



By: *Ferry Biedermann*

Green politics in a defensive crouch as priorities shift elsewhere



Green politics are in for a rough ride the next few years, as voters across the globe have made clear over the past twelve months that they prioritise other, seemingly more pressing, concerns.

From the **decimation**, just last week, of the Irish Green Party, part of the ruling coalition, to Donald Trump preparing to once more pull the US out of the Paris Agreement on climate change, dark clouds are gathering over green initiatives.

Voter concern over environmental and climate issues has not necessarily weakened everywhere, it has just been overtaken by what many regard as issues that need more immediate attention, from the cost of living, or, especially in Ireland, housing, to security concerns that might prioritise energy independence and investment in defence.

Some of it, though, can be attributed to gains by the far-right and accompanying misinformation campaigns in many countries.

In the Netherlands, for example, where a far-right-dominated **government** came to power this year, an analysis of elections at the end of 2023 shows that acceptance of the well-established role of human behaviour in climate change, while still relatively high for Europe, was now lower than it had been in the past.

The EU is changing course

The European Union, long seen as the bulwark of sustainable policies in the world, is also signalling that it is changing course. Last month, for example, the European Parliament **postponed** implementation of the landmark Deforestation Regulation, part of the European Green Deal, by a year, until the end of 2025.

This was spun as a victory for green politics in the first major confrontation over the Green Deal since European Parliament elections in June, in which green parties suffered significant losses.

The centre-right EPP bloc failed in its

attempts to weaken the bill and delay implementation even further. The EPP, however, reserved the right to resume its attempts at a later date and only bowed to the wishes of the European Commission and its president, Ursula von der Leyen, whom it supports.

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Von der Leyen, who needed to keep the Greens onboard in her second Commission after gains by the far-right parties, has on the one hand vowed to stick to the Green Deal, but has on the other signalled that like much of the European population, she too has different priorities in her second term.

The Green Deal was too much of a, well, big deal, to abandon or drastically alter openly. And there's also the issue of stability of the business environment, which to a certain degree needs predictability and consistency.

Thus, the Green Deal will stand as a symbol but in practice it is about to be hollowed out, undermined and delayed. Von de Leyen has announced she will meet industry criticism on one of the most effective ways of weakening the rules while ostensibly letting them stand, by loosening reporting requirements.

Speaking after the European Council summit in Budapest in November, she **said** she'd roll the reporting rules for three initiatives, the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive, the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive, and the EU Taxonomy, into one.

Shifting of the priorities

Von der Leyen's step came after EU leaders demanded for the bloc's competitiveness to be boosted by slashing red tape. The so-called Budapest declaration called for "concrete proposals on reducing reporting requirements

by at least 25 percent in the first half of 2025.”

It all has eerie echoes of the upcoming Trump administration’s clever ways to reduce government waste - the Department of Government Efficiency, DOGE, headed by those well-established environmentalists Elon Musk and Vivek Ramaswamy.

The EU leaders’ talking points reflect a clear shifting of the priorities within the EU as well, not solely caused by election results but also by growing multi-factor panic over such challenges as a new Trump administration, Europe lagging behind the US in competitiveness, the need for increased defence spending and political instability in their own ranks.

These are all elements in the upcoming German elections, that were brought forward to February after the ruling coalition of Social Democrats, Liberal FDP and indeed, the Greens, were no longer able to contain the squabbling.

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When SPD Chancellor Olaf Scholz **decided** to sack his FDP finance minister about a month ago, the Greens looked on course to lose about a third of their support. They have since made up a few percentage points and might limit their loss.

Both the centre-right CDU/CSU, which is on course to win the elections, and the far-right AfD, which is still polling in second place, had over the past few years clobbered the various green initiatives as being too costly for industry and for ordinary Germans.

The latter was particularly the case with the new Building Energy Act (GEG) **adopted** in 2023, also known as the heat pump law, as it requires the installation of those devices over gas-powered ones.

There’s also much very German handwringing over the Greens’ stance on ending production of the combustion engine by 2035, which is seen as endangering that tottering edifice of German industrial capacity, the automotive industry.

The possible revival of the German Greens

The possible revival of the German Greens’ fortunes can probably be ascribed to the continuing dissatisfaction of the electorate with Scholz and his SPD. This is now being cleverly used by CDU leader and probable next chancellor, Friedrich Merz.

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He did say that Green attitudes towards the economy needed to change, but after initial fierce resistance, the CDU is now also quietly signalling that even the dreaded heat pump law, will not have to be rescinded.

In contrast to Ireland, where the two mainstream coalition partners of the Greens successfully ‘blamed’ them for often unpopular environmental policies, the German Greens might be able to take advantage of the fierce rivalry between the two large traditional

parties and live to fight another day.

But even if they do enter a coalition with the centre-right, the most they can wish for, just as on the EU-level, is a holding pattern, rather than any new, bold initiatives.