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EUROPEAN SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS IN PARTNER COUNTRIES: TRANSFORMATION OF PRIORITIES IN A NEW SECURITY DIMENSION

Background. *In recent years, Europe's security environment has undergone significant transformations under the influence of increasing geopolitical competition, energy and climate-related risks, and instability in neighboring regions. The full-scale war of the Russian Federation against Ukraine has highlighted the need to reconsider approaches to ensuring stability and development across the European region. In this context, the European Union's sustainable development policy has acquired strategic importance as an instrument for integrating economic, energy, and environmental transformation with security objectives. This study aims to analyze the evolution of EU approaches to sustainable development projects in partner countries in the context of contemporary security challenges.*

Methods. *The study employs conceptual frameworks such as the security–development nexus, green security, and resilience governance to provide a comprehensive analysis of the interconnections between sustainable development, security, and institutional resilience of states. Systemic and comparative methods were applied, alongside an analysis of EU political and strategic documents, allowing for an assessment of the characteristics of sustainable development project implementation in different partner regions and their impact on regional stability.*

Results. *The transformation of Europe's security environment has led to the integration of sustainable development policy into the EU's strategic foreign policy and security mechanisms. Implementation of energy transition programs, climate adaptation initiatives, infrastructure modernization, and strengthening of institutional capacities in partner states contributes to enhancing their resilience to complex challenges. In the Eastern Partnership region, investments in transport, energy, digital transformation, environmental sustainability, and institutional reforms support energy security, the development of renewable energy sources, and post-war reconstruction in Ukraine. In the Western Balkans, the implementation of the Green Agenda and the Western Balkans Investment Framework promotes economic decarbonization, modernization of energy systems, improved energy security, and integration with European markets. In the Southern Neighborhood countries, sustainable development projects focus on climate adaptation, socio-economic stability, and the enhancement of institutional capacity in partner states, thereby creating conditions for long-term regional resilience and development.*

Conclusions. *In the context of contemporary security transformations, EU sustainable development policy is evolving into a comprehensive foreign policy tool that integrates economic, energy, environmental, and security priorities. The implementation of corresponding projects in partner countries enhances their resilience to crises, promotes long-term stability, and strengthens the European Union's strategic autonomy on the global stage.*

Keywords: *European Union, sustainable development, international security, development policy, transformation, Eastern Partnership, Western Balkans, South Caucasus, green security, post-war reconstruction.*

Background

Over the past several years, Europe's security environment has undergone significant transformations driven by the growth of geopolitical competition and the emergence of new complex challenges related to energy security, climate change, and instability in neighboring regions. A particularly significant factor in these changes has been the full-scale war launched by the Russian Federation against Ukraine, which has substantially affected the European security order and highlighted the need to reconsider approaches to shaping policies of stability and development in the European region. Under these conditions, the issue of ensuring the long-term resilience of states and regions is increasingly examined through the prism of traditional security policy and in the context of economic, energy, and environmental transformation.

One of the important instruments of such transformation is sustainable development policy, which under current conditions is acquiring new strategic significance in the foreign policy of the European Union. Whereas previously sustainable development projects were predominantly considered as part of international assistance policy and economic modernization, they are now increasingly integrated into a broader system of ensuring security and stability. In particular, the implementation of energy transition programs,

support for climate policy, infrastructure modernization, and the strengthening of the institutional capacity of partner states are regarded as important factors in enhancing their resilience to political, economic, and security crises.

In this context, cooperation between the European Union and partner countries located in strategically important regions of the European neighborhood acquires particular significance. This primarily concerns the states participating in the Eastern Partnership initiative, as well as the countries of the Western Balkans and the Southern Neighborhood. These regions are of considerable importance for ensuring stability on the European continent, as they combine geographical proximity to the European Union with significant potential for economic and energy integration, while at the same time being characterized by increased vulnerability to security, socio-economic, and climate-related challenges. Therefore, sustainable development projects in these countries are increasingly regarded as a component of the formation of a broader system of regional resilience and stability.

In the contemporary transformed security environment, the European Union's sustainable development policy is gradually moving beyond the traditional logic of international technical assistance and is becoming a comprehensive instrument of foreign policy aimed at strengthening the institutional capacity of partner states, supporting energy

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and climate transformation, and creating the preconditions for long-term economic growth and political stability. In this sense, the implementation of European sustainable development projects is increasingly closely linked to the provision of security, reflecting a broader trend toward the integration of development policy and security strategies.

The relevance of this study is determined by the need for a comprehensive analysis of the transformation of the European Union's approaches to the implementation of sustainable development projects in partner countries in the context of changes in the contemporary security environment. Despite the considerable number of scholarly works devoted to particular aspects of sustainable development policy or the EU's foreign policy, the issue of the relationship between the transformation of the security environment and the evolution of the priorities of European sustainable development projects requires further scholarly consideration.

The purpose of the article is to examine the transformation of European sustainable development projects in partner countries and to determine their role in shaping new approaches to ensuring stability and sustainable development in the European region. To achieve this aim, the study envisages analyzing the changes in Europe's security environment, characterizing the growing role of sustainable development policy in the external activities of the European Union, and investigating the main directions of the implementation of relevant projects in the countries of the Eastern Partnership, the Western Balkans, and the Southern Neighborhood.

State of scholarly research on the problem. The issue of sustainable development in the foreign policy of the European Union has attracted considerable attention from contemporary researchers in the fields of international relations, European studies, and security studies. The academic literature widely examines both the institutional mechanisms for implementing the EU's sustainable development policy and its impact on the socio-economic modernization of partner countries. Particular attention has been paid to the integration of environmental and climate priorities into the European Union's external policy, especially in the context of the implementation of strategic initiatives such as the European Green Deal, which defines long-term objectives for the decarbonization of the economy and the transition to climate-neutral development.

A substantial part of research is devoted to the analysis of cooperation between the European Union and the states of neighboring regions, particularly the countries participating in the Eastern Partnership initiative. Within these studies, scholars address issues related to the institutional adaptation of partner states to EU standards, the modernization of energy systems, the development of renewable energy, and the integration of environmental norms into national policies. A separate strand of academic work concerns the analysis of EU policy toward the Western Balkan states, which are considered potential future members of the European Union, as well as research on cooperation with the countries of the Southern Neighborhood, where sustainable development projects are aimed at overcoming socio-economic instability, adapting to climate change, and developing energy infrastructure (European Commission, 2026a; European Commission, 2026b; Rabinovych, & Pintsch, 2023).

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the scholarly literature in studying the relationship between development policy and security. In this context, the concept of the security–development nexus is widely used, emphasizing the interdependence between the stability of states, their economic development, and their institutional

capacity. Researchers increasingly note that an effective development policy can reduce the risks of conflict, enhance the resilience of societies to crises, and contribute to the formation of a stable regional order.

At the same time, the new security challenges that Europe has faced over the past decade have contributed to the emergence of new approaches to analyzing the role of sustainable development in ensuring international stability. Contemporary studies increasingly employ the concept of green security, which considers environmental and climate policy as an important component of the long-term security of states and regions. Within this approach, the energy transition, the development of renewable energy sources, and adaptation to climate change are interpreted not only as environmental or economic objectives but also as instruments for preventing political and social instability (European Commission, 2019).

Despite the considerable number of scholarly works devoted to particular aspects of the European Union's sustainable development policy, the problem of the transformation of European sustainable development projects in the context of changes in the contemporary security environment remains insufficiently studied. In particular, the question of how new geopolitical challenges, including the war against Ukraine, influence changes in the priorities of the European Union in its cooperation with partner countries in the field of sustainable development requires more thorough analysis. It is precisely this issue that constitutes the subject of the present study.

Methods

The theoretical foundation of the study is based on contemporary conceptual approaches that explain the interconnection between processes of development, security, and the institutional resilience of states. The application of these approaches makes it possible to comprehensively analyze the transformation of the European Union's sustainable development policy in cooperation with partner countries under conditions of changes in the contemporary international environment.

One of the analytical approaches used in the study is the concept of the security–development nexus. According to this approach, security and development are viewed as interrelated processes, since instability and conflicts can significantly limit the opportunities for the socio-economic development of states, while an insufficient level of economic and institutional development, in turn, may create preconditions for the emergence of political instability and security crises. The application of this approach makes it possible to consider the implementation of sustainable development projects not only as an instrument of economic modernization in partner states but also as an important mechanism for strengthening their resilience to internal and external challenges.

A second important theoretical approach is the concept of green security, which emphasizes the relationship between environmental policy, climate change, and international security. Within this framework, the energy transition, the development of renewable energy sources, and the improvement of energy efficiency are regarded as factors capable of reducing states' strategic dependencies, strengthening their energy security, and lowering the risks of political instability. For the European Union, the integration of the principles of green security into its external development policy implies stronger support for partner states in the process of their climate and energy transformation.

The concept of resilience governance is also of significant importance for the study, as it focuses on the

capacity of states and societies to adapt to crises while maintaining the functioning of key institutions and socio-economic systems. Within this framework, strengthening institutional capacity, developing resilient infrastructure, and establishing effective crisis-management mechanisms are considered necessary conditions for ensuring long-term stability. For this reason, contemporary sustainable development projects implemented by the European Union in partner countries are increasingly oriented toward supporting institutional reforms, developing energy infrastructure, and enhancing the adaptive capacity of economic systems.

The methodological framework of the research is based on the combination of several scientific methods. In particular, the systemic approach is used to examine the European Union's sustainable development policy as a component of the broader system of international relations and security processes. The comparative method is applied to analyze the specific features of the implementation of sustainable development projects across different regions of EU cooperation with partner countries. In addition, an important role is played by the analysis of political and strategic documents of the European Union, which define the main directions of its policy in the field of sustainable development and international cooperation.

Results

Transformation of Europe's Security Environment

The transformation of Europe's security environment has become one of the key factors shaping the new logic of the European Union's foreign policy and the reconfiguration of the priorities of its sustainable development policy. The full-scale Russian aggression against Ukraine in February 2022 became a catalyst for profound changes in the perception of threats, security strategies, and mechanisms for countering hybrid risks on the European continent. The war intensified traditional military risks and introduced new challenges that extend beyond classical interstate confrontation, ranging from energy dependence and infrastructural vulnerability to hybrid threats and the issue of the EU's strategic autonomy (Genini, 2025).

One of the central transformations of the European security order has been the reconsideration of the role of energy security as a fundamental element of stability. Until 2022, the long-standing dependence of many EU countries on imports of Russian energy resources created significant strategic vulnerabilities that were used as instruments of political pressure and economic influence. After the start of the full-scale aggression by the Russian Federation, supplies of natural gas and oil were significantly reduced, creating an urgent need to diversify energy sources and revise energy strategies. In response, the European Union accelerated the implementation of programs aimed at diversifying energy supplies, expanding renewable energy sources, and increasing energy efficiency as components of its energy security policy (Shoukat et al., 2024).

These changes in the sphere of energy security are closely intertwined with the economic and social dimensions of the broader security environment. The abandonment of traditional dependence on Russian energy resources has become an important element of political decision-making at the EU level aimed at reducing counterparty risks and strengthening macroeconomic resilience. New geopolitical challenges have prompted the EU to intensify negotiations with alternative suppliers and partner countries, expand joint procurement mechanisms, and incorporate the issue of energy autonomy into the broader frameworks of security and sustainable development strategies (Alieva, 2025).

Alongside energy-related transformations, the contemporary security environment in Europe is characterized by intensified geopolitical competition not only along its eastern borders but also in a broader regional context. The activities of external actors, including Russian hybrid tactics, China's expanding economic presence, and complex relations with the United States, create new dimensions of strategic competition. In response to these risks, the European Union and its NATO allies have strengthened coordination in the fields of defense, intelligence, and cybersecurity, while also developing joint initiatives for rapid response to threats that extend beyond traditional military conflicts (Kherimian, 2025).

Particular attention is now also devoted to the resilience of critical infrastructure, which is increasingly becoming a factor of national and regional security. Disruptions to energy, transport, and digital networks during crisis situations may have far-reaching consequences for economic functioning and the viability of societies. For this reason, EU policymakers increasingly integrate measures aimed at enhancing the resilience of infrastructural systems into broader security strategies, including investments in the modernization of networks, the development of renewable energy, cyber protection measures, and crisis management systems.

These complex changes in the security environment have significantly influenced the revision of the European Union's approaches to sustainable development policy. Whereas prior to 2022 sustainable development was largely viewed as a mechanism of economic modernization and social integration, it is now increasingly integrated into a broader spectrum of security strategies. Sustainable development policy has become an instrument for achieving long-term goals of climate and environmental security, as well as a component of strengthening the resilience of states and regions to complex challenges that combine military, economic, and environmental risks. In this sense, contemporary European sustainable development projects play an important role in shaping a new architecture of security in Europe, in which economic, energy, and institutional resilience are regarded as interrelated elements of stability.

Sustainable Development in the EU's Foreign Policy

Within the foreign policy of the European Union, sustainable development is increasingly moving beyond the exclusively economic or environmental sphere and becoming a component of strategic diplomacy and the security mechanisms of the Union's policy framework. In the context of complex challenges—ranging from Russia's military aggression to global climate risks – the EU is reinterpreting sustainable development as an instrument for strengthening the resilience of the socio-economic systems of partner states, while simultaneously contributing to the formation of long-term stability in the broader regional context. Through this transition from the traditional concept of "development assistance" to a foreign policy that integrates security, climate, and economic dimensions, sustainable development is acquiring new strategic significance.

One of the most important strategic initiatives illustrating this new role is the European Green Deal. Both its internal and external components are aimed at achieving climate neutrality by 2050 and integrating environmental standards across all sectors of the economy. It should be noted that this initiative is interpreted not only as an environmental project but also as a mechanism for enhancing the EU's competitiveness and reducing strategic vulnerabilities, particularly energy dependencies. The European Green Deal is implemented through a comprehensive set of measures and policies that include support for renewable energy, energy efficiency, the circular economy, and

sustainable supply chains. All of these elements have a direct impact on the stability of development in partner countries. Ukrainian and other neighboring governments are increasingly incorporating these standards into their own policies, seeking to harmonize them with European norms and thereby stimulate long-term economic growth.

Alongside the Green Deal, the Global Gateway strategy plays an important role, serving as the EU's flagship initiative in the external dimension of sustainable development. Global Gateway is positioned as a package of projects and financial instruments designed to mobilize high-quality investments in partner states in areas such as infrastructure, energy, digital transformation, transport, healthcare, and education, addressing the global investment deficit. This strategy encompasses a wide range of sectors consistent with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Climate Agreement and is aimed at creating smart, clean, and secure connections between the EU and its partners worldwide, including Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the countries of Europe's neighborhood. Global Gateway envisages the mobilization of substantial financial resources - with a planned volume of up to €400 billion in investments by 2027 - to implement projects that simultaneously support economic modernization, environmental transformation, and technological development (European Commission, 2024a).

From an institutional perspective, Global Gateway is implemented through the NDICI-Global Europe instrument, the EU's multiannual financial framework for external action, which includes guarantees, grants, and budgetary support aimed at attracting private investment and reducing risks for partner countries (Council of the European Union, 2026). Recent amendments to the External Action Guarantee (EAG) further strengthen the EU's capacity to respond rapidly and strategically to global challenges while maintaining a focus on sustainable investment development and effective risk management (European Commission, 2025a).

It is important to note that the integration of sustainable development into the EU's foreign policy is not an isolated process but is closely linked to other political priorities, particularly security, strategic autonomy, and competitiveness. For instance, discussions within the EU increasingly emphasize that green and security priorities should develop in parallel - "from green to secure and European" - reflecting the pragmatic approach of contemporary European leaders in shaping policies amid geopolitical instability (European Union Institutions, 2025). Through such strategic shifts, sustainable development policy is becoming more clearly positioned not merely as a component of external assistance but as an instrument of foreign policy and security strategy, contributing to the strengthening of the EU's position on the global stage and enhancing the resilience of partner states to complex challenges.

Eastern Partnership Countries

Within the framework of the European Union's neighbourhood and cooperation policies, the Eastern Partnership (EaP) region represents one of the key priorities for the implementation of sustainable development initiatives. Launched in 2009, the initiative encompasses six countries - Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Belarus (whose participation has been effectively suspended) - and aims to deepen political, economic, and societal ties with the European Union, support reform processes, strengthen institutional capacity, and promote sustainable development in partner states. The Eastern Partnership policy is also aligned with global sustainable

development frameworks, including the Paris Climate Agreement and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals for 2030. Within this policy framework, the EU has already mobilized more than €14.5 billion to support investments in transport, energy, digital transformation, environmental resilience, and improved access to finance for businesses in EaP countries.

Energy integration constitutes one of the most significant areas of cooperation within the Eastern Partnership. A prominent example is the project of synchronizing Ukraine's energy system with the European electricity network ENTSO-E, implemented with the support of the European Union, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), and the World Bank. The successful connection of Ukraine's energy system to ENTSO-E has established the technical and regulatory foundation for deeper integration into the European electricity market, thereby strengthening the country's energy security and reducing dependence on imported energy resources. Such measures not only enhance national resilience but also contribute to the stability of the broader region by reducing the risks of energy crises and external political pressure (ENTSO-E, 2023). In parallel, the EU4Energy UA programme supports initiatives aimed at improving energy efficiency and expanding the use of renewable energy sources. According to assessments by the European Commission, some participating municipalities have already achieved reductions in energy consumption of approximately 15-20 percent, demonstrating the programme's positive impact on sustainable local development.

Another important dimension of cooperation concerns the green transformation of the partner countries' economies. The European Union implements a range of initiatives aimed at strengthening environmental sustainability, promoting the principles of the circular economy, and supporting adaptation to climate-related risks. One such initiative is EU4Green Recovery East, which combines technical assistance, expert consultations, and partial funding for environmental projects in areas such as waste management, biodiversity protection, and air-quality monitoring. The implementation of this programme in Ukrainian cities has already contributed to reducing local pollution levels and has stimulated the adoption of environmentally sustainable practices within municipal management (European Commission, 2024b). In addition, projects such as Green Urban Development, implemented in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), demonstrate that measures aimed at improving the energy efficiency of critical infrastructure and reducing environmental risks can generate tangible benefits at the local level.

This approach has gained particular importance in the context of Ukraine's post-war reconstruction, a process that combines the restoration of infrastructure damaged by the war with long-term sustainable development objectives. The European Union has introduced the Ukraine Facility as a comprehensive national mechanism for coordinating financial support for reconstruction, including the rebuilding of schools, hospitals, and housing, the modernization of transport networks, and the creation of conditions conducive to economic recovery. Preliminary reports indicate that during the first year of implementation more than 250 critical infrastructure facilities were restored, while employment programmes for local communities have contributed to strengthening socio-economic stability in post-war regions (European Commission, 2023). A similar approach is reflected in the joint initiative of the World Bank and the EU,

Rebuild Eastern Ukraine, which focuses on restoring transport and logistics networks and revitalizing economic activity in post-conflict cities. The programme has already enabled the rehabilitation of dozens of kilometres of transport routes and improved the efficiency of local economic systems (World Bank, 2024).

Finally, the institutional resilience of the EU's partner countries is increasingly regarded not only as a mechanism for modernizing administrative structures but also as a foundation for long-term stability. Technical assistance and public sector reform programmes, such as EU4Reform, support institutional development through measures aimed at strengthening the rule of law, improving anti-corruption mechanisms, and enhancing public financial management (Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum, 2025). These initiatives contribute to increased public trust in institutions, greater transparency and accountability of public authorities, and more effective governance, all of which are essential components of successful sustainable development policies. Within this framework, thousands of public servants have participated in professional training programmes, while updated monitoring and evaluation systems have improved the capacity of governments to adapt development strategies to the needs of local communities.

In addition to the large-scale support for transformation processes in Ukraine, an important dimension of the external policy of the European Union is the implementation of sustainable development programmes in other states participating in the Eastern Partnership initiative. Within this framework, the EU has developed a comprehensive system of financial and institutional instruments aimed at supporting energy transition, environmental modernisation, and the strengthening of economic resilience in partner countries. Among the key mechanisms of cooperation, particular importance is attached to programmes such as EU4Energy, EU4Environment, and the Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy initiative, which are designed to promote the principles of the green economy and facilitate the transition to low-carbon development models.

A significant part of these programmes is implemented in the countries of the South Caucasus (Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan) which play an important role in the regional energy and transport architecture. In Georgia, cooperation with the EU in the field of sustainable development is characterised by a high degree of institutional integration and the country's active participation in European energy and climate initiatives. An important instrument of such cooperation is the EU4Energy programme, aimed at supporting reforms in the energy sector, improving regulatory frameworks, and fostering the development of competitive energy markets in the Eastern Partnership countries. Within this programme, technical assistance is provided for the harmonisation of energy legislation, the development of energy statistics systems, and the enhancement of transparency in energy market operations. The programme also contributes to the transition towards low-carbon energy systems and the development of renewable energy sources in the region (GSE, 2024). One illustrative example is the establishment of the regional office of the EU4Energy Governance programme in Tbilisi, which coordinates support for energy sector reforms across the South Caucasus and promotes the creation of a favourable investment environment for the development of energy infrastructure (EEAS, 2017).

Azerbaijan occupies a distinctive position within the regional architecture of sustainable development. Although the country's economy has traditionally been oriented

toward the extraction of fossil energy resources, cooperation with the EU within the framework of EU4Energy and environmental initiatives aims to gradually diversify the energy sector and promote the development of renewable energy. Increasing attention is being devoted to projects related to the formation of a so-called "green energy corridor" between the countries of the Caucasus and the European Union, involving the development of infrastructure for the transmission of electricity and potentially hydrogen between the regions.

An example of infrastructure integration combining the principles of sustainable development and energy security in the South Caucasus region is the Black Sea Submarine Electricity Cable project, which envisages the interconnection of the energy systems of Georgia and Romania with subsequent integration into the EU energy market. The initiative was formalised in 2022 through the signing of an agreement between the governments of Georgia, Romania, Hungary, and Azerbaijan with the support of the European Commission. The project deals with the construction of a high-voltage submarine electricity transmission line exceeding 1,000 kilometres in length, intended to enable the transmission of electricity generated from renewable sources in the Caucasus region to the European energy market (European Commission, 2022). From the perspective of sustainable development policy, this initiative simultaneously addresses several strategic objectives, including the promotion of renewable energy development in the region, diversification of energy supply sources for Europe, and the creation of new cross-border energy corridors.

In Armenia, the new phase of the EU4Energy programme envisages support for the establishment of independent regulatory institutions in the electricity sector, as well as the development of regional energy integration. Particular emphasis is placed on the creation of an effective governance system in the energy sector and on the development of electricity grid infrastructure, which is expected to strengthen the country's energy security and facilitate its integration into the European energy space (CEER, 2026).

Another important dimension of cooperation is the implementation of the EU4Environment programme, which supports the transition toward a green economy in the Eastern Partnership countries. In Georgia, for instance, the programme has contributed to the introduction of mechanisms for strategic environmental assessment and environmental impact assessment in accordance with EU standards, as well as to the development of environmental monitoring systems. At the same time, initiatives aimed at advancing the circular economy are being implemented, including the modernisation of waste management systems and support for environmental innovations in industry.

A further example of the local implementation of sustainable development principles is the participation of municipalities in Armenia and Georgia in the Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy programme, which assists local authorities in implementing climate strategies, improving the energy efficiency of urban infrastructure, and developing sustainable transport systems. Participation in such initiatives enables municipalities to adapt climate policies to local conditions and contributes to the formation of networks of regional cooperation in the field of energy transition.

A comparative analysis of the EU4Energy, EU4Environment, and Covenant of Mayors programmes provides valuable insights into the specific features of implementing European sustainable development projects

in Ukraine. Unlike many other Eastern Partnership states, particularly those of the South Caucasus, where the primary objective remains institutional modernisation and gradual integration into European markets, in the Ukrainian case sustainable development policy is increasingly shaped by security-related factors. These include military threats, the destruction of infrastructure, and the urgent need for post-war reconstruction.

Western Balkan Countries

The Western Balkans region represents one of the priorities of the European Union's external policy in the context of sustainable development, particularly in light of the long-term prospect of integrating these states into the European political and economic space. The Western Balkans traditionally include Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and (partially) Kosovo. These countries face a number of shared historical, economic, and environmental challenges, including a high level of dependence on carbon-intensive energy sources, outdated infrastructure, fragmented environmental legislation, and significant barriers to the implementation of modern sustainable development standards. In the context of EU enlargement and ongoing accession negotiations, the European Union has been developing strategic initiatives for the region that combine economic decarbonization, modernization of energy systems, and harmonization of environmental legislation. Such transformations are essential for enhancing competitiveness, strengthening economic stability, and reducing environmental risks in the long term.

An important example of decarbonization efforts in the Western Balkans is the region's participation in the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, a joint strategic framework developed by the EU and the six partner governments aimed at accelerating the transition to low-carbon economies and ensuring green transformation by 2030. This strategy encompasses several priority areas, including improving energy efficiency in both industrial and residential sectors, expanding renewable energy production, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions. According to assessments by the European Commission, the implementation of the Green Agenda has facilitated the mobilization of more than € 2.4 billion in investments in the region's green sector between 2021 and 2025. These investments include projects aimed at modernizing heating systems, constructing solar and wind energy facilities, and developing low-emission transport solutions. Such initiatives create favorable conditions for diversifying energy sources and reducing the impact of climate-related risks on the economies of the Balkan Peninsula states (European Commission, 2024c).

The modernization of energy systems in the Western Balkans represents another important dimension of sustainable development that produces both environmental and economic benefits. In this context, programmes supported by the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) play a significant role. For instance, projects in Serbia and North Macedonia focus on transforming thermal power plants in order to reduce harmful emissions and shift part of the production capacity toward cleaner energy sources. One notable example is the modernization project of Serbia's Nikola Tesla thermal power plant, which includes the replacement of outdated equipment and the installation of advanced filtration systems. According to data from the EIB, these measures have reduced annual dust emissions by more than 30 percent and significantly decreased sulphur compound emissions, contributing to improved air quality in surrounding communities (Djatkov, 2024; EIB, 2026).

In the field of energy infrastructure, the Western Balkans Investment Framework (WBIF) constitutes another key initiative. This multilateral financing mechanism brings together resources from the EU, the EBRD, the EIB, and other donor institutions to support projects in transport, water management, and energy sectors. Through the WBIF, projects are financed for the reconstruction of major electricity transmission lines, the modernization of gas transport systems, and the strengthening of regional energy networks. These measures contribute to improved energy security and facilitate the integration of national systems with European energy networks. According to WBIF data, between 2019 and 2025 more than €950 million in grants and credit guarantees were allocated for energy investments in approved projects, enabling the modernization of more than 2,000 kilometres of electricity transmission lines across the region (WBIF, 2025).

The harmonization of environmental legislation represents another critical component of sustainable development for Western Balkan countries, particularly in the context of their aspirations for European integration. The European Union provides technical assistance and expert support to help align national regulatory frameworks with the EU *acquis communautaire* in the environmental field, including standards related to waste management, air and water pollution control, environmental impact assessment, and the protection of natural areas. In Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina, this process is accompanied by the development of national environmental protection strategies consistent with EU standards, including waste management plans, water quality monitoring programmes, and public awareness initiatives concerning environmental rights. According to the European Commission's 2024 report, the implementation of certain provisions of EU environmental legislation has led to a 15–20 percent reduction in organic pollution levels in some river basins and has improved the regional system for monitoring environmental risks (European Commission, 2024c).

An analytical assessment of the effectiveness of these initiatives suggests that the EU's policy toward the Western Balkans in the field of sustainable development is comprehensive in nature and aimed not only at improving environmental indicators but also at strengthening the economic viability of the region. The decarbonization of national economies is closely linked to the creation of a competitive environment for investments in green technologies; the modernization of energy systems contributes to greater energy independence and deeper regional integration; and the harmonization of environmental legislation facilitates the gradual alignment of regulatory frameworks with European standards. This process represents an important prerequisite for further European integration. Such an approach corresponds to the EU's broader strategic objectives of stability, prosperity, and security, while simultaneously creating a foundation for the long-term sustainable development of the Western Balkans in the context of global climate and economic transformations.

Southern Neighbourhood Countries

In the external policy of the European Union, the Southern Neighbourhood region – which within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) includes Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, and Tunisia – has been gaining increasing strategic importance in the context of sustainable development. This part of the Mediterranean region is under significant pressure from climate change, environmental degradation, water scarcity, and energy vulnerability. These factors

directly affect socio-economic stability and political dynamics and therefore constitute shared security challenges for the EU and its southern partners. In response, the European Union has developed a number of structured programmes and projects focused on climate adaptation, water resource management, and the development of renewable energy. These initiatives represent key components of the EU's external policy aimed at strengthening the resilience of partner societies and enhancing regional stability.

Climate adaptation has been identified as one of the strategic priorities of cooperation within the Southern Neighbourhood in accordance with the revised ENP framework, which emphasizes support for the development of climate-resilient economies and societies in the region. Expanded climate adaptation programmes facilitate the preparation and implementation of national and local adaptation strategies, the development of long-term action plans to mitigate the impacts of climate change, and the strengthening of administrative capacities to respond to climate-related threats. For example, the EU Mission on Adaptation to Climate Change has received € 124 million in funding to support innovative approaches and projects in this field, which is expected to significantly enhance the resilience of local communities and their capacity to implement adaptation measures in key sectors of the economy and infrastructure. These investments contribute to strengthening adaptive capacity in urban areas, agriculture, and the water sector, which are particularly critical for regions with high climate vulnerability and limited technical and social adaptation mechanisms (EEAS, 2021).

In the field of water resource management, one of the principal challenges facing the Southern Neighbourhood countries is the acute shortage of accessible freshwater resources in the context of rapid population growth, uneven resource distribution, and the impact of climate change on hydrological cycles. The EU supports comprehensive infrastructure and policy initiatives aimed at improving water-use efficiency, modernizing water supply and sanitation systems, and promoting integrated water resource management in partner countries. Although the ENP does not provide a centralized financing mechanism specifically for water projects, the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation – Global Europe Instrument enables the EU to mobilize financial resources for integrated projects that combine investments in water infrastructure with the strengthening of legislative frameworks and improvements in resource governance at both national and local levels (European Commission, 2025b).

Water resource management is also closely linked to the need to ensure food security and adapt the region's agricultural sectors to environmental pressures. Water scarcity directly affects food production and overall economic performance, creating potential risks of social tensions and new migration flows. Consequently, EU policy analysis emphasizes the importance of an integrated approach to water governance that combines infrastructure modernization, strengthened regulatory mechanisms, and public participation in monitoring water systems and environmental conditions.

The development of renewable energy represents a third major dimension of sustainable development in the Southern Neighbourhood, as the region possesses significant potential for solar and wind energy generation. This potential aligns with both economic development priorities and climate commitments under the Paris Agreement. Joint initiatives, such as the project Mitigation Enabling Energy Transition in the Southern Neighbourhood,

aim to support the transition of these countries toward low-carbon economies by increasing the share of renewable energy in national energy mixes, improving energy efficiency in buildings, and promoting public awareness campaigns regarding the benefits of green energy. The project, which includes Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine, and Tunisia, encompasses measures to enhance energy efficiency in buildings and encourages broad participation of local communities in initiatives related to energy efficiency and renewable energy development (AP, 2025).

Under the auspices of the EU, large-scale projects that extend beyond individual states are also being considered, contributing to the integration of energy markets between the southern and northern shores of the Mediterranean. For instance, the initiative to construct a submarine electricity transmission cable between Egypt and Greece aims to establish a trans-Mediterranean energy network capable of supplying renewable electricity to the EU market. Such projects strengthen regional energy security and reduce dependence on conventional energy sources.

Overall, cooperation between the European Union and the countries of the Southern Neighbourhood in the field of sustainable development can be characterized as a multidimensional strategy combining measures to enhance climate resilience, modernize water resource management, and accelerate the transition to renewable energy. This approach reflects the EU's understanding that sustainable development in the Mediterranean region is not merely a matter of economic modernization but also a critical component of security policy, as environmental and energy risks may become drivers of geopolitical instability in neighbouring states. Consequently, the integration of green transformation principles into the broader framework of EU external policy contributes to strengthening political cooperation and promoting long-term stability in the region.

Discussion and conclusions

The conducted research demonstrates that the transformation of the international security system - driven in particular by the full-scale aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine and the intensification of geopolitical competition – has significantly influenced the European Union's approaches to implementing sustainable development projects in partner countries. The analysis of specific initiatives within the frameworks of the Eastern Partnership, the Western Balkans, and the Southern Neighbourhood shows that the EU increasingly integrates the principles of sustainable development not merely as elements of economic or environmental policy but as components of its broader security strategy. Contemporary projects focus on strengthening energy autonomy, developing low-carbon economies, adapting to climate-related risks, modernizing critical infrastructure, and reinforcing institutional resilience (Lafortune, & Fuller, 2026). These priorities illustrate the close interconnection between the security–development nexus and the concept of green security, within which sustainable development becomes a tool for reducing strategic risks and enhancing regional resilience.

The particular attention given to Ukraine confirms that the country simultaneously functions as both a recipient of external assistance and an active participant in shaping a new European security architecture. The integration of sustainable development principles into national post-war recovery strategies and cooperation with the EU enables the combination of economic reconstruction, modernization of energy and social infrastructure, and climate adaptation with Europe's long-term security priorities. In particular, initiatives

in the energy sector, the expansion of renewable energy sources, and the development of monitoring systems for climate targets demonstrate that sustainable development can serve as an effective mechanism for mitigating external risks and responding strategically to crisis situations.

At the same time, the implementation of sustainable development projects in partner countries contributes to strengthening their institutions and increasing their resilience to both internal and external challenges. For the Eastern Partnership, this involves energy integration and post-war reconstruction; for the Western Balkans, the decarbonization of national economies and the harmonization of environmental legislation; and for the Southern Neighbourhood, adaptation to climate change, effective water resource management, and the development of renewable energy systems. Such a comprehensive approach creates conditions for long-term regional stability and ensures the practical implementation of the concept of resilience governance in the EU's external policy.

Therefore, sustainable development is increasingly transforming into a strategic instrument of the European Union's security policy. Sustainable development projects are no longer limited to purely economic or environmental initiatives; instead, they function as important mechanisms for shaping a new architecture of European security. They strengthen strategic interdependence between the EU and its partner countries, contribute to regional stability, and enhance the capacity of states to respond to complex security challenges. In this context, sustainable development policy acts as a catalyst for integrating economic, social, and environmental priorities into the broader security strategy of the European Union, demonstrating the effectiveness of linking external policy instruments with the long-term vision of a resilient Europe.

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ЄВРОПЕЙСЬКІ ПРОЄКТИ СТАЛОГО РОЗВИТКУ В КРАЇНАХ-ПАРТНЕРАХ: ТРАНСФОРМАЦІЯ ПРІОРИТЕТІВ У НОВОМУ БЕЗПЕКОВОМУ ВИМІРІ

Вступ. Упродовж останніх років безпекове середовище Європи зазнало суттєвих трансформацій під впливом зростання геополітичної конкуренції, енергетичних і кліматичних ризиків, а також нестабільності у суміжних регіонах. Повномасштабна війна Російської Федерації проти України актуалізувала необхідність перегляду підходів до забезпечення стабільності та розвитку в європейському регіоні. У цих умовах політика сталого розвитку Європейського Союзу набуває стратегічного значення як інструмент інтеграції економічної, енергетичної та екологічної трансформації із забезпеченням безпеки. Дослідження спрямоване на аналіз трансформації підходів ЄС до проєктів сталого розвитку у країнах-партнерах у контексті сучасних безпекових викликів.

Методи. У дослідженні застосовано концептуальні підходи security-development nexus, green security та resilience governance для комплексного аналізу взаємозв'язку між сталим розвитком, безпекою та інституційною стійкістю держав. Використано системний і порівняльний методи, а також аналіз політичних і стратегічних документів ЄС, що дозволяє оцінити особливості реалізації проєктів сталого розвитку в різних регіонах-партнерах та їх вплив на регіональну стабільність.

Результати. Трансформація безпекового середовища Європи привела до того, що політика сталого розвитку інтегрувалася у стратегічну зовнішню політику та безпекові механізми Європейського Союзу. Реалізація програм енергетичного переходу, кліматичної адаптації, модернізації інфраструктури та зміцнення інституційної спроможності партнерських держав сприяє підвищенню їхньої стійкості до комплексних викликів. У регіоні Східного партнерства інвестиції у транспорт, енергетику, цифрову трансформацію, екологічну стійкість та інституційні реформи забезпечують підвищення енергетичної безпеки, розвиток відновлюваних джерел енергії та післявоєнну відбудову України. У Західних Балканах реалізація ініціатив Green Agenda та Western Balkans Investment Framework сприяє декарбонізації економіки, модернізації енергетичних систем, підвищенню енергетичної безпеки та інтеграції з європейськими ринками. У країнах Південного сусідства проєкти сталого розвитку спрямовані на адаптацію до кліматичних змін, забезпечення соціально-економічної стабільності й підвищення інституційної спроможності партнерських держав, що створює передумови для довгострокової стійкості та розвитку регіону.

Висновки. Політика сталого розвитку ЄС в умовах сучасних безпекових трансформацій перетворюється на комплексний інструмент зовнішньої політики, що інтегрує економічні, енергетичні, екологічні та безпекові пріоритети. Реалізація відповідних проєктів у країнах-партнерах підвищує їхню стійкість до криз, сприяє довгостроковій стабільності та посилює стратегічну автономію Європейського Союзу на глобальній арені.

Ключові слова: Європейський Союз, сталий розвиток, міжнародна безпека, політика розвитку, трансформація, Eastern Partnership, Західні Балкани, Південний Кавказ, green security, післявоєнна відбудова.

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