



## **Master of Arts Thesis**

**Euroculture**

**Palacký University in Olomouc, Czech republic (Home)**

**University of Groningen, the Netherlands (Host)**

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## **What Do We Mean by a “Strong Europe”? Cultural weakness of EU environmental policy**

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## **MA Programme Euroculture**

### **Declaration**

I, Zdenka Sokolíčková hereby declare that this thesis, entitled *What Do We Mean by a "Strong Europe"?*, submitted as partial requirement for the MA Programme Euroculture, is my own original work and expressed in my own words. Any use made within it of works of other authors in any form (e.g. ideas, figures, texts, tables, etc.) are properly acknowledged in the text as well as in the List of References.

I hereby also acknowledge that I was informed about the regulations pertaining to the assessment of the MA thesis Euroculture and about the general completion rules for the Master of Arts Programme Euroculture.

18 May 2011

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## Preface

The biggest challenge in the process of writing a diploma thesis is the temptation to choose an easy path. From the beginning of my research, I have been motivated not to write a thesis that would be “nothing but transference of bones from one graveyard to another” (J. Frank Dobie). The feeling of commitment has never vanished, which helped me boost my energy and keep working despite all the doubts and lack of time (shrinking arbitrarily, showing it is indeed a relative quantity). “Be realistic, demand the impossible,” appeared on a wall in Paris in 1968. And so I did.

I sincerely thank to both my supervisors, prof. dr. Gaudenz Assenza from the Palacký University in Olomouc, and dr. Erwin H. Karel from the University of Groningen. Each of them was helpful in a different way. Gaudenz watchdogged my “simplicity in language and complexity in thought.” Dr. Karel patiently kept drawing my attention to those aspects of the topic which I could not or did not want to see. Together, they made me believe that my work does matter.

Participating in the MA Programme Euroculture has determined the last two years of my life. The coming years will prove whether I have learned enough. At this moment, I feel ready to give it a try.

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Background of the topic

The nature of human society is ambiguous. On one side, people prefer order to chaos, stability to lingering insecurity. On the other side, history of human thought is a witness of a continuous struggle with challenges and crises. We strive for an ideal state, doomed to provisional amendments.

Within the European cultural tradition, it is considered as self-evident that improvement can be achieved through strength. However, this assumption is culturally particular. Ancient oriental wisdom, represented e.g. by Lao Tzu, does not necessarily associate strength with victory and progress. More precisely, not *the* kind of strength and progress accentuated in Western culture. “The soft overcomes the hard; and the weak the strong”,<sup>1</sup> says chapter 36 of *Tao Te Ching*.

Contemporary Europe is cosmopolitan, but it still derives from cultural roots of European origin. Since the society generates its institutions and these again influence the society, values and principles embedded in people's mindsets reflect themselves in the societal order, which becomes a reciprocal instrument of their self-justification.

Although culture is not static, it is rather stable. Changes in the cultural core cannot occur at a high pace. The way we understand the world transforms, but much too abrupt twists would cause lack of security and lead to social anomie. People are open to new ideas only to a certain level. Beyond the limit, rejection is likely because we are in most cases, as Thomas Kuhn revealed in 1962 in his widely quoted essay *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, not able to accept anomalies that would contest the whole system in which we live.

An indispensable part of a worldview is the relation between culture and nature. In other words, every culture approaches the natural environment in its own way, and this mental image works as a guideline for physical behaviour. A society that regards the natural world as intrinsically valuable treats every part of it as such. A society the attitude of which is superior deals with the natural world as if it were an inferior entity. This correlation is not valid only for the ties between culture and nature. It is equally

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1. Lao Tzu, *Tao-te Ching* (Forgotten Books, 2008), 19.

true for interpersonal or business relations.

Environmental commitment is not any more a question of personal preferences. Today's state of the natural environment is objectively worse than in the past, with the speed of degradation accelerating unprecedentedly since the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Individual cultures have to respond to the changing conditions. The answers are based on worldviews, as discussed above.

Thus, also countries cooperating within the institution of the European Union have an answer to the environmental questions of today. The image of a “strong Europe” includes Europe based on sustainable development, “underpinned by the synergies that exist between the economic, social and environmental elements”.<sup>2</sup> This rhetoric is revolutionary compared to the open ignorance of environmental processes some 50 years ago, yet there is no reason for us not to pay attention to the practical content of such an exclamation.

The background of the topic could be formulated in the following way. There is the dynamics of culture, a complex system of human origin, which evolves within the natural environment. There is the trend of environmental deterioration, at least in some of its aspects directly caused by unsustainable life strategies of the developed world. And finally, there is the effort to ensure that Europe, united under the flag of the EU, will successfully stand up to the future challenges. A strong Europe for the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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2. COM(2007) 225 final, 4.

## ***1.2 Statement of the problem***

Despite some rather isolated denial campaigns, it has been internationally acknowledged that environmental burdens that our civilization is dragging behind need to be eliminated. One of the introductory documents issued after the first meeting of the High Level Intergovernmental Advisory Panel of the United Nations Environment Programme for the purpose of the Global Environment Outlook 5 (GEO-5) states:

Since the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, global, regional and national concern for environmental and developmental issues has increased. This has led to an extensive range of internationally agreed environmental and development goals. However, progress towards meeting these has in many cases, been slow.<sup>3</sup>

There seems to be a negative correlation among a number of variables. If culture can and does exercise power over natural environment, and at the same time it is aware of the danger that disinterested exploitation might activate in the future, the logical outcome of this would be an environmental policy that enables both the culture to develop and the natural environment to flourish. Now, it is not the formulation itself but rather its content that is ambiguous. The understanding of what it means to prosper.

With the idea of prosperity and strength, we get back to the topic of worldview. Europe, even though fragmented and insecure about the common direction, is committed to adapt to the newly posed opportunities and threats. It draws some inspiration from other culture's traditions and heritage, but mostly it follows its own know-how.

Since the 1970s, the European Union, a political entity with an increasing influence over an ever growing territory, has become the most active regional power in the world as for its environmental liabilities. The engagement of the EU in this sector is a part of a broader tactics that is supposed to strengthen Europe's position in the changing global environment.

Let us summarize the basic facts. 1) The quality of the natural environment on the planet Earth is declining. 2) Many global, regional and national actors have realized that and are now getting ready to act. 3) The European Union is one of the most heard voices in this respect. 4) Its environmental policy is built on a concept of strength that is bound to the Western worldview and to the dream of Europe in the role of an economic,

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3. *Statement by the Global Intergovernmental and Multi-stakeholder Consultation on the Fifth Global Environment Outlook held in Nairobi from 29 – 31 March 2010*, UNEP/IGMC.2 Rev.2., <http://www.unep.org/GEO/pdfs/GEO-5-HL-FinalStatement.pdf> (accessed 15 March 2011).



political and cultural leader.

The (dys)functionality of an environmental policy based on such a culturally particular image of strength is the core focus of this thesis. My initial motivation stems from the notion of a serious gap between two realities – what we, Europeans, say, and what we do. For centuries, Europe was perceived and presented as a well of strong ideas which diffused into other cultures. Even nowadays, Europe stands for a paradise on Earth for those unable to live a dignified life. From within, the picture of united Europe is much less bright, though, and what is more, there is no coherency between the image Europe wants to spread around itself, and the ideas that truly set it motion.

During my previous educational experience at the Department of Cultural Studies in Prague, Czech republic, I became aware of the relationship between internal ideas and external reality. One of the greatest contributions of cultural ecology was introducing the topic of reciprocal influence between nature and culture. A constant flow of information from the outer world is collectively elaborated in people's minds and reappearing in cultural elements and patterns. Through this never-ending process, worldviews are formed. A worldview, *Weltanschauung*, is a stable (although not static) and shared set of ideas that distinguishes one group of people from another. It determines the way we think about ourselves, about the society, and last but not least, about the natural environment.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, an American essayist concerned with modern societal pressures, made the following observation about the linkage between the inner and the outer:

Every nation and every man instantly surround themselves with a material apparatus which exactly corresponds to their moral state, or their state of thought. Observe how every truth and every error, each a thought of some man's mind, clothes itself with societies, houses, cities, language, ceremonies, newspapers. Observe the ideas of the present day [and] see how each of these abstractions has embodied itself in an imposing apparatus in the community, and how timber, brick, lime, and stone have flown into convenient shape, obedient to the master idea reigning in the minds of many persons [...] It follows, of course, that the least change in the man will change his circumstances; the least enlargement of ideas, the least mitigation of his feelings in respect to other men [...] would cause the most striking changes of external things.<sup>4</sup>

The conceptual shift from one view to another is part of a broader change of

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4. Ralph Waldo Emerson, "War" (lecture delivered in Boston, March 1838). Reprinted in *Emerson's Complete Works*, vol. XI (Boston, MA: Houghton, Mifflin & Co., 1887), 177.

consciousness that accounts for the current crossroads experience (*a meta-system transformation* according to Francis Heylighen, *a global polycrisis* according to Edgar Morin, *a macroshift* according to Ervin László, *a great turning* according to David Korten, *a Great Transformation* according to Karl Polanyi, *a mutation of consciousness* according to Jean Gebser; the list could go on).<sup>5</sup> Such theories of cultural evolution (its dynamics in particular) draw our attention to the importance of worldviews reflected in the external reality. Studying this reality means learning about people's inner world, and also about the chance to regulate consciously the inner-outer world relation.

Apparently, we can talk about worldviews on an individual level but the concept becomes more thrilling when considered on a larger scale. What if there were a sub-consciously accepted worldview that affects a large community, and what if this community had a significant global say? This would imply that a particular aggregation of ideas originating in one culture can have a transcultural impact. It would also mean that in case this worldview includes presumptions with harmful implications for the natural environment, it can cause unprecedented ecological challenges. Culture can clash with nature.

In the late 1950s, the first steps toward united Europe were made. In the 1970s, the institution currently known as the European Union has launched its initiatives dealing with environmental issues. Since the 1990s, the EU has been undergoing a process usually described as environmental policy integration. So far, no other region has made a comparable effort in the direction of environmental improvement. The EU is thus considered to be the world leader on the environmental front, promoting the concept of sustainability and combating the climate change.

The thesis argues that it is vital for a better understanding of the present state of affairs to unveil ideas and concepts that underpin environmental policies fostered by the EU. It appears that it is difficult to extract environment from economy and society. Nevertheless, the thesis keeps its main focus on ecological issues. The EU is supposed to be “strong” and “competitive” because so is supposed to be its worldview. The thesis challenges this assumption, showing that the ideational basis of the EU environmental strategy is at odds with its own goals.

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5. I thank for this formulation to my supervisor, prof. Gaudenz Assenza.

### ***1.3 Topic***

From general reflections upon the problematic nature of the EU environmental policy and its possible stemming from the mainstream frame of reference, the topic of the thesis is narrowed down as follows. Disciplines the findings of which are applied throughout the research are European and cultural studies above all, but perspectives of economics, environmental philosophy, history and political science are also included. The main topic area is defined as European environmental strategy, with a general focus on a critical analysis of the European worldview embedded in the EU environmental policy.

The need to approach the EU environmental policy in a critical manner may seem dubious. There are many other areas where it is much easier (and presumably much more necessary) to prove that the EU is falling behind its ambitious statements, see e.g. the Eurozone, or the immigration issue.

On the other hand, environmental policy is a clear footprint of a culture's worldview. The story of every culture is a double-edged sword. Culture defines its vision in contradiction to nature, but at the same it cannot exist without it. What is more, culture as an adaptation tool is a dynamic system. Interference with the natural environment is inevitable. Therefore, environmental policy is a unique part of the cultural world that directly borders with its natural ecosystem. If we look at the issue in this way, we can see environmental policy of the EU – an analysis of its cultural background – as a good case study for a deeper inquiry into the readiness (or not) of Europe to become “strong”.

Concretely, the focus of the thesis is placed on diachronic development of the worldview dominating the European cultural territory (geographically sub-determined). The institution of the European Union serves as the defined perspective, while its environmental policy is the specific case studied as a manifestation of the general worldview.

#### ***1.4 Research questions and hypothesis***

The main research question that the thesis attempts to answer is:

- What is the current vision of a strong Europe based on, and does it actually make Europe strong and environmentally sustainable?

Three sub-questions serve as guidelines for the structure of the study:

- What does the ideational reservoir of the EU environmental policy consist of?
- How does it determine the policy itself? This question is further specified through the issue of the current economic crisis (see chapter 3).
- If what is depicted as strength is actually weakness, how could we redefine strength?

The thesis ought to test one main hypothesis, namely:

- The EU has constructed a strategy against problems caused by the same concepts that serve as pillars for the strategy itself.

### 1.5 *Relevance and goals of the study*

Any piece of academic writing needs to identify the “blind spots on the map” of knowledge. Scientific literature dealing with global environmental problems and challenges that are gaining ever more attention mostly since the 1960s is abundant. The perspectives are also numerous, ranging from descriptive and pragmatic overviews to theoretical revisions of universal human morality. Most analyses can be found within the fields of environmental history, cultural and social ecology, and environmental ethics.

As far as the richness of sources is concerned, the same goes for environmental policy integration in the European Union. The variety of approaches is somewhat less broad, though, and a significant part of the literature consists of historical summaries of the route the EU environmental strategy followed during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century plus an examination of its concrete implementation, with particular emphasis on hindrances and insufficiencies. The main research fields in this respect embrace European studies, political science, economy and environmentalism.

The thesis will make an effort to bridge a gap that can be easily spotted when browsing the impressive amount of the above mentioned scientific writing. Most of the sources can be classified as either a) general inquiries offering cause-and-effect explanations for the dramatic changes on the face of the Earth,<sup>6</sup> or b) specialized investigations concentrating on the political history of the environmental paradigm within the institution currently known as the European Union.<sup>7</sup> What is missing is a culturally-based scrutiny of the paradigm itself and its EU-level consequences. In other words, there is no satisfying theory that would avoid both the broadness of the first group of sources and the narrowness of the second one. European integration in the environmental field is hardly ever analyzed from the cultural perspective<sup>8</sup> while it is

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6. From the most recent publications that would belong to this category we could name e.g. John McNeill, *Environmental History: As if Nature Existed* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) or *A Passion for This Earth: Writers, Scientists, and Activists Explore Our Relationship with Nature and the Environment*, ed. Benjamin Michelle (Vancouver: Greystone Books, 2008).

7. This category includes all reports and standardized documents issued by legal authorities as well as works of independent researchers. An example would be e.g. John McCormick, *Environmental Policy in the European Union* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), *Environmental Policy in the European Union: Actors, Institutions, and Processes*, ed. Andrew Jordan (London: Earthscan, 2002), or *Energy and Environment in the European Union: Tracking Progress towards Integration* (Copenhagen: EEA; Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2006).

8. This phenomenon is the most obvious when we dive into literature dealing with the EU environmental strategy from outside. Scientific writings of the what-lessons-can-be-learned type usually exclude all efforts to understand the cultural basis of what is happening in the EU and go directly to the facts and

culture that determines political and social control.

We can mention the concept of sustainable development as a good example of why it is crucial to understand the cultural background of an influential idea before we start taking its legitimacy for granted. As Robinson Jeffers – one of the greatest American poets – writes in his verse play *The Cretan Woman*, “there is always a lion just beyond the firelight”.

Professor Susan Baker, researcher in the field of environmental policy at Cardiff School of Social Sciences, argues in her analysis of the EU environmental policy that even if we agreed that the original meaning of sustainable development had a high potential to become a leading idea of an ecologically balanced future, the actual application of it by the EU raises doubts about its efficiency. Not following the concept itself, the EU motivates other world regions to disregard the essence of sustainability, too.

The EU has a significant role to play in shaping sustainable development. The tragedy may be that the EU, a world leader, may well encourage others to replace the original concept of sustainable development with a weaker and highly truncated version of sustainable development.<sup>9</sup>

It is the remarkable ability of the European worldview to penetrate other cultures' cores and to determine their way of dealing with the natural environment on which human society depends.<sup>10</sup> “The way of thinking about the world that has become dominant in the last few centuries originated in Europe”,<sup>11</sup> and therefore, we need to know what this way of thinking consists of and how it modifies environmental strategy that has been developing in Europe's most ambitious project of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Following the design of the research framed by the research questions, there is one main aim with three subordinated goals.

- The objective of the work is to clarify what it signifies precisely when the EU officials call for investment into the entity's strength.

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dates. See e.g. Janet R. Hunter and Zachary Alden Smith, *Protecting Our Environment: Lessons from the European Union* (Albany: State University of New York, 2005).

9. Susan Baker, “The Evolution of the European Union Environmental Policy: From Growth to Sustainable Development,” in *The Politics of Sustainable Development: Theory, Policy and Practice within the European Union*, ed. Susan Baker et al. (London, New York: Routledge, 1997), 105.

10. “While Europe has limited power, it is still the world's major producer of ideology and a normative area that can contribute good ideas.” Johan P. Olsen, “The Many Facets of Europeanization,” *Journal of Common Market Studies* 40, no. 5 (2002): 939. Olsen further argues that European models have occasionally taken the form of colonization, coercion and imposition, but they have also been imitated voluntarily because of their perceived functionality, utility or legitimacy.

11. Clive Ponting, *A New Green History of the World: The Environment and the Collapse of Great Civilizations* (New York: Penguin, 2007), 116.

In order to accomplish this goal, the following needs to be achieved:

- The so-called European worldview is characterised from the historical perspective, with a particular focus on the idea of society's place in the nature.
- The manifestation of the described worldview is illustrated by the example of the current economic crisis, and how it relates to the environmental liabilities of the EU.
- The existing concept of strength is evaluated and revised.

## 1.6 Theory statement and terminology

The overall theoretical approach applied in the thesis derives from my background in cultural studies. I wish to illustrate clearly how ideas about human society and the natural environment mirror themselves in policy being sold by the EU as ecologically sound.

Consensual usage of basic terminology is vital for the comprehensiveness of the text. Therefore, crucial terms with suggested definitions for the purpose of the research are listed below.

**Culture.** The term is one of the most (mis)used expressions in the history of human thought. Definitions vary from esthetics and ethics, through psychology, sociology and anthropology, to ecology, biology and chemistry. In the thesis, it is not used as a normative, hierarchy-associated concept, but as a neutral descriptive tool embracing ideas, norms, customs, artefacts, institutions and all other products of *Homo sapiens sapiens*. The term “European culture” then would mean the historically based set of ideas about individual, society and nature that prevail in the countries declaring coherence with the European “invented community”.<sup>12</sup>

**European worldview.** In contrast to the term culture, I define the term worldview as a culturally specific constellation of thoughts which characterizes a porous but still cohesive community.<sup>13</sup> A worldview is closely linked to the past since it continually evolves in time. On that account, it is crucial to identify schools of thought, theories and perspectives that became widely accepted within the studied society, and that were absorbed in its cultural core. In the case of my thesis, special attention will be paid to those ideas that directly influence the way Europe interprets natural environment and the mode in which it should be treated.

**Environmentalism.** “A concern for the environment, and especially with the bond between humans and the environment; not solely in terms of technology but also in

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12. A sparkling insight into the problem of “inventing” Europe is offered by e.g. Anthony Pagden, “Europe: Conceptualizing a Continent”, in *The Idea of Europe: From Antiquity to the European Union*, ed. Anthony Pagden (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 31-54, or Gerard Delanty, *Inventing Europe: Idea, Identity, Reality* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1995).

13. A worldview is a “set of presuppositions and beliefs that every person has which shape how we make sense of the world and everything in it. This in turn influences such things as how we see ourselves as individuals, how we interpret our role in society, how we deal with social issues, and what we regard as truth”. “worldview” *A Dictionary of Environment and Conservation*. Chris Park. Oxford University Press, 2007. *Oxford Reference Online*. University of Groningen. 24 April 2010  
<<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t244.e9015>>



ethical terms”.<sup>14</sup> The question mark posed in the thesis refers to the essence of environmentalism that has been absorbed into the European worldview. Put differently, the mode in which attention is paid to environmental problems in conformity with European culture is explored.

**Environmental integration.** “The organization of [environmental regulation] so that national boundaries do not matter”.<sup>15</sup> The analysis focuses on theoretical points of departure that justify environmental integration in the European context which can be handled under the umbrella term of the EU environmental strategy.

Finally, Europe will be studied as a whole, thus as a global actor, in the same way as e.g. with the totalities of East Asia or Latin America is often operated. I am aware of the cultural differences and disparities among various parts of Europe. Nevertheless, I argue that without an “ideal type” of Europe (*Idealtypus*, as Max Weber would put it) it is impossible to deal with the topic from the perspective of the underlying culture out of which it emerges.

A clear distinction is also drawn between the terms of **growth** and **development**. One of the arguments used against the alleged sustainability of the EU endeavours will be the fact that economic growth, measured in terms of GDP, is still given priority when assessing a current or future action. Although there are severe clashes among the interests of the member states, the willingness to grow economically is universal. To describe a possible trend which does not rely exclusively on a hypertrophied economy but rather on a healthy and balanced trio economy-society-ecology, I will work with the term development.

Several major theories are utilized in the thesis. Let me mention the most significant ones. For the descriptive part, as a guideline for the history of European Nature-related ideas I used the perspective of a French philosopher Pierre Hadot. His distinction between Promethean and Orphic attitude offered a set of criteria to comment systematically on the historical development.

For the analytical part, a number of approaches was taken into account. British political scientists Simon Lightfoot and Jon Burchell formulated a hypothesis about the

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14. "environmentalism" *A Dictionary of Geography*. Susan Mayhew. Oxford University Press, 2009. *Oxford Reference Online*. University of Groningen. 24 April 2010

<<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t15.e1086>>

15. "integration" *A Dictionary of Economics*. John Black, Nigar Hashimzade, and Gareth Myles. Oxford University Press, 2009. *Oxford Reference Online*. University of Groningen. 24 April 2010

<<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t19.e1629>>

so-called “very rationale” of the EU that undermines any serious environmental commitment. This assumption supported the validity of my central hypothesis.

Thinkers such as Martin Marcussen, Ulrich Beck, Otto C. Scharmer or Robert Costanza produced inspiring theories about the dynamics and patterns of cultural transformations, and the role worldviews may play in such processes.

And finally, for the assessment part, I tried to link my own findings with the theory of conceptualizing sustainable development formulated by Dutch scholars Bert J. M. de Vries and Arthur Petersen, and the framework for scaling and framing policy problems in sustainability elaborated by an Australian academic Stephen R. Dovers.

### **1.7 Method statement**

Methods applied for the purpose of the thesis vary as I move from discussing the European worldview in general toward its reflections in the EU-level policies (economy-environment dichotomy).

An implicit yet always present methodological assumption is the semi-subjectivity of science, in its most precise form represented by the work of Max Weber. Weber emphasised that no scientific work can be purely objective since there is always an ideational background behind it which influences the way we select empirical data and how we interpret them. This principle is essential for the thesis for two reasons. First, it lies in the very core of the thesis statement, namely that the philosophical pillars of the EU environmental policy cannot be seen as flawless since they originate from a worldview with an anti-ecological concept of strength and weakness. Second, the rule is equally true for my own research – subjectivity is inevitable but being conscious about it is the first step on the way toward true knowledge.

In the section dealing with the worldview embedded in the EU environmental policy, I will base my argumentation on a review of existing critical theories. Three sub-themes will be discussed: the history of European ideas regarding nature and the role of human society in it, the current European (Western) worldview, and the official philosophy of European integration in relationship to natural environment. My thinking about the topic has been influenced by the methodological tool recently introduced by Otto C. Scharmer. In his work *Theory U: Leading from the Future as It Emerges*, Scharmer explains cognitive mechanisms that can bring us to a holistic understanding of current negative phenomena that accompany the crumbling worldview.

In the chapter on the (dis)connection of economic and ecological crisis, the thesis conducts a qualitative analysis of primary sources consisting of strategies, directives and policy measures issued mostly by EU bodies and institutions, or loosely EU-affiliated entities, dealing with the regulation of either economic or environmental policy area. Secondary sources such as monographs, journal articles and edited publications (online sources included) are used as well.

The last part closes the circle of theoretical/practical inquiries. An abstract historical (philosophical) essay about the European worldview followed by an analysis of a current phenomenon is translated into an assessment of the concept of strength.

### ***1.8 Synthesis of the state of the research***

Within the field of European studies, several theories about the nature and roots of the EU integration have been established. Scholars pay attention to topics such as European identity (Jeffrey Checkel, Peter Katzenstein), the so-called idea of Europe (Gerard Delanty, Anthony Pagden) or the institutional profile of the EU (John McCormick). As for the issue of the EU environmental policy, historical perspectives combined with political science approaches are common, usually disseminated in the form of articles and edited publications (Susan Baker, Andrea Lenschow, Andrew Jordan and others). A linkage between the two points of view (Europe as a community based on certain ideas versus the story of the EU environmental integration) is inexistent.

Regarding the theme of the current economic crisis in Europe and the ecological liabilities of the EU, the freshness of the issue is mostly reflected in the media and in primary sources such as documents published by the entity itself. Scholarly work is in process.

Finally, introducing the concept of strength to the analysis of contemporary European environmental policy is one of the most difficult features of this thesis, as there is no prior endeavour to analyze the environmental quandaries using this conceptual lens.

### ***1.9 Description of the structure of the study***

The structure of the thesis is denoted by the research questions, which determine the logical order of the chapters to answer them.

First of all, the European worldview with respect to the ideas about nature and the role of civilization is characterized. Special attention is paid to classical ancient thought, Christian thought, secular and progressivist thought, modern economic thought and the most recent movements. The chapter ends with provisional conclusions about the features of the European worldview that condition the EU environmental policy.

The following chapter discusses the problem of today's economic crisis and its relevance for the EU environmental regulation. In this part, concentration is shifted from the past to the present. However, I comment on the economic and ecological outlook of the EU with regard to the question of the essence of strength. The section finishes with updated provisional conclusions.

The third and last chapter has a simple architecture yet it contains the main outcomes of the research, whereas the difference between the so-called conservative and transformative strength is explained.

WE SHALL NOT CEASE FROM EXPLORATION  
AND THE END OF ALL OUR EXPLORING  
WILL BE TO ARRIVE WHERE WE STARTED  
AND KNOW THE PLACE FOR THE FIRST TIME.  
T. S. Elliot

## 2 Europe Denatured: Historical Path of Cultural Arrogance?

The first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has just ended. A number of global and regional processes has been witnessed, many of them labelled as historical, critical, or even unprecedented. Two of them, discussed with great insistence, are crucial for the main research question of this thesis, namely environmental changes and European integration.

The Czech philosopher and supporter of the environmental movement, Erazim Kohák, coined the expression “green halo”. His work *The Green Halo: A Bird's-Eye View of Ecological Ethics* is opened with the following multilayered anecdote:

Once I watched a folk carver decorating his work with leftover modelling paint. He was just painting the apostles' halos green. I was then returning from an ecological conference and so I asked about the deep significance of the green halo. He said, thoughtfully, “I ran out of yellow paint”.<sup>16</sup>

Out of pure necessity, worried about ourselves and those coming after us, we are forced to adapt our worldview to the current unfavourable environmental conditions. We can develop the metaphor one step further, though, and apply it to the topic which will be discussed on the following pages.

The European Union presents itself as a world pioneer and guardian of progressive environmental policies. Following and developing the core ideas of the Club of Rome and its striking report known as *Limits of Growth* published in 1972, the EU has been walking the environmental line – or claiming to be doing so – from then on. Sustainability, introduced in 1987, has become a popular concept mirrored in many official documents. Ecological concerns play a significant role in the image European policy makers want to portray: the united Europe as a strong actor on the global scene.<sup>17</sup> In other words, the EU has a green halo.

But is this really the case? To which extent has the public discourse been shifted in

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16. Erazim Kohák, *The Green Halo: A Bird's-Eye View of Ecological Ethics* (Chicago: Open Court, 2000), xxvii.

17. “During the past two decades the European Union (EU) has emerged as the global leader in international environmental politics.” R. Daniel Kelemen, “Globalizing EU Environmental Regulation” (paper presented at The European Union Studies Association, 11<sup>th</sup> Biennial International Conference, Marina Del Rey, California, 23-25 April 2009), 3.

the direction of profound ecologically-based consciousness? On which ideas and concepts is the EU environmental strategy based? How does its cultural background influence real policy making? Can the EU be interpreted as an inspiring model for the wider world or does the green colour of its halo actually run?

These are the main contextual questions that arise when we, metaphorically speaking, scratch off the green paint covering the EU environmental policies. Constructive cultural understanding of how the issues are taken into account might help us decide whether the EU way is indeed the “new kind of politics [that] environmental protection urgently needs today”.<sup>18</sup> The specific aim of the chapter is to uncover the cultural origins of the mode in which environmental issues are generally addressed by the EU. Its (maybe much too ambitious) goal is to contest the skeptical assumption that “it is nearly impossible to see what is happening until it is inconveniently late to do much about it”.<sup>19</sup>

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18. Joachim Radkau, *Nature and Power: A Global History of the Environment* (Washington, D.C.: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 330.

19. John R. McNeill, *Something New Under the Sun: An Environmental History of the Twentieth-Century World* (London, New York: Norton, 2000), 358.

## 2.1 *Owning Nature: Image of nature and the role of civilization*<sup>20</sup>

It might seem as an exaggeratedly long way to go if we first discuss the history of European ideas about nature before we comment on the environmental strategy applied by the European Union nowadays. In addition, it is difficult to prove that certain concepts developed e.g. during the period of humanism or Enlightenment influence the White Papers delivered by the European Commission on concrete environmental issues since environmental philosophy is – unsurprisingly – never explicitly related to. Despite this methodological obstacle, limited statements about the ties between human society and natural environment, mostly in general strategic documents and introductory chapters of otherwise narrowly focused publications, can be studied and analysed. It will be thus helpful if we revise the story of the attitude that crystallized in Europe towards the non-human, and use it later as argumentation for the criticism of the mainstream understanding of strength.

The very first question that shall be raised is the following: To which extent is a country/culture/region responsible for its behaviour towards the rest of the world, and in how far should it reflect on its strategies in the perspective of being a possible model for others? The point might be less relevant for societies which have an insignificant say in the global context (because they have no contact with other cultures, because they are underdeveloped and thus enjoying low cultural prestige, etc.) but it certainly is of great importance in the case of Europe.

The more globalized the world is, the more serious the problem of placing oneself in the role of a model becomes. In the collective volume *Civilizations in World Politics: Plural and Pluralist Perspectives*, edited by Peter J. Katzenstein, Professor of

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20. The term “civilization” is understood as a weakly institutionalized social order, reflected in and shaped by a variety of practices and processes, varying in space and time, which is highly differentiated and culturally vaguely integrated. Peter J. Katzenstein, “A World of Plural and Pluralist Civilizations: Multiple Actors, Traditions and Practices,” in *Civilizations in World Politics: Plural and Pluralist Perspectives*, ed. Peter J. Katzenstein (London, New York: Routledge, 2010), 5-6. “Civilization”, like “culture”, can hardly be fully defined. Arnold Toynbee, British historian and great theorist of culture, comments on the attempts to define civilization as follows: “When one has described civilization as being a kind or a phase of culture, and when one has discussed the date at which it made its first appearance, one has perhaps implied that one has already arrived at a definition of what civilization is. I myself has been criticized for having operated with the idea without having defined my usage of the word explicitly.” Arnold Toynbee, *A Study of History – Reconsiderations*, Volume XII (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 274. And further: “Perhaps it might be defined as an endeavour to create a state of society in which the whole of mankind will be able to live together in harmony, as members of a single all-inclusive family. This is, I believe, the goal at which all civilizations so far known have been aiming unconsciously, if not consciously.” Ibid., 279. The courage to define such a category in spiritual terms proves Toynbee's capability to escape reductionist simplifications.



International Studies at the Cornell University, the position of Europe in the current global setting is discussed by Emanuel Adler, Professor of International Relations in the Department of Political Science at the University of Toronto. “What is good for Europe, Europeans believe, will be good for the world”.<sup>21</sup> What Adler demonstrates in the text on the example of the EU foreign and security policy is equally valid for the environmental sphere. Europe tends to found its image on the willingness to upgrade its own culture to the global civilizational level. Spreading its ideas is understood as beneficence practised beyond the outer limits of the territory.<sup>22</sup>

This attitude is usually characterized as Eurocentrism, yet we are not arguing that abandonment of the connectedness with the location and its traditional ideas would be the right way how to overcome it. As Val Plumwood, an Australian ecofeminist intellectual and activist, writes in her work *Environmental Culture: The Crisis of Reason*, affirmation of certain epistemic locations can lead to the development of a polycentric or acentred world.<sup>23</sup> Such an acentred world may be a better solution especially in the case when there is one dominant culture with a tendency to propagate its ideas about natural environment which are not sustainable. In addition, getting over civilizational hierarchy would, metaphorically speaking, open the windows of the previous world leaders towards ideas coming from other systems of thought and enrich their ideational capital, strengthening the potential of some concepts and weakening the influence of others.

Another point that derives from the question about suggesting oneself to be followed is the issue of good practice that needs no other advertisement. Looking at the quote by Emanuel Adler, it goes without saying that Europe rather supports the opinion that practices identified as desirable by the Europeans would be beneficent for other societies, too. Without falling into the trap of plain cultural relativism, let us remember that cultural anthropology has proved there exists no exclusively correct interpretation of the world, and thus each culture develops its own adaptive strategy that is considered the most efficient. Inspiration is not *a priori* excluded, though, and diffusion of convenient practices is indeed a usual phenomenon when two cultures start an

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21. Emanuel Adler, “Europe As a Civilizational Community of Practice,” in *Civilizations in World Politics: Plural and Pluralist Perspectives*, ed. Peter J. Katzenstein (London, New York: Routledge, 2010), 84.

22. *Ibid.*, 83-84.

23. Val Plumwood, *Environmental Culture: The Crisis of Reason* (London, New York: Routledge, 2002), 137.

interaction.

Nevertheless, one could table the counter-argument that as for ecologically sound behaviour, there is no space for relativity. Parts of the global ecosystem are interlinked, we could even say they are twisted and tangled into a single and indivisible nod of relations. How can we support the thesis that once a harmonious approach is adopted by one culture, there should be no pressure from that pioneering society on the others to implement the practice as soon as possible, especially when the ecological crisis is on rise?

Carl N. McDaniel, Professor of Biology at the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in New York, gives a partial answer to the question in the introduction of his book *Wisdom for a Livable Planet*:

While history enables us to perceive the overall consequences of how various peoples have lived, science unveils the underlying bases for these consequences. We are far from possessing a complete knowledge of the causes of all phenomena, but we know enough to provide for human well-being and to preserve a healthy planet for future generations. The question is: will we? [...] The ecological revolution is the next big idea in Western culture and has been in the making for more than a century. Religious, political, and economic freedom have been the big ideas that liberated Western culture, propelling it to become the dominant civilizing force of the past several centuries, but the successes of these big ideas have met the limits imposed by biological principles on a finite planet.<sup>24</sup>

McDaniel suggests that despite our limited knowledge about the functioning of the ecosystems, there is sufficient information for us to understand what does strengthen the chances that the crisis will turn out well. He is also critical about the arrogance of the First World's paradigm, blaming it for ignoring the fact that human society is Earth-bound and thus needs to contextualize abstract ideas in a concrete environment.

McDaniel's enthusiasm about the ecological revolution as the coming hit in the history of Western ideas sounds rather precocious, though. There were some alternative approaches vivid within the Western cultural tradition, too, yet there is little evidence for the thesis that it will be “us” who have the potential to lead the world into an ecologically sustainable future.

In spite of the assertive optimism expressed in the quoted paragraph, McDaniel offers a viable method of evaluating ecologically sound practices.

A small group of insightful people has perceived the biological and physical constraints now bearing down on humanity, and they have acted on their

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24. Carl N. McDaniel, *Wisdom for a Livable Planet* (San Antonio: Trinity University Press, 2005), 4.

perceptions. I tell the stories of eight of them,<sup>25</sup> each of whom has taken a major environmental challenge that appears impossible to address effectively. Each story provides a window onto a different aspect of our environmental conundrum, while together the views from all these windows form a full picture of our unsustainable ways of life. At the same time, these visionaries' own lives, like innumerable others scattered around the world, are an inspiration. These men and women enable the rest of us to believe that answers to the challenges we face can be found. The narratives of these visionaries collectively give us hope, and their stories suggest to us ways to create a brighter future for all life.<sup>26</sup>

In this aspect, McDaniel touches upon a crucial point about the justification of following somebody else's good example, namely that tangible results of a practice rather than conviction about its rightness should be the guideline. What is more, telling stories, narrating a lived experience<sup>27</sup> is far more efficient than declaring general principles without personalizing them. In other words, a dialogue is more didactic than a monological lecture. "We need a cultural paradigm shift in many linked areas to adopt a partnership or dialogical model of relationships with nature in place of currently disabling centrist control",<sup>28</sup> says Plumwood and turns our attention to the most problematic issue in the history of European ideas about the non-human world – the muteness of nature perceived as a nullity in itself.<sup>29</sup>

Ideas are not the only factor that sets people in motion but in many aspects they still have a decisive power. The way we perceive and interpret the world affects the way we justify how we treat it<sup>30</sup> and how we understand our history and culture.<sup>31</sup> In a nutshell, thoughts about man's place in the nature do matter.<sup>32</sup> According to Emanuel Adler quoted earlier in the text, the European worldview is exceptional in the degree of its cultural attraction for other civilizations, and the notion of this civilizational magnetism is enforced by active promotion of its core ideas,<sup>33</sup> environmental ideas included.

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25. Terri Swearingen (the topic of toxic waste), Dave Foreman (biodiversity), Wes Jackson (agriculture), Helena Norberg-Hodge (local versus global), Werner Fornos (population), Herman Daly (economy), Stephen Schneider (climate change), and David Orr (education). Note mine.

26. McDaniel, *Wisdom for a Livable Planet*, 4.

27. Illustration of a theory with examples of good/pathological practices is well-done in the work of Otto C. Scharmer, *Theory U: Leading from the Future as It Emerges* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2009).

28. Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*, 238.

29. *Ibid.*, 215.

30. Ponting, *A New Green History of the World*, 116.

31. David Arnold, *The Problem of Nature: Environment, Culture and European Expansion* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 9.

32. "What people thought affected the environment because to some extent it shaped their behavior. And of course, the changing environment played a part in affecting what people thought." McNeill, *Something New Under the Sun*, 326.

33. Adler, "Europe As a Civilizational Community of Practice," 69.

My aspiration is not to provide an in-depth overview of all fundamental ideas that contributed to the European cultural core. Many excellent thinkers did so already.<sup>34</sup> I will limit myself to highlighting those which have their equivalent in the EU environmental policy.

The debate over what does and what does not belong to the ideational reservoir of Europe and thus what can or cannot be included in the tediously constructed European identity is particularly foggy. On the other hand, there is a certain consensus about some of the concepts that are generally considered as European.<sup>35</sup>

We can extract roughly 6 groups of ideas that are always mentioned when the Western (European) worldview is discussed. These include: classical ancient thought (Greek and Roman tradition), Christian (and Jewish) thought,<sup>36</sup> secular thought (Descartes, Bacon, Spencer, Kant etc.), progressivist thought (linked to the rise of science and technology, and the Enlightenment movement), modern economic thought (Smith, Ricardo, Mill, Keynes and Marx), and finally the approach of liberal economics, leading towards consumerism and globalization.<sup>37</sup>

I shall now briefly discuss these “thought nodes”, relating them to the topic of the present EU environmental policies. As already mentioned, the topic is vast and it might be an independent theme for a diploma thesis. Yet we need a crisp characteristics of the path that led to the current situation. Let us take one monographic volume that concentrates on the relationship between man and nature in the history of European thought, and comment on the way each of the presented ranges of ideas is still traceable in the understanding of our culture's place in the ecosystemic context. I will also bear in mind the question of strength, its definition and essence. The work that will serve for the outlined purpose is *The Veil of Isis: An Essay on the History of the Idea of Nature*,

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34. See e.g. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, first published in 1904/1905; Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West*, first published in 1918; or Alfred Whitehead, *Adventures of Ideas*, first published in 1933.

35. I do not claim that there exists anything like unmistakably European, closed reservoir of thoughts. The dynamics of human thought is complex and persuasive theories about the interconnectedness of ideas throughout time and space are numerous. See e.g. Rubert Sheldrake, *The Rebirth of Nature: The Greening of Science and God*, published in 1990; Henryk Skolimowski, *The Participatory Mind*, published in 1994; or Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *La Place de l'Homme dans la Nature: Le Groupe Zoologique Humain*, published in 1956.

36. There is also a school of thought which denies this over and over repeated hypothesis that Jewish and Christian tradition shall be gathered under the same heading. See e.g. John Passmore, *Man's Responsibility for the Nature: Ecological Problems and Western Thoughts* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1974). Passmore argues that the Greek and Christian way of thinking have been much more influential for the current European worldview than the Jewish perception of the world and man's role in it.

37. Ponting, *A New Green History of the World*, 116-136.

written in 2004 by Pierre Hadot, a French historian of philosophy.<sup>38</sup>

### 2.1.1 Classical ancient thought

Thinking about ties between human society and natural environment, I could start my inquiry further in the past, when our life strategy changed from being on a constant move to settling down and adapting the immediate surroundings according to the needs of a stable community.<sup>39</sup> In this way, though, I would dive too deep in history, environmental history in particular,<sup>40</sup> which is not in the centre of my interest. Whenever a scholar wishes to study European civilization, they start with ancient Greece. The EU recalls Greek foundations of European culture on the website dedicated to Greece as Member State:

Greece is one of the cradles of European civilisation, whose ancient scholars made great advances in philosophy, medicine, mathematics and astronomy. Their city-states were pioneers in developing democratic forms of government. The historical and cultural heritage of Greece continues to resonate throughout the modern world - in literature, art, philosophy and politics.<sup>41</sup>

What is this cultural heritage, resonating throughout the world up to the present times, like? How does it shape our life today? Pierre Hadot examines the ancient image of Nature hiding her secrets that Reason tries to grasp. An important point about Greek philosophy with regard to the issue of nature-society relationship is that the natural world was believed to function according to a method that can be revealed through

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38. I am using the Czech translation, Pierre Hadot, *Závoj Isidin: Esej o dějinách ideje přírody* (Praha: Vyšehrad, 2010).

39. See e.g. Joachim Radkau, *Nature and Power: A Global History of the Environment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), especially chapter 2, The Ecology of Subsistence and Tacit Knowledge: Primeval Symbiosis of Humans and Nature.

40. Environmental history “interprets landscapes in terms of their history and analyzes their dynamics, making ecological sense of resource-use practices that have created these landscapes.” Fikret Berkes, “Rethinking Community-Based Conservation,” in *Environment – Key Issues for the Twenty-First Century: Volume 4 – Institutions, Processes and Policies for the Environment*, ed. Jules Pretty (London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2006), 161.

41. Europa.eu, The EU at a glance, European countries, Member states of the EU, Greece, [http://europa.eu/abc/european\\_countries/eu\\_members/greece/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/abc/european_countries/eu_members/greece/index_en.htm) (accessed 20 February 2011). Now this is an interesting issue because the wells of Greek culture were non-European plus the role of Greece in the actual forming of the current European identity is absolutely marginal. “Civilizational memories are a cacophony. Greece as the foundation of European civilization is a perfect example. Widely regarded by Greeks and Europeans alike as Europe's foundational civilization, its history tells a very different story. Greek civilization was not foundational in the sense of having existed apart from the influence of Africa, Egypt, and the Eastern Mediterranean, to which it is linked intimately. [...] Greece as civilizational foundation of a Europe set apart from Islam is also difficult to comprehend – in light of the country's incorporation into the Ottoman empire for half a millennium.” Peter J. Katzenstein and Jeffrey T. Checkel, “Conclusion – European identity in context,” in *European Identity*, ed. Peter J. Katzenstein and Jeffrey T. Checkel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 219.

science. To manage a strong entity provides the manager with strength. Hadot develops a bipolar distinction between two approaches towards the natural world, labelling them as Promethean and Orphic. Although they can and do mingle, they are profoundly different. Talking about strength as embedded in Nature, it is the Promethean attitude that suggests applying violence in order to break resistance.

Science and technology transform physical strength into strength of mind. Technology belongs to the core sources of modern civilisation and it is bound to mechanics and experimental method, both rooted in the culture of ancient Greece. Hadot reminds us that the etymology of “mechanics” points at *méchané* (μηχανή) meaning deceit or treachery. Western science was thus born out of courage to cheat on Nature, fight against her, subdue her forces and use them for the purpose of people's welfare. Technology and mechanics flourished especially in Hellenistic Alexandria from the end of 4<sup>th</sup> century onward.

The Promethean attitude that Pierre Hadot identified in the initial phase of Western science has remained to be the dominant stream throughout European history. Even though numerous influential philosophers applied the alternative – Orphic – approach (such as Socrates, Seneca or the Epicureans), it is rather the understanding of wisdom in terms of practical application and useful skills that is present in our environmental management. Knowledge serves mankind and its purpose is an improvement of people's life; this idea was included in the philosophy of science in ancient Greece, too, yet it was accompanied by stressing the importance of moral strength and respect in front of Nature, a fully incomprehensible entity.

### **2.1.2 Christian thought**

“The 'true' Europe is Latin Christianity, or simply Christianity”,<sup>42</sup> says Holly Case, a historian of modern East-Central and South-Eastern Europe at the Cornell University, and her statement is meant ironically. The question of “the” religion and its being a constitutive part of unified Europe is unsolved. There is no consensus about including Christian thought and values in the strategy that Europe needs to develop facing new challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but the discussion is lively, especially in the context of Islam present in Europe. Jewish, Christian and Islamic communities will have a say in the forming process of the future European governance. In May 2009, José Barroso

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42. Holly Case, “Being European: East and West,” in *European Identity*, ed. Peter J. Katzenstein and Jeffrey T. Checkel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 113.

discussed the role of ethics in the European and global economic order with high-level representatives of Christianity, Judaism and Islam:

As the financial and economic crisis progresses, it becomes increasingly clear that the moment has come to reconcile economic governance with our fundamental ethical values on which the European project has been based over the last 50 years.<sup>43</sup>

Let us consider the connotations of Christianity (and its roots) for the regulation of our society's behaviour toward natural environment. Before commenting on the contribution of Pierre Hadot to the debate, I shall briefly mention the noted article written by Lynn White, an American historian of medieval times, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis" which was published in 1967 in *Science*.<sup>44</sup>

White identifies two main foundations of Western culture, namely science and technology (originating in ancient Greece, as suggested above) and Christian religion. Around the year 1000, European civilization started to use technology for primitive industrial projects, at the end of the 12<sup>th</sup> century wind power was discovered as an energy resource, and in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> century Europe invests its full intellectual potential into technological progress.

The paradigm of Middle Ages in Europe was indeed profoundly Christian. White argues that the era witnessed a shift in the attitude toward natural environment in the sense that instead of being a part of the ecosystem, people interpreted their role as legitimate exploiters.<sup>45</sup>

This interpretation of the European medieval worldview is contestable and White was repeatedly criticised for his teaching.<sup>46</sup> Above all, it is problematic to claim that the attitude toward nature in the Middle Ages was a tectonic rupture caused by spreading Christianity. It shall be rather assumed that the worldview developed in line with the previous phases, and that Christianity (or religion in general) may have a certain influence on it, but not a decisive one since technological progress occurs in almost all

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43. Europa.eu, "Presidents of Commission and Parliament discuss ethical contributions for European and global economic governance with European faith leaders," <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/09/730&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en> (accessed 21 February 2011).

44. Lynn White, "The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis," *Science* 155, no. 3767 (1967): 1203-1207. Reprinted in *Readings in Biology and Man*, ed. Miguel A. Santos (MSS Information Corporation, 1973), 266-274.

45. The same criticism can be found in the work of Friedrich Schiller "The Gods of Greece" (1788).

46. For an overview see e.g. Ronald G. Shaiko, "Religion, Politics, and Environmental Concern: A Powerful Mix of Passions," *Social Science Quarterly* 68, no. 2 (1987): 244-262.

societies, regardless of the dominant religion.<sup>47</sup>

Yet White tries to search for medieval roots of further changes in Europe. He supports the idea that Judaic-Christian teleology includes the belief in eternal progress which can be achieved through pursuing exact knowledge. These theses were further elaborated by Max Weber and they still offer space for new interpretations. Ernest Gellner summarized the discussion about the so-called disenchantment of the world, defining it as “the Faustian purchase of cognitive, technological, and administrative power, by the surrender of our previous meaningful, humanly suffused, humanly responsive, if often also menacing or capricious world”.<sup>48</sup>

The image of a cognitive, technological and administrative power actually suits perfectly the image of the European Union whose calls for reconciliation with ethics cannot be fulfilled unless the entity changes its essence from a pragmatic and mainly economic union of nation-states to a community.<sup>49</sup>

Getting back to what Hadot has to say about Christianity and medieval times, let us dwell shortly on his hypothesis about the Christian foundation of the mechanistic paradigm. According to Hadot, Adam's fall means loss of innocence and also of dominance over the natural world. In order to retrieve innocence, we need the help of religion. In order to retrieve anthropocentric dominance, we need the help of exact science.<sup>50</sup> This reading corresponds with what Lynn White says about the purpose of science in the context of the Christian belief. Hard data and objective explanations is a means that helps us understand God's intentions.<sup>51</sup>

Hadot also pays attention to the work of Philo of Alexandria, a Hellenistic Jewish Biblical philosopher born in 20 BC. His allegorical interpretation of the Bible was influenced by the thought of Plato and it was a well of inspiration for Neoplatonists. He shifts from sensual perception and analysis toward the intelligible, looking for allegories hidden in the literal wording. The same instruction applies to those who study *physis* (φύσις) which is not material but sacred.<sup>52</sup> The sacred secret of Nature is the centre of

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47. I thank for this formulation to my supervisor, dr. Erwin H. Karel.

48. Ernest Gellner, *Culture, Identity and Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), quoted in David Morgan, “Enchantment, Disenchantment, Re-enchantment,” in *Re-enchantment*, ed. James Elkins and David Morgan (Oxon, New York: Routledge, 2009), 5. It seems that Gellner's Faustian approach matches Hadot's Promethean attitude.

49. I am operating with the word “community” in the sense used e.g. by Herman Daly. See McDaniel, *Wisdom for a Livable Planet*, p. 132-163.

50. Hadot, *Závoj Isidin*, 132.

51. White, “The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis”, 272.

52. Hadot, *Závoj Isidin*, 59.



interest for scientists also according to Roger Bacon, an English philosopher living in the 13<sup>th</sup> century who promoted empirical scientific methodology. Experimental method, says Bacon, is an art treating Nature as if it were an instrument.<sup>53</sup>

It would be a one-sided conclusion if we affirmed that Christianity meant a convenient starting point for the reductionist Western science that is not able to come to terms with the new requirements placed on our society in the light of the current environmental challenges. As Pierre Hadot stresses himself, the Promethean and Orphic attitude are often complementary, or at least parallel. Such a double-edged sword is Christianity for contemporary Europe, too. It supports cultivation of our morality and it is not afraid of discussion about values. On the other hand, Christianity does not *a priori* stimulate a holistic attitude toward nature and there is evidence that it rather sees nature as hostile and doomed to be conquered, teaching people to fear it. It risks to remain captured in the abstract spheres of transcendence, viewing the society as set apart from the natural environment; an attitude we can no longer afford.

### **2.1.3 Secular and progressivist thought**

Even though all the scientists and philosophers that gather in the subchapter entitled “secular thought” were Christians, the systems they developed may be considered profane. Their secularism consists in the fact that they turned their attention to the material, physical world, leaving spiritual questions out and operating with the entity of God as if it were just a “retired constructor”.<sup>54</sup>

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the world of science became fascinated by the venture of unveiling the secrets of Nature through experiment. Modern science, says Hadot, is actually a hereditary of magic, and new physics based on mathematics and mechanics is following the intentions of philosophical physics and pseudoscientific disciplines of ancient and medieval times.<sup>55</sup>

As a representative of this movement, we can invoke the name of Francis Bacon, a British empirical philosopher. His ideas about the divine right of men to exploit and control nature, and the usefulness of deriving knowledge about our world by force are well-known and widely quoted. Yet we shall not repeat the mistake of a reductionist and squeeze Bacon's work into several statements usually presented out of their context. It is a common phenomenon that a complex thought is interpreted by a less complex mind

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53. Hadot, *Závoj Isidín*, 114.

54. *Ibid.*, 137.

55. *Ibid.*, 46.

which causes biased judgements, taken for granted the more often they are echoed.

When environmentalists criticise the founding fathers of Western science such as Francis Bacon, Galileo Galilei, René Descartes, Isaac Newton or Immanuel Kant, they often marginalize those aspects or their teachings that would weaken the easy assumption about their philosophical guilt. Once again, let us remind the reader that Hadot's distinction between the Promethean and Orphic attitude is multiplex – great theories always include both smart reduction and wise doubts.

Nevertheless, it is important to stress several points about the secular and progressivist thought that settled in Europe from the late 16<sup>th</sup> until the 19<sup>th</sup> century. One, the society fully adopts the ideal of perpetual progress. Two, spirituality loses its position within science. And three, not causes or purposes but mechanisms are the strategic issues that science ought to comprehend, being directly applied in technology.

Linear understanding of time, and the belief that knowledge can be widened and deepened without limits is bound to the philosophy of Enlightenment which is being recollected whenever the so-called European identity is at stake:

Often, public actors simply refer to [the] community of values without further specifying what it consists of. In many other instances, however, public actors refer to either Enlightenment or Christian values.<sup>56</sup>

The fact that Enlightenment is mentioned next to the dominant European religion might seem to be in contradiction to the thesis that there is no more space for faith in the public sphere, science included. The impossibility of disregarding spiritual needs of human beings is proven by the current importance of religion in the global context, Europe not excluded.<sup>57</sup>

Secular progressivist thought inseminated Europe with tensions that brought excellent results in some areas of human enterprise, leaving other issues fatally unsolved. The image of scientist as an engineer constructing the functions of the machine of Nature<sup>58</sup> has been duplicated in the image of policy maker, this time designing the functions of the society.

#### **2.1.4 Modern economic thought**

The last nod in the net of the European worldview that should be discussed is the

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56. Juan Díez Medrano, "The Public Sphere and the European Union's Political Identity," in *European Identity*, ed. Peter J. Katzenstein and Jeffrey T. Checkel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 95.

57. See e.g. Jürgen Habermas, *Between Naturalism and Religion* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008).

58. Hadot, *Závoj Isidin*, 129.

economic thought.<sup>59</sup> As we will see in the chapter on the linkage between the contemporary economic crisis and the environmental liabilities, modern economic theories – or, more precisely, their truncated versions – are indeed crucial for our understanding of the EU's attitude towards nature.

Several theories were introduced onto the European stage, some of them influential in a particular period of time or geographical area, some of them present since their establishment, spreading among various zones. As I did in the previous subchapters, I will only underline some basic points about the economic way of thinking that is mirrored in the problems the EU is struggling with, forced to redefine its attitude towards natural environment.

One of the pillars that the EU is based on is the principle of free market. The teaching of Adam Smith, a Scottish philosopher and economist born in 1723, is always remembered when capitalism and its guiding law – the so-called invisible hand – are criticised. Yet the same simplification from which the interpretations of Francis Bacon's thought often suffer is common in the case of Smith's theory, too.

McDaniel defends Smith with the following words:

Today the free market as advocated by politicians and their economic advisors operates on the belief that the unrestricted pursuit of self-interest will also serve the public good. What has long been ignored, however, is Smith's assessment of what enables self-interest to effect the greater good. In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* he cautions that self-interest cannot serve the public interest unless it is constrained by the moral force of shared community values. This ethical foundation on which classical economics is based has been lost as modern economists have sought to make their discipline a value neutral science like physics.<sup>60</sup>

The quote points out two matters that should be taken into account with regard to the question of positioning the human society in the natural environment. First, any effort to detach policy-making from values is doomed to fail. Second, a false or incomplete interpretation of a powerful idea can have severe consequences. The former remark will be elaborated in the discussion of the concept of strength.<sup>61</sup> The latter is valid also for the debate about sustainable development and the “weak” implementation

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59. In the work of Pierre Hadot, this issue is not discussed at all, probably because the author analyzes the development of the relationship between man and nature in the European context within certain historical boundaries. Another reason might be that only rough standpoints are taken by the classics of economy as far as natural environment is concerned, and no consistent theories of environmental regulation were elaborated by them.

60. McDaniel, *Wisdom for a Livable Planet*, 162.

61. Adam Smith's teaching in its complexity is advocated also e.g. in the work of David C. Korten, *The Post-Corporate World: Life after Capitalism* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 1999).

of a “strong” thought.

Modern economic theories, being relatively recent, are broad in their variety, and it is thus difficult to summarize which aspects of them can be understood as inherent parts of the European worldview. Be it Smith, Ricardo, Keynes or Marx, the jury is still out on the systems they elaborated. Whichever source we might draw inspiration from, there is an opinion presented by neoclassical economics that needs to be contested:

Economists assure that [...] unpleasant realities represent only temporary sacrifices on the road to universal prosperity. Through economic growth we will expand economic pie to create more for everyone. Plausible as it sounds, the argument is based on two false premises: first, that making money is the same as creating wealth, and second, that an increase in the gross domestic product (GDP) represents an increase in the wealth and well-being of society.<sup>62</sup>

### 2.1.5 Recent wells and streams

Yet this last attitude has been on rise since the 1970s. It is essential to remember the ecological implication of such a development of the European worldview. As Clive Ponting suggests, “by the early twenty-first century the pressures of free-market capitalism, enshrined as the dominant ideology of the world, took little account of environmental constraints and possible future problems”.<sup>63</sup> However, this does not imply that the popular “vulgar” version of capitalism virtually deleted the previous stages of the concerned worldview. Alas, it managed to fully incorporate them and legitimize itself as their true descendant.<sup>64</sup>

As Richard Nisbett states while comparing the Eastern and the Western psychological mind sets, other cultures are to a certain extent right when complaining that “the past five hundred years of Western military, political and economic dominance have made the West intellectually and morally arrogant”.<sup>65</sup> Since the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Europe has often been portrayed as occupying the top position in the civilizational hierarchy. It should not surprise us that such a perspective necessarily brings a strong conviction about the rightness of one's own ideas about how the world functions and what the role of man is within the exploitable, and seemingly inexhaustible, system. The

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62. Korten, *The Post-Corporate World*, 69.

63. Ponting, *A New Green History of the World*, 136.

64. “One reason the environment in the twentieth century changed so much is because prevailing ideas and politics – from an ecological perspective – changed so little.” McNeill, *Something New Under the Sun*, 325.

65. Richard E. Nisbett, *The Geography of Thought: How Asians and Westerners Think Differently... and Why* (New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Singapore: The Free Press, 2003), xx.

overarching priority is that of economic growth.<sup>66</sup>

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century, on the brink of severe environmental malaises, a remarkably strong criticism of the European worldview sprang forth from within. Scientists like Erich Fromm,<sup>67</sup> Edmund Husserl,<sup>68</sup> Hans Jonas,<sup>69</sup> Konrad Lorenz,<sup>70</sup> or Herbert Marcuse<sup>71</sup> came up with critiques of the European *Weltanschauung*. Within the criticised tradition, an ideal member of the European civilization is depicted as a reason-oriented (white male) master of the environment, possibly leader of the outer less-advanced world, able and allowed to exploit the nature in order to improve his standard of living. Intellectual superiority, religiously justified rule over other parts of the ecosystem, mechanistic and objectivistic perception of natural world, linear understanding of the development of human society, and material welfare as an indicator of personal capacities; these are all elements of what we call European worldview.

In addition, “once identity constructions have become consensual and, thus, collective views, they tend to be internalized by actors as well as institutionalized”.<sup>72</sup> This means it is a painful and often dramatic process to modify the stabilized world view because it is simply hard to believe that what has worked out before will not work out anymore in the changed conditions.<sup>73</sup>

Marcussen's remark about the manifold channels of consolidation through separate actors on one side and broader institutions on the other is worth a further elaboration. What I have discussed on the previous pages, reviewing the pillars of the current approach towards nature in the developed world, is a part of its constructed identity. Based on history, traditional systems of thought, custom and institutionalization, the worldview becomes difficult to revise. Even in the context of serious global changes,

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66. We shall not forget, though, that “the drawing of the battle lines 'ecology vs. economy', a popular viewpoint today, is absurd from a historical perspective, since in history economic interest was in many cases identical with interest in protecting the environment.” Radkau, *Nature and Power*, 305. The problem is rather that “the global trend seems to be, more so than ever before, toward giving priority to maximizing profits over the *short term*.” Ibid., 306. Italics mine.

67. See Erich Fromm, *To Have or To Be?*, first published in 1976.

68. See Edmund Husserl, *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology: An Introduction to Phenomenological Philosophy*, first published in 1936.

69. See Hans Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility: In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age*, first published in 1979.

70. See Konrad Lorenz, *Civilized Man's Eight Deadly Sins*, first published in 1974.

71. See Herbert Marcuse, *One-Dimensional Man*, first published in 1964.

72. Martin Marcussen et al., “Constructing Europe: The Evolution of Nation-State Identities,” in *The Social Construction of Europe*, ed. Thomas Christiansen et al. (London, New Delhi, Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2001), 118.

73. McNeill, *Something New Under the Sun*, xxii.

facing concrete signs of a dysfunctional paradigm, we tend to defend our old understanding of the world. It belongs to the constitutional elements of any member of the society and to contest it thus means not only to contest the explanation grid of the group in general, but also of each individual Self.

This leads us to the hypothesis that a systemic change needs to be undertaken on both levels. One, an exclusively top-down effort would not be sufficient because the worldview is internalized by singular minds that cannot be simply “re-formatted” into a different shape. Two, a bottom-up approach alone could fail unless it reaches the institutional sphere, too, since a collective body with executive power can hinder or even stop an innovative process stemming from spontaneous individual initiative.

What is so special about the European *imago mundi* is that “the connections between environmentalist ideas and practices have been so fraught with lasting consequences for Earth and humankind”.<sup>74</sup> To conclude, even though the planetary ecosystem has been suffering from misbalance due to one civilization's reductionist worldview and the results are quite unpleasantly present in our lives for at least half a century, we are not able to come to terms with this fact. We know – but we refuse to believe.

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74. Arnold, *The Problem of Nature*, 190.

## 2.2 *Beyond the green halo: Cultural basis of the EU environmental policy*

Having sketched briefly the main ingredients of the soil in which the contemporary European society is rooted, let us move on to the case study – environmental policy and measures fostered in the European Union.<sup>75</sup>

What must be noticed at the first sight is that environmental concern was completely absent during the first stages of European integration. In 1957, the European Economic Community was founded without any environmental policy or law; the natural environment was not embedded in any form in the Treaty of Rome. Only rare and pragmatic measures were adopted throughout the period from 1957 to 1972 when the UN Conference on the Human Environment was held in Stockholm and the *Limits of Growth* report was published by the Club of Rome.<sup>76</sup>

The impact of the rising political consciousness from which new environmental movements (such as Greenpeace) arose should be mentioned here. Until the 1960s, these movements restricted themselves to simple campaigns for protection of natural sites but it was in this period when their real political influence became more significant and formative regarding public opinion.

It was thus only in the early 1970s, twenty years after the initial (economically and politically motivated) steps, that the idea of common environmental policy found its way into the Community's agenda. During the period from 1972 to 1987, the first three Environmental Action Programmes (EAP) were launched. The measures were rather reactive in nature, thus, they only aimed to solve current pressures (e.g. emission limits).

Environmental integration was thus understood just as another tool to tranquilize economic worries.<sup>77</sup> We could portray the beginning of the environmental build-up as

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75. For a dense and brief historical overview see e.g. Joanne Scott, *Environmental Protection: European Law and Governance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), especially Chapter 1: The Evolution of the EU Environmental Governance. Scott distinguishes 4 stages of the process, namely “the ‘environment regime’ which dates back to 1972; the ‘internal market regime’ (1982); the ‘integration regime’ (1992); and the ‘sustainable development regime’ (1998).” Ibid., 3. These regimes did not replace each other, though; we can rather talk about institutional layering. Ibid., 24. This terminology needs to be discussed, though, because it implies that the development is heading in the correct direction, suggesting that since 1998 we are working within an ideal climate of sustainability. The fact is rather that recently the expression of “sustainable development” has been repeatedly invoked verbally, but not fulfilled in the practical dimension.

76. Philipp M. Hildebrand, “The European Community's Environmental Policy, 1957 to '1992': From Incidental Measures to an International Regime?” in *Environmental Policy in the European Union*, 16-18.

77. Keith Clement, *Economic Development and Environmental Gain: European Environmental Integration and Regional Competitiveness* (London: Earthscan, 2000), 36-37.

follows. An economic union with political implications reconsidered the absence of intervention in the environmental sphere on a utilitarian basis. Various warning voices managed to be heard – the Community understood that environmental issues could not be completely ignored in the sake of its future economic flourishing. This step can be interpreted as positive in the sense that the entity listened to the upgraded knowledge about the connection between society and nature. Nevertheless, the willingness to adapt should not be confused with a paradigm shift. The doctrine of economic growth had not been revised. Adding the scheme of environmental integration to the *acquis* was a re-affirmation of the need to pursue policy that boosts economy, taking the existence of natural limits partially into account.

Another twenty years were needed until broader, both vertical and horizontal directives were drafted. Important milestones were the publishing of *Our Common Future* (the so-called *Brundtland report*) which introduced the concept of sustainable development as a guiding principle for all sectoral policies, and the Single European Act (because of the Qualified Majority Voting instead of unanimity and the legal obligation of the Member States to integrate) entering in force. Both events occurred in 1987.

The speeding up of environmental policy integration started in the late 1980s, and it proceeded during the 1990s and the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Other EAPs were implemented, environment reporting and assessment mechanisms (SEA, EIA, SSA) were introduced, numerous summits were held (Luxembourg in 1997, Cardiff and Vienna in 1998, Cologne and Helsinki in 1999 etc.), both the Treaty of Amsterdam in 1992 and the Treaty of Maastricht in 1997 contained environmental priorities, environmental funding programmes were agreed upon; this list of initiatives is incomplete.<sup>78</sup>

Such a culmination of ecological consciousness deserves closer examination. The EU has gone through quite an abrupt change from pure ignorance to a clearly demonstrated interest. Visions that refer to holistic theories about the tight influence among the variables of nature, economy and society might appear to be ideational newcomers for the EU and yet they are already stubbornly promoted. Why?

To explain this phenomenon, I will use a theoretical pattern that Martin Marcussen presents when discussing how regional and nation-state identities are created. “New ideas about European identity and European political order [must] resonate with given

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78. Clement, *Economic Development and Environmental Gain*, 36-58.



and pre-existing consensual identity constructions. [...] Only those ideas that resonate are considered legitimate in a political struggle”.<sup>79</sup> What Marcussen means is that it is hard to gain support for an idea that has never been a part of – even in an implicit way – the shared package of values and attitudes. An argument that is considered as illegitimate or irrelevant is unlikely to draw attention, either of the leaders or the public.

Let us now try to comprehend why the green words of the EU do not translate into green action. For those who know little about the history of the EU environmental concern, it may seem that the actual reason why all the effort proves to be disappointingly ineffective<sup>80</sup> is because it contradicts the “sacred” principles of the European economic-growth-oriented society.<sup>81</sup> As soon as we dive into the real discussion, though, with a little bit of embarrassment we discover it is the other way round; the EU environmental policy fails because it resonates with the culture from which it stems. The EU's idea of environmental commitment goes in line with the idea of a growing and competitive economy.

To illustrate this issue, let us compare the following two quotes. First, Andrea Lenschow, Professor for European Integration at the University of Osnabrück, shows that the visionary and uncompromising concept of sustainability becomes an ironic slogan without any real content across the political spectrum:

Sustainable development represents an idea able to facilitate political consensus; it offers a story that is attractive to many actors because it provides a conceptual foundation for the pursuit of widely accepted ethical values [...] at seemingly low financial and political costs.<sup>82</sup>

If this is the actual state of affairs, it implies that not much has been left of the original definition of sustainability. To achieve sustainable development would entail indeed high financial and political costs. In case the concept is popular and does not cause any controversy, it makes us believe that the idea is either not understood or misinterpreted on purpose. Which “widely accepted ethical values” are shared universally within our political discourse? There might be some but it is questionable

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79. Marcussen et al., “Constructing Europe,” 117-118.

80. At the end of the millennium, environmental trends still were of net loss, including further degradation and fragmentation of ecosystems, diminishing forests, extinction of species, loss of climate regulation, harmful subsidies etc. Clement, *Economic Development and Environmental Gain*, 3.

81. This is also how environmental NGOs are sometimes perceived – as a threat to the anthropocentric cultural core we have been cultivating for centuries.

82. Andrea Lenschow, “Greening the European Union: An Introduction,” in *Environmental Policy Integration: Greening Sectoral Policies in Europe*, ed. Andrea Lenschow (London: Earthscan, 2002), 6.

that they belong to the values embedded in the strategy for a resilient and ecologically mature lifestyle. Sustainable development turned into a marketing alibi.

Susan Baker, together with Glenn Albrecht, holds the same suspicion:

In the hands of many Western governments, the concept of sustainable development “has been welcomed as the means by which the existing mode of economic production and its associated values can continue with only minor modifications”<sup>83 84</sup>.

Sustainability, as defined in the *Brundtland report* and further elaborated in numerous EU directives and measures, is indeed a well-intended project but with a regrettably low potential as a legal tool. The challenge does not consist in including sustainability among the key principles of integration; this step has already been taken. The problem is more on the side of its practical application (also because of its unclear definition) when confronted with various cultural barriers. According to Angela Liberatore, Professor at the Institute for European Studies in Brussels,

the integration of environmental and sustainable development objectives into all areas of EU policy-making is a challenging task. Institutional arrangements, economic interests and models, political strategies and cultural values are at stake, and profound changes are needed to implement such a task. While being officially endorsed in policy and legal documents, including the Maastricht Treaty, integration is facing various barriers that could lead to the dilution rather than the integration of sustainable development objectives into EU sectoral policies and across sectors.<sup>85</sup>

Lenschow shows that the EU formulations of what can still be interpreted as a sustainable activity is much too broad and much too vague.<sup>86</sup> Therefore, there is no opposition against the idea as such since this “ambiguity [...] may also undermine a clear and effective operationalization”.<sup>87</sup> Baker agrees about the extremely low commitment on both national and international level due to the fact it is possible to pretend virtual environmental concern but act according to the unsustainable European

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83. Glenn Albrecht, “Ethics, anarchy and sustainable development,” *Anarchist Studies* 2 (1994): 97.

84. Susan Baker et al., “Introduction: Theory and Practice of Sustainable Development in EU Perspective,” in *The Politics of Sustainable Development: Theory, Policy and Practice Within the European Union*, ed. Susan Baker et. al. (London, New York: Routledge, 1997), 17.

85. Angela Liberatore, “The Integration of Sustainable Development Objectives into EU Policy-Making: Barriers and Prospects,” in *The Politics of Sustainable Development: Theory, Policy and Practice Within the European Union*, ed. Susan Baker et. al. (London, New York: Routledge, 1997), 124.

86. When asking why the definition of sustainable development is so imprecise, we can hypothesise about the real political support for a brisk concept that would have a direct and significant influence on policy-making in any sector of integration. Another point is that sustainable development cannot be reduced to an exact scientific term and thus it necessarily involves tensions between general verbal characteristics and *ad hoc* interpretations.

87. Lenschow, “Greening the European Union,” 7.

worldview.<sup>88</sup> Unfortunately, civilizations as socially constructed entities should be judged for what they actually do rather than for what they claim to be.<sup>89</sup>

What we see is that the EU has succeeded in rejecting officially the “treadmill approach” of arrogant and open exploitation although it was coherent with the European worldview as well, and the shift was rather triggered by physical threats to the economy than by sincere concern about the future.<sup>90</sup> Nevertheless, it is not willing to transcend the position of “weak” environmental integration – the resource method is still anthropocentric and biased in favor of the Northern (Western, European) view of the development process, environment is valued primarily in monetary terms, and not in cultural or spiritual terms. Environmental challenges are often reduced to managerial puzzles.<sup>91</sup>

Let us illustrate this point on the example of resource efficiency. Use of resources belongs to the key strategic questions for the EU. In January 2011, the Commission issued a communication entitled *A resource-efficient Europe – Flagship initiative under the Europe 2020 Strategy*<sup>92</sup> which is a preparatory document that sketches the tactics of the EU in the coming decades. The introduction reads as follows:

Natural resources underpin the functioning of the European and global economy and our quality of life. [...] The pressures on resources are increasing. If current trends continue, by 2050, the global population is expected to have grown by 30% to around 9 billion and people in developing and emerging economies will *legitimately aspire to the welfare and consumption levels of developed countries*. [...] Continuing our current patterns of resource use is not an option. In response to these changes, increasing resource efficiency will be key to securing growth and jobs for Europe. It will bring major economic opportunities, improve productivity, drive down costs and boost competitiveness. It is necessary to develop new products and services and find new ways to reduce inputs, minimise waste, improve management of resource stocks, change consumption patterns, optimise production processes, management and business methods, and improve logistics.<sup>93</sup>

There are several topics accentuated in the quote that are worth dwelling on shortly. First of all, using natural resources in a more efficient way is justified from a clearly anthropocentric perspective – it is a precondition for further “growth” and

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88. Baker, “Introduction,” 16-18.

89. Adler, “Europe As a Civilizational Community of Practice,” 68.

90. In addition, the rejection is rather official in some policy areas (such as forestry or import from developing countries) where unofficial practice is still in line with the treadmill approach.

91. Baker, “Introduction,” 13-14.

92. COM(2011) 21 final.

93. Ibid., 2. Italics mine.

“competitiveness”. While this thesis is arguing there are cultural reasons for our unsustainable life strategy and therefore the solution needs to be cultural, too, the “flagship initiative” suggests reduction, optimization, management and logistics.

What is more, the formulation highlighted in italics can be interpreted as an unproblematic belief that 1) the European life standard must be maintained in every case and 2) there are no doubts about the legitimacy of less economically successful regions striving for the same civilizational luxury.

Another point to remember is that the Commission is usually the most “radical” body that gets involved in the process of designing a new strategic architecture of the community. EUROCHAMBERS, The Association of European Chambers of Commerce and Industry representing over 20 million enterprises in Europe, published a position paper in which the institution takes a standpoint in regard to *Europe 2020: A Strategy for Smart, Sustainable and Inclusive Growth*.<sup>94</sup> We learn that: “The basic premise, shared by all, is that public resources are rare, which obliges us to define limited priorities and ‘optimise spending’”.<sup>95</sup> From the very beginning, economy only is discussed. Despite the humble effort of the Commission to define a “smart, sustainable and inclusive growth” with environmental questions on mind, representatives of commerce and industry add just a brief note saying that “it will also be *useful* to strengthen and simplify measures to support and encourage eco-friendly investment programmes and for specific efforts for technological development in these fields”.<sup>96</sup> While the Commission sees a wide range of managerial tasks to be solved, bodies and institutions representing specific groups with vested interests limit themselves to the search for solutions of managerial puzzles in *monetary* terms.

Keith Clement, a British researcher on the issues of European environmental policy and sustainable development, concludes that “national reactions and institutional responses to environmental problems indicate that *economic growth* will always be considered *essential*, and that no support would be forthcoming for scenarios recommending a halt to development”.<sup>97</sup>

We shall clarify two aspects here. One is the way of measuring economic growth

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94. COM(2010) 2020.

95. Eurochambers, “Position on the Conclusions of the 5<sup>th</sup> Report on Economic, Social and Territorial Cohesion: The Future of Cohesion Policy”, position paper, February 2011, <http://www.eurochambres.be/DocShare/Common/GetFile.asp?PortalSource=571&DocID=3055&mfd=off&pdoc=1> (accessed 5 March 2011), 3.

96. Ibid., 4. Italics mine.

97. Clement, *Economic Development and Environmental Gain*, 8. Italics mine.

which – as long as it remains encapsulated in the indicator of GDP – is completely detached from the multi-polar reality of human life. Productive and destructive activities can both have a positive impact on the GDP curve, without any positive correlation with the changes in the natural environment.

The other matter is that the expression “halt to development” is misleading. To freeze the time is nobody's aim; environmentalists are rather trying to re-define the idea from unsustainable growth to de-growth,<sup>98</sup> meaning sustainable development. Yet when Clement welcomes the fact that “this approach has encouraged the view of environment not as a constraint on economic development, consuming funds that would otherwise have been invested in growth, but instead as an area of potential”,<sup>99</sup> he might be precociously convinced that a true paradigm shift is taking place. Ecological economy is by no means the mainstream economic thought of our time. The only traceable change in the public debate is that the limits posed by the natural environment present themselves with an ever increasing urgency which turns them into a variable to be taken into consideration.

As a matter of fact, there is hardly any piece of scientific writing which does not place the linkage between economic and ecological concern on the top of the factors that determine the whole EU environmental agenda.<sup>100</sup> Yet this fact does not prove that the perception of intersecting spheres is right or wrong, it simply shows the EU believes that Money Knows Best.<sup>101</sup>

The EU environmental strategy was elaborated through an uneasy political compromise and its success lies fully upon the willingness of the member states' political elites to fulfill its goals. At the same time, a *radical* change of the entire EU-standard way of life cannot be achieved unless the elites are forced to reflect on a widespread public support from the citizens.<sup>102</sup> Top-down and bottom-up paradigm shift

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98. A representative of this school of thought is e.g. Herman Daly, *Beyond Growth: The Economics of Sustainable Development* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996).

99. Clement, *Economic Development and Environmental Gain*, 7.

100. “The perceived nature of environmental and economic trends has often affected EU environmental governance. [...] Globalization and increasing economic competition in the 1990s and beyond contributed to the turn towards more deliberative and flexible environmental governance patterns which aim to integrate economic considerations into environmental policy-making.” Scott, *Environmental Protection*, 4. The author quotes the contribution of Martin Jänicke and Helge Jörgens, in *European Environmental Governance in Transition?*, ed. Katharina Holzinger and Christopher Knill (Bonn: Max-Planck-Projektgruppe Recht der Gemeinschaftsgüter, 2002).

101. I am paraphrasing the 3<sup>rd</sup> law of ecology (Nature Knows Best) as formulated by the American ecologist Barry Commoner in his influential work *The Closing Circle*, published in 1971.

102. Baker, “Introduction,” 22-27.

would have to take place if what is officially claimed were to come true. So far, the approach of the EU does not indicate profound breakthroughs of non-anthropocentric worldviews and it presupposes no significant changes in the politic and economic outlook or in the relationship between men and nature.<sup>103</sup>

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103. Dick Richardson, "The Politics of Sustainable Development," in *The Politics of Sustainable Development*, 43.

### 2.3 *Essence versus surface: Weaknesses and strengths of the EU environmental policy*

What we have seen so far is that the ideational roots of the EU environmental strategy correspond to the cultural core of European civilization. As inherent parts of this core, we spotted reason-based mastery over the environment, belief in progress and superiority of civilization, mechanistic understanding of the ecosystems and pursuit of material growth. The declared priorities such as improvement of the quality of the environment, protecting human health, regulated exploitation of the resources, international commitment to tackle environmental problems, improvement of the quality of life and increased environmental efficiency<sup>104</sup> are chained to the anthropocentric and progressivist worldview.

In this sub-chapter, I shall summarize the weak and the strong points of what Europe sells as a sustainable approach toward environmental challenges.<sup>105</sup>

There are several explanatory patterns that might help us foresee what must be taken into account if the EU environmental strategy is to be improved.<sup>106</sup> To start with, there is the question of actors such as political elites and citizens<sup>107</sup> who have an insignificant say in the process of change unless they feel truly committed. This problem includes the role of leadership and societal movements within a critical stage in the development. In addition, since ideas work as sources of interests, they must be conscious and credible. In this respect, André Nolkaemper, Professor of Public International Law at the University of Amsterdam, has explained why environmental integration must become an autonomous principle which is accepted as a legitimate reason for action.<sup>108</sup> And finally, the structure of the political system, way of administration and traditional practices need to adapt to each other.

It seems that none of the prerequisites has been achieved. Europe is in a need of a

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104. John McCormick, *Environmental Policy in the European Union* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 21-25.

105. Andrew Jordan, "Introduction: European Union Environmental Policy – Actors, Institutions and Policy Processes," in *Environmental Policy in the European Union: Actors, Institutions, and Processes*, 8-10.

106. Apart from the question of underpinning ideas, such an evaluation should be also done with regard to the practical future challenges among which we can mention inter-sectoral policy conflicts, clashes between national and EU-level priorities, and enlargement. The list of factors is extracted from Lenschow, "Greening the European Union," 16-18.

107. For the importance of active citizens in the process of Europeanization see Ulrich Beck and Edgar Grande, "Cosmopolitanism: Europe's Way out of Crisis," *European Journal of Social Theory* 10, no. 1 (2007): 76-79.

108. André Nolkaemper, "Three Conceptions of the Integration Principle in International Environmental Law," in *Environmental Policy Integration*, 28-29.

new political vision; not only for itself but also for its international partners.<sup>109</sup> It has a green halo but its position within the “world risk society” is rather unstable. Ulrich Beck, a German sociologist and Professor at the London School of Economics, came with the thesis that “being at global risk is the human condition at the beginning of the twenty-first century”.<sup>110</sup> He enlists three possible strategies how to deal with the new threats: denial, apathy or transformation.<sup>111</sup> Unsurprisingly, Beck identifies the last one as the only constructive way of adaptation. To enter the process of transformation, though, honesty is required. “How to live, when old certainties are shattered or are now revealed as lies”,<sup>112</sup> asks Beck and I repeat his question, contextualizing it with regard to the cultural background of the EU environmental policy.

What are the main weaknesses of the EU environmental policy? We can distinguish four insufficiencies. One, the connectedness between economy and environment is legitimate and logical but it cannot be the only consideration in the decision-making process. The EU rhetoric has been already adjusted to this need – see e.g. the popularity of sustainable development as an omnipresent logo – but the implementation has been affected insignificantly. Two, environmental changes are still viewed according to the European image of the world – culture clashes with nature.<sup>113</sup> Three, facing the other civilizations' rise, it would be wise for Europe to realize that the conflict between EU-level and national priorities is outdated. And four, the leaders and officials of the EU are those who design environmental policies and thus it is their mostly materialistic-deterministic-anthropocentric frame of reference that counts in the process of development. In this way, the key issue lies at a more fundamental level, namely in the frame of mind of policy makers.

Skeptical as it may sound, there still can be identified two notable strengths. Environmental efforts of the leading countries, citizen initiatives, NGOs' activities or alternative community projects can all be considered as seeds of the upcoming paradigm shift. The transition of the overall political and social culture is snail-like but still existent.

It can be seen e.g. in the debate about the EU constitution or the increasing power

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109. Beck and Grande, “Cosmopolitanism,” 69.

110. Ulrich Beck, “Living in the world risk society,” *Economy and Society* 35, no. 3 (2006): 330.

111. *Ibid.*, 331.

112. *Ibid.*

113. A fresh theory of evolutionary ontology is elaborated by a Czech environmental philosopher, Josef Šmajs. See e.g. *Evolutionary Ontology: Reclaiming the Value of Nature by Transforming Culture* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008).



of the European Parliament. Another sign of improvement is the development of cooperative programmes of the EU Member States and other countries with environmental focus, such as NATURA 2000 or the International Commission for the Protection of the Rhine (founded in 1999). This kind of agreements virtually deletes national borders, which corresponds to ecological thinking outside old rigid patterns of international relations.<sup>114</sup>

And what is more, European culture is nothing but static. Thus, a system which is subject to change can be changed eventually. It was the cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead who said that one should “never doubt that a small group of committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.”

There are numerous issues that hinder better implementation and more satisfying impacts of the EU environmental strategy. Those of political compromise, apathy of politicians and citizens, clashes between sectoral areas, national disparities, or divergence of the EU-level and national preferences have been repeatedly studied. And they all do count. The main founding of this chapter is that there is one more factor which has to be remembered while examining the weak points, namely the European worldview which can be seen as the well of the EU environmental concern.

Finally, how green is the European halo? We have argued that the cultural background of the way the EU deals with environmental issues is not primarily sustainable. On the contrary, the European idea about how human beings are supposed to treat the natural environment and to which extent they are obliged to limit their freedom as a species is rather anti-ecological. In other words, the actual frame of mind that determines environmental policy in the EU is conservative, attracted by the past rather than by the present. *The critical point then is to admit we have been constructing a strategy against problems that have been caused by the same concepts that serve as pillars for the strategy itself.* Unwillingness to regard economic and environmental gain as complementary is caused by the strong emphasis put on the Europeans' welfare. Our life standard is perceived as completely or at least substantially independent of natural capacities.

The EU has run out of yellow paint and decorates now its halo with green. How do we evaluate such a shift? The initiative of the EU in the environmental respect is neither to be unconditionally admired nor to be rejected as hypocrisy. The EU cannot step out

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114. I thank for reminding me of these trends to my supervisor, dr. Erwin H. Karel.

of the cultural reservoir from which it still gains its legitimacy and therefore it has to work with the ideational capital available. Its environmental strategy and policy integration is far from perfect and it deserves deep revision. We may interpret this fact as an absolute disadvantage: “The more consistent a culture's core stories are with biological and physical reality, the more likely its people are to live in a way compatible with ecological rules and thereby persist”.<sup>115</sup> From this perspective, Europe's prospects may seem rather bleak. In one of the following chapters, I will re-define the concept of strength and competitiveness, looking for a loophole in the rigid framework of our time.

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115. McDaniel, *Wisdom for a Livable Planet*, 228.

THE CRISIS OF OUR TIME IS NOT ABOUT FINANCIAL OR ECONOMIC BANKRUPTCY.

THE REAL CRISIS OF OUR TIME IS ABOUT AN INTELLECTUAL BANKRUPTCY:

THE BANKRUPTCY OF MAINSTREAM ECONOMIC THOUGHT.

Otto C. Scharmer

ARE THERE NOT INDEED ENOUGH “SIGNS OF THE TIMES”

TO INDICATE A NEW START IS NEEDED?

Ernst Friedrich Schumacher

### 3 Strong Europe? Economic Crisis and Environmental Liabilities

The European economy is in the midst of the deepest recession since the 1930s, with real GDP projected to shrink by some 4% in 2009, the sharpest contraction in the history of the European Union. Although signs of improvement have appeared recently, recovery remains uncertain and fragile.<sup>116</sup>

These are the words which introduce the document *Economic Crisis in Europe: Causes, Consequences and Responses*, issued in 2009 by the European Commission in order to present the institution's view on the thoroughly discussed global financial crisis. Although the report does not provide an in-depth analysis of the topic, it gives a certain glimpse of the widespread perception of the ongoing processes.

The chain of events that has recently unfolded in the EU is by no means of economic nature only. Economy cannot be adequately analyzed in separation from politics which influences a large range of areas crucial for the citizens, from cultural development through social conditions to the state of natural environment. Understanding the linkage between the global economic crisis and its manifold short- and long-term impacts on the quality of life in the EU prevents us from limiting ourselves to economic inquiries, which do not illuminate neither the complex roots of the crisis nor the potential solutions. Adopting a broader view on the economic crisis does not only help us to better comprehend our society's *economic* standpoint, but it is also an essential prerequisite for forging a clear idea about the region's general outlook for the future.

From a number of aspects that offer themselves when looking at the global economic trends as they hit the EU, I choose their relation to the environment or, more precisely, to the regional environmental commitment. There are several reasons for such a choice.

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116. Marco Buti, foreword to *Economic Crisis in Europe: Causes, Consequences and Responses* (European Commission, DG Economic and Financial Affairs. European Economy, 7/2009. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2009), iii.

First of all, the EU is respected by other world regions (the USA, or the territory covered by ASEAN+6) for the complexity and quick development of the environmental *acquis*. Environmental awareness belongs to one of the characteristics, if not stereotypes, which are ascribed to the recently emerged regional entity. “Europe has taken on a new leadership role in promoting global environmental sustainability. [...] In this particular segment of the market for ideas, it is clear that the balance of power has changed”.<sup>117</sup> The economic crisis will become a test of how deep the environmental consciousness has been rooted in Europe, and it will challenge the political will of the national leaders to stick to the goals agreed on before the recession's outburst.

Such an insight should not shrink into the usual brief comment on the interdependence between the economic crisis and environmental ambitions of the EU, although, the financial difficulties will surely serve as a suitable excuse for those who have never come to terms with the EU environmental policy and have now a strong argument to put on the table.<sup>118</sup> Remarks about costly measures intended to reduce the negative effects of the climate change, likely to be abandoned for the sake of lowered state expenditures, are undoubtedly valid. Nevertheless, they do not constitute a profound systemic rationale for such a reverse course. Rather they build upon the shallow truism that when money needs to be saved, activities which can be quitted without an *immediate* life-threatening effect should be quitted indeed without much hesitation.

I shall go beyond this superficial observation and elaborate on the following hypothesis. If the idea of a 'strong Europe' – as presented by the EU – truly included deep environmental considerations, would it be politically and socially feasible to disregard them because of an economic turmoil? And it is possible go even further, suggesting that the global economic crisis is a parallel phenomenon to the ecological one, both stemming from a false assumption about the essence of strength.

Another facet of the studied topic might be the generally discussed (in)compatibility of *economy* and *ecology*, the latter labeled in the context of human activity as environmentalism.

Economic development and environmental protection are not unalterably

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117. John McCormick, *The European Superpower* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007), 159.

118. See e.g. Guardian.co.uk, “EU countries may use economic crisis to ditch climate change commitments,” by John Vidal and Juliette Jowit, 9 October 2008, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2008/oct/09/energy.climatechange> (accessed 29 September 2010).

opposed to each other. On the contrary, more often than not, development and protection go hand in hand. Improving one enhances the other [and] environmentalists and economists, far from being natural enemies, are in fact natural allies.<sup>119</sup>

Although Schramm's and Warford's statement was pronounced more than 30 years ago, and despite the fact that the EU has been constantly highlighting the close ties between the two, we cannot always say that the Union behaves according to it.

Burchell and Lightfoot, suggest another intriguing idea:

There is strong evidence for a counter argument which proposes that the very rationale for the EU itself represents a major factor in contributing towards increasing environmental problems within Europe, rather than providing effective solutions. How can the EU deal effectively when arguably the underlying cause of many of these problems has been the pattern of continuous economic growth and industrial development, upon which the EU has focused?<sup>120</sup>

It would be too shortsighted to assume that the EU might be forced to cut down on its investments into the environment because it is facing a severe economic earthquake, both triggered by internal economic policy and spilled over onto the European economy from global markets. We shall rather consider what Burchell and Lightfoot label as “the very rationale” and see whether the EU has not risked an economic upheaval with environmental consequences because of its own internal setting.

One way or the other, the relation between economy and environment belongs to the most urging topics of our time. One of the chapter's aims is to reveal whether the current economic crisis is likely to deepen the existing discrepancy between what is understood as good from the economic point of view, and what is beneficial for the environment, human society being a full-fledged part of it. Put differently, I shall inquire into the difference between the idea of an economically competitive Europe and a strong and sound Europe in the context of the global (natural, social, economic) environment.

Finally, it would be unwise to turn the blind eye to the possible positive outcomes of the present-day development. We can presume that meager budgets will lead to a slowed-down production and thus fewer carbon emissions, and to prudent spending in general including transport or energy consumption.<sup>121</sup> Such trends may indeed

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119. Günter Schramm and Jeremy J. Warford, quoted in Clement, *Economic Development and Environmental Gain*, 1.

120. Jon Burchell and Simon Lightfoot, *The Greening of the European Union? Examining the EU's Environmental Credentials* (London, New York: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 12.

121. See e.g. Michael T. Klare, “The Economic Crisis and the Environment,” *The Huffington Post*, 17

temporarily ease the burden our society imposes on the natural environment, as it is often put in the media:

The economic crisis may be wreaking human misery across Europe and around the world on a scale not seen in decades, but if there is a single silver lining to this financial cloud, it is that the collapse of industrial output is also producing a plunge in carbon emission far exceeding any governmental targets.<sup>122</sup>

However true this may be, it will not be sufficient to rely on unsustainable and provisional measures without a clear revision of the life strategy toward the world we inhabit. Another question might prove to be more challenging. As the introductory quote of Ernst Friedrich Schumacher suggests, ripening of time is a process we need to pay attention to if we do not wish to let a unique opportunity pass unnoticed. The last scope of this chapter is an evaluation of the concept of a “strong Europe” revised for the future, matured thanks to the economic crisis. As we will see, not only fiscal amendments will be needed if “the EU [is] to emerge stronger from this crisis”.<sup>123</sup>

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October 2008 , [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/michael-t-klare/the-economic-crisis-and-t\\_b\\_135631.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/michael-t-klare/the-economic-crisis-and-t_b_135631.html) (accessed 29 September 2010).

122. EU Observer, “Economic crisis producing huge drop in EU CO<sup>2</sup> emissions,” by Leigh Phillips, 3 April 2009, <http://euobserver.com/885/27913> (accessed 29 September 2010).

123. COM(2008) 706 final, 7.

### **3.1 Contemporary condition: Economic and environmental wobbling**

It might seem that the Europe we are living in is one – single and unified. Just a brief look into the analyses presented by various actors displaces this assumption by evidence, though. The understanding of the current processes differs immensely as we move from official EU bodies such as the European Commission through governmental institutions and commercial subjects to independent organizations and civil society initiatives.

This fact complicates my research even before it is launched. How can we explore the root causes and suggest a reasonable future path, if we are not able to agree on the actual state? It is likely that the diverse approaches are due to different ideas about the characteristics of a strong and just society. A conviction that the existing societal order is the best one available may soften the perception of the crisis. Analogically, a radical rejection of the present system will lead to calls for its complete revision, often disregarding the costs of such action and having no coherent vision of the future. I will focus in detail on these dissimilar angles in the fourth subchapter.

Nevertheless, in order to consolidate the data that will be further commented on, let us summarize the basic official information about both studied areas.<sup>124</sup>

#### **3.1.1 Economy**

In October 2010, the International Monetary Fund issued its regular report entitled *World Economic Outlook: Recovery, Risk and Rebalancing*, analyzing global, regional and national economic developments and prospects. The publication opens with the following words:

Thus far, economic recovery is proceeding broadly as expected, although downside risks remain elevated. Most advanced and a few emerging economies still face major adjustments, including the need to strengthen household balance sheets, stabilize and subsequently reduce high public debt, and repair and reform their financial sectors.<sup>125</sup>

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124. It is necessary to stress the fact that “official information” can in many cases hardly be considered as accurate and reliable. The EU has recently experienced a shocking discovery that Greek accounting data had been manipulated for several years. The IMF and the World Bank follow their own narrow and limited evaluation indicators of economic prosperity. The EEA bases all its findings on data provided by environmental ministries of the Member States and has thus no independent sources of information etc. I will use publications of these authorities while taking into consideration that the statements reflect the *believed* state of affairs which may not necessarily be the actual one.

125. International Monetary Fund, *World Economic Outlook (WEO): Recovery, Risk, and Rebalancing*. World Economic and Financial Surveys, October 2010, <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2010/02/index.htm> (accessed 8 October 2010).

It is widely known which indicators and trends belong to the negative effects of the crunch, among them:

- GDP growth slow-down
- sub-prime mortgage crisis, U.S. housing bubble burst
- stagnation of housing construction and automotive industry
- drop in international trade
- low consumer confidence
- low investor confidence
- reduced household incomes
- rising rate of unemployment
- volatile financial, currency and commodity markets
- decline in stocks
- unsustainable public debts
- bank insolvencies and bankruptcies, etc.

The urgency of the economic development consists in the fact that it concerns literally everybody, both in the public and private sphere. In Europe, the economic crisis arrived with a slight delay after the sub-prime mortgage collapse which occurred in the USA in 2007 and the American financial sector crash-down, witnessing the bankruptcies of several giant financial institutions. The demand shock that hit Europe in 2008 was accompanied by numerous side-effects as listed above.<sup>126</sup>

The real growth rate of the GDP in the European Union was estimated as 3.1% in 2007, 0.7% in 2008, while there was a sharp contraction in 2009 equal to -4.1%.<sup>127</sup> As far as the GDP is concerned, there are signs of a gradual recovery. In the second quarter of 2010, the EU27 performance achieved an increase by 2%.<sup>128</sup> There are three main factors threatening the GDP trajectory: unemployment causing loss of skills, decreasing stock of equipment and infrastructure, and hampered innovation due to scarce investment.<sup>129</sup> Within one year, the unemployment rate increased by 1.9%, reaching 8.9% in 2009.<sup>130</sup> In August 2010, 23.066 million men and women in the EU27 had no salary income which corresponds to the figure of 9.6%.<sup>131</sup>

Apart from the paralyzed growth of goods and services produced, and the frozen

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126. *Economic Crisis in Europe: Causes, Consequences and Responses* (European Commission, DG Economic and Financial Affairs. European Economy, 7/2009. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2009), 8.

127. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), *The World Factbook: Europe: European Union*, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ee.html> (accessed 10 October 2010).

128. *Eurostat News Release 148/2010 - 6 October 2010*, Eurostat Press Office, 2010.

129. Buti, foreword to *Economic Crisis in Europe*, iii.

130. CIA, *The World Factbook*.

131. *Eurostat News Release 142/2010 - 1 October 2010*, Eurostat Press Office, 2010.



labour market, everybody's eyes are on the issue of the astonishing public financial deficit. Member countries with the joint currency are worse off than those not (yet) included. "On the current course, public debt in the euro area is projected to reach 100% of GDP by 2014".<sup>132</sup> In the EU27 as a whole, the public debt rate rose from 61.6% in 2008 to 73.6% in 2009.<sup>133</sup>

In general, we can see a stagnation, in some Member States a slow and insecure improvement of the economic outlook, pursued through austerity measures with a clear goal of a turn-back to the pre-crisis imagined stability. "The challenge ahead is for policy makers to put in place, in a coordinated manner, policies that support the fundamental adjustments needed for *a return to healthy medium-term growth*".<sup>134</sup> The loss of balance which struck the EU in 2009 and the panic about the Greek case<sup>135</sup> becoming the front-page topic in spring 2010 seem to be overcome. The public is widely expecting tranquilizing news about a snail-like yet guaranteed restoration of the order.<sup>136</sup> Nevertheless, even short-term prospects are formulated with most caution:

There are also a number of factors of uncertainty in the recovery, due to the process of adjustment of balance sheets, a general underestimation of the impact of the crisis on the real economy, negative developments in the labour market and an increase in manufacturing input prices. [...] To sum up, the current scenario depicts a situation in which the sustainability of the present economic recovery in Europe cannot be confirmed, even in presence of recovery signals in the GDP growth. The recent crisis has contributed to the strong deterioration in government deficit and debt ratios in 2009, with a negative prospect in this respect also in the current year.<sup>137</sup>

### 3.1.2 Environment

To assess the state of the environment, numerous factors and variables have to be taken into consideration. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to present a concise and exhaustive summary of the present conditions.

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132. Buti, foreword to *Economic Crisis in Europe*, iii.

133. *Eurostat News Release 55/2010 - 22 April 2010*, Eurostat Press Office, 2010.

134. IMF, *World Economic Outlook (WEO)*, vii. Italics mine.

135. Apparently, there is also Ireland, Spain, Italy and Portugal (the so-called PIIGS Member States) to bear in mind in this context.

136. See the EU summit held in October 2010, where country leaders agreed on a permanent system of policies that should help the Union avoid further financial breakdowns of Member States that are then likely to need a substantial bailout. As the German Chancellor Angela Merkel said, "it is important to create a clear culture of stability in Europe. That is the ultimate for good cohesion in the EU. Europe makes us strong but this Europe needs rules." Reuters, "EU agree to change treaty, create crisis safety net," 29 October 2010, <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSLDE69S0ZE20101029> (accessed 25 November 2010). The idea of tough financial surveillance to preserve the current system is widely supported.

137. Eurostat, *Eurostatistics: Data for short-term economic analysis*, issue number 09/2010 (Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2010), 5.

In addition, it is difficult to speak about the economy of one particular region due to the globalized and interconnected nature of the world markets, and such an interdependence is even stronger if we shift our attention to the issue of natural environment. When the speculation bubble deflated in the USA in 2007, it only took about one year before the recession moved to Europe. In the case of serious ecological breakdowns, like the 2010 BP oil spill, the effects are usually more immediate. It seems that there can hardly exist a healthy economic development only in one part of the world, and the same proves to be valid about a healthy environment. Thus, due to the high degree of interconnectedness and the ever-increasing potential of modern technology and industry (including the potential to incur damage across the national borders, as illustrated by the 2010 red sludge spill accident in Hungary), the path to a favorable state of both economy and environment lies in collective action exclusively.

Nevertheless, we can compile at least an informative review of the official reports' conclusions about the environmental change, first from the global perspective and then with a special focus on the European territory.

The world has changed radically since 1987<sup>138</sup> – socially, economically and environmentally. Global population has grown by more than 1.7 billion, from about 5 billion people. The global economy has expanded and is now characterized by increasing globalization. Worldwide, GDP per capita (purchasing power parity) has increased from US\$5 927 in 1987 to US\$8 162 in 2004. However, growth has been distributed unequally between regions. [...] Changing drivers, such as population growth, economic activities and consumption patterns, have placed increasing pressure on the environment. Serious and persistent barriers to sustainable development remain.<sup>139</sup>

Even though there are large disputes about the intensity, impact and gravity of the environmental change that occurred during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it is widely acknowledged that there has been indeed a dynamic transformation of the natural conditions going on worldwide. The jury is still out on the exact role of human enterprise in these processes but again experts across research fields agree that human activity does interfere with natural ecosystems, and that it triggers or speeds up a number of negative trends.

The GEO-4 report specifies the current situation in Europe as an ambiguous combination of anti-ecological life patterns and advanced environmental commitment:

138. In 1987, *Our Common Future*, known also as the *Brundtland report*, was issued by the WCED.

139. *Global Environment Outlook 04 : Environment for Development* (Nairobi: United Nations Environment Programme, 2007), [http://www.unep.org/geo/geo4/report/GEO-4\\_Report\\_Full\\_en.pdf](http://www.unep.org/geo/geo4/report/GEO-4_Report_Full_en.pdf) (accessed 12 October 2010), 3-4.

In Europe, rising incomes and growing numbers of households contribute to unsustainable production and consumption, increased energy use and emissions of greenhouse gases, poor urban air quality and transportation challenges. [...] Since 1987, greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions from the energy sector have been reduced in Western Europe, but have increased since the end of the 1990s across the whole region, partly because increasing natural gas prices have re-established coal as a key energy source. Recently, growing public awareness, underpinned by rising energy prices, has given a new political momentum to climate change policies. [...] Emissions of air pollutants are largely driven by the demand for greater mobility. The EU has been imposing progressively stricter pollution controls on vehicles. Farming in marginal areas is under pressure, and is subject to both land abandonment and intensification, both of which have impacts on biodiversity. With its many action plans and legal instruments at different levels, the region has a unique experience of environmental cooperation.<sup>140</sup>

In accordance with the findings quoted above, a report published by the European Environment Agency<sup>141</sup> compiles a list of the most acute environmental challenges faced nowadays in the pan-European region:

- unsustainable patterns of production and consumption
- health concerns resulting from pollution of water, air and soil
- climate change
- biodiversity loss
- overuse of marine resources

Among the most influential factors that drive environmental change, particular attention is paid to industry, agriculture and forestry, transport, energy and tourism.<sup>142</sup> These sectors eventually belong to the areas vastly covered by the EU environmental policy.<sup>143</sup>

According to the Eurostat publication *Energy, transport and environment indicators*,<sup>144</sup> monitoring the period from 1996 to 2006, recent development in the EU

140. *Global Environment Outlook 04*, 197. A generalization about the state of environment in all Europe must necessarily be vague. To comprehend the message of the quote, one shall read it in the context of the whole report which summarizes data collected all over the world, thus, Europe is compared to other world regions. The progress made in Europe seems substantial in this perspective, although I argue that such a comparative perspective hinders deeper understanding of the flaws of the European approach since any kind of effort excels when confronted with complete passivity.

141. EEA - European Environment Agency, *Europe's Environment in an Age of Transition: The fourth assessment* (Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2007), [http://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/state\\_of\\_environment\\_report\\_2007\\_1](http://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/state_of_environment_report_2007_1) (accessed 12 October 2010), 21-22.

142. *Ibid.*, 291-356. See also Burchell and Lightfoot, *The Greening of the European Union?*, 91-96.

143. See e.g. *The Politics of Sustainable Development: Theory, Policy and Practice within the European Union*, ed. Susan Baker et al. (London, New York: Routledge, 1997), *Environmental Policy Integration: Greening Sectoral Policies in Europe*, ed. Andrea Lenschow (London: Earthscan, 2002), or *Environmental Policy in the European Union: Actors, Institutions, and Processes*, ed. Andrew Jordan (London: Earthscan, 2002).

144. Eurostat, *Energy, transport and environment indicators. 2008 Edition* (Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2009).

has been marked by the following:

- energy dependency rate<sup>145</sup> increase of about 22%
- total energy production drop by 10% (the only progressed production sectors were nuclear energy rising by 9% and energy from renewable sources by 44%)<sup>146</sup>
- gross inland energy consumption increase by 6%, with oil as the most demanded fuel (37%) (although consumption of energy gained from renewable sources went up by 46%, the total use remains at a low figure of 7%)
- energy consumption rate in the transport sector at 31% and 28% in the industry sector in 2006
- emissions of acidifying substances decrease by 51% (above all thanks to substantial reduction of SO<sub>x</sub> emissions)
- agriculture, energy industries and transport as the major polluting sectors
- planned greenhouse emissions decrease by 8% (EU-27 target for 2012; the rate is difficult to measure since the situation varies largely among the Member States)
- from 2003 onward, decrease of the total amount of municipal waste generated but the figure per capita remains at high levels (EU-27, 517 kg per person in 2006)
- out of 2.900 tonnes of waste generated in EU-27 in 2006, 2.9% of which considered hazardous
- in 2008, the recycling target for old Member States set to 55%
- at least secondary treatment of 70% of the wastewater (urban wastewater in sensitive areas should receive tertiary treatment)
- steady growth of total chemicals production volume (in 2007, 58% of those classified as toxic)
- progress in work on the establishment of NATURA 2000<sup>147</sup>
- 297 billion EUR collected on environmental taxes in 2006 (2.6% of EU-27 GDP)
- 42% of the land area covered by wooded land, 60% of the annual increment in forests available for wood supply harvested, 13% of forest areas in the EU-27 with protective functions

To complete the picture, let us affirm that according to the EEA report *Assessing*

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145. The variable of energy dependency indicates to which extent the EU is (un)able to produce the energy it consumes itself. The need to import energy is thus becoming more acute.

146. However, the absolute numbers show that energy from renewable sources still remains just a minuscule slice of the whole pie, especially in comparison to fossil and nuclear energy. In addition, these figures do not reveal the fact that parallel drop in energy production and growth in energy consumption in the EU means increased import from other world regions where energy is produced unsustainably.

147. NATURA 2000 is “an EU-wide network of nature protection areas established under the 1992 Habitats Directive. The aim of the network is to assure the long-term survival of Europe's most valuable and threatened species and habitats. It is comprised of Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) designated by Member States under the Habitats Directive, and also incorporates Special Protection Areas (SPAs) which they designate under the 1979 Birds Directive. NATURA 2000 is not a system of strict nature reserves where all human activities are excluded. Whereas the network will certainly include nature reserves most of the land is likely to continue to be privately owned and the emphasis will be on ensuring that future management is sustainable, both ecologically and economically.” European Commission, Environment, Nature & Biodiversity, Natura 2000 network, [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/index_en.htm) (accessed 21 November 2010). Progress in work basically means growth of the network.

*Biodiversity in Europe*,<sup>148</sup> biodiversity loss (including freshwater, mountain, forest, coastal and marine, agricultural, grassland and urban ecosystems) has not been halted so far. The impoverishment has not been reduced despite the ambitious targets set, although minor improvements have been recorded.

In spite of the significant effort invested in both economic recovery and environmental sustainability, the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has rather been a lost one for the EU. Negative impacts of the current trends are perceptible on all organizational levels, from the EU as such through separate state units down to individual lives. Neither of the concerned areas shows major favorable developments, apart from partial achievements which can hardly be sustained in the context of a general downturn.

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148. EEA - European Environment Agency, *Assessing Biodiversity in Europe – the 2010 report* (Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2010), <http://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/assessing-biodiversity-in-europe-84> (accessed 13 October 2010), 6-7.

### 3.2 “Strong Europe” in crisis: In the search for solutions

The frog which jumps out of boiling water only if thrown into it directly, but letting itself cook to death if the ambient is heated up gradually, is a common analogy used by environmental scientists when lamenting the slow pace of anti-global-warming measures. As Johnatan Weiner, a renowned author of non-fiction books on his biology observations, once said, “we don't respond to processes. We respond to events.” It illustrates policy makers’ proclivity to react to striking occurrences as opposed to the reluctance to act when the situation is worsening little by little.

In Europe, an economic shock is being experienced since 2008. If we continue with the frog metaphor and apply it to economic developments, it can be said that the frog is frenetically trying to extinguish the fire but refuses to bounce out of the pot.

Confronted with the recession, European authorities are preoccupied with the environmental degradation even less than before the crisis. In comparison to other world regions, Europe enjoys quite a livable environment. Although there are locations with acute ecological problems (e.g. the Rumanian town Copșa Mică where until 1993 carbon black for dyes was produced, or the Zone of Alienation around the site of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster in Ukraine), the Europeans are still in the warming-up phase. Bluntly speaking, it is possible to breathe in Europe but it is becoming hard to pay the bills.

We can interpret the *status quo* in two ways. Either we consider the economic downturn as more urgent than the environmental challenges, or we perceive them both as equally unsettling. If we were to rely on the ethology of frogs, we would opt for the first conclusion.

#### 3.2.1 Perception of the economic crisis

First of all, it might be a good starting point to concentrate on the fact that the word *crisis* is uniformly used by public actors, including politicians, economists or mass media, to describe today's situation. The Greek term's κρίσις original connotations were such as decision, sentence, clash, final battle, or the last stage of an illness where the body either recovers or resigns.<sup>149</sup> From the use of such terminology, we may deduce that those who see the events as critical (i.e. in a crisis) are also willing to adopt radical solutions in order to avoid the final stage of decay. Nevertheless, as we will see later in

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149. Henry George Liddell and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), 793.

this chapter, this shall not be the case.

Let us enter the topic of the economic crisis in Europe as handled by official EU bodies through a quote from a speech held by José Manuel Barroso in August 2010.

The economic and financial crisis – the worst in 80 years – has rocked Europe and the whole world. [...] The crisis is a last wake-up call to us Europeans. A truly united European Union is needed to emerge from this crisis stronger than before. [...] It also shows that action to promote growth and innovation will not, by itself, be enough. First, confidence must be restored. Translating this into the economic and financial field, the European Union had to do three things: stabilise, consolidate, stimulate.<sup>150</sup>

Apparently, there is a solid consensus about the seriousness of the global economic developments. The Commission, traditionally the most eager of all EU actors to push toward federalist measures, also represents the most innovative approach.<sup>151</sup> Yet as the President makes it clear in his opening words, the courage of the EU to tackle the crisis should be embodied in putting more emphasis on principles that can be seen as traditional guidelines of the European integration in general. To be strong again, Europe should resurrect its belief in the path initiated in the 1950s, at the outset of the spectacular economic growth.

Is the meaning ascribed nowadays to the term *crisis* a deep or a shallow one then? Academic works on critical episodes in an institution's development give us certain guidance in this matter. Thomas Kuhn, for example, argues that an extreme accumulation of anomalies – phenomena which cannot be clarified through a usual explanatory pattern – triggers a profound change in the common way of thinking. Revolutionary turnabouts take place when the old order crumbles under the weight of its own unsustainability.<sup>152</sup> Martin Marcussen describes moments called *critical junctures* as “*perceived* crisis situations occurring from complete policy failures, but also triggered by external events”.<sup>153</sup> Such stages can be understood as temporary ruptures of

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150. José Manuel Barroso, “Europe of the Regions: Building Europe from the bottom up” (speech held at the Meeting for Friendship Among Peoples, Rimini, Italy, 27 August 2010), <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/10/403&type=HTML> (accessed 18 October 2010).

151. As opposed to the Council which rather stands for the conservative neoliberal approach and which has a significant influence on the decision making process. The European Parliament could be placed in the middle on this scale of willingness to abandon the business as usual. In addition, those Directorate Generals of the Commission that are linked to areas such as finance, trade or industry are also likely to be anti-alternative in their very nature.

152. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973), 66-68.

153. Martin Marcussen et al., “Constructing Europe: The Evolution of Nation-State Identities,” in *The Social Construction of Europe*, ed. Thomas Christiansen et al. (London, New Delhi, Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2001), 103.

the system, suitable for radical innovative thoughts.

According to the Commission, stabilization of the euro, consolidation of public finances and stimulation of strategic areas are supposed to be the ingredients of the healing medicine. It is difficult to comprehend how such measures can solve a crisis which “is not just an economic or a financial crisis [but] also a crisis of values”.<sup>154</sup> By saying so, President Barroso is missing an important link, stated by Lester Brown in his book “World on the Edge”: “the values generating ecological deficits are the same values that lead to growing fiscal deficits.”<sup>155</sup> What is it precisely that does not work any more? In case Europe is experiencing just an ordinary economic downturn, which can be muddled through, the usage of the word *crisis* is inappropriate and exaggerated. Nevertheless, both statistical data and tangible impacts on real economy do indicate that the term is being used properly enough.

The depth and breath of the current global financial crisis is unprecedented in post-war economic history. It has several features in common with similar financial-stress driven crisis episodes. [...] But the key difference between these earlier episodes and the current crisis is its *global dimension*.<sup>156</sup>

The peculiar point about the mainstream understanding of the situation is that it acknowledges the uniqueness of the opportunity for a new sway, but it does not call for a fresh perspective. Instead of focusing on the future, all effort is put into the process of learning lessons from past crises. It is necessary to stress that historical experience is a precious source of information for present decision makers. Nevertheless, the question which is hardly ever raised is whether the maintenance of the economic system with all its settings should be the ultimate goal of the undertaken steps at all.

So far, the crisis is perceived as a threat to the idea of growth, and restoration of confidence in this school of thought is the main aim of the actors involved. Therefore, not radical (meaning “going to the origin, essential”) but conservative (meaning “designed to preserve, keep intact”) solutions are being considered. Liquidity injections, governmental support for the financial sector and stimulation of the global flow of capital are believed to help while searching for a way out.<sup>157</sup>

There seems to be a contradiction between the admission that the societal order is on the verge of a crisis, and the mental closure of the society toward a paradigm shift. In

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154. Barroso, “Europe of the Regions”.

155. Lester R. Brown, *World on the Edge: How to Prevent Environmental and Economic Collapse* (New York, London: Norton, 2011), 3.

156. European Commission, *Economic Crisis in Europe*, 8. Italics mine.

157. *Ibid.*, 19, 21-22.



this light, the words of President Barroso sound awkwardly impotent.

Emerging from this crisis requires us to put human dignity at the heart of our endeavours. The lesson to be learnt is that neither the market nor the state alone can provide the answers to today's challenges. At least as much as we need them we also need all forces of society to respond to people's needs.<sup>158</sup>

### 3.2.2 Perception of the environmental change

If the economic crisis is perceived as a disastrous process with numerous side-effects, and discussed as a theme of highest importance, environmental decline basically draws the attention under two circumstances. Either there is an environmental disaster, or an environment-focused international meeting is being organized. The Google search engine finds 2.480.000 hits on the combination of “economic crisis” AND EU, but only 249.000 on “environmental crisis” AND EU.<sup>159</sup> Does it mean that the environment is not primarily endangered and that, compared to the economic upheaval, it is ten times less pressing?

The assumption that only striking events (rather than steady processes) set the society in motion is validated by observation of how the two crises are reacted to. Mainstream actors do not use the term *crisis* automatically in the environmental context, for several reasons. First of all, while the economic crisis is broadly acknowledged as such by everyone, there are influential individual and collective players that deny environmental decline or play down its importance.<sup>160</sup>

In addition, the state of natural environment, at least in the EU, has not yet degraded to such an extent that it would be considered an ecological breakdown. The frog has not really noticed so far. Finally, despite all the attempts to reconcile the human world with the natural one, the environment is not seen as the most important prerequisite of people's well-being.<sup>161</sup>

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158. Barroso, “Europe of the Regions”.

159. Searched 19 October 2010.

160. The most outspoken critics of e.g. global warming are former advisor of Margaret Thatcher Viscount Monckton and Czech president Václav Klaus, while the most influential think-tank not sharing the established climate change consensus is Cato Institute.

161. It is the Commission, especially the DG Environment which has repeatedly recognized that “a clean and healthy environment is essential for the well-being and prosperity of society”. (EUR-Lex, Decision No 1600/2002/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 22 July 2002 laying down the Sixth Community Environment Action Programme, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:32002D1600:EN:NOT> (accessed 20 October 2010). Nevertheless, the thinking of the DG Environment is very dissimilar from the general opinion among government leaders who shaped the Treaties. We cannot therefore consider the idea behind the 6<sup>th</sup> EAP as the EU's common standpoint. Burchell and Lightfoot, *The Greening of the European Union?*, 45.

The language reflects what is on our mind, and our mind co-produces the language. The Sixth Community Environment Action Programme, which is the current legal instrument of the EU's pursued environmental commitment, does not include the phrase “environmental crisis” even once. Article 4 plainly enunciates that “a number of serious environmental problems persist and new ones are emerging which require further action”.<sup>162</sup>

The conditions are being altered but this alteration is not necessarily heading toward a critical point. The following quote from President Barroso's speech “From Kyoto to Copenhagen” illustrates exactly the point:

The science is clear. Continuing with business as usual almost certainly means dangerous, perhaps catastrophic, climate change during the course of this century. [...] This part of the message is getting over. I cannot open a newspaper or turn on the television without seeing images of collapsing icebergs, polar bears, or de-forestation. The people on this planet increasingly understand the scale of the problem. But I want to say to you today that understanding the moral context is necessary but not sufficient. My sense from talking to people all over the world about this is that they understand why we have to act and they want to hear about solutions. But those of us with political responsibility have not yet, collectively, convinced them that we have the necessary political will to deliver solutions in line with economic growth and sustainable development.<sup>163</sup>

### **3.2.3 Interconnectedness of crises?**

So far, I have been paying the attention to the two phenomena separately. Yet the focus of this chapter should be their interconnectedness, and especially the search for a common explanation of their occurrence. The mechanisms which are involved in the economic downturn, and the processes that come along with the environmental deterioration are all but simple. Their global scale only enhances their complexity and even though it might not lead to quick and clear answers, it could help us arrive at a sustainable solution if we addressed them as two sides of the same coin. But does the EU, the promoter of the idea of sustainable development, see them as such?

In October 2010, the UN Convention on Biological Diversity was held in Nagoya, Aichi prefecture, Japan. This event drew international attention to environmental issues, and its conclusions did not sound tranquilizing:

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162. EUR-Lex, Decision No 1600/2002/EC.

163. José Manuel Barroso, “From Kyoto to Copenhagen” (speech held at the at the Global Editors' Forum, Copenhagen, Denmark, 9 October 2009), <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/09/458&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en> (accessed 20 October 2010).

The action taken over the next decade or two, and the direction charted under the Convention on Biological Diversity, will determine whether the relatively stable environmental conditions on which human civilization has depended for the past 10,000 years will continue beyond this century. If we fail to use this opportunity, many ecosystems on the planet will move into new, unprecedented states in which the capacity to provide for the needs of present and future generations is highly uncertain.<sup>164</sup>

The Japanese press recognized the EU as the front leader of environmental protection and informed about strong determination to foster tight targets for the coming years, as opposed to the rather hesitating other world regions. “While the European Union champions a rigorous target of halting the loss of biodiversity by 2020, many countries are arguing for a more lenient approach,” states the *Asahi Shimbun* in the Editorial on the Biodiversity Convention.<sup>165</sup> Indeed, EU's achievements are impressive in comparison with other national and transnational entities. However, if we were to evaluate the absolute efficiency of the EU's activity, the image becomes less bright.

In April 2009, the Commission admitted that the loss of biodiversity across the continent by 2010 would not be halted.<sup>166</sup> It was not a representative of the EU bodies but Claire Papazoglou, BirdLife's Regional Director for Europe, who grasped the challenge of linking the environment and the economy, none of them prosperous at the moment.

Decision makers have to wake up. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century short-term economic advantages and vested interests cannot rule policy. Otherwise we won't cope neither with the economic, nor the environmental crisis.<sup>167</sup>

Another source of information on the EU's conceptual understanding of the economy-environment crisis tandem may be the paper issued by the Commission in October 2008, *From financial crisis to recovery: A European framework for action*.

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164. Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, *Global Biodiversity Outlook 3 – Executive Summary* (Montréal 2010, <http://gbo3.cbd.int/the-outlook/gbo3/executive-summary.aspx> (accessed 20 October 2010), 9.

165. “Editorial: Biodiversity Conference”, *The Asahi Shimbun*, 18 October 2010, <http://www.asahi.com/english/TKY201010180266.html> (accessed 20 October 2010). The main outcome of the conference is the agreement on the Strategic Plan to conserve biological diversity until the year 2020, and the Nagoya Protocol on Access to Genetic Resources and the Fair and Equitable Sharing of Benefits Arising from their Utilization. However, necessary financial tools to pursue the goals included in the documents, such as Green Development Mechanism, were not adopted. For more information see <http://www.cbd.int/nagoya/outcomes/>, or <http://www.business-biodiversity.eu/default.asp?Menu=49&News=255>.

166. See European Commission, Environment, Nature & Biodiversity, Biodiversity, Policy, [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/biodiversity/conference/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/biodiversity/conference/index_en.htm) (accessed 20 October 2010).

167. Environment News Service, “Europe Will Miss 2010 Biodiversity Protection Target”, 28 April 2009, <http://www.ens-newswire.com/ens/apr2009/2009-04-28-01.html> (accessed 20 October 2010).

When we search through the document, we come across one (sic!) statement that somehow refers to the question of the environment:

The EU needs to [...] invest in the future through enhancing European competitiveness by continuing to green our economy as a way of creating new jobs and technologies, overcoming our energy security constraints and achieving our environmental goals.<sup>168</sup>

While in case of the unfavorable economic development, the rhetoric of immediate action is also met in the actual measures taken, the environmental loss is often given lip service only.<sup>169</sup>

It is now clear that environmental commitment is likely to be abandoned in the face of the economic woes of the Union. In addition, at this point of time even more eagerly than before, any environmental action is being substantiated on economic grounds.<sup>170</sup> Such an argumentation is not a wrong strategy in itself, but it basically means a cardinal simplification. The idea of “making nature economically visible”<sup>171</sup> is, at the end of the day, compatible with the worldview which brought us to the economic breakdown. Although the call for measuring, managing and rewarding economically responsible stewardship of the natural capital<sup>172</sup> may be a step in the right direction, it is likely to stall any major paradigm shift toward new societal principles, grounded in complete environmental sustainability.

On the other hand, there are some signals that the economic crisis might indeed be

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168. COM (2008) 706 final, 4.

169. “The EU is making progress though this is not enough to improve the general quality of the environment and even less to progress to sustainability. Without accelerated policies, pressures on the environment will continue to exceed human health standards and the often limited carrying capacity of the environment.” Ute Collier, „Sustainability, subsidiarity and deregulation: New directions in EU environmental policy,“ *Environmental Politics* 6, no. 2 (1997): 2.

170. See e.g. the research project known as TEEB, The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity, supported among others by the EU. Take the following quote as an example: “There are two major learning challenges that society faces today. Firstly, we are still learning the 'nature of value', as we broaden our concept of 'capital' to encompass human capital, social capital and natural capital. By recognizing and by seeking to grow or conserve these other 'capitals' we are working our way towards sustainability. Secondly, we are still struggling to find the 'value of nature'. Nature is the source of much value to us every day, and yet it mostly bypasses markets, escapes pricing and defies valuation. This lack of valuation is, we are discovering, an underlying cause for the observed degradation of ecosystems and the loss of biodiversity.” *The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity: An interim report* (European Communities, 2008), <http://www.teebweb.org/InformationMaterial/TEEBReports/tabid/1278/language/en-US/Default.aspx> (accessed 21 October 2010).

171. *The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity: Mainstreaming the economics of nature: A synthesis of the approach, conclusions and recommendations of TEEB* (TEEB, 2008), <http://www.teebweb.org/InformationMaterial/TEEBReports/tabid/1278/language/en-US/Default.aspx> (accessed 21 October 2010). This report was released on 20 October 2010 at the earlier mentioned Convention on Biological Diversity COP10 in Nagoya, Japan.

172. *Ibid.*, 29.

an opportunity for pragmatic green measures. Recently, the EU has been seriously re-considering the basis on which its economic system is standing. Although the political will of the national leaders is varied in this respect, and the support from the citizens' side is always insecure,<sup>173</sup> the official bodies do introduce relatively radical ideas to the discourse. In 2007, for instance, a new international initiative “Beyond GDP: Measuring progress, true wealth, and the well-being of nations” was launched, as a common project of the European Commission, European Parliament, WWF, OECD and Club of Rome.<sup>174</sup> There is an understanding that business as usual has proved to be non-resuscitable and new paths need to be explored. As it is stated in the Council of Environment Ministers' communication reacting to the *European Economic Recovery Plan*,

the efforts to overcome the economic slowdown in Europe provide an opportunity to carry out economic reforms and at the same time move towards more sustainable production methods and consumption patterns.<sup>175</sup>

To sum it up, the realization is growing that the two processes are interlinked, although within the public discourse, the importance of the economic recession is overruling the urgency of the environmental decline.

### **3.2.4 Concrete policy outcomes: merging crises, merging solutions?**

In order to test the hypotheses, I should provide explicit evidence that measures designed by the EU to tackle the economic crisis do take environmental commitment into consideration, although only under limited conditions. I shall discuss the *European Economic Recovery Plan*,<sup>176</sup> drafted by the Commission and adopted in November 2008 as a common EU strategy to combat and overcome the crisis.

The first remarkable fact is that there is no environment-focused equivalent to the *Economic Recovery Plan*. When we inquire into the reason for this, we cannot avoid the question of time frame. Orientation on short-term results, understandable in the case of the EU since it is, among other roles, a political entity, does not take into consideration the way the environment works. We are witnessing a fundamental mismatch in the temporal perspective when dealing with the issues of economic (political) and environmental crises. The failure to address this discrepancy is primarily caused by the

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173. “Despite opinion polls indicating green attitudes among many people, when push comes to shove, people vote with their wallets.” Burchell and Lightfoot, *The Greening of the European Union?*, 97-98.

174. See the web site <http://www.beyond-gdp.eu/index.html>.

175. Council of the European Union, “Green measures to tackle the economic crisis”, March 2009, <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/showFocus.aspx?id=1&focusid=353&lang=en> (accessed 21 October 2010).

176. COM(2008) 800 final.

need of the EU to multi-task and its unwillingness to balance the varied temporal requirements of the immediate economic (influenced by political interest) and long-term environmental commitments. It is logical to expect that the outcome of this would be a slant in favor of the short-term solutions in the economic sphere, if necessary, even at the expense of environmental exposure.

The economic crisis is not handled as a crisis of ideas, even though it has been identified as such by high EU officials. It is still treated as a managerial lapse through measures that virtually “fix” a broken machine instead of developing a new, more reliable one. Now, when this approach is extended to nature, we can expect at best modest results, and at worst, a regrettable failure.

Markets can respond to signals in minutes and hours. Nature responds more slowly to an “environmental recovery plan”. A neglected habitat can take years to recover, while cutting greenhouse gas emissions is measured in years and decades. The response to stopping banks from collapsing was swift and expensive, but the rescue of the natural world is a work in progress that has yet to be paid for.<sup>177</sup>

The fact that vast intellectual and even bigger financial resources are allocated for immediate economic rescue plans to save the markets but there is not even a serious discussion of a comprehensive environmental “bail-out” (which indeed needs much more sophistication and care) only proves the presupposition that the decline of the natural environment is not deemed critical.

Getting back to the issue of concrete maneuvers, what does Rankin, the European Voice reporter, mean by “swift and expensive”? The *European Economic Recovery Plan* (adopted in 2008) is based on two key pillars and one general principle. The tactic consists of demand boosting and confidence stimulation through a massive financial injection into the economy, equal to €200 billion (1.5% of GDP).<sup>178</sup> This instant action is then followed by a programme aiming at the so-called smart investments for the future competitiveness of the EU, such as energy efficiency, clean technologies, and infrastructure and inter-connection for innovation. The Plan adopts solidarity and social

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177. Jennifer Rankin, “Breaking butterflies upon a wheel of indifference?” *European Voice*, 27 August 2009, Policies section, Environment section, Conservation section, <http://www.europeanvoice.com/article/imported/breaking-butterflies-upon-a-wheel-of-indifference-/65721.aspx> (accessed 25 October 2010).

178. Over the years 2008-2010, the EU has actually invested €400 billion, thus about 3.3% of the GDP to support the economy. European Commission, “Driving the European Recovery: EU's response to the economic and financial crisis,” [http://ec.europa.eu/financial-crisis/supporting/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/financial-crisis/supporting/index_en.htm) (accessed 25 October 2010).

justice as its fundamental principle.<sup>179</sup>

It is worth dwelling on two issues that concern the EU's strategy to milden the crisis impact. First of all, what is the qualitative nature of the recovery plan? And how will it influence the environment (if at all)?

Citizens have been repeatedly reassured that the present course of action is leading the EU out of the crisis and that the region will supposedly emerge “stronger” than ever before. Indeed, there have been some signals of economic awakening in some Member States, at least as far as the statistical indicators suggest.<sup>180</sup> The EU is proceeding with its crisis management, concentrating mainly on surveillance of fiscal policies, macroeconomic policies and structural reforms, and enforcement mechanisms for non-compliant countries.<sup>181</sup> The idea behind the policies is that “the financial system is deeply flawed”<sup>182</sup> and unethical in some aspects, and that more integration (and rejection of protectionism) will also bring more stability.

The end of the economic crisis is not expected in the near future due to the complex situation on the world markets which are – within the global economy – relevant for the development of the EU. Nevertheless, the economic sector seems to be slowly reacting to the attempted revival measures.

As already hinted, the role that environmental commitment plays in the battle against economic downturn is rather limited in its philosophical width but it is understood as a step forward on the path toward energy efficiency and technological innovation. Improved infrastructure, transport, water and waste management, renewable energies, green products and services, sustainable consumption patterns and low-carbon economy belong to the highlights of the effort.<sup>183</sup> We could argue that narrowing the

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179. COM(2008) 800 final, 3.

180. According to the Interim forecast issued in September 2010, “the economic recovery in the EU, while still fragile, is progressing at a faster pace than previously envisaged. In particular, real GDP growth for both the EU and euro area surprised markedly on the upside in the second quarter of 2010.” European Commission, DG Economic and Financial Affairs, *Interim forecast September 2010: EU recovery progressing within an uncertain global environment*, [http://ec.europa.eu/economy\\_finance/articles/eu\\_economic\\_situation/2010-09-13-interim\\_forecast\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/articles/eu_economic_situation/2010-09-13-interim_forecast_en.htm) (accessed 25 October 2010).

181. Europa.eu, “EU economic governance: the Commission delivers a comprehensive package of legislative measures,” <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/10/1199&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en> (accessed 23 October 2010).

182. European Commission, “Driving the European Recovery”.

183. Council of the European Union, “Council Conclusions on the Contribution of the Council (Environment) to the Spring European Council (19 and 20 March 2009),” <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/App/NewsRoom/related.aspx?bid=89&grp=14848&lang=EN&cmsId=339> (accessed 25 October 2010).

issue to climate change mitigation, revised energy policy and advertising green products is indeed a result of a restrained understanding of our society's dependence on the natural environment. On the other hand, if environmentally conscious legislation is introduced alongside the instruments outlined to speed up the economic recovery, the environment could profit as well.

To do justice to the EU's tactics when facing the economic turbulence, we have to acknowledge the stress put on environmentally sensitive policies. However, if the chances for European economy are scarce but existent, the prospects of an environmental recovery are even looser. “While some European leaders can be cautiously hopeful about the economy, they should all be deeply worried about Europe's natural wealth”.<sup>184</sup>

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184. Rankin, “Breaking butterflies upon a wheel of indifference?”



### **3.3 Essence of strength**

Having reviewed the modes in which the presumably interfering issues are perceived by the EU, I shall move to the core idea of this chapter. The angle from which the topic can be approached afresh is the essence of strength as embodied in the officially transmitted statements and strategic documents. There are three main points to be illuminated.

Firstly, how can we define strength with regard to the indicia included in the discussed sources? Key words such as *restoration*, *confidence*, *growth*, *stability*, *competitiveness*, or *innovation* may cast some light on the matter.

Secondly, to which extent is such an idea about (cultural, regional, economic, political etc.) strength compatible with our knowledge about the needs of the natural environment in its actual state? Such an analysis can unveil whether the EU is aware of the mutual relation between economic policies and environmental change, and how serious it is about adjusting the system with respect to the idea of sustainability.

Last but not least, we shall open the arena for revisions of the essence of strength in case it turns out to be limited in its potential to lead Europe out of the tunnel in which she has marched. Cultural flexibility should be neither underestimated nor embroidered. Culture is an open and dynamic entity but it cannot easily move beyond its limits, however difficult it might be to define them. It would be thus utopian to call for a complete abandonment of the present idea of strength but a sensitive restructuring of the concept's elements may be feasible.

#### **3.3.1 Strength as a means**

The understanding of strength mirrored in the EU's approach toward various aspects of the regional and world development can be generally characterized as *instrumental*. A strong Europe is depicted as an entity ready to face competitors, as a serious rival and possibly a leader of less advanced communities, introducing model strategies to be followed. This is surely the case of environmental commitment; the EU labels itself as a pioneer on the environmental front and generally speaking, it has been accepted as such by other regional players and transregional institutions. But it also applies to economic policies which are presented as innovative and worth pursuing on a global scale. "Europe is well placed to play an active role in designing the new global

architecture and making it work effectively”,<sup>185</sup> states the Commission in its anti-crisis plan communication.

Another aim which can be achieved through a strong position of Europe is further economic growth. Rich scholarly work has been produced around the question of the distinction between growth and development, and it would go beyond my focus to elaborate in detail on this issue. The following quote by John Stuart Mill grasps the ambiguous nature of wealth which is supposed to be a means but, due to the difficulty to obtain it, often grows into the ultimate end.

It is scarcely necessary to remark that a stationary condition of capital and population implies no stationary state of human improvement. There would be as much scope as ever for all kinds of mental culture, and moral and social progress; as much room for improving the Art of Living, and much more likelihood of its being improved, when minds ceased to be engrossed by the art of getting on.<sup>186</sup>

The ideology represented by the Commission embraces the concept of a multi-sided and equal development. This view is profoundly different from the neoclassical economic school of thought neglecting social and environmental limits to economic growth.<sup>187</sup> Having said that, we shall not disregard the prevailing importance of economic welfare for the EU. Even though the GDP is criticized as a misleading indicator,<sup>188</sup> red numbers continue to be observed with anxiety and political leaders are having a hard time to justify even the slightest drop.

The distribution of power in this battle of ideas is rather uneven. The mindset of the society, formed throughout decades of one-dimensionality, is reflected in institutional bodies with executive power, working in the name of public interest. Since the society generates its institutions and these, in turn, influence the society, values and principles embedded in people's mindsets reflect themselves in the societal order, which becomes a reciprocal instrument of their self-justification. Thus, the European Commission currently finds itself in a social climate, which is programmed to re-create the existing

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185. COM(2008) 706 final, 8.

186. John Stuart Mill, *Principles of Political Economy* (London: Longmans, 1871), 332.

187. Matthew A. Cole, *Trade Liberalisation, Economic Growth and the Environment* (Cheltenham, Northampton: Edward Elgar, 2000), 41.

188. “Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is a powerful and widely accepted indicator for monitoring short to medium term fluctuations in economic activity, notably in the current recession. For all of its shortcomings, it is still the best single measure of how the market economy is performing. But GDP is not meant to be an accurate gauge of longer term economic and social progress and notably the ability of a society to tackle issues such as climate change, resource efficiency or social inclusion. There is a clear case for complementing GDP with statistics covering the other economic, social and environmental issues, on which people's well-being critically depends.” COM(2009) 433 final, 10.

patterns (business as usual), and, in spite of the ambitious goals proclaimed, cannot avoid being mired into this rigid mental atmosphere. The scope of the precipitous rescue action was, after all, to restore confidence in the system as a whole. Environmental commitment was only a complementary element to consider in the context of the restoration effort.

### **3.3.2 Balance of strength**

If we identify the substance of strength in sticking to the order which existed before the crisis, the manoeuvring space for new thought patterns becomes scarce. The history of environmental policy integration in the EU is a long row of arguments and counter-arguments in the discussion about harmonizing economy and nature. The matter could be simplified by saying that mainstream economists, politicians and environmentalists have been trying to answer the question whether or not the re-allocation of resources towards environmental protection is doomed to be accompanied by economic slowdown in short-, middle- and long-term perspectives.

Such rationalizing harkens back to the concept of the conservation of energy, according to which any increase on one side needs to be balanced through a decrease somewhere else within the system. The debate about the economy threatening the environment, or environmental commitment (usually reduced to conservation) hampering economic growth, is thus a product of a classical scientific theory.

The American ecological economist Herman Daly<sup>189</sup> is renowned for his ability to formulate new, fundamental questions. Daly contested not only the feasibility of economic growth but also its desirability.<sup>190</sup> Following this path of critical thinking, we can analogically challenge the presumption of energy conservation, arguing that parallel improvement is possible. When one part of a whole grows stronger, another part may not necessarily suffer a decline. Here the nature of the growth becomes a crucial determinant.

From what is seen in the EU's reaction to the halted economy, it seems there is a certain resentment about the need to revise the mainstream idea of growth, but it is admittedly overdue. Since the 1960s, a recognizable shift in the public discourse has

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189. Herman Daly was born in 1938. During his employment by the Environment Department of the World Bank, he contributed to the formulation of sustainable development policy guidelines. Daly introduced the idea of uneconomic growth. Among other titles, his publications include *For the Common Good*, written in 1989 together with John B. Cobb, and *Valuing the Earth*, written in 1993 in collaboration with Kenneth Townsend.

190. See Cole, *Trade Liberalisation, Economic Growth and the Environment*, 50.

taken place, and Europe is familiar with that. Nevertheless, she is unsure about her own willingness to transgress the limits of the dominant idea of growth, incompatible with environmental awareness.

### 3.3.3 Strength as the ultimate end

This chapter suggests a qualitative revision of the idea of strength, in the sense that if its purpose is restricted to being instrumental, it is unlikely to include true and full environmental considerations.

Nongovernmental independent actors that contribute to the debate about economic and environmental crisis<sup>191</sup> have proven to generate the most innovative ideas. Their analysis reflects a move from the lower level of instrumentality to the upper level of ethics (and beyond).

Let us take as an example a position paper issued by the WWF in September 2010, as a reaction to the EU's plan how to diminish the negative impacts of the economic crisis through a newly designed and controlled community budget.

Reforming the EU budget is an essential part of a successful European response to the crisis. Europe and European countries must not repeat the recent mistakes of bail out plans and recovery packages to save the banks and keep the 'business as usual' economy turning. Many of these investments potentially risk exacerbating the ecological crisis.<sup>192</sup>

In this case, a return to the pre-crisis state is seen as problematic not only for the expenses of such an attempt. There is a call for an utter revision of the former system, now collapsing.

The EU budget must be radically reformed to reflect the enormity of the systemic crisis ahead. [...] The EU can and must take responsibility. It must ensure that citizen's money is properly invested in an economy of the future, which will safeguard them, their children and generations to come.<sup>193</sup>

As discussed earlier, the timeframe of the change is important for the issue of the two interlinked crises. While the EU has difficulties to get quick and flexible measures through for bureaucratic reasons, it is absolutely beyond its capabilities to adopt a legally binding agreement, the results of which none of the elected politicians will live to see.

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191. At this place, I return to the expression of environmental crisis because so do the independent institutions.

192. WWF, *Making the EU Budget Work for EU Citizens* (WWF: Brussels, 2010), [http://wwf.panda.org/about\\_our\\_earth/all\\_publications/?194993/Making-the-EU-Budget-work-for-EU-Citizens](http://wwf.panda.org/about_our_earth/all_publications/?194993/Making-the-EU-Budget-work-for-EU-Citizens) (accessed 29 October 2010), 5.

193. *Ibid.*, 11.

The quote reproduced below expresses courageous determination to raise our endeavour from modest and politically correct compromises to a more serious intention to improve human living conditions. The European Social Forum is certainly not a representative voice of Europe, but still it deserves to be heard.

The newspapers may speak of financial and economic crises, but when we look around ourselves, we don't see derivatives and financial markets – what we see is the destruction of communities, of our social and natural environments, of our relations to each other. [...] We need to fight where we stand: to create another world, we also need to create another Europe and tear down the walls of the fortress that surround it. Against those who try to create divisions between social and ecological justice, we assert that they do not contradict each other. They are and have to be complementary. Our vision is of a good life for all, not a nightmare of authoritarian eco-austerity.<sup>194</sup>

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194. European Social Forum, “Climate Justice Movements call in Istanbul,” <http://www.fse-esf.org/spip.php?article694> (accessed 8 October 2010).

### 3.4 *Letting the future come: At the crossroad of ideas*

Within the European cultural tradition, it is regarded as self-evident that progress and improvement can be achieved by a powerful drive, be it intellectual, economic or political, which has the notion of strength at its core.

Strength and competitiveness belong to features emphasized in the European culture. European Union is its explicit offspring, “drawing inspiration from the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe”.<sup>195</sup> The dialogue between our society, our economy and the natural environment is led within the limits of this institutionalized worldview.

One of the most misleading factors in the EU's discussion about environmental issues is the language. It is easy to cover one idea with another expression, and once this camouflage strikes the chord with the prevalent cultural pattern, the original intention is not revealed any more in the public. A lot of effort is put into activities launched “in order to address the great societal challenges, to enhance the EU's overall competitiveness and to meet high consumer demands”.<sup>196</sup> Less controversy is found on the level of our knowledge about the real challenges we are facing. An ordinary cultural goal, rooted in the image of human society standing above the natural world, is confused with a deep ecological concern.

Yes, the EU has played a crucial role in the shift of the public discourse as far as the world environmental outlook is concerned. Nevertheless, this shift is not qualitative, meaning it does not imply a cultural change, as the EU “has well-known aspirations to lead the rest of the world towards solutions, but has struggled to deliver the necessary internal changes”.<sup>197</sup> The behavioural patterns are slightly modified, by some individuals or solitary institutions more than by others. Yet the community as a whole is still marching toward its original aim – an instrumentally “strong Europe”.

However, the faultiness of the logic of strength in its traditional rationalist sense can be visible as other regional powers adopt it in order to make a case for the sake of

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195. EUR-Lex, Treaty of Lisbon amending the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty establishing the European Community, signed at Lisbon, 13 December 2007 (Official Journal of the European Union, 2007/C 306/01), <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/JOHtml.do?uri=OJ:C:2007:306:SOM:en:HTML> (accessed 10 October 2010).

196. Definition of the Knowledge Based Bio-Economy. KBBE can be concisely defined as “transforming life sciences knowledge into new, sustainable, eco-efficient and competitive products”. See the web page <http://www.kbbe2010.be/en/kbbe2010/about-kbbe/defining-kbbe>.

197. Andrew Jordan et al., “Climate Change Policy in the European Union: An Introduction,” in *Climate Change Policy in the European Union: Confronting the Dilemmas of Mitigation and Adaptation?*, ed. Andrew Jordan et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 4.

maximizing their own growth as opposed to meeting Europe's call for sustainability halfway. Although Europe is slowly and painfully realizing the need for fundamental reform, it is still clinging to the essentially economic rhetoric of "competitiveness". There is little wonder, then, that the argument of strength and growth is being returned to the Western world by developing countries, such as China and India. They make a case for their own "economic development" and "growth" and explain their unwillingness to make adequate environmental commitments with a similar "competitiveness" mantra. Indeed, unless the EU makes a radical break with the mindset and practice of the past and is able to offer a clear sustainable alternative, how can it counter the claim that other parts of the world should be allowed to follow that unsustainable path of industrialization, which made Europe so prosperous?

European Union claims to have a recipe for the environmental malaises of today and it is the most active regional actor dealing with this problem. This fact is widely recognized and it is touted especially by the European Union itself. Time and again, official EU bodies stress the progress in environmental policy, recently adding the formula about the economic crisis being an opportunity for a new wave of greening measures.

The Environment Policy Review published in 2008 by the European Commission reads:

The crisis is a crucial opportunity to "green" our economy and lay the foundations for low-carbon and resource-efficient growth. As the downturn influences our policies, a stronger environment policy can help spark economic recovery and lasting EU competitiveness.<sup>198</sup>

A usual way of solving a problem to which we think to have a ready answer is to implement it more eagerly. The European Union has elaborated a concept of a "strong Europe" and if we have not achieved the desired level of strength yet, it is believed, it means the concept has not been promoted and followed systematically enough. The idea of the lack of systemic approach in implementing environmentally-friendly solutions holds true, as the overall policy change in this sphere in the EU is characterized as "lopsides ([...] in terms of modes and instruments) and unevenly focused (with mitigation almost completely eclipsing adaptation)"<sup>199</sup> and its temporal development being "highly

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198. European Commission, 2008: *Environment Policy Review* (Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2009), [http://ec.europa.eu/environment/pdf/policy/epr\\_2008.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/environment/pdf/policy/epr_2008.pdf) (accessed 29 October 2010), 12-13.

199. Jordan et al., "Governing Climate Change in the European Union: Understanding the Past and Preparing for the Future," in *Climate Change Policy in the European Union: Confronting the*

uneven with numerous fits and starts rather than an inexorable progress”.<sup>200</sup> Our contention, then, is that the underlying reasons for that is the wrong choice of a fundamental objective. The crisis is depicted as another chance to foster the old idea of an economically, politically and culturally powerful Europe. *Growth, economic recovery, and competitiveness*; these are some of the purposes of the economic and environment policy integration, which in turn is supposed to guarantee a higher quality of life to the EU citizens.

We are in a situation when global environmental challenges increase in their urgency, while our tools to mitigate their impacts are ever less efficient.

At the end of the millennium, environmental trends still were of net loss, including further degradation and fragmentation of ecosystems, diminishing forests, extinction of species, loss of climate regulation, harmful subsidies etc.<sup>201</sup>

On the occasion of the G20 summit in Toronto, Canada, in June 2010, the two highest officials of the European Union expressed their wish to “secure strong and sustainable growth”.<sup>202</sup> Such a statement is likely to raise interest in the way of achieving the goal; journalists, politicians and analysts ask *how* the European Union wants to follow its agenda. This approach is traditional in the sense that none of the actors of the debate challenge the initial assumptions about the right way to go.

But we can also study the European Union policy from a deeper level. We can focus on the meaning of the terms like *security, strength, sustainability, or growth*. At this moment, the EU's stability is shaken at its foundations. When thinking about its future development, it might be useful to examine the solutions suggested for the economic crisis, and their implications for the environment. For the question marks of the 21<sup>st</sup> century are different from those of the previous era, and the relation between culture and nature, between human civilization and the natural environment has become an issue of an ever growing importance.

It is clear that the present path of world development is not sustainable in the longer term, even if we recognise the enormous potentials of the market and of technological innovation. New ideas and strategies will be needed to

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*Dilemmas of Mitigation and Adaptation?*, ed. Andrew Jordan et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 259.

200. Ibid.

201. Keith Clement, *Economic Development and Environmental Gain: European Environmental Integration and Regional Competitiveness* (London: Earthscan, 2000), 3.

202. See the press release entitled “Securing strong and sustainable growth” - President Barroso and President Van Rompuy set out EU goals for the G20 summit in Toronto,” <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/10/784> (accessed 30 July 2010).



ensure that improved living conditions and opportunities for a growing population across the world can be reconciled with the conservation of a viable climate and of the fragile ecosystems on which all life depends. A new vision and path for world development must be conceived and adopted if humanity is to surmount the challenges ahead.<sup>203</sup>

This quotation from the website of The Club of Rome is an example of thinking that goes beyond standard political action. The status of the European Union is different from the position of an autonomous group of experts. The EU is a political entity, a regional team of still independent players. Nevertheless, its leaders declare commitment to help develop a 'strong' community ready for the coming decades, taking the environment into account as a partner, and not only as a resource. In addition, if the EU wished to change its course, it could do it, with more efficiency than any prestigious think tank.

When we inquire into the essence of strength as understood in the contemporary mainstream discourse within the EU, we see that the proposed economic and environmental measures are doomed to bring conservative results. The causes of the two tectonic crises are indeed intertwined and they require special treatment. A treatment with which we might as well be culturally unfamiliar.

Today, leaders and change makers across all institutions are torn between worlds: on the one hand they are confronted with a set of unprecedented 21<sup>st</sup>-century leadership challenges; and on the other they find themselves equipped with a 20<sup>th</sup>-century management toolkit that is inadequate to fix the problems they face. Between these two worlds there yawns a wide chasm that today's leaders struggle to bridge.<sup>204</sup>

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203. The Club of Rome, „A New Path for Development,“ [http://www.clubofrome.org/eng/new\\_path/](http://www.clubofrome.org/eng/new_path/) (accessed 29 October).

204. Otto C. Scharmer, “The Blind Spot of Institutional Leadership: How To Create Deep Innovation Through Moving from Egosystem to Ecosystem Awareness” (draft paper prepared for World Economic Forum Annual Meeting of the New Champions 2010, Tianjin, People's Republic of China, 13-15 September), <http://www.ottoscharmer.com/publications/articles.php> (accessed 29 October 2010).

CONFIDENCE MUST BE RESTORED.  
José Manuel Barroso

EUROPE HAS TO RESTORE GROWTH.  
Richard Baldwin

STRENGTH DOES NOT COME FROM PHYSICAL CAPACITY.  
IT COMES FROM AN INDOMITABLE WILL.  
Mahatma Gandhi

## 4 Concept of Strength

To understand the meaning of *strength* which is supposed to be the goal of the EU's effort to deal with the current stage of decline means to understand the internal setting of the institution as such. The point I wish to make is not only to identify the mainstream frame of reference, but also to show how compatible it is with the steps that ought to be attempted if a more resilient society is to emerge.

The fact that a change in the course is desirable is presented here as uncontested. As Bert J. M. de Vries and Arthur C. Petersen from the Netherlands Environmental Assessment Agency state,

the transition towards a more sustainable relationship between the human species and its natural life-support system, is a major challenge for humanity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>205</sup>

Now the question is how, through what mechanisms and under which circumstances such a shift is feasible. By no means is it self-evident that a positive transformation will occur. From the past, numerous cases are known where a human dominated socio-ecological system suffered from a crisis leading to a depression because a non-resilient state was caused by internal changes or external force (the Akkadian empire of Mesopotamia, Eastern Islanders, Mayans, the Roman Empire, etc.).<sup>206</sup>

On the other hand, it would be a symptom of too a narrow and self-determining way of thinking if we assumed that Europe is standing on the verge of a breakdown which cannot be prevented, be it due to an incorrect internal constitution or unfavourable external circumstances (or both). The possibility to transform the ability of people to make choices and through individual action influence institutions and the

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205. Bert J. M. de Vries and Arthur C. Petersen, "Conceptualizing sustainable development: An assessment methodology connecting values, knowledge, worldviews and scenarios," *Ecological Economics* 68 (2009): 1017.

206. Rachael Beddoe et al., "Overcoming systemic roadblocks to sustainability: The evolutionary redesign of worldviews, institutions, and technologies," *PNAS* 106, no. 8 (2009), <http://www.pnas.org/content/106/8/2483.full.pdf+html> (accessed 10 March 2011).

society as a whole is an essential starting point for any critical analysis of societal processes.

As I have argued in the previous chapters, in the history of ideas that gained attention in Europe there were several which still belong to the core mental setting of our society. The power of an individual conviction is not to be underestimated, yet de Vries and Petersen argue that

organizations, and not individuals, are the actors in the societal networks which run the human world with its macro-problems – although every organization is the expression of individuals.<sup>207</sup>

The aim of this chapter is not to deliver a sermon on how to reanimate an ethics for Europe, nor is the intention to draw a pessimistic and resigned picture of the European Union as an unsustainable entity incapable to reform. By focusing on the concept of strength (its content and implications), the functional laws and principles of the EU's worldview configuration will be revealed. Understanding a problem means being on the right way toward a solution. As soon as we know about the culture and the ecological context that condition a society's outlook, it eases any attempt to regulate it.

In the article of Rachael Beddoe, Robert Costanza and others, the need of harmony between our *thinking* about the world and its *real* functioning is acknowledged:

Effectively adapting to potential collapse requires a thorough realignment of the way we view and interact with our surroundings – what has been called a socio-ecological “regime shift”. A socio-ecological regime is a culture embedded in, and co-evolving with, its ecological context. “Regime” suggests a complete, interacting set of cultural and environmental factors that operate as a whole. When the ecological context changes so that the existing regime is no longer adaptive, societies must either identify and surmount the roadblocks confronting a regime shift or else become unsustainable and decline.<sup>208</sup>

This thesis is trying to analyze the barriers of such a socio-ecological regime shift within the EU on the example of its environmental policy. The choice of the policy area is motivated by my personal interests; I am aware of the fact that the potential collapse that might be awaiting us is not a partial one. As we have seen in the chapter on the linkage between ecological liabilities and economic difficulties of our time, the “package” of possible breakdowns cannot be neatly unpacked and singular dysfunctions re-distributed in smaller and less complex boxes. This is caused by the rooting of the regime both in culture – a cryptic phenomenon itself – and in the natural environment

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207. de Vries and Petersen, “Conceptualizing sustainable development,” 1116.

208. Beddoe et al., “Overcoming systemic roadblocks to sustainability,” 2483.

that hosts culture. Let us add that from the quote reprinted above it is not quite clear that the influence between cultural and environmental factors is reciprocal.

What is more, ecological resilience in Europe (and elsewhere) needs to be secured at all layers of culture which is

composed of three elements: worldviews, institutions and technologies. Worldviews are perceptions of how the world works. Institutions are used to convey a culture's norms and rules such as economy, religion, education. Technologies are applied information both in the form of physical technologies, but also instruments such as interest rates. Worldviews, institutions and technologies (WITs) work as an integrated system and they should change as such if society is to become more sustainable.<sup>209</sup>

This triangle of WITs can be applied on my case in the following way. First of all, I have been discussing the European worldview as it was formed and re-formed throughout the history, introducing new ideas into the core and maintaining some of them as basic pillars. One of the institutional outcomes of this particular understanding of the world is the European Union, and one of its “technological” instruments is the environmental policy. If the DG Environment officials are right then all three steps on the ladder must be taken into consideration.

What is more, this concept of culture as a multi-layered system penetrating the mind of the individual, institutions created and realized by groups of individuals, and technologies that correspond back again to the perception of how the world works confirms the correctness of the methodology of the thesis. If we identify a systemic weakness in the environmental policy itself, it can lead us to the cause of a deeper failure in the fundamentals of the EU. And once we point at a substantial well of weakness in the Union's endogenous setting, the European worldview which breast-fed the project of European integration can be critically examined through this conceptual lens, too. Or, it is possible to go the other way round, as this text actually did.

Worldviews, institutions and technologies are mutually interdependent and mutually reinforcing. Although institutions are perhaps the chief traits upon which cultural selection acts, a specific worldview or set of worldviews will drive the institutions and technologies we develop by providing boundary conditions. For example, if our goal is to improve quality of life, we will develop institutions and technologies that promote that goal, whereas if our goal is endless economic growth, we will develop a different set of institutions and technologies. Conversely, our worldviews are reinforced by the rules our institutions set for us. For example, institutions such as education and the media play a critical role in shaping our worldview and

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209. European Commission, DG Environment, *Science for Environment Policy: Overcoming cultural barriers to sustainable development*, News Alert Service, Issue 147, 2 April 2009.

set of goals. Technologies, in turn, have a powerful impact on worldviews and institutions.<sup>210</sup>

It goes without saying that the same is valid for the concept of strength. It is the – in some cases explicit, in others implicit – definition of strength deriving from our cultural paradigm that is imprinted in the institutions. Those disseminate the notion of strength further, into individual behavioural patterns and thinking modes.

Yet this mechanism should not be decoded as a vicious circle from which there is no emergency exit. There is a cardinal difference between the natural and cultural evolution, namely that the latter one can (and ought to) be regulated. Beddoe et al. suggest that “a major unique feature of cultural evolution is that it is 'reflexive' in the sense that our cultural goal affects the process”.<sup>211</sup> This implies a great hope because it means we can determine our future, shifting our attention from maximizing growth toward maximizing human well-being.<sup>212</sup>

The argument of this chapter will develop as follows. After explaining why the focus is placed on the concept of strength, the usual image of what it means to be strong (as an individual, an institution or a society) will be characterised. I will look once again at the EU environmental policy and examine its efficiency with regard to the present challenges. Can the EU environmental policy as it is intended and implemented nowadays be considered as strong? What kind of strength are we relating to in case we answer the question with a “yes”, and what notion of strength do we hold if we respond with a “no”?

The mainstream specification of strength connotations will then be contrasted with different notions in order to show its dysfunctional features. Finally, I will attempt to re-define strength, transgressing the limits posed by the European worldview reflected in the European Union, a political, economic and cultural entity that has not yet become an ecological one.

Only a strong Europe, indeed, can

offer [...] the best chance of pursuing, with due regard for the rights of each individual and in awareness of their responsibilities towards future generations and the Earth, the great venture which makes of it a special area of human hope.<sup>213</sup>

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210. Beddoe et al., “Overcoming systemic roadblocks to sustainability,” 2484.

211. Ibid, 2488.

212. Ibid.

213. EUR-Lex, Preamble of the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe, 2004/C 310/01, 16.12.2004 (Official Journal of the European Union, 2004/C 310/01), <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/JOHtml.do?uri=OJ:C:2004:310:SOM:EN:HTML> (accessed 15 March 2011).

#### 4.1 *Smart enough for further growth: Conservative strength*

The aim of the Lisbon strategy, formulated for the period 2002 – 2010, was to change the EU into the most competitive and most dynamic knowledge economy, able to maintain a sustainable growth with more and better work places and a strengthened social cohesion.<sup>214</sup> Even though the most apparent strike of the economic crisis was over by 2010, Europe was not on the top of its potential.

In March 2010, the European Commission drafted a document entitled *Europe 2020: A European strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth* which pre-defines the institution's future priorities and preferred instruments to achieve the set goals. In the preface, the President of the Commission summarizes the main points that the new strategy should be built upon:

European leaders have a common analysis on the lessons to be drawn from the crisis. We also share a common sense of urgency on the challenges ahead. Now we jointly need to make it happen. *Europe has many strengths. We have a talented workforce, we have a powerful technological and industrial base. We have an internal market and a single currency that have successfully helped us resist the worst. We have a tried and tested social market economy. We must have confidence in our ability to set an ambitious agenda for ourselves and then gear our efforts to delivering it.*<sup>215</sup>

There are several interesting ideas in the quote. First of all, Barroso assumes there is a common interpretation of the state of affairs in Europe, at least among the leaders. Plus there is a joint feeling that we have to act properly and flexibly. Further in the text, the President calls for a strategy that

help us come out stronger from the crisis and turn the EU into a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy delivering high levels of employment, productivity and social cohesion.<sup>216</sup>

The formulation might sound catchy and energetic, yet it does not differ substantially from the statements about the future course of the EU before the economic crisis hit the region. The stress put on the image of Europe as a strong economy above all has not been removed.

With a closer look at the strengths enlisted in Barroso's appeal, we find expressions stemming exclusively from the sphere of economy (key words like *workforce, technology, industry, or market*). The viability of the economic paradigm and structures

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214. Karel Tomšík, *Evropská integrace a environmentální ekonomika* (Praha: Česká zemědělská univerzita v Praze, 2009), 111.

215. José Manuel Barroso, preface to *Europe 2020: A European strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth* (COM(2010) 2020). Italics mine.

216. Ibid.

that prevail in contemporary Europe is thus not questioned. There is actually a clash between the conservative frame of reference that is shared by European leaders, and the vocabulary of change which they use. The text also includes the following communication:

Europe faces a moment of transformation. The crisis has wiped out years of economic and social progress and exposed *structural weaknesses* in Europe's economy.<sup>217</sup>

In that case we may conclude that Europe can be strong if it succeeds in a more rigid enforcement of the principles on which it was founded in the 1950s. The eventual weakness of the economy can be overcome through a more loyal adherence to the worldview, and not really through its deep transformation.

To be more concrete, Europe in the year 2020 should rely on one particular strength consisting of three mutually reinforcing priorities, namely the smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. The key words for this strategy include: knowledge, innovation, resource efficiency, green and competitive economy, employment, and social and territorial cohesion. The ultimate goal is to “make up for the recent losses, regain competitiveness, boost productivity and put the EU on an upward path of prosperity ('sustainable recovery')”.<sup>218</sup>

Let the reader pay attention to the emphasis put on the term of growth. It has been almost 25 years now since the alternative expression of development, with serious reasons for it, was introduced. Yet the EU still prefers to grow. Herman Daly objects against the traditional concept of growth:

Economists overwhelmingly agree that 1) economic growth, as measured by GNP, is a very good thing, and 2) that global economic integration via free trade is unarguable because it contributes to competition, cheaper products, world peace, and especially to growth in GNP. Policies based on these two conceptually immaculate – and interrelated – tenets of economic orthodoxy are reducing the capacity of the earth to support life, thereby literally killing the world.<sup>219</sup>

The way Daly argues is as different from the argumentation of the EU officials as it can be. The point of departure is dissimilar; while Daly accepts the limited potential of the planet to host civilization, the EU's horizons do not go beyond the welfare of its citizens. The only restriction that the EU tries to deal with in a more conceptual manner is the exhaustibility of resources that are – unsurprisingly – vital for its economy.

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217. COM(2010) 2020, 3. Italics mine.

218. Ibid., 6.

219. Daly, *Beyond Growth*, quoted in McDaniel, *Wisdom for a Livable Planet*, 132.

The quote reproduced below portrays the other axis of the European strength:

We can also count on our *strong values*, democratic institutions, our consideration for economic, social and territorial cohesion and solidarity, our respect for the environment, our cultural diversity, respect for gender equality.<sup>220</sup>

This confidence of the EU elites about values that are universally shared by the people living in Europe is even more ill-founded than the one about economic power. While there is a certain consensus among European citizens about the need to protect the economic “business as usual”, there is a very scarce common understanding of desirable values. The failure of the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe (TCE), drafted and signed by the Member States in 2004, and never ratified due to the referenda in France and the Netherlands in 2005, was an easily legible sign that apart from having a common market, Europe is not united.<sup>221</sup>

Dario Castiglione, Professor of Social Sciences at the University of Exeter, does not hide his skepticism about the strength of values supposedly shared throughout Europe:

In the reality of an increasingly multicultural and diverse Europe – where mobility and migration play a much larger role than in the near past – such an insistence on values, even on universal values, risks being socially and culturally divisive rather than unifying. Moreover, in some cases, it is difficult to see what makes certain values specifically our own, if not a selective reconstruction of the historical evidence.<sup>222</sup>

Castiglione reacts to the thought of Jürgen Habermas, the most audible voice defending positive results of the European distinctive historical legacy, greatly exaggerating the degree of system and value convergence within the EU.<sup>223</sup>

As we can see, there is a lively discussion among European scholars and political leaders about the (non)existence of ideas that should be the leading principles of further integration. These ideas should not be confused with the complex of worldview which has been discussed in the previous chapters, though. The public debate about the cherished European values ought to bring about prescriptive findings; a proper

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220. COM(2010) 2020, 7. Italics mine. The phrases preceding the quoted text read: “Europe has many strengths: we can count on the talent and creativity of our people, a strong industrial base, a vibrant services sector, a thriving, high quality agricultural sector, strong maritime tradition, our single market and common currency, our position as the world’s biggest trading bloc and leading destination for foreign direct investment.”

221. Some assert instead that the “no” of the referenda signified a project of integration on the Europeans’ mind which is different from the one represented by the EU leaders. See e.g. Hartmut Kaelble, “Identification with Europe and politicization of the EU since the 1980s,” in *European Identity*, ed. Jeffrey T. Checkel and Peter J. Katzenstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 210.

222. Dario Castiglione, “Political identity in a community of strangers,” in *European Identity*, ed. Jeffrey T. Checkel and Peter J. Katzenstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 45.

223. Ibid. Habermas especially underlines the Enlightenment view of European identity.



definition of a common ethical heritage would simplify any decision-making related to conflicting values. My general analysis of the European worldview, on the contrary, was intended to serve as a tool for a better comprehension of the community's overall outlook and character. I study its image of the world in order to understand why the society behaves the way it does, not to preach how it *should* act.

Let us leave apart the issue of respect and tolerance (be it related to ethnic or religious minorities, national and cultural identity, gender and sexuality, needs of natural environment, etc.). These words have a very fuzzy meaning, or, more precisely, they are interpreted in a very inconsistent manner. Since no formulation of the level and conditions of tolerance has ever been included in any legally binding document, the EU takes advantage of every opportunity to highlight the overall generosity of its enlightened citizens without risking any need to take a clear standpoint.

If one actually tests for a correspondence between what the EU says and what it does, normative power as a basis for European identity comes up short.<sup>224</sup>

This statement made by Checkel and Katzenstein reminds us of the issue hinted already once in the chapter on the link between the economic crisis and environmental liabilities. Normative power Europe, the role of the EU as a model for the wider world, is tightly connected to the European concept of strength.

Generally speaking, the EU is lacking a critical feedback on truisms that hinder any move beyond the conservative idea of strength, leading no further than to the so-called smart growth. To uproot the widespread conviction about the rightness of the path chosen by Europe – proven by the high standard of living the Europeans have been enjoying for decades – is a daunting task indeed.

Before I take a closer look at how the EU environmental policy mirrors the phenomena listed among the strong points of Europe, I shall shortly discuss a theory about the influence of worldviews on strategic future scenarios, developed by de Vries and Petersen in the already quoted article “Conceptualizing sustainable development: An assessment methodology connecting values, knowledge, worldviews and scenarios,” published in 2009.

The framework suggested by de Vries and Petersen is useful for my case because it takes into account both the environmental challenges and the question of economic

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224. Jeffrey T. Checkel and Peter J. Katzenstein, “The politicization of European identities,” in *European Identity*, ed. Jeffrey T. Checkel and Peter J. Katzenstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 9.

growth. The scheme reproduced below will be commented on after the necessary conceptual framework for a further analysis of this model is provided.

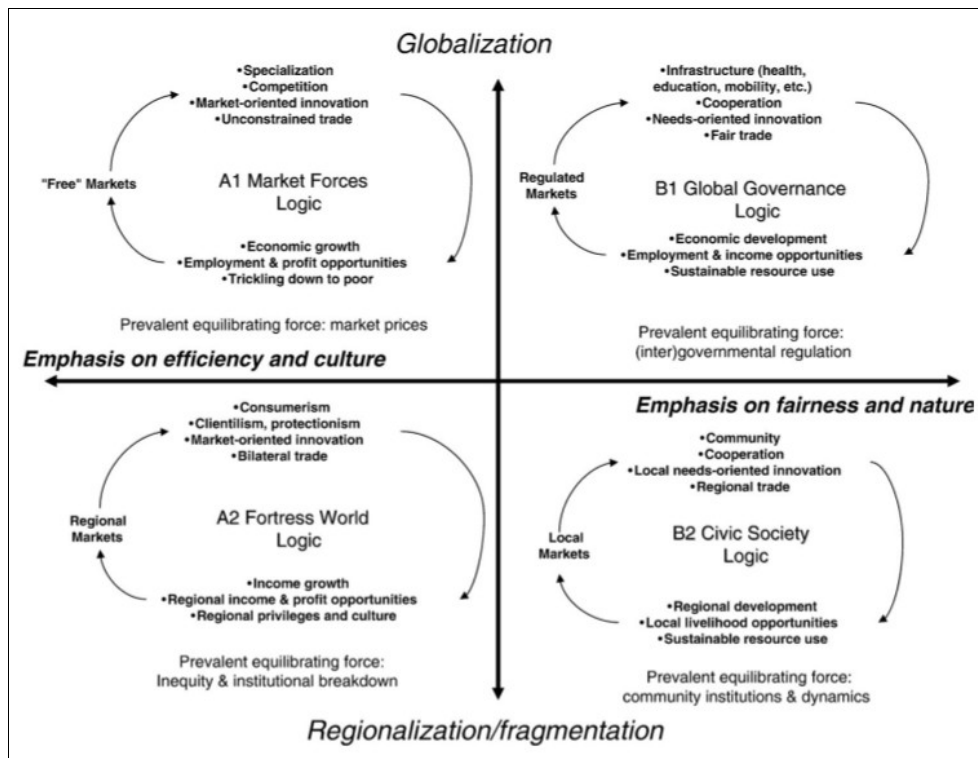


Fig. 1: Scenario logic in the four IPCC-SRES quadrants: economic growth.  
 Source: de Vries and Petersen, “Conceptualizing sustainable development,” 1013.

First of all, the authors are talking about individual worldviews, and not institutional ones. Nevertheless, institutions are created, represented and modified by and through concrete people. Thus the processes that a singular mind undergoes do matter when an institution steps on the stage, too.

In addition, the model is dealing with intangible and constantly changing phenomena such as culture, worldview, knowledge, or values. It would be inaccurate to claim that the EU as an indivisible whole stands for this or that image of the world. Just the three main bodies with executive power (the Council, the Commission and the Parliament) differ largely in their points of departure. Then there are the citizens, diverging usually in quite a significant way from the lines drawn in Brussels.

Yet we can extract three main modes of self-representation of the EU in the everyday life, which also to a certain extent correspond to the three facets of “strong Europe” that will be revealed in an instant.

According to Juan Díez Medrano, Professor at the Department of Sociology at the University of Barcelona, we can distinguish among the following three paths of self-

representation, whereby the first one is accentuated by far the most, and the last one with most caution.

Above all, the EU embodies a big market that is needed for competition in a global economy, consequential for economic growth, inflation and unemployment.<sup>225</sup> Europe is associated with the image of a mighty economic power, a competitive economy with growth rates driven by ever increasing consumption.<sup>226</sup> In the figure designed by de Vries and Petersen, we would place the EU in the top left corner, emphasizing efficiency and culture, plus taking advantage of the opportunities created in the globalization processes. Specialization, competition, innovation and trade; those are the main stimulating factors.

Bearing in mind what kind of attitude toward nature has been established in Europe throughout centuries, we can link the relationship between human beings and nature with the value-laden worldview based on Market Forces Logic. It also depends on the character and aims of the highly specialized and anti-holistic Western science which is supposed to accumulate findings that can be translated into innovative technologies. Innovation then speeds up competition is the basic prerequisite for free markets.

The second type of self-presentation, applied with similar insistence, is the EU as a mighty polity. The aspect of competitiveness is involved in this image as well – in the global political context, the EU needs to act as a strong political apparatus to raise respect and exercise geopolitical influence.

There is a certain ambiguity included in the effort to present the Union as a politically homogenous player. Medrano makes a point about the tendency of the elites to depoliticize the EU. This trend is a reaction to the split among the citizens regarding the EU's cultural and social identity. Apart from the fact that hardly any efficient future reforms can proceed smoothly unless the leaders of the Member States decide to work on a political consensus,<sup>227</sup> the imagined political strength of Europe is generally illusory.

Regulation and integration is impossible without political support. And it is in this regard that the EU is unsuccessfully trying to bridge a gap between the project of European integration and its real dynamics. Rather than being an actual strength,

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225. Juan Díez Medrano, "The public sphere and the European Union's political identity," in *European Identity*, ed. Jeffrey T. Checkel and Peter J. Katzenstein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 94.

226. I thank for this formulation to my supervisor, prof. Gaudenz Assenza.

227. Medrano, "The public sphere and the European Union's political identity," 107.

political unity is a desired one.

The EU adds value on the global scene. The EU will influence global policy decisions only if it acts jointly. Stronger external representation will need to go hand in hand with stronger internal co-ordination.<sup>228</sup>

Represent and co-ordinate, and influence globally as a singular actor. Global Governance Logic, the top right corner in the figure of de Vries and Petersen, is the not-yet-reached frame of reference of the classical EU's ideologues. The argumentation in favor of this direction often includes formula about sustainable development: “International cooperation and solidarity are needed for solving the large-scale and long-term social and environmental problems which the world is facing”.<sup>229</sup>

I have already touched upon the disequilibrium between the words and the deeds, as manifested during the recent economic crisis. The shift from accentuating culture and efficiency in the first place toward attentiveness for fairness and nature has not been completed. With the words of de Vries and Petersen:

Many people will dismiss the B1 logic as being a hierarchist utopia. [...] Not being able to join the “famous and wealthy” in the consumer paradise of the A1 world, B1 people may resort to a kind of realism which is sometimes weird mix of consumerism, clientelism, nationalism/territorialism and fatalism (A2).<sup>230</sup>

Interestingly enough, this observation turns out to be an accurate description of the tensions and pull-and-push forces that can be detected in contemporary Europe. The EU is *not* a strong polity and the threat of fragmentation should not be underestimated. Now the question is why the logic of global governance is so impotent and inflexible.

Let us hypothesize that the second pillar of the imagined European strength is based on the same false assumption that makes the first one – Europe as a mighty economic power – structurally shallow. The frame of reference that prevails and to which even people occasionally open toward complexity converge when the times get tough is in line with the cultural weakness inherited with the conservative European worldview.

The third part played by the EU is Europe as a cultural entity, usually a republican one, with democracy trumping religious or ethnic images, referring to democracy or citizenship, and praising the EU's values.<sup>231</sup> Even this cultural basis of Europe's image is meant to be competitive and exclusive. The First World's culture is seen as superior to other cultures and Europe claims to have the potential to guide the rest of the world on

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228. COM(2010) 2020, 6.

229. de Vries and Petersen, “Conceptualizing sustainable development,” 1014.

230. Ibid.

231. Medrano, “The public sphere and the European Union's political identity,” 94-95.

its course to a higher stage of civilization.

Hartmut Kaelble from the Department of History at the Humboldt University argues that this kind of identification with a superior Europe is now rather suppressed as a worldview. He presents a thesis about an *inferior* Europe in the face of outer threats, represented nowadays by Islam and rising Asia.<sup>232</sup>

The idea might be partially right, yet on a qualitative basis we could include the identification with a threatened Europe in the superior image of European civilization, too. It does not move beyond the conservative idea of strength, it only adjusts to the newly posed challenges. A strength which can only be efficient in a static and predictable world can easily become maladaptive when the reality strikes with a profound change. Unable to switch to a less conservative core, it only alters the surface. In this way, a supposedly superior Europe is said to be attacked by inferior cultures. As Katzenstein and Checkel put it, “the politics of threat and fear are one kind of European identity politics”.<sup>233</sup>

This internal weakness, the incapability to open up to the re-structured global order, is reinforced by the fact that Europe lacks “characteristics that can generate a strong sense of collective self”.<sup>234</sup> Self-presentation of the EU on the cultural basis is thus the less efficient one, which confirms the hypothesis that the institution in its current design is unable to step over its own shadow of a utilitarian economic alliance.

Nevertheless, a weak(ened) cultural identity does not prevent culture from influencing the institution. Quite the contrary. In a brief report on the quoted article by Beddoe et al., DG Environment officials write:

Current western WIT<sup>235</sup> was founded in the industrial revolution in a relatively uncrowded world with abundant natural resources provided globally. It focused on unlimited growth of material production using consumption as an indicator of quality of life. However, the world has changed: fossil fuels are not abundant, natural resources have limits, signs of which are already apparent, biodiversity is declining and further material growth no longer significantly adds to quality of life. As a result, the current western WIT is creating several barriers to adaptation to environmental change.<sup>236</sup>

As cultural anthropology has revealed, culture is an adaptive tool universally used

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232. Kaelble, “Identification with Europe and politicization of the EU since the 1980s,” 199.

233. Katzenstein and Checkel, “Conclusion – European identity in context,” 214.

234. *Ibid.*, 224.

235. Meaning worldviews, institutions and technology, thus all manifestations of culture.

236. European Commission, DG Environment, *Science for Environment Policy: Overcoming cultural barriers to sustainable development*, News Alert Service, Issue 147, 2 April 2009.

by human society. At present, Europe is undergoing a test of flexibility and resilience. In the chapter dedicated to the cultural background of the EU environmental policy, I have listed the main cultural themes and features that crystallized during long centuries of Europe's dominance. The main issue about culture is its complexity; the fruitlessness of any attempt to reduce culture-related questions to partial problems (science, economy, religion, education, etc.) has been repeatedly proven.

For the same reason it is not self-evident how to combine culture with the scheme of de Vries and Petersen that worked well in the case of economy and politics. The authors clearly use the term “culture” in a different meaning than I do. The A-column stands in opposition to the B-column which includes environmental consciousness. In the last section of this chapter, I will argue that culture does not necessarily contradict nature, in case it is ready to accept natural world as a partner, thus a subject involved in numerous processes and relations, and not a given object without any needs. Europe's own image about her cultural profile is fuzzy, and the EU deals with this fact in a clumsy way, trying to stimulate a more concrete identity but avoiding any interference of such efforts with economy and politics.

Polarities nature/culture and efficiency/fairness are, in my opinion, outdated. They do work within the old concept of strength where the idea of sustainability adapts to the prevalent worldview, and not the other way round. As Tim O'Riordan, former Professor of Environmental Sciences at the University of East Anglia, says: “We will need the 'hot flame' of crisis and the 'slow burn' of social learning and adaptiveness if we are to move forward towards sustainability”.<sup>237</sup>

Before I elaborate on the 'slow burn' of a different, *transformative* concept of strength, let us get back to the EU environmental policy using the conceptual lens of the thesis.

There is the hypothesis that the overarching concept of strength which can be ensured through competitive growth is a principle that drives the EU in any segment of its endeavour. Yet the focus of this thesis is on environmental policy, because it is the obviousness of a different order that governs the natural world which may foster a cultural awakening.

At this moment, I have to face the methodological question of how to evaluate

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237. Tim O'Riordan, “Biting More than Chewing: Transforming Institutions for Sustainability” (paper presented to Barcelona Workshop, Institute for Sustainable Development, Barcelona, Spain, 14 June 2004).

whether the EU environmental policy is indeed based on the conservative concept of strength, as discussed above. What are the criteria that would help select important information about policy which covers a vast range of areas, from waste management and energy efficiency to biodiversity and consumers' behaviour?

Shaping its strategy for the coming decade, the EU is forced to contextualize what is and will be happening in Europe within the events occurring beyond European boundaries. A clear definition of priorities is a must for any entity that is serious about active leadership. Underneath I reprint such a key priority as drafted by the Commission:

Sustainable growth means building a *resource* efficient, sustainable and competitive economy, exploiting Europe's leadership in the race to develop new processes and technologies, including green technologies, accelerating the roll out of smart grids using ICTs, exploiting EU-scale networks, and reinforcing the competitive advantages of our businesses, particularly in manufacturing and within our SMEs, as well through assisting consumers to value *resource* efficiency. Such an approach will help the EU to prosper in a low-carbon, *resource* constrained world while preventing environmental degradation, biodiversity loss and unsustainable use of *resources*. It will also underpin economic, social and territorial cohesion.<sup>238</sup>

To begin with, the paragraph includes the word “resource” four times. Oil, gas, wood, water, fossil fuels and other precious works of nature are indispensable for a civilization that reached such a high technological stage as Europe did. Technology, however, is raised from instrumental level (where it justly belongs) to ideational, with some irony we may even say philosophical, level. Resources, thus something that is meant to be re-sourced (exploited, used), turned out to be limited. The strategy that the EU claims to be in need of ought to combine this new discovery with maintaining the *status quo*, modestly amended through innovative technology and less ignorant consumer patterns. When we compare this interpretation with the definition of sustainable development presented in 1987 in the so-called *Brundtland report*, namely development that “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”,<sup>239</sup> the contrast is obvious.

The image of the world is always implicit in the statements of policy makers, but it is present in one way or another. Scholars who specialize in European environmental policy often point out that a general paradigm shift is restricted to programatic

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238. COM(2010) 2020, 12. Italics mine.

239. United Nations, *Our Common Future: Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development* (1987), 24.

declarations only.<sup>240</sup> In my thesis, I argue that there is little evidence even for such an affirmation. The world is understood as *constrained*, thus as a barrier for free and unregulated growth. If worldviews are manifested in institutions and technology, formed throughout the long course of cultural history, Europe accentuates limits that need to be transgressed, competition in which one needs to succeed, and progress that must not be halted.

Such an attitude does not embody any signs of “a coherent and viable alternative [which] is sorely needed”.<sup>241</sup> The main challenge, according to the EU, is to focus *more* on efficiency, growth, competitiveness, and technology, only this time with the specific goal of preventing environmental decay. In a constrained world, attention is paid to hindrances that block the path toward further growth, and not to creativity of the system including natural, social and human potential.<sup>242</sup>

We often encounter the argument that

in the tough world of everyday politics, environmental policy integration will only flourish when environment departments fight and win non-environmental departments around their way of thinking.<sup>243</sup>

This idea of environment-friendly concepts that have to elbow their way into politics is indeed familiar to interest groups and official bodies active in the environmental sector. Nevertheless, commitment to resilience (be it in economy, social affairs, politics or environmental management) does not exist in a partial, truncated version of one department within a large institution. There is nothing such as environment-committed society where neither individuals nor institutions care about ecological liabilities. All three levels, micro- (individual), meso- (institutional), and macro- (societal) are possibly involved in the process of policy re-shaping.

Ulrich Beck distinguishes among denial, apathy and transformation, as far as strategies of crisis handling are concerned. In the case of the EU, however, it is not unambiguous which label to choose for its environmental policy. We have certainly passed the stage of denial, but we have not entered the era of transformation yet. Nor can we consider the Union's ecological engagement as apathetic. The focus of this thesis

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240. Andrea Lenschow, “Conclusion: What Are the Bottlenecks and Where Are the Opportunities for Greening the EU?” in *Environmental Policy Integration: Greening Sectoral Policies in Europe*, ed. Andrea Lenschow (London: Earthscan, 2002), 226.

241. Robert Costanza, “Stewardship for a 'Full' World,” *Current History* 107 (2008): 31.

242. *Ibid.*, 32.

243. Andrew Jordan, “Efficient Hardware and Light Green Software: Environmental Policy Integration in the UK,” in *Environmental Policy Integration: Greening Sectoral Policies in Europe*, ed. Andrea Lenschow (London: Earthscan, 2002), 53.



is directed on the conservative concept of strength which determines the character and mechanisms of environmental policy formulation and implementation. But how can the primary cultural frame of mind be changed then? Which way to go to erode the conservative setting, and establish a new, transformative one?

People fail to adapt for at least three reasons: first, they may not see, understand or fully grasp the significance of the threat before them, and therefore cannot see its ramifications; second, the challenge may simply be too great for the culture's adaptive capacity, something that cannot be known until all options have been tried and failed; and third, the anxiety, pain or conflict involved may be too stressful.<sup>244</sup>

The last part of this chapter will examine the alternatives for Europe in the perspective of the challenges we have not been capable to handle so far, due to a false, culturally rooted paradigm.

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244. JoAnne van Tilburg, *Easter Island*, quoted in McDaniel, *Wisdom for a Livable Planet*, 216.

#### 4.2 *Wise enough for deeper development: Transformative strength*

Prosperity consists in our ability to flourish as human beings – within the ecological limits of a finite planet. The challenge for our society is to create the conditions under which this is possible. It is the most urgent task of our times.<sup>245</sup>

Transformative strength, expressed in a simplified way, is a precondition of a dignified human life. Human existence within the society based on the conservative concept of strength has become both culturally and naturally unsustainable. Natural environment can be seen as a limit, with its laws and subtly balanced processes, so easily disrupted by inattentive people's behaviour. But it can also be seen as an infinitely creative and rich system which hosts human community, potentially innovative and wealthy as well.

Strategies of transition toward a more realistic worldview do exist, yet they are never trivial. The way from an ill-defined image of the world to an ecologically sound one cannot be walked by institutions only. Micro- and macro-scale changes need to take place, too: “A regime shift cannot occur without changing worldviews, institutions, and technologies together, as an integrated system”.<sup>246</sup> The WITs are not human-independent, though. Quite the contrary, they are created and realized by people. First and foremost, transformative strength dwells in strong individuals.

If we assume that the understanding of strength, as presented by the European Union and mirrored in its environmental policy, is not transformative, we can deduce that individuals who adhere to this approach exercise and cultivate rather weakness than strength. At present, Europe is not prospering. I have discussed Europe's decline in the sphere of economy and environment in the previous chapter, but a cultural weakness has necessarily a similar impact on other sectors, such as social cohesion, quality of education, etc. Now the question is, what is our best hope? Genuinely democratic cultural change strategies,<sup>247</sup> or societal collapse that finally triggers a paradigmatic sway?<sup>248</sup>

The concept of transformative strength inherently includes activity, as opposed to passivity implanted in conservative strength. An engaged approach toward one's life and

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245. Tim Jackson, foreword to *Prosperity without Growth: The Transition to a Sustainable Economy* (Sustainable Development Commission, 2009), <http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/publications.php?id=914> (accessed 30 March 2011).

246. Beddoe et al., “Overcoming systemic roadblocks to sustainability,” 2484.

247. Plumwood, *Environmental Culture*, 3.

248. Beddoe et al., “Overcoming systemic roadblocks to sustainability,” 2485.

involvement in the course of the concerned society detests reluctance to act. One of the most pressing insufficiencies of the EU environmental policy is the gap between theory and practice. In my thesis, I have argued that *the reason for this incongruence is to be found in the theory itself, founded on an unsustainable worldview, and not in weak channels of implementation.*

Accepting the presumption that only a deep crisis can bear fresh perspectives goes in line with the conservative image of the world on which the EU environmental policy is eventually based. In other words, it encourages the society to keep the track of “business as usual”.

Inspired by thinkers such as Kenneth Boulding, Herman Daly or Robert Costanza, some scholars develop knowledge which may make the relatively abundant ecosystem goods and services accessible through their critical approach: “Our current institutional and technical approach is also an extension of a long-term trend of adaptation to an empty world”.<sup>249</sup> The emptiness of the world we are living in is not objective, as I have argued in the chapter dealing with the historical origins of the European worldview. A worldview is a cultural (social) construct and it ought not to be understood as a synonym for “truth” about the world.

Belief in unlimited growth, and increasing unsustainable complexity<sup>250</sup> can thus be abandoned in favour of a full-world philosophy. To establish this new regime, the following four steps should be accomplished: 1) redefinition of well-being metrics, 2) reduction of complexity and increasing resilience, 3) expansion of the “commons” sector, and 4) removing barriers to improve technology and knowledge.<sup>251</sup> As long as we see strength anchored in competitive economic, political and cultural performance, neither individuals, nor institutions and the society as such can transform.

The question in the title of the thesis, about the meaning of the strong Europe ideal, goes beyond the topic of environmental policy. While the first chapter mostly dealt with historical stages of the European worldview, with special focus on the relationship between civilization and nature, the second chapter touched an up-to-date topic of economic crisis. The last pages are dedicated to a re-formulation of the concept of strength, extracting it from an empty world where everything is allowed, placing it “back” to a full world. Within the new understanding of our living conditions, the

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249. Beddoe et al., “Overcoming systemic roadblocks to sustainability,” 2485.

250. Ibid.

251. Ibid., 2487-2488.

environment is both full of possibilities and limits.

The following two quotes, one from a well of ancient wisdom, the other one from a work that has appeared only recently, both recall the same need for balance between culturally specific laws (with the sociologist Robert K. Merton we would say goals and means to achieve them) and universal laws.

The partial becomes complete; the crooked, straight; the empty, full; the worn out, new. He whose [desires] are few gets them; he whose [desires] are many goes astray.<sup>252</sup>

We require a belief system that embraces with joy and celebration humanity's limitless capacity for spiritual and intellectual growth while at the same time accepting and appreciating the physical laws and limits governing the biosphere.<sup>253</sup>

The polarities of empty/full and weak/strong have much in common. Our current belief system is usually said to emerge during the period of Industrial Revolution, which saw the world as empty in the sense of complete availability of infinite resources for exploitation. The obsession with material growth, however, at the expense of spiritual and intellectual (personal) development has been sustained by older ideas already. Europe has existed in an empty world for long centuries, mistaking weakness for strength. When Lao Tzu confidently states that the weak has, at the end of the day, more potential than the strong, one interpretation of the idea might be the following: Linear and hierarchic understanding of the world where one entity can grow and exercise power at the expenses of the rest of the system is fallible. In the course of time, unregulated expansionism is counterproductive.

If we get back to van Tilburg's three reasons for a culture's inaptitude in the time of crisis, we can generalize her statement as follows: people fail to adapt in case they are weak. Not being strong enough to see there is a threat, and to challenge it overcoming one's own fear means risking the future.

Having said that, we shall not forget that personal development can only be pursued in a favourable environment consisting of functional institutions. Margaret Wallström, the former Environment Commissioner, said in 1999 that current integration strategies are “the beginning of a learning process in our thinking and attitudes”.<sup>254</sup> The institution of the EU thus may have a huge potential for a sustainable society if it were relying on strong people. The necessity to establish resilient institutions is well expressed in the

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252. Lao Tzu, *Tao-te Ching*, 12.

253. McDaniel, *Wisdom for a Livable Planet*, 225.

254. Quoted in Lenschow, *Environment Policy Integration*, 3.

quote below:

A transition will occur in any case, and [...] it will almost certainly be driven by crises. Whether these crises lead to decline or collapse followed by ultimate rebuilding, or to a relatively smooth transition depends on our ability to anticipate the required changes and to develop new institutions that are better adapted to those conditions.<sup>255</sup>

In my thesis, I argue that *better adaptability can be secured through adherence to a transformative concept of strength*. Although a negative definition is insufficient, I still claim that this new approach opposes a number of pillars underpinning the conservative European image of strength, e.g. accentuation of short-term efficiency and economic performance, but also pride and readiness to conquest, principles disseminated by Western science.<sup>256</sup>

Otto C. Scharmer in his work *Theory U: Leading from the Future as it Emerges* summarizes the critical issues of the so-called developed world which is represented by Europe and civilizations she has inspired:

- It is functioning thanks to global economy the result of which is 80% of world population living in poverty.
- Investment into unsustainable agriculture and breeding causes soil erosion and produces unhealthy food.
- Investment into inefficient healthcare system brings poor results because it does not address real causes of our era's diseases.
- Investment into educational system is also unfruitful because it does not prepare young people for the tasks they will face in the future.<sup>257</sup>

Scharmer also identifies three main modes of reaction to a moment of crisis. We can respond to fundamentalist ideologies relating to the past, defend the *status quo* of scientific materialism (this attitude is similar to Ulrich Beck's passive apathy/active

255. Beddoe et al., "Overcoming systemic roadblocks to sustainability," 2488.

256. An interesting remark made by de Vries and Petersen is that we can hardly disregard the influence of science on worldviews. Strong knowledge (see further) goes hand in hand with positivism and material objective external world as the only point of reference. "Here we introduce a 'quality' aspect of knowledge: the notion of *strong knowledge*. It posits that three elements have been strengthened in the evolution of scientific knowledge: a formal body of concepts and rules; observations reframed in an experimental setting; and hypotheses which connect the observations via logical operations. A scientific theory becomes stronger and matures by eliminating 'weak' elements, such as false logic. The dominant body of knowledge is called scientific and is largely shared, or at least accessible, via journals, the media and experts. The archetypical cognitive maps usually are approximate and simplified versions of scientific insights – and are called metamodels, 'stylized facts,' or simply correlations." de Vries and Petersen, "Conceptualizing sustainable development," 1011. Strong science within the conservative concept of strength then plays the same role as wisdom does within the transformative one.

257. Scharmer, *Theory U*, 2-3.

denial), or call for individual and collective transformative changes. In Scharmer's analysis, the EU is included among the NDCs, Newly Declining Countries, together with the USA and Japan.<sup>258</sup> The reason why Europe has not begun to acquire a new, truly sustainable frame of reference (as Commissioner Wallström used to hope) is that she has not overcome Scharmer's three forms of resistance. He calls them Voice of Judgment (“old and limiting patterns of judgement and thought”<sup>259</sup>), Voice of Cynicism (“emotions of disconnection such as cynicism, arrogance, and callousness that prevent us from diving into the fields around us”<sup>260</sup>), and Voice of Fear (“fear of letting go of the familiar self and world; fear of going forth; fear of surrendering into the space of nothingness”<sup>261</sup>).

All these blocks correspond to particular aspects of weakness. In the first chapter of the thesis, I presented some arguments that explain the historical basis of the European Voice of Judgment. The chapter on the linkage between responses to economic crisis and ecological liabilities shows an exemplary manifestation of the Voice of Fear. The emotional facet of resistance was not covered since it is related to psychology, a relevant issue for environmental consciousness yet going beyond the scope of this thesis.

To be aware of the barriers for a transformative cultural shift is the first step. Innovation is needed in economic, political and cultural infrastructure. The EU environmental policy, as momentarily designed and implemented, is rooted in a worldview that suffers from a resentment toward processes which would make Europe strong for real. Strong not in competitiveness, but in sustainability.

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258. Scharmer, *Theory U*, 87.

259. *Ibid.*, 245.

260. *Ibid.*

261. *Ibid.*

## **5 Conclusion and Recommendations**

In my thesis, I have been discussing the gap between declared essential prerequisites for sustainability within the EU, and the real meaning of such declarations. The perspective from which this question has been approached is cultural, analysing the worldview and the way it shapes our mindsets.

There is a difference between a goal and a means chosen to reach it. Strength and resilience of a civilization is a long-term and uneasy aim. It can only be achieved if the path of development that is supposed to lead to the desired stage is properly framed and followed. In the goal-means relationship, two possible traps should be avoided:

- 1) an ill-defined goal, while a wrong goal is impossible to be corrected by any designed means, regardless of their being well-intentioned;
- 2) a well-defined goal unreachable due to an ill-defined means.

Usually, various actors involved in the discussion about the EU's environmental commitment stress that the polity has been heading toward the right horizon, but following an unfortunate path. Worries about economic growth are said to overcome any concern about ecological dignity.

In my conclusion, I will argue that we have been caught in the former trap – the one of a misleading goal. It becomes irrelevant then whether the instruments adopted to pursue the strategy are suitable or not. As the question included in the title of this thesis suggests, the clue lies in the very framing of the problem.

### ***5.1 Synthesis of findings framed by research questions***

One of the initial hypotheses that eventually brought me to the topic was the necessity to be aware of the ideational reservoir of the EU environmental policy in order to evaluate its outcomes. Which cultural inputs can we identify in the regulatory instruments of the society-environment interaction?

To grasp the life story of a civilization is demanding, if not beyond the bounds of possibility. In the first chapter of the thesis, I have presented a short excursus into the history of the European attitude toward natural environment.

Two main findings about the European worldview (studied in the context of environmental changes and the need to pay attention to them) can be summarized as

follows:

- 1) As any other cultural paradigm that has proven durability and efficiency, the grouping of ideas accepted by or born in Europe shows consistency in time. Even though the historical stages which had a decisive influence on its current outlook often stood in apparent contradiction to each other (e.g. medieval Christian paradigm versus birth of science during the Renaissance era versus secularism of the Enlightenment, etc.), the image of strength persists almost unaltered throughout centuries of paradigmatic turmoils.
- 2) When talking about the characteristics of the European worldview, its ambiguous potential should be always kept in mind. On one side, there are certain dominant ideas, metaphors and assumptions which ensure historical coherence, yet essentialism would drive us into passivity. European culture has never been conserved in a static phase and it has always been moved, shaken and transformed. The aspect of ambiguity is important for the system to change in case it comes to realize its own flaws.

The image of strength which has been cultivated and fostered throughout our culture's history has several pillars. These pillars stem from different parts of the cultural core, including religion, philosophy, science and economic thought. They include:

- strong human world-natural world polarity;
- Eurocentrism;
- scientific knowledge (translated into technology) serving as a tool of power;
- ideal of eternal progress (linear understanding of the world);
- ongoing tendency to disregard ethical and spiritual matters as relevant for public discourse;
- economic system based on free markets (including free move of capital);
- material welfare as indicator of well-being.

The defined perspective of my thesis is the given polity of the European Union. In the second chapter, entitled “Strong Europe? Economic crisis and environmental liabilities,” I have analyzed whether and how the ideational background summarized above practically influences a concrete policy problem. In this section, another of my primary hypotheses has been tested, namely how the EU defines the expression of a “strong Europe”.



As mentioned some pages above, the main argument of my research is that the dysfunction of the EU environmental policy is caused by an erroneous principle incorporated deeply into the European understanding of the society's place in the world. We cannot “fix” a systemic flaw through an instrumental amendment; when the ultimate goal is actually out of focus, there is no way how to accomplish an improvement.<sup>262</sup>

On the example of the recent economic crisis, I have shown the discrepancy between the idea of an economically competitive Europe and a strong and sound Europe in the context of the global (natural, social, economic) environment. In the proposed solutions to the current economic downturn in the EU, we can hardly find any substantial consideration for changing the economic course taken decades ago, linked to long centuries of shaping Europe's “strong” profile.

One of the conclusions drawn from the comparison between the perception of the economic and ecological crisis is the fact that conscious de-growth (necessary for equilibrated development) is unthinkable within the current EU discourse. Environmental commitment has a chance to gain support mostly in case it stimulates immediate economic competitiveness at the same time.

These findings are related to the analysis of the European worldview traceable in the European history of ideas and in the contemporary political reality of the EU. The last part of my thesis has been structured as a proposal of redefinition, recapitulating the main points about the mainstream image of strength and confronting them with another concept, this time in the form of a transformative axiom. Here I have elaborated on my final research question, namely: If what is depicted as strength is actually weakness, what kind of vision can actually make Europe strong and environmentally sustainable?

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262. Or at least not in terms of politics, which is based on different principles than other spheres of human endeavour, such as art. Artistic performance can indeed succeed in creating a value without a clear concept of the final state to be achieved, but politics cannot.

## ***5.2 Revision of the concept of strength and weakness from environmental perspective***

Stephen R. Dovers, Professor at the Australian National University, specializing in environmental policy, developed a framework which ought to facilitate scaling and framing policy problems in sustainability. I have not applied his theory in the body of my thesis,<sup>263</sup> but I consider it helpful for the final evaluation of the discussed concept of strength.

The crucial assumption of Dovers is that

the relative magnitude and comparative features of sustainability issues should be assessed in two complementary ways: over the scope of *all* policy problems in a comparative fashion, and on a problem-by-problem basis for more detailed purposes.<sup>264</sup>

In addition, Dovers distinguishes six problem framing attributes, including

- spatial scale of cause or effect;
- magnitude of possible effect (differentiating between impact on natural/human systems);
- temporal scale of possible impacts (timing, longevity);
- reversibility;
- mensurability (meaning to which extent we understand the problem); and
- degree of complexity and connectivity.<sup>265</sup>

The problem scaled and framed within this thesis does relate to the issue of sustainability, although it is not a “classical” matter mentioned in the debate. My focus was placed on the credibility of the concept of strength, which is used as an argument to defend the EU environmental policy (and any other policy area as well).

Thinking about the spatial scale of environmental measures that derive from the conservative image of strength, the issue actually surpasses the EU boundaries. Not only does the EU draft and implement measures which determine the outlook of the environment within the European territory, but they also have a significant impact on the environmental agenda worldwide. The global aspect of strength rooted in cultural particularities such as objectivization, linearity or materialization is thus worth our

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263. I came across the work of Dovers' only when the body of my thesis was already in a consistent form, and applying his theory would have meant major restructuring.

264. Stephen R. Dovers, “A Framework for Scaling and Framing Policy Problems in Sustainability,” *Ecological Economics* 12 (1995): 94. Whether or not I have completed a full assessment will be discussed in the section on research limitations.

265. *Ibid.*, 96-97.

attention. The revised concept of strength, where strong individuals (formed by and realizing their creative potential in resilient institutions) perceive themselves and the whole human community as part of broader ecosystems, has an equally wide impact from the spatial perspective. Less emphasis is put on Europe being a model for the rest of the world, though, and more is invested in cultivation of such an environment where authentic responses can be developed by other cultures.

As far as magnitude of the effects is concerned, I have repeatedly argued that worldviews penetrate every manifestation of human enterprise. In the case of conservative strength, the ratio of impact on human systems is said to be high (acting in order to improve human well-being through economic growth), while the impact on natural systems is either underestimated or not taken into consideration. In the case of transformative strength, the two ratios are balanced against each other, which can lead to economic de-growth.

The aspect of temporality is also important for any attempt to redefine strength and ensure that a stronger Europe indeed is soon to emerge. The question of time (when we are to see the results of our activity reflected by the natural environment, and how long these changes will persist) should be answered with the help of science, one of the most powerful tools originating in Europe. Proximity and even uncertainty have already established their place within contemporary natural sciences, but the fact of not-knowing and the need to accept it has not found its way into policy-making yet.

The problem of not being sure about the full influence of our deeds is closely linked to the next problem framing attribute, namely reversibility. In line with the tradition of conservative strength, there are two possible courses in this respect. Striving for continuous growth and boosted competitiveness can either lead us to undertaking irreversible steps, or make us insist on passivity unless we can precisely quantify the need to act and the economic profit which may be gained from the action. Transformative strength, on the contrary, encourages systematic work accompanied by up-to-date research activities, preferring resilience (thus inner ability of the system to overcome critical stages also through auto-correction) to competitiveness. Competitiveness can be achieved as a secondary outcome of the policy, but it can hardly be its primary goal.

The level and depth of our understanding (measurability) of environmental challenges is another differentiating factor between the two concepts of strength. Apart

from admitting the risk of incomplete knowledge (which is also a relevant information for decision makers, though), transformative strength operates on other levels of cognition, too. Not only science, but also art or emotions such as compassion and humbleness can raise their voice in the discussion.

The last attribute, which Dovers suggests to be considered when approaching environmental policy problems, is the degree of complexity and connectivity. Its omnipresent relevance is one of the most distinctive features of the environmental policy sector. The issues we are dealing with are complex in their very essence, and there is hardly any human activity which has no connection to the natural environment at all. Within the frame of reference delineated by the conservative concept of strength, complexity is intentionally reduced and weaker connections to other issues disregarded. Opening toward complexity and taking intersecting links into serious consideration (and not only as the so-called horizontal theme<sup>266</sup>) conditions the solidity of strength in transformative terms.

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266. Horizontal themes, such as equal opportunities or environmental impact, are officially evaluated for each project sponsored by the EU. The fundraising practice is quite different, though, when horizontal themes are usually regarded as a matter of customary “Eurospeak” and grant applications only include vague formulations about zero relevance.

### ***5.3 Implications for theory, method and policy***

When considering possible implications of the thesis findings, we can identify three main domains of applicability.

First of all, in the course of the research, I have gathered arguments supporting my hypothesis about deeper roots of the EU environmental policy insufficiencies. The question about the essence of strength, cherished as the decisive feature of the Union for the future, has been answered with a draft of a theory distinguishing between conservative and transformative strength. While the former one is an instrument that can lead no further than to continuous growth with its negative side-effects for the natural environment, the latter goes in line with the notion of multi-dimensionality of human enterprise. Transformative strength needs to be bolstered not only through issue-targeting environmental measures but also through measures in other policy areas such as education, economy, healthcare or foreign policy.

In addition, the conceptual focus of the thesis can serve as an example of a theory deriving from the field of cultural studies (worldview, its historical basis, metabolism and width of consequences) applied onto policy evaluation. One of the absenting aspects of the existing EU environmental policy analyses is the linkage between broader cultural dynamics and narrow policy-making. Such methodology could be a way of avoiding the trap of shallow tools used to assess shallow measures. As Stephen R. Dovers says,

it may not be the area of “environmental policy” that we should look, but rather at social and economic policies that shape overall consumption patterns.<sup>267</sup>

In other words, priority ought to be given to exploring deeper levels of insight.

And finally, the thesis suggests a shift in preferences as far as the process of policy-shaping is concerned. The initial step would be sincerity of decision makers, refraining from vocabulary which mingles conservative intentions with innovative proclamations. The next move is designing the policy according to the actual goal that is to be achieved. Once we know what a “strong Europe” means, the chance to create it increases.

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267. Dovers, “A Framework for Scaling and Framing Policy Problems in Sustainability,” 104-105.

#### ***5.4 Limitations of the research***

Let us recall the main research question (a) and the core hypothesis (b) of the research:

a) What is the current vision of a strong Europe based on, and does it actually make Europe strong and environmentally sustainable?

b) The EU has constructed a strategy against problems caused by the same concepts that serve as pillars for the strategy itself.

There are four major limitations and drawbacks of the research carried out for the purpose of this thesis, one concerning the subjectivity of the very starting point, and one for each of the three parts of the work itself.

Let us begin with the three main chapters, each of which has a different focus and structure, and therefore also different problematic points.

In order to understand the various stages on the way to today's state of art, it was necessary to present a historical overview of ideas and concepts which affected the attitude of Europeans toward nature. Such a short excursus must inevitably bring simplifications and only partial elaboration. Even following a line which has been already drawn by renowned historians could have led to cherry-picking and ignoring phenomena that still played an important role. Any effort to offer an exhaustive picture about the history of the interaction between European culture(s) and natural environment would have been sufficient as a topic for the whole thesis, though, which would have made it purely descriptive. In this way, the length and depth of the first chapter was adapted to the needs of the topic, summarizing the main issues that can be spotted in today's approach of decision makers, but going further, from the past to the present.

The second chapter, analyzing the aspect of strength from the perspective of the two intersecting crises, economic and ecological, was meant as a practical example of the mechanisms through which the discussed worldview regulates our perception and reaction to such large-scale processes. The chapter was presented at a scientific conference entitled “Our Common Present: Global Challenges for Social and Cultural Ecology” held on 2 March 2011 at Charles University in Prague, Czech republic.<sup>268</sup> It is going to be published, in a slightly modified version and co-authored by Gaudenz

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268. PowerPoint presentation and abstract (all in Czech) of the conference paper can be found at <http://www.ecoology.org/nase-spolecna-pritomnost/prezentace>.

Assenza and Aliaksandr Martynau, in a peer-reviewed university journal *Acta Universitatis Carolinae, Philosophica et Historica, Studia Sociologica VII*, ISSN 0567-8293, within the year 2011. The publication was sponsored by the Czech Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports within the project “The Global Financial Crisis: An Interdisciplinary Analysis,” carried out by the Department of Politics and European Studies, Palacký University in Olomouc, Czech republic.

Despite successful dissemination of this chapter's outcomes, it could be argued that the text does not satisfy the requirements of a case study. It remains rather broad in focus and there is no detailed analysis of e.g. one concrete policy area or one Member State's experience. Only general provisions, be it in the economic or environmental sector, are discussed. Narrowing the topic as much as possible and collection of both qualitative and quantitative data would have made the argument stronger. Nevertheless, this deficiency can also be interpreted as a subject for further research (see below).

As for the last section of the thesis, where the concepts of conservative and transformative strength are introduced, it would have been helpful if not only the mainstream understanding of strength but also existing alternatives had been commented on throughout the thesis. That was actually one of my initial plans, and contrasting the images of strength as represented by various actors was included in my first thesis proposal. However, it became clear later on that such a comparison would have amplified the topic substantially and not enough attention would have been paid to the study of the mainstream approach (which was, after all, my core interest). Once again, this imperfection can inspire further inquiries.

And finally, I shall admit that my subjective motivation to work on the topic was rather critical. It was thus possible that, semi-intentionally, I underestimated or ignored positive shifts in the development of the EU's environmental agenda. On the other hand, only what truly matters to you is worth the effort to criticize it, whereas through strict observation one may help improve it. My ambition is no higher than “to be employed as an under-labourer in clearing ground a little, and removing some of the rubbish, that lies in the way to knowledge”.<sup>269</sup>

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269. John Locke, “An Epistle to the Reader,” in *An Essay Concerning Humane Understanding* (Philadelphia: Kay & Troutman, 1849, first published in 1690), 13.

### ***5.5 Need for further research***

As mentioned above, there are two priorities for further research. Firstly, a case study (be it focused on a single policy area such as climate change, or the development of environmental policy in one Member State, e.g. Czech republic) would be a solid argument for the applicability of the hypotheses.

Secondly, a comparative analysis among the concept of conservative strength as embodied by the EU policy and decision makers, and various concepts of transformative strength represented by other actors would be useful for defining concrete recommendations for the future. Not only criticism of the *status quo* accompanied by a draft of revision, but also practical examples of already implemented approaches that bring more satisfying results would make the research more constructive.

If we want to understand better what the role of the European Union is or can be for the future of the environment we inhabit, it is necessary to grasp the potential of the institution to trigger positive changes. In the section discussing the characteristics of transformative strength, I have mentioned the Voices of Judgement, Cynicism and Fear that Otto Scharmer points out as barriers of a resilient development. Throughout the thesis, emotional disconnection and alienation of the EU citizens has not been an issue, yet it is probably as limiting as the widespread rigid frame of reference. “Most people believe [the EU] to be useful without feeling deeply attached to it”,<sup>270</sup> political scientists notice. Can such a world-detached pragmatism lead us out of the tunnel of Judgement, Cynicism and Fear? The ability to distinguish between strength and weakness could be an important device for anyone searching for a viable exit.

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270. Richard Bellamy and Dario Castiglione, “Legitimising the Euro-'polity' and its 'Regime': The Normative Turn in European Studies,” *European Journal of Political Theory* 2, no. 1 (2003): 21.



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