine. Addressing energy security and renewable energy production will be crucial in tackling both immediate and long-term challenges. Denmark can use its presidency as an opportunity to push for robust policies that enhance the EU's energy resilience, promote sustainable energy technologies, and ensure a smooth transition away from fossil fuels. This approach will align with the EDG's goals while also showcasing Denmark's commitment to leading by example in environmental sustainability.

At the EU level, the study highlights the importance of a flexible policy framework that accommodates the unique contexts of member states while still pursuing ambitious climate goals. It indicates that a one-size –fits- all approach may not be effective. Instead, the EU could benefit from policies that support tailored strategies, allowing countries to innovate and lead in their areas of strength. This approach can ensure ambitious climate targets are met without national contexts and priorities. This ensure ambitious climate targets are met without compromising national priorities.

The EGD serves as an example of such a tailored strategy. By establishing broad objectives and providing a detailed framework the EGD allows for flexibility in implementation across different member states. It encourages the development of tailored sustainability strategies, considering each nations's specific circumstances, resources and capabilities. This ensures that every country can make meaningful contributions to the EU's climate goals in a manner that is both effective and contextually appropriate. Moreover, promotes fair distribution of the burdens and benefits of climate action, ensuring that the responsibilities and benefits are shared evenly among all the member states.

However, the flexible strategy of the EGD, also brings challenges. Economical and technological gaps among can result in uneven progress, necessitating financial support and knowledge transfer to address these differences. As mentioned, aligning national policies with EU directives is politically sensitive and complex requiring ongoing negotiation to harmonize national sovereignty with EU-wide objectives. Addressing these challenges requires enhanced financial mechanisms, capacity building, transparent communication, and strengthened coordination. By tackling these challenges, the EU can ensure that ambitious climate targets are achieved efficiently across all member states.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study aimed to answer the research question How does Denmark harmonise between the climate policy of the EGD and its own national policies? A content analysis was conducted, where four key themes were made based on the Europeanisation theory.

The first theme is Denmark's engagement as a frontrunner in renewable energy, sustainability, and climate action. In this theme it is argued that Denmark's leadership in renewable energy and climate action is shaped by its historical achievements and innovative strategies, influencing both national and EU policies. Through proactive engagement and strategic alliances, Denmark advances ambitious climate goals within the EU, while leveraging European integration to enhance its global impact. The second theme is Denmark's alignment with EU's Climate Policy. In this theme it is claimed that Denmark demonstrates strong alignment with EU climate policies, especially by proactively incorporating EGD objectives into its national strategies. Exceeding EU targets and actively supporting initiatives like the EGD, Denmark plays an important role in shaping global climate governance and advancing collective efforts towards sustainability. The third theme is Denmark's adaptation pressure due to lack of harmonization. In this theme it is emphasised that Denmark faces challenges in harmonising its environmental policies with EU directives like the EGD, in areas like agriculture and carbon- intensive- industries. Conflicting national priorities, economic factors, and political opposition hinder smooth adaptation, highlighting the complexity of aligning domestic agendas with EU standards. The fourth theme is impact of the EGD. In this theme it is outlined that EGD serves as a transformative framework, for environmental policies in Europe, although it is subdued by the Danish politicians. Denmark strategically harmonises its economic strategies with EGD objectives, utilizing EU initiatives while maintaining autonomy in certain areas, thereby contributing to both domestic growth and EU sustainability goals. In summary,



Denmark harmonises the climate policy of the EGD through a combination of proactive initiatives, and strategic adaptation. Despite challenges mentioned above, Denmark's approach highlights the importance of balancing EU directives with national contexts and priorities. This balance doesn't only ensure compliance but also enhances Denmark's leadership in sustainable development within the EU.

Regarding further recommendation for future research, a comparative study between Denmark and other EU member states to understand the varying levels of adaptation and implementation of EGD policies, an area that was not fully explored in this study. Such research could help identify best practices and common challenges providing a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing successful implementation across different context. In addition since it is indicated in the analysis, research could investigate the role of public awareness and political will in the implementation of the EGD. Thereby also examine how increased knowledge and engagement With EGD among Danish politicians and the public might influence policy- making and compliance. Understanding these dynamics could yield valuable insights on how to increase a better informed and motivated population, thereby enhancing the effectiveness and unity of EGD objective implementation at both the national and EU levels.

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