THE FUTURE OF GREEN INDUSTRIAL POLICY: AN OVERVIEW OF POLICY COMMUNICATION

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Abstract. *Green industrial policy has become a key element of contemporary economic and environmental governance, aiming to reconcile industrial competitiveness with climate neutrality and sustainable development. As governments increasingly adopt such strategies, policy communication plays an important role in shaping their formulation, implementation and public legitimisation. This paper examines the evolution of the European Union's institutional discourse on industrial policy between 2021 and 2025 by analysing three major policy documents: the updated Industrial Strategy (2021), the Green Deal Industrial Plan (2023), and the Clean Industrial Deal (2025). Using a qualitative research strategy based on document and discourse analysis, the study investigates shifts in institutional narratives and the transformation of key concepts. The findings indicate that EU institutional discourse reflects political priorities while functioning as a strategic instrument for adapting legitimacy in response to economic and geopolitical constraints.*

Keywords*: European Green Deal, green industrial policy, net-zero, transition, political communication.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Inclusivity represents a central concern of European public policy, particularly in relation to migration, minority rights and social cohesion (Nica, 2025:153). In this context, inclusion operates across multiple governance levels, from national and subnational (regional and local) to supranational and global levels, including the sphere of international organisations (Brie, 2025:10). At the same time, Green Industrial Policy has become a key element of contemporary economic and environmental governance, aiming to reconcile industrial competitiveness with climate neutrality and sustainable development. The last decade has marked a profound reconfiguration of industrial policy in the European Union (EU), amid the convergence of several structural crises: climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, the energy crisis and the intensification of global geopolitical competition. In this context, European industrial policy has evolved from a predominantly competitiveness and internal market-oriented framework towards an integrated model, combining the objectives of decarbonisation, strategic autonomy and economic resilience.

The update of the EU Industrial Strategy (2021), the launch of the Green Deal Industrial Plan (2023) and the adoption of the Clean Industrial Deal (2025) reflect not

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only adjustments to public policy instruments, but also a transformation of the normative and discursive framework through which European industrial development is conceptualised. The literature emphasises that contemporary industrial policies can no longer be analysed exclusively in economic terms but must be understood as political and symbolic projects that build legitimacy for major structural transformations (Rodrik, 2004; Mazzucato, 2018). In parallel, research on sustainability discourse shows that climate and industrial policies are accompanied by strategic narratives aimed at reducing tensions between competitiveness and decarbonization (Hajer, 1995; Eckert & Kovalevska, 2021). The Green Deal has been interpreted as an example of a transformative discourse that combines climate urgency with the promise of economic modernization (Eckert & Kovalevska, 2021). However, the discursive dynamics of European industrial policy in the post-Green Deal phase remain insufficiently explored, especially in relation to new geopolitical and economic pressures.

Thus, this research starts from the premise that the evolution of EU industrial policy between 2021 and 2025 represents not just a succession of institutional reforms, but a strategic discursive recalibration, through which the European Commission adapts the language, priorities and legitimization frameworks to a changing international environment. Although there is a consistent literature on the Green Deal and European industrial policy, the comparative analysis of the evolution of the strategic and discursive framework between 2021 and 2025 remains limited. In particular, the relationship between: decarbonization objectives, global competitiveness imperatives, and the discursive construction of "strategic autonomy" is not sufficiently investigated. Therefore, the central question of the research is to identify how the EU redefines industrial policy in a context marked by the tension between climate ambition and economic and geopolitical constraints. Thus, the present scientific approach aims to answer several research questions:

(1) How is the discourse on EU industrial policy evolving between 2021 and 2025?

(2) How is the institutional discourse on EU industrial policy changing (keywords, narratives, rhetoric), and what type of legitimacy is constructed through discourse – technocratic, transformative or pragmatic?

This research uses a qualitative approach, drawing on methods such as document and discourse analysis, to examine the evolution of the European Union's strategic framework for industrial policy between 2021 and 2025. The methodology is appropriate to the objective of identifying both the normative and strategic content of the documents, as well as the rhetorical and narrative mechanisms through which they construct legitimacy and political meaning. The study is based on a comparative analysis of three official documents of the European Commission: the Updated EU Industrial Strategy (SI, 2021), the Green Deal Industrial Plan (GDIP, 2023), and the Clean Industrial Deal (CID, 2025). The documents are treated as institutional products that reflect both public policy orientations and discursive constructions of the industrial transition.

The study contributes to the literature on: the transformation of European industrial policy; the relationship between sustainability and competitiveness; the analysis of institutional discourse in the EU. In addition, the research provides insight into how discourse becomes a strategic tool for managing tensions between climate objectives and industrial pressures. In a geopolitical context characterized by technological competition and green protectionism, understanding this dynamic is essential for assessing the long-term coherence of the European industrial project.

The article is structured in six sections – the first section, the introductory one, provides the framework and motivation for the research; the second section provides an overview of the specialized literature on industrial policy and its associated discourse; the third section presents the research design and methodology; the fourth section proposes an analysis of the rhetoric behind the three industrial policy documents – SI (2021); GDIP (2023); CID (2025); the fifth section is dedicated to reflections on the changing narrative of industrial policy; and the paper concludes with the conclusions and implications for future industrial policies.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The traditional industrial policy of the European Union has historically focused on increasing competitiveness, technological innovation and adapting to structural changes in the market economy (Council of the European Union, 2024). However, in the context of the EU's climate ambitions, this policy is taking on a "green" dimension, oriented towards decarbonisation, climate neutrality and sustainability. The literature treats this transformation both as a conceptual evolution and as a change in public policy discourse and practices. In the context of climate challenges and the transition towards a sustainable economy, the concept of "green industrial policy" has become central to research on the European Union's development strategies. The term reflects efforts to reorient traditional industrial policies – focused on competitiveness and productivity – towards objectives of decarbonisation, energy efficiency and eco-innovation (Smith & Timmer, 2020). The literature highlights both the theoretical foundations of green industrial policy and the implementation mechanisms within the European framework.

At a general level, the concept of integration is understood as a multidimensional process that combines structural integration (labor market, education), cultural integration (language, values), social integration (relationships and participation) and identificational integration. Some authors emphasize structural components as central indicators of integration, while others distinguish between integration at the legal-political, socio-economic and cultural-religious levels (Cutoi, 2025: 27-18).

Conceptually, the notion of "green industrial policy" combines industrial traditions with environmental objectives, involving government interventions designed to stimulate the development of low-emission technologies and vice versa, reducing emissions through sectoral support (Rodrik, 2015). Although Rodrik (2015) argues that traditional principles of industrial intervention remain valid, the shift to green technologies requires institutional adaptations that respond to both economic efficiency and climate imperatives.

A significant body of work discusses the roots and evolution of the concept in the economic literature. Poli (2018) argues that green industrial policy is not a complete break with classical industrial policies, but an extension aimed at internalizing the external costs of production and encouraging activities with low environmental impact. The authors thus highlight a convergence between endogenous growth theory and economic arguments on market failures associated with climate change (Jones & Klenow, 2019). At the EU level, a significant body of literature analyses the policy strategies and instruments that structure the green approach. The European Green Deal strategy, launched in 2019, is often cited as a benchmark for the detailed formulation of climate objectives and their integration into key industrial sectors (European Commission, 2019; Weber & Rohracher, 2021). Researchers highlight the role of the Just Transition Mechanism and sustainable financing schemes (e.g. the NextGenerationEU Recovery

Plan) as concrete examples of policies aimed at reducing regional disparities and supporting green reindustrialization (Mazzucato & Semieniuk, 2018; Becker et al., 2022).

According to the literature, a common feature of all definitions of industrial policy is that it refers to "government policies, which aim to affect the structure of an economy, generating benefits for society" (Taglapietra and Veugelers, 2019). New trends in studies on industrial policy, called "new industrial policy", emphasise that industrial policy should have objectives beyond short-term competitiveness and economic growth; it should have a broader, multidimensional objective that can be captured by the notion of long-term social well-being (Taglapietra and Veugelers, 2019).

The delineation of a "green" version of industrial policy becomes necessary once decarbonisation is established as a primary societal objective, as the EU has done through the EGD. Taglapietra and Veugelers (2019) introduce an interesting vision of green industrial policy, according to which: while the objective of climate policy is decarbonisation and the objective of (new) industrial policy is social well-being, green/green industrial policy needs to reconcile the objectives of decarbonising the economy (such as climate policy) and social well-being (such as industrial policy). According to Taglapietra and Veugelers (2019), this combination of objectives immediately highlights the challenge of green industrial policy: meeting both objectives simultaneously – a task that becomes particularly difficult when they are in conflict, when compromises must be made, or when one of the objectives is not met. Green industrial policy must also take into account "market failures in climate terms", the main of which is that GHGs are a side effect of economic activities. However, those responsible for their generation do not pay the related costs. Moreover, according to the authors, green industrial policy requires implementing specific instruments that go beyond classic industrial policy measures; these instruments need not be new, but they must be adapted to fit a green industrial policy.

Also, drawing on previous studies on industrial policy, Lucchese and Pianta (2020) argue that a more ambitious industrial strategy for Europe is essential to develop a combined set of policies that steer Europe's investments towards environmentally sustainable activities, manage structural change and ensure equity of economic outcomes across countries and regions (a perspective also shared in the studies of Pollin (2017) and Pettifor (2019)). The green transition of the industrial sector will entail a reorganization of institutions and their governance, as well as of production and technological processes, and even of technologies themselves, which will represent a real challenge at the level of the EU and its Member States - as Rodrik (2014) has pointed out, "the challenge of climate change directly affects the basic structure of national economies and places industrial policy squarely on the policy agenda of governments".

Another important point concerns the institutional dimension and governance. According to Laponche (2021), the effectiveness of green industrial policy depends on the capacity of European institutions to coordinate transnational actions, harmonise environmental standards, and mobilise both the public and private sectors. However, critics highlight the risks of "greenwashing" and the fragility of implementation, especially in Member States with low institutional capacities (Van den Bergh, 2020).

Finally, emerging literature emphasises the socio-economic impact of the green transition. Empirical studies suggest that green industrial policies can generate new business and employment opportunities, but can also increase tensions in traditional labour markets (Fankhauser et al., 2021). Critical perspectives warn of the need for a

balance between climate ambitions and social coherence to prevent polarisation and inequality (Böhringer & Rutherford, 2022).

A distinct dimension of this literature is discourse analysis, which explores how public policies are formulated, legitimised, and communicated. Discourse analyses on EGD reveal that the EU's institutional discourse favours the legitimisation of sustainability in political terms, but can overwhelm or even contradict critical social science perspectives on sustainability (Eckert & Kovalevska, 2021). Thus, key elements such as "climate neutrality" or "green transition", "net-zero industry", become discursive tools that shape the policy framework, but also public and academic perceptions of what an effective green industrial policy entails.

The importance of discourse analysis in this field stems from its ability to identify the conflict between traditional economic narratives — focused on competitiveness — and ecological narratives — oriented towards sustainability — and to highlight the role of political actors, institutions, and interests that shape policy formulation and implementation (Eckert & Kovalevska, 2021). Thus, contemporary literature suggests that a truly "green" version of EU industrial policy is not merely a set of economic measures but a discursive and institutional device that negotiates economic, technological, and ecological priorities in a complex geopolitical context. Overall, the literature provides a robust analytical framework for understanding green industrial policy as a multidimensional process: combining classical industrial theories with the objectives of the ecological transition and using methodological tools such as discourse analysis to decipher not only what policies are promoted, but also how they are constructed and their legitimacy in public and institutional discourse.

3. DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

This research uses a qualitative strategy, drawing on methods such as document and discourse analysis, to examine the evolution of the European Union's strategic framework for industrial policy between 2021 and 2025. The study is based on the comparative analysis of three official documents of the European Commission: The updated EU Industrial Strategy (2021), the Green Deal Industrial Plan (2023), and the Clean Industrial Deal (2025).

Document analysis examines the normative content, stated objectives, proposed instruments, and thematic priorities. According to Bowen (2009), document analysis is a systematic method for reviewing and interpreting official documents, enabling the identification of recurring themes and the conceptual framework of public policies. Procedurally, the analysis included identifying dominant themes (e.g., transition, green industry, competitiveness, resilience, net-zero, strategic autonomy); coding key terms; comparing the structures of policy objectives and instruments; and identifying changes in priorities across documents. The analysis was guided by the literature on paradigmatic shifts in public policies (Hall, 1993), looking at whether the documents indicate incremental adjustments or paradigmatic transformations in European industrial policy.

To capture the symbolic and rhetorical dimensions of industrial policy, the research draws on elements of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and on the model used by Eckert and Kovalevska (2021), which analyses the Green Deal discourse through the lens of sustainability and the narrative construction of transition.

Critical discourse analysis is a research strategy designed to reveal its "hidden" agenda and objectives and to identify the themes around which a topic is built, as well as those it avoids. In the current scientific approach, the analysis has become a way of

discovering what the new industrial policy implied when it was established as a political program by the European Commission. The analysis was mainly directed at the language addressed in the main documents on industrial policy, examining the content of the first industrial policy strategy, the post-strategy industrial plan, and the Clean Industry Pact, respectively, through phraseology, concepts, keywords and sentence patterns. Particular attention was paid to the phrases introduced to industry-related concepts, the registers that feed the content, and the style used to represent it. A series of keywords was identified and quantified, together with their contexts, assuming that any text can be characterised by its key linguistic units (cf. Eckert and Kovalevska, 2021; Stubbs, 2001; Fidler & Václav, 2018). The distribution of grammatical structures was analysed, and recurrent verbs, noun phrases, patterns and sentence constructions that mark the agents of specific actions were observed. The linguistic research falls within studies of critical linguistics and discourse analysis (Cohen, 2010; Fairclough, 2001; Nichols, 2007; van Dijk, 2008) and is based on recent research on discourse in the green industry. Also, following the model of Eckert and Kovalevska, textual analyses (including percentage counts of grammatical patterns, influence, and other textual features) and word category analyses were performed to identify words associated with certain concepts. After analyzing the text of SI, GDIP and CID, the most relevant results were manually selected, which allowed to outline a picture of how the key theme of the European future in relation to green industry was presented and developed in the documents, what were the critical concepts supporting it and in what ways its content opened the way to a reflection on the concept of net-zero industry.

The discursive analysis focused on the following dimensions:

a) Keywords and semantic fields: identifying the frequency and centrality of concepts such as "industry", "clean", "resilience", "net-zero", "competitiveness", "green", etc. These were analysed as indicators of the dominant regulatory framework.

b) Dominant message and narrative: it was observed whether the documents build a narrative of climate emergency, a narrative of economic opportunity, or a narrative of protecting European industry.

c) In the sense proposed by Hajer (1995), the analysis aimed at how the discourse creates "storylines" capable of coagulating political consensus.

d) Language and rhetoric: the type of language used was analysed: technocratic, mobilising, pragmatic, defensive.

e) Addressing and target audience: the analysis assessed to whom the discourse is addressed: industrial actors, investors, Member States, and European citizens. This dimension is relevant in the framework of discursive institutionalism, where legitimacy depends on the capacity of the discourse to build coherence between the ideational and institutional levels (Schmidt, 2008).

Combining document analysis with discourse analysis is appropriate for the study of green industrial policy, as it is not only a set of economic instruments, but also a normative project of societal transformation. The literature shows that climate and industrial policies are strongly dependent on discursive legitimacy and the capacity to build narrative consensus (Eckert & Kovalevska, 2021; Schmidt, 2008). Therefore, the adopted methodology allows the capture of both the material dimension (instruments, financing, regulation) and the symbolic dimension (narratives, legitimacy, strategic framing).

4. DATA ANALYSIS

In recent years, the European Union has progressively revised its industrial policy framework to respond simultaneously to the global challenges of competitiveness, climate change and economic security. From the 2021 update of the Industrial Strategy, continuing with the Green Deal Industrial Plan (2023) and culminating in the Clean Industrial Deal (2025), the EU's industrial policy reflects a dynamic discourse, combining environmental objectives with concerns for economic resilience. This section summarises the main features of these documents. It provides an analysis from a discourse perspective, examining key words, dominant messages, rhetoric, and the way the target audience is addressed.

Context and objectives of the EU Industrial Strategy (2021)

The European Union Industrial Strategy updated in May 2021 reflects the institutional response to recent crises – in particular the COVID-19 pandemic – and aims to transform European industry into a driver of sustainable growth, innovation and competitiveness in a globalised economy (European Commission, 2021). The updated document highlights the need to accelerate the green and digital transitions, strengthen the resilience of the internal market, and reduce strategic global dependencies (e.g., in raw materials and technology), while also supporting small and medium-sized enterprises, which are essential for European industrial dynamics.

The main themes of the strategy include: resilience and strategic autonomy – reducing vulnerabilities to disruptions in global supply chains; green and digital transition – technological transformation of traditional industries; global competitiveness – supporting innovation and financial support measures for key industrial ecosystems; addressing recent crises – the pandemic and economic disruptions have highlighted the need for proactive industrial policies (European Commission, 2021).

This initial strategic framework serves as the conceptual basis for later, more specific plans for decarbonisation and industrial competitiveness. The strategy document reflects a vision that combines traditional economic objectives (increasing competitiveness) with new sustainability imperatives, thus providing a framework for reindustrialisation in a sustainable manner.

The 2021 strategy is descriptive and adaptive, focusing on lessons learned from the crisis and prioritising industrial policies aligned with the EGD and digitalisation objectives. It can be noted, however, that the emphasis on resilience can be vague, without specific implementation and measurement tools.

The language of the 2021 EU industrial strategies is normative-programmatic, focused on terms such as "resilience", "competitiveness", and "digital and green transition". The dominant message is one of balance between ecological transformation and economic modernisation, addressed primarily to public decision-makers and strategic economic actors in the EU. According to the literature on European industrial policy, this alignment reflects global trends in modern industrial policies, combining sustainability objectives with traditional economic imperatives (Oehler-Șincai, 2022).

Green Deal Industrial Plan (2023): focus on net-zero technologies

The Green Deal Industrial Plan, launched in 2023, introduces a more specific instrument to accelerate the industrial transformation towards climate neutrality. The Green Deal Industrial Plan has a clearer mandate focused on the net-zero industrial transition and on strengthening production capacity for clean technologies. The document highlights four essential "pillars" for increasing competitiveness in the net-zero technology sector: a predictable, simplified regulatory framework, rapid access to

finance, skills development, and resilient supply chains. Key components include: simpler regulations to reduce administrative burden and accelerate project implementation; financing and support for scale-up in clean tech sectors; addressing skills through education and training; opening up external markets and resilient supply chains (e.g. critical raw materials).

The message of the plan is very similar to that of the 2021 Strategy. However, it emphasises the role of net-zero technologies as a competitive advantage and not just a regulatory challenge. The European Commission sees this plan as a "once-in-a-generation opportunity" to position European industry at the forefront of net-zero technologies, while supporting job creation and innovation (European Commission, 2023).

The distinctive element of this plan is the proactive orientation towards the industrialisation of clean technologies, in the context of intense global competition, for example with the United States and China (through measures such as the Net-Zero Industry Act and the Critical Raw Materials Act). However, the literature is divided on the effectiveness of the instruments and the risks associated with excessive deregulation in practice. Critics argue that there are tensions between the simplification of regulations and the demands of sustainability, especially for SMEs (Financial Times, 2024).

The language of the GDIP is much more ambitious and visionary than that of the 2021 strategy. Terms such as "global leadership", "green tech revolution", and "scaling up" reflect not only a commitment to sustainability but also to strengthening the EU's position on the world stage. The message is built around the idea that sustainability and industrial competitiveness are not contradictory, but complementary – a rhetoric frequently analysed in the literature on industrial transformation strategies (Eckert & Kovalevska, 2021). This approach is likely to appeal to technology companies and investors, emphasising "economic opportunity" rather than just "moral obligation".

Clean Industrial Deal (2025): from strategy to concrete measures

In February 2025, the European Commission adopted the Clean Industrial Deal, a more detailed and practical plan for industrial transformation, with a strong focus on competitiveness, decarbonisation, affordable energy and financing (European Commission, 2025).

Key elements include: access to cheaper energy and the acceleration of clean energy; stimulating demand for clean products (including public and private procurement criteria); dedicated financing – a new state aid framework, a potential "industrial decarbonisation bank" and budgetary provisions of over €100 billion; circularity and access to critical materials; developing skills and quality jobs; reducing bureaucracy and increasing coordination between political levels. CID is often presented as a "growth engine" and a response to global competitive challenges – especially from China and the United States – but also as a tool to turn decarbonization into a strategic advantage (Reuters, 2025).

Compared to the Green Deal Industrial Plan, the CID places a more explicit emphasis on: global competitiveness (e.g. significant financial support and local procurement criteria), affordable energy as an economic foundation for the competitiveness of European industries, financing innovation and accelerating technological deployment.

Independent evaluations point to the challenges of rapid adoption, the fragmentation of national policies, and the risk that some measures benefit polluting industries without strict controls. Civil society and environmental experts have raised

concerns about the dilution of reporting requirements and the possible maintenance of fossil fuel dependency in certain segments.

The CID discourse combines pragmatic economic elements with green themes, but places greater emphasis on "global competitiveness", "affordable energy costs", and "support for traditional industries". The language tends to be more instrumental than that of the GDIP, addressing not only eco-innovators but also traditional sectors of the European economy facing severe competitive pressures. This shift reflects a rhetorical adjustment towards a wider audience, including traditional economic actors and regions with energy-intensive industries. Journalistic analyses indicate a tense discourse between maintaining climate goals and regulatory concessions for heavy industry sectors (The Guardian, 2025).

The evolution of the discourse on industrial policy

For an analysis of the discourse on the axes of keywords, language, message and rhetoric, we can identify recurring elements:

i. Keywords and meanings

- Competitiveness – appears constantly in all documents, emphasising the EU's ability to compete on the global stage (European Commission, 2021;2023; 2025).
- Decarbonization / clean energy / net-zero – symbolises not only a climate target, but also a driver of innovation and economic growth in the political discourse (European Commission, 2021;2023; 2025).
- Circularity – appears as an integral part of the "clean economy" and long-term competitiveness (European Commission, 2021;2023; 2025).
- Resilience – this concept acts as a link between the lessons of recent crises and the need for industrial policy adaptation (European Commission, 2021;2023; 2025).

ii. Language and rhetoric

The EU's official discourse presents a positive, solution-oriented rhetoric, using terms such as "growth", "prosperity", "quality jobs" and "innovation". The CID plan, for example, emphasises that decarbonisation is not just a regulatory obligation but an "engine for growth" and a means of creating conditions for economic prosperity (European Commission, 2025). Similarly, the 2021 and 2023 plans emphasise both economic resilience and structural transformations, reflecting a rhetoric aimed at reducing negative perceptions of technological change and building consensus on the "green component" of industry.

iii. Addressing and targeting

The discourse is aimed at multiple audiences:

- national governments – through support in implementation;
- economic actors/industry – through promises of financing and simplified regulatory framework;
- the general public/citizens – through promises of quality jobs and cheaper energy;
- external partners – through emphasis on global competitiveness and strategic autonomy.

The evolution from the Industrial Strategy 2021 to the Green Deal Plan 2023 and the Clean Industrial Deal 2025 shows a coherence in the vision of industrial transformation, but also a "maturation" of the policy instruments – from general strategic guidelines, to concrete financial measures and regulation. The EU's political discourse is

based on a dual rhetoric: combining the commitment to climate neutrality with the need to protect and develop the competitiveness of European industry in an increasingly challenging global environment.

For each of the three strategies analyzed, certain semantic and communication features are highlighted (see table 1).

Table 1 Keywords and language

Aspect	**2021 (Strategia UE)**	**2023 (GDIP)**	**2025 (CID)**
Keywords	resilience, digital, green, competitiveness	net-zero, green tech, leadership, scale up	clean, competitiveness, energy costs, decarbonization
Dominant message	balance between sustainability and economic growth	rapid and global industrial transformation	pragmatic support for industry and decarbonization
Language	programmatic/formative	visionary/ambitious	pragmatic/strategic
Public address	policymakers and industry	cleantech companies, investors, innovators	traditional sectors and energy-intensive economies

Source: authors' design, based on European Commision, 2021; European Commision, 2023; European Commision, 2025.

The comparative analysis highlights a discursive evolution from structural and generalist priorities (2021), towards an explicit language oriented towards clean technologies and global leadership (2023), and then towards a more balanced discourse between green and industrial (2025). This evolution reflects changes in the geopolitical and economic context, as well as the EU's internal pressures to maintain cohesion among its members.

Messages, rhetoric, discourse

For the discursive analysis, the literature on the political discourse of sustainability and the narrative construction of the green transition is relevant (Hajer, 1995; Eckert & Kovalevska, 2021). Eckert and Kovalevska (2021) show that the Green Deal discourse is based on three dominant elements: (1) the narrative of climate emergency; (2) the promise of green economic growth; (3) consensus building through inclusive and technocratic language.

Applying this grid to the three documents, a clear evolution is observed: Strategy 2021 builds a balanced narrative between the traditional economy and emerging transitions, using a relatively neutral and technical vocabulary. Green Deal Industrial Plan 2023 combines aspirational language ("Net-Zero Industry", "lead the clean tech revolution") with a pragmatic message about reducing barriers and accelerating investments. Clean Industrial Deal 2025 adopts a "business plan" rhetoric for industry, emphasising increased competitiveness alongside decarbonization, reflecting a hybrid discourse: ecological and pro-business.

The discursive analysis suggests an evolution from a theoretical and structural language (Strategy, 2021), to a more instrumental and implementation-oriented vocabulary (Green Deal Industrial Plan), culminating in a rhetoric in 2025 that integrates

immediate economic reasons (costs, competitiveness) alongside nominal environmental concerns. This evolution can be interpreted either as a response to external constraints (market, geopolitics) or as an adaptation of the political discourse towards a broad industrial audience. Compared with the Industrial Strategy (2021), the Green Deal Industrial Plan (2023) offers ambitious directions towards clean technologies, and the Clean Industrial Deal (2025) translates these directions into a pragmatic set of measures for competitiveness and decarbonization. The discursive analysis shows an increase in emphasis on economic competitiveness, while the commitment to sustainability remains, but is adapted to the real constraints of European industry.

Industrial Strategy 2021 – the discourse of resilience

Discursively, the Strategy 2021 is marked by:

- technocratic vocabulary ("ecosystems", "value chains", "financial instruments")
- call for post-pandemic "resilience"
- emphasis on "open strategic autonomy"

The rhetoric is moderate and consensual. It is not the climate crisis narrative that dominates, but that of economic vulnerability. Applying Hajer's (1995) terms, the document builds a broad discursive coalition while avoiding polarisation. Sustainability is integrated, but not radicalized.

This strategy corresponds to a phase of paradigmatic consolidation, in which legitimacy is built through balance and technical rationality

Green Deal Industrial Plan 2023 – the transformative discourse

GDIP marks a change in tone. Terms such as:

- "net-zero"
- "global leadership"
- "green industrial revolution"
- "acceleration"

The discourse becomes more mobilizing and strategic. According to Eckert and Kovalevska (2021), this type of language produces a "normalizing radical transformation" effect – systemic change is presented as inevitable and opportunistic.

A double rhetorical strategy is observed:

1. Urgency – the transition must be accelerated;
2. Opportunism – the transition generates competitive advantages.

This combination reflects what the literature calls the "ecological modernisation narrative" (Mol & Spaargaren, 2000): environmental protection is compatible with economic growth. However, from a critical perspective, this rhetoric can minimise redistributive conflicts and social costs of the transition (Blyth, 2002).

Clean Industrial Deal (2025). – the discourse of reconciliation

The CID introduces a more balanced, even defensive, discourse. Dominant terms:

- "affordable energy costs"
- "energy-intensive industries"
- "global competitiveness"
- "quality jobs"

The emphasis shifts from green leadership to maintaining the industrial base. The rhetoric is more pragmatic and more oriented towards economic cohesion. In a theoretical key, the CID can be interpreted as a discursive recalibration strategy (Schmidt, 2008), through which the Commission adapts the narrative to maintain political legitimacy in a tense geopolitical context.

Compared to the GDIP, the CID language is less idealistic and more oriented towards "transition management" than towards "revolutionary transformation".

The evolution of the three documents can be summarised as follows:

• 2021: technocratic stabilization discourse;
• 2023: transformative and mobilizing discourse;
• 2025: pragmatic discourse of reconciliation;

This dynamic reflects what the literature on public policies calls "adaptive policy framing" (Schmidt, 2008): adjusting the narrative framework to respond to external changes (energy crises, global competition, internal pressures).

At the same time, a tension is observed between two paradigms: the "green transformation" paradigm and the "industrial competitiveness" paradigm, within which the EU seeks to discursively integrate them. Still, the balance between them changes over time.

"Net-zero industry" – Phrases and keywords used in industry communications

According to Cohen (2010), keyword analysis extracts the predominant concepts reported to a reference point. To evaluate the keywords relevant to "green industry", following the model applied by Cohen in another field, thirty keywords of the Industrial Strategy (2021), the GDIP Communication, respectively the CID, were quantified, their context was considered, and then the first ten were chosen, which proved to be predominant. In descending order, the keywords identified in the tables (see table 2, table 3, table 4), are followed by the number of occurrences within the text, and by their percentage, by a report on the total number of words. Given that the total number of words of each document, the percentage was calculated by multiplying the number of occurrences by one hundred and dividing the result by the total number of words.

The most frequent and repeated words were: industry/industrial; net-zero; green; clean, energy; technology/technologies/technological; qualification/requalification; plan(s); development/in development; trade; transition; investments; economy/economic; financing.

Table 2. Keywords associated with the green transition – A new Industrial Strategy for Europe (2021)

Keywords	Frequency	Percentage
Industry	92	1,06%
Technology	38	0,43%
Transition	34	0,39%
Investment	31	0,35%
Economy/economic	27	0,31%
Competitiveness	27	0,31%
Green	25	0,28%
Sustainable/sustainability	22	0,25%
Plan	20	0,23%
Development	19	0,21%

Source: Authors' design, based on European Commission, 2021; Butișcă, 2023.

The new industrial strategy (2021) relies on the fact that EU industry must play a leading role in achieving the climate neutrality objective: "European industry must play a leading role in the ecological transition", "this strategy lays the foundations for an industrial policy that will support the twin transition, make EU industry more competitive globally and strengthen Europe's strategic autonomy", etc. The industrial strategy also relies on "net-zero technologies" presented as "disruptive technologies", "qualification", "innovation" or "competition". The strategy identifies broad objectives (e.g. open strategic autonomy), but the concrete implementation mechanisms are not always clearly explained, which risks leaving interpretation at the political or technocratic level. This observation reflects Eckert and Kovalevska's (2021) idea that discourse can have performative value — to influence perception and legitimize institutions — without guaranteeing real transformations.

Table 3. Keywords associated with the transition to green industry – GDIP (2023)

Keywords	Frequency	Percentage
Industry/industrial	85	0,81%
Net-zero	82	0,78%
Green	74	0,70%
Energy	68	0,64%
Technology/ technologies/technologic	63	0,60%
Qualification/re-qualification	58	0,55%
Plan(s)	47	0,44%
Development/ developing	46	0,43%
Transition	45	0,42%
Clean	30	0,28%

Source: Authors' design, based on European Commission, 2021; Butișcă, 2023.

In the case of GDIP, the word "industry/industrial" appeared 85 times (0.81%), especially in established expressions such as "net-zero industry", "European industry", "green industry", "industrial transformation", "industrial revolution", etc. "net-zero" was also extremely frequent (it appeared 82 times, at a percentage of 0.78%), especially in expressions such as: "net-zero industry", "net-zero technologies", "net-zero products", "net-zero economy", etc. The words "green", "energy", "technologies", "qualification/requalification" (presented in the context of the green, just transition that leaves no one behind) were also very frequent. Judging by the number of words and the meaning of certain established expressions, the most important themes of the "net-zero industry" turned out to be "transition", "transformation", "challenge", "plan", "measure", "regulation" or "technological change", which supported meanings associated not only with the industry but also with the economic sector and the business environment.

A distinct topic of the GDIP register, and particularly addressed within the PEE (which, as mentioned, underpins the GDIP), is that of "economic transformation/growth" ("the economic shape of the net-zero era will be firmly established"), which conceptually stands in the way of the sustainability that the EU is pursuing.

Other meanings of the keywords were adjusted similarly, for example, "economy" became "green", "clean", and "circular", to be implemented through a "new circular economy action plan".

Table 4: Keywords associated with the green transition – CID (2025)

Keywords	Frequency	Percentage
Clean	107	0,85%
Industry	83	0,66%
Investment	62	0,49%
Economy/economic	56	0,44%
Transition	50	0,39%
Technology	48	0,38%
Circular	40	0,31%
Competitiveness	35	0,27%
Resilient	24	0,19%
Green	9	0,07%

Source: Authors' design, based on European Commission, 2025.

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As for the CID, the keyword is "clean", which appears in the text of the 107th Communication, in structures such as "clean industry", "clean energy", "clean production", "clean transition", "clean technology", etc. The CID uses terms such as "clean", "competitive", "circular" and "resilience" — a vocabulary similar to that of the EGD — which can be interpreted more as a rhetorical framework for political legitimisation than as a guarantee of actual results. The emphasis on economic growth and competitiveness (at the same time as environmental terms) may favour the maintenance of the existing economic structure over a fundamental change in the mode of production and consumption — a structural tension that critics of the EGD have already highlighted.

5. DISCUSSION

Between 2021 and 2025, the European Union's institutional discourse on industrial policy has evolved significantly, reflecting major geopolitical, economic, and climate changes: the COVID-19 pandemic, the energy crisis generated by the war in Ukraine, global industrial competition (USA–China), and the acceleration of the green transition. The comparative analysis of the updated Industrial Strategy (2021), the Green Deal Industrial Plan (2023) and the Clean Industrial Deal (2025) highlight a gradual transformation of the discursive framework – from a predominantly technocratic-structural narrative to a pragmatic-competitive one, with transformative-strategic accents.

Starting from the discursive perspective proposed by Eckert and Kovalevska (2021), which emphasises the role of institutional language in building legitimacy and configuring the political agenda, the present analysis examines: (1) the modification of keywords and semantic associations, (2) the reconfiguration of dominant narratives, and (3) the type of legitimacy constructed through discourse.

The political communication of the European Union's industrial strategies constitutes a complex field, in which European institutions not only announce policies but also construct a political discourse aimed at mobilising public support, consolidating institutional legitimacy, and positioning the EU as a global actor. This communication is

not limited to the transmission of information, but includes the semantic construction of key concepts, such as "competitiveness", "climate neutrality", "green and digital transition" or "global leadership".

In 2021, the EU Industrial Strategy, updated after the COVID-19 pandemic, strengthened the objectives of global competitiveness, internal market resilience, and strategic autonomy, emphasising the dual objectives of the green and digital transitions.¬ Subsequently, in 2023 and 2025, the EU introduced two major communications, the Green Deal Industrial Plan and the Clean Industrial Deal, which transform these objectives into concrete policies, communicating a proactive vision of European industrial transformation.

A central element of political communication is the selection and repetition of certain terms, which create thematic frames through which the public shapes the understanding of political reality.

For the Industrial Strategy 2021, frequent terms include “strategic autonomy”, “internal market”, “value chains”, “green and digital transition”, “SMEs”, “industrial ecosystems”, “competitiveness”, “innovation”, “resilience” and “quality jobs”. These are used to connect the EU economy to social values and to the European project as such. The discourse builds a semantic network centred on the idea of internal consolidation and systemic protection. “Strategic autonomy” is consistently associated with “openness”, avoiding protectionist connotations and positioning the EU as a balanced actor in a globalised economy.

The main narrative is one of structural recovery and consolidation after the pandemic crisis. European industry is presented as the foundation of prosperity and green transition, but the emphasis is on systemic adaptive capacity.

The rhetoric behind the Industrial Strategy emphasises technical formulations; frequent nominalisations (“competitiveness”, “diversification”, “digitalisation”); modal verbs (“must”, “shall strengthen”, “shall support”); language of systemic management.

The central actor is the EU as a guarantor of stability, and the type of legitimacy is predominantly technocratic (Scharpf, 1999). Legitimacy is based on institutional expertise, economic analysis, strategic coordination, and public policy instruments. The discourse conveys the idea that the EU knows how to manage global complexity. Power is justified by competence. The 2021 discourse mainly builds a technocratic legitimacy: the use of dense, conceptualised language; the predominance of nominalisations (“digitalisation”, “integration”, “diversification”); the centrality of expertise and the normative framework. The EU institutions present themselves as the architects of structural stability, and legitimacy derives from technical competence and coordination capacity.

In the Green Deal Industrial Plan (2023), the discourse emphasizes “net-zero technologies”, “clean technologies”, “acceleration”, “simplification”, “investment”, “global leadership”, “competition”, “clean energy”, “quality jobs”, “access to finance”, “simplified framework” and “global leadership in clean technologies”. Thus, a positive narrative is built, oriented towards economic opportunities and structural transformation. The technical terms of 2021 are partially replaced by a vocabulary more oriented towards action and urgency. Dynamic verbs (“to accelerate”, “to boost”, “to strengthen”) become more frequent.

The rhetoric behind the GDIP focuses on: more mobilising energy; a call for urgency (“race to net-zero”); combining climate language with that of the market; the

constant association between “decarbonization” and “growth”; and the idea of “Europe will lead the global transition”.

The narrative becomes one of geopolitical opportunity. The green transition is no longer just a climate necessity, but a strategic opportunity for global repositioning. The discourse creates a direct link between decarbonization and industrial competitiveness. Thus, the Green Deal Industrial Plan transforms the climate agenda into an offensive industrial project.

Regarding the type of legitimacy: transformative + technocratic (Burns, 1978; Scharpf, 1999) - the discourse does not just administer reality; it redefines it. Legitimacy derives from: the EU's capacity to transform the economy; the historical mission of the climate transition; the discourse evokes the future ("future-proof economy", "next generation industries"); the moral role of Europe in combating climate change. A normative identity is built: Europe as a responsible and visionary actor.

In the Clean Industrial Deal (2025), the communication shifts the focus to terms such as "clean industry", "decarbonization", "low energy costs", "global competition", "circularity", "€100 billion financing" and "competitive industrial ecosystem".

The dominant narrative becomes one of economic realism. The green transition is maintained, but integrated into a discourse about burden reduction, investment stability, and immediate global competitiveness.

The rhetoric is less idealistic and more oriented towards concrete solutions. The CID rhetoric envisages a more direct language; less idealistic rhetoric; emphasis on “feasibility”, “implementation”, “concrete instruments”; frequent combination of the terms “clean” + “competitive”. A reduction in the symbolic dimension and an increase in the instrumental dimension are observed. The type of legitimacy is pragmatic (Sabel & Zeitlin, 2010), and economic efficiency, measurable results, the protection of European industry, and a response to global competition justify power. It is no longer just about vision or expertise, but the capacity to deliver tangible results. EU institutions legitimise their actions through the capacity to produce tangible results in a competitive environment.

An adaptive discursive dynamic is observed: from internal consolidation (2021), to strategic mobilisation (2023), to competitive realism (2025).

In the terms of Eckert and Kovalevska (2021), this evolution demonstrates how institutional discourse functions as a tool for adjusting legitimacy according to context. Language is not neutral; it shapes perceptions of priorities and redefines the EU's role in the global economic order.

The communication of these policies is structured on several levels of address:

a) Political and institutional leadership:

The speeches are often anchored by statements from the President of the European Commission or other leaders, who position the initiatives as expressions of “European leadership” in the industrial and climate transition. The messages emphasise the EU’s role as a global leader in clean technologies and innovation, trying to create political and emotional legitimacy around these projects.

b) Multiple addresses:

The target audience is diverse: from Member States and international partners, to private industry, civil society and citizens. Terms such as “quality jobs”, “financing”, and “investment opportunities” are used to generate cross-cutting support.

c) Consensus mobilisation:

The communication includes calls for institutional and social cooperation, reflecting not only a persuasive technique, but also a semi-normative framework of European public dialogue, in which the emphasis is on consensus and co-construction.

The discursive style of official EU communications is generally formal, technical and prescriptive, characterised by: complex sentences with multiple subordinate clauses linking strategic objectives to concrete actions; modal and intention verbs ("must", "will support", "will promote"), which communicate both commitments and future directions; frequent use of nominalisations (e.g. "competitiveness", "decarbonisation", "financing") to focus the discourse on concepts rather than actors. This creates a dense, abstract symbolic register that favours institutional authority.

This style is effective for official policy documents, but can create obstacles to the accessibility of communication and direct engagement with the general public.

Eckert & Kovalevska (2021) provide a critical framework for discursive analysis that reveals how political discourse, through the choice of certain terms, lexicon, and structures, legitimises institutional power and shapes the agenda. The authors show that, in the case of the European Green Deal, the discourse emphasises the EU as an expert and leader, using a technical language that can distance the general public. Applying this perspective to industrial strategies, we can similarly observe that the discourses of these communications: construct the EU as a central and legitimate actor in the industrial, ecological and digital transitions; create strong connections between economic competitiveness and climate policies, which can hide tensions between social/participatory objectives and economic logic; use a technical register that can reflect institutional orientations rather than the immediate needs of citizens.

The keywords mentioned above are frequently associated in the EU discourse to form positive metaframes: "green transition" + "economic opportunities", "global competitiveness" + "innovation and jobs", "decarbonization" + "sustainable growth".

These associations contribute to a narrative in which sustainability is integral to economic progress, and they also reflect the academic critique of the "ecological modernisation discourse" — a dominant way of expressing environmental policies through the lens of the market and technology.

Words, phrases, metaphors, and sentence patterns mediate intended messages, aiming to highlight or marginalise a subject, emphasise or marginalise an agenda, and gain the trust of the audience (Stubbs, 2001). Naming central concepts for a subject, relexicalizing words, giving them innovative meanings, and using euphemisms are strategies for improving a certain social reality (Stubbs, 2001). Moreover, the constant repetition of phraseological patterns and collocations prioritises and fixes meanings in the minds of speakers and establishes habits that lead to thinking about certain problems.

Linguistic analysis shows that the EU has constructed a discourse on "net-zero industry" and has used certain keywords, established expressions and grammatical patterns to support its traditional agenda and prioritise certain familiar topics (Butișcă, 2023). Communication does not deviate from these in any major direction; as a result, the transition of the industrial sector remains a key topic that must be discussed in Europe by the institutions of power that mediate knowledge and seek to position readers to support it. By doing so, the EU promotes its "hegemony" and controls the public discourse and, implicitly, the "consumers" of the discourse. Given the current power structure, it will be difficult for the EU to manage these topics, despite the revolutionary approach to industrial policy. The results clearly show that it has opted for the language of business, institutional diplomacy, and language specific to economic or technological

fields to communicate to the public the future of the net-zero industry (Butișcă, 2023). Linguistic analysis highlighted that the established expressions, concepts, keywords and grammatical patterns of the register supported the traditional agenda of supporting the EU as a coordinating institution (Butișcă, 2023). The complexity of the lexicon, the lack of clarity in the transfer of meanings and the ambiguity support the institutional/administrative character, rather than the public character of the communication. The choice of words, established phrases, metaphors, and sentence patterns mediated the intended messages of communication, highlighted or avoided topics or agendas, and helped gain the trust of the audience (Butișcă, 2023). Naming the central concepts of the topic, relexicalizing familiar words by endowing them with innovative meanings, and using euphemisms were also strategies used to improve a particular social reality.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The research aimed to identify how the EU is redefining industrial policy in a context marked by the tension between climate ambition and economic and geopolitical constraints.

Answering the first research question, the EU's industrial policy from 2021 to 2025 reflects a complex discursive and strategic trajectory in which sustainability and economic competitiveness priorities intertwine and redefine one another. The 2021 Industrial Strategy laid the foundations for the twin transition, the 2023 GDIP pushed for net-zero ambitions and international leadership in clean technologies, and the 2025 CID adopts a more pragmatic tone, addressing both traditional and emerging industries. From a discursive perspective, the language evolves from normative to visionary and then to strategic, adapting to a diverse audience – from institutions and innovators to traditional industrial sectors. The 2021 discourse reflects this positioning by using a technocratic language and is oriented towards "industrial ecosystems", "resilience" and "strategic autonomy". In the logic of public policy theory (Howlett & Ramesh, 2003), the document operates at the level of a "policy paradigm shift", reconfiguring the objectives of industrial intervention from purely economic competitiveness towards sustainable structural transformation. The Green Deal Industrial Plan (2023) radicalises this approach, approaching the "transformative industrial policy" model described in the literature on socio-technical transitions (Weber & Rohracher, 2012). The "net-zero industry" discourse introduces an explicitly normative dimension: not just modernisation, but the reconfiguration of energy and productive systems. The Clean Industrial Deal (2025), on the other hand, seems to rebalance the paradigm towards a more pragmatic approach, close to the concept of "embedded autonomy" (Evans, 1995): the state maintains the strategic direction, but adapts the instruments to maintain the support of traditional industrial actors.

In response to the second research question, the comparative and discursive analysis highlights that the EU industrial policy between 2021 and 2025 is not just an evolution of instruments, but a transformation of the narrative framework. The 2021 Strategy consolidates the double transition in a technocratic and consensual framework. The GDIP radicalises ambition, using a mobilising and strategic language. The CID introduces a pragmatic dimension, reconciling climate objectives with industrial realities. The political discourse of European industrial policy between 2021 and 2025 is not static, but reflects a continuous strategic recalibration. If the 2021 Industrial Strategy consolidates a technocratic legitimacy based on expertise and coordination, the Green

Deal Industrial Plan introduces a transformative legitimacy, centred on global leadership and structural change. Finally, the Clean Industrial Deal crystallises a pragmatic legitimacy, anchored in efficiency, competitiveness and immediate economic results. Thus, the EU institutional discourse is evolving from a predominantly administrative model to a strategic-mobilising one and subsequently to a pragmatic-economic register, demonstrating the capacity of political communication to adapt sources of legitimacy according to historical context and systemic pressures.

The transition to a climate-neutral industry will therefore be a defining task. The challenges are numerous, but they also bring opportunities for growth and efficiency through synergies with industry, the development of innovation hubs, and global leadership. The efforts led by EU industry have been vast so far. However, their continuation will require a dynamic EU industrial policy, comprising an ambitious industrial strategy, together with a mission-oriented EEP that supports and multiplies industry's efforts. A successful industrial transition in the EU would not only provide a credible path for the rest of the world. However, it would also make a historic contribution to the global fight against climate change.

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