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A Comparative Analysis of the European Commission's Response to Energy Crises

Master Thesis

MA International Relations: Global Conflict in the Modern Era

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Since February 2022, the international system has been a witness to Russia's aggression with the invasion of Ukraine. Even though the consequences are more tragic for the Ukrainian people, indirect impacts have already affected Western countries and especially Europe. The contemporary violent situation that destabilized the international political and economic system managed to weaken the European Union's (EU) relationship with Russia even more. The current energy crisis constitutes a significant development that needs to be closely examined, due to its devastating and uncertain outcome, and because it led to the occurrence of a notable change in the European Commission's leading stance on the issue of energy security.

The energy sector used to be one of the main fields of cooperation between the EU and the Russian Federation, given the fact that the EU member states are seriously dependent on Russia's energy resources (Siddi, 2017a, p.364-365). During the period 2004-2014, Russia was one of the main external suppliers of the EU, as over 30% of coal and crude oil originated from Russia, and over one-third of natural gas imports came from its Eastern neighbor (Eurostat, 2016). The reliance on Russia was more severe in the case of certain Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries that experienced significant problems during the gas supply disruptions of 2006 and 2009, that emerged from the Russo-Ukrainian gas-related disputes (Maltby, 2013, p. 438). For instance, Hungary and, Poland were the first countries that experienced a disruption in their gas supplies (BBC, 2006a), while within hours several European countries such as Austria, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, and Slovakia announced a decrease between 25% to 40% (BBC, 2006b).

However, apart from the CEE countries, Western European countries such as France, the Netherlands and especially Germany had traditionally close energy ties with Russia. In the case of Germany, the country since the communist era had introduced the notable policy of Ostpolitik, which was an initiative of convergence with the Soviet Union, focusing on the domain of energy (Schmitt, 2022). This political program was meant to become one of the most influential political programs of Germany, which affected its relationship with Russia and other Soviet states -including Ukraine-, its cooperation with other member states of the

European Community, and its alignment with the further integration of the energy policy that the European Commission was aiming at. For instance, the Nord Stream 2 project became one of the most controversial issues regarding EU energy developments, because a serious intra-EU and between-member states debate emerged regarding the coordination of the project with the general European objectives of the European Commission.

The abovementioned gas supply disruption of 2006, the reoccurrence of another gas supply disruption in 2009 involving once again Russia and Ukraine, as well as the developments occurring in 2014 with the annexation of Crimea by Russia had again an impact on the energy field and the European energy security. These developments influenced the recognition of Russia's new motif of behavior as an energy supplier and partner of Europe, leading to the conclusion that Russia did not constitute one of the EU's "strategic partners" anymore. This position was even supported by Federica Mogherini,¹ while giving a speech in the European Parliament on September 2014 (Euractiv, 2014). All these occurrences not only initiated a change in the Commission's perspective regarding Russia as an energy supplier but also turned out to be an opportunity for the articulation of a unified approach on the issue of energy security that could even lead to further integration of energy policy and governance. In 2014 Donald Tusk² communicated a proposal for the formation of an Energy Union within the EU, which would enhance unity and solidarity among the member states and would confront the dangerous energy policy of Russia against certain European states (Tusk, 2014). The Commission's vision of the Energy Union, which was materialized in 2015, found its origins in Tusk's initial proposal.

The Juncker Commission (2014-2019) and the von der Leyen Commission (2019-present) which will be specifically mentioned in this thesis, positioned the vision of the Energy Union at the top of their priority lists. Both Commissions had to manage several challenging situations during their incumbency regarding energy policy. The Juncker Commission during the preliminary stages of shaping the Energy Union found difficulties

¹ Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Italy (2014), High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (2014-2019)

² Prime Minister of Poland (2007-2014), President of the European Council (2014-2019)

to bring together the member states' positions about energy and energy relations with external suppliers -especially with Russia. The idea of energy security differed across the EU member states and this affected the development of their energy policies. This made the Commission's job even more difficult and projects such as Nord Stream 2 became a further inhibitory factor for the integration of the energy policy and governance because it led to an extended intra-EU crisis and were against the Commission's diversification efforts. On the other hand, during its tenure, the von der Leyen Commission faced various energy-related crises, including those unrelated to Russia such as the intra-EU tensions concerning the management of the energy crisis during the Covid-19 period. However, the highlight of the von der Leyen Commission became the contemporary energy crisis since the initial conditions seemed to be advantageous for the development of the Energy Union vision.

The existing literature briefly initiated to articulate the narrative that the contemporary energy crisis could become an important foundational shift for the EU's energy architecture (Bianchi & Raimondi, 2022, p.4). However, the limitations on the European Commission's progress – such as the persisting intergovernmental approach of certain member states concerning the energy policy- and particularly the long-lasting problem of the EU's member states' dependence on Russian energy supplies became the focal point of analysis of the current literature. The existing and changed context could constitute an important starting point for the examination of the Commission's development in terms of energy policy integration and the overall altering stance that the European institution managed to format during this crisis. In that case, in order to identify the important change in the Commission's position it is needed to demonstrate the limitations of the EU's previous initiatives to intake a more leading role in the Union's energy policy as well as the context's differences that led to this change.

So, the thesis concentrated on the research question of: ***“How did the Russo-Ukrainian conflict of 2022 and the accompanying energy crisis affect the EU's energy policy and governance?”***. Answering this requires a comparative assessment of the Commission's work in the periods between 2014-21 and 2022-23, in terms of the capacity to achieve

deeper political integration and solidarity in the issue of energy policy and decision-making. The significance and contribution of the thesis lie in its identification that the integration progress of the EU's energy policy is undergoing a steady and strategically directed path toward its completion. This identification highlights the positive developments and progress of the EU's energy policy, reinforcing the notion that a true energy union is evolving.

The thesis starts with a literature review based on the theories that theorized the energy policies and relations with Russia and the theories about the integration process of the energy policy. Chapter 3 engages with the methodological framework that the thesis is based on and the sources that the analytical part of the thesis is derived from. Chapters 4 and 5 constitute the empirical part of the thesis, as they focus on the developments that affected the vision of the Energy Union and the overall progress of the integration process in the energy policy area. Finally, the thesis closes with a conclusion, in which all the concluding remarks on the differences and similarities between the reactions to the two major Russian-involved crises are presented.

The thesis continues to the next chapter where relevant literature is reviewed.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The literature review aims to provide a synopsis of the theoretical approaches that throughout the years enlightened the energy policy and security in EU's member states, especially concerning Russia and its energy resources and practices. The second section will concentrate on how the academic literature perceived the European Commission's stance on energy policy and how it integrated the EU energy policy. The theories of intergovernmentalism and its branches and supranationalism will be highlighted since they contain concepts that the analysis will use to understand and review the EU's and its member states' actions and activities regarding the unified approach to energy issues. Overall, the debates explored in the chapter will enhance the research's objective to answer the research question.

Different approaches to energy policy and security in the EU

The until 2022 close energy relationship between the EU member states and Russia, was one of the most debatable issues both on how the EU member states' energy policies regarding Russia were theoretically approached and how Brussels wanted to approach the matter.

Over the years scholars had theorized the approach that the EU and its member states adopted about the energy relationship with Russia. In this part of the literature review, two academic debates regarding the EU-Russia energy relationship unfolded. The first referred to neoliberalism and the concept of economic interdependence against the neorealist and more securitized approach that aims to promote the connection between asymmetrical interdependence and the generation of security dilemma and conflict. The second debate was between the neorealist perspective and the constructivist approach which negates the existence of a security threat and attributes this interpretation based on the formation of identities and perceptions about each actor. These academic debates were examined first because they characterized and influenced the energy policies, and the perceptions of the EU member states about energy security especially relating to Russia and consequently affected the European energy policies.

Scholars like Krickovic (2015) and Siddi (2017a) identified that the oldest EU member states and especially Germany approached the matter of energy cooperation with Russia from a liberal perspective. The concept of economic interdependence, which entails that the fear of losing the economic benefits generated by their economic partnership discourages states from getting into a conflict against their economic allies, was a quality that certain EU countries supported regarding their energy relationship with Russia (Krickovic, 2015, p.4-5). So far, there was the opinion that the EU-Russia energy relations were characterized by symmetrical interdependence, as both the EU member states and Russia had mutual interests and the superiority of Russia on the energy sector was counter-balanced to other commercial sectors (Siddi, 2017a, p.369). Until recently, in Germany there was the opinion that Russia constituted a loyal associate, that would not fail its promises towards its partner, as it was already demonstrated by previous instances during the darkest periods of the Cold War (Łada et al., 2015, p.64). Overall, it was perceived that during the first half of the 2000s, the energy trade and relations between EU and EU member states with Russia were influenced by the liberal perspective, as new projects were also undertaken (Nord Stream pipeline) and long-term contracts with the Russian state gas company, Gazprom, were signed (Siddi, 2017a, p.371). According to Siddi (2018), the high degree of interdependence and the position that the EU kept as a liberal actor, focusing on its energy relations with Russia as a commerce relationship, led to the persistence and the increase of the interdependence between the two actors even during times of political crises, like the Ukrainian crisis of 2014.

However, according to scholars the same pattern of symmetrical interdependence was not evident after the mid-2000s. The 2004 Union's enlargement and the fact that the Union would become geographically and consequently politically closer to Russia would reinforce the liberal cooperation with the eastern partner (European External Action Service, 2001, p.1-3). However, the same development was examined as a counter-argument by Newnham (2011) and Krickovic (2015), who identified the higher energy dependence of the new member states on the Russian energy resources (especially natural gas) as a negative factor for the actors' symmetry and positioning the EU into a seriously vulnerable position. Conditions like the gas supply disruptions of 2006 and 2009 and the

2014 crisis, reinforced the abovementioned positions that the energy relations between the EU and Russia could not be interpreted anymore based on the perspective of the liberal approach and the notions of symmetrical interdependence. This argument was articulated because the practices and policies that each actor followed to secure its position in this relationship led to the intensification of security tensions, and political clashes and deepened the economic and security competition (security dilemma) (Krickovic, 2015).

The economic growth of Russia and its economic relationship with European countries, especially after the 2014 crisis, continued to be analyzed under a neorealist and more pessimistic perspective, wanting to expose the security threat underlying. Terms like “petro-power”, “petro-carrots” and “petro-sticks” emerged, to explain the advantageous (i.e., Belarus) and the punishing practices (i.e., Ukraine, Georgia) that Russia was using to manipulate its partners’ dependence on its energy resources (Newnham, 2011, p.139). However, apart from the arguments against economic interdependence, the concept of power asymmetry in combination with the notion of vulnerability emerged as necessary tools -especially of the realist perspective- to interpret the power asymmetries within interdependence relationships (Christie & Grätz, 2009, p. 1). Christie and Grätz (2009) explained that there is a particular type of conflict that within a bilateral, interdependent relationship could have a more severe impact on one state than the other within a given timeframe. The scholars justified this analysis in relevance with the situation that emerged after the 2009 gas supply disruption and the demonstration of Bulgaria’s and Ukraine’s vulnerability in comparison to Russia’s position (Christie & Grätz 2009, p.2).

The academic debate between the liberal approach and the securitized approach regarding the energy relations between the EU and the Russian Federation became particularly evident in the political debate about the Nord Stream 2 project. The pipeline initiative, which would bypass Ukraine as a gas transit country and would directly connect Russia with Western Europe, stimulated furthermore the differences between the EU member states and the economic interests versus political and security interests dichotomy (Loskot-Strachota, 2016, p.1-2). As will be discussed in the following chapters, the debate became a thorny issue in the intra-EU energy deliberations since the old Western member states

involved in the project,³ pointed out the economic and commercial purposes and advantages of the project that would emerge by the direct connection of Western Europe with Russia (Siddi, 2020, p.12). On the other hand, the confronting side of the CEE states, supported by the United States (US), demonstrated the catastrophic consequences that this project would have for Ukraine's bargaining power towards Russia as well as that it would further intensify EU's dependence on Russia. Also, the pipeline construction would threaten their interests by being sidestepped by the main transit routes of the East-West energy trade (Siddi, 2020, p.11-12). Both academic and political positions that emerged from the Nord Stream 2 debate had reasonable arguments and ideas. However, the continuation of close energy relationships with Russia even though it has already proved to be an unreliable supplier, would lead to the intensification of the EU's energy dependence on Russia and would not strengthen its energy security.

However, the EU energy policies and idea of energy security have been approached by critical theoretical perspectives too. According to Tom Casier (2016), the examination of the EU's complicated energy relations with Russia under the narrow perspective of geopolitical analysis and power politics was reductionist. Scholars like Kuzemko (2014), Casier (2011), and Siddi (2017b) interestingly approached the issue of EU-Russia energy relations through the lenses of constructivist theory, aiming to explain the divergent positions of EU member states towards Russia. In more detail, Kuzemko (2014) examined the derailment of the EU-Russia energy relations as a result of the different interpretations of the societal role of energy. The market-based approach of the EU captures energy as a trading item, whereas in the case of Russia energy is interpreted and used as a critical resource that could lead to the economic and political revival of the country (Kuzemko, 2014, p.61-64). Casier (2011) identified that there is little evidence to support the connection between the EU's high dependence on Russia's energy resources and a security threat to the EU. In that case, the scholar got to the conclusion that the intensified concerns about the energy dependence and energy security threat posed by Russia could be interpreted based on the shifting identities and perceptions in the general Euro-Russian

³ The energy companies involved in the Nord Stream 2 project originated from Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, and France.

relations, which were reframed under more competitive, zero-sum terms (Casier, 2011, p.546). Siddi (2017b) concluded that the role of identities and their formation based on the experiences of the past led to the perception of many CEE countries for the Russian “Other” was deeply affected by historical memories. Even though this approach explained the deeper reason for the augmented securitized approach by some EU member states, the position is also justified because of the previous cases of energy crises. However, simultaneously this deep-rooted pessimistic perception is not only a burden for the EU-Russia energy relationship but also posed a hurdle to the intra-EU member states’ relations making the efforts for a more unified front even harder.

Overall, the rationale for mentioning the developments and the theoretical approaches in this part is to highlight that until recently energy policy of the member states were not completely aligned with the European Commission’s position regarding energy policy, security, and relationships with external suppliers. Through the years, the European Commission has been struggling, to determine its stance in the spectrum of EU energy policy and energy security, and hence that is a topic of analysis that would be introduced in the second part of the literature review and further explored on the part of the analysis. Moreover, the presentation of the theoretical and political side of the energy-related deliberations between EU member states over the years, was important to perceive their influence in EU’s energy policy and reactions until today.

The European Commission and the absence of an integrated approach and decision-making

Energy policy and governance in a supranational, integrated EU-level constituted a thorny issue of deliberations for the European Commission, as the most independent institution of the Union. Since the early 2000s, the energy policy was perceived by scholars as a significant area with the perspective to reactivate the integration process and to reevaluate the EU’s abilities towards its member states and citizens (Bocquillon & Maltby, 2020). However, the abovementioned theoretical debate that influenced the energy discussions between the EU member states as well as the developments that occurred throughout the

years, were particularly evident on the theoretical perspectives that reviewed the Commission's position over the years.

The Commission's stance in terms of energy policy and diplomacy over time was an important issue of analysis, due to the many developments which affected its position, particularly in the case of its relations with external suppliers like Russia. McGowan (2008, p.102) described the EU's energy policy as more market-oriented and liberal, but without actual consistency, since the Union wanted to promote EU-led internal and external liberal policies, while simultaneously certain member states followed the concept of "economic nationalism" by wanting to support and protect existing companies. As will be discussed in the following chapters the Commission while having a vision about the further integration of the energy policy, in the period of 2014-2019 ended up becoming a neutral recipient and follower of the Western member states' energy policies.

The weak progress of integration in the sector of energy policy could be attributed to a certain extent to the abovementioned situation. However, Marco Siddi and Kustova (2021) argued that the post-2014 crisis Commission adopted a more securitized EU energy policy, and it became a strategic actor. It held a more provocative stance, especially regarding Russia and as a result, its relationship with international organizations such as World Trade Organization (WTO) and several member states was affected. Although, this kind of approach would further intensify the great power competition and the intra-EU tensions (Siddi & Kustova, 2021, p.1090).

In the case of the Nord Stream 2 controversy, the securitized approach regarding the energy dependence on Russia in combination with the exploitation the domestic fossil fuels (coal and shale gas) represented the position of the CEE member states (such as Poland) which contradicted to the perspective of other member states such as Germany that aimed to the acceleration of the energy transition, while keeping liberal external energy relations (Siddi & Kustova, 2021, p.1081). The Commission's work to shape a common European energy policy and perception of energy security was not an easy case and the intra-EU tensions put the European institution in the middle with a limited margin of reaction. For instance,

the case of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline was considered as an opportunity for the European Commission to promote EU legislation and measures that would prevent the project (Siddi, 2020). However, the Commission's approach not only did not stop the European dependence on Russia but simultaneously at least until recently did not promote the integration process of the energy policy.

On the other side, Kuzemko (2014) counter-argued that the Commission's stance was neither liberal-oriented nor geopolitical nor environmental, but it could be characterized as a complicated combination of all of them. The Commission's convoluted approach, which became more evident through its interventions in the energy markets based on climate and geopolitical motivations, indicated that the EU is divided about energy-related issues (Kuzemko, 2014, p.70). This argument could be considered the most accurate given the fact that the Commission was attempting to manage energy-related issues more diplomatically while attempting to win the support of all countries, which resulted in the lack of an explicit positive or negative stance over the countries' energy choices.

The legislative framework and the member states' perception of the emergence of a more supranational and integrated approach to energy policy and security should also be mentioned. The 2007 Lisbon Treaty was interpreted as a cornerstone moment for the promotion of a more supranational perspective on the issue of energy security (Bocquillon & Maltby, 2020, p.40). Although, Article 194 of the Treaty became the most controversial point of the document since it clarified that the issues of energy supply and energy mixes were still positioned on member states' authority (Jegen, 2013, p.12). According to Jegen (2013), this development revealed that certain member states still positioned energy policy and security to an intergovernmental spectrum. Furthermore, Maltby (2013) recognized that there were multiple means that the Commission could use to present and upgrade itself as a "supranational policy entrepreneur", including the enrichment of the existing norms of policymaking to establish legitimacy, taking advantage of the policy window opened during crisis, the involvement in continuous advocacy and others. Although this version of the Commission's competence was discovered in the academic literature, it also demonstrated that its implementation lacked the strength and focus to alter the

intergovernmental approach to energy policy (Maltby, 2013). Even though the Commission sought to capitalize on the 2014 crisis by establishing the 2015 Energy Union, as will be covered in the subsequent chapters, the member states severely scaled back the more supranational measures, such as the creation of a voluntary but joint gas purchasing mechanism and the Commission's desire to be aware of the member states' intergovernmental energy-related agreements.

In the case of the supranationalism versus intergovernmentalism debate, the literature agreed regarding the measures that the Commission needed to implement to fulfill its integration process. However, Bocquillon and Maltby (2020) focused on the analysis of the EU's energy policy and governance from the spectrum of intergovernmentalism and its distinct branches. The scholars argued that under the perspective of new intergovernmentalism, the member states invested in the reinforcement of collaboration in the energy area, but without having to transfer power to supranational institutions, as they preferred to sustain their national sovereignty. Consequently, that was the reason that the role of certain intergovernmental EU institutions, such as the European Council and the Council of the EU where consensus persists, was increased (Bocquillon & Maltby, 2020, p.40). Simultaneously, the 2018 Governance Regulation of the Energy Union led to the realization that the notion of new intergovernmentalism did not characterize the new reality. A new, "hybrid" form of intergovernmentalism known as "embedded intergovernmentalism" was created where both features of intergovernmental governance and the Community method could be retrieved, since both the member states through the European intergovernmental institutions (Council and the European Council) and the Commission increased their bargaining and political power (Bocquillon & Maltby, 2020, p.53).

However, as it will become evident through the next chapters this kind of intergovernmentalism did not lead to the intensification of the integration process nor it influenced the European diversification efforts. Until recently, Bocquillon's and Maltby's (2020) position about the increased planning and monitoring role of the Commission did not impact the integration process, so once again the intergovernmental dimension

prevailed. A noteworthy change in the Commission's position occurred with the emergence of the 2022 geopolitical and energy crisis when Brussels took initiatives to handle the energy crisis and to accomplish the phasing out of Russian fossil fuels (Siddi & Tafuro Ambrosetti, 2022, p.38). The REPowerEU plan and the EU Energy Platform led the way for a more supranational approach on the issue of external relations with energy suppliers as well as on the issue of joint purchasing of gas (Directorate-General for Energy, n.d.). The fact that until today the EU and its member states have persisted on the Russian pressures and that the European Commission in 2022 signed 10 indicative and binding agreements with third country suppliers (Dennison et al., 2022), reveal that the Commission exploited the contemporary situation of crisis. Although this change is important for the identification of the occurring alterations in the European energy policy and governance and the evolvement of the integration process, the academic literature nowadays mostly emphasizes the severe European dependence on Russian energy resources and the many mistakes that the Commission and the member states did the past years.

In that way, this research did not only focus on the energy reliance of the EU and its member states on Russia but also concentrated on how the contemporary situation and the energy crisis that intensified in 2022, are giving an optimistic indication about the future of the Energy Union and the Commission's energy governance.

The thesis' subsequent chapter focuses on the methodology used to conduct the research.

Chapter 3: Methodological Framework

Research Question:

How did the Russo-Ukrainian conflict of 2022 and the accompanying energy crisis affect the EU's energy policy and governance?

To identify the evolution of the EU's energy policy and integration in light of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, a comparison of the contemporary state of the EU's energy policy with what came between 2014 and 2022 is necessary, including exploring the contexts in which any developments occurred (Walk, 1998). Since the before (2014-2022) and after (post-2022) cases share many similarities in terms of independent variables, the design used is the "Most Similar Systems Design" (MSS) (Lim, 2010, p.34). In more detail, this comparative analysis can be characterized as a within-case comparison, which follows entirely the logic of MSS design (Lim, 2010, p. 57-58). The research focused on a single-unit case study -the energy policy of the EU- that was divided into two periods: 1) the formation of the EU energy policies after the developments in Ukraine in 2014 (2014-2021) and 2) the formation of the EU energy policies after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022. This type of cross-time comparative analysis could be characterized as a case-oriented approach rather than a variable-oriented one. The case-oriented perspective of comparative analysis focuses more on the accomplishment of an in-depth knowledge of a small number of cases- in this situation the cases of EU energy policy after the 2014 geopolitical events and after the 2022 critical situation- and complexity. According to Weber, this type of comparative analysis does not aim for generalizations but for limited generalizations about the divergence that occurred in the past and a detailed understanding of particular procedures (Della Porta & Keating, 2008, p.203-206).

Both cases emerged after the tragic developments that occurred in Ukraine after the unraveling of Russian aggression leading to vulnerability and insecurity for the EU's energy situation. For a long time and even before the serious crises that occurred after 2014, the EU member states developed energy security concerns, which led to different preferences for energy policy integration and energy relations with external energy

suppliers. Most importantly, in both cases the Commission initiated various measures to address the energy insecurities that occurred, trying to promote the further political integration of the sector. However, at the bottom line the Commission -especially in the period of 2014-2021- did not manage to bring together the position of all member states regarding energy security.

Even though many similarities can be identified in both cases, the outcome (dependent variable) of the level of integration and unified approach accomplished by the European Commission has been considerably different. From 2014 to 2021 the Commission struggled to find its leading role in the energy policy area, while simultaneously having to deal with the intra-EU disputes related to the energy dependence on and energy relationships with Russia. The Nord Stream 2 project became a controversial matter for the European energy deliberations since it was against the Commission's diversification program and after all the Commission did not adopt a more critical and more decisive position towards the project. Moreover, the Commission confronted the disapproval of the CEE member states and especially of Poland regarding the persistence of the Commission on the green transition goals even in times of crisis such as the Covid-19 period. The European Commission did not manage to unite the member states visions over energy policy and security, and that became evident with the low levels of integration and unification in the field. This case got seriously altered in 2022 when even traditional energy partners of Russia such as Germany realized that Russia could not be recognized as a reliable partner leading to a groundbreaking development for the European energy policy and integration.

These methodological elements lead to the statement of the thesis on the points of comparison (Walk, 1998). Therefore, the thesis of this comparative analysis, which demonstrates mostly the differences between the periods and consequently the policies that were developed in the past, is the following:

Whereas the EU's energy policy was perceived as a weakly integrated policy issue that was mostly examined by the member states in intergovernmental EU institutions such as the European Council, nowadays the leading role of the European Commission regarding the

management of the crisis accompanied by the formation of other organs such as the EU Energy Platform, indicates that to a certain extent, the issue of energy policy has been centralized and institutionalized.

The comparative analysis was also based on the method of document analysis. As a qualitative method, document analysis requires the examination and mostly the interpretation of resources aiming to understand and develop observational knowledge (Bowen, 2009, p.27-28). Documents that were used for interpretation during the research vary. As the thesis aimed to compare the EU energy policy over the years – especially in relevance to the EU member states’ dependence on Russian energy resources-, primary sources such as the European Energy Security Strategy (EESS) (2014) and the seven State of the Energy Union reports were used. The EESS and the first six Energy Union reports represented mostly the developments occurring from 2014 to 2021 and that is why in chapter 5 the thesis examined the 7th Energy Union report as well as the REPowerEU plan. Even though the documents are not the same, all of them address in a way the issue of dependence on Russian energy resources and the diversification efforts of the European Commission to get out of its import reliance. Additionally, declarations and remarks of influential for the Energy Union initiative politicians and European officials were used to retrieve information about their positions regarding the Energy Union, the perception of energy security in these times of uncertainty and insecurity, and their overall stance towards the integration of energy policy. The politicians and European officials that will be referred in the following chapters are: Donald Tusk,⁴ Maroš Šefčovič,⁵ Miguel Arias Cañete,⁶ Ditte Juul Jorgensen,⁷ Ursula von der Leyen⁸, Olaf Scholz,⁹ Wolfgang Schäuble,¹⁰ Frank-Walter Steinmeier¹¹ and Pierre Schellekens.¹² Finally, information and positions about

⁴ Prime Minister of Poland (2007-2014), President of the European Council (2014-2019)

⁵ Vice-President of the European Commission (2010-2014), Vice-President of the European Commission for Interinstitutional Relations and Foresight (2019-2024)

⁶ European Commissioner for Energy (2014-2019)

⁷ Director-General for Energy at the European Commission since 2019

⁸ President of the European Commission since 2019

⁹ Chancellor of Germany since 2021

¹⁰ President of the Bundestag (2017-2021), Federal Minister of Germany for Finance (2009-2017)

¹¹ President of Germany since 2017, Federal Minister of Foreign Affairs (2005-2009, 2013-2017)

¹² Director for Energy Policy: Strategy and Coordination for the Directorate-General for Energy since 2022

developments occurring in the European energy field were also retrieved by secondary sources, like newspaper articles and journal articles.

Information and positions of the European Commission or the lack thereof that were retrieved from these documents were used to support the overarching argument of the thesis that a genuine difference and a higher integration regarding the energy policy and energy security was evident after the 2022 crisis. Also, in the case of chapter 5 which interpreted the contemporary events, only one State of the Energy Union report was used. For that reason, the research on the contemporary developments retrieved information and evidence that supported the arguments from the REPowerEU plan and recent speeches of EU officials and European politicians like the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen and the German Chancellor Olaf Scholz. Through the examination of these primary sources was possible to connect the academic debates and the theoretical background that were reviewed in the previous chapter of the literature review. Overall, the review of these sources was used to answer the research question, by assessing the Commission's position on the achievement of the Energy Union and the member states involved, as well as the identifying the change in the Commission's leadership in energy policy and governance.

The organizational scheme that was selected for the thesis was in text-by-text, where all the points of A and then all the arguments of B are highlighted (Walk, 1998). As the thesis concentrated on two specific periods, the in text-by-text way led to a more comprehensive analysis of the factors and developments that drove the EU's contemporary reaction and stepping up on the matter of energy policy.

The following chapter explores the energy sector and the EU energy policies in relation to the Ukrainian Crisis from 2014 to 2021. Through the examination of primary sources, it evaluates the Commission's progress in achieving the Energy Union's objectives, considering the influence of intra-EU tensions and developments like Covid-19 on the Commission's stance.

Chapter 4: The Ukrainian Crisis of 2014, the vision of a European Energy Union and its progress

This chapter engages with the developments and the processes that the Commission initiated from 2014 to 2021 towards the intensification of integration efforts in the energy policy area and identifies whether they affected the overall conception of a more integrated European energy policy.

Since the 2000s, the issue of energy policy and the matter of the EU's dependence on energy imports has been a focal point of Brussels' policy and the deliberations among EU member states. Previous developments, such as the 2004 EU's wide enlargement towards the East and the gas supply disruptions of 2006 and 2009 emerging from Ukrainian-Russian disputes drove the EU and especially the Commission to emphasize the concept of energy security. The 2014 crisis presented an opportunity for the European Commission to promote further the political integration of the Union especially around energy policy. As will be demonstrated by the following analysis of the 2014-2021 period, the European Commission did not manage to accomplish the further integration and unification of the European energy policy and governance as well as the needed diversification from the Russian energy resources. This happened because several Western EU member states continued to have close energy ties with Russia, with Nord Stream 2 being one of the most controversial projects of the past years in Europe, because of the massive intra-EU dispute that emerged between the Western EU member states involved in the projects and the CEE member states and Commission. Additionally, a second reason for this result was the Commission's energy transition and decarbonization program and the Commission's persistence on it – even in times of crisis and uncertainty like the Covid-19 period. This practice led to the fragmentation between the Commission and the CEE member states, even though these states in general were in favor of the Energy Union and the further unification of the European energy policy.

On April 21, 2014, while the 2014 Russo-Ukrainian Crisis was already in progress, the Polish Prime Minister (PM) but soon-to-be President of the European Council Donald Tusk submitted a proposal regarding the response that the EU must have against the Russian

energy aggression towards some of the EU member states (Tusk, 2014). Tusk's proposal was meant to be the starting point for the later articulation and formation of the Energy Union. The paradigm of Euratom was used as a reference point by the Polish politician, while simultaneously concepts of joint negotiating mechanisms with Russia, solidarity among member states in case of supply disruptions, and the exploitation of Europe's fossil fuels (coal and shale gas) were also included (Tusk, 2014). These were some of the proposal's points that were intended to serve as a foundation for both cooperation and controversy between the Commission and the member states. For instance, even though Tusk asked for a more integrated and centralized to the Commission energy policy, simultaneously he criticized the Commission's environmental restrictions which hindered the exploitation of local energy resources (Tusk, 2014).

The response from Brussels came after a month, in the form of the "European Energy Security Strategy" (EESS). The concept of security was the focal point as the Strategy referred both to the effects of the 2004 enlargement in terms of intensified dependence on imports from a single supplier, and the devastating effects that the supply disruptions in the 2000s had on at least some member states (European Commission, 2014, p.3). As the contingency of supply disruption due to the tensions between Russia and Ukraine at that point was high, certain pillars referred to the EESS aimed at enhancing member states' solidarity, diminishing energy demand, and augmenting the green energy production within the Union (European Commission, 2014, p.3). However, even though the European proposal was based on Tusk's proposal at the same time differed. The Commission continued to lobby over the needed exploitation of renewable energy apart from the possibility of energy disruptions and still addressed the issue of member states' right to determine their energy mixes and partnerships diplomatically. This argument can be supported by the Commission's continuation of not openly referring to Russia as an unreliable supplier. For instance, in the case of CEE member states that were entirely dependent on Russia, the Commission addressed the situation by using the terms "single supplier" and "single external supplier" to portray Russia, while in the cases of the 2014 Russian cyberattacks against Ukrainian energy infrastructure and other countries (the Czech Republic and Bulgaria) (Pillai, 2023, p.3), the Commission left the description of

the attackers vague by using characterization such as “non-EU entities”, “state-companies” and “key supplier countries”(European Commission, 2014, p.6).

The diplomatic and restrictive approach that the Commission used in this document regarding Russia’s unreliability, can be explained by the legislative framework within which the European energy policy should be shaped. The Lisbon Treaty of 2007 was interpreted as a ground-breaking development for the evolution of the EU’s energy policy and integration of energy markets wanting to promote solidarity between the member states. However, Article 194 emphasized that all the measures related to the well-functioning of the internal market, the guaranteeing of security of energy supply in the Union, and the promotion of the interconnection of energy networks, should be fully aligned with the member states’ right to determine their energy mixes and cooperations with external suppliers (Council of the European Union, 2007, Art. 194). The Lisbon Treaty just re-stated the existing form of decision-making and the intergovernmental perspective and the dominance of national preferences remained central (Maltby, 2013, p.440). Based on this argument, it can also be explained the fact that even though the proposal of the Polish PM mentioned the necessity for the formation of a joint gas purchasing mechanism, in the EESS document the Commission clarified that the Euratom’s Supply Agency that was used as a reference did not operate or purchase independently but played a mostly advisory role (European Commission, 2014, p.18).

Nevertheless, throughout this period and especially through the preliminary phase of the EESS, the promotion of the significant and helpful role that the Commission could provide on energy and political dialogues with important energy partners was something that the Commission invested in, and with a good reason. Even though the Commission could not control the energy relations of member states with external suppliers, was responsible for ensuring that the member states’ energy initiatives followed the EU legislation, and the European policies on the security of supply and preventing any medium or long-term impacts on other member states and the EU (European Commission, 2014, p.18). For that reason, the Commission highlighted the importance of being informed about the energy-related plans of member states beforehand (European Commission, 2014, p.18). This point

was seriously affected by the dispute between Brussels and six member states in 2013 concerning agreements with Russia about the construction of the South Stream pipeline (Siddi, 2016, p.137). The construction of the South Stream pipeline became an issue for the European Commission because the new pipeline that would connect Russia through the Black Sea to Bulgaria and through Serbia, Hungary, Slovenia, and even Austria was going to give Gazprom full ownership of another pipe network. Apart from the fact that this development was against the EU's legislative rules (BBC, 2014), the Commission's supplier diversification proposals and Russia's aggressive energy practices could be interpreted as factors that drove Brussels' decision to suspend the South Stream project. The same important fact for the Commission's role was once more referred to the presentation of the Energy Union Package in 2015 (European Commission, 2015, p.7) and became even more necessary during the deliberations regarding the Nord Stream 2 project.

At this point is important to demonstrate how did the more intergovernmental institution of the EU, the European Council, react to the articulation of the EESS and the preliminary conceptualization of the Energy Union. Through the European Council's summits of June and October 2014 when the EESS was ratified, the argument that could arise is that still at this point the member states were not willing to give up their right to determine their own energy policy and energy mixes. This position can be justified by the fact that the issues of energy security and governance were examined less than the green transition as well as that the issue of joint purchasing of natural gas was neglected by the concluding remarks of the European Council. Regarding the governance system of the Energy Union, the European Council clarified that the system should be dependable and transparent without many administrative responsibilities, aiming to ensure the EU's energy policy and its goals, by acknowledging and respecting the member state's right to decide their energy mixes (European Council, 2014, p.9). Finally, a similarity can be identified between the secondary sources examined in the literature review regarding the academic debate of supranationalism versus intergovernmentalism and the evidence given by the primary sources of the European Council, since the position of the member states towards the supranational character of the Energy Union became apparent.

The EESS constituted the stepping-stone for the Energy Union Package and deliberations emerged concerning the next steps in the integration process of the energy policy. The Energy Union was presented as the highest point of the Juncker Commission (2014-2019), with Maroš Šefčovič commenting that the new initiative would not just be a repackaging of previous, and of limited success endeavors (Keating, 2015). However, simultaneously Vice-President Šefčovič highlighted that the traditional debate between the CEEC that were in favor of a more radical and concentrated synthesis of the integrated energy policy, and the Western member states which followed a more distant stance to the initiative, could ultimately become an inhibitor for the European undertaking (Keating, 2015). This position could be justified by the concerns and reactions of certain member states, private stakeholders, and even external suppliers like Russia, about the amplification of the Commission's role in the energy policy area. Additionally, their concern could be also supported by the fact that the Commission started to become more outspoken about Russia's role and practices. For instance, both Šefčovič and the Commissioner for Energy and climate actions Miguel Arias Cañete, enhanced the external energy diplomacy by approaching other possible suppliers to the East (Azerbaijan) and the West (USA), wanting to present the next phase of the Energy Union that would not give in to “monopolistic bullies” (Keating, 2015).

In February 2015, the Juncker Commission presented the Energy Union Package and highlighted the need for a unified approach to energy policy and security. This approach would be based on several linked dimensions with the most important being energy security, solidarity, and trust, the enhancement of energy efficiency leading to mitigation of demand, and the decarbonization of the economy based on the 2030 climate and energy framework (European Commission, 2015, p.4). Nevertheless, it can be retrieved that with the document which would supposedly promote the further unification of the energy policies of the Union, the Commission continued to refer to semi-meters so that Western countries could endorse its package and not exploit to the fullest the opportunity of the post-crisis period. This happened because the member states' concerns and aspirations affected the Commission's position to some points that could lead towards the desirable integration. For instance, although the point of initiatives of joint purchasing was not

completely left out as Šefčovič hinted, the issue was understated. The Commission would have to further investigate the options for the establishment of a mechanism based on voluntary demand for cooperative gas purchasing in times of crisis and mostly in circumstances when member states were dependent on a single supplier (European Commission, 2015, p.6), as it was also a concluding point of the European Council in March 2015 (European Council, 2015).

As it was already mentioned, the Juncker Commission left all the points that could lead to a more centralized and more EU-centric approach at a primary level. This led to the beginning of the Commission's criticism and resemblance with the previous Commission led by José Manuel Barroso. The previous Commission (2004-2014) has been criticized for being a follower of the member states' needs and wishes, rather than a leader of the European initiative (Keating, 2015). This can also be supported by the fact that even though the Commission encouraged the efforts of supplies by enhancing the investments in renewables resources and of suppliers by approaching potential partners in the East (Algeria, Turkey, Azerbaijan, the Middle East) and the West (USA, Canada), the member states remained considerably dependent on Russian natural gas imports (Eurostat, 2022b). The dependence was more evident in the case of the CEE member states that were more vulnerable (Eurostat, 2022b), whereas simultaneously Western stakeholders strengthened their energy cooperation with Russia by initiating conversations about the new infrastructural project of Nord Stream 2 (Fisher, 2016, p.1). Seven months after the presentation of the Energy Union Package, in September 2015, and with the dispute in Ukraine still ongoing, five European energy stakeholders¹³ signed a contract with the state-owned Russian Gazprom for the construction of a new pipeline project through the Baltic Sea (Fisher, 2016, p.1).

The political and theoretical debates identified in both the secondary sources analyzed in Chapter 2 and primary sources, articulated by Maroš Šefčovič, emerged once more with the initiation of the Nord Stream 2 project. The development of the project reflected the

¹³ The European energy companies that participated in the Nord Stream 2 project originated from Germany (BASF and E.ON), France (Engie), Austria (OMV), and the Netherlands (Shell).

controversies regarding the economic-driven perspective of the Western EU member states and the politically-driven approach of the CEEC to the energy relations with Russia (Siddi, 2020, p.12). Although, the project was also noteworthy evidence of what the member states truly considered about the involvement of Brussels in the energy policy, its external dimension, and the overall approach to the issue of EU energy security. For example, Germany – as a state having close energy ties with the Russian Federation- interpreted the issue of energy security as a more technical matter that is mostly connected with the needed maintenance of infrastructure rather than a geopolitical issue (Łada et al. 2015, p.58). Germany traditionally approached energy-related issues from a commercialized, liberal perspective, where the energy stakeholders -and not the government- oversaw the negotiations about new energy projects. In this case, the intense advocacy and interference of the German government on the issue of Nord Stream 2, came only after the intensification of the debate about the project. Germany and Austria became the most direct supporters of the project, with the Dutch and French parts remaining in favor of the project by showing less enthusiasm (Fischer, 2016, p.2).

On the other hand, the opposition that Poland and other CEE member states as well as the US advanced could lead to the argument that these stakeholders advocated the European Commission's position to diversify from the Russian resources. The political leadership of Poland was a traditional advocate of the Energy Union undertaking, as it simultaneously presented Russia and its energy policy, as a critical threat to the EU's energy security. These states were severely against the project, by posing political, geopolitical, regulatory, and environmental arguments. According to them the launch of Nord Stream 2 was not aligned with the ongoing conflict in Ukraine, the economic sanctions that were imposed on Russia as well as with the compliance of the EU law and the overall vision of the EU's Energy Union. The suspension of the South Stream project was another point that the opposing states took advantage of, to support their stance against the new Russian-involved initiative (Fischer, 2016, p.1-2).

Even though the opposing states informed several times the Commission about the dangers of Nord Stream 2 including the endangerment of their access to energy resources and the

effect on the bargaining power of the EU and Ukraine towards Russia (Sytas, 2016), as it can be retrieved by the Energy Union reports the Commission kept addressing the issue indirectly. The Second Report on the State of the Energy Union in February 2017 was the first Commission's Report after the announcement and the launch of the Nord Stream 2 project and the institution just commented that all new energy initiatives should align with the Energy Union's long-term goals (European Commission, 2017a, p.10). This occurred because the Commission still did not have the needed support from the EU member states and had not managed to align the positions of the member states regarding the issue of energy security. Nevertheless, in order to strengthen its position regarding its stance towards the Nord Stream 2 project that they did not fully comply with the Energy Union vision and its position on energy diplomacy, the Commission referred to new infrastructure projects that enhanced the diversification of supplies and suppliers and interconnected the member states (European Commission, 2017a, p.9). Simultaneously, from the document it can be retrieved that the Commission was still coping to find its place in the Ukraine-Russia controversy and its reliance on Russian energy resources. That can be supported by the fact that the Commission referred vividly to the cases where its intervention was needed for ensuring Ukraine's energy supplies from Russia and the continuation of usage of the gas transit route from Russia to Ukraine to the EU (European Commission, 2017a, p.12). The Commission hoped to enhance its stance on the Nord Stream 2 issue as well, as it asked for permission from the member states -through the Council of the EU- to negotiate the Nord Stream 2 with the project's stakeholders (European Commission, 2017b). However, once more the intergovernmental perspective of the project's stakeholders halted any effort for the Commission's meddling (Gotev, 2017).

Until this point two remarks can be made. First, the overall controversial situation between Ukraine and Russia did not seriously affect the position of certain member states regarding their energy partnership with Russia but had a direct impact on the European Commission's position as a leading figure in the energy policy area. Secondly, the Commission, while recognizing its weak role in the external dimension of energy policy and governance especially regarding Russia, wanted to promote its significance and its progress on the issue of the Energy Union by referring extensively in the developments on the area of the green

transition and relevant investments that took place in this field. The pattern identified was evident in the next two Reports, the Third State of the Energy Union (November 2017) as well as the Fourth (April 2019) and last Report of the Juncker Commission. In the case of the Fourth Report on the State of the Energy Union, Brussels referred to the diplomatic efforts regarding the smooth operation and supply of the EU by the Ukrainian transit route (European Commission, 2019, p.23). Nevertheless, the fact that the Commission did not make any remarks regarding one of the most controversial matters of the energy field at that period – the project of Nord Stream 2- demonstrated that the European Commission had still not convinced the member states of the diversification efforts from the Russian energy resources. The European institution failed on addressing the issue of energy security as an issue of security in general terms, leaving the vision of the Energy Union unaccomplished.

The conditions of uncertainty and insecurity in front of the Russian energy policy, which drove in the first place the shaping of the Energy Union vision by the Juncker Commission did not manage to alter the member states position towards a more unified and integrated European energy policy and governance. Almost the same pattern of disagreements and disapprovals from the member states continued with the appointment of the new Commission led by Ursula von der Leyen. The European Green Deal that was implemented in December 2019 and the overall logic of the green transition, were the major drivers of the new Commission's energy policy. Although the Covid-19 pandemic of 2020, could function as an opportunity to bring all member states together to manage the implications that the pandemic brought on the energy field, in the end, augmented the tensions between the Commission and Poland. While the Commission acknowledged the impact that the pandemic had on the diversification efforts and the energy efficiency of the Union as the energy demand increased (European Commission, 2020, p.5), simultaneously certain Eastern EU member states and most notably Poland argued that in these times of extreme conditions, the green goals of the Union should be postponed (Siddi, 2023, p.84). The positive results of the legislative framework and the Regulation on Gas Security of Supply in the case of energy security during the pandemic (European Commission, 2020, p.6) seemed irrelevant at last. This kind of development in the intra-EU relationship

demonstrated that in times of crisis -even if Russia was not involved- there was a lack of unanimity and agreement both among the member states and between the Commission and the member states because every stakeholder wanted to promote its personal agenda instead of promoting the common vision of the Energy Union.

This argument can be further supported by the fact that the European Commission continued to refer to some of its successes like the increase of its leading position on deliberations concerning international climate efforts and discussion with energy suppliers, even though the most significant channel of energy supplying still originated by Russia via the Ukrainian transit route (European Commission, 2020, p.16-17). The citing of this development as a success, not only revealed the continuing reliance of the EU member states on Russian energy resources but also depicted that the Commission's diversification efforts were limited and insignificant, because as was already mentioned there was not the needed consensus and unity to diversify from Russia. The EU's ongoing dependency on Russia can be also demonstrated through numbers, as Russia remained the EU's main supplier of natural gas, crude oil, and hard coal in 2020, with Russia's natural gas imports to the EU covering 46% of its total natural gas imports (Eurostat, 2022a).

The reliance on Russian energy resources was meant to be augmented with the completion of Nord Stream 2 in September 2021 (Soldatkin, 2021). Even though Brussels wanted to comment on the positive developments that occurred in 2020 (European Commission, 2021), the fact that the Commission in its sixth report on the State of the Energy Union, did not refer in any way to the highly disputed pipeline project of Nord Stream could mean that the Commission acknowledged its failure. The energy dependence on Russia would increase, the bargaining power of the Commission as well as of Ukraine in the field of energy security would be limited, and the diversification efforts towards renewable sources and other external suppliers would be affected. However, earlier that year, in February 2021, DG ENER's Director General Ditte Juul Jorgensen responded to the European Parliament's calls on shutting down the Nord Stream 2 project, acknowledged that the infrastructure was against the Energy Union's diversification efforts, but since the project was a private undertaking, the Commission's reaction margins were limited (Geropoulos,

2021). Brussels could only reassure that Nord Stream 2 would operate according to the International and European Union Energy law and based on the Gas Directive of 2019, the Commission could employ the EU's energy law on interconnected infrastructure from third countries (Geropoulos, 2021). Simultaneously, in 2019 the US initiated interventionist sanctions against Nord Stream 2, which had as a result the targeting of the EU member states' companies involved. This kind of sanctions were condemned by the Commission (Geropoulos, 2021). At this point, it should be mentioned that even though the Commission supported the European companies against the US interventionist sanctions, simultaneously the Commission did not aim at supporting the initiative of Nord Stream 2. Brussels wanted to demonstrate the unity that the Union and the member states should share on issues related to the Union's energy security while seizing the opportunity to not close the channel of communication with the Nord Stream 2 stakeholders.

Overall, until this point of time and analysis, it can be justified the position of Szulecki et al. (2016, p.548) that the Energy Union started as an empty box in which every stakeholder tried to pursue their agenda. The abovementioned political differences were interpreted based on the theoretical and political debates that were demonstrated in the chapter of the literature review and became further evident from the analysis of primary sources in this chapter. The chapter so far analyzed how the crises of this period affected the vision of the Energy Union and concluded that a more integrated and unified approach to energy policy, security, and governance was far from being accomplished because the European Commission did not bring together the positions of member states.

Chapter 5 engages with the contemporary situation that the Commission had to deal with and how the 2022 developments affected the Energy Union and the integration of European policy, security, and governance decisively.

Chapter 5: The contemporary situation and the opportunity for a change

This chapter discusses the present circumstances and challenges -especially in terms of the EU's extensive energy dependence on Russia- faced by the European Commission, under the leadership of Ursula von der Leyen. Furthermore, it examines the impact of the 2022 events on the Energy Union and the improved integration of the European energy policy, security, and leadership.

The 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine came and shook the reality of Europe, while at the same time, the contemporary situation gave another opportunity to the European Commission to push further its integration on the energy policy area, by promoting the need for diversification from the Russian energy. The Commission's first challenging task was to unify all member states regarding the restrictive measures against Russia and the energy ties of the EU member states. The convergence of the member states and the implementation of sanctions against Russia was rapid, as since the first days of the Russian invasion, measures regarding the financial sector, the commercial sector, and even the energy sector have been taken (European Council, 2023).

The European Commission had the opinion that the Russian energy exports were those that supported the Russian aggression policy against Ukraine as well as that Russia put into force its extorting energy policy against Europe to affect the EU's reaction to the Russo-Ukrainian conflict (European Commission, 2022a, p.1). Given that context and the aforementioned extended European dependence on Russian energy resources, the European response to this development seemed like a complicated issue that the Commission could take advantage of. Until this time the energy sector and energy trade were widely left out of the equation of the EU-Russia energy relations, but that changed in 2022. In February 2022, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz shocked the international system by referring to the war as a turning point ("*Zeitenwende*") for Germany's policy, in all fields of cooperation with Russia, including the energy sector (Scholz, 2022), while he had already halted the approval procedure for Nord Stream 2 (Chazan, 2022). Former politicians that supported the close energy ties with Russia such as Wolfgang Schäuble and Frank-Walter Steinmeier admitted their mistake, with Steinmeier acknowledging the

misinterpretation of Russia's intentions regarding the construction of the Nord Stream 2 pipeline (Wintour, 2022). This political development involving Germany, one of the staunchest supporters of the energy trade with Russia, despite the criticism that the German political leadership received about its procrastination, opened the way for the intensification of reaction measures, including energy-related measures.

During the first months of the new European reality, among other measures, the European Council decided to implement a trade blockade on Russian coal and other solid natural resources (European Council, 2023). It is significant to demonstrate that since the beginning of the new crisis, the European Council presented in agreement and aligned with the Commission's narrative regarding the termination of the extreme European dependence on Russia. In contrast to the presentation of the Energy Union in 2015, when the European Council remained focused on the intergovernmental viewpoint of energy policy and security, the measures implemented, and the forthcoming commitments reflected a fundamental shift in the European Council's approach. However, the actual implementation of the coal embargo came only in August, while during this period, similar restrictions were applied to crude oil imports. Simultaneously, exemptions applied to member states that were completely dependent on Russian pipeline crude oil imports (Siddi, 2023, p.85).

In May 2022, the Commission introduced the REPowerEU Plan, as it was previously requested by the European Council, for a more comprehensive and holistic approach to reduce Europe's reliance on Russian energy resources (European Commission, 2022a, p.1). As stated in the text, the policy that the EU's response should be based on is the "Fit for 55" package,¹⁴ which aims to achieve the EU's green transition while also implementing efforts to ensure energy supply and storage security. The Commission on this document clarified that the adoption of renewable energy was the only solution to the contemporary energy crisis, even though resources like coal would be used more in the short-term, and this plan could not be realized in any case independently by the member states.

¹⁴ Fit for 55 package constitutes a list of proposals aiming to amend and update the EU legislation and to initiate new endeavors to ensure that the EU policies are aligned with the climate goals agreed by the Council and the European Parliament.

Additionally, the Commission stepped out and stated that the unbundling from Russian dependence affordably and feasibly would only be possible through a joint reaction with endeavors like collective planning, purchases, and better alignment (European Commission 2022, p.2).

The Commission articulated the REPowerEU plan based on four pillars: 1) energy savings, 2) diversification of EU's supplies, 3) acceleration of EU's clean energy transition by swiftly replacing fossil fuels, and 4) a combination of investments and reforms (European Commission 2022a, p.1). What can be derived from the REPowerEU plan at an early stage is that, aside from the fact that the Commission referred to joint measures as the only available solution, the Commission acknowledged that coal would remain a needed, available resource for a longer period than expected because of this crisis (European Commission, 2022a, p.2). This approach represented a remarkable difference in the Commission's handling of the current crisis, compared to the last similar dispute with Poland during the Covid-19 energy crisis. Although this would have short-term implications for the EU's green transition and climate-neutral goals, it also brought together the positions of the EU member states and inspired a sense of security and unity, because this complicated situation required a safer approach in terms of access to energy resources, and coal as an energy supply could provide that.

The energy savings pillar was addressed as the most efficient and affordable approach to handling the contemporary energy crisis, while at the same time, it would enhance and support the energy efficiency targets of the EU (European Commission, 2022a, p.3). However, the diversification of energy imports and the measures proposed under this perspective constituted a remarkable opportunity for the further intensification of the Commission's decision-making capacity and the overall energy policy integration. The REPowerEU plan became the first official European document, where the vision of Donald Tusk of a common purchasing mechanism became a reality. The EU Energy Platform, which was established on April 7th, 2022, became the first step towards voluntary joint gas, LNG, and hydrogen purchases (European Commission, 2022a, p.4). The fact that this initiative came after the European Council's mandate and that the European Commission

was already considering the development of a voluntary operational joint purchasing mechanism that would negotiate and represent the involved member states, demonstrated that the EU member states in this contemporary perceived the energy security as an integral part of their overall security and that the European Commission was the suitable institution to ensure this kind of undertaking. The three main functions of the EU's Energy Platform aimed to aggregate the demand as well as its structure, to enhance the efficiency and transparency of utilizing gas infrastructure for importing, storing, and transmitting gas, while simultaneously ensuring the highest possible level of supply security and storage refilling, and finally to strengthen the idea of joint international cooperation with external, reliable suppliers (European Commission, 2022a, p.4).

The consequent development of the AggregateEU mechanism was a significant milestone for the management of the energy crisis as well as for the Commission because it led to a more centralized and institutionalized way of conducting energy arrangements. Furthermore, it is evident that the Commission became significantly proactive during this crisis to address the winter's difficulties or even the member states' succumbing to the difficulties of the situation, because the initiative's objective is to ensure the needed and essential capacity of gas suppliers for the upcoming winter of 2023-24 (European Commission, 2023). The European Commission made apparent that the organ would not be responsible for the gas purchase and will not own any gas. The Commission's commitment was the creation of the AggregateEU mechanism, the design of the gathering and tendering process with PRISMA,¹⁵ and finally the lobbying and encouragement for the participation of member states and companies in the initiative. Even though the Commission would not involve actively in the contract negotiations and would not directly purchase gas, its role in promoting the initiative and assuring compliance with the EU competition rules, represented a significant development for the unification of the EU and Energy Community countries¹⁶ in the energy field (European Commission, 2023). Finally, the fact that the Commission quickly managed to initiate and articulate this kind of

¹⁵ The service provider of AggregateEU.

¹⁶ International organization aiming to extend the EU's internal energy market principles to neighboring countries. The Community includes Albania, Bosnia Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Kosovo, Moldova, Montenegro, Serbia, and Ukraine.

mechanism, demonstrated its changed and reinforced position regarding the crisis response, its desire to completely diversify from the Russian supplies, and its altered and leading role in the case of energy policy.

Even though the REPowerEU plan referred extensively to the replacement of fossil fuels and the acceleration of Europe's clean energy transition (European Commission, 2022a, p.6-11), the European plan was severely criticized especially in the case of the short-term measures leading to implications to the green transition and climate policy. Since the Commission needed to replace the imports of fossil fuels from Russia by approaching diverse foreign sources and expanding LNG supplies by 50 bcm while the non-Russian pipeline gas supplies by 10 bcm, the construction of new fossil fuel infrastructure was required (European Commission, 2022, p.13). Although Brussels tried to diminish the importance and the potential financial cost of these endeavors as well as their environmental impact (European Commission, 2022a, p.13), the budget of 10 billion euros that was required for the development of the infrastructure led to serious criticism. The increase in LNG imports from more distant countries such as the US and Qatar would subsequently result in an increased environmental impact due to transportation. Moreover, the practice of fracking used by the US for the extraction of shale gas and oil, which is banned in several EU member states due to its significant environmental footprint, raised further concerns over the EU's compliance with its environmental and green policies (Siddi, 2022, p.8). Finally, the European Commission's practices of increasing the pipeline imports from countries such as Algeria and Azerbaijan were commented negatively, because the EU would once again become dependent on non-democratic states, and the increased interaction with these countries could delay their green transition (Siddi, 2022, p.8).

Another aspect of the Commission's reaction that was questioned was the omission of nuclear trading with Russia. Although the REPowerEU plan mentioned the significance for certain member states to diversify from the Russian nuclear fuels that are needed for the operation of their nuclear reactors, the trade with Russia in this domain continued. The Commission proposed the close cooperation of the member states with the EU and with

international suppliers of uranium that could lead to the quicker ending of reliance on Russia and combined with domestic natural gas production could result in the reinforcement of supply security (European Commission, 2022a, p.5). However, this was not the case as since September 2022 the European nuclear trade with Russia was still present despite the conflict in Ukraine and the Ukrainian reactions over the absence of sanctions in this area (Corbet, 2022). Even one year after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2023 the issue of nuclear commerce with Russia has not been settled. The Soviet-built reactors existing in the EU and their specialty of requiring customized fuel from Russia made the dependence on Russian nuclear resources hard and the imposing of sanctions in this field even harder (Jack & Cooper, 2023). Countries that possess these kinds of reactors including Hungary, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Finland, and the Czech Republic, were strongly opposed to imposing sanctions in this domain. Even though some of them (Bulgaria and the Czech Republic) turned to international suppliers according to the Commission's suggestion, Hungary intensified its nuclear connection with Moscow by building two more nuclear reactors and receiving a Russian economic loan (Jack & Cooper, 2023). The Commission's proposal in this domain was not fully implemented by the member states and was not even strengthened at a European level, since the conditions of the European nuclear sector made it unrealistic for the Commission to pursue this kind of reaction.

Overall, apart from the fact that certain points of the REPowerEU plan and the general response were criticized because of their potential negative effect on the EU's energy transition, the European document constituted a rapid and unified response to the Russian aggression and blackmailing energy policy. That is significant because compared to previous responses to crises such as in the case of Covid-19, the Commission currently focused more on getting on board most member states regarding its reaction to the crisis. The Commission managed to align the member states with the idea that the handling of Europe's energy dependence on Russia needed to end immediately and that all initiatives should focus on addressing this issue as well as providing adequate energy resources for the upcoming winter. The energy transition and the climate and environmental goals of the

EU were not neglected but at this point, Brussels highlighted the importance of energy security as a fundamental part of the Union's security in general.

In September 2022, Ursula von der Leyen while giving a speech remarked the so far successes of the Commission and the member states during this period that were based on the member states' solidarity. However, in the case of moving on from the energy dependence on Russia and the manipulative Russian energy policy, the Commission wanted to further propose the implementation of a price cap on Russian gas to hurdle the financing of the Russian aggression against Ukraine (Von Der Leyen, 2022). This could be characterized as an important move from the Commission's side since it aimed to take further advantage of the positive results of the thus far measures and the overall unification that was evident. However, this proposal was not welcomed by all member states. In particular, Hungary, Slovakia, and Austria turned against this cap on Russian gas, because they feared that Russia would suspend all gas flows (Rankin, 2022). Countries such as the Netherlands, Denmark, and Germany became more hesitant with this proposal, as it could divide the intra-EU positions. Simultaneously, others -including France and Poland- were even more supportive of the idea to impose a general price cap on all gas imports, so that the rise of the prices could be constrained (Rankin, 2022). This European proposal became one of the most controversial issues regarding the response to the crisis, as it became an issue of uncertainty and disagreement between the member states and the Commission. However, despite Hungary managing to pass its plan of negotiating with Russia without the need to notify or consult with the Commission (Reuters, 2022), the idea of implementing a price cap was approved by the European countries in December 2022 after extensive deliberations and meetings (Abnett, 2022). This once again demonstrated the European Commission's notable competence regarding the crisis management.

The Commission's specific approach to lowering energy dependence on Russia, as well as its broader involvement in crisis management, was important as it yielded positive results within the first year of implementation. The 7th Report on the State of the Energy Union, which was published in October 2022, presented the progress of the European Commission and the member states during the crisis. With the measures implemented throughout 2022,

the percentage of Russian pipeline gas diminished from 41% in 2021 to 9% in September 2022, while simultaneously LNG became the key source of supply (European Commission, 2022b, p.5-6). Moreover, as it was already mentioned the Commission aimed to prepare for the next winter by enhancing the idea of gas storage. According to the Storage Regulation that was presented in March 2022, the EU member states should fill 80% of their gas storage by November 2022 (Council of the European Union, 2022). By mid-October 2022, the EU had accomplished to reach 91% of the gas storage filling level, while fourteen member states had already reached the 80% goal by the beginning of October 2022 (European Commission, 2022b, p.6). In terms of diversification of suppliers and supplies, the European Commission referred extensively to the significant agreements that the Commission took part in and initiated with external suppliers including Norway, Egypt, Israel, Azerbaijan, and Algeria for the import of gas, LNG, and hydrogen (European Commission, 2022b, p.7).

Although the data for the EU's energy situation in 2023 are still not officially published, according to Pierre Schellekens the contemporary crisis manifested a historical task for the EU and its stance as an important geopolitical actor. The Commission managed to counter all the prophecies predicting the end of the EU (Directorate-General for Energy, 2023). The measures proposed by the European Commission managed to decrease the representation of Russian gas imports to 6-7% of the EU's total gas imports, but most importantly the Commission accomplished to maintain the Union's coherence and unity regarding the response to the energy crisis, the Russian aggression as well as the rising energy prices (Directorate-General for Energy, 2023). Moreover, the REPowerEU triggered the political debate concerning the close relationship between the energy transition and the security of supply (Directorate-General for Energy, 2023). As it was already argued, the Commission recognized the importance of fossil fuels -especially in times of crisis and uncertainty- but simultaneously the member states acknowledged that the diversification of supplies is aligned with both the energy transition and supply security. Overall, the current crisis not only did not signify the end of the EU but caused the shaping of a collective mindset, which subsequently led to the intensification of the energy policy's integration process (Directorate-General for Energy, 2023).

The analysis of primary sources generated in 2022-23 identified a noteworthy change regarding the academic debates that were extensively referred to the literature review. The securitization of energy became a broadly accepted position among member states, especially among member states that had traditionally positioned the energy sector as a commercial and liberal concern. Furthermore, the emergence of the EU Energy Platform and the AggregateEU revealed that the shift towards a more centralized and unified approach to joint gas purchasing, which seemed unthinkable and ignored during the previous crises by the member states, eventually occurred. This type of evolution was shaped because the von der Leyen Commission, in addition to taking advantage of good circumstances for change, had long formed clear rhetoric concerning the unreliability of Russia. It recognized that a temporary diversion from the green transition was required in order to have the support of the member states while maintaining that remains the ultimate goal.

The next chapter of the conclusion will deliver the closing remarks regarding the impact of the past and contemporary energy crises on the configuration and evolution of the European energy policy, security, and leadership.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The thesis scrutinized the European energy policy and governance from 2014 until 2023 to answer the research question of “*How did the Russo-Ukrainian conflict of 2022 and the accompanying energy crisis affect the EU’s energy policy and governance?*”, with the contemporary situation being interpreted as a potential turning point for the European integration. Since the beginning of this research, it was needed to contextualize the conditions of the member states’ serious dependence on external suppliers and most importantly Russia. Developments that affected the member states’ relationship, whether positively or negatively, or neutrally were mentioned, because, as revealed in the literature review and chapters 4 and 5, these developments also influenced the Commission’s stance on the member states, Russia, and the concepts of energy security and governance. The theoretical perspectives and the academic debates that shaped the member states’ position on energy security and were examined in the literature review, managed to influence the interpretation of the Commission’s position and its stance ultimately. The part of the European leadership and the lack thereof in the case of energy policy was mostly presented through the academic debate of supranationalism versus intergovernmentalism.

The within-case comparative analysis that was used in combination with the method of document analysis, enabled the identification of similarities and differences between the Commission’s reaction and implementation of measures throughout these years to accomplish the vision of the Energy Union. Primary sources including the EESS, the Reports on the State of the Energy Union, the REPowerEU plan, and others were used, so that the Commission’s conception of progress regarding the solidarity of the Union, the diversification efforts as well as its leadership on the external issues could be examined. Moreover, the remarks of European politicians and EU officials that played a significant part in the shaping of the European energy policy were also used.

Moving on to the analysis of the two periods with their shaping developments, the research identified similarities and differences. The Juncker Commission which had to cope with the 2014 crisis and the Nord Stream 2 intra-EU controversy, even though it introduced the concept of the Energy Union, did not manage to convey a unified, European approach to

the issue of energy union. The Juncker Commission although declared that it would adopt a more “political” position (Keating, 2015), in the end did not coordinate successfully towards the integration of the energy policy and undoubtedly did not undertake a more leading role. The intergovernmental approach of the member states in the issue of energy policy and security was sustained during this period, resulting in the continuation of the dependence on Russia as well as in the persistence of the intra-EU tensions regarding this issue.

On the other hand, President von der Leyen mentioned her desire to lead a “geopolitical Commission” (Von Der Leyen, 2019), making in that way transparent the Commission’s securitized approach to addressing all kinds of issues. However, in the beginning once again the absence of unification became evident during the exigent period of the Covid-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, this was not the case with the contemporary crisis that was influenced by the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The current situation led to the member states’ understanding that energy security could not be separated from the general concept of the European security, as well as the Commission acknowledged that extraordinary situations need exceptional confrontation.

In that case, the conclusion that was retrieved from the research and the definitive answer to the research question is that the 2022 Russo-Ukrainian conflict and the consequent intensification of the energy crisis had a decisive effect on the way the European policy and governance were shaped compared to the past and that the integration process of the energy policy is undergoing. Traditional energy partners of Russia, e.g., Germany, altered their consistent cooperation with the country (Scholz, 2022), while simultaneously acknowledging the mistakes of past decisions (Wintour, 2022). Moreover, the alignment of the European Council and the European Commission about the needed measures to finally diversify from Russia, demonstrate the stepping down of the intergovernmental approach in the energy policy domain and the culmination of the supranational solutions in times of crisis. The REPowerEU Plan, as a plan aiming to manage urgent circumstances, apart from the fact that suggested measures for the termination of the European reliance on

Russia, also gave a considerable reference to the needed solidarity for the management of the contemporary situation as well as the proactiveness for the upcoming winter.

Regarding the research's limitations, the research did not explore all the environmental and green transition documents that were published over the years, since they would not benefit the research and its objective. Additionally, as the research was divided into distinct periods, important developments of the years before these periods were not exhaustively analyzed, so that the focus could remain on the periods of 2014-2021 and 2022-2023. Moreover, the fact that the topic of analysis was extremely current, affected the availability of primary sources. In particular, the annual Report on the State of the Energy Union for the year of 2023 was not published while the research was conducted. In that case, the research concentrated more on facts that were addressed by European officials for the Commission's and Union's in general progress in 2023, while the REPowerEU plan was notably a significant document, which enabled the identification of the Commission's behavioral and governance change. Finally, what it should be taken into consideration is that as the contemporary crisis is still ongoing and the conflict in Ukraine is still active, the Commission's swift can be altered at any time.

However, the last abovementioned point can function as both a limitation and starting point for future research. Researchers should follow all the relevant developments concerning the sustainability of the Commission's position and measures as well as the member states' compliance with the new reality and ongoing integration process of the European energy policy. Furthermore, future research could focus on potential developments that would strengthen and deepen the unity that is present at the moment. Moreover, the leadership of the Commission and other European institutions and figures including the European Council and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs, could also be reference points for future analysis, in terms of competence, intra-EU support, and efficiency.

Overall, the thesis contributed to the academic knowledge by identifying that the integration process of the European energy policy seems to be undergoing. On a theoretical level, it made evident the Commission's supranational involvement, the until this point

acceptance of this development by the member states and the groundbreaking distancing from their intergovernmental approach. Throughout the research the complicated and widely interpreted stance of the Commission regarding energy policy and security was ultimately positioned under the perspective of securitization. The 2022 crisis established that the energy policy and security are focal points for the deepening of EU's integration and will continue to be at the center of attention of the academic and political world.

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