THE IMPACT OF THE EUROPEAN GREEN DEAL IN THE FIELD OF ENERGY ON THE NATIONAL ENVIRONMENTAL LEGISLATION

Gueorgui STOEV (2026) – summary of the PhD thesis

The PhD thesis examines how the European Green Deal influences Bulgarian environmental legislation, with a particular focus on the energy sector. The analysis starts from the broader transformation of international environmental cooperation into a global climate governance framework, shaped by agreements such as the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the Kyoto Protocol, and the Paris Agreement. These instruments progressively elevated climate protection to a central position in environmental law and policy, particularly because of the dominant share of greenhouse gas emissions originating from the energy sector. In this context, the European Green Deal, announced in 2019, represents the EU's most ambitious strategy to date for steering the Union toward climate neutrality by 2050 through decarbonisation, greater reliance on renewable energy, increased energy efficiency, and modernisation of infrastructure. Although the European Green Deal itself is not legally binding, functioning instead as a form of *Soft Law* that sets strategic direction rather than immediate obligations, its significance lies in the cascade of binding secondary legislation it has triggered, which directly affects Member States and shapes their national legal frameworks.

The PhD thesis argues that Bulgaria's environmental and energy legislation has undergone consistent transformation as a result of its EU membership and the growing body of climate-related EU rules. The European Green Deal intensifies this interaction by creating a coherent long-term vision that informs national policy choices. The research advances the hypothesis that Bulgarian environmental legislation could not achieve the necessary scope, coherence, or effectiveness without the influence of EU law. At the same time, the study emphasises that Bulgaria retains considerable space for autonomous policymaking because energy and environmental matters fall within shared competence between the EU and the Member States. Therefore, national authorities can pursue their own strategic priorities, if these remain consistent with EU objectives. This balance enables Bulgaria to defend its national energy interests, including the role of nuclear power and the pace of coal-phase-out, while still contributing to the overarching goals of climate neutrality and sustainable development.

The analysis extends to the constitutional dimension, highlighting rights such as the right to a healthy environment and the right to work, which can sometimes be in

tension, especially in regions dependent on coal-based energy production. A significant part of the doctoral research addresses strategic opportunities arising from Bulgaria's geographic and resource characteristics. One such area is the country's exclusive economic zone and continental shelf in the Black Sea. The European Green Deal's emphasis on offshore renewable energy corresponds with these maritime zones, where Bulgaria has sovereign rights under international law. The study notes that these areas remain largely underutilised for energy development, despite their potential to support diversification of supply, encourage innovative technologies, and strengthen national and EU-level energy security.

The doctoral research also focuses on the role of nuclear energy in the climate-neutrality trajectory. It argues that the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom) is an underexploited mechanism that could support the deployment of low-carbon technologies. While the EU primarily emphasises renewable energy, the PhD thesis contends that nuclear energy, hydrogen systems, and future fusion technologies could play a decisive role in ensuring stability and reducing the overall cost of the transition in the long term. For Bulgaria, which already operates nuclear facilities and possesses technical expertise, further development in this area could provide both economic and strategic benefits.

In its conclusions, the dissertation argues that Bulgaria must adopt a coherent, consensual, and long-term energy strategy capable of reconciling environmental imperatives with national economic, social and security interests. Legislative reforms, infrastructure development, and investment planning should be guided by a balanced understanding of sustainable development that gives equal weight to ecological protection, economic viability, and social stability. At the European level, the PhD thesis identifies gaps in the European Green Deal's design – most notably its lack of crisis-response tools in response to unexpected shocks, such as the COVID-19 pandemic or the Russian invasion of Ukraine, exposing EU's energy vulnerabilities, particularly its dependence on Russian gas, thus bringing energy security to the forefront of the political agenda. At the same time, there is an insufficient recognition of the different energy specialisations of Member States.

The PhD thesis ultimately suggests that the EU should consider enhancing the flexibility of its climate and energy policies, reinforcing the role of Euratom, and adopting a more diversified approach to energy technologies. Such adjustments would allow Member States, including Bulgaria, to contribute more effectively to the EU's climate goals while maintaining realistic pathways tailored to their national contexts.