

THE ROLE OF THE EUROPEAN CLIMATE PACT IN STRENGTHENING THE STRATEGIC RESILIENCE OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

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ABSTRACT: The article analyzes the role of the European Climate Pact in strengthening the strategic resilience of the European Union, in a context marked by intensifying climate change, energy vulnerabilities, and increasing geopolitical pressures. As a participatory instrument of the European Green Deal, the Pact mobilizes citizens, local communities, public authorities, and economic actors towards reducing emissions and adapting to climate impacts, thus contributing to reinforcing the EU’s capacity to prevent, manage, and recover from systemic shocks. By promoting the transition to sustainable development models, by fostering innovation and social cohesion, and by creating polycentric networks of climate governance, the European Climate Pact becomes a key vector of the structural transformation necessary to achieve climate neutrality by 2050.

KEY WORDS: European Climate Pact, Strategic Resilience, European Union, European Green Deal, climate governance.

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of strategic resilience has become essential in the discourse of the European Union over the past decade, as a response to the convergence of climate, energy, and geopolitical crises that have revealed structural vulnerabilities within the European project. The intensification of climate change—manifested through extreme phenomena, ecosystem degradation, and pressures on critical infrastructure—has highlighted the limits of a high-emission economic model that undermines the EU’s capacity to respond to systemic shocks. The energy crisis, amplified by the war in Ukraine, has demonstrated the Union’s risky dependence on fossil fuel imports from unstable regions [10].

On the geopolitical level, the deterioration of the security environment, global competition, and the fragility of supply chains have shown that resilience cannot be confined to its economic dimension, but instead requires a coherent integration of climate, energy,

social, and political factors. Recent events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic or trade tensions, have confirmed the need for enhanced capacities to anticipate and manage cross-border risks.

In this context, strategic resilience emerges as an essential framework for maintaining the functioning of European societies in the face of major shocks, by combining prevention, adaptation, and recovery capacities. The increasing severity and frequency of extreme climate phenomena—from wildfires, heatwaves, and droughts to hurricanes, as well as slow-onset processes such as desertification, biodiversity loss, or sea-level rise—confirms the urgency of building a resilient future and developing adequate adaptation capabilities [9].

2. THE CONCEPT OF STRATEGIC RESILIENCE IN EU LAW AND POLICIES

Resilience is a complex concept with multiple meanings, ranging from technical and

engineering forms to psychological, ecological, social, or economic dimensions. Recent literature moves away from traditional interpretations and places emphasis on integrated approaches, particularly on social-ecological resilience and its social, political, and institutional components. Essentially, resilience refers to the ability of a vulnerable system to maintain its essential functions and to adapt in the face of risks [18].

Strategic resilience, a more recent concept, reflects the ability of states, regions, or organizations to manage and overcome simultaneous or successive shocks—economic, social, political, or geographic—while maintaining stability and the capacity for sustainable development. It concerns the evolution of systems toward a higher level of equilibrium and prosperity [17].

The construction of resilience, including strategic resilience, is based on seven essential principles: diversity and redundancy, management of connectivity, control of slow variables and feedback mechanisms, adaptive systems thinking, continuous learning, broad participation, and polycentric governance. The application of these principles must be adjusted to national and regional specificities.

3. THE EUROPEAN CLIMATE PACT

The European Green Deal, conceived as the European Union's growth strategy for a sustainable future, is founded on the premise that the green transition represents a major opportunity, while the absence of action generates considerable costs. It highlights the EU's leadership role in preventing the most severe climate impacts by committing to climate neutrality and strengthening preparedness capacities. At the same time, it promotes more ambitious adaptation measures, developed on the basis of the EU's 2013 Adaptation Strategy [20]. In this regard, the Pact constitutes an essential instrument for the recovery and transformation of European society, guiding the green transition toward achieving strategic objectives related to environmental protection, and the health and safety of citizens.

The long-term vision foresees that, by 2050, the European Union will become a society fully resilient to climate change, completely adapted to its inevitable effects. However, the complexity of the climate-neutrality objective requires a comprehensive approach that goes beyond the mere reduction of greenhouse gas emissions. The measures and actions provided for in the EU Strategy for Adaptation to Climate Change can significantly contribute to achieving this objective by supporting and encouraging the efforts of Member States to strengthen resilience, increase adaptive capacity, and reduce vulnerabilities associated with climate impacts [23].

The European Climate Pact is one of the flagship initiatives of the European Green Deal and aims to mobilize citizens, local communities, civil society organizations, and economic actors in the transition toward a climate-neutral Europe by 2050. Launched by the European Commission in 2020, the Pact is embedded in the broader architecture of the Union's climate policies, highlighting the shift from an exclusively institutional governance model to a participatory one, based on the direct involvement of non-state actors in shaping and implementing climate objectives [6]. Through this approach, the EU seeks not only technological and economic transformation, but also a cultural one, grounded in awareness, responsibility, and collective action.

The Pact functions as an open platform that facilitates the exchange of information, dissemination of best practices, and creation of local initiatives, supporting communities in adopting concrete measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to climate change. Its central element is the network of Climate Ambassadors—volunteers selected across Member States to promote climate education, civic engagement, and the implementation of local climate-impact projects [14]. They act as intermediaries between European institutions and the community level, contributing to the legitimacy and visibility of EU climate policies [24].

Another pillar of the Pact is the Climate Pledges mechanism, through which

individuals, local authorities, and private entities make voluntary climate commitments, ranging from reducing energy consumption to developing green infrastructure. Although not legally binding, these commitments are integrated into a monitoring and reporting framework designed to foster public accountability and cultivate a culture of climate transparency [13]. In parallel, the Pact provides methodological support and training resources to facilitate project implementation and ensure the durability of results.

The European Climate Pact also stands out for its strategic value in strengthening the EU's climate and socio-economic resilience. By activating local communities and stimulating social innovation, the Pact helps create more adaptable social structures capable of managing climate and energy shocks. Moreover, it supports territorial cohesion, reducing participation gaps between regions and strengthening local involvement in the green transition [7]. Thus, the Pact is not merely a communication initiative but a participatory governance instrument intended to generate a cumulative impact on Europe's capacity to meet its climate objectives and to reinforce its strategic autonomy in the face of emerging crises.

Overall, the European Climate Pact is an emblematic example of the evolution of EU policies toward collaborative and inclusive models of climate governance, through which the Union seeks to transform the green transition into a democratic, decentralized, and citizen-oriented process. By combining tools of education, civic mobilization, and multi-level cooperation, the Pact contributes to strengthening the resilience of European societies and facilitating the implementation of the ambitious goals set by the European Green Deal.

4. THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE PACT TO STRENGTHENING THE EU'S STRATEGIC RESILIENCE

The European Climate Pact represents a key instrument within the architecture of the European Union's strategic resilience, as it provides a participatory framework that

mobilizes societal resources in the face of climate, energy, and socio-economic challenges. Broadly understood, strategic resilience refers to the EU's capacity to anticipate, absorb, and respond effectively to systemic shocks while maintaining its functionality and long-term policy objectives [8]. In this context, the Pact contributes to the creation of a social and institutional ecosystem capable of supporting the climate transition and, simultaneously, reducing the Union's structural vulnerabilities.

A first area in which the Pact strengthens strategic resilience is climate resilience. By stimulating public participation, disseminating knowledge, and promoting sustainable practices, the Pact generates a culture of adaptation, facilitating the integration of mitigation measures into both individual and collective behaviors [11]. These processes increase the capacity of communities to prevent and manage the effects of climate change—such as heatwaves, floods, or droughts—thereby indirectly reducing the economic and social costs generated by such phenomena [16].

Secondly, the Pact has a significant impact on energy resilience. Through local projects focused on energy efficiency, reducing consumption, and promoting renewable energy, the Pact contributes to decreasing the EU's dependence on external resources, particularly fossil fuels originating from geopolitically unstable third countries. In the context of the energy crisis that unfolded in 2021–2022, the importance of these initiatives grew, as local communities became relevant actors in diversifying energy sources and managing demand at the territorial level [10].

At the socio-economic level, the Pact supports resilience by strengthening social cohesion and the capacity of communities to respond to shocks. Educational projects, awareness campaigns, and volunteer networks create flexible social infrastructures capable of supporting the green transition and reducing the vulnerabilities of groups affected by economic transformations. By directly involving citizens in the decision-making process, the Pact also contributes to strengthening trust in European institutions

and enhancing the legitimacy of climate policies [12].

Not least, the European Climate Pact reinforces the institutional resilience of the Union. It creates communication channels between the European, national, and local levels, facilitating the flow of information and accelerating processes of institutional learning. In addition, the Pact provides a social laboratory for testing and implementing innovative governance solutions, contributing to the long-term adaptability of EU policies. Thus, the Pact not only supports climate objectives but becomes a pillar of the Union's capacity to address geopolitical tensions, energy crises, or economic disruptions [22].

Therefore, by mobilizing communities, developing social capital, and promoting a culture of sustainability, the European Climate Pact proves to be a fundamental element of the EU's strategic resilience. It complements the legal and economic instruments of European climate policy and strengthens the Union's capacity to react coherently and effectively in an international context marked by instability and rapid change.

However, although the European Climate Pact is an essential instrument for the green transition and a catalyst for civic participation, its implementation faces several limitations and challenges that may reduce its strategic impact. One of the main limitations is the voluntary nature of the commitments undertaken by individuals, organizations, and local authorities. The absence of a binding legal framework means that levels of engagement vary significantly between Member States and across actor categories, generating fragmented outcomes and difficulties in evaluating real progress [15]. Furthermore, uneven participation reflects pre-existing socio-economic disparities: regions with stronger institutional resources benefit more from the Pact's initiatives, while vulnerable or rural areas often remain underrepresented, thus amplifying capacity gaps in the climate transition [19].

Another major challenge is the risk of “participatory greenwashing,” where some entities may use the Pact's platform to enhance their public image without implementing substantial emission-reduction measures. In

the absence of robust monitoring and verification mechanisms, there is a risk of overestimating the real contribution of local projects to the EU's climate objectives [2]. At the same time, the integration of initiatives generated through the Pact into national or regional public policies is often limited, as multi-level coordination remains insufficiently developed, and civic initiatives do not always translate into sustainable institutional actions [21].

Finally, the Pact faces challenges related to visibility and accessibility. Insufficient communication at the local level and the lack of resources for dissemination affect its ability to attract new participants. Additionally, the cultural and linguistic diversity of the Union may create barriers to adopting coherent climate messages and to mobilizing citizens equally across regions. In this regard, the Pact's success depends on strengthening local support structures and developing more robust instruments for monitoring, coordination, and institutional integration.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The European Climate Pact asserts itself as an essential instrument in strengthening the strategic resilience of the European Union, not only through the mobilization of citizens and local actors, but also through its function as internal climate diplomacy, which facilitates dialogue, cooperation, and cohesion around the objectives of the green transition. As a participatory initiative, the Pact contributes to legitimizing the EU's climate policies, reducing tensions between institutions and society, and creating a deliberative space in which non-state actors can influence the decision-making process [4]. In this sense, it represents an extension of multi-level governance, helping to harmonize local and European interests and thus strengthening the democratic dimension of the climate transition.

With regard to strengthening strategic resilience, the Pact provides a social infrastructure capable of supporting adaptation and response to climate, energy, and socio-economic crises. However, for its potential to be fully realized, certain key mechanisms must

be reinforced. First, a professionalization of the monitoring framework would allow for a more rigorous evaluation of voluntary commitments and would reduce the risks of participatory greenwashing. Second, increasing funding dedicated to local projects would help reduce regional disparities and enhance the impact of community initiatives on energy and climate resilience. Third, it would be useful to establish platforms for interregional cooperation to promote the dissemination of best practices and to integrate Pact-generated projects more effectively into national and European public policies [5].

The European Climate Pact is a social laboratory of the green transition and a pillar of internal climate diplomacy, capable of strengthening the cohesion, participation, and adaptive capacity of the Union. Yet consolidating its role requires a combination of financial, institutional, and participatory instruments designed to transform civic mobilization into a lasting contribution to Europe's strategic resilience. Thus, the Pact is not merely a tool for climate communication, but an essential factor for the social and democratic integration of the Union's climate objectives in the context of increasingly complex geopolitical and economic challenges.

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