

On the Periodization of EU's Environmental Policy Development

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Summary:

The present article explores the main stages of the environmental protection policy development of the European Union. The introduced periodization is based on the scope of the basic agreements (resolutions) within the Community/The Union, taking into account the most important elements of their changes and outlining the changes in the main contractual (normative) framework, concerning directly the environment and the environmental protection.

Based on the EU contractual and legal framework and the regulations of the specific environmental measures, the following stages of the Union are defined:

1. 1957 – 1987 – from the establishment of the European economic community to the entering into force of the Single European Act;
2. 1987 – 1993 – from the entering into force of the Single European Act to the EU Treaty (the Maastricht Treaty);
3. 1993 – 1999 – from the EU Treaty (the Maastricht Treaty) to the agreements of Amsterdam;
4. 1999 – 2009 – from the agreements of Amsterdam to the Lisbon Treaty;
5. 2009 – Present.

The most important changes in the constituent treaties and the European secondary legislation which have a

fundamental role for the development of the environmental protection policy are briefly analysed. The secondary legislation is a reflection of the process of integration within the Union (including the strengthening role of the institutions). The process of integration has its influence over the development and the applying of the environmental protection policy.

The basic exogenetic factors for the evolution of the examined policy are clarified; the relation and the interdependence between the following two processes – creation and development of the contractual and legal, and institutional framework and the evolution of the environmental measures are examined. As a result of these examinations, it is concluded that: with the progress of the process of integration, the environmental protection policy became one of the basic horizontal policies of EU.

Key words: European Union, environmental protection policies

JEL Classification: F53, Q56

1. Introduction

The environmental protection policies worldwide and in particular within the European Union have passed through a significant development in the last decades. Currently the climate changes are one of the most important international topics since their influence on the population and world economy demonstrate rising negative

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effects causing loss of lives, huge natural disasters, decrease of living standard and ability of world economy to further develop in efficient manner.

Within the last decades the European Union as a global player has developed its policies related to environmental protection and currently is one of the most active participant worldwide. This development is mostly related to a steady upgrade of the contractual (normative) and institutional framework that the Union executes. As a most important factor for the above is the continuous integration process within the EU which creates conditions for further deeper development of common policies and validation of the Union as a global player worldwide.

2. Methodology

The impact of the endogenetic (internal) and exogenetic (external) factors is examined by combined method of analysis and synthesis. The causal connections between the most important events in the history of the European Union and their reflection on the environmental policy are clarified. Specifically, the factors and the components arising from the legal development and their influence over environmental protection are analyzed in more details. The impact of external for EU factors, but related with its role as a "global player" in the international trade, the economy, the politics and the environmental protection policy in particular, is examined as well.

Endogenic factors result from the process of integration. The improvement of the instruments for establishing and application of EU policies is the most distinctive factor among the endogenic factors. The improvement of these instruments is a necessary precondition for the sustainability of the actions, related to the environmental protection, and for the application and the

development of EU policies as a whole. The environmental protection policy and the measures, undertaken at Community level in that respect, aptly illustrate the entire evolutionary processes, related to creating mechanisms for implementation of common policies which are most effective when they are established and applied not at the Member State level, but at the European Union level (principle of subsidiarity).

Exogenetic factors, in respect of the European Union, are the effects, related to the change in the environmental awareness of individuals. This growing awareness came to light through creating and developing of the green movements in Europe. The most popular among them is the German Green Party, later Alliance '90/The Greens, led by Joschka Fisher, vice chancellor and minister of foreign affairs during the 1990's.

3. Preconditions for the emergence of the EU environmental policy

The application of policies (whether in the public or in the private sector) in different areas requires the presence of two basic components:

- Contractual and legal framework;
- Institutional framework.

In addition to these two components, the success of any policies depends on the existence of mechanisms for their establishment and application. The legal and institutional frameworks in the EU are necessary, but insufficient for sustainable results. Therefore the establishment and the promotion of sustainable instruments for application and development (evolution) of the policies, the environmental protection policies in particular, combined with the established framework, substantially contribute to their successful implementation, application, further development, and improvement.

After the treaties of Rome were signed in 1957, the creations of a general common

market, a customs union, common policies, etc. were some of the priorities of the Community. This was regulated with the first articles of the Treaty establishing the European Economic Community (EEC). In the Treaty, it is specified that: *"The Community shall have as its task, by establishing a common market and progressively approximating the economic policies of Member States, to promote throughout the Community a harmonious development of economic activities, a continuous and balanced expansion, an increase in stability, an accelerated raising of the standard of living and closer relations between the States belonging to it."*¹ In addition, it is pointed out that: *"The common market shall be progressively established during a transitional period of twelve years. This transitional period shall be divided into three stages of four years each."*²

Given the above, the environmental protection was not among the priorities during the first stages of the development of the Union (the Community). The lack of the improvement of the environmental policies was due to, of the one part, the fact that the environmental protection in general required joint actions by states from EEC/EU, and of the other part, the level of preparedness of the states for common policies was relatively low.

Since the establishment of the EEC, the Union has undergone a considerable evolution which reflects the processes of integration through a number of amendments to the basic Treaties. As it was mentioned above, it is inarguable that the presence of these Treaties was a necessary condition. Their application itself was a prerequisite for the establishment of common policies in a number of social and economic areas within the Community/The Union,

but the lack of practical mechanisms for implementation of these policies prevented the full achievement of the objectives.

Only in the beginning of the 1970s the environmental policy as a whole, not the individual measures, became a priority for the EEC. The pursuit of sustainable development, including the improvement of the quality of life, triggered the need to launch more thorough and comprehensive measures for improving the environment, affected in part by the rapid economic growth. These measures and policies could be provisionally divided into the several stages discussed below. The periodization, introduced here, is based on the content of several documents, directly related to the environmental protection, the results of the implemented policy, which upgrade and are complementary to the achievements from previous stages, and also the presence of established mechanisms for application of the environmental protection policy.

The basic criteria for the proposed periodization are divided in two main groups:

- The contractual and legal framework changes;
- The institutional evolution of the Union and the authorities, responsible for the application of the environmental policy in particular.

Apart from the introduced criteria, it should be noted that the creation of a legal framework has its long-term impact and consequences. The establishment and the function of the European institutions have the same influence. In addition, some of the policy-making factors are exogenetic. The environmental policy could be influenced, sometimes even in a decisive manner, by the individual behavior and the individual attitude, the social processes and the economic events, the political movements,

¹ Article 2 of the Treaty establishing the EEC, Rome, 1957

² Article 8 of the Treaty establishing the EEC, Rome, 1957

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etc. The periodization of the environmental policy development of the EU could be summarized as it is shown below:

a clear legal basis, more than 100 pieces of legislation, designed to protect the environment have been adopted by the

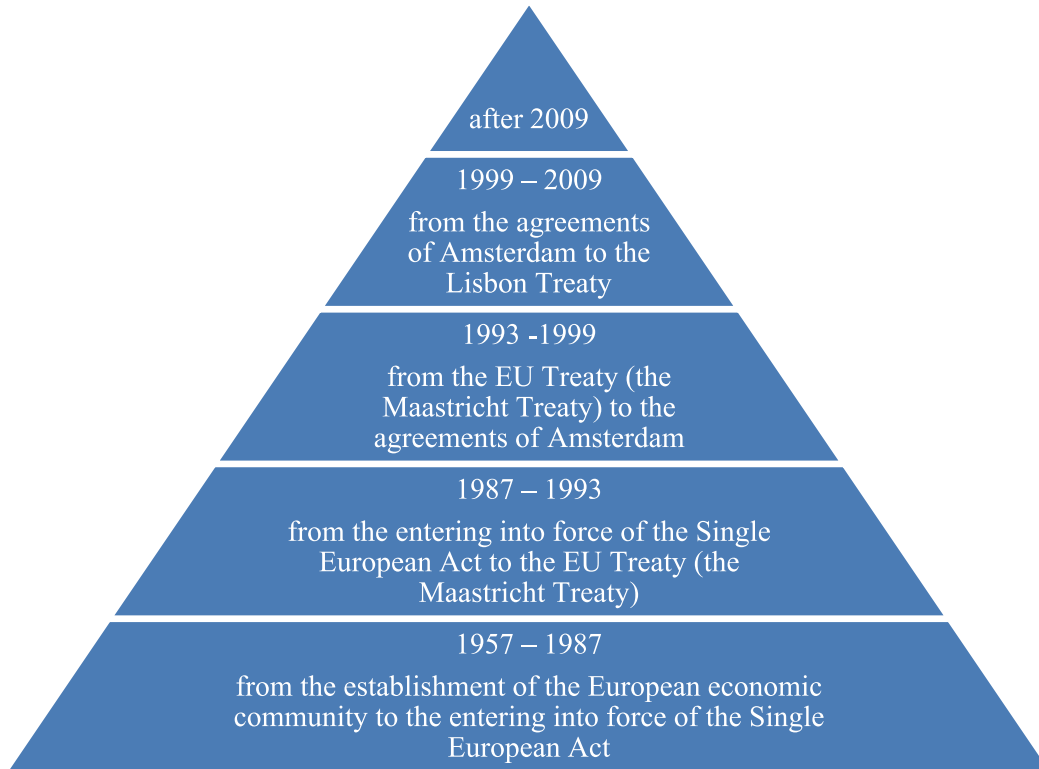


Fig. 1. Periodization of the environmental policy of the EEC/EC/EU

4. Specific stages in the environmental protection policy development in EU

4.1. Stage 1: from the establishing of the European Economic Community to the entry into force of the Single European Act

According to the Community legislation in force prior to 1987 (of the Single European Act came into force, which is discussed in greater detail in the next stage) there were some provisions, concerning the environmental protection. Levy (1993, p.53) points out that: "*despite the lack of*

Council of the European Communities". The real measures goes back to the summit meeting in Paris held between 19 and 21 October 1972. As a result of the meeting, the heads of state and governments who attended the summit made a statement, concerning the environmental protection policy as well. In Article 3 of the statement, the participants pointed out that in order to improve the quality of life and the relevant standards: "*particular attention will be given to intangible values and to protecting the environment, so that progress may really be put at the service of mankind.*" This statement makes reference not only to the above-cited general framework but

also to the specific actions that were the beginning of the environmental protection policy envisaged in Article 8 *"The Heads of State or of Government emphasized the importance of a Community environmental policy. To this end they invited the Community Institutions to establish, before 31 July, 1973, a program of action accompanied by a precise timetable"*. A number of studies show that this program was the first practical action taken by the EEC that was directly related to environmental protection. Jordan and Adelle (2013, p.88), for example, point out: *"...before the nineties heads of state or of government only occasionally deal with issues affecting the environment. For example, the summit in Paris in 1972 initiated a common policy on environmental protection by the indication on the Commission to establish action programs for the environment"*. Later on in 1972 the program was adopted and it was focused on prevention. Furthermore the fundamental "the polluter pays" principle was clearly defined and the first ministries of ecology were set up as a result of the emerging institutional framework related to the environmental protection policy. At Community level, in 1973 the Environment Directorate-General was established as part of the European Commission.

In summary, a conclusion can be made that in the first stage of the EU environmental policy the environmental protection was not a definite goal neither was a policy at Community level. This situation could be explained by the degree of development of the integration process and by the lack of specific legal and institutional frameworks. The environment and its protection, during this first stage, was a responsibility of the national governments within the Community, whereas the environmental policy was shaped at the supranational level. The latter was still at its embryonic stage and could boast only minor achievements.

4.2. Stage 2: from the entering into force of the Single European Act to the entering into force of the Treaty on European Union (The Maastricht Treaty)

The adoption of the program in 1972 precipitated considerable amendments to the Community's legal framework. The major changes were the amendments to the constituent treaties of Rome, implemented by the Single European Act. Marsden (2008, p.163) quotes Davis *"Adding the name" Environment "(Articles 130r, 130s and 130t) to the Treaties presents explicit confirmation of the existence and importance of Community environmental policy and the possibility to incorporate these policy objectives and principles on which it is based"*.

The Single European Act, signed in February 1986 and came into force on 1 July 1987, changed the way the European institutions operated and expanded their powers and scope of action. The changes concerned mostly the areas of the research and development, the environment and the common foreign policy. As it was mentioned above, SEA and the second stage of the evolution of the environmental protection policy in general suggested a wide range of changes at the legal and contractual level, and at the institutional level as well (these levels are interrelated). These changes strengthened the role of the Parliament, for example, through the implementation of the principle of agreement of this institution on a host of key issues (agreements establishing association, participation in inter-institutional dialogue, and other agreements) It is worth noting that the application of this procedure remained limited to the cases where the Council acted by a qualified majority, but importantly the environmental issues were an exception to this rule.

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The above-cited Articles which vested more powers in the Community expose the evolution in the agreements, related to the environmental protection policy namely "to preserve, protect and improve the quality of the environment; to contribute towards protecting human health; to ensure a prudent and rational utilization of natural resources"³. The SEA authorized the Community to interfere in the area of the environmental policy, only in cases when the action at higher level would be more effective, than the action at the level of the Member States (subsidiarity).

In addition to the amendments to the constituent treaties, the secondary legislation underwent significant changes as well – the Community directives and regulations. Some of the main directives are pointed out below:

4.3. Stage 3: From the EU Treaty to the agreements of Amsterdam

The EU Treaty is the second important amendment to the constituent treaties. The EU Treaty was signed on the 7 February 1992 and came into force on the 1 November 1993. It is beyond any doubt that the treaty could be defined as a next stage of the integration; it points out the following: "This Treaty marks a new stage in the process of creating an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe, in which decisions are taken as openly as possible and as closely as possible to the citizen"⁴.

It should be noted the change concerning the decision making rules. This change has its impact on the creation (including the revision and the supplementation) and the application of the policies and the actions referring to the environmental protection in

Table 1. Main directives related to the environmental protection, which came in effect during Stage 2.

Directive	Institution	Subject of regulation
1999/31/EC	Council of the EU	Landfill of waste
91/271/EEC	Council of the EC	Urban waste water treatment
92/43/EEC	Council of the EC	Conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora

Source: Created by the author on the basis of EUR-Lex, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu>

It could be argued that the second stage, characterized by the entering into force of the SEA, laid down the foundations of the modern environmental protection policy. Today a number of policies are developed on its basis, namely the policies related to the preservation, protection and improvement of the environment. Given the degree of the integration at that moment, at the institutional level and at Community level, the EEC was in a position to develop policies (other than the basic ones) and mechanisms related to the environment and its protection.

particular. It should be further emphasized that role of the European Parliament with regard to the implementation and application of the European Union policies was further increasing.

A characteristic of the EU Treaty was the application of the principle of the subsidiarity (according to the provisions of the SEA) to environmental protection, as it has already been mentioned. According to this principle, in the areas which do not fall within the exclusive competence of the Community, the Community undertake actions only if its

³ Article 130r, 130s u 130t of the Treaty establishing the EEC, Treaties amending these Treaties, Single European Act, Luxembourg, 1986

⁴ Article 1 of the Treaty on European Union

objectives can be better achieved by the Community, than at the national level.

The EU Treaty implemented changes in the contractual and the legal framework which indicated an evolution in the environmental protection policy. During Stage 2, as it was mentioned above, by the SEA was implemented the Article 130r. Ison, Peak and Wall (2002, p. 320) argues that by this treaty "EU role regarding the environment in global policy making" expands. The cited authors outlined the responsibility of the Union for undertaking "measures at international level for actions related to environmental problems on a global level".

The development of the secondary legislation of the Union was achieved by a number of new directives and regulations. The main directives during the third stage are shown in the table below:

4.4. Stage 4: From the agreements of Amsterdam to The Lisbon Treaty

This stage began with the successive amendment to the EU constituent treaties made in compliance with the agreements of Amsterdam (The Amsterdam Treaty). The Amsterdam Treaty was signed on the 2 October 1997 and came into force on the 1 May 1999. The treaty provided more institutional reorganizations, reflecting the permanent trend in the enhancement of the role and the powers of the European institutions over the national institutions in various fields. The most illustrative example of this increase was the newly established powers of the European Parliament vested through the treaty.

According to Mahmoudi (2009, Introduction) "the amendments that have been introduced are comprehensive and

Table 2. Main directives, related to the environmental protection, which entered into force during the Stage 3

Directive	Institution	Subject of regulation
96/61/EC	Council of the EU	Integrated pollution prevention and control
96/62/EO	Council of the EC	Ambient air quality assessment and management
98/83/EO	Council of the EC	Quality of water intended for human consumption

Source: Created by the author on the basis of EUR-Lex, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu>

Wilkinson (1992, Introduction) argues that "the best way to describe the impact of European Union policy in the field of environmental protection is "two steps forward, one step back". The same author (1992) explores the impact of the EU Treaty and suggests that this treaty confirmed the desire of the states of the Community to effectively protect the environment. In addition, he stresses the fact that the treaty required the enhancement of the relations between the environmental protection policies and the other Community policies, and that the protection of the environment and the environmental policy could widen its scope of development in other areas too.

require many extensive commentaries. Parts of these amendments concern the protection of the environment within the European Union". Specifically, the scope of the principles laid down in the Article 130r of the Treaty (as the prevention, the "polluter pays" principle, the principle of subsidiarity, etc.) was extended with the principle of sustainable development. The latter was influenced mainly by the UN Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, Brazil. In that regard, Mahmoudi (2009) cites an amendment of the Treaty, in particular the seventh paragraph of the preamble: *DETERMINED to promote economic and social progress*

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for their peoples, taking into account the principle of sustainable development and within the context of the accomplishment of the internal market and of reinforced cohesion and environmental protection, and to implement policies ensuring that advances in economic integration are accompanied by parallel progress in other fields".

It should be noted also the modification of the Article 130 (r) of the EU Treaty (apart from the already cited modification, related to the sustainable development), namely:

constitution. As regards the protection of the environment as such, these amendments generally reflect the outstanding place that environmental protection has received within EU".

There were also modifications in the secondary legislation. The main changes within Stage 4, namely from the agreements of Amsterdam to The Lisbon Treaty can be found in the table below:

In summary, the fourth stage was characterized by the setting up of complete

Table 3. Main directives, related to the environmental protection, came into force during Stage 4

Directive	Institution	Subject of regulation
2003/87/EC	The European Parliament and the Council	Establishing a scheme for greenhouse gas emission allowance trading within the Community and amending Council Directive 96/61/EC
2008/50/EC	The European Parliament and the Council	Ambient air quality and cleaner air for Europe
2008/98/EC	The European Parliament and the Council	Waste and repealing certain Directives

Source: Created by the author on the basis of EUR-Lex, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu>

"Community policy on the environment shall aim at a high level of protection taking into account the diversity of situations in the various regions of the Community".

The Treaty amendments introduced a new element with regard to the environmental protection policy and made it contingent on scientific research and scientific progress. Precisely: "in preparing its policy on the environment, the Community shall take account of available scientific and technical data"⁵.

The above-cited amendments to the Treaty expose the growing and primary importance of the environmental protection policy for the European institutions and the continuous progress in this area. Mahmoudi (2009, p.135) observes that "The Amsterdam Treaty undoubtedly introduces the most comprehensive amendments since 1987 to the environmental provisions of the EC

mechanisms for the creation and application of policies, including the environmental protection policy, among other. Yet the Community policy as a whole was still less influential than the national policies that impacted the effectiveness of the new EU policies. As it was noted above, in order to ensure that the policies are effective, they should be implemented and applied by a large number of states, united in regions covering a significant territory.

5. After the Lisbon Treaty – the modern stage of the environmental protection policy

The signing of the Lisbon Treaty, being into force until the present moment, was the last significant amendment to the treaties. The Treaty was signed on the 13 December 2007 in Lisbon, Portugal and

⁵ Article 130r, paragraph 3 of the EU Treaty

entered into force on the 1 December 2009. A specific component of the Treaty, related to the environmental protection policy is the joint competence of the European Union and the Member States in the area of the energy policy and environmental protection in general. The secondary legislation regulating the environmental protection policy has remained without significant changes since the signing of the Lisbon treaty.

The most characteristic features of the

development (mentioned at 4.4 above), in this regard the UN is the leading institution at the international level; the focus of the environmental policies which changed from the protection of the environment to the protection of nature; the endeavor to place man/the individual as a part of society at the center of numerous synergies, etc. The relations between the institutional and the legal framework and the environmental protection policy development could be illustrated in this manner:

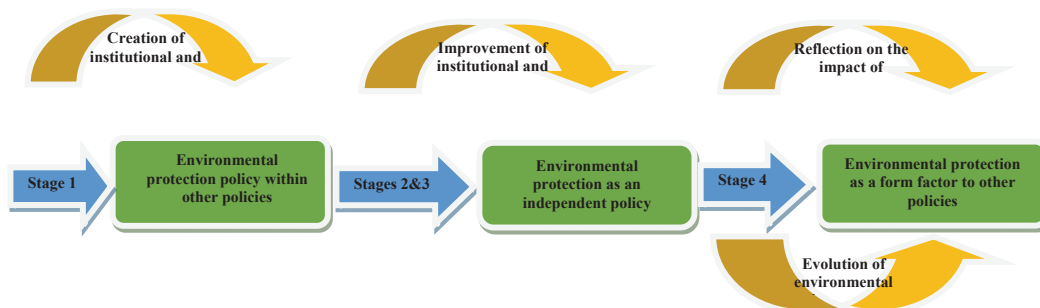


Fig. 2. Stages and evolution of the environmental protection policy in the EEC/EC/EU

process of the EU environmental protection policy evolution are related to climate change and its negative implications for the economy and the society at large. Other aspects of this policy also have been developed. The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union provides "promoting measures at international level to deal with regional or worldwide environmental problems, and in particular combating climate change"⁶. The modern situation of the EU environmental protection policy has been formed on that basis. The characteristics of this situation are defined by several aspects which are independent from the formal institutional and legal frame in the Union (including the already examined aspects as legislation, institutions, implementing policies mechanisms, etc.) and had a strong influence over the process of integration: the concept of sustainable

An important characteristic of the modern stage of the EU environmental protection policy is the great influence of this policy over other European policies, a process called "greening". Some examples of the environmental policy influence:

- Agricultural policy – restriction on the chemicals used in farming; development of organic farming; significant development (and financial assistance) of the research and crating of sustainable crops which will not require to be treated with plant protection products or fertilizers, etc.;
- Cohesion policy, transport policy in particular – continuous accelerated built-up or reconstruction of the wastewater collection and treatment facilities; reusing and recycling of the waste; proactive development of the transport by rail or water as less polluting types of transport, etc.;

⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Glossary:Kyoto_basket

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- Energy policy – more restrictions on the emissions of harmful to the environment gases (carbon dioxide, sulphur compounds, particular matter, etc.); promotion of renewable sources of energy; imposing fines and termination of the activities of the facilities without machinery for purification of harmful gases, etc.;
- Transport policy – transition from transport by road to transport by rail and by water; development of the combined transport; improvement of energy efficiency of the transport in general, etc.;
- Common commercial policy – the signing and the compliance of the international environmental agreement are promoted among the European Union trade partners. This policy is a precondition for more favourable customs procedures.

6. Empirical evidences of the EU environmental policy's results

There are several main indicators (results) that demonstrate in practice the effects on application of the environmental policy within the Union, namely:

- ✱ Reduction of greenhouse gas emissions;
- ✱ Reduction of landfilled waste;
- ✱ Environmental protection expenditure in Europe, and other issues.

Since the first of the above-mentioned indicators is mostly applied within the international practice it is a subject to deeper review and analysis. In essence the greenhouse gases include⁷ carbon dioxide (CO₂), methane (CH₄), nitrous oxide (N₂O), and the so-called F-gases (hydrofluorocarbons, perfluorocarbons and sulphur hexafluoride (SF₆)). These gases are aggregated into a single unit using gas-specific global warming potential factors. At the international level the gases are considered as the so called "Kyoto basket"

which indicates trends in total man-made emissions of those gases.

The Kyoto Protocol is an international agreement linked to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, which commits its Parties by setting internationally binding emission reduction targets. The Kyoto Protocol was adopted in Kyoto, Japan, on 11 December 1997 and entered into force on 16 February 2005. The detailed rules for the implementation of the Protocol were adopted at Conference of Parties 7 in Marrakesh, Morocco, in 2001, and are referred to as the Marrakesh Accords. Its first commitment period started in 2008 and ended in 2012⁸.

Such a target is set to the EU member states and it is fixed to reduction of emissions of those gases with 8% on the basis of 1990's emissions⁹ up to 2012. The target is redistributed among themselves, taking advantage of a scheme under the Protocol known as a "bubble", whereby countries have different individual targets, but which combined make an overall target for that group of countries. The figure below demonstrates the achievement of the target stated above:

As already pointed out above the different EU countries have different individual targets. Taking this into consideration it should be analyzed how the countries reach the target. The figure below shows the data in this relation:

Main conclusions from the above figures can be summarized as follows:

- The EU's member states by 2012 have reached the target stipulated by the Kyoto Protocol namely that gas emissions should be lowered to 81,69 % compared to the basic 1990 (the reduction is more than double above the threshold);

⁷ http://unfccc.int/kyoto_protocol/items/2830.php

⁸ http://unfccc.int/kyoto_protocol/items/3145.php

http://unfccc.int/kyoto_protocol/items/3145.php

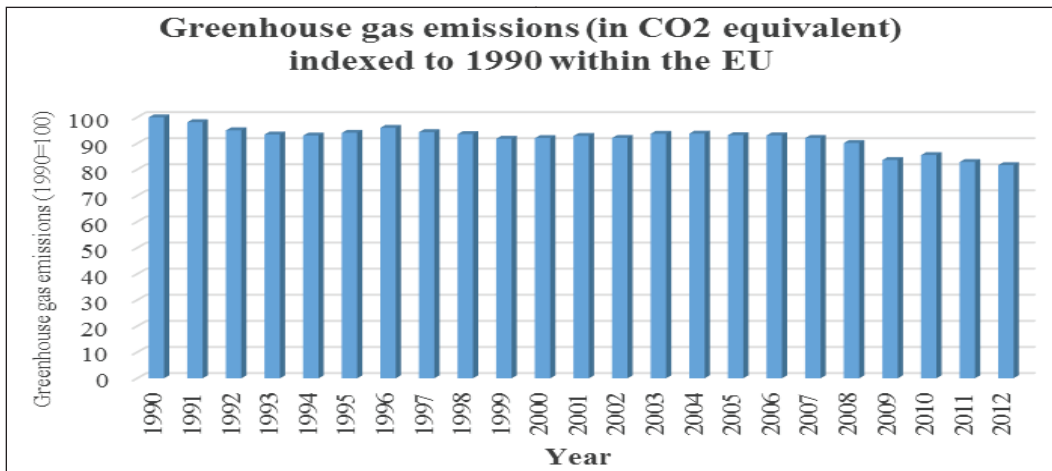


Fig. 3. Greenhouse gas emissions (in CO₂ equivalent) indexed to 1990 (=100) within the EU

Source: Created by the author on the basis of Eurostat's data available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&plugin=1&language=en&pcode=tsdcc100>

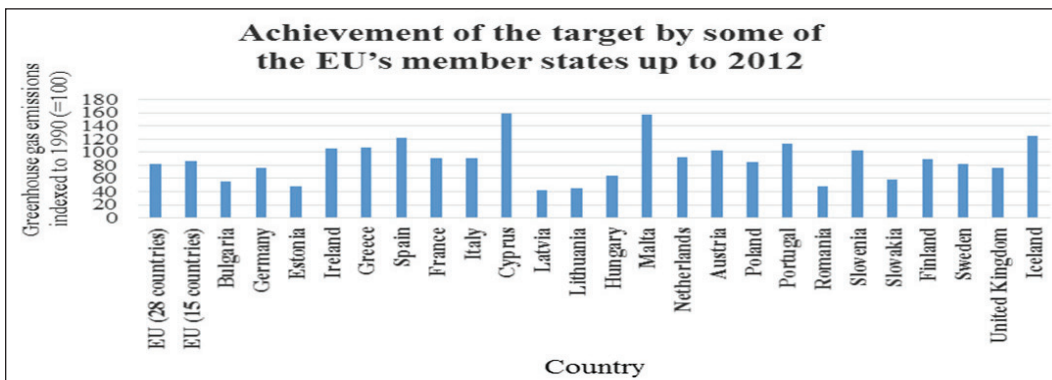


Fig. 4. Achievement of the target by some of the EU's member states up to 2012

Source: Created by the author on the basis of Eurostat's data available at: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&plugin=1&language=en&pcode=tsdcc100>

- With some exceptions (1996 and in the 2000-2003 period when the indicator was slightly higher compared to previous periods) there has been a persistent declining trend compared to the base level;
- The EU benefits from this long-term policy by improving the quality of life and living conditions within the continent as well as contributes to achievement of this target worldwide;
- The execution of the target varies widely across EU member states— some countries are far below the target (for example Latvia – 42.92 %, Lithuania – 44,46 %, Ro-

mania – 47.77 %, etc.), whereas others are far above it (Cyprus – 158.09 %, Malta – 157.71 %, etc.). There are several reasons for some countries' failure to reach the set target. One is related to their energy resources - they not use natural gas for energy production. The other is connected to their comparatively small size and their geographic location far from the rest of the European countries. Hence the European Union and its institutions should pay more attention to countries that are high above the target.

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Another appropriate indicator related to the topic is the reduced quantity of landfilled waste. Since it includes many sub-indicators (e.g. quantity of generated waste, quantity of treated waste, constructed and operated

Taking into consideration the above figure, the assumption can be made that the quantity of disposed of waste has been on the rise. What is more, treated waste has increased its share – from 82.99 % in 2004



Fig. 5. Generated and treated waste (EU 28 countries)

Source: Created by the author on the basis of Eurostat's data available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-datasets/-/env_wasoper

<http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&pcode=ten00108&language=en>

landfills, etc.) the most appropriate among them is the waste treatment which leads to reduction of quantity of landfilled waste. The figure below shows the data in this relation:

to 91.58 % in 2012. In conclusion, the policy applied by the European Union related to waste management demonstrates reduction of landfilled waste.

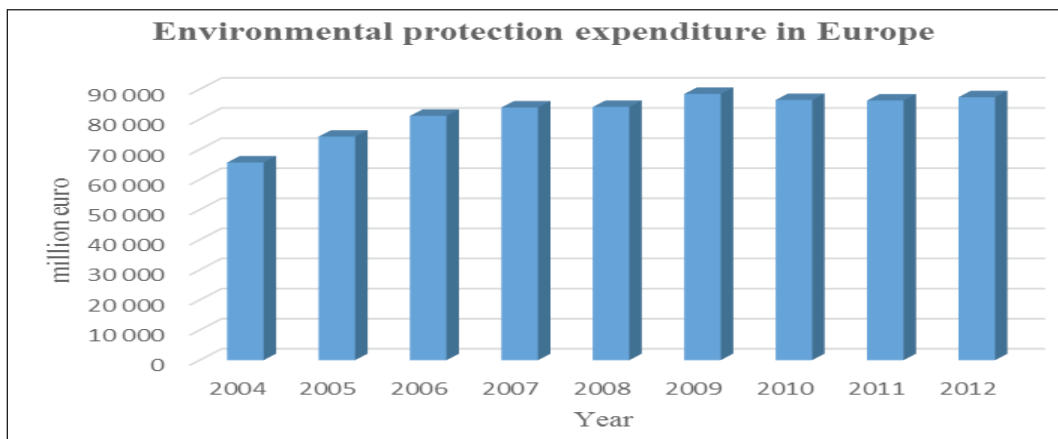


Fig. 5. Environmental protection expenditure in Europe (million euro)

Source: Created by the author on the basis of Eurostat's data available at:

http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-datasets/-/env_ac_exp1r2

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An appropriate indicator related to the environmental protection is the expenditure spent within the EU. The figure below shows that the increase in amounts in the course of time (or the preservation due to the financial crisis after 2009):

Conclusions

Based on the outlined stages of the modification and the evolution of the contractual and legal framework and the institutional frame of the Union, the following conclusions could be drawn:

1. A concrete and targeted, contractual, legal and institutional framework for the development of an environmental policy, which was in practice non-existent until the end of Stage 1 (1987). The lack of these frameworks impeded the application of common measures for environmental protection and thus prevented the emergence of the single economic space.
2. The creation through the SEA of an appropriate legal frame with numerous beneficial external and internal factors allowed the rapid evolution of the environmental protection measures. These measures differentiated in a single Community policy. The environmental policy was a precondition for creating of an institutional net which triggered the legislative process during Stages 2 and 3. The legal "upgrade" of the environmental policy had a strong impact on the process of integration and enhanced the transfer of more tasks and roles from the national institutions to the Community

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institutions. The enhanced role of the European Parliament in the environmental protection policy is an excellent example for the process.

3. During 1990's and the years of the new century the importance of the external (exogenetic) factors in the development of the environmental protection policy increased. The concept of sustainable development, launched at the UN Conference in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, was the most important external factor. Other conferences with great impact on the environmental protection policy are: the Kyoto Conference in Japan (1997), the Johannesburg Conference (2002) and the Durban Conference (2011) in the Republic of South Africa, the conference in Paris (2015), etc. The resolutions made by these conferences have influenced the European environmental protection policy.
4. During the modern stage of the development of its environmental policy, the Union enhances its horizontal aspect and promotes it as essential for the development of numerous other policies. This would justify the conclusion that the environmental protection policy is the most important horizontal policy of the Union.
- 5. At international level the EU's member states reach the most important targets related to environmental protection. Hence, the Union as a global player should be even more active in promoting and developing the environmental protection policy.

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