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The European Green Deal, its narrative of *green politics for the next generation* and the EU's search for a stable telos

Abstract

This paper presents the European Green Deal (EGD) as a political project based on a renewed accumulation strategy with green growth at its heart and a new overall narrative of 'green politics for the next generation'. Together both EGD pillars attempt to stabilise the EU's statehood and legitimacy by establishing a new hegemonic statehood telos. An analysis of EGD's reception by civil society is conducted to examine the efforts of the European Commission. From a critical perspective on statehood, which is treated as a social relation, perceptions of civil society actors are key to discussing EGD's potentially stabilising success. The findings of the actor analysis as a part of a Historical Materialist Political Analysis (HMPA) indicate that EGD can be act as a starting point for a new hegemonic moment in European integration. However, further efforts must be made to safeguard this first positive discursive success.

Keywords: European Green Deal, EU statehood, hegemony, civil society, climate movement

1. Introduction: Climate movement, EGD and EU's latent smouldering statehood crisis

In the aftermath of the Paris Climate Conference (2015), a new pan-European protest cycle developed since 2018, decisively shaped by Fridays For Future (FFF) (Haunss et al., 2020). Because of its protests, the young climate movement brought climate policy to greater public attention and increased political pressure for an ambitious climate protection agenda (Huth 2020, 137). Through the FFF movement, its pan-European protests and the synchronous and intertwined reporting about it, a supranational European public sphere emerged – at least for a short time – overlapping the member states, through which a European reference to action and meaning had become visible in societal discourse (ibid., 140; 143). In a short time, the young climate movement influenced public opinion and thus, the EU's social and political power relations. This was one reason why climate policy became one of the dominant issues in the latest European elections (Braun & Schäfer, 2022). A look at Eurobarometer data also shows that climate change concerns among EU citizens reached a temporary high in the election year 2019. Asked in autumn 2019 about the two most important issues the EU is facing, 24 % of respondents named climate change (European Commission [EC], 2019b, 15), compared to only 8 % in spring 2017 (ibid., 16). The Special Eurobarometer data on climate change underlines this: Asked about the single most serious problem the world is facing as a

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whole, climate change ranked second in April 2019 with 23 % (EC, 2019c, 6). In the most recent survey (spring 2021), it ranked first with 18 % (EC, 2021a, 9).

The mobilisation success of the climate movement also impressed Commission President Ursula von der Leyen (2019b, 5), who took over the office in 2019 and declared that the passion and energy of the young climate activists had inspired her. Picking up on the public presence of climate change, von der Leyen presented the European Green Deal (EGD), the EU's new growth strategy at the end of 2019, which aims "to transform the EU into a fair and prosperous society, with a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy where there are no net emissions of GHG in 2050 and where economic growth is decoupled from resource use." (EC, 2019a, 2) Ursula von der Leyen (2019a) underlined the EGD's particular scope with her phrase "Europe's man on the moon moment". The rhetorical efforts of the Commission and its President point to an elaborate strategic approach (e.g. Gengnagel & Zimmermann 2022) and a new green narrative that seems to be condensed in the EGD. This is the starting point for this paper, taking up the discussion from the Special Issue of this journal.

In their introduction of the Special Issue, Zimmermann and Gengnagel (2022, 160) state that "the EGD also participates in the construction of a cohesive societal framework", and Haas et al. (2022, 250) acknowledge that "the Commission is trying to bring together different dynamics with the EGD in order to deal with its own legitimacy crisis." The EGD can thus be seen as a reaction to the latent smouldering crisis of EU statehood that had been developing since the 1970s (Gerken 2021). This crisis emerged from the series of profound crises – beginning with the constitutional crisis in 2005 – that have characterised European integration in recent years. EU's latent smouldering statehood crisis rooted in the lack of an overarching hegemonic statehood telos, a coherent and consensually anchored definition of EU's raison d'être (ibid., 18), and a crisis of EU governance diagnosed by Börzel (2016). In this sense, the EGD attempts to establish a stable and socially anchored EU statehood telos. Following this, this article studies civil society's reception of the EGD to discuss whether its underlying strategic approach could successfully mark a 'new hegemonic moment' in EU politics. In other words: Given the climate movement's success of mobilisation and the growing public concern about climate change, the EGD's potential for stabilising European integration, EU's statehood and its legitimacy shall be examined. However, before this, the study's theoretical and methodological framework shall be specified in the following sections.

2. EU's integral statehood

Pierre Bourdieu (2014, 185ff.) describes the formation of modern statehood as a long process of capital and power concentration, particularly the accumulation of symbolic capital, which was previously incorporated individually by rulers and

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transformed into a public concentration. This transformation marks the origin of the modern state, which Bourdieu (2014, 122) defines as the "central bank of symbolic capital". In addition to the monopoly of legitimate physical violence elaborated by Max Weber, the modern state is, according to Bourdieu, characterised in particular by its 'monopoly of legitimate symbolic violence' (ibid., 346). In the processes of accumulation, which are socially contested and conflictual, the state and its apparatuses acquire the power to denominate and construct common patterns of perception. "This process of unification, centralization, standardization, homogenization […] is the act of making of the state" (Bourdieu, 2014, 120). Building on these premises and considering previous EU-related accumulation processes, a specific formation of EU statehood can be described. The emergence of EU statehood is a process in which "the hierarchies among the individual apparatuses change and new European (quasi) state apparatuses emerge continuously." (Buckel et al., 2017, 14) This results in an interwoven structure of statehood, which condenses into a specific "multi-scalar European ensemble of state apparatuses" (ibid.) and displays an ongoing transformation of the member states' monopolies of symbolic violence towards a supranational monopoly at the EU level (Gerken 2021, 34). This monopoly enables concrete political and bureaucratic practices of EU statehood actors (Gerken, 2022, 733). It is based on legal competences, which assign responsibilities to the EU state apparatuses and involve them in "key functions of sovereign government" (Genschel & Jachtenfuchs, 2015).

The political and bureaucratic practices of the EU state apparatuses ensemble are embedded in civil society, as stated in Gramsci's (1971, 263) pioneering work of integral statehood. Alongside the practices in the political-bureaucratic field (Bourdieu, 2014), civil society practices in social space are a central point of reference for statehood (re)production. In materialist state theory terms, 'integral' statehood describes a social relation. More accurately, a "material condensation of […] a relationship [of forces] among classes and class fractions." (Poulantzas, 2000, 128) Statehood is a strategic field "in which power nodes and power networks intersect, both connecting and displaying contradictions and gradations." (ibid., 136) In this respect, the concept of EU statehood highlights the concrete expression and effects of EU's governance practices, which – mediated through societal struggles – operate in a contingent space at the interface between the transforming nation-state and the processual formation of a political form on the European scale (Gerken, 2021, 48). This definition goes hand in hand with Gramsci's core concept of hegemony. In the struggles for hegemony mediated through concrete *political projects* and initiatives (Buckel et al., 2017, 18), the goal is to inscribe a specific telos into the EU's statehood, its structures and thus its symbolic capital stock. In this respect, struggles over the state always represent struggles over the monopoly on the legitimate physical and symbolic monopoly on violence, as Bourdieu (2014, 346) points out. Accordingly, different actors, which can be bundled as *hegemony projects* due to their distinct strategies (Buckel et al., 2017, 17), compete in social

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space to inscribe their specific goals and purposes hegemonically in the *statehood telos*. Teloi are closely linked to *state projects*, with which the unity and coherence of the apparatuses are intended to achieve (ibid., 2017, 11) and which deal "with the specifically juridico-political aspects of legitimation." (Jessop, 1990, 219). State projects, in turn, are closely related to specific *accumulation strategies* that operate in the economic field. They define "a specific economic 'growth model' complete with its various extra-economic preconditions and also outlines a general strategy appropriate to its realisation." (ibid., 198) As long as they are hegemonically anchored, a state project, its inherent accumulation strategy and its underlying statehood telos are the legitimising basis of state actions in terms of its social acceptance and recognition. But due to the societal struggles and public discourses, the statehood's (re-)production in the social space is always prone to failure. A hegemony crisis occurs if a given statehood formation is publicly called into question. Statehood crises, in turn, build on hegemony crises and are characterised by the fact that even the actors within governmental institutions can no longer create internal unity (Gerken, 2021, 52). Both were seen during the Euro crisis, in which a highly conflictual and socially polarising deepening of integration occurred, conducted by an overall hegemony crisis (Oberndorfer, 2012), which led to a non-hegemonically anchored expansion of the EU statehood that ended up in a phase of integration lethargy and the aforementioned statehood crisis (Gerken, 2021).

3. Methodology

To examine the stabilising effect of the EGD on the EU's integral statehood from the theoretical framework presented, a Historical Materialist Political Analysis (HMPA) will be conducted. With regard to Buckel et al. (2017) and in contrast to Brand et al. (2021), this study explicitly refers to a Historical Materialist *Political* Analysis rather than a Historical Materialist *Policy* Analysis. When speaking of a political analysis, the underlying scope of power relations in policy articulation from both political and societal perspectives is especially highlighted (Buckel et al., 2017, 16). Drawing from the aforementioned theoretical perspective on EU statehood, this study chose the HMPA framework due to its shared roots and potential for investigating hegemonic shifts in the complex of state and civil society. In line with this, HMPA as a comprehensive methodology framework goes beyond more technical approaches such as Critical Discourse Analysis, which could methodically be integrated though (Brand et al., 2022, 286). In this study, however, a qualitative content analysis will be conducted to focus on the actors and entities of civil society and how they, as part of the integral statehood, reacted to and assessed the EGD. According to the HMPA framework, the research efforts presented in this paper are a first building block of a broader research agenda to investigate EGD-related societal struggles and hegemony shifts in the EU.

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In general, HMPA "operationalises the empirical analysis of political conflicts in three steps: the analysis of context, actors and process." (Buckel et al., 2017, 20) HMPA confronts researchers with a high level of complexity and number of analytical sub-steps, but is also open to specific designs of its steps based on research interest (ibid., 22). With this in mind, this study arranges the HMPA framework for its purposes and focuses on specific aspects of an HMPA-related actor analysis. Thus, in line with Brand et al. (2022, 290), this study firstly investigates a group of specific civil society actors instead of aggregated hegemony projects, which should be addressed in further research. On account of this, in addition to the websites of *Fridays For Future* (FFF), the websites of the following climate and environmental NGOs were systematically searched for relevant documents (press releases, statements, commentaries, reports, policy recommendations, etc.) that explicitly refer to the EGD: *Climate Action Network* (CAN), *European Environmental Bureau* (EEB), *Friends of the Earth Europe* (FoEE), *Greenpeace* and *World Wide Fund for Nature* (WWF). The data corpus is completed with documents from the *European Trade Union Confederation* (ETUC), *Business Europe* (BE) and the *European Round Table for Industry* (ERT) as representatives from the traditional economic cleavage of capital and labour. Apart from trade unionists and business fractions that play an essential role in European policy-making and due to its focus on climate and environmental actors, this study omits other actors like welfare organisations, political think tanks or other organised civil society organisations. These are worth exploring in further research, especially to get a complete picture of social power relations in the context of the EGD.

Furthermore, the actor analysis in this paper sets its starting point on a concrete political initiative (EGD) from within the EU's ensemble of state apparatuses and not on the overall societal conflicts preceding the EGD. Accordingly, it cannot provide a conclusive answer as to how strongly the EGD is influenced by civil society actors or which social power relations are ultimately condensed in it. Instead, the focus is reversed, and the climate movement's and climate and environmental NGOs' assessment of the EGD is in the spotlight. This focal point is intended to provide empirical evidence as to whether the EGD provides a positive point of reference in the public debates about the EU, which could stabilise the EU's statehood. Despite the mentioned limitations, the study design and its methodological framework aim to gain hints of change in the EU's hegemony formation by investigating civil society actors from inside the climate and environmental policy field in particular. In the aftermath of this study a broader research programme should follow to address blind spots resulting from the pragmatic research choices made here.

4. The EGD and its underlying strategic approach

Before focusing on civil society actors and their reception of the EGD in detail, the following subchapters intend to specify the EGD in line with materialist state

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theory terms as a *political project* based on a new narrative of 'green politics for the next generation' and a reformulated accumulation strategy. By doing so, in addition to the introduction, this chapter provides contextual hints in terms of an abbreviated HMPA context analysis.

4.1 The EGD as a political project

Still confronted with the latent smouldering statehood crisis, the renewal of EU's growth strategy Europe 2020, which was due to expire at the end of 2019, was one of the first tasks of the new Commission under Ursula von der Leyen. With the EGD, she finally presented a new strategy embedded in the public debates on climate action and linked climate policy with future economic development. The EGD promises a green transition to a resource-efficient and competitive economy without GHG emissions and a decoupling of economic growth from resource consumption (EC, 2019a, 2). To this, the EGD communication describes a series of potential measures and advocates for sustainability as a cross-sectional topic in all EU policies. As usual, Commission communications should be first read as guiding documents. In them, political flagship initiatives are outlined, bundled into packages of measures and embedded in an overarching narrative, which ultimately condenses hints of guiding principles (Gerken, 2021, 56). Moreover, due to their function, communications usually have to be understood as declarations of intent for deeper elaboration, formal decision-making processes and future governmental and bureaucratic actions. In that respect, the EGD communication provides a "European Green Deal Strategic Framework" (EGDSF; Paleari, 2022, 197) that is referred to in public debates.

The EGD relies on the EU growth strategies, which have been guiding the Union's (economic) policies for a decade since 2000. Compared to its predecessors, the EGD goes beyond those strategies and links future economic development with climate protection and sustainability goals on a higher level. It promises nothing less than a green, sustainable and climate-compliant EU growth model. This linkage significantly boosts climate and energy policy, making it the "driving force of the EGDSF" (ibid., 215) and, thus, of the EU's future economic development. It is based on EU climate policy that has become increasingly ambitious since the 2000s (von Homeyer et al., 2022, 959) and specifically on the "Climate and Energy Package 2020" of 2008/09 and the "Climate and Energy Policy Framework 2030" of 2013–19 (Gheunes & Oberthür, 2021). Even if ambitious changes to the former policy frameworks are most noticeable in the core areas of climate, energy and transport (ibid., 213; 198), the EGD is nevertheless having an impact on policy areas that have so far only been marginally covered by the previous policy agenda (von Homeyer et al., 2022, 127). Whether the GHG reduction targets and intended measures set by the EGD are adequate to achieve comprehensive decarbonisation and meet the Paris targets remains controversial (ibid., 125). At the same time, the EGD represents qualitative progress, mainly through its accompanying measures,

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such as the new ratchet mechanism, as well as its long-term perspective, which strengthens the instruments of EU climate policy in particular (ibid., 128). Lastly, the EGD is characterised by a more active policy mix (Pronetera & Quitzow, 2022, 6) and a more robust interventionist approach in industrial and infrastructural policies (Abels & Bieling, 2022).

Despite its limitations, one could conclude, as Eckert (2021, 81) does, that the EGD implies a fundamental change of course: "The green transition is supposed to break with an economic model based on fossil fuels and pollution while leaving no one behind. The EGD ambition is nothing less than a fundamental transformation of the economy and strives to bring all EU policies in line with the climate neutrality pledge." Bongardt and Torres (2022, 170) also establish a new quality of European integration: "The European Green Deal has the potential to be more than the sum of its parts and therefore a building block to the European economic model. Its sustainability lens makes it an overarching programme that aims at transformational change to the EU economic model, encompassing all previous economic coordination efforts in a structured and coherent way." (ibid., 173) As these comments indicate, the EGD seems to succeed in establishing an essential discursive reference point. Directly coming from within the EU statehood, the EGD, and in particular its strategic framework, marks a political project through which the Commission seeks to intervene in public debates to establish positive references and hegemonise the EU's statehood. The two central building blocks of this political project, its new narrative of 'green politics for the next generation' and its reformulated accumulation strategy, underscore this.

4.2 The narrative of 'green politics for the next generation'

"The atmosphere is warming and the climate is changing with each passing year. One million of the eight million species on the planet are at risk of being lost. Forests and oceans are being polluted and destroyed," declares the EGD communication (EC, 2019a, 2). According to the Commission, the EGD is an answer to this, culminating in the issued "green oath" of "do no harm" (ibid., 19). Moreover, the Commission (2019a, 2; 20) promises that the EU will draw on its "strengths as a global leader on climate and environmental measures." Through the self-attributions made, the Commission suggests that it has understood the central message of climate activists. The fact that the Commission directly addresses the new climate movement and public opinion on climate change with the EGD is also repeatedly emphasised. In her political guidelines, Ursula von der Leyen (2019b, 5) declared that the millions of young climate protesters have inspired her and that "it is our generational duty to deliver for them." Additionally, in spring of 2020, Frans Timmermans said that "we would have no European Green Deal without [Greta Thunberg] and the Fridays For Future movement" (Euronews, 25.11.2021). This firm reference made to young climate activists is linked to an over-generational and future-oriented legitimation motif. EGD "resets the Commission's commitment

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to tackling climate and environmental-related challenges that is this generation's defining task" (EC, 2019a, 2), with the aim of "improving the quality of life of current and future generations" (ibid., 23). The addressing of future generations is a significant legitimising theme of EU representatives, which Ellinas and Suleiman (2014, 200) have highlighted in their study of Commission staff: "The results of our survey indicate a general consensus among European officials that they are defending the interests of future Europeans." This legitimacy mode on behalf of future generations is particularly prominent in the context of the pandemic recovery plan Next Generation EU (NGEU), which is closely linked to the EGD. According to the Commission (2020a, 2), the Covid 19 crisis has once again demonstrated the urgency of a green transition. Thus, the political task now is to "build a more sustainable, resilient and fairer Europe for the next generation." (ibid.). In line with this wording, the EGD should become the starting point for a greener and more sustainable EU policymaking in the name of future generations. This narrative of 'green politics for the next generation' depicts one pillar of the Commission's political project to hegemonically back the EU's statehood. It passes the appeals of young and future EU citizens on to the currently responsible generation and creates an image in which the EU actively assumes its climate policy leadership role to make Europe the first climate-neutral continent. Whether von der Leyen's 'moonshot' (Gengnagel & Zimmermann, 2022) will ultimately be successful depends on whether this new green narrative finds sufficient backing and support in civil society.

4.3 EU's reformulated accumulation strategy

The Growth Strategy of Lisbon (2000–10) aimed for transforming the EU into the most competitive region in the world. It combined "neoliberal competitiveness with concerns of the transnational social democratic project", however, "in ways that effectively subordinate the latter to the former." (van Apeldoorn, 2009, 29) In the Europe 2020 Strategy (2010–20), the increase of global competitiveness, primarily defined as price competitiveness, continued to be the guiding principle (Gerken, 2021, 110ff.). The EGD now focuses on a different paradigm, which is oriented towards the promise of green growth and seeks "to maximise benefits for health, quality of life, resilience and competitiveness." (EC, 2019a, 3) But the communication also stresses "the need to maintain [EU's] security of supply and competitiveness." (ibid., 2) Competitiveness thus remains an important goal, even though a redefinition of the EU competitiveness doctrine has been emerging for some time against the backdrop of new geopolitical and geoeconomic challenges (Abels & Bieling 2022). This is also reflected in a more pronounced interventionist approach in industrial and infrastructure policies (ibid., 446). Ultimately a more active governmental role is required due to the green transition path outlined in the EGD, which is oriented towards the guiding idea of technological progress. The Commission (2019a, 8) mentions that the "EU industry needs 'climate and

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resource frontrunners' to develop the first commercial applications of breakthrough technologies in key industrial sectors by 2030." In many places, the EGDSF points out innovations and technological development to achieve climate policy goals. The basic idea behind this techno-fixation is "that technological change and substitution will improve the ecological efficiency of the economy, and that governments can speed up this process with the right regulations and incentives." (Hickel & Kallis 2020, 2)

Furthermore, EGD implementing and achieving climate neutrality will require significant financial effort. The Commission (2019a, 18) estimated that an additional 260 billion euros would be needed annually. However, the actual financial requirement is likely to be much higher, as even the Commission (2020b, 4) confirmed. Nevertheless, the EGD investment plan only intends the mobilisation of one trillion euros in a decade (ibid.). Even though the financial capacity for the green transition significantly increased by NGEU, the EU continues to operate, as in the past, primarily with public investment incentives, through which additional private investments should be mobilised. The EGD communication already states that "[t]he private sector will be key to financing the green transition." (EC, 2019a, 16) In this respect, it is not surprising that the Capital Market Union, which has already been projected since 2015 and has been criticised several times, is also going to pick up speed again in the EGD's shadow (EC, 2020b, 11). Hence, a "green" reanimation of financialisation is also part of the EGD. Altogether, a partly finance market-driven green growth paradigm is becoming the leading dogma of the reformulated EU accumulation strategy outlined by the EGD, suggesting that further economic growth can be compatible with planetary boundaries. At the same time, according to Hickel and Kallis (2020, 1), green growth could be seen as a misguided, politically motivated objective because "there is no empirical evidence that absolute decoupling from resource use can be achieved on a global scale against a background of continued economic growth."

5. Civil society's reception of the EGD

The previous chapter presented an analysis of the EGD and its underlying strategic approach. As shown, the EGD as a political project contains two primary strategic efforts. Firstly it establishes a narrative of 'green politics for the next generation', and therefore it argues on behalf of young and future generations of EU citizens. Secondly, the political project elaborates a green growth accumulation strategy. Drawing from this, the following section presents the outcome of the HMPA-related actor analysis and focuses on EGD's reception by civil society and thus on a determination of EGD's position in the social space and its power relations.

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5.1 Young climate movement's reception

It is first notable that the young climate movement only acts to a limited extent in writing. As in the case of FFF, it is organised in the form of local activist groups, and unlike the classic environmental NGOs, there are no European umbrella organisations. This organisational profile of the young climate movement also leads to it not always speaking with one voice, as seen in the case of the failed attempt at a European citizens' initiative (FFF, n.d.). Overall, FFF's public statements primarily address the core demands of the movement. In a joint open letter of 34 FFF activists from various European countries in the run-up to the presentation of the European Climate Act from 2020, FFF demanded ambitious reduction of GHG emissions (FFF, 2020). Furthermore, the reduction path had to be based on scientific knowledge and aim at a reduction of significantly more than 50 % by the year 2030, as well as the achievement of zero emissions substantially earlier than in the year 2050 (ibid.). Building on this minimum compromise, FFF Germany (n.d.) demanded net zero GHG emissions by 2035 and a reduction of GHG by 80 % by 2030. Beyond these general calls, the EGD itself is rarely addressed directly. When this does happen, an ambivalent relationship with the EGD becomes evident, which manifests itself in the fact that the political efforts associated with the EGD and its green narrative are generally welcomed, but concrete measures are judged as too unambitious (e.g. FFF Germany, 2020a). A fundamental criticism of EGD's basic economic premises is rarely voiced. One exception is a statement in which a radical change is demanded, and purely technical solutions are criticised (FFF Germany, 2020b). Furthermore, a "debate is called for about what makes our lives worth living and how we can get to that living within planetary boundaries. However, this debate is not being held. The narratives in a European Green Deal remain the same" (ibid.). Ultimately, it is criticised that quantitative growth remains at the core of EGD. It is still given positive credit, though, by stating that EGD also contains some good aspects.

While the young climate activists mainly raise general demands and get involved in the social debates through activist methods of struggle, the traditional environmental and climate NGOs especially engage in bureaucratic forms such as advising and lobbying, which is characterised by a more substantial reference to the EGD. This results in a division of labour in the social space where activist-oriented movement actors socially mobilise, whereas NGOs are more committed to the institutionalised political decision-making processes.

5.2 Climate and environmental NGOs' reception

Ursula von der Leyen's announcement in July 2019 that she would present a European Green Deal within her first 100 days in office was initially met with positive reactions from environmental and climate NGOs. "We particularly welcome your commitment to come forward with a proposal for a European Green Deal

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[...]. This will be essential to tackle the existential crises of climate change and biodiversity loss as well as prevent the spread of toxic chemicals and promote the circular economy," stated EEB (2019a). The announced denomination of an Executive Commission Vice-President responsible for the EGD was also welcomed (EEB et al., 2019, 3). At the same time, several expectations were associated with the declarations (EEB, 2019a; 2019b; 2019c; WWF, 2019a). "A meaningful 'European Green Deal' should aim for a top-to-bottom, long-term mobilisation of public and private efforts in favour of a just transition towards a climate-neutral and sustainable economy, leaving no one behind", writes EEB et al. (2019, 2). WWF (2019a, 2) formulated five tests that the EGD would have to pass: strengthening decarbonisation and renaturation targets, introducing flagship initiatives for a sustainable food system, aligning private and public finances towards climate neutrality, guaranteeing a just transition and not tolerating non-compliance (also EEB, 2019b). Even the framing of the Commission's strategic approach was re-produced in civil society terms. Accordingly, EEB (2019b, 4) highlighted that "[a]n effective European Green Deal could boost jobs and opportunities, safeguard our climate and environment for future generations and become an era-defining policy that will rebuild trust in EU institutions in the eyes of European citizens."

After a draft version of the EGD had been leaked in November 2019, compared to the initial positive reactions, it was mostly met with criticism from civil society actors. Greenpeace (2019a) commented: "This is a vast policy programme that marks a shift away from the Juncker commission's deregulation agenda. But you just have to look beyond the top lines to see that the proposed measures are either too weak, half-baked or missing altogether. […] This plan barely scratches the surface." They further stated: "The Commission promised the green deal would be an unprecedented response to the science and the demands of climate strikers who are again on the streets today. But this is simply not up to the task." (ibid.) In addition, the CAN (2019a) commented: "The recently leaked draft of the European Green Deal shows that the Commission has already forgotten their promises in the European Parliament to ramp up the 2030 climate target in the first 100 days in office." The Coalition for Higher Ambition (2019) attempted to remind the Commission of its promise in a letter: "We strongly welcome your decision to put the fight against climate change at the heart of the European Union's action for the years to come." The appeal continues: "We urge you to come forward with a proposal to increase the EU's NDC to at least 55 % of GHG emissions reductions by 2030 compared to 1990 levels within the first 100 days of your mandate." (ibid.) A demand that in the EGD communication published two days later still came with a small caveat (range 50–55 %; EC, 2019a, 4) and was adopted as the official EU reduction target within the EU Climate Act and the Fit for 55 Package in early summer 2021.

After the Commission officially presented its EGD communication on 11 December 2019, the reactions were mixed. Greenpeace (2019b) stated again that the climate targets proposed would be "too little too late." While the EGD Communica-

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tion called for a reduction of GHG emissions of at least 50 % and a target of 55 % compared to 1990 (EC, 2019a, 5), many climate NGOs called for a reduction aligned with the 65 % target (Greenpeace, 2019b; WWF, 2019b; CAN, 2020b, 15; EEB, 2021). Furthermore, in its initial reaction, FoEE (2019) argued that the promises of the EGD were "too small, too few, and too far off." WWF (2019c) formulated clear expectations that ambitious measures must follow the implementation of the EGD: "only the concrete legislative and policy proposals expected in the coming months will show the extent to which the Commission is actually committed to heeding scientific recommendations for urgent and far-reaching transformational change." WWF (2019b, 1) presented a series of concrete proposals for improvement, preceded by the statement that the Commission has presented a truly comprehensive package of measures and commitments with the EGD. Fundamental criticism was also voiced. FoEE (2019) criticised, "President von der Leyen is still clinging to old consumption- and growth-obsessed economics." (ibid.) The EEB (2019d) comments: "There is no empirical evidence to support the idea that decoupling economic growth from environmental pressures is possible on anywhere near the scale needed to deal with environmental breakdown." Despite this criticism, there were also words of praise. EEB, for example, stated that the EGD "does promise 'deeply transformative policies' in the future and is an important first step by the new Commission" (ibid.). Furthermore, "[t]he European Green Deal includes important commitments to a toxic-free environment, to end harmful subsidies and loopholes, and to design the genuinely transformative policies we will need to deliver for future generations." (ibid.) FoEE's (2019) assessment similarly stated, "the 'European Green Deal' marks a major change in tone, in response to rising public concern and demonstrations on the planetary emergency." Following these ad hoc assessments, the NGOs focused on specific EGD issues and their implementation. Therefore, fiscal, economic, social, and governance aspects, which are particularly important due to the latent smouldering EU statehood crisis, will be in focus in the following.

In the light of the green transition's financial challenge stressed by the Commission, NGOs demand, among other things, that a significant share of the regular EU budget should be allocated to EGD implementation. CAN (2020a) suggests that at least 40 % of the regular budget should be earmarked for the green transition. A joint paper by seven NGOs calls for at least 50 % (EEB et al., 2019, 3). At the same time, the restrictive EU fiscal rules and the Excessive Deficit Procedure are urged to become climate-focused and to be reformed to support the EGD (ibid., 10; WWF, 2020a, 5; CAN, 2021; Finance Watch et al., 2022; CAN & Finance Watch, 2022). The Capital Market Union (CMU), which the Commission identifies as a central EGD piece, receives less attention than fiscal policy. One exception is the seven NGOs' joint paper, which described the CMU as "highly debatable." They warned that the embedding of the CMU in the EGDSF should not distract from the "missing elements in the post-crisis financial reform agenda […] and [...] the importance

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of hardwiring sustainability in capital market practice" (EEB et al., 2019, 7). NGOs unanimously welcome the connecting of NGEU with the EGD (WWF, 2020a, 3; WWF et al., 2020; CAN, 2020b; CAN et al., 2021a): "We are happy to see the European Green Deal described as 'Europe's recovery strategy'," commented EEB (2020). The additional mobilisation of 750 billion euros through NGEU would thus also favour EGD implementation. The central NGEU governance instrument is the so-called Recovery and Resilience Plans, in which member states set out how they use the additional resources made available by the Recovery and Resilience Facility. "If spent wisely, the […] Facility will enable major public investments in the next critical decade for climate action and environmental protection." (CAN et al., 2021a) The call to EU policymakers was, therefore, "to develop comprehensive […] Sustainable Recovery Plans." (WWF et al., 2020) However, as other priorities are set in the recovery plan besides the financing of EGD measures (target: at least 37 % of the volume), the concern remains that the NGEU's clout may ultimately not be sufficiently used for the green transition (CAN et al., 2021a) and that the wrong incentives may be set (CAN et al., 2021b).

In analogy to the demands for a sustainability-compliant NGEU design, the NGO papers contain similar requests for the European Semester, the EU's regular and central economic governance framework: It "needs to be greened to ensure that it becomes an economic governance mechanism encompassing all dimensions of the ecological transition." (CAN et al., 2021a). By this, a formal integration of the Sustainable Development Goals and the EGD commitments into the Semester's monitoring is claimed (New Economy Foundation & EEB, 2020, 19; EEB, 2019b). As one reform measure, EEB et al. (2019, 10) proposed that the country reports to be prepared within the European Semester, and the country-specific recommendations should also increasingly address environmental and social policy issues in the future. Furthermore, the macroeconomic imbalance procedure and the fiscal policy assessment framework should be expanded by including ecological aspects, and the binding nature of the European Semester should be strengthened (ibid.). Unanimously, environmental and climate NGOs criticise the "one-in-one-out" principle propagated by the Commission (New Economic Foundation & EEB, 2020; EEB, 2019b; WWF, 2019a; WWF, 2020b). The Commission's intention with this principle is to prevent over-regulation by ensuring that "when introducing new burdens, we systematically and proactively seek to reduce burdens imposed by existing legislation." (EC, 2021b, 11) NGOs criticised that if the EGD is taken seriously, more regulations would be needed, which should not be at the expense of existing regulations (EEB, 2019c). Thus, the urgent demand was to "Scrap the 'one in, one out' proposal [...] and operationalise the green oath (to do no harm) in the European Green Deal to be the guiding principle for a reformed better regulation agenda." (New Economic Foundation & EEB, 2020, 3)

Furthermore, environmental and climate NGOs demand a social policy "to ensure that the transition from a polluting economy to one that is sustainable includes

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measures that support workers, communities and regions negatively affected by the transition, and prioritises the needs of citizens, and in particular women, and local communities." (CAN 2019b) In this sense, the reference to the Just Transition Mechanism and the Just Transition Fund implemented within the EGDSF are positive, even though details and implementation are criticised in parts (e.g. EEB et al., 2019; EEB, 2019b; WWF, 2019a; CAN et al., 2020). EGD's social accentuation with the idea of a just transition indicates a crucial connection between environmental and climate NGOs on the one hand and trade unionists on the other.

5.3 Reception of corporatist actors: ETUC, BE & ERT

Although the EGD had only been announced, the ETUC (2019, 2) called for it to be accompanied by a comprehensive just transition strategy in October 2019. Thus, the Commission's announcement to set up the Just Transition Fund was met with a positive response (ibid., 4). The Fund "should contribute to fix problems of workers in regions depending on sectors that are at the frontline of de-carbonisation by providing technical assistance and by supporting their efforts to plan the transformation of their economies and the diversification of their industries." (ibid.) These demands have been renewed several times (ETUC, 2020a; 2021a; 2021b). In addition, ETUC (2020a, 12) advocates a broad understanding of a just transition that contains nothing less than a radical rethinking of the economy and society: "The core objectives […] are the fight against climate change following an evidence-based approach, the achievement of the sustainable development goals, social justice, the protection of human rights, gender equality, full employment and decent work, democratic participation as well as intra and intergenerational equity." Framed as an "inclusive European Green Deal" (ETUC, 2019), a various social and labour market policy demands are discursively embedded into the EGDSF. From ETUC's (2020a, 12) point of view, the EGD is heading in the right direction. However, "more efforts are indeed needed to ensure sufficient funding, more efforts are needed to have an inclusive governance with workers and more efforts are needed to ensure that this green deal is also social, benefitting to people and especially the most vulnerable." Altogether, the EGD is assessed positively: "With its European Green Deal, the European Commission has outlined a coherent and positive project for the EU." (ibid.) From a climate policy perspective, the ETUC (2019, 1) is committed to climate neutrality. Its support for the EGD is also rooted to the climate policy protest cycle, whose demands it thus implicitly supports (ibid.).

For ETUC (2020b), another important issue is the new industrial strategy, which should also be oriented towards just transition principles. ETUC states that "EU industrial strategy should create supply and demand markets for carbon neutral solutions while protecting EU industry from carbon and investment leakages […], boost the development of climate-neutral technologies and boost investments in infrastructures needed to deploy these technologies." (ibid.) In its assessment of the

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strategy, the ETUC (2020c, 12) attests that it points in the right direction, even if ETUC again calls for greater consideration to be given to the social dimension. Moreover, the ETUC (2020c, 4) refers positively to the competitiveness issue and "fully supports the analysis of the Commission that a strong and competitive European industry contributes to the broader goals of protecting key European values in an increasingly multipolar world." Further on, the industrial strategy "is to help the EU to lead the climate and digital transitions as well as to drive EU's competitiveness." (ETUC, 2020a, 9) With their references to competitiveness, the trade union actors also support the guiding principle of BE (2021) and the ERT (2021; 2022). BE (2019a, 1) has already expressed the central position of the competitiveness paradigm among business actors in September 2019: "The challenge is to develop climate-neutral solutions and technologies, while preserving Europe's competitiveness, prosperity and jobs." The ERT (2019) stated, that they "support Europe's ambition to become long-term climate-neutral. The challenge is not whether, but how to achieve neutrality in a way that enhances European leadership and competitiveness, and encourage the other 90 % of the world (in terms of global emissions) to take similarly bold actions." In the view of the two influential industry associations, business enterprises should be at the heart of the EGD: "Only competitive and profitable companies will bring technological solutions, sustain jobs and generate wealth. A strong economic pillar is therefore a prerequisite, and the only way to ensure that the green transition does not lead to de-industrialisation and job losses." (BE, 2019b) This technology optimism by business associations is also reflected in the EGD communication, as is the opening of new green business areas for European companies. The ERT (2020, 4) simply puts it: "We believe the Green Deal is not only a sustainability imperative, it is also an important business opportunity for Europe." Additionally, ERT speaks of a golden triangle of clean energy, industrial competitiveness and climate neutrality that needs to address: "Support the overarching climate neutrality objective with a robust industrial policy to boost European industry's global competitiveness, and secure long-term access to clean energy at competitive prices. Enabling companies to invest in the transition requires an appropriate policy framework that stimulates Europe's competitiveness and fosters economic growth." (ibid.) Finally, as expected, both associations advocate green economic growth as the driver of the green transition: "if we want to continue to ensure good living standards, live up to our European values and set an example for the rest of the world, we must maintain the competitiveness and economic sustainability of our project. The EU has to strive for economic sustainability, which is about the capacity of economies to generate economic growth over the long term, as a precondition for investments needed for social development and environmental protection." (BE, 2019c, 2)

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6. With 'green politics for the next generation' to new legitimacy?

The preceding analysis has shown that civil society actors, despite certain unfulfilled demands and criticism about details, tend to perceive the EGD positively and use the EGDSF to act for their policy goals. This is expressed in the overall benevolent critical accompaniment provided by the comprehensive analytical work of the NGOs. Because of the few written documents of the young climate movement (here: FFF), this finding is more apparent for organised civil society actors (here: climate and environmental NGOs, BE, ERT and ETUC). Defined as a political project based on two pillars, the EGD, as a reformulated accumulation strategy, frames a green growth paradigm backed up by the narrative of green politics for the next generation. This strategic approach attempts to fill the narrative gap of non-hegemonic statehood expansion during the Euro crisis. It seeks to overcome the latent smouldering EU statehood crisis by setting positive societal references and linking to young activists' and NGOs' climate policy demands. The following paragraphs will sum up the insights from the actor analysis and link them to the EU's current challenges of hegemony before discussing EGD's overall influence on the EU's statehood and constellation of hegemony in the concluding chapter.

As an accumulative strategy, the EGD rallies the majority of climate and environmental NGOs behind it. Therefore, the key positioning of sustainability and climate neutrality in the EU's new growth strategy has a positive effect. In some cases, NGOs even explicitly take up the EGD as a growth strategy. For instance, WWF (2019a) states that the EGD, as an integrated cross-sectoral approach, ultimately not only benefits the environment and EU citizens but also Europe's economic position in the world and its competitiveness (also Coalition for Higher Ambition, 2021). While a fundamental critique of EGD's overall green growth paradigm is articulated by civil society actors as well (e.g. EEB et al., 2019; Greenpeace, 2019b; WWF, 2020b), it is relatively restrained and mainly secondary to the comprehensive discussion of specific measures and criticism on details. In the overall view, FoEE (2020, 2) seems to be the most critical; they attest to "inadequate reduction targets, unrestricted access to raw materials, and an emphasis on techno-fixes and failed market-based solutions". Furthermore, they state: "This failure to challenge the paradigm of increased consumption and endless economic growth means the proposals are fundamentally flawed and will prevent Europe from bringing our socio-economic system within all planetary boundaries in time to avert climate and ecological breakdown." (ibid., 1) Nevertheless, in other statements of FoEE (2019) the EGD has also marked "a major change in tone, in response to rising public concern and demonstrations on the planetary emergency."

Despite critical voices, the findings indicate a tentative discursive success for the EGD and thus open up a starting point for a new hegemonic moment. However, such a finding is not a unique feature of the EGD. Like the previous growth strategies, the Lisbon and Europe 2020 strategies already had a similar positive

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point of reference (Gerken, 2021, 116f.). While the Lisbon Strategy was initially embedded in neoliberal hegemony (van Apeldoorn, 2009), the Europe 2020 Strategy – under the circumstances of the Euro crisis – could not write its positive reflection into a hegemonic statehood telos (Gerken, 2021, 317). That is more likely to succeed with the new narrative of green politics for the next generation. Arguing on behalf of next generations, the EGD is embedded in diffuse wishes for a 'better future'. The Commission skilfully took up this claim in connection with NGEU, which is closely linked to the EGD, and argued that the Corona crisis was also an opportunity "for our European Union to get back to its feet and move forward together to repair damage from the crisis and prepare a better future for the next generation." (EC, 2020a, 1) "This is Europe's moment and it is time to seize it together," the Commission claims (ibid., 2) Thus, the pandemic was used "to frame its Green Deal as an exit strategy and to equip itself with funds to accelerate the transition." (Bongardt & Torres, 2022, 179) In this vein, NGEU sets another reference to foster EGD-driven public debates. However, an active tackling of challenges is required for the strategic approach to result in a new hegemonic moment and a stable telos.

Expectations arising from the EGD are particularly challenging. Despite the positive references made to the EGD, civil society's reception of the EGD shows that the requirement for a more ambitious climate policy within the EGD is more than evident. Against this background, the pressure on EU policymakers is high. If even the minimum goals set out by the EGD were missed, the Commission's discursive achievements would also be called into question. This pressure of expectation is intensified by the fact that many participants in climate protests place their hopes in institutions such as the EU (Neuber et al., 2020, 89). Furthermore, analysis of Eurobarometer data from 2017 has shown that "respondents with higher levels of attachment to the EU also have higher levels of climate change concern" (Morales-Giner & Gedik, 2022, 9), which underlines the critical task for EU policymakers. Expectations are also high on EU social policy and the outlined just transition. In the latest green transition Special Eurobarometer, 88 % of the EU citizens surveyed agreed (38 % of them tended to agree) that the green transition should leave no one behind (EC, 2022). At the same time, only 14 % of respondents fully agreed that the EU is doing enough to make the green transition fair, while another 36 % of respondents tended to agree. Therefore and due to the limited resources of the Just Transition and the Social Climate Fund (100, respectively 72.2 billion Euros) it remains questionable whether the social policy accompanying the EGD is appropriate to address (unintended) consequences of the green transition. These possible consequences come up against existing social inequalities within and between the EU's member states (Haas et al., 2022, 248). Furthermore, different regional climate change perceptions are already visible in Special Eurobarometer data (EC, 2021a), pointing to a possible climate policy divide in the EU. Only in the eight North-Western EU member states (Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, Ireland, Germany,

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Belgium, Finland and Luxembourg), climate change is seen as the most urgent problem, as is the European average. In the other member states, other issues rank first, inter alia economic concerns (Greece, Spain, Latvia) as well as poverty and hunger (France, Portugal, Cyprus, Slovenia). Against this background, the generally limited EU social policy still is a major structural hurdle for a successful hegemonic anchoring of a renewed EU statehood telos.

The major EGD coup, to combine climate protection with economic growth, resembles an attempt to square the circle. However, critical academics (e.g. Hickel & Kallis, 2020) have doubts that the EU can succeed in this attempt. Therefore, the compromise intended in the EGD between sustainability and economic interests has an asymmetrical and unstable character. Although sustainability and climate neutrality are named guiding principles, they are mostly subordinated to economic premises. This can be seen in the central position assigned to private market actors (techno-fixation, green markets, CMU) and secondly in the fact that the EGD is supposed not to jeopardise the EU's global competitiveness. The EGD support by Europe's economic elites (BE and ERT) is based precisely on these preconditions. In this respect, the EGD involves the danger of a mere renewal of a neoliberal accumulation approach geared to the world market and aimed for competitiveness with a new green coat of paint, as for instance Samper et al. (2021) have concluded. However, whether this will happen isn't clear now, especially since the EGD also opens up possibilities for alternative policy approaches that aim to push back neoliberal premises (Morgenthaler & Thiele 2021, 67). The EGD thus has its own political contingency and calls for further action.

7. The EGD between a new hegemonic moment and business as usual

The EGD exhibits a significant ambivalence between a new hegemonic moment and business as usual. By establishing a point of reference in public debates, the Commission's efforts to get civil society actors active in environmental and climate policy on board seem to be successful at the moment. Therefore, in the short run, the EGD contributes to stabilising the EU, its legitimacy and thus, its statehood. This is not least due to its system-developing nature, which is much more socially compatible than radical, especially system change approaches (Morgenthaler & Thiel, 2021, 54f.; Svensson & Wahlström, 2023, 18). But in the medium run, the EGD will be under the tremendous pressure of committing civil society actors to it. If EU policymakers fail to address or delay addressing climate change in a sufficiently ambitious way, the protests of the young climate movement will pick up speed again.

Although this paper indicates that the narrative of 'green politics for the next generation' could be a cornerstone for a new stable EU statehood telos, a fundamental shift in hegemony that is societal secured has not yet been achieved. Thus, using

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the EGDSF for further integration is essential from a hegemony perspective. As seen in the case of NGEU, it was possible to break through the integration lethargy partially. Although NGEU will decisively strengthen the EU's economic governance in the coming years by joint EU borrowing and its fiscal clout, it will not solve any structural problems due to its temporary nature. Instead, it even strengthens the premises of the EU statehood transformed during the Euro crisis, which has not yet been hegemonically secured (Gerken, 2022, 734). The time has to show whether NGEU and the EGD will only be temporary achievements or will be able to establish a new integrational impetus. It will be important here that further integration projects arise from civil society itself, which are placed alongside the EGD originating from within the EU state apparatus ensemble. As highlighted by the analysis especially more social policy and just transition efforts and principle reforms of EU's economic governance framework are called by environmental and climate as well as unionist actors. Whether the EGD as an elite political project and attempt to fight the latent smouldering EU statehood crisis with the new narrative of 'green politics for the next generation' will ultimately create enough coherence in society in terms of an initial point for a renewed and path-breaking EU state project must be observed.

Therefore and due to the analysis' limitations, further research effort is needed. As mentioned at the outset, the research presented in this paper is intended as a starting point of a broader HMPA, which is necessary to confirm the EGD-related stabilising effects on the EU's statehood and the foreshadowed shifts in hegemony. Further investigation is especially needed in three fields: First of all, the study presented bears the problem of dealing solely with a selection of civil society actors. In this respect, the analysis conducted has to be replicated with a wider set of actors. This deeper analysis of civil society actors, secondly, must move beyond the level of individual actors to the aggregate level of hegemony projects, especially to investigate their power resources and their efforts to become hegemonic. Lastly, a detailed process analysis as the third step of HMPA is also needed to confirm shifts in hegemony and EU's statehood in terms of a comprehensive state project and a hegemonical secured statehood telos. Nevertheless, the analysis and the results presented in this paper show that this research agenda could be very fruitful in getting closer to the underlying changes in the current EU's social power relations and statehood formation. In any case, as the paper has shown, the new narrative of 'green politics for the next generation' in line with the EU's new green growth strategy displays various points of connection to political and civil society debates on the progress of EU integration in terms of a future stable statehood telos to overcome EU's latent smouldering statehood crisis.

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