Renewable and Alternative Energy in the European Council: The Evolution of a Greener Agenda?

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Table of Contents

1 Introduction

1.1 EU Renewable and Alternative Energy: A Credibility Gap in the European Council

Renewable and alternative energy policy was first introduced to the European Union's (EU) agenda in 1993 with the creation of the ALTENER Programme "on the promotion of renewable energy sources in the EU" (Wettestad, 2000, p. 32). Renewable energy sources (RES) encompasses both EU renewable and alternative energy (Wettestad, 2000, p. 32). Alternative energy emits less pollutants than nonrenewable energy while renewable energy is a type of alternative energy that is replenished by the ecosystem (Dresselhaus, 2001, p. 335). Since ALTENER's creation, the EU's rhetoric towards RES has evolved from being on the sidelines of EU policy to emerging as a domain "where the EU has pursued far-reaching global leadership" (Oberthur & Dupont, 2011, p. 76).

However, the main puzzle observed in previous literature demonstrates that despite the EU's attribution as a global RES leader, they have faced a credibility gap between their international leadership and level of attention devoted to RES policy domestically (Oberthur & Roche Kelly, 2008, p. 34). The EU committed to renewable energy targets following the 1997 Kyoto Protocol, however, no compulsory EU-wide RES targets were considered until the 2009 Renewable Energy Directive (RED) (Thaler, 2016, p. 574). Prior to the 2009 RED, the EU's former non-binding policies failed to meet their renewable energy goals (Wettestad, Eikeland & Nilsson, 2012, p. 71).

This pattern of inattention is especially prominent within the European Council (EC) (Yamin, 2000, p. 49). The EC is the EU institution representing member states' heads of government and heads of state (Alexandrova, Carammia & Timmermans, 2012, p. 71). Regardless of the European Commission's creation of packages such as the 1993 carbon and energy tax, the EC opposed them based on subsidiarity which protects member state sovereignty unless EU-level harmonization is absolutely necessary (Wettestad, 2000, p. 32). This was criticized throughout the 1990s as the EC was accused of maintaining a credibility gap between their external initiatives and internal political goals for RES policy (Yamin, 2000, p. 49). This gap was especially problematic as the EC is attributed as the main informal agenda-setter, or institution which guides the attention of policy-makers who create internal legislation (Alexandrova et al., 2012, p. 71).

Following the EC's approval of the Commission's climate and renewable energy package in 2008, scholars perceived this would introduce a newfound salience in the EC towards RES policy (Buchan, 2015, p. 346). However, this is not the case as the EC's RES attention "remained dampened in enthusiasm" and particularly irregular on the EC's agenda over time (Buchan, 2015, p. 346; Wurzel, Liefferink & Lullo, 2019, p. 252). An agenda is composed of issues receiving high attention within a political system (Kingdon, 2003, p. 3). Although many issues are 'on' the agenda, agenda-setting consists of a political competition to place issues as 'high' on the agenda as possible (Princen, 2007, p. 28).

The level of attention ascribed to different issues on the agenda has vast implications on the policy-making process as it determines the subjects that are focused on by policy-makers (Princen, 2009, p. 7). Hence, to understand the EC's credibility gap, between their external leadership and internal political aspirations for RES policy, it is important to describe how attention towards RES evolved over time on the EC's agenda and explain why this pattern was fostered. Henceforth, I will examine the question:

How has attention towards renewable and alternative energy policy on the European Council's agenda evolved over time and why?

This thesis will focus on the political agenda which consists of the issues considered by political decision-makers which, in this case, is the EC (Princen, 2009, p. 21). To answer this research question, I will use the Punctuated Equilibrium Theory (PET). This theory stipulates that attention towards issues on the agenda alternates between lengthy periods of stasis, or equilibrium, with brief interruptions of radical punctuation, or disequilibrium (True, Jones & Baumgartner, 2007, p. 155).

1.2 Relevance of this Research

Although there has been research on the level of attention attributed to energy policy on the EC's agenda, the literature is lacking in studies on "the different components of the EU energy policy agenda," such as renewable and alternative energy (Alexandrova & Timmermans, 2015, p. 59).

Hence, it is unclear whether research on the broader energy policy domain is analytically relevant towards the EC's RES agenda. Consequently, this research is theoretically pertinent by introducing an in-depth study of the RES subdomain in the PET literature. Additionally, determining the evolution of RES attention on the EC's agenda is practically significant for EU policy-making dynamics (Princen, 2009, p. 7). This research would provide insight regarding whether policy changes to close the EU's RES credibility gap, in practice, are possible over time despite institutional and cognitive obstacles faced in the struggle to raise the issue on the agenda.

1.3 Structure of the Thesis

Following the introduction, the second section will establish the theoretical framework. The theoretical framework will elaborate on PET and, particularly, the two theoretical concepts of focusing events and policy images. I will then dealinate the relevance of PET and the EC as a unit of observation. The third section will delve into a literature review on EU PET research and RES policy. The fourth section will explain the research design and methodology. In the fifth section, the research analysis will be conducted for the descriptive evolution of attention and the reasons behind this pattern in the EC using the two theoretical concepts. Lastly, the sixth section will draw conclusions on the results and provide a critical reflection of the theory and the analysis that was conducted along with avenues for further research.

2 Theoretical Framework: Punctuated Equilibrium Theory

Punctuated Equilibrium Theory was developed in the 1980s to explain policy-making in the US context (True et al., 2007, p. 155). PET has now been applied to EU agenda-setting as research has demonstrated that agendas of EU institutions follow the same punctuated change pattern as national political systems (Princen, 2013, p. 863). However, it is important to note that PET at the EU-level differs from the US through displaying less radical punctuations due to the limited role of public opinion in legislation (Princen, 2013, p. 863). PET suggests that attention on the agenda follows a dual pattern characterized by long periods of incrementalism disrupted by brief punctuations of change (Princen, 2013, p. 854). As a result, equilibrium and radical changes in

attention are part of the same process (Princen, 2013, p. 855). Based on PET's theoretical framework, I will hypothesize:

H: Attention towards renewable and alternative energy policy on the European Council's agenda will fluctuate from lengthy periods of stasis to brief periods of punctuation over time.

This dual pattern can be explained by micro-level and macro-level processes (Beyer, Breunig & Radojevic, 2018, p. 43). As a microfoundation, PET builds upon Simon's (1985) assumption that decision-makers are boundedly rational (Jones & Baumgartner, 2005, p. 12). *Bounded rationality* entails that, due to limited attention spans, policy-makers must choose which issues to focus on whilst ignoring others (Simon, 1985, p. 301). This produces a *bottleneck of attention* among limited issues at a time based on the institution's function (Simon, 1985, p. 302).

However, institutions vary in their carrying capacity of workload they can devote attention to within a given time (Simon, 1985, p. 302). Institutions which exhibit s*erial information processing* make decisions through single issues at a time due to low carrying-capacity on the agenda (True et al., 2007, p. 159). In the EU, this type of information processing is characterized within the EC due to the absence of a group of experts to assist it in its functions as a *macro-political institution* (Elias & Timmermans, 2014, p. 165). This is countered with *parallel processing* where multiple issues can be handled simultaneously by delegation of tasks among expert subunits called *policy subsystems*, such as the Commission and their Directorate Generals (True et al., 2007, p. 158; Elias & Timmermans, 2014, p. 166).

At the macro-level, incrementalism occurs due to the capturing of an issue area by a policy subsystem (Baumgartner & Jones, 1991, p. 1051). This establishes further as subsystems possess the same *policy image* which are shared assumptions and perceived salience of an issue (Princen, 2013, p. 856). This policy image is reinforced once a subsystem possesses a *policy monopoly* due to limited disagreement and shared interests towards the issue (True et al., 2007, p. 157). These factors collectively produce *negative feedback* dynamics where policy change is resisted and the status quo of attention is maintained (Beyer et al., 2018, p. 44).

On the other hand, punctuated attention occurs when the issue captures the attention of macro-political institutions, such as the EC (Alexandrova et al., 2012, p. 73). This changes the perceived

salience and understanding of the issue, prompting drastic change of its relevance on the agenda (True et al., 2007, p. 162). Shifts to different institutions, or *venues*, can also occur due to exogenous shocks, or *focusing events* (Beyer et al., 2018, p. 44). This generates *positive feedback* where the policy image is cyclically redefined fostering radical change in attention dynamics on the agenda (Princen, 2013, p. 857). Positive feedback is maintained until serial processing prompts the issue to be replaced by others with a higher salience on the agenda and the equilibrium of attention returns (True et al., 2007, p. 164).

2.1 Focusing Events

Based on Birkland's (1998) seminal work, *focusing events* will be conceptualized as large-scale exogenous political shocks (p. 54). According to PET, focusing events may provide momentum for radical attention change (Beyer et al., 2018, p. 44). Due to cognitive limitations, which cause underreaction towards an issue in serial processing institutions, focusing events provoke this to be countered with a vast overreaction (Princen, 2013, p. 855).

However, not all focusing events generate attention on the political agenda (Kingdon, 2003, p. 95). Alexandrova (2015) notes that the EC responds to focusing events "on purely strategic interests" (p. 505). Hence, focusing events generate punctuated attention within the EC due to multiple reasons. Firstly, external large-scale events can increase the perceived importance of an issue area domestically (Alexandrova, 2015, p. 510). Secondly, these events can trigger increased attention due to their implications on relations between the EU and a foreign state (Alexandrova, 2015, p. 511). Lastly, focusing events also could provide an impetus to justify pursuing broad policy goals (Alexandrova, 2015, p. 511).

2.2 Policy Images

Policy images will be conceptualized as the factual information and emotive appeal attributed to an issue (True et al., 2007, p. 161). Although conflicting definitions of policy problems may be created, policy images must compete with one another to increase in salience to agenda-setting institutions, such as the EC (Daviter, 2007, p. 656). If a policy image is reframed to appeal to the

functional role of an institution outside the subsystem, it causes disequilibrium in attention cycles (Jones & Baumgartner, 2005, p. 6).

It is expected in the PET framework that the EC will prioritize issues of *high politics images* (Alexandrova, 2016, p. 422). *High politics* images are urgently framed issues based on a salient shared political problem (Alexandrova & Timmermans, 2015, p. 46). Within the EU, these include threats to internal security and defense of the Union (Alexandrova, 2017, p. 761) However, when an issue is framed with a *low politics image*, it is expected to generate equilibrium in the EC's attention (Alexandrova et al., 2012, p. 70). *Low politics* images are framed issues on the grounds of professional or technocratic concerns (Alexandrova & Timmermans, 2015, p. 46). Within the EU, these include issues of the single market, health and transportation (Alexandrova, 2017, p. 761).

2.3 Focus of the Thesis

Despite the myriad of dynamics associated with attention changes in PET, this thesis will focus on *policy images* and *focusing events*. This will be done due to the limited longitudinal research on the impacts of focusing events on attention levels (Alexandrova, 2015, p. 509). Moreover, although focusing events are determined to have significant impacts on attention towards an issue on the agenda, they do not punctuate an issue on their own (Kingdon, 2003, p. 93). Princen (2011) suggests that focusing events and shifting policy images work in tandem to variate attention patterns, however, this has not been sufficiently empirically investigated within the EU's PET literature (p. 933). Instead, EU PET literature has focused on venues and policy images (Princen, 2013, p. 855). Furthermore, the EC is overlooked in EU research on policy images despite the importance of framing in explaining allocation of attention on their agenda (Alexandrova, 2016, p. 410-411).

2.4 Relevance of PET and the European Council

As my research question focuses on the evolution of RES policy on the EC's agenda, the long-term approach of PET provides a suitable framework (True et al., 2007, p. 158). PET is more suitable than other theories of attention since the energy policy domain has been proven to follow

a pattern exhibiting both punctuation and incrementalism (Benson & Russel, 2015, p. 199). As PET combines punctuation and incrementalism under one framework, this will provide a fruitful analysis to determine whether the RES subdomain follows the same pattern (True et al., 2007, p. 155).

The EC has been increasingly examined for EU agenda-setting studies due to its position as the EU's "highest political body" which guides the attention of legislative policy-makers (Alexandrova et al., 2012, p. 69). Moreover, as the EC establishes the "general political priorities of the Union," it is a suitable institution to apply to the long term policy-making approach of PET (TEU, article 15; Alexandrova et al., 2012, p. 154). The EC is also expected to follow a PET pattern as it "mirrors national executives" in agenda-setting due to serial processing dynamics which prompts rapid turnover of attention to a variety of issues (Alexandrova et al., 2012, p. 77-84). Since this thesis will also focus on shifting policy images and focusing events, the EC is also relevant. This is because PET research has shown that the EC is the core EU institution which reacts to high politics affairs such as focusing events and shifting policy images from low to high politics (Alexandrova & Timmermans, 2015, p. 509).

3 Literature Review

3.1 State of the art in EU PET Research and the RES Policy Domain

Princen (2010) demonstrates that PET is valuable to EU agenda-setting as the assumptions follow a similar pattern to national institutions at the EU-level (p. 40). PET scholars posit that research combining quantitative datasets which focus on specific issue areas would provide a fruitful contribution to PET literature (Princen, 2013, p. 866). This research aims to facilitate this innovation to PET research by quantitatively analyzing the EC's attention towards RES policy. Quantitative content analysis (QCA) has also been used by PET scholars to model longitudinal attention patterns of various issue areas within EU institutions (Alexandrova, Carammia, Princen & Timmermans, 2014, p. 154). Additionally, the use of binary coding to investigate factors which generate attention has been applied in agenda-setting research (Elias, 2019, p. 76). This analysis will build upon the QCA research and introduce the binary coding methodology to the PET framework.

The EU PET literature has made relevant contributions to the energy policy domain. Research on the broader energy policy domain indicates that EC attention towards energy policy follows a punctuated pattern in response to shifting policy images from low to high politics and is "driven by focusing events" (Alexandrova & Timmermans, 2015, p. 46; Tosun, Biesenbender & Schulze, 2015, p. 5-6). Since RES has been an integral feature in the EU initiative to create a common energy policy since the 1980s, it has been stipulated as a central subdomain of the EU's energy policy agenda (Gokgoz & Gucervin, 2018, p. 227). However, EU PET literature lacks in research on the evolution of attention towards energy subtopics such as the RES domain (Alexandrova & Timmermans, 2015, p. 590). Through applying PET, this thesis will contribute whether the pattern in energy policy can be affirmed in the central RES subdomain.

Three RES policy images, within the EU, have been addressed in the literature. First, the low politics image focuses on the harmonization of the EU's renewable energy market (Jacobs, 2015, p. 109). However, in the early 2000s, two high politics policy images emerged which highlighted the issue on the EC's agenda (Wettestad et al., 2012, p. 75). The linkage of renewable energy and climate mitigation "put the topic on the EC's agenda by means of the high politics route" due to its impact on the long-term goals of the Union (Biesenbender, 2015, p. 34). This was expanded to an energy supply security frame following a perceived threat towards the EU's energy imports (Buchan, 2015, p. 355). Moreover, the impact of focusing events on EC attention to RES policy has been accentuated in the state of the art (Thaler, 2016, p. 578). Focusing events, such as the 2006 Russian-Ukraine crisis, are deemed critical developments which prompted the EC to prioritize RES as the most secure domestic energy source (Thaler, 2016, p. 578).

This research fits within the state of the art by determining whether PET patterns observed within the broader energy policy domain will be applicable in the renewable and alternative energy policy subdomain.

4 Methodology

4.1 Research Design

A longitudinal research design, which explores variation in one case over a long period of time, will be used for the analysis (Halperin & Heath, 2017, p. 151). Evaluating the longitudinal change distribution is the most suitable design as the research question aims to analyze the long-term attention pattern of RES policies on the EC's agenda (Princen, 2013, p. 857).

The research will be based on the time frame 1995-2008. This is because the EU's involvement during the Kyoto Protocol negotiations from 1995 marked its emergence as a global renewable energy leader. (Yamin, 2000, p. 48). Hence, it would provide a fruitful contribution to the literature to analyze the EC's attention following this milestone in their international position on RES (Yamin, 2000, p. 50) Since the EC's role as a formal EU institution was facilitated following the 2009 ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, this research will conclude prior to this drastic change to maintain the reliability of this analysis (Alexandrova et al., 2014, p. 154). This time frame also fits the requirements of the PET framework by basing the research on a span over a decade (Howlett & Cashore, 2009, p. 35).

4.2 Data Selection

The EC Conclusions will be used as the source of data. The Conclusions are created as a direct output of each EC meeting based on a consensus among heads of state and government regarding what was discussed and what the future goals are (Alexandrova et al., 2014, p. 156). This is the most suitable data as the Conclusions are the only formal and regular documents issued based on the EC's discussions as their meetings occur behind closed doors (Alexandrova et al., 2012, p. 72). The Conclusions are also suitable for agenda-setting studies as they dictate the EC's opinions, goals and concerns on policy issues (Elias, 2019, p. 68). The Conclusions can be accessed through the EU website on https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/european-council/conclusions/.

To collect the data, firstly, the Conclusions issued during the time frame will be compiled using Alexandrova et al.'s (2014) European Council Conclusions dataset. The dataset is the most suitable collector of the data as it compiles all EC conclusions into one dataset (Alexandrova et al., 2014,

p. 155). The dataset can be accessed on http://www.policyagendas.eu/. Overall, 55 documents have been issued during this time period. Next, all Conclusions which discussed RES, as coded at the (quasi)-sentence level by Alexandrova et al. (2014), will be selected from the dataset. These consist of 22 EC Conclusions within this time frame (see appendix 1).

4.3 Research Method

The type of analysis used will be quantitative. This is because quantitative analysis is most suitable for research which deals with many observations over time (Halperin & Heath, 2017, p. 6). Moreover, as the research question aims to analyze a change distribution, quantitative data on policy change is appropriate (Princen, 2013, p. 859). The unit of analysis for the research will be the (quasi)-sentence level. This is the most suitable unit of analysis for the EC Conclusions as the Conclusions often contain multiple ideas which are grammatically separated within one large sentence, hence, it is important to deconstruct the sentences into the quasi-level (Alexandrova et al., 2014, p. 157).

I will operationalize the 'level of attention,' using the frequency the issue area is mentioned within the content of policy agendas (Princen, 2009, p. 50). This operationalization, albeit, is somewhat limited as it is not self-evident that attention patterns are fully represented in official documents (Princen, 2009, p. 50). However, for this thesis, this is the most suitable measurement for attention as it provides the most objective assessment of attention over a long time frame compared to other methods, such as interviews (Princen, 2009, p. 49).

To descriptively analyze the development of attention, the method of analysis used will be a quantitative content analysis. This will be done to count the frequency of RES mentions within the Conclusions over the specified time frame to map attention changes, as done by Elias (2019) (p. 72). Given that the subject of analysis will be the EC, content analysis is best suited as it allows for observation of individuals, such as heads of state, who are typically unreachable for direct assessment (Halperin & Heath, 2017, p. 346).

Firstly, the coded frequency of renewable and alternative energy topics brought up on the EC Conclusions between 1995 to 2008 will be identified. This will be collected using Alexandrova et

al's. (2014) European Council Conclusions dataset. Alexandrova et al. (2014) counted the frequency of RES issues brought up on a year-to-year basis in the EC Conclusions which are each attributed to a single Comparative Agendas Issue Code (CAPIC) under the '806' subtopic stipulating 'alternative and renewable energy' (p. 162). Next, a QCA will be conducted based on the frequency the '806' code was brought up annually from Alexandrova et al.'s (2014) dataset. This will be done manually by going through Alexandrova et al.'s (2014) dataset using Microsoft Excel and conducting a mathematical analysis to count the absolute annual frequency of the '806' code within the time frame. Subsequently, a graphical frequency distribution, displaying the total amount of observations per year, will be made based on the results of the content analysis to display the evolution of absolute frequency of RES policy on the EC's agenda between 1995 to 2008 (Halperin & Heath, 2017, p. 366). PET will then be applied to determine whether the hypothesis of this research can be confirmed or rejected. Documentation on the coding can be found in appendix 2.

The explanatory analysis will be done based on the results of the descriptive analysis. Firstly, the results of the content analysis, conducted for the descriptive analysis, will be used to determine the overall (quasi)-sentences of annual RES attention on the EC's agenda. Next, a QCA will be conducted using this data to code the frequency of times *focusing events* and *high or low politics policy images* drove attention towards RES within the EC. This will be done using a binary coding scheme to code whether the factor is present in the RES (quasi)-sentence (code of 1) or not (code of 0). Creating a binary coding scheme encourages a comparative reproduction of this research to another policy domain or political system (Toshkov, 2016, p. 114). However, it is important to note that this method could make the results less precise due to the limited categories (Toshkov, 2016, p. 114). The absolute frequency of 0 and 1 codes, within the annual RES agenda, will be manually counted using Microsoft Excel. Next, the relative percentage of RES (quasi)-sentences mentioning the factor (code of 1) from the overall RES (quasi)-sentences (code of 0 and 1) will be displayed in a graphical frequency distribution using a statistical analysis with the formula below:

$$\text{Relative annual percentage of focusing events} = \frac{\text{Frequency of focusing events in RES agenda}}{\text{Frequency of overall RES agenda}}$$

$$\text{Relative annual percentage of high politics policy images} = \frac{\text{Frequency of high politics images in RES agenda}}{\text{Frequency of overall RES agenda}}$$

Using these results, I will explain the role of focusing events, the internal market image, the climate mitigation image and the energy supply security image in generating the levels of attention observed in the descriptive analysis. I will then discern whether these findings coincide or contrast with the PET literature.

The categories for the binary coding scheme of policy images are based on Alexandrova and Timmerman's (2015) notion that attention to issues on the EC's agenda can be shaped by both high politics and low politics policy images (p. 46). *High politics issues* encompass problems which are framed as an urgent shared political problem directly affecting the political environment (Alexandrova & Timmermans, 2015, p. 46). *Low politics issues* are framed as technocratic policy matters by administrative expert groups (Alexandrova & Timmermans, 2015, p. 46). Based on this conceptualization of high and low politics images, the three policy images, which are the internal market, energy supply security and climate mitigation are taken based on Buchan's (2015) seminal work on the evolution of RES policy preoccupations within the EU (p. 345). The coding categories for focusing events is based on Birkland's (1998) conceptualization of focusing events as "sudden, uncommon attention grabbing-events" either due to their harm potential or immense magnitude (p. 53-55). Moreover, Elias' (2019) codebook of focusing events was also utilized based on the operationalization of focusing events in the context of the EC (p. 224).

Tables 1,2 and 3 depict the binary coding scheme which will be used for the analysis explaining the RES attention patterns within the EC agenda using the high politics policy images, focusing events and low politics policy image. The RES (quasi)-sentences will be coded with a 0 if the statement described in tables 1,2 and 3 are not present in the RES (quasi)-sentences and will be coded with a 1 if the factors stipulated in the tables are present. Documentation on the coding and relative percentage calculation values can be found in appendix 3.

Energy Supply Security Image	Climate Mitigation Image	Coded Value
Statements which argue that RES is a reliable energy supply (eg: RES as an EU emergency stock)	Statements which argue for RES as a condition for environmental protection	0: Not mentioned 1: Mentioned
Statements which argue for RES as a solution for higher energy efficiency	Statements which argue for RES to meet emissions targets (eg: forming a biofuels trade scheme)	0: Not mentioned 1: Mentioned
Statements which emphasize RES to solve foreign energy import dependence	Statements which emphasize EU reduction of greenhouse gas emissions	0: Not mentioned 1: Mentioned

Table 1: High Politics Policy Image Coding Scheme

Internal Market Policy Image	Coded Value
Statements which argue for the positive impact of RES harmonization on market competition (eg: cost-competitive technology)	0: Not mentioned 1: Mentioned
Statements which highlight the negative impact of divergent national RES policies on market competition (eg: rising utility prices)	0: Not mentioned 1: Mentioned
Statements which argue for the benefits of Europeanizing renewable schemes (eg: feed-in tariff scheme)	0: Not mentioned 1: Mentioned

Table 2: Low Politics Policy Image Coding Scheme

Focusing Events	Coded Value
Statements which discuss socio-political events concentrated in specific geographical regions or areas of interest	0: Not mentioned 1: Mentioned

Event can be inside or outside the EU if it impacts the RES domain	0: Not mentioned 1: Mentioned
Event can be manmade (eg: terrorist attack) or natural (eg: earthquake)	0: Not mentioned 1: Mentioned
Event can be harmful or positive to incite political mobilization	0: Not mentioned 1: Mentioned

Table 3: Focusing Events Coding Scheme

5 Analysis

5.1 Attention Pattern of RES on the EC's Agenda

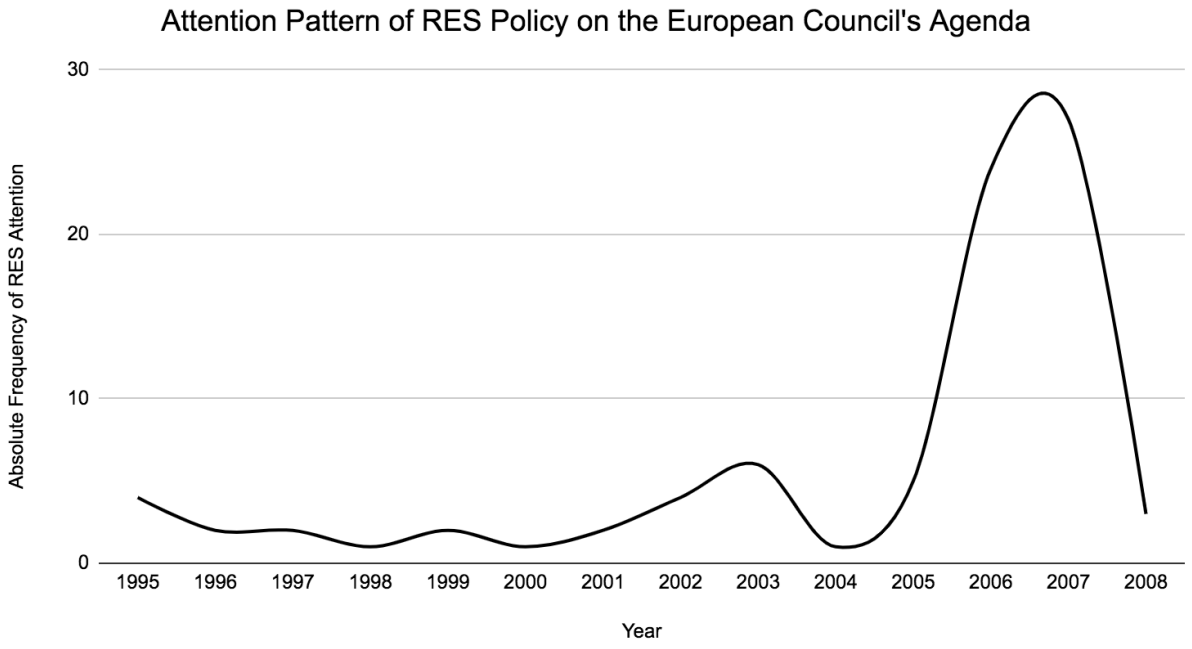

Figure 1: *Attention to Renewable and Alternative Energy on the EC's Agenda*

The analysis will begin with the descriptive research. Figure 1 displays the evolution of the annual absolute number of mentions to RES by the EC over the time period of 1995-2008. This contains all (quasi)-sentences of RES within the EC Conclusions each year based on the data coded under CAPIC '806' by Alexandrova et al. (2014). In total, within the time frame of 1995-2008, 83 (quasi)-sentences were found within 22 EC Conclusions which mentioned RES. Figure 1

demonstrates that RES policy attention was distributed unevenly over time on the EC's agenda. Based on this data, two trends can be observed.

Firstly, from 1995 until 2005, RES was characterized by equilibrium on the EC's agenda. This entails that it was receiving low attention on the EC's agenda (True et al., 2007, p. 157). As depicted in figure 1, attention towards RES policy within the EC remained between 1 to 6 annual absolute mentions within the EC Conclusions. This indicates that, due to bounded rationality, the EC was incapable of devoting wide-scale attention towards RES (True et al., 2007, p. 156). These dynamics prompted RES policy to be engaged in negative feedback dynamics as policy change remained constrained within the EC (True et al., 2007, p. 160). Hence, this signifies that RES policy during the time frame of 1995 to 2005 remained captured within the Commission's subsystems due to agreement over its policy definition (Beyer et al., 2018, p. 44). This is substantiated by Buchan (2015) who argues that in the late 1990s and early 2000s, RES policy was characterized by interests on the Commission's agenda to achieve open access on energy networks across the EU (p. 351).

Next, radical punctuated change is exhibited in the years 2006 and 2007. This is the case as the absolute frequency of mentions increases from 5 in 2005 to 24 in 2006 and, subsequently, 27 in 2007 (see figure 1). This disequilibrium entails that RES policy was engaged in positive feedback due to conflicting visions, by the EC, over the definition of RES as a policy image (Princen, 2013, p. 857). These findings also suggest that EC attention to RES is unevenly distributed over time as expected from a macro-political institution (Alexandrova et al., 2012, p. 84). Hence, from 2006 to 2007, the EC perceived RES to be a salient issue which required serial attention prompting a removal of the issue from the Commission's subsystems (Beyer et al., 2018, p. 44). This is validated by Oberthur and Dupont (2011) who argue that late 2006 and early 2007 marked increased attention of RES policy on the EC's agenda as this era signified a new wave of urgency towards RES policy (p. 82). As expected in a punctuated equilibrium pattern, this radical attention towards RES only lasted briefly. The EC's attention rapidly declined from 2007 to 2008 with a drop in annual absolute mentions to renewable and alternative energy drastically declined from 27 to 3 (see figure 1).

These findings indicate that the hypothesis of this research can be confirmed as RES policy indeed fluctuated from lengthy periods of low attention to a brief period of high attention. Henceforth, attention evolved in a punctuated equilibrium pattern. The results are supported by previous research which illustrate that the broader energy policy domain follows a punctuated pattern on the EC's agenda (Alexandrova & Timmermans, 2015, p. 58). This also substantiates previous work suggesting that attention cycles of policy domains on the EC's agenda typically follow a PET pattern due to its macro-political structure which provides it with a higher volatility of attention changes (Alexandrova et al., 2012, p. 84). This pattern has been empirically validated in the organized crime policy domain on the EC's agenda between 1975 and 2010 (Elias & Timmermans, 2014, p. 171).

5.2 Low Politics: Internal Market Policy Image

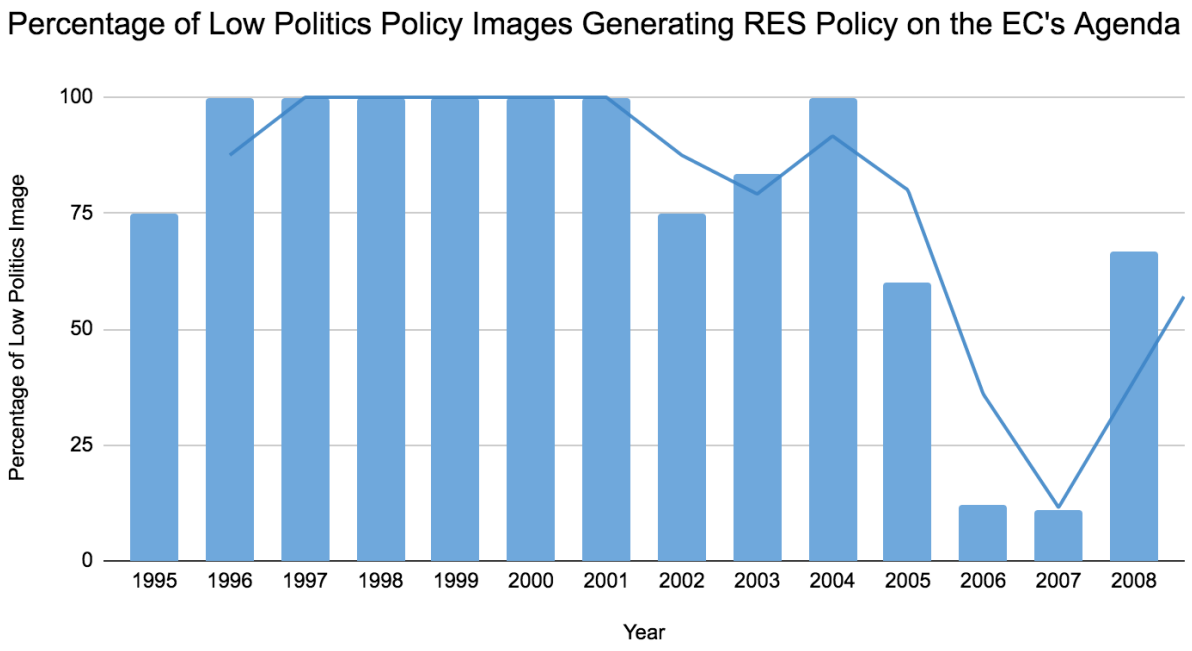

Figure 2.1: *Percentage of Low Politics Policy Image Generating RES Attention on the EC's Agenda*

The explanatory analysis of the internal market policy image will now be discussed. Figure 2.1 displays the percentage of relative mentions to the (low politics) internal market image from the

overall frequency of RES (quasi)-sentences analyzed in the descriptive research. These findings support that EC attention, during periods of equilibrium, are generated by a low politics policy image (the internal market image), whereas low politics images are not responsible for generating attention during disequilibrium.

Figure 2.1 depicts that from the 1995 to 2005 period of equilibrium, discerned in section 5.1, the internal market policy image consistently generated EC attention to RES. As shown in figure 2.1, the percentage of attention on the RES agenda, generated by the internal market image, remained at a high level, between 66.7% to 100%, during the period of equilibrium. These findings entails that the Commission's policy monopoly over RES with the internal market image generated stasis on the EC's agenda. (True et al., 2007, p. 157). This is because boundedly rational decision-making prevented heightened attention towards a matter not subject to the EC's high politics domain of expertise (Jones & Baumgartner, 2005, p. 12). These results go in line with Thaler's (2016) findings that EC involvement in the liberalization of the renewable energy market was scarce, throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s, since it was dominantly framed within the Commission's regulatory expertise (p. 574).

However, the internal market image played less of a role in generating EC attention towards RES during the 2006 and 2007 period of punctuation. Figure 2.1 demonstrates that the internal market image declined from generating 60% of annual RES mentions in 2005 to producing 12% in 2006 and 11.1% of annual RES mentions in 2007. The relative percentage of the internal market image then increased back to 66.7% in the 2008 return to equilibrium. This entails that RES was engaged in positive feedback dynamics during 2006 and 2007 which redefined the dominating policy image prompting radical attention by the EC (True et al, 2007, p. 160). This is substantiated in the literature suggesting that RES policy shifted from a matter of market integration to a necessity for intergovernmental intervention due to concerns of climate and energy security (Buchan, 2015, p. 354-355). Hence, the punctuation in attention patterns towards RES within the EC in 2006 and 2007 can be explained by the shift of the dominant policy image away from the internal market to a framing within the EC's functional expertise (Alexandrova et al., 2012, p. 74). This will be elaborated further in the following sections.

These findings are affirmed by previous work which suggest that the EC does not generate attention towards issues deemed as low politics (Alexandrova & Timmermans, 2015 p. 58). This is because the EC must be selective towards the issues they consider since they process information serially (Alexandrova & Timmermans, 2015, p. 44). As previous literature attributes the internal renewable energy market as a low politics matter, it was determined as an issue within the Commission's function (Buchan, 2015, p. 349). Moreover, this analysis confirms the longitudinal empirical pattern, within PET research, that out of the 21 main EU policy domains, the EC only attributes high attention towards issues deemed as high politics, such as defense policy (Alexandrova et al., 2014, p. 161).

5.3 High Politics: Energy Supply Security and Climate Mitigation Policy Images

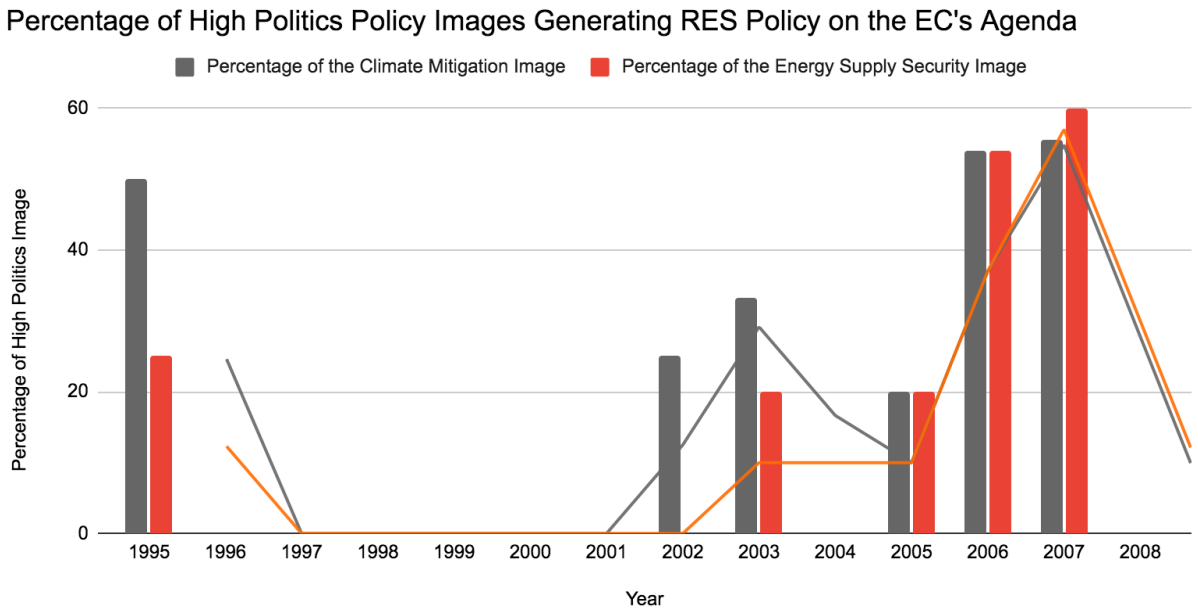

Figure 2.2: *Percentage of High Politics Policy Image Generating RES Attention on the EC's Agenda*

The explanatory analysis of the climate mitigation and energy supply security policy images will now be discussed. Figure 2.2 shows annual changes of the relative percentage that the high politics image generated attention from the overall RES agenda of the EC between 1995 to 2008. Figure 2.2 depicts that both the climate mitigation and security of energy supply policy images generate

attention to RES policy on the EC's agenda during the period of disequilibrium but also generate attention periodically throughout equilibrium.

Figure 2.2 demonstrates that there is a radical increase in the percentage of RES (quasi)-sentences framed in the climate mitigation and energy supply security image from 20% in 2005 to 54% in 2006 during the period of punctuation shown in figure 1. This entails that, as expected in PET, the shift from a low politics to a high politics policy image of RES prompted the EC to capture the issue as it corresponded with the EC's high politics function (Alexandrova et al., 2012, p. 70). These results have been substantiated by Oberthur and Dupont's (2011) analysis which contends the EC's increased attention towards RES policy, in 2006 and 2007, to reinvigorated concern about climate change and energy security (p. 87). This was prompted by political turmoil in the Middle East and Russia, which demonstrated an urgent need and opportunity to build EU RES policy (Oberthur & Dupont, 2011, p. 87). Hence, the EC's serial processing prompted an overreaction in the attention towards RES as a high politics matter. These findings are consistent with the literature that the EC responds with radical attention to high politics policy framing (Alexandrova et al., 2012, p. 73).

However, both policy images also demonstrate multiple spikes in attention throughout the 1995 to 2005 period of stasis displayed in figure 1. This attention peak occurred in 2002 as the percentage of attention to RES produced by the climate mitigation image surged from 0% in 2001 to 25% in 2002 (figure 2.2). Moreover, the energy supply security image displayed a similar increase in 2003 as its percentage of generating RES attention on the EC's agenda grew from 0% to 20% (see figure 2.2). These increases in the percentage of high politics policy images during stasis also coincide with PET literature. Scholars assert that high politics framing must be accompanied by context-based factors, such as focusing events, to generate high attention in the EC (Alexandrova, 2015, p. 408). This has been empirically proven through the issue of bioterrorism which punctuated attention on the EC's agenda following the shifting policy image alongside the focusing events of the 2001 US anthrax attacks (Princen & Rhinard, 2006, p. 1126). Hence, although high politics policy images may be present on the EC's agenda during periods of equilibrium, they may not generate punctuated attention due to the lack of other factors necessary for facilitating positive feedback, such as focusing events (True et al., 2007, p. 160).

5.4 High Politics: Focusing Events

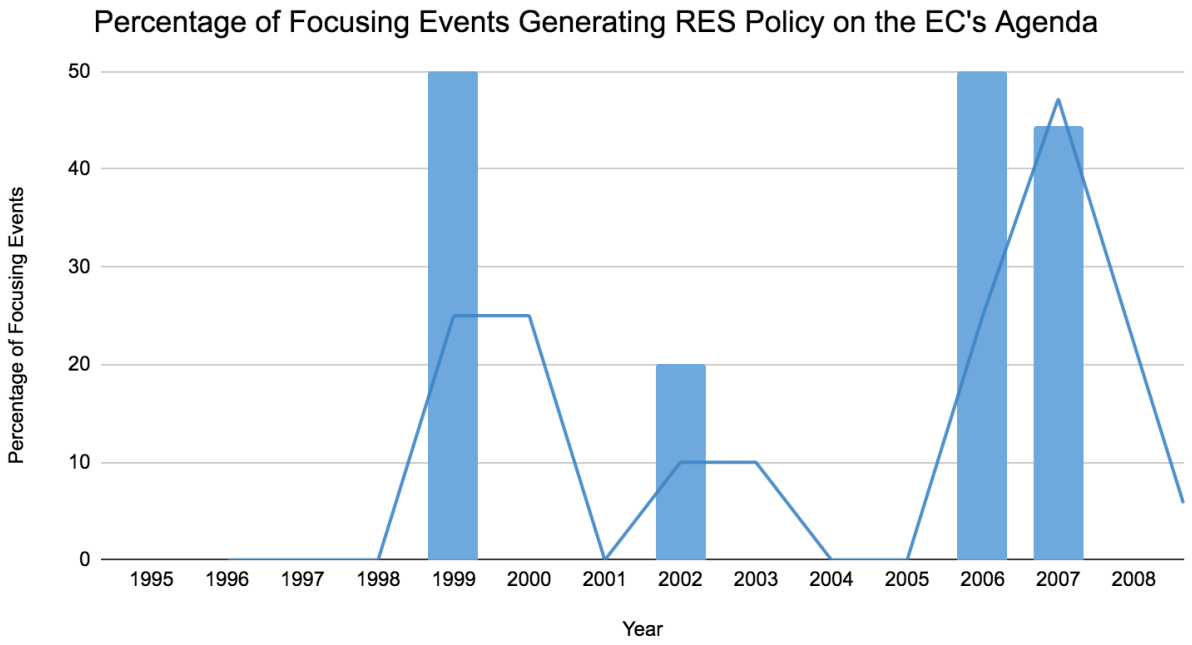

Figure 2.3: *Percentage of Focusing Events Generating RES Attention on the EC's Agenda*

Lastly, the explanatory analysis of focusing events will be discussed. Figure 2.3 depicts the annual relative percentage of focusing events which generate attention from the overall RES agenda of the EC. Figure 2.3 ascertains that, similarly to the high politics policy images, the focusing events act as an explanation for the EC's punctuated attention, however, they also generate attention at certain points during stasis.

Figure 2.3 demonstrates that the percentage of focusing events which generated RES attention on the EC's agenda drastically increased to 50% of the overall RES agenda in 2006 and 44.4% of the RES agenda in 2007 during the period of punctuation outlined in section 5.1. This radically decreased to a 0% relative percentage of focusing events within the RES (quasi)-sentences following the return to equilibrium in 2008. This affirms the PET assumption that the EC is highly reactive to focusing events as a venue for high politics (Alexandrova, 2015, p. 509). Hence, as depicted in figure 2.3, the occurrence of focusing events in the RES policy domain successfully incited an overreaction of attention by the EC, hence, prompting a period of disequilibrium in 2006

and 2007 (Alexandrova, 2015, p. 507). These findings go in line with Thaler's (2016) research that critical events, such as the 2006 Russia-Ukraine gas dispute, prompted the EC to react with urgency to RES policy as a threat to the EU's energy security (p. 578).

However, there have also been numerous increases of focusing events in the EC's RES agenda throughout the 1995 to 2005 stasis. This occurred where focusing events occupied 0% of the RES agenda in 1998 to 50% of the RES agenda in 1999 and in 2002 where focusing events generated 20% of annual RES attention from 0% in the previous year (see figure 2.3). This suggests that stasis can be explained by the failure of focusing events to prompt a punctuated reaction within the EC as they did not suit the EC's strategic interests (Alexandrova, 2015, p. 513). Hence, the EC was not incentivized to allocate high attention towards RES due to issue competition with other policy domains deemed as more relevant to their strategic interests, such as defense following the 2001 9/11 terrorist attack (Alexandrova, 2015, p. 521).

These results go in line with previous work that changes in EC attention towards energy policy are guided by focusing events (Buchan, 2015, p. 358). Moreover, this finding that focusing events are not uniform in their impact on attention is consistent with Alexandrova's (2015) research that focusing events do not always generate punctuated attention on the EC's agenda (p. 525). This is because for positive feedback to occur, other factors must be present such as redefined policy images (Alexandrova, 2015, p. 525). Hence, the 2006 and 2007 punctuation must be explained by the simultaneous occurrence of focusing events and shifts in policy images. This is depicted in figures 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 which illustrate that the punctuation in attention was supported by both the shift of policy image from low politics to high politics alongside an increase in focusing events during 2006 and 2007. However, during stasis, these dynamics did not work in tandem.

6 Conclusion

This thesis described and explained the evolution of attention towards renewable and alternative energy policy on the EC's agenda. This thesis examined the research question:

"*How has attention towards renewable and alternative energy policy on the European Council's agenda evolved over time and why?"*

This research question can be answered that attention towards RES has evolved in a punctuated equilibrium pattern on the EC's agenda over time. This can be explained through the redefinition of policy images and increase in focusing events over time.

The main findings of the analysis demonstrate that between 1995 to 2008, RES policy follows a punctuated equilibrium pattern characterized by both incrementalism, between 1995 to 2005, and punctuation, between 2006 and 2007, which returns to incrementalism in 2008 on the EC's agenda. These findings are crucial as they confirm the hypothesis that RES policy underwent a lengthy period of stasis disrupted by brief punctuated attention on the EC's agenda. Additionally, these findings contribute to the literature by providing empirical support for previous PET research that attention towards issues on the EC's agenda is distributed unevenly over time since the EC processes information serially and must prioritize some issues over others (Alexandrova et al., 2012, p. 84).

Moreover, the research finds that the low politics internal market image generated attention on the EC's agenda during stasis. Focusing events and the high politics climate mitigation and energy supply security images generated high attention on the EC's agenda prompting the period of disequilibrium. However, the high politics images and focusing events also periodically generated attention throughout periods of stasis. As expected by positive feedback, this suggests that the punctuation of RES on the EC's agenda can be explained by the simultaneous occurrence of shifting policy images to high politics and the increase of focusing events rather than individual occurrence of these factors. Hence, the explanatory findings are central as they support PET expectations of positive feedback dynamics and the role of high and low politics issues in generating different attention levels on the EC's agenda (Alexandrova & Timmermans, 2015, p. 58). Additionally, these results have contributed to the literature by demonstrating that RES follows the same dynamics as the broader energy policy domain by responding in a PET pattern to critical events and shifting policy images (Alexandrova & Timmermans, 2015, p. 46-47).

6.1 Critical Reflection of the Research

This research has innovated the PET methodology through introducing a systematic binary coding scheme of PET explanatory factors to the longitudinal QCA research. This methodology is

valuable as it allows PET scholars to reproduce this research on other EU policy domains and political systems (Princen, 2009, p. 50). A further strength of this research is its focus on specific explanatory factors to explain the EC's RES policy attention. By concentrating on policy images and focusing events, I contributed to closing the literature gap regarding the dual impact of policy images and focusing events on the EC's attention patterns (Princen, 2011, p. 933; Alexandrova, 2016, p. 410-411).

Despite these additions, several limitations of the research must be noted. Firstly, the coding for the explanatory research does not take into account the likelihood of irregularity in relative percentages of each factor as an explanation of EC attention due to limited RES data. For instance, the 1995 surge of the climate mitigation policy image, as generating 50% of RES attention on the EC's agenda, is only based on 4 coded RES mentions where climate mitigation was mentioned once (see figure 2.2). Henceforth, the results would be more fruitful with additional data on annual EC RES attention. Moreover, this research neglects other explanatory factors. Previous PET research has emphasized venue shifts as an explanation for punctuation in EU attention (Princen, 2010, p. 37). Since the RES subdomain is under-explored, it is unclear whether factors, such as venue shifts, possess more explanatory power in explaining attention changes on the EC's agenda compared to focusing events and policy images.

Furthermore, although PET provided a meaningful framework for this analysis, the research demonstrated that PET fails to account for the shifting competences of EU institutions. The EC's roles have evolved since its foundation in 1974 (Alexandrova, 2015, p. 509). Despite the aim to control for this factor, by concluding the time frame for analysis prior to the 2009 Lisbon Treaty ratification, this does not resolve for other changing factors such as the increase of EC issued Conclusions in 1996 (Alexandrova, 2015, p. 509). Hence, EU PET literature would profit from further work which accounts for the complexity of the EU agenda-setting context due to the unfixed roles of EU institutions.

6.2 Avenues for Further Research

This thesis preliminarily introduces the subdomain of renewable and alternative energy to the PET literature on the EC. Further research should elaborate on these findings with reference to other

explanatory variables, such as venue shifts, to provide a complete picture of the evolving RES attention patterns. Moreover, a qualitative analysis would provide more contextual research on which focusing events helped punctuate the issue on the EC's agenda and how the policy image shift took place. This research also demonstrated the theoretical relevance of conducting PET research on energy subdomains. Hence, this design should be expanded to other subdomains, such as nuclear energy, to determine whether they also follow the same PET pattern to the broader energy policy domain. Additionally, as the time frame for analysis concluded in 2008, a reproduction of this research on the following decade would provide valuable insight regarding how the EC's attention to RES policy has evolved in recent years and whether they have, indeed, continued to follow the trajectory to a 'greener' agenda.

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8 Appendix

Appendix 1: EC Conclusions on Renewable and Alternative Energy

Number	Year	Day	Month	City, Country
1	1995	26, 27	June	Cannes, France
2	1995	10, 11	December	Helsinki, Finland
3	1996	21, 22	June	Florence, Italy
4	1997	16, 17	June	Amsterdam, Netherlands
5	1998	11, 12	December	Vienna, Austria
6	1999	3, 4	June	Cologne, Germany
7	2000	19, 20	June	Santa Maria da Feira, Portugal
8	2001	15, 16	June	Goteborg, Sweden
9	2002	15, 16	March	Barcelona, Spain
10	2003	20, 21	March	Brussels, Belgium
11	2003	16, 17	October	Brussels, Belgium
12	2004	25, 26	March	Brussels, Belgium
13	2005	22, 23	March	Brussels, Belgium
14	2005	15, 16	December	Brussels, Belgium
15	2006	23, 24	March	Brussels, Belgium
16	2006	15, 16	June	Brussels, Belgium
17	2006	14, 15	December	Brussels, Belgium
18	2007	8, 9	March	Brussels, Belgium
19	2007	13, 14	December	Brussels, Belgium
20	2008	13, 14	March	Brussels, Belgium

21	2008	19, 20	June	Brussels, Belgium
22	2008	11, 12	December	Brussels, Belgium

Appendix 2: Frequency distribution of RES on the EC's agenda

Year	**Number of Conclusions Issued**	**Annual Frequency of (Quasi)-Sentences in Conclusions**	**Annual Frequency of (Quasi)-Sentences on RES in Conclusions**
1995	2	2144	4
1996	3	1292	2
1997	3	1342	2
1998	2	1391	1
1999	4	3260	2
2000	4	2392	1
2001	5	1767	2
2002	4	2051	4
2003	4	2155	6
2004	4	2248	1
2005	3	1733	5
2006	3	1686	24
2007	3	1435	27

2008	5	1567	3

Appendix 3: Frequency distribution of policy images and focusing events in generating RES attention on the EC's agenda

Appendix 3.1: *Internal Market (Low Politics) Policy Image*

Year	**Annual Frequency of (Quasi)-Sentences on RES**	**Code of 0: Factor not mentioned**	**Code of 1: Factor Mentioned**	**Percentage of Codes with Factor Mentioned**
1995	4	1	3	75%
1996	2	0	2	100%
1997	2	0	2	100%
1998	1	0	1	100%
1999	2	0	2	100%
2000	1	0	1	100%
2001	2	0	2	100%
2002	4	1	3	75%
2003	6	1	5	83.3%
2004	1	0	1	100%
2005	5	2	3	60%
2006	24	21	3	12%
2007	27	24	3	11.1%
2008	3	1	2	66.7%

Appendix 3.2: *Climate Mitigation (High Politics) Policy Image*

Year	**Annual Frequency of (Quasi)-Sentences on RES**	**Code of 0: Factor not mentioned**	**Code of 1: Factor Mentioned**	**Percentage of Codes with Factor Mentioned**
1995	4	2	2	50%
1996	2	2	0	0%
1997	2	2	0	0%
1998	1	1	0	0%
1999	2	2	0	0%
2000	1	1	0	0%
2001	2	2	0	0%
2002	4	3	1	25%
2003	6	4	2	33.3%
2004	1	1	0	0%
2005	5	4	1	20%
2006	24	11	13	54%
2007	27	12	15	55.6%
2008	3	3	0	0%

Appendix 3.3: *Energy Supply (High Politics) Policy Image*

Year	**Annual Frequency of (Quasi)-Sentences on RES**	**Code of 0: Factor not mentioned**	**Code of 1: Factor Mentioned**	**Percentage of Codes with Factor Mentioned**
1995	4	3	1	25%
1996	2	2	0	0%
1997	2	2	0	0%
1998	1	1	0	0%
1999	2	2	0	0%
2000	1	1	0	0%
2001	2	2	0	0%
2002	4	4	0	0%
2003	6	5	1	20%
2004	1	1	0	0%
2005	5	4	1	20%
2006	24	11	13	54%
2007	27	12	15	60%
2008	3	3	0	0%

Appendix 3.4: *Focusing Events (High Politics)*

Year	**Annual Frequency of (Quasi)-Sentences on RES**	**Code of 0: Factor not mentioned**	**Code of 1: Factor Mentioned**	**Percentage of Codes with Factor Mentioned**
1995	4	4	0	0%
1996	2	2	0	0%
1997	2	2	0	0%
1998	1	1	0	0%
1999	2	1	1	50%
2000	1	1	0	0%
2001	2	2	0	0%
2002	4	3	1	25%
2003	6	6	0	0%
2004	1	1	0	0%
2005	5	5	0	0%
2006	24	12	12	50%
2007	27	15	12	44.4%
2008	3	3	0	0%