

Review

Environmental Policy and Air Quality Standards of the European Union

Jelena Vapa Tankosić ^{1,*}

¹ Faculty of Economics and Engineering Management in Novi Sad, University Business Academy in Novi Sad, Cvećarska 2, 21000 Novi Sad, Serbia

* Correspondence: jvapa@fimek.edu.rs

Received: 03 June 2022; Accepted: 12 November 2022

Abstract: In the last 50 years, environmental protection has become an indispensable part of most European initiatives and the basis of economic sustainable development. The EU's environmental protection is based primarily on available scientific and technical information for the future planning activities, taking into account the ecological state of the region, potential benefits that will arise from the application of specific measures or and harms due to the lack of implementation of the measures. All this is viewed from the aspect of the costs of environmental protection activities and the degree of contribution to the economic and social development of the region and the Union as a whole. Seven so far completed specialized Environmental Action Programs helped to improve both EU legislation and practice in member countries in the direction of sustainable development and environmental protection. On the other hand, since the beginning of the seventies of the twentieth century, the European Union has been dealing with the problem of improving air quality by controlling the emission of harmful substances into the atmosphere, as well as improving the quality of fuel and integrating guidelines for respecting the environment in the transport and energy sectors. For the Republic of Serbia, this issue is extremely important as it should follow, among others, the EU standards in the area of environmental protection and sustainable development, in the viewpoint of a potential EU member state. However, the adoption and implementation of the *acquis* of the EU in the field of environmental protection will require significant investments in the future.

Keywords: Environmental standards; EU policy; ecology; environmental protection; air pollution.

1. Introduction

The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union deals with the basic goals and principles of environmental protection policy, the implementation of which is primarily based on preventive and local action. Namely, one of the basic premises of this policy is that damage caused to the environment should be removed where it occurred, and also that the costs of those operations should be paid by the polluter. Article 191 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union [1] specifically provides that this policy contributes to:

- preserving, protecting and improving the quality of the environment;
- protection of human health, as well as rational use of natural resources;
- promoting measures on the international level that would solve the existing problem in environmental protection.

In accordance with Article 6 of the Treaty establishing the European Community [2], environmental protection goals must be integrated into all EU policies, that is, constant cooperation of all subjects is required in order to find the best solutions to environmental protection problems, including e.g. spatial, urban planning and use of arable land. EU Strategy for Sustainable Development [3] considers this type of progress to be a global goal, where the EU has one of the key

roles, which was confirmed by the UN's "Rio Declaration" from 1992, of which the EU is a signatory, as well as by subsequent meetings and documents on this topic (19th extraordinary session of the UN General Assembly 1997, the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002, the Lisbon and Stockholm meetings of the Council of Europe, etc.). At all international gatherings, the EU has unequivocally demonstrated its willingness to participate to the greatest extent possible in activities aimed at sustainable development and environmental protection. The EU 2020 Strategy adopted in 2010 has been directed in this direction, which, together with the Action Plan for Climate Change, has foreseen measures to reduce emissions of so-called "greenhouse gases" by 20-30% by 2020 in order to prevent excessive global warming caused by intensive emission of water vapor, methane and carbon dioxide into the Earth's atmosphere. This group of activities also has included an increase in energy production from renewable sources (sun, wind, sea energy, etc.) to 20%, as well as an increase in general energy efficiency also by 20% [4].

For the preparation of this paper, a descriptive method, analysis and synthesis technique, as well as analysis of the content of laws in the field of ecological policy and air quality standards of the European Union. This paper shall in the first part focus on the review of the European Union Environmental Action Programmes which set the directions for the EU environmental policy, setting key priority objectives. The second part shall review the policy and standards of the European Union in the field of air quality. In the third part the author will analyse some of the challenges of the Republic of Serbia in the field of environment in light of the future EU standards requirements.

2. EU Policy in the Field of Environmental Protection

The Treaty of Rome from 1957 did not set the basis for a common EU policy in the field of environmental protection because the field of environmental protection was regulated at the national level of the member states. During the period of early integration, the activities of the EU were focused on the promotion of free trade and economic development of the member countries and not so much on issues of environmental protection. The EC summit in Paris (1972) laid the foundations for environmental protection at the level of the entire EU, and the Commission was asked to develop an action program for environmental protection, so that in 1973 the implementation of five-year action programs began [5].

The single European act from 1986 (Article 130r-t) introduces the legal framework related to the protection of the environment, the principles of prevention and detection of the cause and its origin into the Treaty of Rome. The Regulation on the establishment of the European Environment Agency was adopted in 1990. It entered into force at the end of 1993, and immediately afterwards the office of the European Environment Agency was established in Copenhagen. European Information and Monitoring Network for the Environment (Eionet) were also established by this regulation. The Agency's mission is to assist the Community and Member States in making informed decisions on improving the environment by integrating environmental issues into economic policies.

The Maastricht Treaty (1992) in the field of the environment includes in Article 2 among its objectives the promotion of sustainable and non-inflationary growth while respecting the environment. Environmental protection was then integrated into other EU policies and linked to objectives in other sectoral areas. The Lisbon strategy, in the year 2000, points to the fact that economic growth should be harmonized with the sustainable use of natural resources. Today, environmental protection is not just one of the sectoral policies of the EU because environmental protection is closely integrated with economic and social development.

In the last 50 years, environmental protection has become an indispensable part of most European initiatives and the basis of economic sustainable development. In 1972, the EU started an environmental protection project through specific environmental action programs, EAP (Environmental Action Programme), and seven programs of this type have been implemented to date. The first program, which contained a good number of elements of what we now call sustainable development, began in 1973 and lasted until 1977. The second EAP was implemented in the period 1977-1981 and represented a practical expansion of the first EAP, with a particular emphasis on the protection of nature, i.e. the environment. The third EAP (1982-1986) dealt, among

other things, with the analysis of potential risks and benefits from the implementation of environmental protection policies on the common market, while at the beginning of the next EAP cycle (1987–1992) as in 1987 environmental protection became a chapter in the Single European act, which is considered a turning point in the recognition of environmental activities and their acceptance as one of the most important policies of the Union. During the fifth EAP program (1992-1995) a number of environmental issues were addresses such as climate change, acidification and air pollution, depletion of natural resources and biodiversity, depletion and pollution of water resources, deterioration of urban environment, deterioration of coastal zones and waste. The sixth EAP was designed for a significantly longer period of time and lasted from 2002-2010. This environmental protection action program was started with the motto: "Environment - our future, our choice" and ended in 2012. This program had four priority areas [6]:

1. climate change
2. preservation of biodiversity and natural systems
3. environmental impact on human health, i
4. sustainability of natural resources and waste management.

The seventh EAP adopted by the Decision No 1386/2013/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 November 2013 on a General Union Environment Action Programme to 2020 'Living well, within the limits of our planet' [7] has the following priority objectives:

- (a) "to protect, conserve and enhance the Union's natural capital;
- (b) to turn the Union into a resource-efficient, green and competitive low-carbon economy;
- (c) to safeguard the Union's citizens from environment-related pressures and risks to health and well-being;
- (d) to maximise the benefits of Union environment legislation by improving implementation;
- (e) to improve the knowledge and evidence base for Union environment policy;
- (f) to secure investment for environment and climate policy and address environmental externalities;
- (g) to improve environmental integration and policy coherence;
- (h) to enhance the sustainability of the Union's cities;
- (i) to increase the Union's effectiveness in addressing international environmental and climate-related challenges.

The 8th EAP has entered into force on the 2nd May 2022, adopted by a Decision (EU) 2022/591 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 6 April 2022 on a General Union Environment Action Programme to 2030. The 8th EAP supports the European Green Deal, EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, the new Circular Economy Action Plan, the Chemicals Strategy for Sustainability and the Zero Pollution Action Plan. Its' priority objectives are focused on: greenhouse gas emissions reductions, adaptation to climate change, a regenerative growth model, a zero-pollution ambition, protecting and restoring biodiversity, and reducing key environmental and climate impacts related to production and consumption [8].

3. Air Quality Standards of the European Union

Since the beginning of the seventies of the twentieth century, the European Union has been dealing with the problem of improving air quality by controlling the emission of harmful substances into the atmosphere, as well as improving the quality of fuel and integrating guidelines for respecting the environment in the transport and energy sectors. The European Union aims to reach air quality levels that do not cause negative impacts on human health and the environment. As a result, great progress has been made in reducing air pollutants such as sulfur dioxide, lead, nitrogen oxides, carbon monoxide and benzene. However, despite the progress made so far, poor air quality continues to cause serious problems. Vehicles, industry, power plants, agriculture, households and waste are the main air pollutants in Europe. Reports from the European Environment Agency [9] state that air pollution and noise pollution continue to have serious health consequences in urban areas. In 2011, around 430,000 premature deaths in the EU were linked to exposure to fine particles in the air, while noise exposure contributes to at least 10,000 premature deaths from heart disease

every year. While greenhouse gas emissions in the EU have decreased by 19% compared to 1990, the EU has set a goal of reducing those emissions by 40% by 2030 compared to the 1990 level. We must also bear in mind that production economic activities in Europe registered a growth of 45%. The financial crisis did not divert the attention of European citizens from environmental issues. A large proportion of the European population still breathes air with air pollution levels that exceed EU standards and WHO air quality guidelines for health protection [10].

Emissions of the main air pollutants in Europe have declined over the last few decades, indicating a positive shift in air quality. However, certain sectors deviate from this positive trend as an increase in the level of air pollutants in the form of fine suspended solids has been registered particles (PM_{2.5}), which occur during the burning of coal and biomass (in households and commercial and institutional plants) as well as coarse suspended particles PM₁₀ (which originate from industry and transport) and are emitted directly into the air. Particulate matter is the deadliest form of air pollution because it has the ability to penetrate deep into the lungs and bloodstream, causing cancer, mutating DNA, heart attacks and premature death.

The main instruments of the EU policy for improving air quality are numerous directives that establish air quality standards to ensure protection against excessive concentrations of pollution.

The first main instrument was the Framework Directive on air quality 96/62/EC, which refers to the monitoring of places and areas where the air quality does not meet the standards of the European Union, informing the public and taking measures to meet these standards, which was repealed by Directive 2008/50/EC.

The subsequent important decisions and directives aimed at improving air quality and establishing air quality standards were introduced in the EU period from 1980 till 2004:

- Council Directive 80/779/EEC of July 15, 1980 on air quality limit values and values for sulfur dioxide and suspended particles, which was last amended by Directive 89/427/EEC and repealed by Council Directive 1999/30/EC.

- Council Directive 85/203/EEC of March 7, 1985 on air quality standards for nitrogen dioxide, which was last amended by Council Directive 91/692/EEC and repealed by Council Directive 1999/30/EC.

- Council Decision 97/101/EC on establishment of reciprocal exchange of information and data from networks and individual stations for measuring ambient air pollution in member states - repealed by Directive 2008/50/EC and replaced by Implementation Decision 2011/850/EU.

- Council Directive 1999/30/EC concerning limit values for sulfur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide and oxides of nitrogen, particulate matter and lead in ambient air (first daughter directive). In addition, the aim of the Directive was to establish adequate information on the concentrations of these substances in the air. It was repealed by Directive 2008/50/EC.

- Directive 2000/69/EC of the European Parliament and the Council regarding limit values of benzene and carbon monoxide in ambient air (second daughter directive) which was subsequently repealed by Directive 2008/50/EC.

- Directive 2002/3/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council regarding ozone in ambient air (the third daughter directive), which was subsequently repealed by Directive 2008/50/EC.

- Council Decision 2004/461/EC determining the questionnaire that should be used for annual reporting on the assessment of ambient air quality according to Council Directives 96/62/EC and 1999/30/EC, then Directives 2000/69/EC and 2002/3/EC of the European Parliament and the Council.

- Commission Decision 2004/224/EC establishing the obligation of member states to submit plans and programs within two years for those zones where certain limit values have been exceeded according to Council Directive 96/62/EC on limit values - repealed by the Implementation Decision 2011/850/EU.

Directives on air quality standard that are currently in force in the EU are the following:

- Directive 2004/107/EC of the European Parliament and the Council on arsenic, cadmium, mercury, nickel and polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons in ambient air (fourth daughter directive);

- Directive 2008/50/EC on ambient quality air and cleaner air for Europe merged most of the existing legislation into a single directive (except for the fourth daughter directive) without changing

the existing air quality objectives. It introduced: new air quality targets for PM_{2.5} (fine particles) including limit value and exposure reduction targets, the possibility of reducing natural sources of pollution when assessing compliance with limit values, as well as the possibility of extending the deadlines by three years (PM₁₀) or by five years (NO₂, benzene) to comply with limit values. Article 1 establishes measures aimed at: 1. Definition and determination of air quality objectives in order to avoid, prevent or reduce harmful effects on human health and the environment as a whole; 2. Assessment of air quality in member states based on common methods and criteria; 3. Obtaining information on air quality in order to provide assistance in the fight against air pollution and harmful effects, monitoring long-term trends and improvements resulting from national and Community measures; 4. Making information about air quality available to the public; 5. Maintaining air quality if it is satisfactory and improving it in other cases; 6. Promoting greater cooperation between member states in the area of reducing air pollution.

Member states are obliged to designate competent bodies at appropriate levels that are responsible for: a) assessment of air quality; b) approval of measurement systems (methods, equipment, networks and laboratories); c) ensuring the accuracy of measurements; d) analysis of assessment methods; e) coordination in their territory if the Commission organizes quality assurance programs at the level of the entire community; (f) cooperation with other Member States and the Commission.

- Commission Implementation Decision 2011/850/EU of December 12, 2011, which establishes the rules for Directive 2004/107/EC and 2008/50/EC of the European Parliament and the Council regarding the mutual exchange of information and reporting on ambient air quality.

- Directive 2015/1480/EC of August 28, 2015 supplementing several annexes to Directives 2004/107/EC and 2008/50/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing rules relating to reference methods, data validation and location of sampling sites for air quality assessment.

The Clean Air for Europe (CAFE) program was launched in March 2001 with the aim of providing long-term strategic advice to protect against the significant negative effects of air pollution on human health and the environment as specified in the CAFE communication (COM (2001) 245). CAFE was a technical analysis and development program that supported the development of the Thematic Strategy on Air Pollution within the Sixth Action Program for Environmental Protection. On September 21, 2005, the Commission adopted the Thematic Strategy (COM (2005) 446). The main elements of the Thematic Strategy are: Thematic Strategy, Annexes, Directive on Ambient Air Quality and Cleaner Air for Europe ("CAFE" Directive) (COM (2005) 447), Impact Assessment of the Thematic Strategy and the CAFE Directive (SEC (2005) 1133) [11].

The thematic strategy on air pollution is a key strategic document that defines goals for the reduction of certain pollutants with the aim of improving legislation in the field of the environment and integrating air quality issues into relevant policies. The Strategy describes in detail the problems related to air quality in EU member states. The strategy then defined the improvement of legislation in the area of air quality as well as the adoption of a new Directive on air quality (Directive 2008/50/EC of the European Parliament and the Council of May 21, 2008 on air quality and cleaner air for Europe). Polluting substances that cause the greatest concern from the point of view of impact on human health are tropospheric ozone and suspended particles, especially PM_{2.5}. The goal also includes more effective protection of the ecosystem (against acid precipitation and exposure to nitrogen and ozone). Annex 3 states that compared to the situation in 2000, the Strategy sets specific long-term goals (for 2020) in the area of air quality and should reduce losses in life expectancy as a result of exposure to solids by 47%; reduction of acute mortality due to ozone exposure by 10%; reduction in acid deposition by 74% in forested areas and 39% in surface fresh water areas; reducing the area of ecosystems exposed to eutrophication by 43%

As the next step towards improving air quality, the European Commission adopted the Clean Air Package in 2013 [12] (with targets for air in Europe for 2020 and 2030, as well as accompanying legislative measures.

In 2018, the Commission has adopted the Communication "A Europe that protects: clean air for all" [13] which provides national, regional and local actors with practical help in improving air

quality in Europe. Regarding financial support against air pollution in Europe, the Seventh Action Program for EU Environmental Protection, the multi-annual financial framework of the EU 2014-2020, the Europe 2020 Strategy and the Framework Program for Research and Innovation (Horizon 2020) represent a unique financial platform that includes both investments and research activities. On 26 October 2022, as part of the European Green Deal, the Commission proposed to revise the Ambient Air Quality Directives. The revision aligns the air quality standards more closely with the recommendations of the World Health Organization, Air Quality Guidelines.

4. Republic of Serbia and the Environmental Protection Challenges

Understanding the status and development of air quality standards in Europe is of key importance to support the development and implementation of European, national and regional policies, as well as to inform the research and innovation community on the most important challenges in air quality management that need to be met in the near and medium-term future. The preservation of air quality as well as improvement of air quality is one of the priorities in the National Strategy for Sustainable Development of the Republic of Serbia [14] which applies especially to urban environments and the proximity of thermal power plants and industrial plants, such thermal power plants in Obrenovac, Kolubara and Kostolac, refineries in Pančevo and Novi Sad, chemical industry and metallurgical complexes in Pančevo, Kruševac, Šabac, Bor and Smederevo.

Key national priorities of the Republic of Serbia are integrating environmental issues into other sectoral policies (integration of economic, social and ecological approaches and analysis, use of strategic environmental assessment instruments, encouragement of social dialogue, socially responsible business and public-private partnership); precaution (require the preservation of the natural balance when there is no reliable information about a certain problem, planning and implementation so as to cause the least possible change in the environment, act preventively to prevent possible significant negative impacts on the environment, especially if the welfare of people and animals is threatened); the polluter/user pays (inclusion of costs related to the environment in the price of the product, including the costs of environmental destruction in the economic costs of the polluter/user, applying the polluter/user pays principle); sustainable production and consumption (respect balanced relations in the exploitation of natural resources and ensure a high level of protection and improvement of the quality of the environment).

Air pollution can be defined by the presence of one or more polluting substances in the air over time sufficient to damage the health of people, plants or animals, and the general quality of the environment [15, 16]. With the adoption of new legislation in Serbia, the air protection system has been significantly improved. The Law on Air Protection [17] and other by-laws regulate air quality management as well as measures to prevent the emission of pollutants into the air, which should lead to more efficient and effective implementation of activities in order to protect the health of people, animals and the environment and to comply with EU standards. Based on the Law on Air Protection the Environmental Protection Agency is obliged to prepare and publish the Annual Report on the state of air quality in the Republic of Serbia every year.

The environmental protection financing model in European countries includes funds from the state budget, specialized domestic and international banks for financing environmental protection projects (EIB, EBRD) as well as from EU funds. In the EU accession process, the member countries undertake to contribute to the EU budget in accordance with their GDP. In return, they acquire the right to use funds from the EU budget through various funds, programs and instruments for the implementation and financing of environmental protection projects. European structural and investment funds, which represent almost half of the EU budget, are conditional on national co-financing. Multiannual financial framework - MFF EU in the period from 2014 to 2020, included allocations for sustainable development covering also natural resources: common field. policy, common policy of fisheries, rural development and environmental protection. The LIFE program as a financial instrument of the European Union that supports environmental and nature conservation

since 1992, LIFE has co-financed around 4,000 projects, EU activities in terms of resource efficiency, nature and biodiversity (especially the Natura 2000 network), as well as the climate action.

The National Strategy of the Republic of Serbia for approximation in the field of environment [18] predicts that the adoption and implementation of the *acquis* of the EU will require significant investments in the future. The total costs of approximation are estimated at 11.5 billion euros in the period until 2030. Considerable financial resources are needed to achieve compliance with EU directives. Funding is provided through EU grants; assets of financial institutions (domestic and other commercial banks and international institutions EBRD, EIB); Republic budget; Budget of local self-governments. The establishment of the Green Fund as a budget fund is a function of the financial approximation of EU regulations by sector, including waste management, contained in the National Strategy of the Republic of Serbia for approximation in the field of the environment.

5. Conclusions

The EU environmental protection has become an indispensable part of most European policies and the basis of economic sustainable development. Seven so far completed specialized Environmental Action Programs helped to improve both EU legislation and practice in member countries in the direction of sustainable development and environmental protection. On the other hand, since the beginning of the seventies of the twentieth century, the European Union has been dealing with the problem of improving air quality by controlling the emission of harmful substances into the atmosphere. Emissions of the main air pollutants in Europe have declined over the last few decades, indicating a positive shift in air quality. However, certain sectors deviate from this positive trend as an increase in the level of air pollutants in the form of fine suspended solids has been registered particles (PM_{2.5}), which occur during the burning of coal and biomass (in households and commercial and institutional plants) as well as coarse suspended particles PM 10 (which originate from industry and transport) and are emitted directly into the air. Up till now, numerous directives that establish air quality standards to ensure protection against excessive concentrations of pollution various have been implemented in the EU. For the Republic of Serbia, the issue of environmental protection is extremely important as it should follow, among others, the EU standards in the area of environmental protection and sustainable development, in the viewpoint of a potential EU member state. With the adoption of new legislation in Serbia, the air protection system has been significantly improved. However, the adoption and implementation of the *acquis* of the EU in the field of environmental protection will require significant investments in the future.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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