

The EU's Renewable Energy 'Permitting Turn'

Prompted by climate action, driven
by geopolitics

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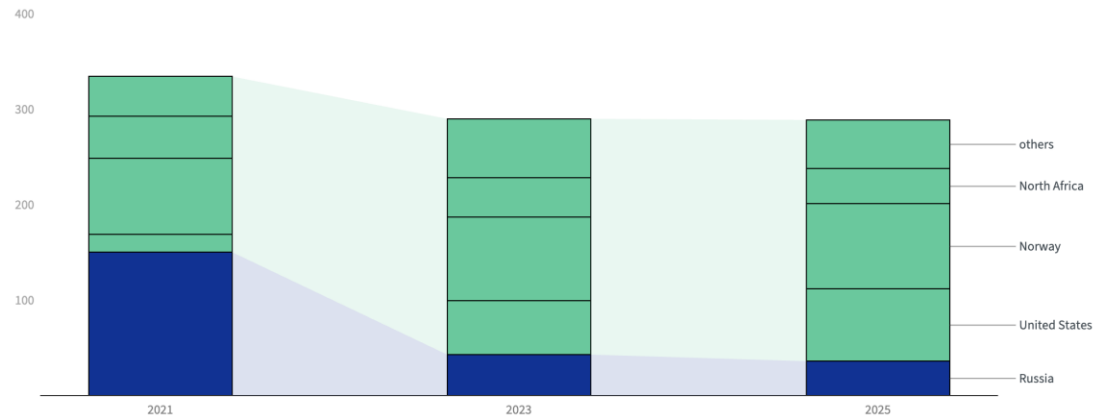
Lagging Climate Action

- [Climate action tracker](#): policies, NDC, and finance all 'insufficient'
- [ECNO](#): EU 2030 targets are at risk due to insufficient national contributions and policies
- [SolarPowerEU](#): 2025 400 GW target hit but 750 GW 2030 target to be missed
- [WindpowerEU](#): Installations well short of 2030 targets

External Shocks

- 2021 shock: supply chains + environmental factors
- 2022 shock: RU war on UA (approx. 40% of EU supply)
- 2026 shock: Strait of Hormuz (approx. 20% of global supply)
- EU regularly confronted with the need to pivot.

The chart below shows the volume of gas imported by the EU in billion cubic metres.



Source: European Commission calculation based on LSEG (Refinitiv) and ENTSO-G

How can EU policy toward permitting renewable energy be understood?

Scholarship

Paper	Focus/thesis
Leenders et al. (2025)	Exceptional framing to accelerate renewable policy
Söderholm and Petterson (2025)	“Green versus green dilemma” (climate vs environment)
Wallace et al. (2025)	Solar “sacrifice zones”
Díaz-Cuevas et al. (2025)	Zoning-renewable acceleration area nexus. Case study: Portugal.
Meeus et al. (2025)	“Simplification is not a synonym for deregulation” and focus on “cleaning up”.
Gurreck (2025)	Planning and Permitting Under the RED III, focus on legal interpretation.
Da Silva (2024)	Risk of environmental deregulation (legal analysis)
Thierjung (2023)	The Legal Concept Of ‘(Overriding) Public Interest’
Anker & Olsen (2023)	Climate > environment, need to revisit/revamp Birds and Habitats Directives
Olivares (2023)	Energy-climate-security > environment since Russian war
Durá-Aleman et al. (2023)	EU climate and energy policies compromised biodiversity protective legislation

Need to update climate law to accelerate permitting ([Ruge 2022](#)); challenges in municipality-level competence in enforcing biodiversity-compatible permitting ([Wretling et al. 2022](#)); need to align climate and environmental goals ([Hardiman 2022](#)); Akerboom et al. ([2018](#), [2019](#)) transposition of EU law, differences, challenges.



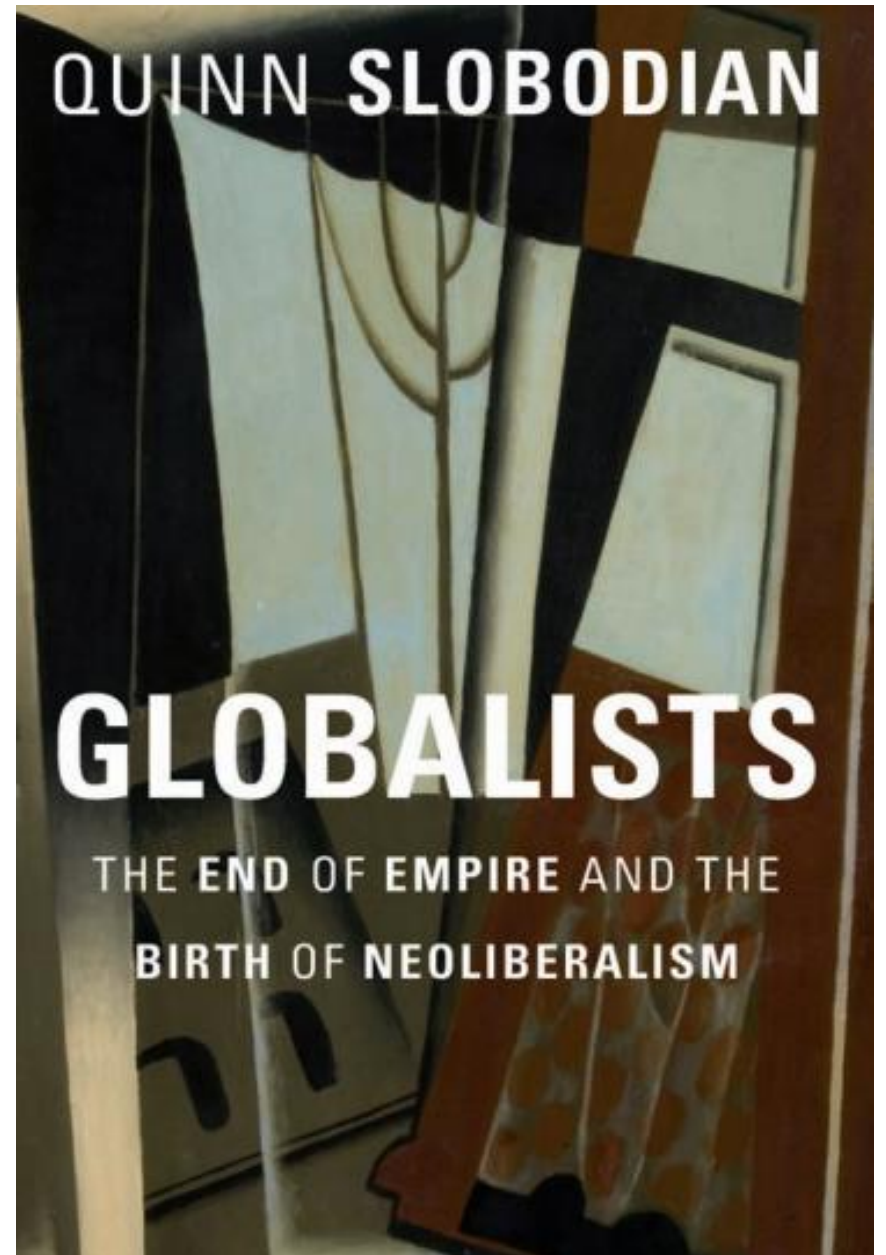
Is this neoliberalism?

“A theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade.”

– David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*

State and/or quasi-state

Ensure the legal framework to
enable functioning market



DEREGULATION

OR

RE-REGULATION?

**REGULATORY REFORM
IN EUROPE
AND THE UNITED STATES**

Edited by

Giandomenico Majone

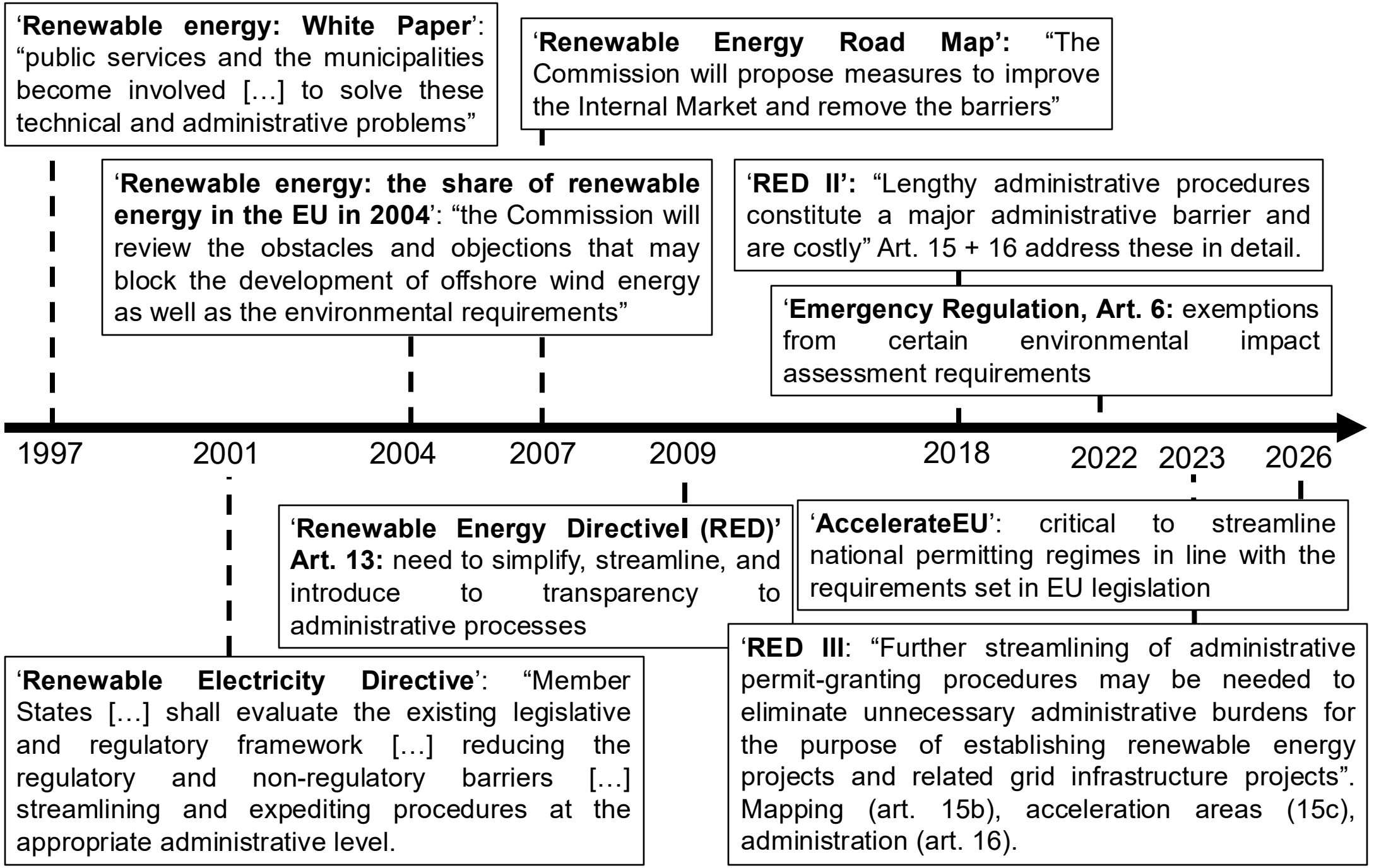
De- vs re-regulation

Majone's and others' work on political economy of regulation + institutional creep (à la Ernst Haas)

EU environmental policy:

“from a social democratic policy aiming to protect the environment from the economy to a neoliberal policy aiming to protect the environment through the economy”

– ([Woodhouse 2025](#))



'Renewable energy: White Paper': "public services and the municipalities become involved [...] to solve these technical and administrative problems"

'Renewable Energy Road Map': "The Commission will propose measures to improve the Internal Market and remove the barriers"

'Renewable energy: the share of renewable energy in the EU in 2004': "the Commission will review the obstacles and objections that may block the development of offshore wind energy as well as the environmental requirements"

'RED II': "Lengthy administrative procedures constitute a major administrative barrier and are costly" Art. 15 + 16 address these in detail.

'Emergency Regulation, Art. 6: exemptions from certain environmental impact assessment requirements

1997 2001 2004 2007 2009 2018 2022 2023 2026

'Renewable Energy Directive (RED)'
Art. 13: need to simplify, streamline, and introduce to transparency to administrative processes

'AccelerateEU': critical to streamline national permitting regimes in line with the requirements set in EU legislation

'Renewable Electricity Directive': "Member States [...] shall evaluate the existing legislative and regulatory framework [...] reducing the regulatory and non-regulatory barriers [...] streamlining and expediting procedures at the appropriate administrative level.

'RED III: "Further streamlining of administrative permit-granting procedures may be needed to eliminate unnecessary administrative burdens for the purpose of establishing renewable energy projects and related grid infrastructure projects". Mapping (art. 15b), acceleration areas (15c), administration (art. 16).

Policy approach: Prime environmental threat is climate inaction + imports pose a security threat.

EU policy: reduce dependence.

Emphasis and speed has shifted from RED II to III + 2024 Recommendation and RePowerEU/Accelerate EU*

EU institutions more articulate in mandating action.

*Commission Recommendation (EU) 2024/1343 of 13 May 2024 on speeding up permit-granting procedures for renewable energy and related infrastructure projects

Beyond renewable energy

- Little guidance on application
- Broader implications: apply “simplified” permitting to other infrastructure
- Overriding public interest: electricity grid, CO2 pipelines, data centres, mines, and even natural gas projects*.



*Policies include European Grids Package, CO2 infrastructure and market proposal, Cloud and AI development Act, ReSourceEU, Environmental Omnibus, and Industrial Acceleration Act

Concluding Thoughts

- Acceleration is driven by external events, but draws on lineage of similar policy logic
- Simplification ==> dismantling RES barriers
- Objective: supports capital (neoliberalism), but also other goals (climate targets) + EU institutional creep
- Implementation largely remains to be seen

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