



KADIR HAS UNIVERSITY

SCHOOL OF GRADUATE STUDIES

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES

**COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF  
THE EU ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY WITH  
THE INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AGENDAS:  
A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE COUNCIL  
CONCLUSIONS BETWEEN 2015-2020**

ENES GİDER

MASTER OF THESIS

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A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies of Kadir Has University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in International Relations

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## APPROVAL

This thesis/project titled COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE EU ENVIROMENTAL POLICY WITH THE INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AGENDAS: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS BETWEEN 2015-2020 submitted by ENES GİDER, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts is approved by

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METHODS OF DISSEMINATION**

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In addition, I acknowledge that any claim of irregularity that may arise in relation to this work will result in a disciplinary action in accordance with the university legislation.

ENES GİDER

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23.06.2022



*To the Future of the Planet...*

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**ABSTRACT**

The European Union remains to exist as a unique regional integration initiative. Its uniqueness is not only due to its cultural characteristics. One of the main qualities that makes it special is its power to set or direct international agendas. At the top of most vital issues of today - the impact of which can now be seen in daily life at any time - is the environmental issue. The EU has shown its intention to lead in this matter as well. The Green Deal, which it recently launched, is one of the most important proofs of it. However, this intention will have no meaning as long as it is on paper. The way to evaluate it is to first examine the regular work of policy makers, and then evaluate the success of their practices. For this purpose, this research will examine both how the environmental issue is handled in the Council of the European Union conclusions and the environmental performance of the European Union within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals. Thus, it may be possible to see whether the environmental policy of the European Union has developed in line with the international agendas it pioneered. Also, to a certain extent, an answer may be given to the question of whether the European Union's environmental policy, which is one of the main debates in the literature on the European Union environmental policy, basically has an internal or an external nature.

**Keywords:** European Union, Council of European Union, Environment, European Union Environment Policy, Sustainable Development, Content Analysis



AB ÇEVRE POLİTİKASININ ULUSLARARASI KALKINMA GÜNDEMLERİ İLE  
KARŞILAŞTIRMALI ANALİZİ:  
2015-2020 ARASINDAKİ KONSEY SONUÇ BELGELERİNİN İÇERİK ANALİZİ

## ÖZET

Avrupa Birliği, özgün bir bölgesel bütünleşme girişimi olarak varlığını sürdürmektedir. Eşsizliği, yalnızca kültürel özelliklerinden ileri gelmemektedir. Onu özel kılan başlıca niteliklerinden biri, uluslararası gündemleri belirleyebilme ya da yönlendirebilme gücüdür. Günümüzün en yaşamsal konularının başında ise -artık etkisi her an gündelik yaşantıda görülebilen- çevre sorunu bulunmaktadır. AB, bu konuda da öncülük etme niyetini ortaya koymuştur. Son zamanlarda yayımlanmış olduğu Yeşil Mutabakat bunun en önemli kanıtlarındandır. Gelgelelim, kağıt üzerinde kaldığı sürece bu niyetin bir anlamı olmayacaktır. Bunu ölçmenin yolu da önce politika yapıcılarının düzenli çalışmalarını incelemekten, sonra da uygulamalarının başarısını ölçmekten geçmektedir. Bu araştırma, bu amaç doğrultusunda, hem Avrupa Birliği Konseyi sonuç belgelerindeki çevre konusunun nasıl ele alındığını hem de Sürdürülebilir Kalkınma Amaçları çerçevesinde Avrupa Birliği'nin çevre performansını inceleyecektir. Böylece, Avrupa Birliği çevre politikasının öncülük ettiği uluslararası gündemlerle uyumlu gelişip gelişmediği görülebilecektir. Ayrıca, belli bir ölçüde, Avrupa Birliği çevre politikaları yazınında ana tartışmalardan olan, Avrupa Birliği çevre politikasının temelde içsel bir özellik mi yoksa dışsal bir özellik mi taşıdığı sorusuna da bir yanıt verilebilecektir.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** Avrupa Birliği, AB Konseyi, Çevre, Avrupa Birliği Çevre Politikası, Sürdürülebilir Kalkınma, İçerik Analizi

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
Council Conclusions	European Council Conclusions
EAP	Environment Action Plan
EEA	European Environment Agency
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
G20	Group of Twenty
HLPF	High-Level Political Forum
IEEP	Institute for European Environmental Policy
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
KBA	Key Biodiversity Area
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MERCOSUR	Mercado Común del Sur (Southern Common Market)
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SDSN	Sustainable Development Solutions Network
The Council	Council of the European Union
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The European Union is a gigantic structure with 27 members, a population of about half a billion and a GDP of 15 trillion dollars (WorldBank 2021). However, the European Union is not just about these quantitative data. The European Union has many features that cause it to be asserted as a normative power (Bickerton 2011). Although other regional multidimensional union initiatives have occurred throughout history, none of these initiatives have survived due to several reasons, such as the failure of sovereignty transfer (Buelvas 2013). However, there are many regional organizations that still exist, but they are not multidimensional, or they do not have the claim of being a supra-national organization like the European Union such as ASEAN or MERCOSUR (Michael 1999) (Merke, Stuenkel and Feldman 2021).

The scope of multidimensionality here can mainly include social, political and economic aspects. Even looking at the data on immigration to European Union countries from outside the European Union can suffice to say that the European Union is a social center of attraction (EuroStat 2021). In addition, many scholars argue that the European Union is a center of political gravity due to its place both in the current world order and in the world order to be established in the future (Acemoglu 2020). Thirdly, the economic aspect of multidimensionality can be easily understood by looking at the economic size and foreign trade volume of the European Union (EuroStat 2021) or the agreements on economic integration between the member states (Stack and Bliss 2020).

However, the normative existence of Europe did not begin with the European Union. When evaluated as a continent, there are numerous international source texts that are of European origin or to which European countries have contributed significantly. While many international documents such as the Magna Carta, the European Convention on Human Rights, the European Social Charter, and the Paris Climate Agreement are directly European in origin, there are also several international documents led by European countries, such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights or International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.



The last link in the chain of European-led or European-contributed international texts is the European Green Deal. The European Green Deal, which is the outcome of a series of environmental policies followed by the European Commission, offers a framework to the whole world on the most acute problem of our age, the “environmental problem”. The Deal brought a new dynamism to the environmental debate. In addition, countries around the world have begun to shape their environmental policies around the Deal and prepare action plans within this framework (Kumar 2021; Ministry of Commerce of Turkey 2021).

However, the environmental issue has long exceeded being an issue that remains "on paper". Nowadays, rarely does a day go by without an event to discuss environmental problems or without news about the environment, or without the issues are not mentioned by politicians. In other words, the environmental issue (whether global warming, carbon emissions, pollution, climate change or any other sub-topic) has a permanent place on the agendas of the public, academia and politics. Moreover, the subject of the environment has even started to be considered a security issue with the discourse of “existential threat” or with the claims of “climate realpolitik” (Kefferpütz 2021). So, it is not a “soft” question anymore.

The general portrait of the European Union may be praiseworthy from the above-mentioned aspects, but it is still needed to analyze whether the European Union has a coherent policy development. In order to see this coherence, first of all, this study shall assess the EU environmental policy, the development of international agendas and the Council Conclusions. Then, it shall apply content analysis on the Council Conclusions between 2015-2020 and sketch out the environmental performance of the European Union through the relevant indicators. Considering the fact that the Council of the European Union is the policy-making center of this gigantic device, which is a reference point on various issues, the Council Conclusions are worth building the study upon themselves. After the presentation of the findings, mostly with figures and tables, results regarding the content analysis of the Council Conclusions and the environmental performance of the European Union shall be discussed in comparison with the development of the historical course of the EU environment policy and international agendas. In conclusion, humble recommendations to policymakers for the future policy and academics for the further research shall be tried make.

## 1.1 Literature Review

One of the mainstreaming debates regarding the European Union environmental policy is about its internal and external dimensions. In other words, whether the European Union environmental policy is driven by internal motive or external motives. Instead of the word “motive”, impulse or impetus can be used. The first group in the literature claims that the European Union is a global actor but its primary reasons are internal (Hildebrand 1992). According to this point of view, the EU executes environmental actions for the purposes limited with the Union (Jordan and Adelle 2012; Knill and Liefferink 2007)

The second group in the literature claims that the European Union is a global actor in environmental issues (Kilian and Elgström 2010; Parker and Karlsson 2010). It points out the expansionary nature of the EU policies (Weale 1999). Even though there are some scholars who assumes that the institutional pioneering role of the EU is led by some certain member states (Liefferink and Andersen 1997; Börzel 2002; Jordan and Liefferink 2005; Collier 1998), this research shall not be structured on this assumption of some leader states within the Union.

As an extension of the latter approach, the European Union is considered as a normative power in this sense (Manners 2002; Duchêne 1972; Bull 1982). This normative power is strongly backed by its economic size (Damro 2012; Meunier and Nicolaïdis 2006). Thus, it finds the capacity to be an international actor (Jupille and Caporaso 1998; Bretherton and Vogler 2006). Moreover, as previously mentioned, it plays the leading role (Oberthür and Roche Kelly 2008; Parker and Karlsson 2010; Torney 2015a, 2015b) in the international agreements (Delreux 2011, 2014; Oberthür and Groen 2015; Groen and Niemann 2013; Bäckstrand and Elgström 2013; van Schaik and Schunz 2012). This study shall be built upon the assumptions and assertions of the externalist.

## 1.2 Research Question and Hypotheses

The main question of this research is, “Did the European Union’s environmental policy develop in accordance with international development agendas between 2015-2020?”

In search of this question, the study will also test the following hypotheses:

- H1 : Environment is a prominent topic in the discussion at a political level in the EU.
- H2 : Environment increases its centrality in the discussion at a political level in the EU.
- H3 : EU has a pioneering role on environmental issues theoretically at a global level.
- H4 : EU has a pioneering role in environmental issues practically at a global level.
- H5 : EU has a satisfactory achievement regarding the environmental issues.
- H6 : There is a balance among the distribution of environment-related issues in the Conclusions.
- H7 : There is a correlation between the prevalence of environmental issues in the Conclusions and the EU’s performance on environment-related SDGs.
- H8 : EU’s environmental policy is shaped in accordance with international agendas.

In addition to these points, the study will include answers to the following side questions:

- What is the historical background of the idea of sustainable development?
- How was the EU environmental policy developed?
- What is the nature, structure, and role of the Council of the EU?
- What is the function of the Council Conclusions?
- What recommendations can be proposed to the policymakers in this regard?

### **1.3. Significance of the Research**

The word chosen by the world-famous Oxford Dictionary as the word of the year in 2019 is “climate emergency” (Schuessler 2019). This is a clear indication that environmental problems and their fatal effects, especially climate change, cannot be ignored. Of course, the Oxford Dictionary is not the only criterion. The issue has been embraced by many national, international and intergovernmental actors, as well as being worthy of research by countless researchers. The United Nations, European Union, and G20 are just a few of these actors who give the environmental situation a place on the top of its agenda.

However, concrete facts that have been put forward by scientific means also show the vitality of the environmental problem. According to the report published by the United Nations (UN) Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), when the Sustainable Development Goals expire by 2030, the global temperature is expected to increase by 1.5 degrees at best. Again, according to this report, as a result of this, the life of living and non-living beings on earth will be adversely affected in various aspects (IPCC, 2021). The effects of this negative trend have begun to reflect on people's daily lives in recent years. Deterioration of seasonal balance, difficulty in accessing food due to drought, and restriction of access to clean water resources are just a few of these effects.

At this point, considering its political, economic and social magnitude, the European Union has a great responsibility. The responsibility of the European Union as a normative power is not limited to the Union; it turns into a global responsibility. From this point of view, the work of the European Council, which brings together the leaders of the European Union, is of great importance. Due to the leverage of the Union, it has the potential to trigger a domino effect.

The year 2015, when Sustainable Development Goals was adopted, was a milestone in terms of raising global awareness of environmental destruction and taking steps against it on the basis of a certain framework. The second milestone in terms of time is 2020, the year when both the Kyoto Protocol ended and the Paris Agreement began to take effect. In accordance with this line, many international developments took place between these two dates. Because of all this, examining the meetings of the ministers of the European Union at the Council of the European Union between 2015-2020 based on the conclusions, which is the primary source, presenting the findings by charting the developments in this process and making recommendations that will contribute to the work of other actors, especially the European Union, by evaluating the outputs make this research significant.

## 2. CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND

### 2.1. European Union's Environmental Policy

#### 2.1.1. European Union

Before discussing the environmental policy of the European Union, it is useful to take a look at the history and structure of the idea of unity in Europe and the European Union as an institution. In the past, there have been attempts to unite Europe under a single government, and they have been successful for certain periods (for example, the Roman Empire and the Napoleonic era). However, this state of “being one” and a state of being “unity” are very different matters. At this point, what is understood as unity is important. As given in the Cambridge Dictionary, the concept of unity has different definitions. Of these definitions, the closest to the meaning here is: “*a political unit made up of two or more separate units such as states*” (Cambridge Dictionary n.d.).

Considered in this context, it would be more accurate to attribute the origin of the search for unity in Europe to the Age of Enlightenment. The first person to pioneer this issue was the German philosopher Immanuel Kant. Immanuel Kant's work "An Essay on Perpetual Peace" talks about a structure where international problems will be resolved peacefully, and decisions are taken in a parliament that reflects the representation of each social unit. When we look at the basic features proposed in this essay, it can be observed that it is similar to the European Union in many ways. For example, this ideal structure would be a federation where all member states are considered equal, and all members would have a republican constitution. It also refers to the core values adopted by the European Union (e.g., freedom of thought, freedom of the press...) (Kleingeld 2006).

Another important initiative that prepares the infrastructure of the European Union idea can be considered the Concert of Europe. Although the Concert of Europe, also known as the Vienna System, is thought of as the predecessor of the League of Nations or the United Nations, it has provided a period of peace and stability from its establishment in 1814 to the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. It can also be said that it contributes to the idea of the European Union functionally since it can solve its international issues by having a discussion with each other. In this context, unlike the European Union, it does not have regular meetings but has ad hoc meetings specific to the problem and threat (Chapman, 1998).

However, the European Union is not just an organization established to prevent the states parties from fighting each other. Although it was initially established as a political and economic structure, over time, it has turned into a political, economic and social integration project. After the Second World War, in 1950, with the emergence of the Schuman Plan, the foundations of the European Union were laid under the name of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). This plan aimed to eliminate the ongoing tension and conflict situation between the Germans and the French for many years and started cooperation on coal production. Later, through various treaties and expansion stages, shown in Figure 2.1 and Figure 2.2, the scope and function of the Union were expanded and updated (European Union n.d.) (European Parliament n.d.).

**1951 | Treaty of Paris:** It laid the first stone on the way to the European Union and established European Coal and Steel Community with the aim of the economic integration of Europe and maintaining peace.

**1957 | Treaty of Rome:** It established the European Economic Community (EEC) with the aim of making Europe a single market along with the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom).

**1965 | Merger Treaty:** It unified the European Coal and Steel Community, European Atomic Energy Community and the European Economic Community and established the European Community (EC).

**1985 | Schengen Agreement:** It lifted restrictions on the movement of people and goods at the borders between the five member states of the EC (Belgium, France, West Germany, Luxembourg, Netherlands). Today, 26 countries are party to this treaty.

**1987 | Single European Act:** It aims to eliminate the economic barriers between the member states and increase harmony and thus creating a competitive area. It also exposed the concept of European Political Cooperation.

**1992 | Maastricht Treaty:** It changed the name of the European Community to the European Union, forming the three pillars, which are The European Communities, The Common Foreign and Security Policy, Police and Judicial Co-operation in Criminal Matters.

**1997 | Treaty of Amsterdam:** It expanded the powers of the European Parliament, gave the European Union the power to legislate on various issues, and touched on cooperation on issues of common security and foreign affairs.

**2001 | Treaty of Nice:** It strengthened the European Parliamentary legislative and supervisory aspects, changed the institutional structure of the European Union and thus provided the capacity to cope with the challenges posed by the new enlargement.

**2007 | Treaty of Lisbon:** It offers to make the Charter of Fundamental Rights legally binding and has made some changes to improve the functioning of the decision-making mechanisms for the post-enlargement period.

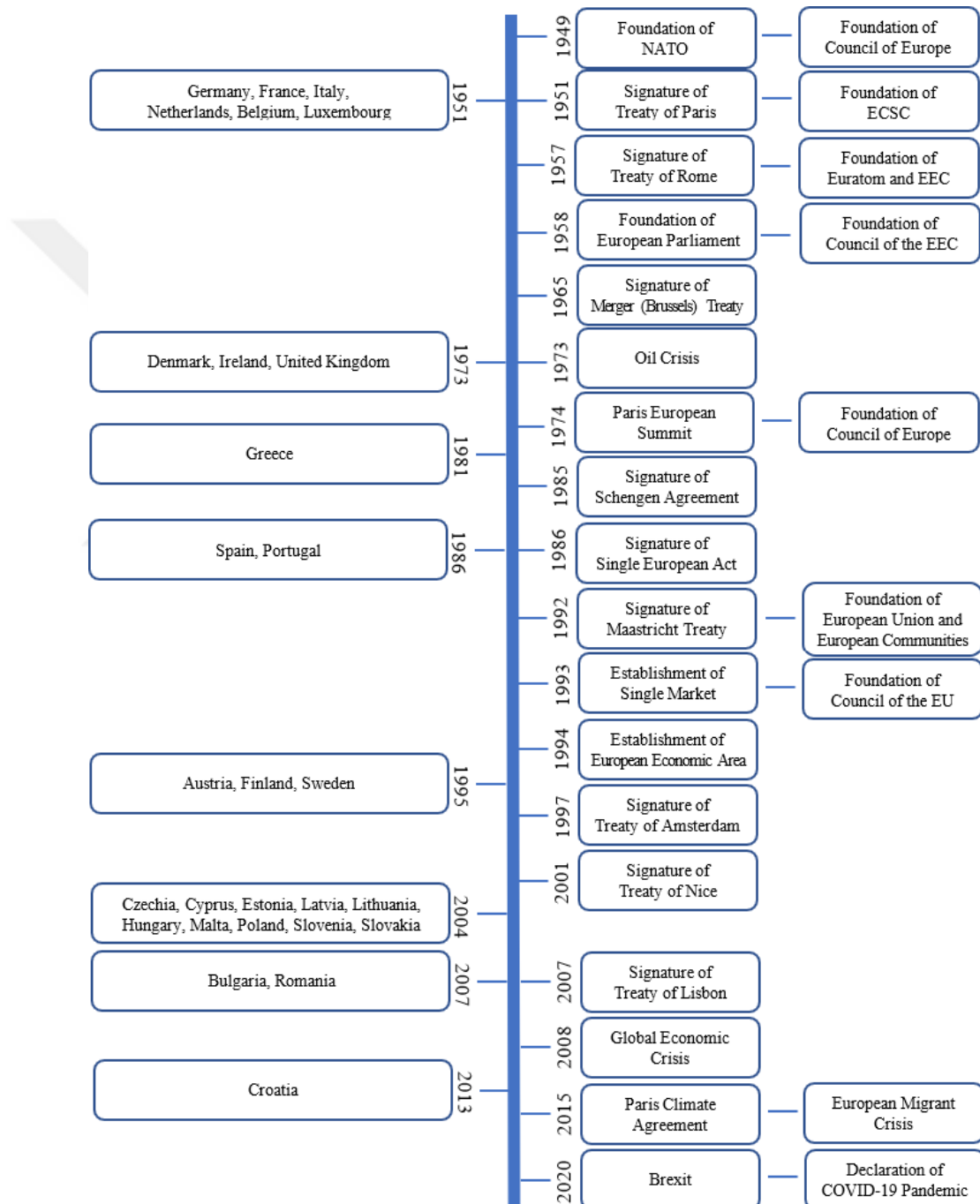


Figure 2.1: Timeline of the European Union  
Compiled by the author based on the data on (European Union 2021)

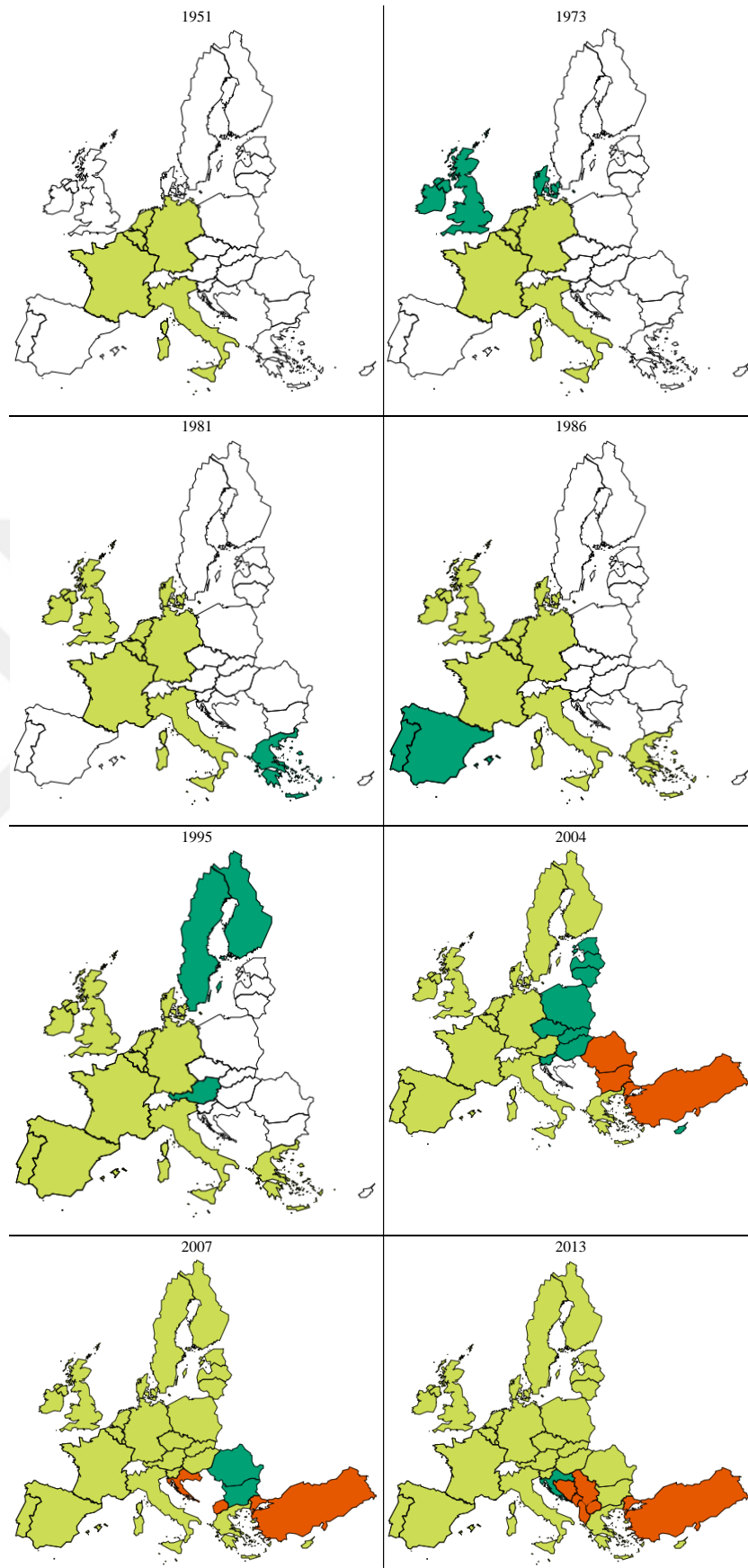


Figure 2.2: Enlargement Process of the European Union (European Union 2021)



### **2.1.2. Environmental policy**

Although the word environment has different meanings in different branches, it can be said that the meaning of environment, in this context, is derived from the German zoologist Ernst Haeckel's definition of ecology. In his work "Oecologie und Chorologie", he explained what he meant by ecology as follows: "By ecology, we mean the whole science of the relations of the organism to the environment including in the broad sense, all the 'conditions of existence'. These are partly organic, partly inorganic in nature; both, as we have shown, are of the greatest significance for the form of organisms, for they force them to be adopted." (Egerton 2013, 226)

Dictionary of Global Climate Change offers a definition of environment similar to the definition of ecology by Haeckel: "The sum of all external conditions affecting the life, development and survival of an organism." (Maunder 1992, 73). It is seen that OECD, a pioneer organization and reference point for development, assumes the same definition. Merriam-Webster makes a slightly more detailed definition but stresses the same points "The complex of physical, chemical, and biotic factors (such as climate, soil, and living things) that act upon an organism or an ecological community and ultimately determine its form and survival" (Merriam-Webster n.d.)

However, the environment has been brought to international agendas because of environmental problems. It can be stated that the emphasis on the environment also increases depending on the severity of environmental problems. In the past, the issue of environmental pollution was often emphasized because it had a more direct impact and was confronted more concretely. On the other hand, nowadays, environmental problems are mostly associated with climate change. Environmental policies are generally developed to deal with these environmental problems using some tools and instruments.

The leading environmental problems in terms of the impact area and impact severity are climate change and global warming. As a domino effect, these problems trigger many sub-problems, from sea-level rise (and therefore the flooding of settlements) to drought (and therefore the problem of famine). Therefore, although it has been accepted that the global temperature increase cannot be prevented, keeping it at 1.5 degrees has been written at the top of the global agenda. The special report prepared by the IPCC offers a detailed perspective on the subject based on facts and data (IPCC 2021).

Another major problem is the pollution of natural resources (water, soil, air...). Unlike climate change and global warming (global cooperation and the adoption of a common environmental policy are indispensable for the solution of these problems), problems related to natural resources create tangible effects that are undeniably obvious at the national and even local level. For example, semi-enclosed seas are in danger of mucilage due to the water pollution and pose a great threat to marine life (EEA 1999), but when the policymakers focus on the “consequence” rather than the “problem” itself, danger turns into reality in a short while (Savun-Hekimoğlu and Gazioğlu 2021).

The second main problem associated with natural resources is the problem of the "depletion of resources" resulting from the unconscious consumption of natural resources. This issue is directly related to sustainability. As will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters, SDG 12 focuses on this problem. One of the clearest examples of this topic is the Deforestation of the Amazon. By 2030, more than a quarter of the Amazon Rainforest will be deforested. In addition to the economic motives that first come to mind (for the sake of the wood industry and agriculture), the Brazilian government considers this attempt as an opportunity to assimilate the tribespeople (Sandy 2019). As seen in this example, some economic and social policies may bring about environmental problems.

In addition, there are also problems of erosion and desertification, decrease in biodiversity, the pressure of rapid population growth on natural systems, ozone hole, acid rain, nuclear/radioactive pollution etc. and each of these problems deeply affects the welfare and survival of humanity and requires a multi-faceted and multi-stakeholder policy but it is redundant to probe them all. Keeping the definition of environmental policy by Britannica that “Environmental policy, any measure by a government or corporation or other public or private organization regarding the effects of human activities on the environment, particularly those measures that are designed to prevent or reduce harmful effects of human activities on ecosystems.” (Bueren 2019) in mind, considering the Policy Evaluation Framework (See: Figure 2.3) and in the light of the above-mentioned facts, an accurate environmental policy can be defined as Environmental policy is a multi-dimensional policy created by a legal entity to produce a full or partial solution to certain environmental problems by involving all stakeholders who may have a share in the problem or solution, and by using pre-designed special policy instruments based on the calculation of long-term impacts and short-term results of its action.

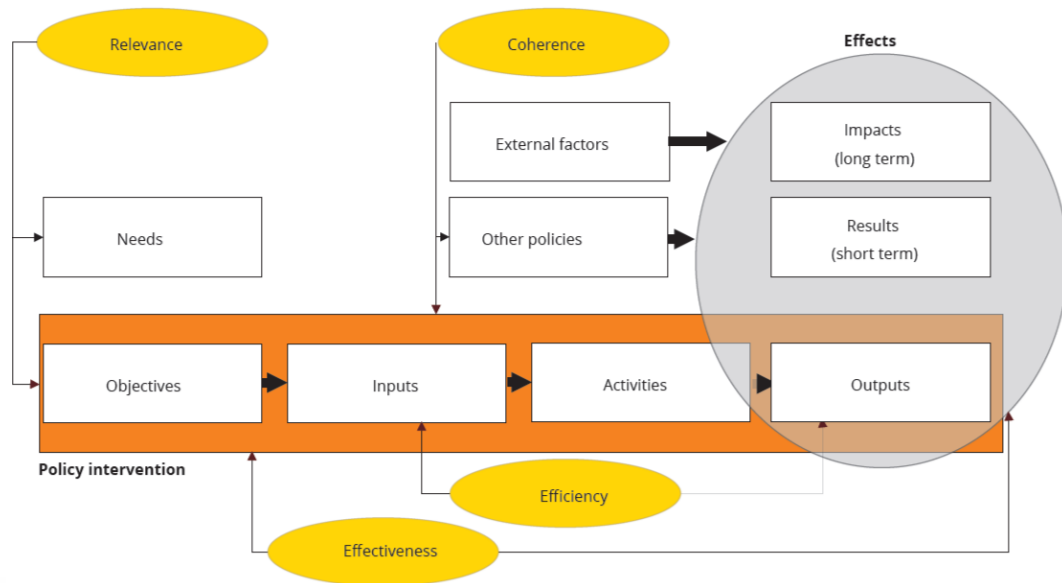


Figure 2.3: Policy Evaluation Framework (EEA 2016)

However, it is necessary to know the main instruments to be used in the implementation of the environmental policy to solve the problems briefly mentioned above. As the above-mentioned examples indicated, unless a timely and accurate environmental policy addressing the problem is developed, and unless this policy is implemented using the right instruments, it is inevitable for policy makers to take a reactive attitude and take actions that will not root out the problems but will try to get rid of the consequences of the problems. Numerous policy instruments addressing environmental problems are in use. Some of the basic environmental policy instruments are as follows (OECD 2017):

**Taxes:** It aims to make the pollution caused by products and activities costlier.

**Fees and Charges:** It has the same purpose as the tax but proposes a required payment.

**Tradable Permits:** It is for allocation of emission or resource exploitation rights.

**Deposit-Refund Systems:** It demands a surcharge for possible pollution but pays the surcharge back when the pollution is prevented.

**Subsidies:** It provides advantages for environment-friendly solutions to make them attractive for producers or consumers.

**Voluntary Approaches:** It motivates organizations to achieve their self-commitments about environmental performance for a positive environmental image of them.

### 2.1.3. EU environmental policy

As shown in Figure 2.4, European Union applies a certain policy cycle. Putting citizens' engagement into the core and circulating around science, citizens and policy, it (1) defines the problem, (2) format a policy, (3) adopt the policy, (4) implement the policy and (5) evaluate the policy. (European Union, 2018) In addition to this, EU Environmental Policy shares a similar structure to the overall environmental policies, but when gone into particulars, its character can be comprehended properly. In order to understand the European Union Environmental Policy, it is necessary to pay attention to the grounds, principles, objectives, instruments and historical development of the common environmental policy of the European Union (Egeli 1996).

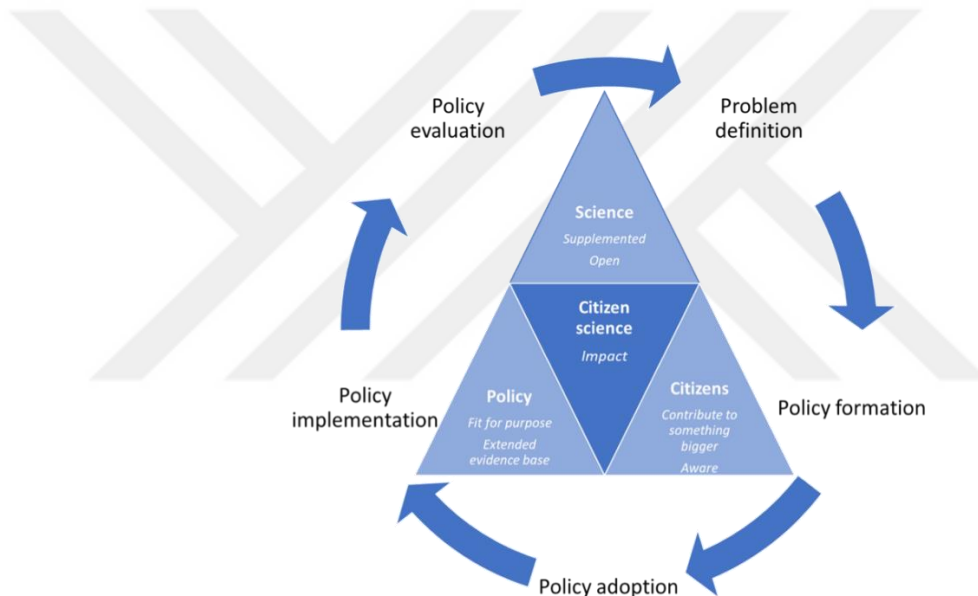


Figure 2.4: Three main pillars of citizen science in the policy cycle: scientific excellence, citizen engagement, and policy relevance (European Union 2018)

#### 2.1.3.1. Grounds of the EU environmental policy

First of all, remembering that one of the aspects of the EU is being an economic union, it has to provide an equal ground to its members. Otherwise, hostile attitudes may occur among the members, and it may harm the harmony in the Union. Even though environment-friendly solutions are the most beneficial ones for all in the long-term, strict regulations or sanctions for the sake of the environment may cause an economic disadvantage for the companies within that specific region (Burns, Eckersley and Tobin 2020).

The second reason is the socio-economic commitments of the European Union. European Union aims to deliver a wealthy and prosperous life for primarily its citizens of about a half-billion and for the rest of mankind (Schuman 2011). Due to the understanding of sustainability (including its three sectors: economy, environment, and society), it is accepted that mere material development does not provide high living standards, and it cannot be succeeded without well environmental conditions.

Thirdly, as stated previously, the European Union is a normative power. It takes the leading the rest on the environment (as it does in other significant global issues) as its duty and its historical responsibility. It can be understood from an idealistic worldview or a pragmatist worldview. Idealistically, everybody has an equal share to make the world a better place to live. Pragmatically, the impacts of the environmental issues know no bounds; if the EU does nothing, it is negatively affected too.

#### **2.1.3.2. Development of the EU environmental policy**

There are documents that make it possible to follow the development of the European Union's environmental policy on a certain line. These are Environment Action Programmes (EAP). The first Programme emerged in the '70s when the first enlargement of the European Union took place at the same time, the Oil Crisis hit Europe and the first direct elections to the European Parliament were held (European Union 2021). Including the two Programmes (VI: 2001-2010, VII: 2011-2020) in the period covered by this study, a total of 7 Environment Action Programmes, which EAPs serve as guidelines outlining the environmental policy of the Union, were published until 2020. In this context, EAPs explain objectives, priorities and principles by referring to the reasons. As can be seen comparatively in Table 2.1, the course of EAPs is basically as follows:

**1973-1976 | Environment Action Programme I:** The First EAP can be regarded as a kind of avant-garde document which touches upon immediate environmental problems and shows good faith in the future (Council 1973).

**1977-1981 | Environment Action Programme II:** It can be considered as a prolongation of the first EAP (European Council 1977).

**1982-1987 | Environment Action Programme III:** While maintaining many of the previous emphases, some new priorities and objectives were put on the agenda (European Council 1983).

**1987-1992 | Environment Action Programme IV:** It is a better-structured document consisting of strong references to the EEC Treaty, which is amended by the Single European Act, brings a specific chapter for the environment and also covers economic and social dimensions with regards to sustainability (European Commission 1986).

**1993-2000 | Environment Action Programme V:** It is a detailed knowledge-based report enriched by figures which notice the concept of “sustainable development” for the first time in terms of EAPs (European Community 1993).

**2001-2010 | Environment Action Programme VI:** Unlike the stress on pollution in the previous reports, climate change is put in the center (European Union 2002).

**2011-2020 | Environment Action Programme VII:** Externalities, integration and policy cohesion are brought to the forefront (European Union 2013).

Years	EAP No	Objectives	Principles	Priorities
1973-1976	I	No Pollution Ecological Balance and Biosphere Protection No Exploitation of Resources or Nature Quality in Development Environmental Aspect in Urban Planning Common Solutions with Other Actors	Prevention Comprehensiveness Avoidance Scientificness Polluter Pays No Degradation Cooperation Integration Multi-Level Action Harmonization	Reduction of Pollution and Nuisances Improvement of Environment Joint Action and International Cooperation
1977-1981	II	No Pollution Ecological Balance and Biosphere Protection No Exploitation of Resources or Nature Quality in Development Environmental Aspect in Urban Planning Common Solutions with Other Actors	Prevention Comprehensiveness Avoidance Scientificness Polluter Pays No Degradation Cooperation Integration Multi-Level Action Harmonization	Pollution, Land Use and Generation of Waste Protection of Space, Environment and Natural Resources Protection of Water and Atmosphere and Elimination of Noise International Cooperation
1982-1987	III	Protection of Human Health Dissemination of and Access to Research Results Consideration of Scientific Data in Decision-Making Optimal Resource Allocation Application of Council Decision and the Information Agreement	Prevention Integration Rectification at Source Desirability of Action Avoidance of Duplication Cost-Benefit Analysis Consideration of Different Conditions Research and Consultation	Policy Integration Reduction of Pollution and Nuisance Environmental Impact Assessment Environmental Protection (Land, Water, Atmosphere) Noise Pollution Transfrontier Pollution Dangerous Chemicals Waste Management Clean Technology International Cooperation
1987-1992	IV	Preservation, Protection and Improvement of the Quality of the Environment Protection of Human Health Prudent and Rational Utilization of Natural Resources Implementation of Community Directives Policy Integration Product Standards & Emission Limits	Polluter Pays Prevention Rectification at Source Multi-Media Analysis and Control Cost-Benefit Analysis Cooperation Consideration of Different Conditions Wholistic Development Scientificness Integration	Progressive Development and Environmental Standards Policy Integration Environmental Impact Assessment Pollution and Nuisance Noise Pollution Environmental Protection and Biotechnology Waste Management Clean Technology Erosion and Water Supply International Participation International Cooperation
1993-2000	V	Sustainable Management of Natural Resources Integrated Pollution Control and Prevention of Waste Reduction in the Consumption of Non-Renewable Energy Improved Mobility Management Environmental Quality in Urban Areas Improvement of Public and Safety	Precaution Polluter Pays Shared Responsibility Prevention Integration Subsidiarity Sustainable Development Sound Planning	Climate Change Acidification and Air Pollution Depletion of Natural Resources and Biodiversity Depletion and Pollution of Water Deterioration of Urban Environment Deterioration of Coastal Zones Waste
2001-2010	VI	Emphasizing Climate Change Protecting, Conserving, Restoring and Developing the Functioning of Natural Systems Contributing to a High Level of Quality of Life and Social Well Being Better Resource Efficiency and Resource and Waste Management	Polluter Pays Precaution Preservation Rectification at Source Integration Cooperation Promotion and Encouragement	Climate Change Nature and Biodiversity Environment and Health Quality of Life Natural Resources Wastes
2011-2020	VII	Protection of Natural Capital Resource-Efficient, Green and Competitive Low-Carbon Economy Safeguarding from Environment-Related Pressures and Risks Improved Implementation Expanding the Knowledge Base for the Environmental Policy Investment for Environment Addressing Environmental Externalities Integration and Policy Coherence Urban Sustainability	Precaution Prevention Rectification at Source Polluter Pays Integration Cooperation Promotion and Encouragement	Protection of Natural Capital Resource-Efficient, Green and Competitive Low-Carbon Economy Safeguarding from Environment-Related Pressures and Risks Improved Implementation Expanding the Knowledge Base for the Environmental Policy Investment for Environment Addressing Environmental Externalities Integration and Policy Coherence Urban Sustainability <sup>1</sup>

Table 2.1: Overview of the Environment Action Programmes  
(Table is compiled by the author using seven Environment Action Programmes)

<sup>1</sup> By the 7<sup>th</sup> Environment Action Plan, convergence of priorities and objectives completed, and those items unified.

In addition to the internal regulations and plans, especially Environment Action plans, which paint the European Union environment policy with a broad brush, there are various multilateral agreements that affect the environmental road of the Union. In the context, a total of 44 environmental agreements under 12 titles, of which the European Union is a party or a signatory, can be seen in Table 2.2:

FIELD	NAME	DATE
Air	Geneva Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution	1979
Biotechnology	Cartagena Biosafety Protocol* to the Rio Convention on Biological Diversity** and its Supplementary Protocol on Liability and Redress***	*2000 **1992 ***2010
Chemicals	PIC Rotterdam Convention on Prior Informed Consent	1998
	POP Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants	2001
	Minimata Convention on Mercury	2013
Civil Protection and Environmental Accidents	Helsinki Convention on Industrial Accidents	1992
	Barcelona Convention	1976
	Bonn Agreement	1983
	Lisbon Agreement	1990
	OSPAR Convention	1992
	Helsinki Convention on the Baltic Sea	1992
	Bucharest Convention on the Protection of the Black Sea Against Pollution	1992
Climate Change and Ozone Depletion	Vienna Convention for the Protection of the Ozone Layer	1985
	Montreal Protocol	1987
	UNFCCC Framework Convention on Climate Change	1997
	Paris Agreement	2015
	Kyoto Protocol	2015
Governance	Espoo Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment	1991
	Aarhus Convention on access to information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters* and its Protocol on Pollutant Release and Transfer Registers**	*1998 **2009
Industry	Helsinki Convention on Industrial Accidents	1992
Land Use	Alpine Convention	1991
Nature and Biodiversity	Ramsar Convention on Wetlands of International Importance	1971
	Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora	1973
	Bonn CMS Convention on the Conservation of Migratory Species	1979
	CBD Convention on Biological Diversity	1992
	Bern Convention on European Wildlife and Habitats	1979
	CAMLR Convention for the Conservation of Antarctic Marine Living Resources	1980
	Convention for the protection of Vertebrate Animals used for Experimental and other Scientific Purposes	1986
	Alpine Convention	1991
	International Tropical Timber Agreement	1994
	Agreement on the conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds	1995
	Cartagena Protocol on Biosafety	2003
	Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of the Benefits arising from their Utilization	2010
	Agreement on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Prespa Park Area	2010
Soil	UNCCD Convention to Combat Desertification in Africa	1994
Waste	Basel Convention on hazardous wastes	1989
	Barcelona Convention	1976
Water	Bonn Agreement	1983
	Danube river basin convention	1987
	Helsinki Convention on Watercourses and International Lakes	1992
	Rhine river basin convention	1999
	OSPAR Convention	1992
	Helsinki Convention on the Baltic Sea	1992
	Bucharest Convention on the Protection of the Black Sea Against Pollution	1992

Table 2.2: The European Union Environmental Agreements (European Commission 2017)



### 2.1.3.3. Principles of the EU environmental policy

There are certain basic principles adopted by the European Union in connection with the above-mentioned grounds. The instruments, objectives and policy development to be discussed in the following sections have always been shaped around these principles. These principles are referenced in EU treaties, legislation, reports and guidelines. Almost all of these principles (Prevention, Precaution, Rectification at Source, Polluter Pays and Cooperation) are mentioned in Article 174 of the Treaty establishing the European Community (European Union 1957: 71-72). In addition, the concept of integration is also referred to in the legislation of the European Union (European Parliament, 2021). Consequently, six main principles that the Union relies on can be mentioned in this respect: prevention, precaution, rectification at source, polluter pays, cooperation and integration.

**Prevention:** It prioritizes prevention over reparation, and it requires taking measures to eliminate possible harm to the environment before those possibilities realize (Oskam, Vijftigschild and Graveland 1997).

**Precaution:** It is applied for avoiding environmental damages when there is scientific uncertainty about the hazards of an activity or product (European Commission 2017).

**Rectification at Source:** It functions in line with the principle of prevention, and it supposes to get rid of pollution where it comes into existence (unlike the end-of-pipe approach) before it diffuses around (European Commission n.d.).

**Polluter Pays:** It bases on the polluter's (actors or activities) responsibility of bearing the cost of compensation for the effects of the pollution on the area and the people (Calster 2020).

**Cooperation:** Since the EU takes a leading part regarding the discussion and implementation of the international environmental agenda and as SDG 17 mandates, cooperation for achieving environmental goals is required (European Parliament 2021).

**Integration:** Considering the fact that sustainable development stands on the three pillars of the economy, society and environment, any decision or action toward the environment should pay regard to economic and social aspects and should not be in contradiction with other policies of the Union (Sjåfjell 2019).

#### 2.1.3.4. Objectives and priorities of the EU environmental policy

In Article 174 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, the objectives of the environmental policy of the Community are expressed as “preserving, protecting and improving the quality of the environment, protecting human health, prudent and rational utilisation of natural resources, promoting measures at international level to deal with regional or worldwide environmental problems” (European Union 1957). As shown in Table 1, Environment Action Programmes, which form the main framework of the EU environment policy, mention about several objectives, from the reduction of pollution to the protection of human health and from a competitive low-carbon economy to policy coherence. Over time, the objectives have changed to the conditions and requirements of the period and become simplified in general terms. The priorities and objectives that were reinforced, complemented and intertwined with each other for a long time became inseparable in the last EAP and were named "priority objectives". However, the predominant objectives are as follows:

**Reduction of Pollution and Nuisance:** It is one of the oldest identified environmental problems and has become substantially less of a priority over time.

**Protection of Human Health:** It can, in fact, be regarded as an ultimate objective and has always been valid.

**Prevention of Waste:** It is one of the most extended objectives in scope and range and remains relevant in terms of sustainability.

**Integration and Policy Coherence:** It requires compatibility at the horizontal (inter-sectoral and inter-institutional) and vertical (succession in environmental policies) planes.

**Rational Utilization of Natural Resources:** It is perhaps the most essential objective for sustainability, as it emphasizes the necessity of the efficient use of limited resources.

**Cooperation:** It is emphasized from the very beginning that it is essential to cooperate with actors from various levels in order to overcome environmental problems.

**Climate Change:** It has been at the top of the agenda, especially in the last two decades, and has led to the environmental problem being called an "existential threat".

#### 2.1.4. The Council conclusions

The Council of the European Union (a.k.a. Council of Ministers), which today constitutes one of the seven basic institutions of the EU, (University of Portsmouth 2013) emerged as a result of a natural course of history and structural progress. Before the Union attained a well-functioning institutional structure, the ministers of state or government of the member countries of the Union would occasionally meet in summits and discuss issues concerning the survival of Europe, especially the integration process in Europe. With the catalytic effect of the Empty Chair Crisis (1965-1966), it became clear that the governing bodies and decision-making mechanisms needed to be restructured (De Schoutheete 2012).

Even though some formal changes have occurred about the status and function of the Council, as can be seen in Figure 2.5, its main role has been determining (or pointing out) the political route and priorities of the European Union since the beginning. In addition to this, it discusses and adopts the Union laws, harmonizes the policies of the member states, forms the common foreign and security policy, takes a decision about the international agreements between the EU and other states and cooperates with the Parliament on the budget. Also, although it does not have legislative power, it has the capability to ask the European Commission to prepare a proposal on a particular subject and, after examining the proposal, refer it to the Council of the European Union (European Council, European Council n.d.).

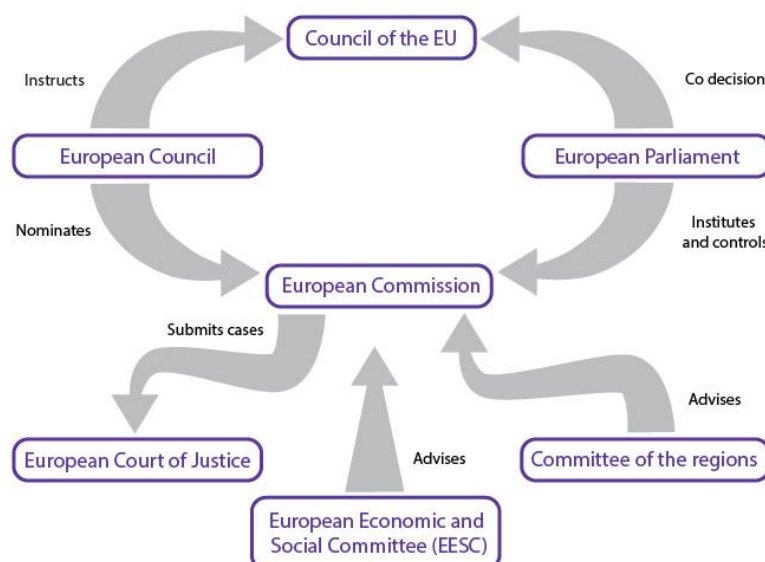


Figure 2.5: Understanding EU Institutions (University of Portsmouth 2013)

However, the Council did not come into its current structure all of a sudden; it passed through certain stages and evolved into its present form. The process started in 1952 with the Special Council of the European Coal and Steel Community. 5 ministers of the member countries gathered under the chairmanship of Adenauer to discuss the best use of national resources in line with their national interests and the common interest of the Community. Since then, it has become increasingly complex as Union's areas of cooperation have diversified and the number of members has increased. Therefore, the Union took on a new structure in 1958. In this structure, the Council was of great importance. However, this structure was also not sustainable and the operation of the Union was interrupted due to the "empty chair" policy adopted by France in the 1960s. A structural reform was required in order to permanently solve the problem that was temporarily overcome with The Luxembourg Compromise. This happened with the establishment of the Council of the European Communities in 1967. Finally, with the Union's current structure, it was transformed once again and took the name the Council of the European Union in 1993 (European Union 2013).

Basically, the Conclusions, which include the points discussed during the meetings and deemed worthy of paper, are not binding documents, but they are important concrete outputs that enable the public to know the content of the meetings. Conclusions are published as a first draft, but revisions and corrections for that conclusion can also be published if deemed necessary. Conclusions not only serve to enlighten the public but also guide the leaders by preventing them from returning to the matters that have been settled and providing the basis for the policies they will develop. Of course, the content of all the meetings held may not be shared with the public, or informal and exceptional meetings may have been held, again in the interest of the public. In this case, statements or declarations can be taken air instead of Conclusions, which are not legally binding but have a formal nature (European Council n.d.). However, Conclusions split into two: Council Conclusions which are issued by the Council and Presidency Conclusions which are issued by the presidency. Those two papers do not involve or overlap each other (European Council n.d.). In this study, Council Conclusions are used.

## 2.2. International Development Agendas

### 2.2.1. Sustainable development

The use of the concept of “sustainability”, which constitutes the essence of the concept of sustainable development, has its origins in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Hans Carl von Carlowitz, a mining manager in the Saxony region of Germany, felt the need to address the issue of sustainability after a crisis. As a natural consequence of the incalculable cutting of trees for mining in the region, a timber crisis occurred at the beginning of the 1700s. Thereupon, Carlowitz treated the concept of “sustainability” (*nachhaltigkeit*) in his book “Silviculture Economics” (*Sylvicultura Oeconomica*) regarding the issue in 1713 (Ulrich 2007).

As a matter of fact, this specific example was not native to that region. The Industrial Revolution produced great material prosperity, but it was one-sided. Environmental and social elements, which represent the other two dimensions of sustainable development, were ignored. As such, in fact, sooner or later, the economic aspect was also undermined. Consequently, in the course of time, the importance given to the concept of sustainability has increased (Sachs 2015). However, the concept of sustainable development came to the fore with the Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development (aka the Brundtland Report). In the Brundtland Report, sustainable development is defined as “development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (Brundtland 1987).

As can be deduced from the definition above, sustainable development underlines the fact that both production and consumption should occur within the framework of planetary boundaries. Also, sustainable development emphasizes the multidimensional nature of development. As can be seen in Figure 2.6, there are three main domains: ecology, economy and society. It is sometimes called four domains, including culture. In any case, all dimensions are intertwined, and none of the aspects is ignored (Mulligan 2014).

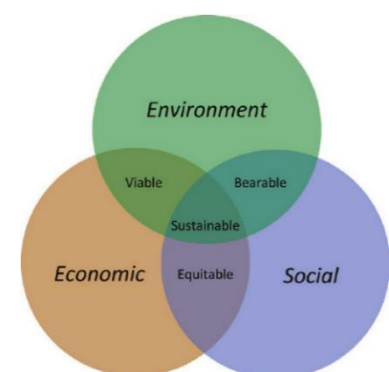


Figure 2.6 Spheres of Sustainable Development (von Keyserlingk 2016)

Also, sustainable development success turns conflict into negative peace and negative peace into positive peace basically (Marinez- Soliman 2017; Price 2017; Milante et. al. 2017). With this understanding, two different sets of goals have been designed for achieving sustainability: Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development Goals.

### 2.2.2. Millennium Development Goals (2000-2015)

The first set of goals is the Millennium Development Goals which was acknowledged by the United Nations in 2000. As can be seen in Figure 2.7, when thinking over the most urgent problems in the world, the United Nations and its agencies decided to focus on (1) extreme poverty, (2) primary education, (3) gender equality, (4) child mortality, (5) maternal health, (6) contagious diseases, (7) environmental sustainability, (8) global partnerships. Considering the key MDG achievements, such as improvements in extreme poverty, child mortality, lack of primary education, and HIV/AIDS, it can be said that the MDGs met their purpose. Also, in addition to these sharp drops in unpleasant rates, the Paris Climate Summit in 2015 can be regarded as another significant feat (UNDP 2015).



Figure 2.7: Millennium Development Goals (United Nations 2015a)

Even though the officials draw mostly a positive picture, the minuses of the MDGs are more than their pluses. The MDGs have made way to ending extreme poverty and improving the living standards, and the MDGs have achieved to arouse the interest of the member governments (Max 2015). However, the MDGs had not sorted out the root causes of poverty, could not reach satisfying outcomes to a global extent, and had been in need of improvement in monitoring, evaluation and accountability (Managure 2015; Coonrod 2014). Also, even if the numbers about extreme poverty and infectious diseases have reduced, appropriately, 800 million people still live in extreme poverty, and 800 million people go hungry, about 60 million children are unprovided with primary education and etc. (United Nations 2015).

### 2.2.3. Sustainable Development Goals (2015-2030)

In order to create an updated road map for the period of 2015-2030, Ban Ki-Moon, Secretary-General of the United Nations at that time, convened two different platforms in 2012: The high-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) and the High-Level Panel of Eminent Persons to assess the overall performance regarding the Millennium Development Goals and shape the Agenda 2030. Accordingly, the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in 2012, entitled “The Future We Want,” was conducted. As a result of this effort, as can be seen in Figure 2.8 understanding of sustainable development was improved, and 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were adopted (Sachs 2015; UN General Assembly 2012).

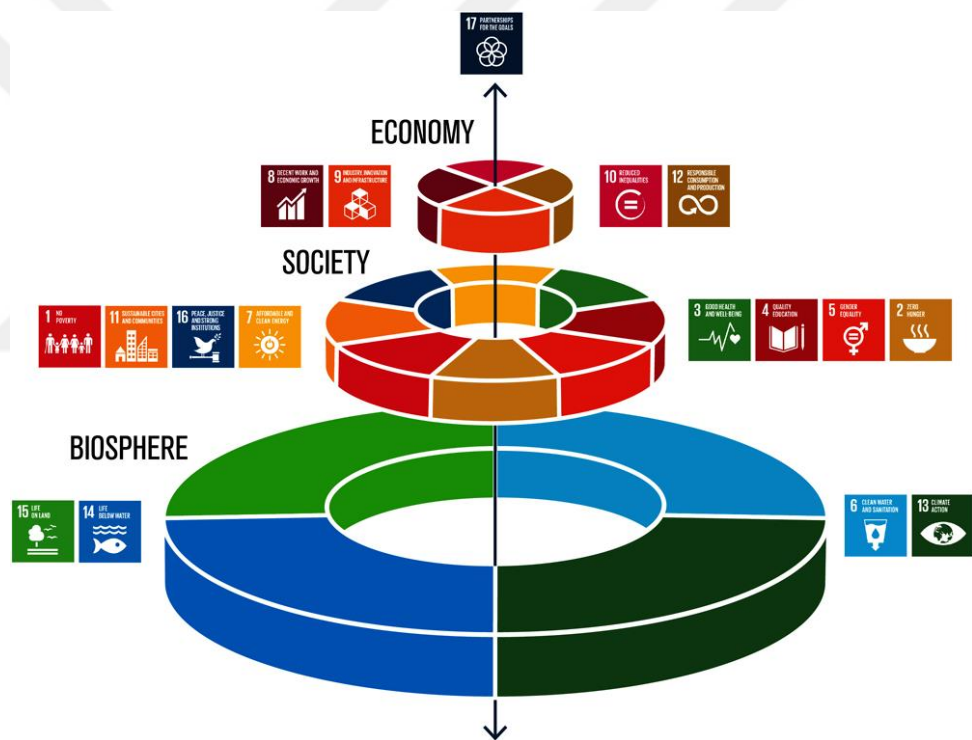


Figure 2.8: SDGs “Wedding Cake” (Stockholm Resilience Centre 2016)

Basically, it can be said that the goals have become more comprehensive in terms of content and target group, and more concrete targets have been set. On the other hand, fundamentally, SDGs still aim to find solutions to planetary problems and ensure peaceful societies with the notion of good governance (Brown 2018; Jukneviene and Kareivaite 2012). The novelty and characteristic attributes of SDGs can best be understood by comparing them to MDGs. In this respect, Table 2.3 can be useful.

	MDGs	SDGs
Date of Adoption	2000	2015
Date of Completion	2015	2030
Number of Goals	8	17
Number of Targets	21	169
Number of Indicators	60	232
General Scope	Community Development	Economic Prosperity, Social Equity, Environmental Stewardship
Target Group	Developing Countries	Entire World
Formulated by	A Group of Experts	The UN Member States, Open Working Groups, General Public
Method	Top-Down	Bottom-Up
Pros	Reduced extreme poverty, Rarified epidemics, The enhanced interest of states	More integrative and more comprehensive Improved monitoring, evaluation and accountability Awareness of national realities Convenience for localization
Cons	Lack of monitoring, evaluation and accountability, Ongoing extreme poverty and hunger for 800m+800m people	Complexity of documents

Table 2.3: Comparison of MDGs and SDGs

(Compiled from Clarke 2015; Managure 2015; Beare 2015; Boucher 2015; PSA 2017)

In addition to Table 2.3, which compares the overall features of MDGs and SDGs, as it is related to the scope of this study, the number of the environment-related SDGs (SDG 6, SDG 13, SDG 14, SDG 15) and their targets (41) is bigger than the number of MDG (MDG 7) and its targets (4). It points out a broadening perspective. Table 2.4 shows the above-mentioned Goals and Targets.

MDG 7	SDG 6	SDG 13	SDG14	SDG 15
<b>Policy Integration</b> <b>Reduction in Loss of Biodiversity</b> <b>Access to Safe Water and Basic Sanitation</b> <b>Improvement in the Lives of Slum Dwellers</b>	Equal Access to Safe Water Access to Adequate Sanitation Improvement of Water Quality Increase of Water-Use Efficiency Integrated Water Management Protection of Water Systems International Cooperation and Capacity Building Participation of Local Communities	Strengthening of Resilience Policy Integration Improvement of Education and Awareness Implementation of the Commitments Promotion of the Mechanisms	Prevention of Marine Pollution Protection of Marine and Coastal Systems Minimization of Ocean Acidification Regulation of Harvesting and Overfishing Conservation of Coastal and Marine Areas Prohibition of Fisheries Subsidies	Sustainable Use of Water Implementation of Sustainable Management Combat Desertification Conservation of Mountain Ecosystems Reduction of Degradation of Natural Habitats Fair Utilization of Genetic Resources Ending Poaching of Protected Species Prevention of Invasive Species Integration of Ecosystem Values into Plans and Strategies Increase of Financial Sources for Conservation Mobilization of Sources for Forests Enhancement of Global Support

Table 2.4: Targets of Environment-Related MDGs and SDGs

(United Nations 2015a) (United Nations 2015b)



### 3. RESEARCH DESIGN

#### 3.1. Content Analysis

The concept of content analysis, which is a basic research method in my social sciences, has nearly a century of history. It can be defined as “a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use” (Krippendorff 2004). All kinds of "content" can be used while performing the analysis. Considering the definition of the concept of content, content can be considered not only as text but also as any kind of resource, including photography, video, voice record (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries n.d.) and content that has emerged or may emerge in the age of new media.

Conceptualization, standardization, generalization and categorization are essential principles in content analysis, which is possible by relying on existing quantitative data or transforming qualitative data into quantitative data. However, content analysis has four core concepts: (1) measurement, which is “the assignment of numbers that stand for some aspect of the text”, (2) indication, which is “the inference by the investigator of some unmeasured quality or characteristic of the text from those numbers”, (3) representation which is “techniques for describing syntactic, semantic, or pragmatic aspects of texts” and (4) interpretation which is “the translation of the meaning in text into some other abstract analytical or theoretical language” (Weber 1999: 75).

There are three prominent methods in content analysis. The first one is a basic content analysis which involves coded data and qualitative techniques, mostly handles direct and explicit contents, and statistical instruments are used. The second one is an interpretive content analysis which involves coded data and qualitative techniques, handles both direct-indirect and explicit-implicit contents, and some statistical instruments may be used. The third one is qualitative content analysis is a quite flexible method that may use uncoded or coded data, existing texts and materials or a hybrid of both, and be employed in descriptive, comparative or interpretive studies. (Drishko and Maschi 2016). In this study, the qualitative content analysis method will be applied.

### 3.2. Methodology

During the research conducted for this study, basically, three different methods were followed. In the Introduction and Conceptual Background sections, a literature review was conducted for the relevant titles and concepts. In this first phase, where most primary sources are selected, universal academic research engines such as Google Scholar, Web of Science and Scopus, as well as national academic networks such as Council of Higher Education's Thesis Center and DergiPark, were used. Where necessary, academic networks such as Academia and ResearchGate were also utilized.

In the Findings section of the Study, all Conclusions in the relevant time period were accessed via the official website of the Council.<sup>2</sup> The collected Conclusions were first examined through the headings. As a result of the examination, a general distribution of topics was revealed by the determined 10 categories. Then, the Conclusions about the environment were examined, and its distribution by the environmental policy headings of the European Parliament and the Sustainable Development Goals were revealed.

As can be seen in Figure 3.1, in the data acquisition and analysis phase, the following procedure was followed:

1. The study titles were chosen based on the frameworks that could be considered valid for the environment.
2. When a reference to the relevant title is detected in the text, a notch is drawn in a box in the relevant year of that title.
3. When the examination of the document in question is finished, the boxes with lines are painted.
4. When the examination of all documents in the relevant year was completed, the next box after the last painted box was sealed by painting with a different color in order to avoid an incorrect marking when examining the next documents.
5. The painted boxes were counted and entered into the table.
6. Graphs were created from the data in the tables.
7. Finally, analysis was made based on both quantitative data and literature review and document readings during the study.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/documents-publications/public-register/council-concl>

In the Conclusion and Recommendations section, evaluations were made on the data obtained, the strengths of the European Union's environmental policy were mentioned, and the deficiencies were pointed out based on the content analysis of the Conclusions.

	Combating climate change	Biodiversity, land use and forestry	Water protection and management	Air and noise pollution	Resource efficiency and the circular economy	Sustainable consumption and production	Chemicals and pesticides	SDG-6 (Clean Water and Sanitation)	SDG-13 (Climate Action)	SDG-14 (Life below Water)	SDG-15 (Life on Land)
2015											
2016											
2017											
2018											
2019											
2020											

Figure 3.1: Examination Table

### **3.3. Limitations**

The first limitation is that not all documents are accessible. Although all Conclusions are listed on the official website of the European Council, some documents were not accessible. Although it constitutes a limitation, since the rate of inaccessible documents is around 10%, it does not have a significant impact on the result of the research.

The second limitation is about framing the research in terms of a time interval. Considering that Conclusions have been listed since 1999 and MDGs and EAP VI came into force in 2000, the study might start by 1999 or 2000, but it would bring an insurmountable burden. Also, it might cause a consistence problem between the period of 2000-2010 and 2010-2020. For this reason, 2015, which is the first of SDGs, came to the fore.

The third limitation in the literature, there is no agreed conceptual framework for analyses. The first of these limitations is about the categorization of environmental issues. This limitation is overcome by choosing the categorization of the European Parliament and the environment-related Sustainable Development Goals. The second of these limitations is about the performance assessment of the European Union in the context of SDGs. There are some reputable reports about it, but the methodology of these reports is not coherent, neither inter se nor in themselves. This problem is coped with using all those reports.

## 4. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE EU ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY WITH THE INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AGENDAS: A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS BETWEEN 2015-2020

### 4.1. European Union's Environmental Policy in the Council Conclusions

Most of the Council Conclusions are available on the official website of the Council. In the period covering the period from the beginning of 1999 to the end of 2020, a total of 1564 Conclusions were recorded. 1412 of these documents, or 90% of them, can be accessed electronically. Although a general trend of increase has been observed in the number of documents over the years, the number of conclusions per year has exceeded 100 as of 2015. This situation has increased the number of documents to be examined and enriched the content. If we compare conclusions to "samplings" in statistics, the abundance of documents strengthens the representation of the "population".

As can be seen in Figure 4.1, in 2015, which is the first year within the temporal scope of this research, a total of 112 conclusions were published, and 111 of them could be accessed. In the second year, 2016, 184 Conclusions were published, and all of them were accessible. In the third year, 2017, 163 Conclusions were published, and all of them could be accessed. In the fourth year, 2018, 140 Conclusions were published, and 134 of them could be accessed. In 2019, the fifth year, 161 documents were published, and all of them were accessible. In the sixth and last year, 2020, 132 documents were published and again, all of these documents could be accessed.

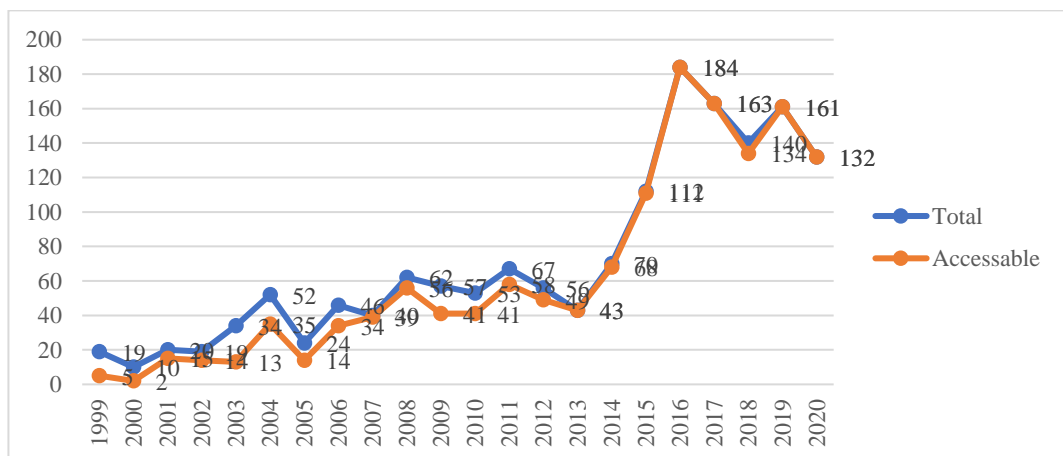


Figure 4.1: Number of EC Conclusions by Year

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	TOTAL
<b>Total Number of Conclusions (Excluding REV's and CORs)</b>	104	177	159	127	149	119	835
<b>Total Number of Conclusions (Including REV's and CORs)</b>	111	184	163	134	161	132	885
<b>Total Number of CORs</b>	6	7	1	5	6	4	29
<b>Total Pages of CORs</b>	6	7	1	5	6	4	29
<b>Total Number of REV's</b>	1	0	3	2	6	9	21
<b>Total Pages of REV's</b>	8	0	18	13	46	100	185
<b>Total Pages of Conclusions (Including REV's and CORs)</b>	838	1146	1108	1043	1141	1164	6440
<b>Total Pages of Conclusions (Excluding REV's and CORs)</b>	824	1139	1089	1025	1089	1060	6226
<b>Total Number of Environment-Related Conclusions (Excluding CORs and REV's)</b>	12	23	20	15	36	42	148
<b>Total Pages of Environment-Related Conclusions (Excluding CORs and REV's)</b>	98	185	142	122	285	384	1216

Table 4.1: Overview of Conclusions

As can be seen in Table 4.1, 885 Conclusions equal to 6440 pages in total were whipped through, and 148 environment-related Conclusions equal to 1216 pages in total were scrutinized.

#### **4.1.1. Overview of the Council conclusions by title**

Although the scope of this study is the environmental policy of the European Union, it will give a more holistic understanding to first see the weight of the "environment" issue, among other issues. When the Council Conclusions between 2015-and 2020 (885 accessible, 892 documents in total) are examined, it is seen that 10 main headings stand out. While reviewing, REV (revision) and COR (correction) documents were read, but to avoid duplication, their assets were not reflected in the tables unless there was a significant difference in content.

Those main headings are Law (including human rights, regulations, freedom etc.), Defense (including terrorism, border security etc.), Foreign Relations (including cooperation, interventions etc.), Economics (including agriculture, investment, funds, energy etc.) Environment, Membership (including enlargement, accession etc.), Culture (including values etc.), Social Policy (including gender, education, racism, health, sports etc.), Migration (including asylum, human trafficking) and Science (including technology, research, data, innovation, knowledge etc.).

Before interpreting the graphs, it is necessary to clarify a few issues. First, in order to assure accuracy, not only the headings were checked but also the text when necessary. Second, from time to time, a document has increased the value of multiple main headings because it addresses several topics, not just one main heading, such as a document on "arms sale to Mexico". In such a case, it is directly related to "Security", "Economics," and "Foreign Relations" due to its scope. Third, for instance, a document title mentioning "relations with the North Macedonia" may be counted under "Membership" or "Foreign Relations" based on the content of the document.

#### 4.1.1.1. Council conclusions by title in 2015

There were 112 Council Conclusions for 2015. 111 of those documents were available. When the titles of the Conclusions in 2015 were examined, the distribution of topics is as in Figure 4.2: Law 6%, Defense 10%, Foreign Relations 32%, Economics 18%, Environment 10%, Membership 3%, Culture 2%, Social Policy 12%, Migration 1%, Science 6%.

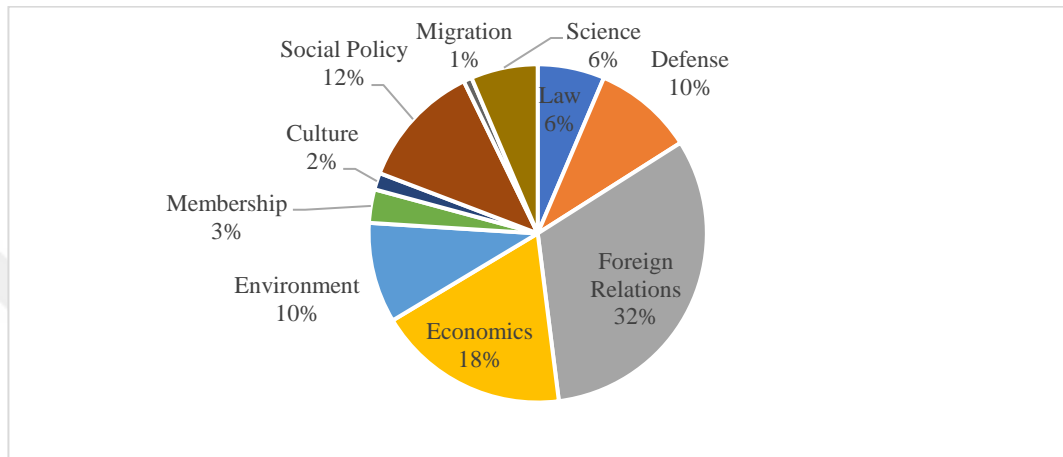


Figure 4.2 Main Topics of the Council Conclusions in 2015

#### 4.1.1.2. Council conclusions by title in 2016

There were 184 Council Conclusions for 2016. 184 of those documents were available. When the titles of the Conclusions in 2016 were examined, the distribution of topics is as in Figure 4.3: Law 8%, Defense 7%, Foreign Relations 22%, Economics 25%, Environment 14%, Membership 3%, Culture 1%, Social Policy 11%, Migration 3%, Science 6%.

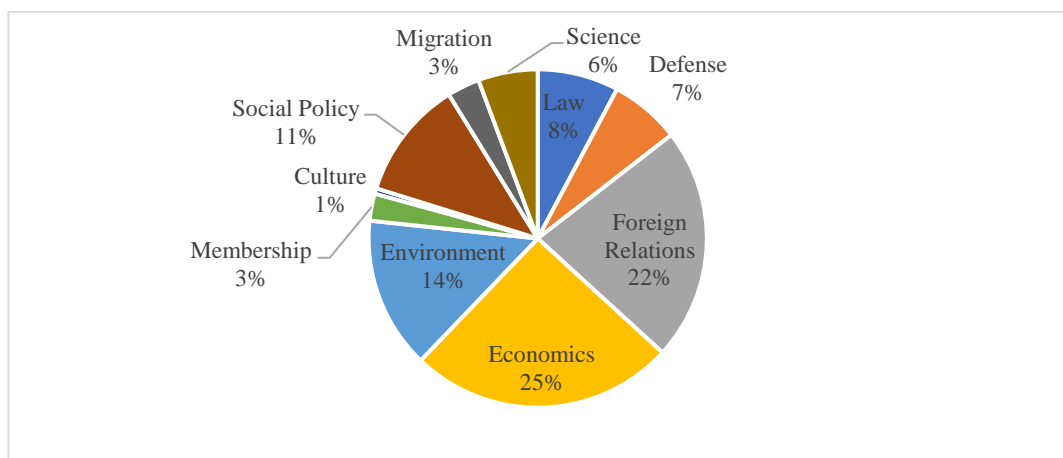


Figure 4.3: Main Topics of the Council Conclusions in 2016



#### 4.1.1.3. Council conclusions by title in 2017

There were 163 Council Conclusions for 2017. 163 of those documents were available. When the titles of the Conclusions in 2017 were examined, the distribution of topics is as in Figure 4.4: Law 11%, Defense 19%, Foreign Relations 36%, Economics 41%, Environment 20%, Membership 7%, Culture 3%, Social Policy 21%, Migration 4%, Science 6%.

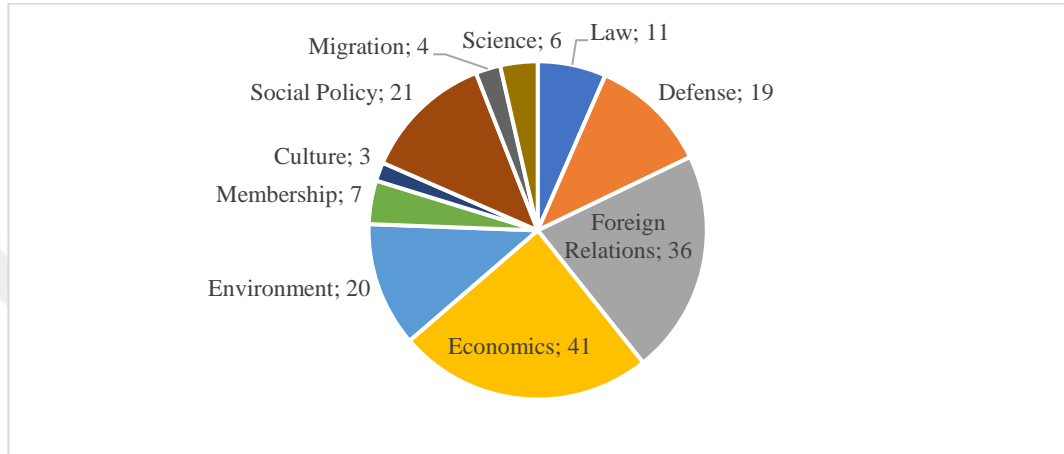


Figure 4.4: Main Topics of the Council Conclusions in 2017

#### 4.1.1.4. Council conclusions by title in 2018

There were 140 Council Conclusions for 2018. 134 of those documents were available. When the titles of the Conclusions in 2018 were examined, the distribution of topics is as in Figure 4.5: Law 9%, Defense 16%, Foreign Relations 23%, Economics 18%, Environment 14%, Membership 5%, Culture 3%, Social Policy 6%, Migration 1%, Science 5%.

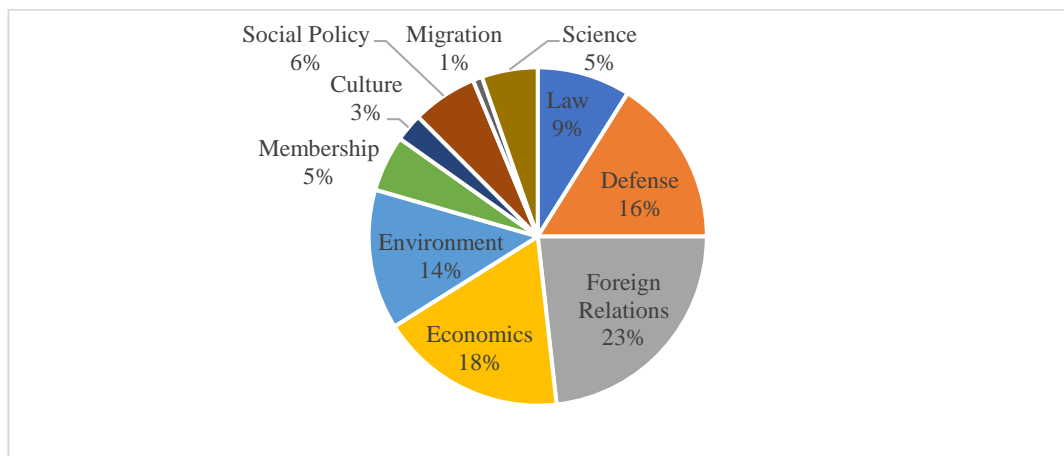


Figure 4.5: Main Topics of the Council Conclusions in 2018

#### 4.1.1.5. Council conclusions by title in 2019

There were 161 Council Conclusions for 2019. 161 of those documents were available. When the titles of the Conclusions in 2019 were examined, the distribution of topics is as in Figure 4.6: Law 12%, Defense 9%, Foreign Relations 18%, Economics 18%, Environment 21%, Membership 2%, Culture 2%, Social Policy 14%, Migration 1%, Science 3%.

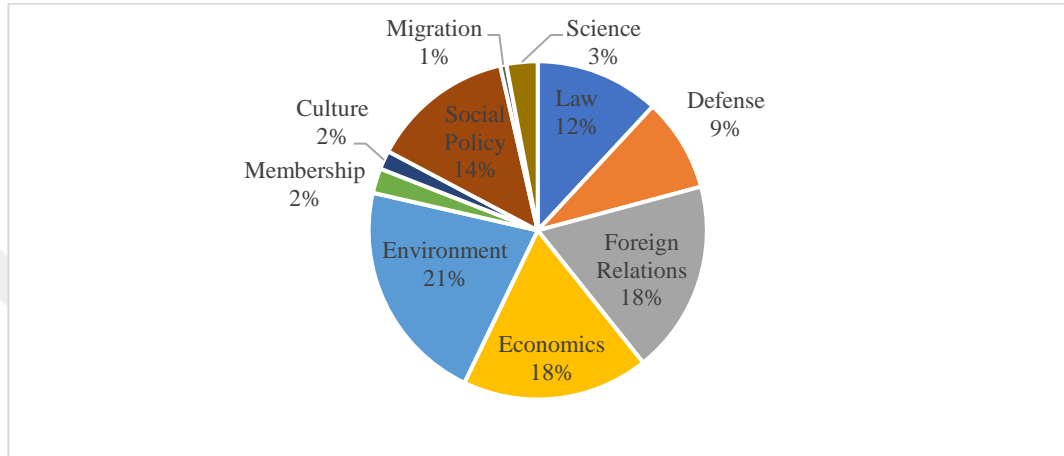


Figure 4.6: Main Topics of the Council Conclusions in 2019

#### 4.1.1.6. Council conclusions by title in 2020

There were 132 Council Conclusions for 2020. 132 of those documents were available. When the titles of the Conclusions in 2020 were examined, the distribution of topics is as in Figure 4.7: Law 7%, Defense 5%, Foreign Relations 11%, Economics 29%, Environment 26%, Membership 1%, Culture 2%, Social Policy 14%, Migration 1%, Science 4%.

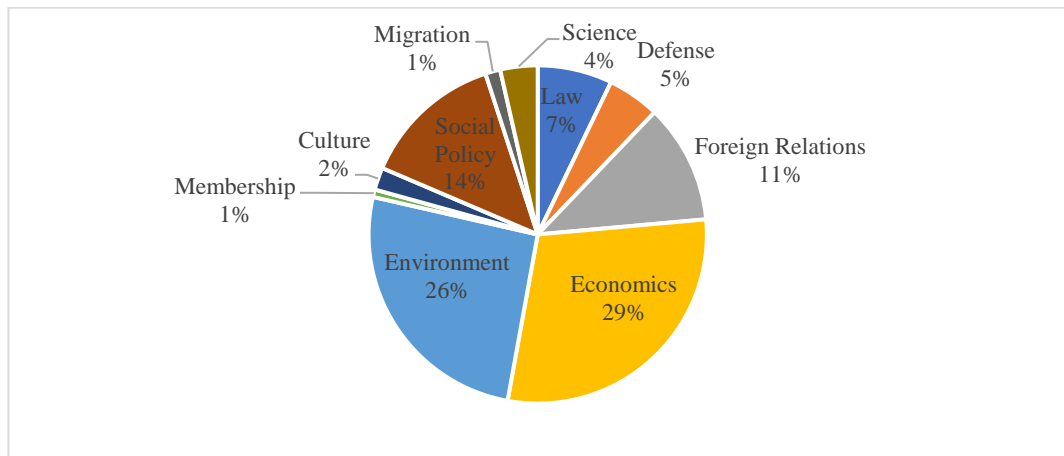


Figure 4.7: Main Topics of the Council Conclusions in 2020

#### 4.1.1.7. Council conclusions by title between 2015-2020

There were 892 Council Conclusions between 2015-2020. 885 of those documents were available. When the titles of the Conclusions between 2015-2020 were examined, the distribution of topics is as in Figure 4.8: Law 8%, Defense 9%, Foreign Relations 21%, Economics 22%, Environment 16%, Membership 3%, Culture 2%, Social Policy 12%, Migration 2%, Science 5%.

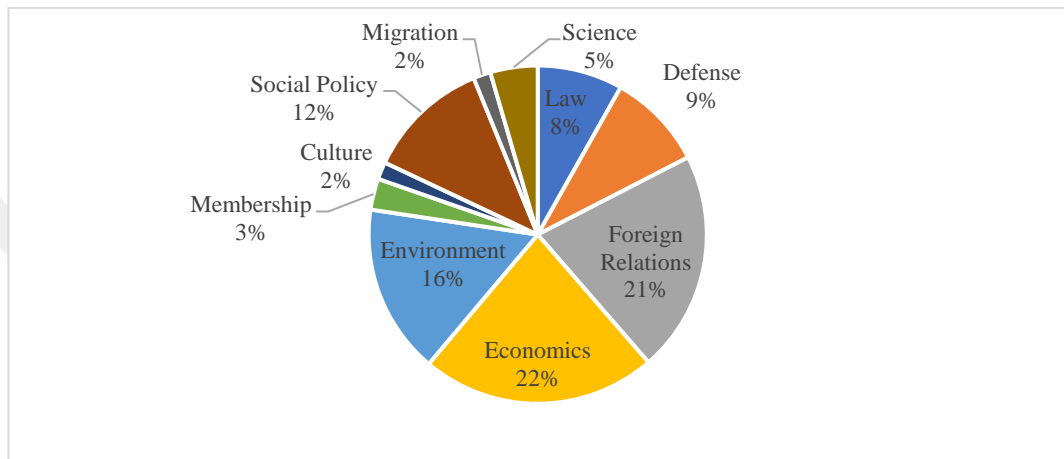


Figure 4.8: Main Topics of the EC Conclusions

Also, the distribution of these topics over the years can be seen in Figure 4.9:

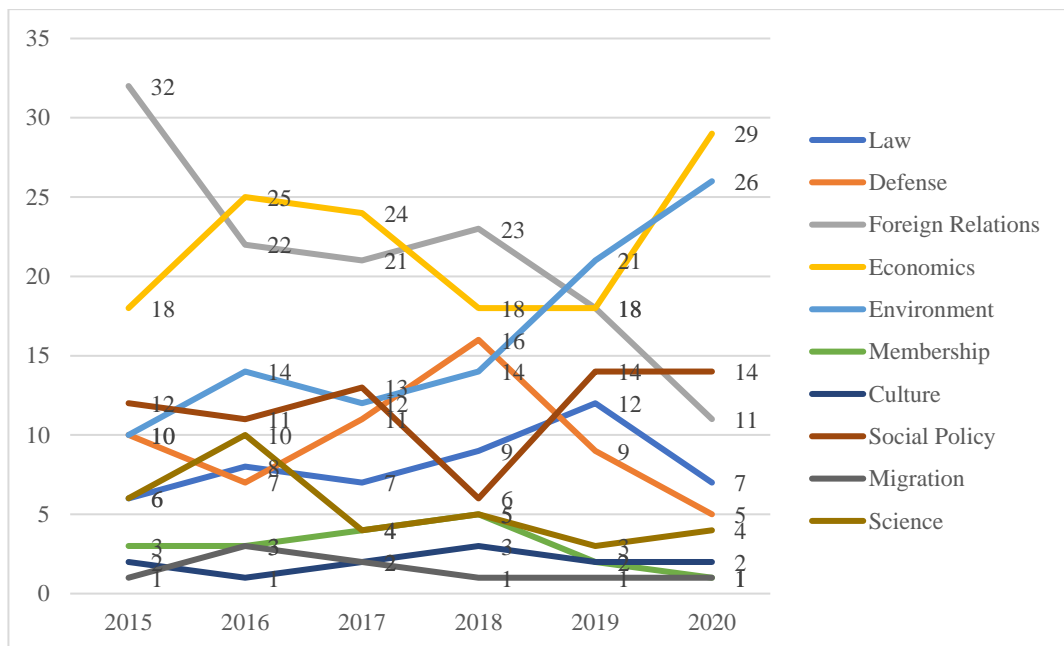


Figure 4.9: Change in the Main Topics of the Council Conclusions over the Years (Percentage Change)

#### 4.1.2. Content analysis of The Council conclusions in terms of environment

Different from the overview of the Council Conclusions, not only the titles but also the texts of the Conclusions are analyzed in detail. In this context, two different categorizations are used in order to make the analysis of the Council Conclusions: (1) Analysis based on environment-related Sustainable Development Goals, (2) analysis based on the European Parliament's categorization of the EU environmental policy.

The first analysis is made using the seven main titles of the European Parliaments for the description of general principles and basic framework of the environment policy: Combating climate change; Biodiversity, land use and forestry; Water protection and management; Air and noise pollution; Resource efficiency and the circular economy; Sustainable consumption and production; Chemicals and pesticides (European Parliament 2021).

As shown in earlier chapters, there are four Sustainable Development Goals that are directly linked to the environment: SDG-6 (Clean Water and Sanitation - Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all), SDG-13 (Climate Action - Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts), SDG-14 (Life Below Water - Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development) and SDG-15 (Life on Land - Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss) (Stockholm Resilience Centre 2016).

As can be seen in Figure 4.10, excluding corrections (CORs) and revisions (REVs), 12 Conclusions in 2015, 23 Conclusions in 2016, 20 Conclusions in 2017, 15 Conclusions in 2018, 36 Conclusions in 2019 and 42 Conclusions in 2020 were related to the environmental issues.

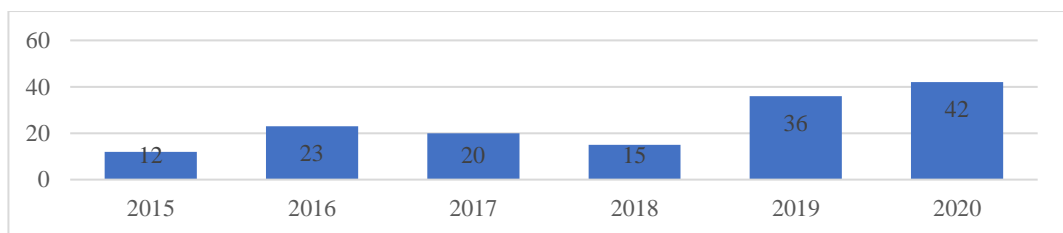


Figure 4.10: Total Number of Environment-Related Conclusions (Excluding CORs and REVs)

#### 4.1.2.1 Content analysis of the Council conclusions in terms of environment in 2015

There were 112 Council Conclusions for 2015. 111 of those documents were available. 12 of those documents, equal to 10%, addressed the environmental issues. Number of those Conclusions were as follows: 10995, 13175, 13202, 13420, 13875, 14193, 14261, 14265, 14266, 14459, 15071, 15389.

As can be seen in Figure 4.11, when the texts of the Conclusions in 2015 were examined, the distribution of topics in terms of the environment by Sustainable Development Goals was as follows: SDG-6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) 17%, SDG-13 (Climate Action) 67%, SDG-14 (Life below Water) 8%, SDG-15 (Life on Land) 8%.

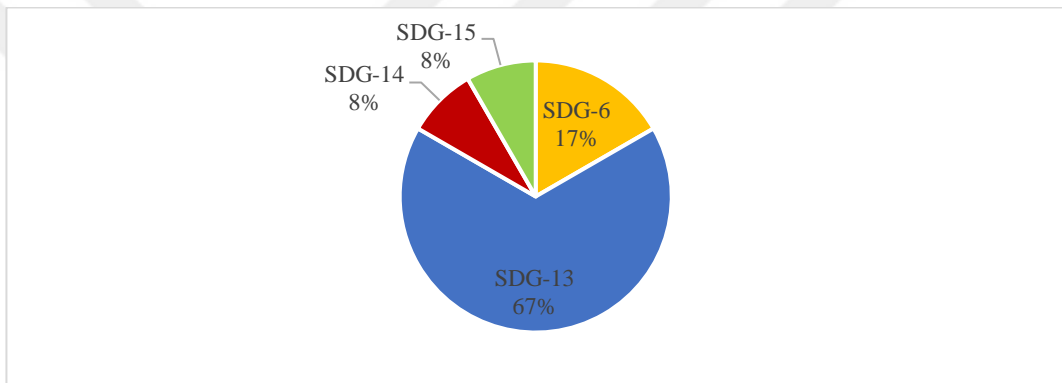


Figure 4.11: Distribution of topics in terms of the environment by SDGs in 2015

In addition, as can be seen in Figure 4.12, the prevalence of such items was as follows: SDG-6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) 17%, SDG-13 (Climate Action) 67%, SDG-14 (Life below Water) 8%, SDG-15 (Life on Land) 8%.

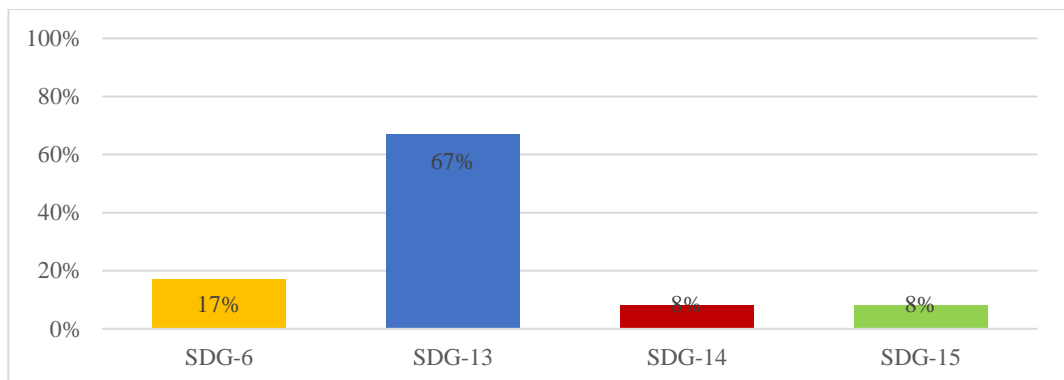


Figure 4.12: Prevalence of topics in terms of the environment by SDGs in 2015

Also, as can be seen in Figure 4.13, when the texts of the Conclusions in 2015 were examined, the distribution of topics in terms of the environment by the categorization of the European Parliament was as follows: Combating climate change 28%; Biodiversity, land use and forestry 3%; Water protection and management 7%; Air and noise pollution 17%; Resource efficiency and the circular economy 21%; Sustainable consumption and production 17%; Chemicals and pesticides 7%.

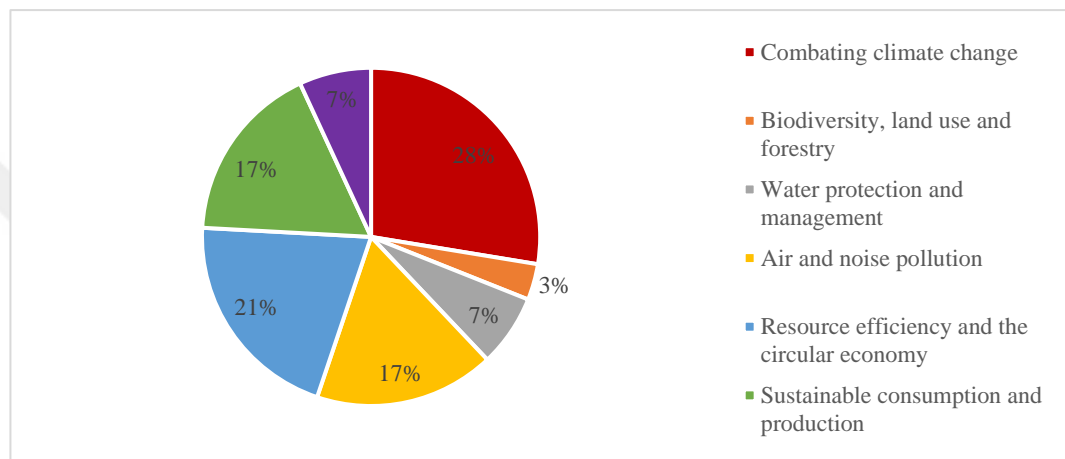


Figure 4.13: Distribution of Topics in Terms of Environment by the EP Categories in 2015

In addition, as can be seen in Figure 4.14, the prevalence of such items was as follows: Combating climate change 67%; Biodiversity, land use and forestry 8%; Water protection and management 17%; Air and noise pollution 42%; Resource efficiency and the circular economy 50%; Sustainable consumption and production 42%; Chemicals and pesticides 17%.

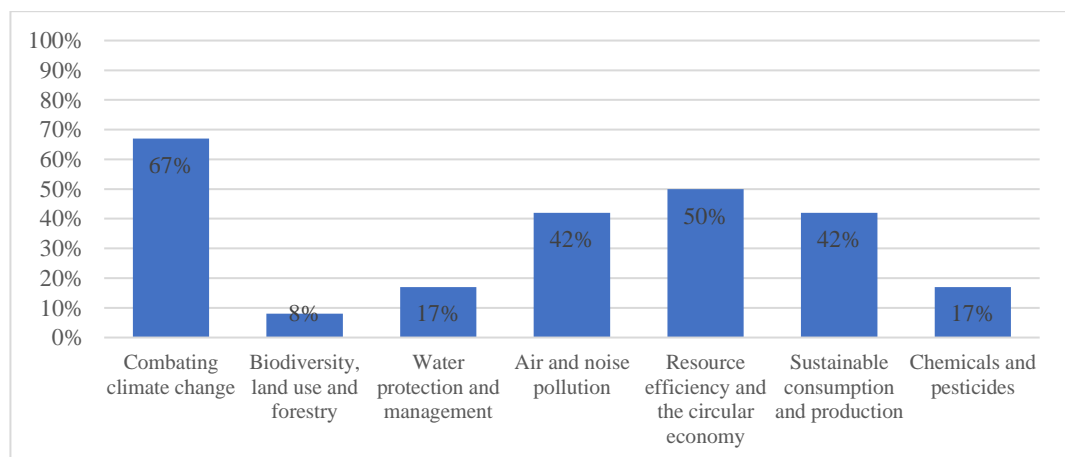


Figure 4.14: Prevalence of Topics in Terms of Environment by the EP Categories in 2015

#### 4.1.2.2 Content analysis of the Council conclusions in terms of environment in 2016

There were 184 of Council Conclusions for 2016. 184 of those documents were available. 28 of those documents, equal to 14%, addressed to the environmental issues. Number of those Conclusions were as follows: 10392, 10400, 10512, 10518, 10721, 10730, 11346, 11369, 12807, 13157, 13342, 13398, 14167, 14381, 14542, 14839, 15300, 15314, 15412, 15673, 6061, 7221, 8165, 8822, 8824, 8832, 8833.

As can be seen in Figure 4.15, when the texts of the Conclusions in 2016 were examined, the distribution of topics in terms of the environment by Sustainable Development Goals was as follows: SDG-6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) 21%, SDG-13 (Climate Action) 31%, SDG-14 (Life below Water) 21%, SDG-15 (Life on Land) 27%.

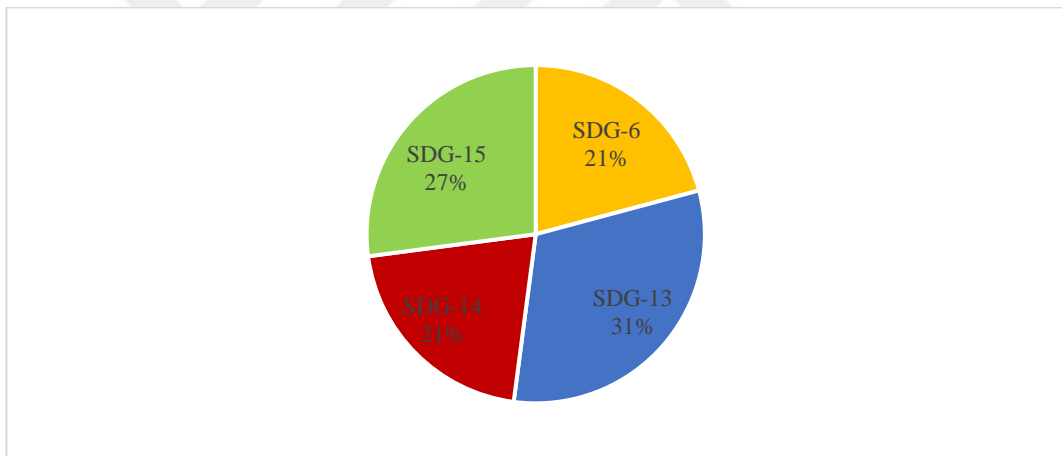


Figure4.15: Distribution of topics in terms of the environment by SDGs in 2016

In addition, as can be seen in Figure 4.16, the prevalence of such items was as follows: SDG-6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) 43%, SDG-13 (Climate Action) 65%, SDG-14 (Life below Water) 43%, SDG-15 (Life on Land) 56%.

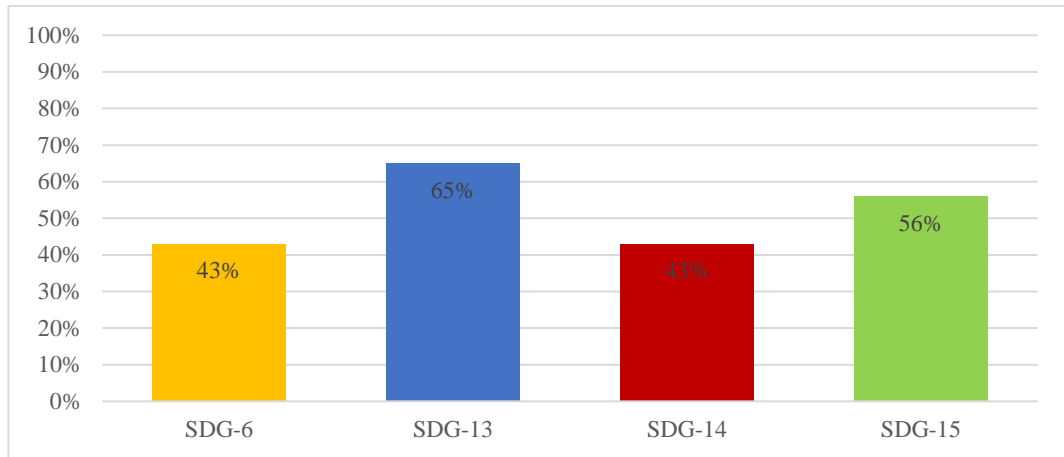


Figure 4.16: Prevalence of topics in terms of the environment by SDGs in 2016

Also, as can be seen in Figure 4.17, when the texts of the Conclusions in 2016 were examined, the distribution of topics in terms of the environment by the categorization of the European Parliament was as follows: Combating climate change 20%; Biodiversity, land use and forestry 17%; Water protection and management 14%; Air and noise pollution 10%; Resource efficiency and the circular economy 14%; Sustainable consumption and production 16%; Chemicals and pesticides 9%.

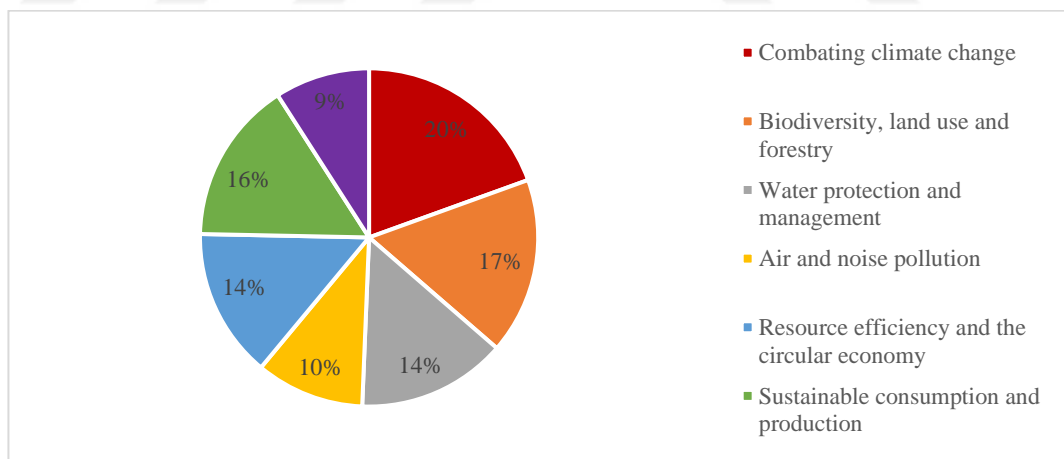


Figure 4.17: Distribution of Topics in Terms of Environment by the EP Categories in 2016

In addition, as can be seen in Figure 4.18, the prevalence of such items was as follows: Combating climate change 65%; Biodiversity, land use and forestry 57%; Water protection and management 48%; Air and noise pollution 35%; Resource efficiency and the circular economy 48%; Sustainable consumption and production 52%; Chemicals and pesticides 30%.



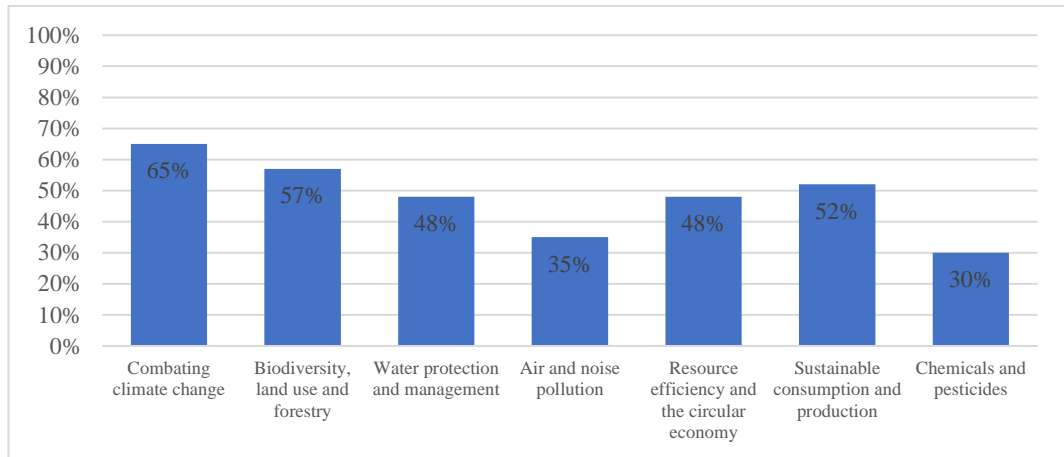


Figure 4.18: Prevalence of Topics in Terms of Environment by the EP Categories in 2016

#### 4.1.2.3 Content analysis of the Council conclusions in terms of environment in 2017

There were 163 of Council Conclusions for 2017. 163 of those documents were available. 20 of those documents, equal to 12%, addressed to the environmental issues. Number of those Conclusions were as follows: 10238, 10370, 10456, 10500, 12950, 13070, 13101, 13198, 14148, 15131, 15425, 15573, 15811, 6981, 7495, 8361, 9376, 9645, 9760, 9976.

As can be seen in Figure 4.19, when the texts of the Conclusions in 2017 were examined, the distribution of topics in terms of the environment by Sustainable Development Goals was as follows: SDG-6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) 12%, SDG-13 (Climate Action) 50%, SDG-14 (Life below Water) 19%, SDG-15 (Life on Land) 19%.

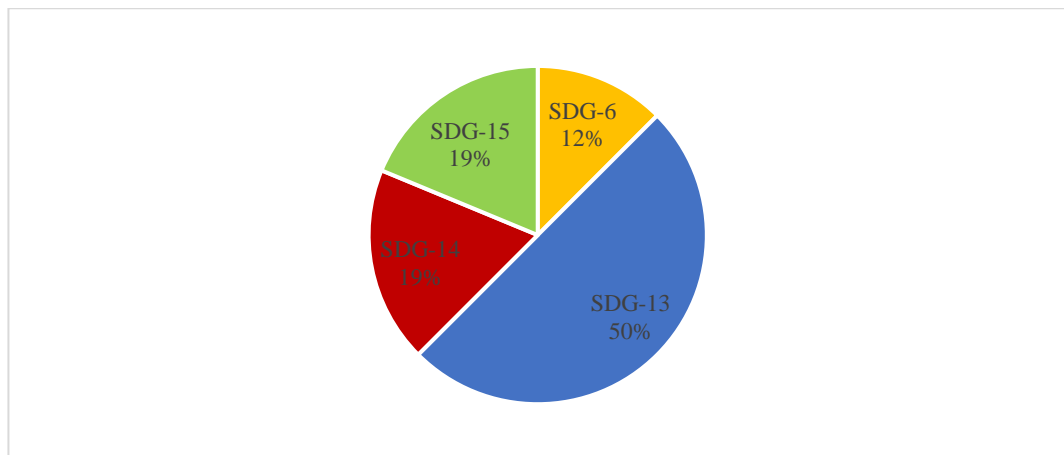


Figure 4.19: Distribution of topics in terms of the environment by SDGs in 2017

In addition, as can be seen in Figure 4.20, the prevalence of such items was as follows: SDG-6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) 20%, SDG-13 (Climate Action) 80%, SDG-14 (Life below Water) 30%, SDG-15 (Life on Land) 30%.

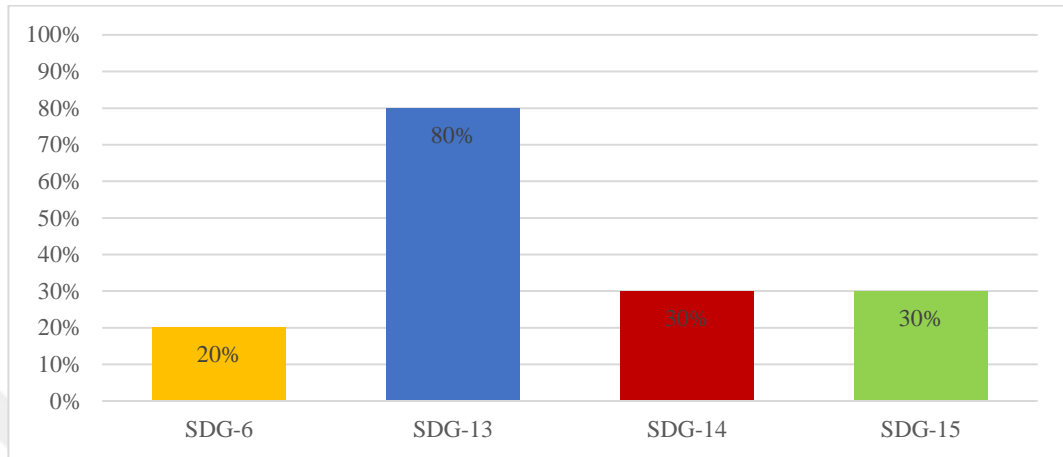


Figure 4.20: Prevalence of topics in terms of the environment by SDGs in 2017

Also, as can be seen in Figure 4.21, when the texts of the Conclusions in 2017 were examined, the distribution of topics in terms of the environment by the categorization of the European Parliament was as follows: Combating climate change 30%; Biodiversity, land use and forestry 11%; Water protection and management 11%; Air and noise pollution 15%; Resource efficiency and the circular economy 11%; Sustainable consumption and production 17%; Chemicals and pesticides 5%.

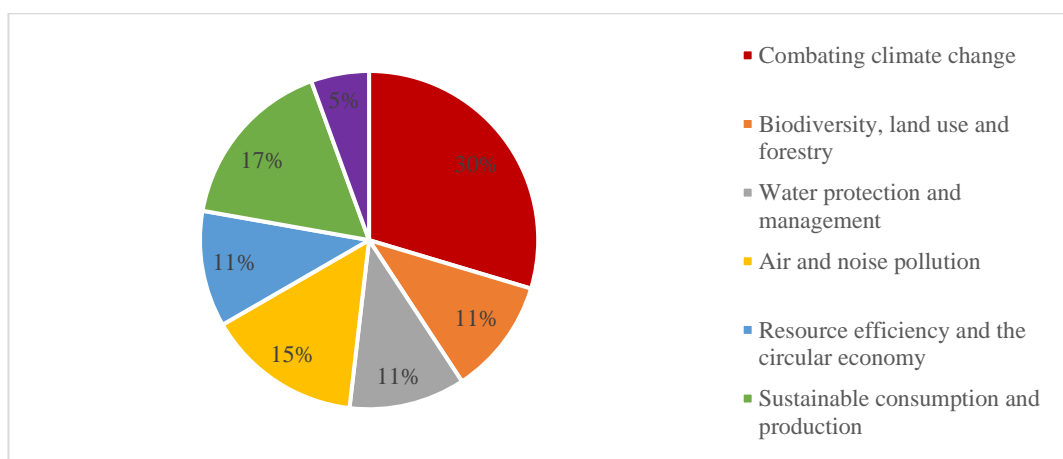


Figure 4.21: Distribution of Topics in Terms of Environment by the EP Categories in 2017

In addition, as can be seen in Figure 4.22, the prevalence of such items was as follows: Combating climate change 80%; Biodiversity, land use and forestry 30%; Water protection and management 30%; Air and noise pollution 40%; Resource efficiency and the circular economy 30%; Sustainable consumption and production 45%; Chemicals and pesticides 15%.

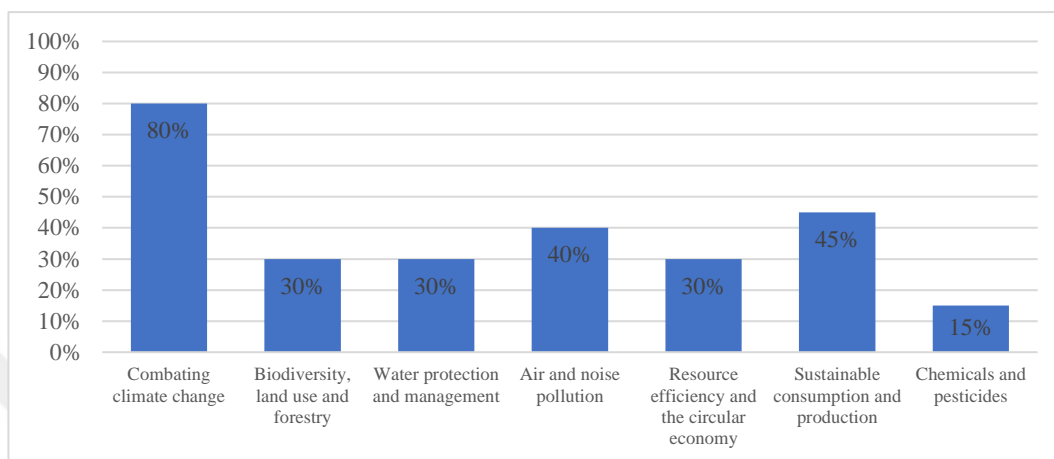


Figure 4.22: Prevalence of Topics in Terms of Environment by the EP Categories in 2017

#### 4.1.2.4 Content analysis of The Council conclusions in terms of environment in 2018

There were 140 Council Conclusions for 2018. 134 of those documents were available. 15 of those documents, equal to 14%, addressed the environmental issues. Number of those Conclusions were as follows: 10227, 10447, 10505, 12901, 12948, 13864, 13991, 15766, 15782, 6125, 7939, 8756, 8954, 8959, 8960.

As can be seen in Figure 4.23, when the texts of the Conclusions in 2016 were examined, the distribution of topics in terms of the environment by Sustainable Development Goals was as follows: SDG-6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) 12%, SDG-13 (Climate Action) 46%, SDG-14 (Life below Water) 15%, SDG-15 (Life on Land) 27%.

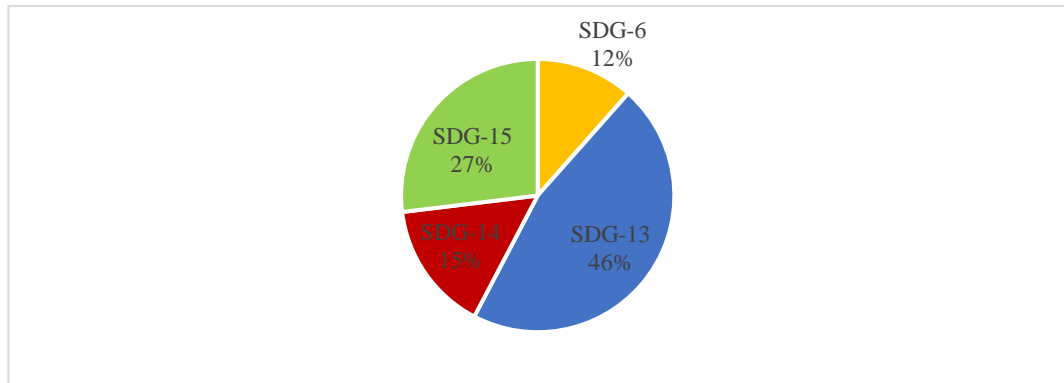


Figure 4.23: Distribution of topics in terms of the environment by SDGs in 2018

In addition, as can be seen in Figure 4.24, the prevalence of such items was as follows: SDG-6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) 20%, SDG-13 (Climate Action) 80%, SDG-14 (Life below Water) 27%, SDG-15 (Life on Land) 47%.

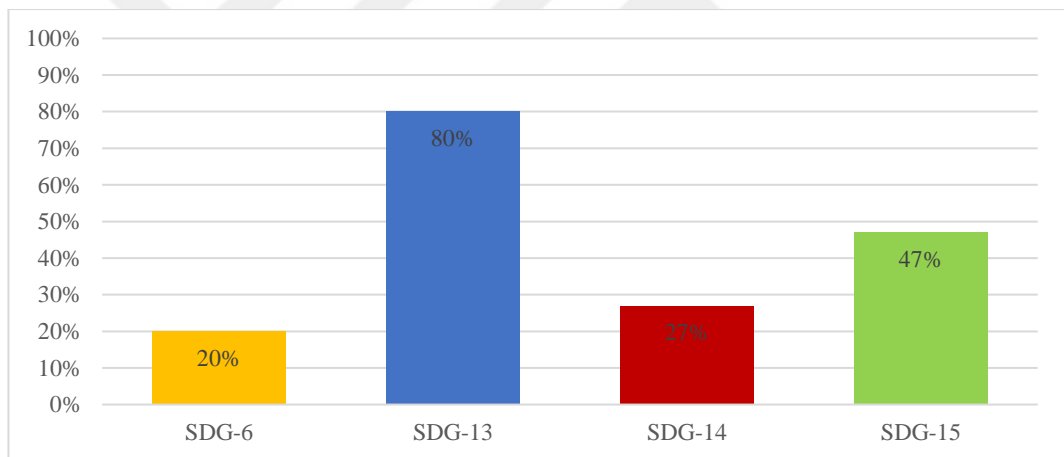


Figure 4.24: Prevalence of topics in terms of the environment by SDGs in 2018

Also, as can be seen in Figure 4.25, when the texts of the Conclusions in 2018 were examined, the distribution of topics in terms of the environment by the categorization of the European Parliament was as follows: Combating climate change 26%; Biodiversity, land use and forestry 15%; Water protection and management 13%; Air and noise pollution 13%; Resource efficiency and the circular economy 13%; Sustainable consumption and production 13%; Chemicals and pesticides 7%.

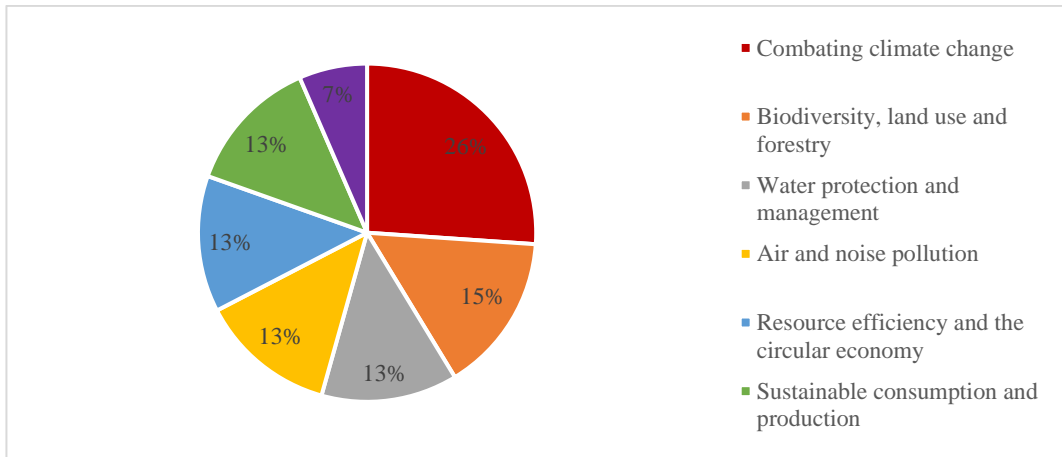


Figure 4.25: Distribution of Topics in Terms of Environment by the EP Categories in 2018

In addition, as can be seen in Figure 4.26, the prevalence of such items was as follows: Combating climate change 80%; Biodiversity, land use and forestry 47%; Water protection and management 40%; Air and noise pollution 40%; Resource efficiency and the circular economy 40%; Sustainable consumption and production 40%; Chemicals and pesticides 20%.

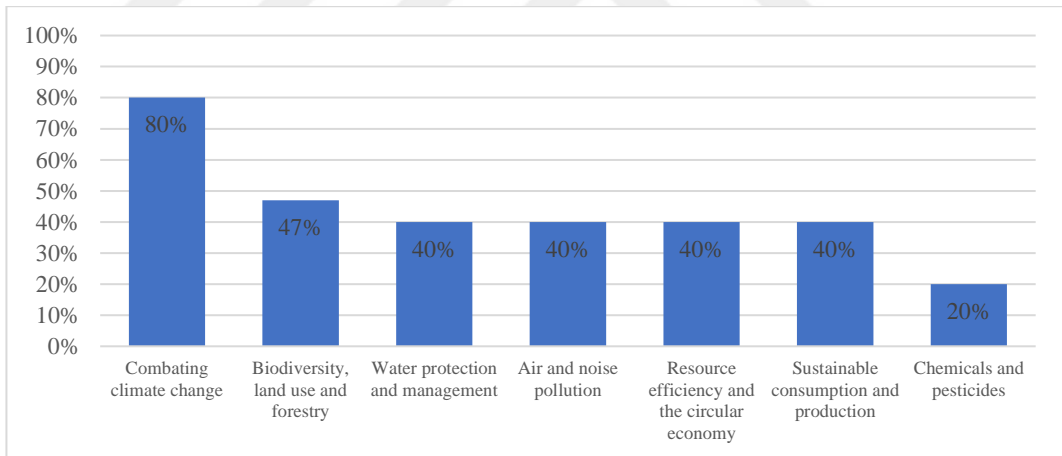


Figure 4.26: Prevalence of Topics in Terms of Environment by the EP Categories in 2018

#### 4.1.2.5 Content analysis of The Council conclusions in terms of environment in 2019

There were 161 of Council Conclusions for 2019. 161 of those documents were available. 36 of those documents, equal to 21%, addressed to the environmental issues. Number of those Conclusions were as follows: 10011, 10146, 10592, 10713, 10997, 11073, 12791, 12795, 12975, 13521, 13871, 14249, 14434, 14594, 14603, 14653, 14835, 14861, 15151, 15231, 15262, 15272, 5601, 5768, 6153, 7115, 7322, 8286, 8555, 8609, 9131, 9201, 9300 9706, 9707, 9713.

As can be seen in Figure 4.27, when the texts of the Conclusions in 2019 were examined, the distribution of topics in terms of the environment by Sustainable Development Goals was as follows: SDG-6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) 13%, SDG-13 (Climate Action) 47%, SDG-14 (Life below Water) 16%, SDG-15 (Life on Land) 24%.

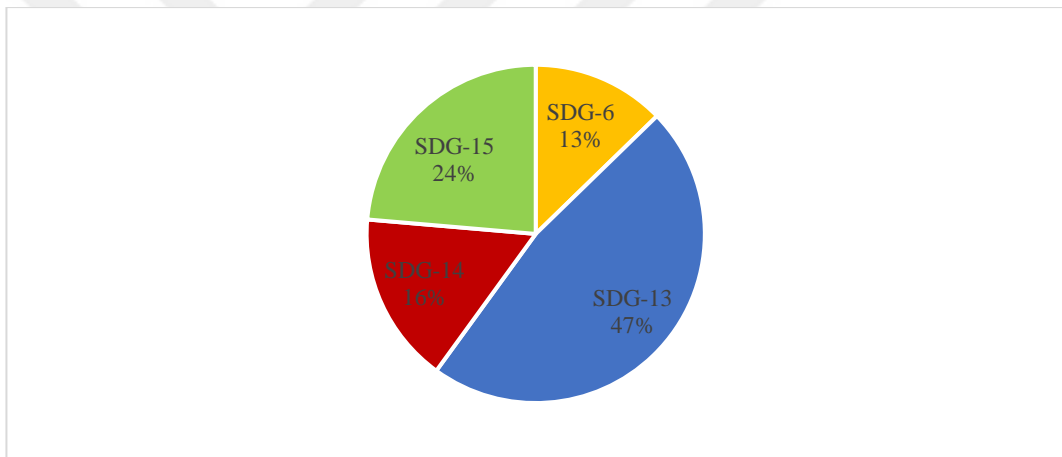


Figure 4.27: Distribution of topics in terms of the environment by SDGs in 2019

In addition, as can be seen in Figure 4.28, the prevalence of such items was as follows: SDG-6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) 19%, SDG-13 (Climate Action) 72%, SDG-14 (Life below Water) 25%, SDG-15 (Life on Land) 36%.

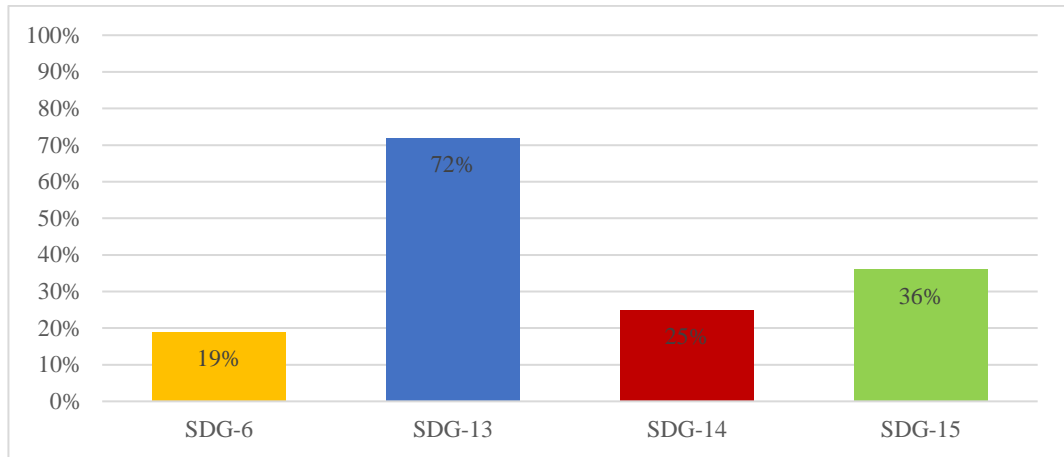


Figure 4.28: Prevalence of topics in terms of the environment by SDGs in 2019

Also, as can be seen in Figure 4.29, when the texts of the Conclusions in 2019 were examined, the distribution of topics in terms of the environment by the categorization of the European Parliament was as follows: Combating climate change 25%; Biodiversity, land use and forestry 12%; Water protection and management 10%; Air and noise pollution 13%; Resource efficiency and the circular economy 15%; Sustainable consumption and production 13%; Chemicals and pesticides 12%.

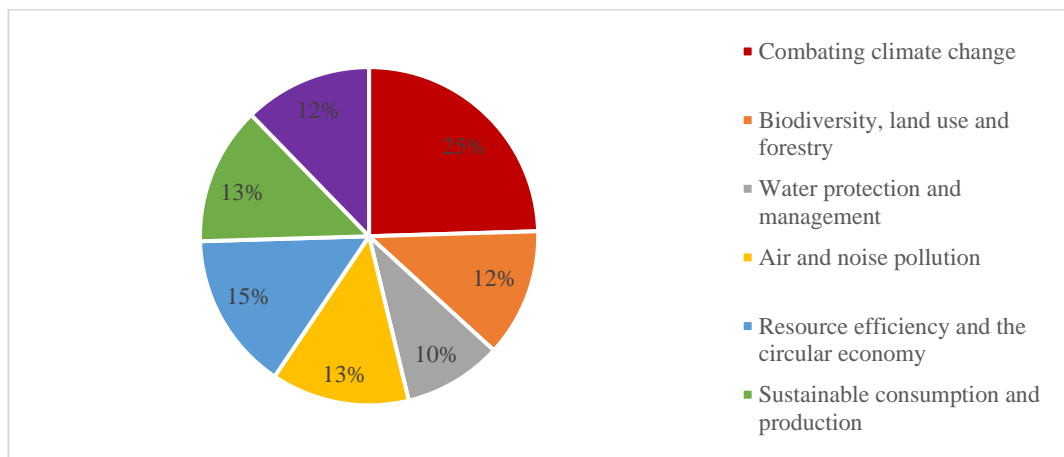


Figure 4.29: Distribution of Topics in Terms of Environment by the EP Categories in 2019

In addition, as can be seen in Figure 4.30, the prevalence of such items was as follows: Combating climate change 72%; Biodiversity, land use and forestry 36%; Water protection and management 28%; Air and noise pollution 39%; Resource efficiency and the circular economy 44%; Sustainable consumption and production 39%; Chemicals and pesticides 36%.

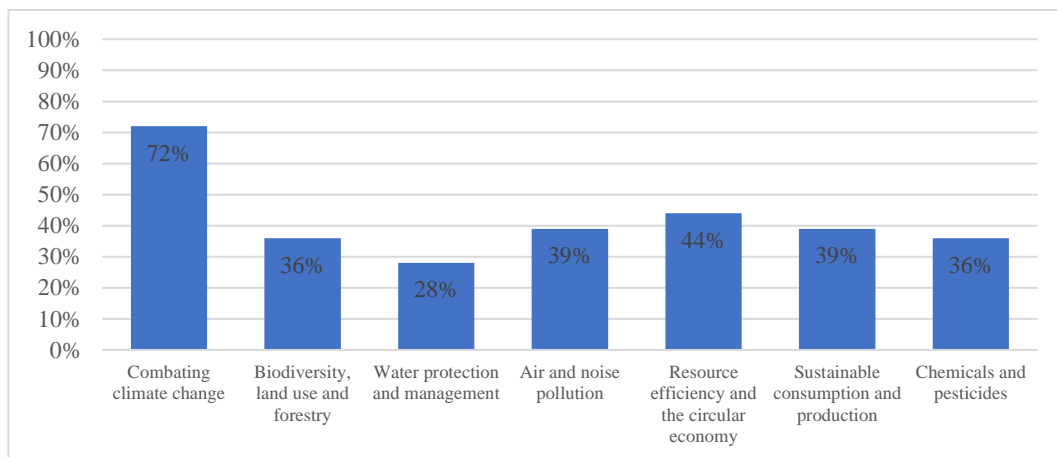


Figure 4.30: Prevalence of Topics in Terms of Environment by the EP Categories in 2019

#### 4.1.2.6 Content analysis of the Council conclusions in terms of environment in 2020

There were 132 of Council Conclusions for 2020. 132 of those documents were available. 36 of those documents, equal to 26%, addressed to the environmental issues. Number of those Conclusions were as follows: 12099, 12210, 12481, 12695, 12756, 12851, 13004, 13352, 13453, 13454, 13646, 13893, 13976, 14167, 14168, 14169, 14198, 5033, 5982, 6132, 6425, 6650, 7271, 8295, 8512, 8566, 8624, 8626, 8628, 8648, 8668, 8711, 9133, 9183, 9258, 9401.

As can be seen in Figure 4.31, when the texts of the Conclusions in 2020 were examined, the distribution of topics in terms of the environment by Sustainable Development Goals was as follows: SDG-6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) 7%, SDG-13 (Climate Action) 52%, SDG-14 (Life below Water) 13%, SDG-15 (Life on Land) 28%.

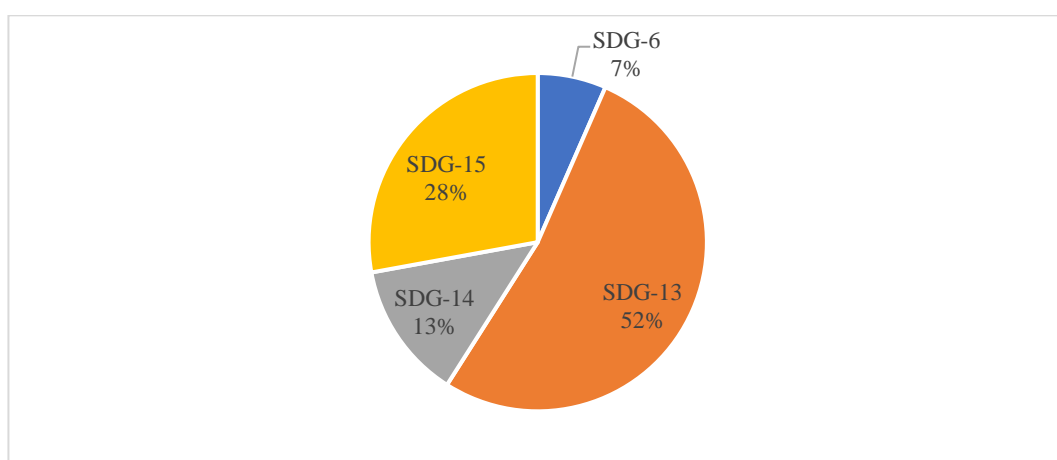


Figure 4.31: Distribution of topics in terms of the environment by SDGs in 2020



In addition, as can be seen in Figure 4.32, the prevalence of such items was as follows: SDG-6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) 10%, SDG-13 (Climate Action) 76%, SDG-14 (Life below Water) 19%, SDG-15 (Life on Land) 40%.

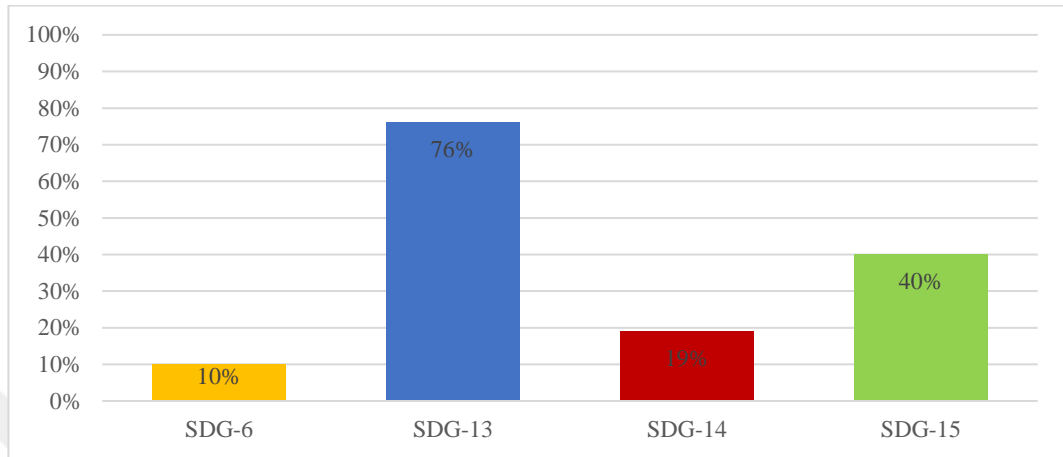


Figure 4.32: Prevalence of topics in terms of the environment by SDGs in 2020

Also, as can be seen in Figure 4.33, when the texts of the Conclusions in 2020 were examined, the distribution of topics in terms of the environment by the categorization of the European Parliament was as follows: Combating climate change 29%; Biodiversity, land use and forestry 19%; Water protection and management 5%; Air and noise pollution 14%; Resource efficiency and the circular economy 23%; Sustainable consumption and production 6%; Chemicals and pesticides 4%.

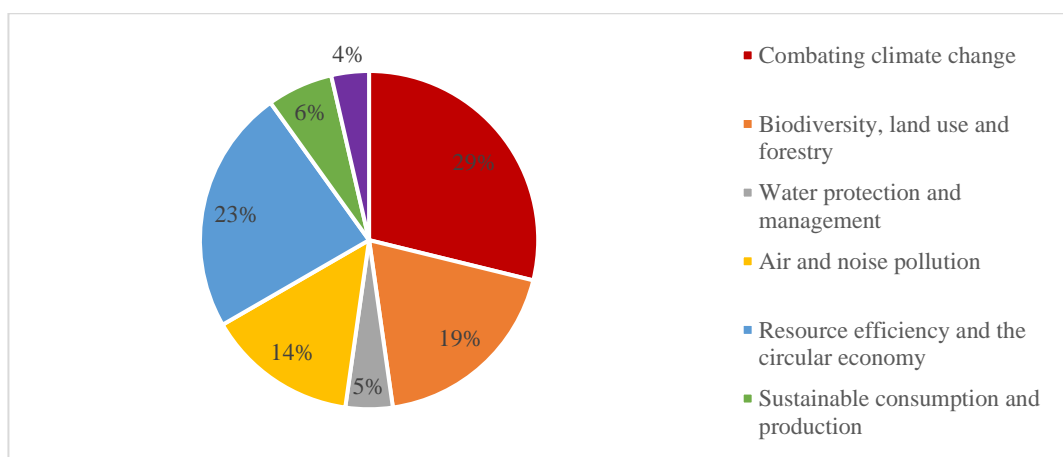


Figure 4.33: Distribution of Topics in Terms of Environment by the EP Categories in 2020

In addition, as can be seen in Figure 4.34, the prevalence of such items was as follows: Combating climate change 76%; Biodiversity, land use and forestry 50%; Water protection and management 12%; Air and noise pollution 38%; Resource efficiency and the circular economy 62%; Sustainable consumption and production 17%; Chemicals and pesticides 10%.

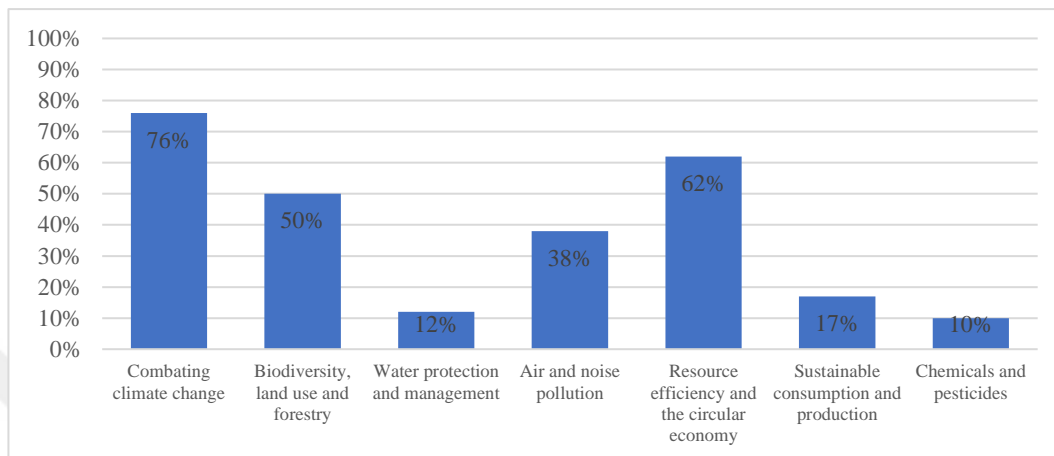


Figure 4.34: Prevalence of Topics in Terms of Environment by the EP Categories in 2020

#### 4.1.2.7 Content analysis of The Council conclusions in terms of environment in 2015-2020

There were 892 Council Conclusions between 2015-2020. 885 of those documents were available. 147 of those documents, equal to 17%, addressed the environmental issues. A number of those Conclusions were as follows:

As can be seen in Figure 4.35, when the texts of the Conclusions between 2015-2020 were examined, the distribution of topics in terms of the environment by Sustainable Development Goals was as follows: SDG-6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) 9%, SDG-13 (Climate Action) 50%, SDG-14 (Life below Water) 15%, SDG-15 (Life on Land) 26%.

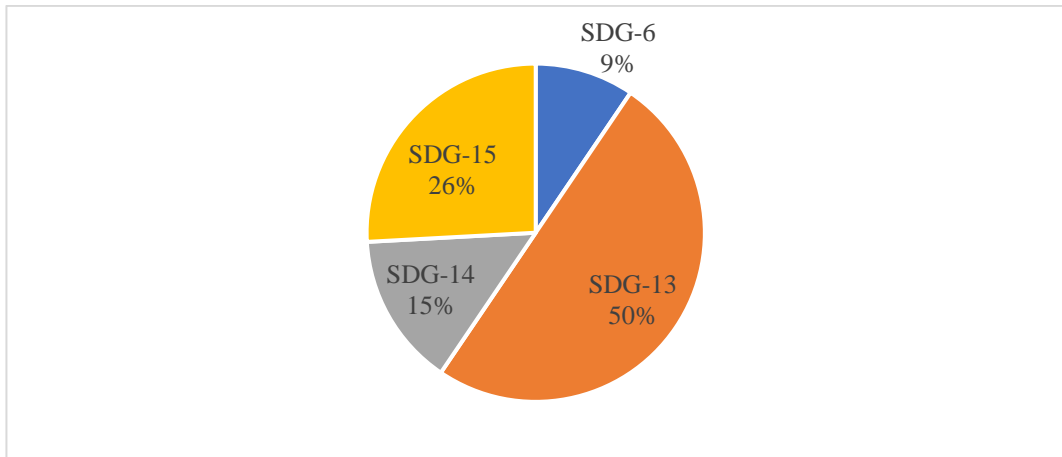


Figure 4.35: Distribution of topics in terms of the environment by SDGs between 2015-2020

In addition, as can be seen in Figure 4.36, the prevalence of such items was as follows: SDG-6 (Clean Water and Sanitation) 7%, SDG-13 (Climate Action) 39%, SDG-14 (Life below Water) 11%, SDG-15 (Life on Land) 20%.

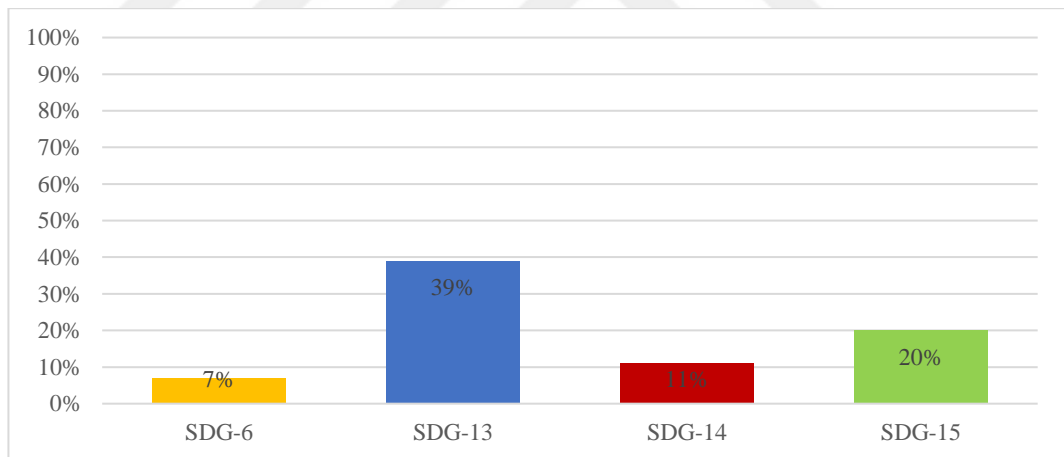


Figure 4.36: Prevalence of topics in terms of the environment by SDGs between 2015-2020

Also, as can be seen in Figure 4.37, when the texts of the Conclusions between 2015-2020 were examined, the distribution of topics in terms of the environment by the categorization of the European Parliament was as follows: Combating climate change 26%; Biodiversity, land use and forestry 14%; Water protection and management 9%; Air and noise pollution 13%; Resource efficiency and the circular economy 17%; Sustainable consumption and production 13%; Chemicals and pesticides 8%.

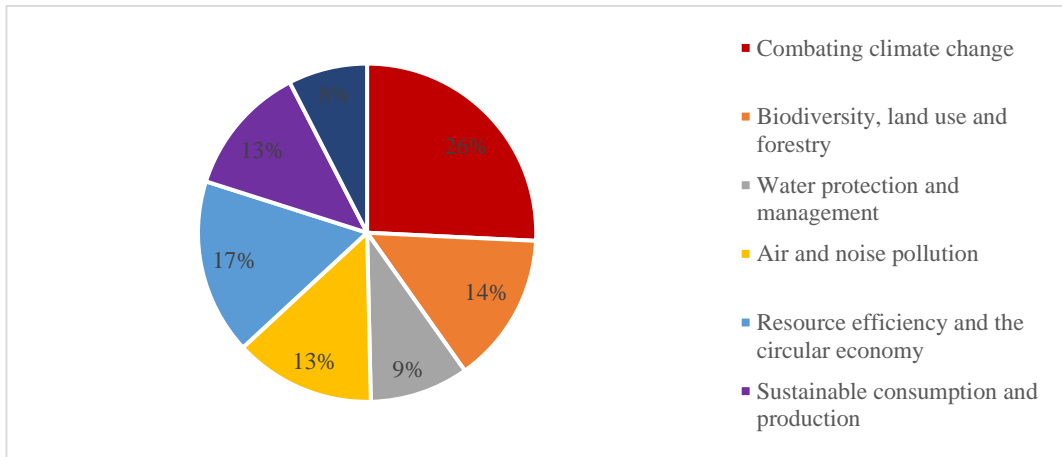


Figure 4.37: Distribution of Topics in Terms of Environment by the EP Categories between 2015-2020

In addition, as can be seen in Figure 4.38, the prevalence of such items was as follows: Combating climate change 74%; Biodiversity, land use and forestry 41%; Water protection and management 27%; Air and noise pollution 38%; Resource efficiency and the circular economy 48%; Sustainable consumption and production 36%; Chemicals and pesticides 22%.

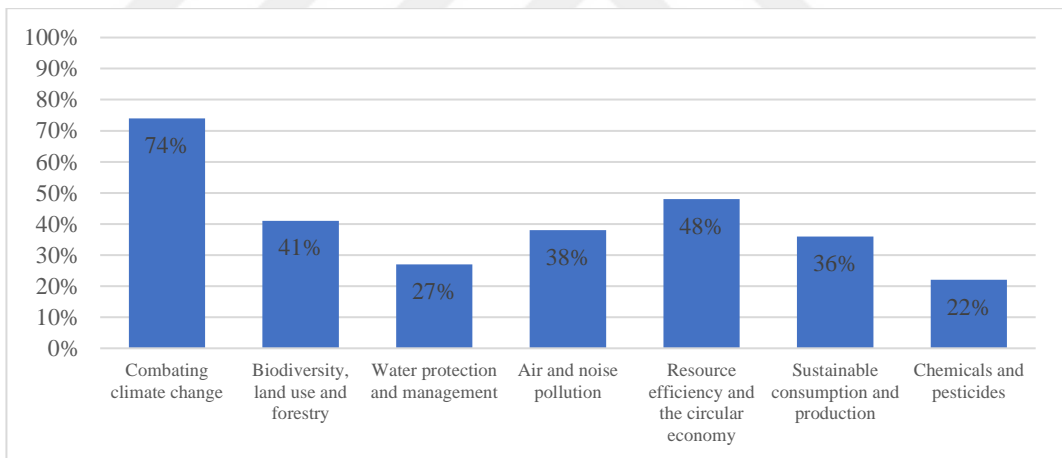


Figure 4.38: Prevalence of Topics in Terms of Environment by the EP Categories between 2015-2020

In addition to the above-mentioned category titles, significant stresses in the Conclusions are as follows: Biotechnology, Carbon Capture and Storage, Carbon Capture and Use, Carbon Pricing, Climate Diplomacy, Climate Finance, Climate Neutrality, Climate Resilient Development, Climate Risk Assessment, Climate Risk Management, Climate Security, Climate Smart, Climate-Resilient Investment, Decarbonization, Disaster Risk Assessment, Disaster Risk Management, Disaster Risk Resilience, End-of-Waste, Environmental Crime, Environmental Footprint, Environmental Offense, Existential Threat, Green Economy, Green Finance, Green Job, Greenhouse Gas, Greenhouse Gas Emission, Leave No One Behind, Low-Carbon Economy, Millennium Development Goals, Nature-Friendly Continent, One Health, Planetary Boundaries, Polluter Pays, Ratification, Rectification at Source, Resilience, Sustainable Development, Sustainable Development Goals.

Also, main institutions referred in the Conclusions are as follows: 2030 Agenda (2015), Aarhus Convention (1998), Addis Ababa Action Agenda (2015), Aichi Biodiversity Targets - Convention on Biological Diversity (1992), Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy (2020), Ballast Water Management Convention (2004), Barcelona Convention (1976), Coalition of Finance Ministers for Climate Action (2019), Common Agricultural Policy (2006), Conference of the Parties (1995), Carbon Offsetting and Reduction Scheme for International Aviation (2016), Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context (1991), Environment Action Plan (1972), European Marine Observation and Data Network (2009), European Environmental Agency (1993), European Year for Development (2015), Global Forest Financing Facilitation Network (2015), Global Climate Action Agenda (2016), Global Climate Action Champions (2015), Global Climate Action Summit (1979), Global Climate Change Alliance (2007), Green Agenda, Green Climate Fund (2010), Green Deal (2012), High-Level Political Forum (2012), International Platform for Sustainable Finance (2019), Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (1988), Kyoto Protocol (1997), Ministerial on Climate Action (2017), National Air Pollution Control Programme (2016), Natura 2000 (1992), Nationally Determined Contributions (2015), National Energy and Climate Plans (2018), One Planet Summit (2017), Paris Agreement (2015), Rio Convention (1992), Sendai Framework (2015), The Future We Want (2012), The LIFE Programme (1992), UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (2012), UN Convention on Biological Diversity (1992), UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (1992), UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (1994), UN SDG Report, UN Environment Programme (1972), United Nations Forum on Forests (2000), Water Convention (1992).

## 4.2. European Union's Environmental Performance

First of all, the European Union does not directly prepare an SDG report. However, there are three reputable reports that can be used to gain insight into the EU's SDG performance:

The first of these reports is the report called “Sustainable Development in the European Union,” prepared by EuroStat on the EU's sustainable development performance since 2015. Although these reports provide regional data, they have undergone a methodological transformation over the years. However, its most important feature is that it shows the basic data about the indicators while providing an overview of each SDG.

The second one is the reports published by the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) & Institute for European Environmental Policy (IEEP) since 2015 under the name of “Sustainable Development Report”. This report, like the report prepared by EuroStat, has undergone a methodological transformation over the years. Although it does not cover all countries since the first report was prepared in 2015, it is valuable in terms of demonstrating national and regional SDG performances.

The third one is “The Sustainable Development Goals Report” prepared by the United Nations since 2015. Unlike the other two reports, this report does not provide detailed data, but it is worth examining as it offers a global outlook on sustainable development. Although this report will not provide a direct clue about the EU's performance, it gives an idea of the global situation of which the EU is a part and contributes to the understanding of the context.

It should be noted that it is not sufficient to choose only one of these reports and to accept the sole basis for the evaluations to be made in Conclusions and Recommendations. Moreover, it is not possible to combine these three reports in perfect harmony and present a single homogeneous image. In fact, this homogeneous image cannot come out perfectly even if a single report is selected. Yet all three reports, in their own uniqueness, are the most respected SDG reports. Therefore, in this chapter, in order to maximize the accuracy of the conclusions to be drawn and the recommendations to be presented, the most appropriate and beneficial pieces will be selected from all three reports and included in the study.

#### 4.2.1. European Union's environmental performance in 2015

Considering that ☀️ means “Changes are clearly favorable in relation to SD objectives”, 🌤️ means “No or moderately favorable changes in relation to SD objectives”, ☁️ means “Changes are moderately unfavorable in relation to SD objectives”, 🌧️ means “Changes are clearly unfavorable in relation to SD objectives” and “:” basically means “no data” (EuroStat 2015); according to Table 4.2, it can be said that the outlook of the EU in 2015 is not spotless, but the weather is mostly clear in terms of environment according to EuroStat.

Indicator	Long-Term Evaluation (Since 2000)	Short-Term Evaluation (Last Five Years)
Resource Productivity	☀️	☀️
Resource Use and Waste		
Domestic Material Consumption	☀️	☀️
Generation of Waste Excluding Major Mineral Wastes	🌧️	🌤️
Hazardous Waste Generation	🌤️	🌤️
Recycled and Composted Municipal Waste	☀️	☀️
Atmospheric Wastes	☀️	☀️
Consumption Patterns		
Electricity Consumption of Households	🌤️	🌤️
Final Energy Consumption	🌧️	☀️
Production Patterns		
Environmental Management System	☀️	🌤️
Organic Farming	:	☀️
Greenhouse Gas Emissions (GHG)	☀️	☀️
Primary Energy Consumption	🌤️	☀️
Climate Change		
Greenhouse Gas Emissions by Sector	:	:
Global Surface Average Temperature	☀️	☀️
GHG Emissions Intensity of Energy Consumption	☀️	☀️
Energy		
Energy Dependence	🌤️	🌧️
Consumption of Renewables	☀️	☀️
Electricity Generation from Renewables	☀️	☀️
Share of Renewable Energy in Transport	☀️	☀️
Common Bird Index	🌤️	🌤️
Biodiversity		
Protected Areas	:	:
Fresh Water Resources		
Water Abstraction	:	:
Water Quality in Rivers	☀️	☀️
Marine Ecosystems		
Fishing Capacity	:	:
Land Use		
Artificial Areas	:	🌤️
Nutrient Balance on Agricultural Land	☀️	☀️

Table 4.2: Evaluation of Environment-Related Indicators of the EU in 2015  
(Reproduced from EuroStat 2015)

Considering that ● means “rank 1-5”, ● means “rank 6-13”, ● means “rank 14-20”, ● means “rank 21-27”, ● means “rank 38-34,” and ● means “no data” (SDSN 2015); according to Table 4.3, it can be said that the overall environmental performance of the European Union in 2015 is neither good nor bad according to the first world’s SDG index by SDSN.

	6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION		13 CLIMATE ACTION		14 LIFE BELOW WATER		15 LIFE ON LAND	
	6.1	6.2	13.1	13.2	14.1	14.2	15.1	15.2
Austria	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Belgium	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Bulgaria	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Croatia	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Cyprus	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Czechia	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Denmark	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Estonia	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Finland	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
France	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Germany	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Greece	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Hungary	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Ireland	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Italy	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Latvia	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Lithuania	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Luxembourg	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Malta	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Netherlands	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Poland	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Portugal	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Romania	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Slovakia	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Slovenia	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Spain	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
Sweden	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
United Kingdom	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
OVERALL	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

Table 4.3: Dashboard of Environment-Related Indicators of the EU in 2015  
(Reproduced from SDSN 2015)



#### 4.2.2. European Union's environmental performance in 2016

Considering that ■ means “SDG threshold has been met”, ■ means “significant challenges remain”, ■ means “major challenges must be overcome if the country is to meet the goal,” and ■ means “no data” (SDSN 2016); according to Table 4.4, it may be misinterpreted that overall performance of the European Union in 2016 is far from being sufficient, but it should be noted that due to the methodology, which is adopted in the report if there is one “yellow” and two “greens” for an indicator of an SDG, the color of that SDG is yellow. So, there is a kind of rounding down.

	6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION	13 CLIMATE ACTION	14 LIFE BELOW WATER	15 LIFE ON LAND
Austria	■	■	■	■
Belgium	■	■	■	■
Bulgaria	■	■	■	■
Croatia	■	■	■	■
Cyprus	■	■	■	■
Czechia	■	■	■	■
Denmark	■	■	■	■
Estonia	■	■	■	■
Finland	■	■	■	■
France	■	■	■	■
Germany	■	■	■	■
Greece	■	■	■	■
Hungary	■	■	■	■
Ireland	■	■	■	■
Italy	■	■	■	■
Latvia	■	■	■	■
Lithuania	■	■	■	■
Luxembourg	■	■	■	■
Malta	■	■	■	■
Netherlands	■	■	■	■
Poland	■	■	■	■
Portugal	■	■	■	■
Romania	■	■	■	■
Slovakia	■	■	■	■
Slovenia	■	■	■	■
Spain	■	■	■	■
Sweden	■	■	■	■
United Kingdom	■	■	■	■
<b>OVERALL</b>	■	■	■	■

Table 4.4: Dashboard of Environment-Related Indicators of the EU in 2016  
(Reproduced from SDSN 2016)

### 4.2.3. European Union's environmental performance in 2017

Considering that “↑” means “significant progress”, “↗” means “moderate progress”, “↘” means “insufficient progress”, “↓” means “movement away,” and “:” means “data not available” (EuroStat 2017); according to Table 4.5, it can be said that overall performance of the EU in terms of the environment in 2018 is mostly in progress based on the EuroStat data.

Indicator	Long-Term Evaluation (Since 2000)	Short-Term Evaluation (Last Five Years)
<b>SDG 6 – Clean Water and Sanitation</b>		
<b>Sanitation</b>		
Population having neither a bath, nor a shower, nor indoor flushing toilet in their household	↑	↑
Population connected to at least secondary wastewater treatment	:	:
<b>Water Quality</b>		
Biochemical oxygen demand in rivers	↑	↑
Nitrate in groundwater	↑	↑
Phosphate in rivers	↑	↑
Freshwater bathing sites with excellent water quality	:	↑
<b>Water Use Efficiency</b>		
Water exploitation index	:	:
<b>SDG 13 – Climate Action</b>		
Greenhouse gas emissions (GHG)	↑	↑
GHG emissions intensity of energy consumption	↗	↗
Primary energy consumption	↗	↑
Final energy consumption	↑	↑
Share of renewable energy in gross final energy consumption	↑	↑
Average CO <sub>2</sub> emissions per km from new passenger cars	:	↗
<b>Climate impacts</b>		
Mean near-surface temperature deviation	:	:
Climate-related economic losses	:	:
Mean ocean acidity	:	:
<b>Support for climate action</b>		
Contribution to the international 100bn USD commitment to climate-related expending	:	:
Population covered by the Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy signatories	:	:
<b>SDG 14 – Life Below Water</b>		
<b>Marine conservation</b>		
Sufficiency of marine sites designated under Nature 2000	:	:
<b>Sustainable fisheries</b>		
Catches in major fishing areas	:	:
Assessed fish stocks exceeding fishing mortality at maximum sustainable yield (F <sub>MSY</sub> )	↑	↑
<b>Ocean health</b>		
Bathing sites with excellent water quality	:	↑
Mean ocean acidity	:	:
<b>SDG 15 – Life On Land</b>		
<b>Ecosystems status</b>		
Share of forest area	↑	↑
Biochemical oxygen demand in rivers	↑	↑
Nitrate in groundwater	↑	↑
Phosphate in rivers	:	↑
<b>Land Degradation</b>		
Artificial land cover per capita	:	↘
Change in artificial land cover	:	↓
Estimated soil erosion by water	↑	:
<b>Biodiversity</b>		
The surface of terrestrial sites designated under Natura 2000	↘	↗
Common bird index	:	↑

Table 4.5: Evaluation of Environment-Related Indicators of the EU in 2017

(Reproduced from EuroStat 2017)

Also, considering that “●” means SDG achievement, “●” means “challenges remain”, “●” means “significant challenges remain”, “●” means “major challenges remain,” and “●” means “data not available” (SDSN 2017); according to Table 4.6, it can be said that overall performance of the EU in terms of the environment in 2018 according to SDSN is significant challenges remain.

	6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION	13 CLIMATE ACTION	14 LIFE BELOW WATER	15 LIFE ON LAND
Austria	●	●	●	●
Belgium	●	●	●	●
Bulgaria	●	●	●	●
Croatia	●	●	●	●
Cyprus	●	●	●	●
Czechia	●	●	●	●
Denmark	●	●	●	●
Estonia	●	●	●	●
Finland	●	●	●	●
France	●	●	●	●
Germany	●	●	●	●
Greece	●	●	●	●
Hungary	●	●	●	●
Ireland	●	●	●	●
Italy	●	●	●	●
Latvia	●	●	●	●
Lithuania	●	●	●	●
Luxembourg	●	●	●	●
Malta	●	●	●	●
Netherlands	●	●	●	●
Poland	●	●	●	●
Portugal	●	●	●	●
Romania	●	●	●	●
Slovakia	●	●	●	●
Slovenia	●	●	●	●
Spain	●	●	●	●
Sweden	●	●	●	●
United Kingdom	●	●	●	●
<b>OVERALL</b>	●	●	●	●

Table 4.6: Dashboard of Environment-Related Indicators of the EU in 2017  
(Reproduced from SDSN 2017)

#### 4.2.4. European Union's environmental performance in 2018

Considering that “↑” means “significant progress”, “↗” means “moderate progress”, “↘” means “insufficient progress”, “↓” means “movement away,” and “:” means “data not available” (EuroStat 2018); according to Table 4.7, it can be said that overall performance of the EU in terms of the environment in 2018 is in progress based on the EuroStat data.

Indicator	Long-Term Evaluation (Since 2000)	Short-Term Evaluation (Last Five Years)
<b>SDG 6 – Clean Water and Sanitation</b>		
<b>Sanitation</b>		
Population having neither a bath, nor a shower, nor indoor flushing toilet in their household	↑	↑
Population connected to at least secondary wastewater treatment	:	:
<b>Water Quality</b>		
Biochemical oxygen demand in rivers	↑	↑
Nitrate in groundwater	↗	↑
Phosphate in rivers	↑	↘
Freshwater bathing sites with excellent water quality	:	↑
<b>Water Use Efficiency</b>		
Water exploitation index	:	:
<b>SDG 13 – Climate Action</b>		
Greenhouse gas emissions (GHG)	↑	↑
GHG emissions intensity of energy consumption	↗	↗
Primary energy consumption	↗	↗
Final energy consumption	↗	↘
Share of renewable energy in gross final energy consumption	↑	↑
Average CO <sub>2</sub> emissions per km from new passenger cars	↗	↗
<b>Climate impacts</b>		
Mean near-surface temperature deviation	:	:
Climate-related economic losses	:	:
Mean ocean acidity	:	:
<b>Support for climate action</b>		
Contribution to the international 100bn USD commitment to climate-related expending	:	:
Population covered by the Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy signatories	:	:
<b>SDG 14 – Life Below Water</b>		
<b>Marine conservation</b>		
The surface of marine sites designated under Nature 2000	:	↑
<b>Sustainable fisheries</b>		
Catches in major fishing areas	:	:
Assessed fish stocks exceeding fishing mortality at maximum sustainable yield (F <sub>MSY</sub> )	:	:
<b>Ocean health</b>		
Seawater bathing sites with excellent water quality	:	↗
Mean ocean acidity	:	:
<b>SDG 15 – Life On Land</b>		
<b>Ecosystems status</b>		
Share of forest area	:	↑
Biochemical oxygen demand in rivers	↑	↑
Nitrate in groundwater	↗	↑
Phosphate in rivers	↑	↘
<b>Land Degradation</b>		
Artificial land cover per capita	:	↘
Estimated soil erosion by water	↑	:
<b>Biodiversity</b>		
The surface of terrestrial sites designated under Natura 2000	:	↗
Common bird index	↘	↗
Grassland butterfly index	↓	↓

Table 4.7: Evaluation of Environment-Related Indicators of the EU in 2018

(Reproduced from EuroStat 2018)

Also, considering that “●” means SDG achievement, “●” means “challenges remain”, “●” means “significant challenges remain”, “●” means “major challenges remain,” and “●” means “data not available”; and “↓” means “decreasing”, “→” means “stagnating”, “↗” means “moderately increasing”, “↑” means “on track” and “♦♦” means “data not available” (SDSN 2018); according to Table 4.8, it can be said that overall performance of the EU in terms of the environment in 2018 according to SDSN is significant challenges remain and moderately increasing.

	6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION		13 CLIMATE ACTION		14 LIFE BELOW WATER		15 LIFE ON LAND	
	Level	Trend	Level	Trend	Level	Trend	Level	Trend
Austria	●	→	●	↗	●	♦♦	●	→
Belgium	●	↑	●	↗	●	↗	●	→
Bulgaria	●	♦♦	●	↗	●	→	●	→
Croatia	●	↓	●	↑	●	→	●	↑
Cyprus	●	→	●	↑	●	↗	●	♦♦
Czechia	●	→	●	↗	●	♦♦	●	→
Denmark	●	→	●	↑	●	→	●	→
Estonia	●	→	●	↓	●	↗	●	→
Finland	●	→	●	↗	●	→	●	→
France	●	↗	●	↑	●	→	●	↗
Germany	●	→	●	→	●	→	●	→
Greece	●	↗	●	↑	●	→	●	↗
Hungary	●	↑	●	↑	●	♦♦	●	→
Ireland	●	↑	●	↑	●	↗	●	→
Italy	●	↑	●	↑	●	→	●	→
Latvia	●	→	●	→	●	→	●	→
Lithuania	●	↗	●	→	●	→	●	→
Luxembourg	●	→	●	↗	●	♦♦	●	↗
Malta	●	→	●	↗	●	→	●	♦♦
Netherlands	●	→	●	→	●	→	●	→
Poland	●	→	●	→	●	↓	●	→
Portugal	●	↗	●	↑	●	↗	●	↗
Romania	●	♦♦	●	↑	●	↗	●	→
Slovakia	●	↓	●	↗	●	♦♦	●	→
Slovenia	●	↗	●	↑	●	↗	●	→
Spain	●	→	●	↑	●	→	●	→
Sweden	●	→	●	↗	●	→	●	→
United Kingdom	●	→	●	↑	●	→	●	↗
OVERALL	●	↗	●	↗	●	→	●	→

Table 4.8: Dashboard of Environment-Related Indicators of the EU in 2018  
(Reproduced from SDSN 2018)

#### 4.2.5. European Union's environmental performance in 2019

Considering that “↑” means “significant progress”, “↗” means “moderate progress”, “↘” means “insufficient progress”, “↓” means “movement away,” and “:” means “data not available” (EuroStat 2019); according to Table 4.9, it can be said that overall performance of the EU in terms of environment in 2019 is in progress based on the EuroStat data.

Indicator	Long-Term Evaluation (Since 2000)	Short-Term Evaluation (Last Five Years)
<b>SDG 6 – Clean Water and Sanitation</b>		
<b>Sanitation</b>		
Population having neither a bath, nor a shower, nor indoor flushing toilet in their household	↑	↑
Population connected to at least secondary wastewater treatment	:	:
<b>Water Quality</b>		
Biochemical oxygen demand in rivers	↑	↗
Nitrate in groundwater	↗	↗
Phosphate in rivers	↑	↑
Freshwater bathing sites with excellent water quality	:	↑
<b>Water Use Efficiency</b>		
Water exploitation index	:	:
<b>SDG 13 – Climate Action</b>		
Greenhouse gas emissions (GHG)	↑	↑
GHG emissions intensity of energy consumption	↗	↑
Primary energy consumption	↗	↘
Final energy consumption	↘	↓
Share of renewable energy in gross final energy consumption	↑	↗
Average CO <sub>2</sub> emissions per km from new passenger cars	↗	↗
<b>Climate impacts</b>		
Mean near-surface temperature deviation	↓	:
Climate-related economic losses	:	:
Mean ocean acidity	↘	↘
<b>Support for climate action</b>		
Contribution to the international 100bn USD commitment to climate-related expending	:	:
<b>SDG 14 – Life Below Water</b>		
<b>Ocean health</b>		
Coastal bathing sites with excellent water quality	:	↗
Mean ocean acidity	↘	↘
<b>Marine conservation</b>		
The surface of marine sites designated under Natura 2000	:	↑
<b>Sustainable fisheries</b>		
Estimated trends in fish stock biomass	:	:
Assessed fish stocks exceeding fishing mortality at maximum sustainable yield (F <sub>MSY</sub> )	:	:
<b>SDG 15 – Life On Land</b>		
<b>Ecosystems status</b>		
Share of forest area	:	↑
Biochemical oxygen demand in rivers	↑	↗
Nitrate in groundwater	↗	↗
Phosphate in rivers	↑	↑
<b>Land Degradation</b>		
Soil sealing index	:	↘
Estimated soil erosion by water	↑	:
Settlement area per capita	:	↓
<b>Biodiversity</b>		
The surface of terrestrial sites designated under Natura 2000	:	↘
Common bird index	↘	↘
Grassland butterfly index	↓	↗

Table 4.9: Evaluation of Environment-Related Indicators of the EU in 2019  
(Reproduced from EuroStat 2019)

Also, considering that “●” means SDG achievement, “●” means “challenges remain”, “●” means “significant challenges remain”, “●” means “major challenges remain,” and “●” means “data not available”; and “↓” means “decreasing”, “→” means “stagnating”, “↗” means “moderately increasing”, “↑” means “on track” and “♦♦” means “data not available” (SDSN 2019); according to Table 4.10 it can be said that overall performance of the EU in terms of environment in 2019 according to SDSN is significant challenges remain and moderately increasing.

	6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION		13 CLIMATE ACTION		14 LIFE BELOW WATER		15 LIFE ON LAND	
	Level	Trend	Level	Trend	Level	Trend	Level	Trend
Austria	●	↑	●	→	●	♦♦	●	↗
Belgium	●	↑	●	→	●	→	●	↑
Bulgaria	●	↗	●	↗	●	↗	●	↑
Croatia	●	↗	●	↗	●	↗	●	↑
Cyprus	●	↑	●	↗	●	→	●	♦♦
Czechia	●	→	●	→	●	♦♦	●	↑
Denmark	●	↑	●	↗	●	↗	●	↑
Estonia	●	→	●	→	●	↗	●	↑
Finland	●	↑	●	↗	●	→	●	↑
France	●	↗	●	→	●	↗	●	↗
Germany	●	↑	●	→	●	↗	●	↑
Greece	●	↗	●	↗	●	↗	●	↗
Hungary	●	↑	●	→	●	♦♦	●	↑
Ireland	●	↑	●	↓	●	↗	●	↑
Italy	●	↑	●	↗	●	→	●	↑
Latvia	●	→	●	→	●	↗	●	↑
Lithuania	●	↗	●	↓	●	↗	●	↑
Luxembourg	●	↑	●	↗	●	♦♦	●	↗
Malta	●	↑	●	→	●	↗	●	♦♦
Netherlands	●	↑	●	↓	●	→	●	↑
Poland	●	→	●	→	●	↗	●	↑
Portugal	●	↗	●	↓	●	→	●	↗
Romania	●	↗	●	↑	●	↗	●	↑
Slovakia	●	↓	●	↗	●	♦♦	●	↑
Slovenia	●	↗	●	↗	●	♦♦	●	↑
Spain	●	↑	●	→	●	↗	●	→
Sweden	●	↑	●	↗	●	→	●	↑
United Kingdom	●	↑	●	↗	●	↗	●	↗
OVERALL	●	↗	●	↗	●	↗	●	↑

Table 4.10: Dashboard of Environment-Related Indicators of the EU in 2019  
(Reproduced from SDSN 2019)

#### 4.2.6. European Union's environmental performance in 2020

Considering that “↑” means “significant progress”, “↗” means “moderate progress”, “↘” means “insufficient progress”, “↓” means “movement away,” and “:” means “data not available” (EuroStat 2020); according to Table 4.11, it can be said that overall performance of the EU in terms of environment in 2020 is in progress based on the EuroStat data.

Indicator	Long-Term Evaluation (Since 2000)	Short-Term Evaluation (Last Five Years)
<b>SDG 6 – Clean Water and Sanitation</b>		
<b>Sanitation</b>		
Population having neither a bath, nor a shower, nor indoor flushing toilet in their household	:	↑
Population connected to at least secondary wastewater treatment	:	:
<b>Water Quality</b>		
Biochemical oxygen demand in rivers	↑	↗
Nitrate in groundwater	:	:
Phosphate in rivers	↑	↗
Inland water bathing sites with excellent water quality	:	↑
<b>Water Use Efficiency</b>		
Water exploitation index	:	:
<b>SDG 13 – Climate Action</b>		
Greenhouse gas emissions (GHG)	↗	↘
GHG emissions intensity of energy consumption	↗	↗
Share of renewable energy in gross final energy consumption	↑	↗
Average CO <sub>2</sub> emissions per km from new passenger cars	↗	↘
<b>Climate impacts</b>		
Mean near-surface temperature deviation	↓	:
Climate-related economic losses	:	↓
Mean ocean acidity	↘	↘
<b>Support for climate action</b>		
Contribution to the international 100bn USD commitment to climate-related expending	:	:
Population covered by the Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy Signatories	:	↑
<b>SDG 14 – Life Below Water</b>		
<b>Ocean health</b>		
Coastal bathing sites with excellent water quality	:	↗
Mean ocean acidity	↘	↘
<b>Marine conservation</b>		
The surface of marine sites designated under Nature 2000	:	↑
<b>Sustainable fisheries</b>		
Estimated trends in fish stock biomass	:	:
Assessed fish stocks exceeding fishing mortality at maximum sustainable yield (Fmsy)	:	:
<b>SDG 15 – Life On Land</b>		
<b>Ecosystems status</b>		
Share of forest area	:	↗
Biochemical oxygen demand in rivers	↑	↗
Phosphate in rivers	↑	↗
<b>Land Degradation</b>		
Soil sealing index	:	↘
Estimated soil erosion by water	↗	↗
<b>Biodiversity</b>		
The surface of terrestrial sites designated under Natura 2000	:	↗
Common bird index	↘	↗
Grassland butterfly index	↓	↗

Table 4.11: Evaluation of Environment-Related Indicators of the EU in 2020  
(Reproduced from EuroStat 2020)



Also, considering that “●” means SDG achievement, “●” means “challenges remain”, “●” means “significant challenges remain”, “●” means “major challenges remain,” and “●” means “data not available”; and “↓” means “decreasing”, “→” means “stagnating”, “↗” means “moderately increasing”, “↑” means “on track” and “♦♦” means “data not available” (SDSN 2020); according to Table 4.12, it can be said that overall performance of the EU in terms of environment in 2020 according to SDSN is significant challenges remain and moderately increasing.

	6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION		13 CLIMATE ACTION		14 LIFE BELOW WATER		15 LIFE ON LAND	
	Level	Trend	Level	Trend	Level	Trend	Level	Trend
Austria	●	↗	●	→	●	♦♦	●	→
Belgium	●	↗	●	→	●	↑	●	→
Bulgaria	●	↑	●	→	●	→	●	→
Croatia	●	→	●	↓	●	↗	●	→
Cyprus	●	→	●	→	●	↗	●	→
Czechia	●	↑	●	→	●	♦♦	●	↗
Denmark	●	↗	●	→	●	↗	●	↗
Estonia	●	↗	●	↓	●	↗	●	↗
Finland	●	↑	●	→	●	↗	●	→
France	●	↗	●	→	●	↗	●	↗
Germany	●	↗	●	→	●	↗	●	→
Greece	●	↗	●	→	●	→	●	→
Hungary	●	↑	●	↓	●	♦♦	●	→
Ireland	●	↗	●	→	●	→	●	↗
Italy	●	↑	●	→	●	→	●	↓
Latvia	●	↑	●	↓	●	↗	●	↗
Lithuania	●	↑	●	↓	●	↗	●	↗
Luxembourg	●	↗	●	→	●	♦♦	●	→
Malta	●	↗	v	→	●	↗	●	→
Netherlands	●	↗	●	→	●	↗	●	↗
Poland	●	↑	●	↓	●	→	●	→
Portugal	●	↑	●	↓	●	→	●	→
Romania	●	↗	●	↓	●	↗	●	→
Slovakia	●	↗	●	↓	●	♦♦	●	→
Slovenia	●	↑	●	↓	●	↗	●	→
Spain	●	↗	●	→	●	→	●	↓
Sweden	●	↗	●	→	●	→	●	→
United Kingdom	●	↗	●	→	●	↗	●	→
OVERALL	●	↗	●	→	●	↗	●	→

Table 4.12: Dashboard of Environment-Related Indicators of the EU in 2020  
(Reproduced from SDSN 2020)

#### 4.2.7. European Union's environmental performance in 2021

Considering that “↑” means “significant progress”, “↗” means “moderate progress”, “↘” means “insufficient progress”, “↓” means “movement away,” and “:” means “data not available” (EuroStat 2021); according to Table 4.13, it can be said that overall performance of the EU in terms of environment in 2021 is in progress based on the EuroStat data.

Indicator	Long-Term Evaluation (Since 2000)	Short-Term Evaluation (Last Five Years)
<b>SDG 6 – Clean Water and Sanitation</b>		
<b>Sanitation</b>		
Population having neither a bath, nor a shower, nor indoor flushing toilet in their household	:	↑
Population connected to at least secondary wastewater treatment	:	:
<b>Water Quality</b>		
Biochemical oxygen demand in rivers	↑	↑
Nitrate in groundwater	↘	↘
Phosphate in rivers	↑	↓
Freshwater bathing sites with excellent water quality	:	↗
<b>Water Use Efficiency</b>		
Water exploitation index	:	:
<b>SDG 13 – Climate Action</b>		
<b>Greenhouse gas emissions (GHG)</b>		
GHG emissions intensity of energy consumption	↑	↑
Share of renewable energy in gross final energy consumption	↑	↗
Average CO <sub>2</sub> emissions per km from new passenger cars	↘	↘
<b>Climate impacts</b>		
Mean near-surface temperature deviation	↓	:
Climate-related economic losses	↓	↓
Mean ocean acidity	↘	↘
<b>Support for climate action</b>		
Contribution to the international 100bn USD commitment to climate-related expending	:	↑
Population covered by the Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy signatories	↑	↑
<b>SDG 14 – Life Below Water</b>		
<b>Ocean health</b>		
Coastal bathing sites with excellent water quality	:	↗
Marine waters affected by eutrophication	:	:
Global mean ocean surface acidity	↘	↘
<b>Marine conservation</b>		
The surface of marine sites designated under Nature 2000	:	↗
<b>Sustainable fisheries</b>		
Estimated trends in fish stock biomass	:	:
Assessed fish stocks exceeding fishing mortality at maximum sustainable yield (F <sub>MSY</sub> )	:	:
<b>SDG 15 – Life On Land</b>		
<b>Ecosystems status</b>		
Share of forest area	:	↗
Biochemical oxygen demand in rivers	↑	↑
Phosphate in rivers	↑	↓
<b>Biodiversity</b>		
The surface of terrestrial sites designated under Natura 2000	:	↗
Common bird index	↘	↗
Grassland butterfly index	↓	↓

Table 4.13: Evaluation of Environment-Related Indicators of the EU in 2021  
(Reproduced from EuroStat 2021)

Also, considering that “●” means SDH achievement, “●” means “challenges remain”, “●” means “significant challenges remain”, “●” means “major challenges remain,” and “●” means “data not available”; and “↓” means “decreasing”, “→” means “stagnating”, “↗” means “moderately increasing”, “↑” means “on track” and “♦♦” means “data not available” (SDSN 2021); according to Table 4.14, it can be said that overall performance of the EU in terms of environment in 2021 according to SDSN is significant challenges remain and moderately increasing.

	6 CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION		13 CLIMATE ACTION		14 LIFE BELOW WATER		15 LIFE ON LAND	
	Level	Trend	Level	Trend	Level	Trend	Level	Trend
Austria	●	↗	●	→	●	♦♦	●	→
Belgium	●	↑	●	→	●	↗	●	→
Bulgaria	●	↗	●	→	●	↗	●	↗
Croatia	●	↗	●	→	●	↗	●	→
Cyprus	●	→	●	→	●	↗	●	↗
Czechia	●	↑	●	→	●	♦♦	●	↗
Denmark	●	↗	●	→	●	→	●	↗
Estonia	●	↗	●	→	●	↗	●	↗
Finland	●	↗	●	→	●	↗	●	→
France	●	↗	●	→	●	↗	●	↗
Germany	●	↗	●	→	●	→	●	→
Greece	●	↗	●	→	●	→	●	→
Hungary	●	↗	●	↓	●	♦♦	●	→
Ireland	●	↗	●	→	●	→	●	↗
Italy	●	↗	●	→	●	↓	●	→
Latvia	●	↑	●	↓	●	↑	●	↗
Lithuania	●	↑	●	↓	●	→	●	→
Luxembourg	●	↗	●	→	●	♦♦	●	↗
Malta	●	↗	●	↗	●	↗	●	→
Netherlands	●	↗	●	→	●	→	●	↗
Poland	●	↑	●	→	●	→	●	→
Portugal	●	↑	●	→	●	→	●	→
Romania	●	↗	●	→	●	↗	●	→
Slovakia	●	↗	●	→	●	♦♦	●	↗
Slovenia	●	↑	●	→	●	↗	●	→
Spain	●	↗	●	→	●	↗	●	↓
Sweden	●	↗	●	→	●	↗	●	→
United Kingdom	●	↗	●	↗	●	↗	●	↗
OVERALL	●	↗	●	→	●	↗	●	→

Table 4.14: Dashboard of Environment-Related Indicators of the EU in 2021  
(Reproduced from SDSN 2021)

#### 4.2.8. European Union's SDG index between 2016-2021

As can be seen in Table 4.15, the first SDG Index was prepared in 2015, and 34 countries were listed. In the following years, the scope of the index was broadened and included 149 countries in 2016, 157 countries in 2017, 156 countries in 2018, 162 in 2019, 166 in 2020 and 165 in 2021. While the overall of the EU is better than 57% of all in the first index, which includes only developed countries, this rate is 85% in 2016, 87% in 2017, 87% in 2018, 87% in 2019, 88% in 2020 and 88% in 2021. Due to the Brexit, the UK is not included in 2020 and 2021.

	2015		2016		2017		2018		2019		2020		2021	
	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score	Rank	Score
Austria	12	6.92	7	79.1	7	81.4	9	80.0	5	63.2	7	80.7	6	82.1
Belgium	8	7.00	12	77.4	12	80.0	12	79.0	16	58.5	11	80.0	5	82.2
Bulgaria	-	-	33	71.8	40	72.5	34	73.1	36	90.1	39	74.8	45	73.8
Croatia	-	-	36	70.7	24	76.9	21	76.5	22	85.9	19	78.4	14	80.4
Cyprus	-	-	45	66.5	50	70.6	50	70.4	61	49.6	34	75.2	40	74.9
Czechia	24	6.24	15	76.7	5	81.9	13	78.7	7	79.8	8	80.6	12	81.4
Denmark	3	7.55	2	83.9	2	84.2	2	84.6	1	76.0	2	84.6	3	84.9
Estonia	21	6.42	21	74.5	15	78.6	16	78.3	10	82.9	10	80.1	10	81.6
Finland	4	7.52	4	81.0	3	84.0	3	83.0	3	67.1	3	83.8	1	85.9
France	10	6.97	11	77.9	10	80.3	5	81.2	4	61.5	4	81.1	8	81.7
Germany	6	7.08	6	80.5	6	81.7	4	82.3	6	67.8	5	80.8	4	82.5
Greece	30	5.88	37	69.9	38	72.9	48	70.6	50	64.6	43	74.3	37	75.4
Hungary	32	5.55	24	73.4	18	78.0	26	75.0	25	81.9	29	77.3	25	78.8
Ireland	20	6.47	14	76.7	19	77.9	18	77.5	19	61.6	14	79.4	13	81.0
Italy	26	6.13	35	70.9	30	75.5	29	74.2	30	65.6	30	77.0	26	78.8
Latvia	-	-	28	72.5	32	75.2	27	74.7	24	71.9	24	77.7	22	79.2
Lithuania	-	-	31	72.1	36	73.6	36	72.9	32	73.1	36	75.0	31	76.7
Luxembourg	17	6.66	16	76.7	33	75.0	22	76.1	34	41.6	44	74.3	40	74.2
Malta	-	-	32	72.0	22	77.0	30	74.2	28	62.9	32	76.0	33	75.7
Netherlands	7	7.04	8	78.9	13	79.9	11	79.5	9	49.6	9	80.4	11	81.6
Poland	21	6.42	38	69.8	27	75.8	32	73.7	29	84.9	23	78.1	15	80.2
Portugal	25	6.23	34	71.5	28	75.6	31	74.0	26	70.9	25	77.6	27	78.6
Romania	-	-	41	67.5	35	74.1	44	71.2	42	93.8	38	74.8	39	75.0
Slovakia	27	6.02	26	72.7	23	76.9	24	75.6	27	71.4	27	77.5	19	79.6
Slovenia	13	6.91	17	76.6	9	80.5	8	80.0	12	70.0	12	79.8	9	81.6
Spain	18	6.65	30	72.2	25	76.8	25	75.4	21	70.1	22	78.1	20	79.5
Sweden	1	7.86	1	84.5	1	85.6	1	85.0	2	67.7	1	84.7	2	85.6
United Kingdom	15	6.83	10	78.1	16	78.3	14	78.7	13	50.7	13	79.8	17	80.0
EU Overall	16	6.68	22	74.86	21	77.88	21	76.98	21	69.10	20	78.36	19	79.7
World Total	34		149		157		156		162		166		165	

Table 4.15: SDG Ranks and Scores of the EU Countries between 2016-2021  
(Compiled from SDSN 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021)

### 4.3. Global Outlook toward the Environment-Related SDGs

To consolidate insight into the European Union's outlook on the environment, it is necessary to take a look at the global outlook. In this regard, "The Sustainable Development Goals Report", prepared by the United Nations and published 6 issues in 2016, can be a reference point. The global facts highlighted by the United Nations in the context of SDG 6, SDG 13, SDG 14 and SDG 15 are as follows:

**2016:** Overall situation is clearly negative, but the trend is not pessimistic. The SDG-specific situation of the world is as follows: (United Nations 2016)

- **SDG 6:** Water stress affects 2 billion people around the world, especially in Northern Africa, Western Asia, Caucasus and Central Asia and Southern Asia.
- **SDG 13:** The Paris Agreement, whose basic requirement is "intended nationally determined contributions", aims to limit the increase in global temperature to 2°C.
- **SDG 14:** The proportion of coastal and marine areas protected, which is a key indicator for life below water, increased from 1.0% to 8.4% since 2000.
- **SDG 15:** Net change in forest area is -7535 thousand of hectares which is equal to one-third of the total since 1990.

**2017:** Overall situation is clearly negative, but the trend is not pessimistic. The SDG-specific situation of the world is as follows: (United Nations 2017)

- **SDG 6:** The proportion of the population that does not have access to safely managed drinking water is 29%.
- **SDG 13:** 142 countries submitted the Nationally Determined Contribution, 148 countries ratified the Paris Agreement, and 197 countries are party to UNFCCC.
- **SDG 14:** Coverage of Key Biodiversity Areas (KBA) for marine biodiversity by protected areas increased from 32% to 45% since 2000.
- **SDG 15:** The proportion of terrestrial KBA increased by 11% since 2000, and the proportion of inland freshwater and mountain KBAs increased by less than 1%.

**2018:** Overall situation is moderate, and the trend is barely positive. The SDG-specific situation of the world is as follows: (United Nations 2018)<sup>3</sup>

- **SDG 6:** Proportions of the population using basic water and basic sanitation in fragile states are 62% and 41%, while 90% and 70% are in non-fragile states.
- **SDG 15:** While the proportion of inland freshwater KBA increased by 0.1% since 2015, inland freshwater KBA is 1%, and mountain KBA is 0.1%.

**2019:** Overall situation is negative, but the trend is optimistic. The SDG-specific situation of the world is as follows: (United Nations 2019)

- **SDG 6:** 1 out of 10 people do not have access to basic drinking water, and 2 out of 5 people do not have a basic handwashing facility at home.
- **SDG 13:** Global mean temperature is 1°C above the pre-industrial baseline, and atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> concentration is 146% of pre-industrial levels.
- **SDG 14:** The proportion of water under the protection of national jurisdiction has more than doubled since 2010, reaching 17%.
- **SDG 15:** Land degradation affects 20% of the earth's land area and the lives of 13% of the world population.

**2020:** Overall situation is clearly negative, but the trend is optimistic with the effect of COVID-19. The SDG-specific situation of the world is as follows: (United Nations 2020)

- **SDG 6:** Two out of five health care facilities and people (at home) worldwide do not have basic handwashing facilities.
- **SDG 13:** Even though greenhouse gas emissions decreased by 6%, they are still short of the 7.6% annual reduction required to limit global warming to 1.5°C.
- **SDG 14:** Marine KBAs covered by protected areas increased to 46%, and human activity in oceans drastically reduced thanks to COVID-19.
- **SDG 15:** An average of 10 million hectares of forest areas remain to be destroyed every year since 2015.

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<sup>3</sup> SDG 13 and SDG 14 are not included in the report.

**2021:** Overall situation is moderate, but the trend is optimistic, especially with the effect of COVID-19. The SDG-specific situation of the world is as follows: (United Nations 2021)

- **SDG 6:** 26% of the world population suffers from a lack of safely managed drinking water, 46% lack of safely managed sanitation and 29% lack of basic hygiene.
- **SDG 13:** Global average temperature at 1.2°C above pre-industrial baseline thanks to COVID-19 and meeting the target of keeping under 1.5°C.
- **SDG 14:** Dead zones, which means the areas of water that lack sufficient oxygen to support marine life, increased from 400 to 700 since 2008
- **SDG 15:** The proportion of terrestrial KBAs increased to 43%, freshwater KBAs to 42% and mountain KBAs to %41.



## 5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The European Union is a unique organism with a population of up to hundreds of millions, a GDP of trillions of euros, the values and norms it produces, the international agendas it supports, attractive living conditions and historical depth. All these characteristics inevitably urge the European Union to claim to be a normative power, feeling a historical responsibility. Here, the leading one among these issues in recent years is the environment, and more specifically, global climate change. The distinctiveness of the environment from other major issues (for example, the refugee crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic or the Russian attack on Ukraine) is the fact that it is both horizontally (theoretical background) and vertically (historical process) significant.

The environment has evolved over time from a marginal and/or sophisticated subject to a mainstream and central one. In this transformation process, while international conventions, legal regulations and high-level political summits proceeded through one channel, civil society initiatives advanced as a second channel. Despite the importance of civil society and its impact on politics, especially with the development of communication tools, decision mechanisms and decision-makers still remain to be the leading roles. At this point, in the context of the European Union, the European Council, which is the highest level political body composed of heads of state or government, comes to the fore. When it comes to the European Council, the primary sources for primary content analysis are Conclusions.

The object with which the Decision-makers interact is the legal ground, or in other words, the legal framework. The legal ground or legal framework both forms a basis for politicians and shapes their policies by keeping them within certain limits. On the other hand, politicians are reforming this framework with their legal regulations. In short, there is a spiral progression, and a dialectical operation is experienced. To put the environmental issue by analogy: (a) international conventions are the pillars that sustain the building; (b) legal regulations are beams that increase the strength of the building; (c) international agendas are the walls of the building that give movement to those insides; (d) politicians are the builders who are tasked with making this building permanently habitable for the people of the household. In the historical flow, this building naturally rises, and new floors are added to the building. The last floor of this structure, which resembles the Tower of Babel, is surrounded by the Sustainable Development Goals.



The European Union has also formed its environmental policies in general within the frame dictated by these walls. Nevertheless, it is beneficial to evaluate the extent to which the European Union has developed its environmental policies aligned with these frameworks and whether its environmental policies and environmental performance are consistent. In this sense, the most up-to-date international reference point is the reports on Sustainable Development Goals, which have been published since 2015. When the hypotheses of the study are tested based on the findings derived from EC Conclusions and SDG reports, the results are as follows:

Considering the fact that the share of Economics is 22%, Foreign Relations is 21%, and Environment is 16%, H1 “Environment is a prominent topic in the discussion at a political level in the EU” is accepted.

Considering the fact that the share of the Environment is 10% in 2015, 14% in 2016, 20% in 2017, 14% in 2018, 21% in 2019 and 26% in 2020; H2 “Environment increases its centrality in the discussion at the political level in the EU” is partially accepted.

Considering the fact that the European Union is a signatory to 44 international agreements on the environment, H3 “EU has a pioneering role on environmental issues theoretically at global level” is accepted.

Considering the fact that the overall rank of the European Union in the SDG Index is 16 of 34 in 2015, 22 of 149 in 2016, 21 of 157 in 2017, 21 of 156 in 2018, 21 of 162 in 2019, 20 of 166 in 2020 and 19 of 165 in 2021; H4 “EU has a pioneering role on environmental issues practically at global level” is accepted.

Considering the fact that the European Union’s environmental performance is mostly positive according to EuroStat and neutral according to SDSN in 2015, mostly negative according to SDSN in 2016, mostly positive according to EuroStat and mostly negative according to SDSN in 2017, mostly positive according to EuroStat and mostly negative according to SDSN in 2018, neutral according to EuroStat and mostly negative according to SDSN in 2019, neutral according to EuroStat and mostly negative according to SDSN in 2020, neutral according to EuroStat and mostly negative according to SDSN in 2021; H5 “EU has a satisfactory achievement about the environmental issue” is mostly rejected.

Considering the fact that the share of SDG 6 is 7%, SDG 13 is 52%, SDG 14 is 13%, SDG 15 is 28%, and the share of “Combating climate change” is 26%, “Biodiversity, land use and forestry” is 14%, “Water protection and management” 9%, “Air and noise pollution” is 13%, “Resource efficiency and the circular economy” is 17%, “Sustainable consumption and production” is 13%, “Chemicals and pesticides” is 8%; H6 “There is a balance among the distribution of environment-related issues in the Conclusions” is rejected.

Considering the fact that the prevalence of SDG 6 is 7%, SDG 13 is 39%, SDG 14 is 11%, and SDG 15 is 20%, and the European Union’s overall performance according to SDSN for SDG 6 is challenges remain, SDG 13 is major challenges remain, SDG14 is significant challenges remain, SDG 15 is significant challenges remain; H7 “There is a correlation between the prevalence of environmental issues the in the Conclusions and EU’s performance about environment-related SDGs” is rejected.

Considering the qualitative judgment of the author based on the analysis of 885 Conclusions equal to 6440 pages, H8 “EU’s environmental policy is shaped in accordance with international agendas” is mostly accepted.

When all these conclusions are interpreted, the following overall evaluation can be made:

- Firstly, the EuroStat and SDSN reports do not match either in method or assessment. While EuroStat's reports paint a relatively positive image, SDSN paints a relatively negative image.
- Secondly, even if the environmental performance of the EU is not satisfactory, it is at the forefront of the SDG Index because the rest of the world is doing worse.
- Thirdly, although the EU keeps the environmental issue in the center theoretically (international agreements) and politically (The Council Conclusions), a practical performance in direct proportion to this concern has not been demonstrated.
- Fourthly, there are frequent references to the European Parliament’s categories for environmental policy in the Conclusions.
- Fifthly, although there are frequent references to institutions and concepts related to the international environmental agenda in the Conclusions, there is a noticeable lack of alignment of discourses to the SDGs.

In the light of these assessments, the following recommendations may be proposed:

- Preparing more detailed SDG reports touching indicators and providing comparable and aligned data can improve monitoring.
- More frequent direct and explicit references to Sustainable Development Goals, Targets and Indicators in Conclusions can support reporting.
- Options for filtering by categories and labels on the official website for the Council Conclusions can encourage the researchers.
- Improved methodology for SDG reports by EuroStat can strengthen policymaker's hands and direct them more accurately.

In conclusion, as assumed based on the review in the literature on the European Union environmental policy, it is approved that the European Union environmental policy has an external dimension. With pros and cons, the European Union performs the role of normative leadership at the global level and fulfills the historical responsibility as it claims. However, in order to be the best among the good ones rather than being the lesser evil, the European Union should take concrete actions and supports its rhetorical and theoretical accomplishment with practical achievements through an absolute success at environmental performance.

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## APPENDIX A

### A.1 Council Conclusions associated with environment

YEAR	NAME	YEAR	NAME	YEAR	NAME
2015	ST_10995_2015_INIT_en	2018	ST_10227_2018_INIT_en	2020	ST_12099_2020_INIT_en
	ST_13175_2015_INIT_en		ST_10447_2018_INIT_en		ST_12210_2020_INIT_en
	ST_13202_2015_INIT_en		ST_10505_2018_INIT_en		ST_12481_2020_INIT_en
	ST_13420_2015_INIT_en		ST_12901_2018_INIT_en		ST_12695_2020_INIT_en
	ST_13875_2015_INIT_en		ST_12948_2018_INIT_en		ST_12756_2020_INIT_en
	ST_14193_2015_INIT_en		ST_13864_2018_INIT_en		ST_12851_2020_INIT_en
	ST_14261_2015_INIT_en		ST_13991_2018_INIT_en		ST_13004_2020_INIT_en
	ST_14265_2015_INIT_en		ST_15766_2018_INIT_en		ST_13352_2020_INIT_en
	ST_14266_2015_INIT_en		ST_15782_2018_INIT_en		ST_13453_2020_INIT_en
	ST_14459_2015_INIT_en		ST_6125_2018_INIT_en		ST_13454_2020_INIT_en
ST_15071_2015_INIT_en	ST_7939_2018_INIT_en	ST_13646_2020_INIT_en			
ST_15389_2015_INIT_en	ST_8756_2018_INIT_en	ST_13893_2020_INIT_en			
2016	ST_10392_2016_INIT_en	2019	ST_8954_2018_INIT_en	ST_13976_2020_INIT_en	
	ST_10400_2016_INIT_en		ST_8959_2018_INIT_en	ST_14167_2020_INIT_en	
	ST_10512_2016_INIT_en		ST_8960_2018_INIT_en	ST_14168_2020_INIT_en	
	ST_10518_2016_INIT_en		ST_10011_2019_INIT_en	ST_14169_2020_INIT_en	
	ST_10721_2016_INIT_en		ST_10146_2019_INIT_en	ST_14198_2020_INIT_en	
	ST_10730_2016_INIT_en	ST_10592_2019_INIT_en	ST_5033_2020_INIT_en		
	ST_11346_2016_INIT_en	ST_10713_2019_INIT_en	ST_5982_2020_INIT_en		
	ST_11369_2016_INIT_en	ST_10997_2019_INIT_en	ST_6132_2020_INIT_en		
	ST_12807_2016_INIT_en	ST_11073_2019_INIT_en	ST_6425_2020_INIT_en		
	ST_13157_2016_INIT_en	ST_12791_2019_INIT_en	ST_6650_2020_INIT_en		
	ST_13342_2016_INIT_en	ST_12795_2019_INIT_en	ST_7271_2020_INIT_en		
	ST_13398_2016_INIT_en	ST_12975_2019_INIT_en	ST_8295_2020_INIT_en		
	ST_14167_2016_INIT_en	ST_13521_2019_INIT_en	ST_8512_2020_INIT_en		
	ST_14381_2016_INIT_en	ST_13871_2019_INIT_en	ST_8566_2020_INIT_en		
	ST_14542_2016_INIT_en	ST_14249_2019_INIT_en	ST_8624_2020_INIT_en		
	ST_14839_2016_INIT_en	ST_14434_2019_INIT_en	ST_8626_2020_INIT_en		
	ST_15300_2016_INIT_en	ST_14594_2019_INIT_en	ST_8628_2020_INIT_en		
	ST_15314_2016_INIT_en	ST_14603_2019_INIT_en	ST_8648_2020_INIT_en		
	ST_15412_2016_INIT_en	ST_14653_2019_INIT_en	ST_8668_2020_INIT_en		
	ST_15673_2016_INIT_en	ST_14835_2019_INIT_en	ST_8711_2020_INIT_en		
ST_6061_2016_INIT_en	ST_14861_2019_INIT_en	ST_9133_2020_INIT_en			
ST_7221_2016_INIT_en	ST_15151_2019_INIT_en	ST_9183_2020_INIT_en			
ST_8165_2016_INIT_en	ST_15231_2019_INIT_en	ST_9258_2020_INIT_en			
ST_8822_2016_INIT_en	ST_15262_2019_INIT_en	ST_9401_2020_INIT_en			
ST_8824_2016_INIT_en	ST_15272_2019_INIT_en				
ST_8832_2016_INIT_en	ST_5601_2019_INIT_en				
ST_8833_2016_INIT_en	ST_5768_2019_INIT_en				
2017	ST_10238_2017_INIT_en		ST_6153_2019_INIT_en		
	ST_10370_2017_INIT_en		ST_7115_2019_INIT_en		
	ST_10456_2017_INIT_en		ST_7322_2019_INIT_en		
	ST_10500_2017_INIT_en		ST_8286_2019_INIT_en		
	ST_12950_2017_INIT_en		ST_8555_2019_INIT_en		
	ST_13070_2017_INIT_en		ST_8609_2019_INIT_en		
	ST_13101_2017_INIT_en		ST_9131_2019_INIT_en		
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	ST_14148_2017_INIT_en		ST_9300_2019_INIT_en		
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	ST_15573_2017_INIT_en		ST_9713_2019_INIT_en		
	ST_15811_2017_INIT_en				
	ST_6981_2017_INIT_en				
	ST_7495_2017_INIT_en				
	ST_8361_2017_INIT_en				
	ST_9376_2017_INIT_en				
	ST_9645_2017_INIT_en				
ST_9760_2017_INIT_en					
ST_9976_2017_INIT_en					

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Undergraduate : Kadir Has University, Political Science and Public Administration (2017)

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### Work Experience :

Sworn Translator, Freelance (2022-Present)

Project Officer, UCLG-MEWA (2020–Present)

Research Fellow, CIES (2019–2021)

Technical Assistant, Kadir Has University (2019–2020)

Research Assistant, Kadir Has University (2018–Present)

Distance Education Content Development and Preparation Specialist, E-Academy (2019–Present)

Immigration Specialist, Bedel Mobility Solutions (2018–2018)

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Editor & Writer, Fihrist Dergi (2016-2017)

Fundraiser, WWF Turkey (2014–2014)

Animator, RB Organization (2010-2012)

### Publications :

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