

Environmental Politics and the Need for Reconciliation: The case of the Water Framework Directive and the Renewable Energy Directive

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Abstract

The European Union and its Member States rely on a vast range of legislations covering the main policy areas. Over the last 30 years, the extent and the intensity of legislation-making have increased exponentially, especially in the Environmental arena.

Although this abundance of legal instruments represents a certainty of tutelage of EU citizens, it has raised concerns on issues such as the effective implementation of the EU legislation and the incompatibility of certain EU directives' provisions with other Community provisions. Therefore, it is important to discuss upon the conflicts that can rise between the objectives of two or more EU legal frameworks, as in the case of the Water Framework Directive and Renewable Energy Directive.

Despite the fact both Directives aim at the general objective of improving environmental quality through the protection and restoration of water bodies and through the production of renewable energy, the specific objectives might become contradictory. This is the case of the exploitation of certain renewable alternatives, such as hydropower, when such activity has been found responsible for generating stress on natural resources. On the other hand, requirements considered necessary to protect water courses, might negatively affect the production of renewable energy, thus the potential of certain climate change mitigation measures. Surely, this kind of conflict is one of the main factors generating and increasing policy uncertainty which in turn, affects national policies and their implementation, and last but not least energy companies.

It becomes more and more striking that the objectives of directives can conflict and there is a need of a well balanced approach of EU policies in order to meet both climate and water protection objectives, and there is an urgency to integrate and implement environmental concerns into sectoral policies at both EU, national and regional level.

The purpose of my research is to understand the conflicts and synergies between the goals behind the WFD and RES Directive, how we can reconcile these objectives, and investigate the challenges that governments, industry and researchers are facing when trying to implement these Europe-wide goals at national and regional scales.

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