

From Manifestos to Reality: Environmental Policy Implementation in Serbia amidst EU Accession

By
Alina Garipova

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Supervisor: **Evelyne Patricia Hübscher**

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Author's declaration

I, the undersigned, Alina Garipova, candidate for Master of Public Administration, declare herewith that the present thesis is exclusively my own work, based on my research.

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Date: 01 June 2024

Name (printed): Alina Garipova

Signature:



Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to evaluate the fulfilment of environmental commitments made by leading political parties in Serbia and assess the extent to which the EU's accession process has impacted the adoption of environmental policies. Applying the responsible party model and the external incentives model, this thesis provides an analysis of party manifestos and EU accession process documents in the period from 2008 to 2023. The paper reveals that while there is a decreasing environmental pledge-making by the main parties, the fulfilment of existing pledges remains high. The EU's impact on pledges is especially evident during the initial period of analysis, coinciding with Serbia's attainment of candidate status. Still, even if the EU's role has become less visible in pledges in later stages, the cooperation in the environmental sector has persisted. Overall, the analysis reveals a complex interplay of domestic and external pressures from the EU, highlighting the significance of ongoing EU involvement.

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Introduction

As part of their electoral strategy, political parties make pledges which inform the voters about party intentions if they are to be elected. Pledge-making allows to hold parties accountable as it is possible to assess whether the voters were actually provided with the policies they voted for (Vestergaard 2020). Pledges are usually included in the party manifestos and may concern a broad spectrum of issues: economy, health, corruption, environment, etc.

For the countries with strong domestic aspirations to join the European Union, it is usually visible that all the major political actors are devoting efforts to show commitment to the accession process. The process is multidimensional and one of the important sets of reforms is related to environment and climate change. Thus, the efforts may start to be reflected in the form of inclusion of environmental pledges in the manifestos of the parties expecting to form the government and end with the actual implementation of the EU recommendations.

Environmental protection since the 1990s has become one of the central topics on the agenda in various countries. European Union is traditionally thought of as being one of the pioneers in creating and implementing policies for environmental protection. It sets the standards not only for its members but also for the candidate countries. Being attracted to the benefits of the EU membership, the candidates have to adopt environmental reforms. This process is at times problematic as some domestic actors might be opposed to them because of other more pressing issues (according to a more traditional realist understanding). At the same time, many of these countries indeed do have significant environmental problems and following EU regulations is in their interest.

Most of the Western Balkans countries are EU accession candidates with serious environmental problems. Among them is Serbia, which got its full independence in 2006 but was interested in the EU accession even before. Serbia had applied and received the candidate status, thus having to work on the alignment of their policies and indicators with the EU *acquis*. The current political situation in the country is a subject of complex evaluations, which makes this particular case interesting. While the country has been on the path of European integration since 2009, now it is called backsliding democracy (Freedom House 2024). The same party has been ruling the country since 2012 and the latest 2023 parliamentary elections have been called by many observers fraudulent (ibid.). Thus, it is particularly interesting to study pledge-making and pledge-fulfilment in the country through the lens of European integration. And given the EU's commitment to sustainable development and environmental protection, this thesis will concentrate exactly on the environment. Hence, it is possible to formulate the research question:

To what extent is the pledge-making translated into pledge-fulfilment of environment policies by main political parties in Serbia? And have the formed governments been responsive to the criticism and recommendations of the EU?

The present thesis, focusing on Serbia, will try to add to the existing research on pledge-making and pledge-fulfilment as such studies on the Western Balkans countries are limited. Moreover, as this thesis concentrates on the environmental sphere and uses the EU lens to demonstrate the unique features of environmental policy adoption in Serbia, it introduces a novel angle of the analysis.

To answer the research questions, the thesis will proceed as follows. Firstly, it will discuss relevant academic literature to get acquainted with the processes of pledge-making and pledge-fulfilment, the influence of the factor of EU accession, and the process of environmental policy adoption in order to improve the understanding of the specificities of research. Secondly, the thesis will explain the theoretical framework and the research design. This section will also include an overview of the main political parties whose pledges will be analysed. The third part of the paper will focus on the identification of pledges through the content analysis of party documents over the years. And finally, the last part will analyse to what extent the pledges were fulfilled and what role in this plays the EU.

Literature review

1. Parties' pledge-making and pledge-implementation

To begin with, the fate of the status of the environment primarily relies on the actions of the government. There is a variety of factors which influence their stance and generally their willingness and capacities to implement the promises(not only environmental). Thus, for the present research, it is particularly interesting to look at the explanations of such divergencies and generally the connection between parties, their pledge-making and implementation.

The literature on pledge-fulfilment seems extensive and consists of predominantly case or comparative studies. It covers mostly the same discussion of the translation of pledge-making into the implementation of promises but is not usually focused on the particular sector. Moreover, the literature is concentrated mostly on the Western states. There is a gap in the literature on the pledge-fulfilment in the Western Balkans countries, which this thesis will try to fill.

Starting with the definition of a 'pledge', the Cambridge dictionary describes it in the following way: "a formal promise, or something that is given as a sign that you will keep a promise". This definition points to the creation of a formal connection between the two sides. Indeed, the processes of pledge-making *and* pledge-fulfilment form the base of democratic political regimes¹. Through these processes, parties find their electoral base and establish a connection with voters. And as parties are seeking to be elected for the next terms, the logical expectation is that they

¹ Heinisch, Reinhard, and Annika Werner. "How rational are voters when expecting government parties to fulfil pledges? A cross-national survey experiment." *European Journal of Political Research* 62, no. 3 (2023): 852-872.

would fulfil the promises to create trust. However, there is a wide perception by people that parties break promises, which the scientific society finds to be mistaken. Researchers find mixed data and argue that citizens often have a too simplistic view (Thomson 2020). Their perceptions and evaluations are impacted by both mistrust (intuitive thinking, doubt) and distrust (informed opinion) (Thomson and Brandenburg 2018). In reality evidence from Ireland, for instance, shows that the citizens' evaluation of pledge fulfilment is skewed and the true analysis demonstrates a higher share of keeping the promise (Thomson 2011). Some of the expected reasons are subjective. The first is the perception of the party, whether it is aligned with personal identification. Another is related to personal experience addressed by the pledge - in this case, the perception is more positive.

Indeed, parties face various political and economic constraints which limit their pledge-fulfilment, as their own interests are not only in policy-making but also to appeal to voters and unifying the different factions within a political party (Thomson et al. 2017). Naurin et al. (2019) show that in countries with single-party executives, pledges have more chances of being implemented, while for coalition governments the likeliness is lower. Thomson et al. (2017) argue that holding the position of a prime minister is positively correlated with the fulfilment of pledges within a coalition government, but the extent is not always large.

It is already visible that Robert Thomson's works are especially useful in the discussion of pledge-making as he has been exploring the various case studies from different angles, which allow to understand the motivations and actions of parties before and post-election. Thomson (2020) argues that the usage of party manifestos, even under criticism, is a good tool for assessment as they are the sources which indeed contain a significant amount of pledges. However, it is important to

distinguish between general statements reflecting parties' positions or opinions and the real pledge, which is done by linguistic analysis (Fornaciari et al. 2021). Sometimes it is also useful to study the role of media portrayal of party pledges as it may enhance or limit the support as the majority of citizens do not read party manifestos but rather rely on media sources (Costello and Thomson 2007). Another dimension they study is the difference in the topics of pledges. Their peculiar finding supports the saliency theory of party competition, which argues that parties do not make pledges opposite to their competition, but rather the extent of pledge-making varies (ibid). Thus, the inference is that many of Thomson's hypotheses about broad and more niche factors which can impact fulfilment will act as a great theoretical and analytical tool for this thesis, which will be explained later.

2. EU influence on pledge-making

This thesis is interested in exploring to what extent have the EU negotiations for accession been a strong factor in the changing environmental pledge-making and policy implementation, which requires first to understand the relationship between the necessity to comply with the EU rules and domestic politics. The process of enlargement of the EU presupposes adherence to various criteria(Copenhagen Criteria) and the extensive implementation of policies to ensure that the candidate states meet the EU standard. As Thomson (2009) explains, this process can be imagined as a continuum, where at the extreme point of maximum harmonisation is the European Commission and the Parliament, and the starting point is the status quo. Candidate countries are located between these points. To show that they are ready for accession and to get unanimous approval from all member states, candidate countries have to demonstrate compliance. Therefore, during the times when the EU assesses the progress and is pondering whether to move further, the

political elite is expected to make more efforts to show a strong interest in the continuation of the process. Thus, political parties with pro-EU ideology who are in power or strive for it are expected to manifest their interest and loyalty in their speeches and manifestos, etc. (Ray 2003).

At the same time, their pro-EU stance depends much on the interests of its electorate, according to the ideas of the strategic party behaviour (Downs 1957). Downs notes that party behaviour is predicted by the electorate's concerns and parties are likely to change their policy proposals if it can increase their chances of getting elected. Hence, if the electorate is against the EU accession, then the negotiations are becoming more problematic and slow. Moreover, since the direction and the pace of negotiations are dependent on the political leadership if their political survival is under threat, they are likely to prioritise the electorate's wishes over the EU's (Schimmelfennig et al. 2006).

As Ladrech (1994) explains, the whole process of Europeanisation requires the reorganisation of politics, which is an extremely difficult and conflicting process. The domestic power struggle and the attempts of one party/leader to retain its power for many terms (even overcoming some laws) do not send a positive signal to the EU. In the condition when candidate countries' internal political activities are perceived sceptically by the EU, the best tool is to show compliance with the requirements to confirm the readiness for harmonisation (Dudley 2020). As Dudley showed in their research, the milestones when the EU assesses the performance or when the parties sign new agreements are the most important time periods when one can expect an increased share of pro-EU pledges and policy compliance.

3. Environmentalism in policy-making

Environmentalism in policy-making has become an essential part of the political agenda of parties (Rohrschneider 1993). The logical expectation of pro-environmental parties to succeed more in meeting the environmental targets matches with the results of the studies by Jensen and Spoon (2011) and Knill et al. (2010). As for the mainstream parties, their environmental stance expectedly varies (Müller-Rommel and Poguntke 2013), however parties on the left side of the political spectrum demonstrate more environmentalism (Carter 2013). Schulze (2014) introduces the factor of the international regulations and obligations and argues that the party stance on their adoption is influenced not by its position on political spectrum but rather by the direct perception of environmental policy preferences. Leinaweaver and Thomson (2016) found out that in centralized governments, the prime ministers' party shapes environmental policies; in decentralized ones, the environment ministers' party does. The study by Derndorfer, Hoffman and Theine (2022) emphasise that in order for environmental policies to be truly effective, it is essential for parties to connect them to other policy areas, as it would make them more integrated with a more long-term effect.

Western Balkans studies of environmental policy-making reveal a variety of regional peculiarities, many of which are connected to the EU enlargement. Jehlička and Tickle (2004) explain that in the initial stages of reproachment with Europe the region was active in terms of environmental policymaking, but closer to the end of 1990s became more passive, which makes it more difficult to adopt more serious environmental measures. Rohrschneider and Miles (2013) find out that environment is not the centre of attention of the parties in Central and Eastern Europe because of primacy of discussion of economic topics, which is questioned by the authors given severe

pollution problems. Fagan and Buzogany (2022) argue that EU accession cannot be considered to be the primary influencing factor of the adoption of environmental policies as the political ideology of parties seem to take precedence. Hence, it is possible to infer that indeed both general and regional environmental policy-making procedures are complex and influenced by the variety of factors to different extents.

Theoretical framework

The present work will be centred around parties' pledge-making and the consequent implementation of environmental policies taking into account the EU influence and other additional factors. It can be seen that the work involves the analysis of complex processes and adds an EU's accession influence angle. Therefore, for this thesis it is important to establish clear theoretical ideas which be applied as lenses of analysis and which will cover both aspects of work: 1) translation of pledge-making into pledge-fulfilment, and 2) the factor of EU accession.

Firstly, as was indicated in the literature review, one of the most prominent academics writing about pledge-making and pledge-implementation is Robert Thomson. His works often apply the **responsible party model** (Ranney 1954) as the theoretical base. There are various key components of the theory, such as that responsible parties should maintain unity, inform their voters, and be policy-driven. However, the most important element of the theory for this work is that parties are expected to implement the policies they promised in their electoral campaigns. And, as Thomson (2011) explains, it does indeed happen in the majority of cases.

The present case study will apply this theory and check whether Serbian political parties keep their electoral promises. However, taking into account the changing political environment in the last two decades, what is expected in the Serbian case is the implementation of policies to varying extents. This extent is the result of various factors affecting implementation - EU influence, the electorate's public opinion and demand for change of policy, international pressure, etc.

This leads to a second part of the theoretical framework of this thesis, which will act as a lens for analysing the influence of the prospects of joining the EU. **The external incentives model** is applied in various papers on EU integration. The model was developed by Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier (2004) and is argued to be the best theoretical framework for the assessment of candidates' compliance (Heemskerk 2020). Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier (2004) explain that the EIM assesses how the EU through the system of rewards and threats changes the domestic equilibrium. The success of conditionality depends on four factors: 1) determinacy of the conditions for obtaining the reward (with more clear instructions leading to a better result) 2) speed and size of promised rewards (with more tangible and promptly received rewards leading to a better result) 3) credibility of EU's rewards and threats (with more consistency of EU actions leading to a better result) 4) the presence of domestic veto players and adoption costs (with less influence of veto players and adoption costs leading to a better result).

Thus, although this model was developed for evaluation of the 2004 accession process of Central and Eastern European countries, it is still a useful instrument for the Serbian case as it allows to create a context and provide more details on the engagement of the EU and Serbia. The model will help to cover the aspect of the external factor in this work.

Therefore, taking all into consideration, the following **hypothesis** can be developed:

The fulfilment of environmental pledges by major political parties in Serbia is intensified during the periods close to significant EU accession process milestones.

The hypothesis acknowledges the influence of the European Union, and its strict criteria for accession which include environmental standards. Thus, during the most important stages of

accession discussions, more policy implementation is expected to be seen as non-compliance with EU requirements and regulations is likely to hinder the accession severely.

Research design

This work will explore the process of pledge-making and the implementation of environmental policies by the main Serbian political parties that take the most seats in the Parliament as a result of elections. As the process is associated with the process of joining the European Union, the research will pay special attention to this factor, which means using the EU assessment documents of the Serbian progress. The main research questions are the following:

To what extent is the pledge-making translated into pledge-fulfilment of environment policies by main political parties in Serbia? And have the formed governments been responsive to the criticism and requirements of the EU?

The research design is a case study as it will allow to hold in-depth analysis of this particular case by investigating the peculiar features which affect the studied process (Simons 2009). Following the typology of case studies by Thomas (2011), the purpose of the study is exploratory, while the approach is theory-testing and illustrative.

Chronological framework

This work will explore the period from 2008 to 2023. There are several reasons for this choice. Firstly, the chosen beginning date is 2008, when the profound discussions about the application for candidacy started (formal application happened in 2009) and the parliamentary elections were happening the same year. The last election this study will take into account is parliamentary elections of 2022 with the assessment of pledge-fulfilment until 2023, when the new early elections

happened. This choice was made due to the fact that it may be too early to assess the results of the 2023 election and by the absence or insufficiency of the relevant policy information. Providing more details about each period and the EU milestones, the chronological framework will be the following:

1) 2008-2012:

- The elections are held in 2008
- 2008: signing of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement.
«SAA is a legal basis for the improvement of cooperation between Serbia and the EU in a number of areas: economic and commercial policy, ...environment...»²
- 2009: application for EU membership
- 2012: Serbia receives candidate status

2) 2012-2014:

- The elections are held in 2012
- 2013: European Council opens accession negotiations
- 2014: opening of the accession negotiations

3) 2014-2016:

- Elections in 2014

4) 2016-2020:

- Elections in 2016

² MEI - Stabilisation and Association Agreement. n.d. "Stabilisation and Association Agreement." Accessed June 1, 2024. <https://www.mei.gov.rs/eng/serbia-and-eu/stabilisation-and-association-agreement/#:~:text=SAA%20is%20a%20legal%20basis,cooperation%2C%20small%20and%20medium%2Dsize>

- 2017-2018: Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) is concentrated on Environment

5) 2020-2022:

- Elections in 2020
- 2020: adoption of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans
- 2021: opening by the EU of the Chapter 27 (Environment and Climate) to accession negotiations
- 2021 – 2022: mass environmental protests in Serbia

6) 2022-2023:

- Elections in 2022

Thus, what is expected is the increased inclusion of the environmental agenda (and its content being connected to EU accession) into party materials and the implementation of environmental policies in the first and last periods (2008-2014, 2020-2022) as the milestones and other events are the most significant.

Methodology

This paper will employ several methods. The first part of the paper will be focused on the analysis of party manifestos. The choice of parties whose manifestos will be analysed depends on the number of seats they have taken. Serbian electoral system is proportional representation with closed electoral lists, the threshold for political parties to participate in the distribution of seats in the parliament is 5% (with the exceptions of the national minorities and a situation when no party

wins more than 5%) and the number of seats in the Parliament is 250³. Thus, taking into account these facts, the lowest number of seats a non-ethnic party can win is 12-13. At the same time, in the presence of parties winning many more seats, it may be too difficult for small parties to influence policy-making significantly. Therefore, this work will utilise the manifestos of parties with 30 or more seats. In the time period from 2008 to 2023, there were cases when the party could win the majority (at least 126 seats), which is another discussion, as it allows to assume that this party will have the most influence and one should pay special attention to its manifesto. In addition, relying on the European Parliamentary Research Service's (2019) report, which claims that Serbia's declining democracy is reflected in the excessive concentration of power in SNS Coalition's hands and in the smaller possibility for the opposition to influence the implementation of laws, this thesis will attribute the most powerful role to the parties in government, not in opposition (in the period from 2012 to 2022). Withal, the research will still include the main parties in opposition which won a significant number of electoral seats in 2008 and 2012, as democratic decline started after SNS became a ruling party in 2012. To add, even though the research acknowledges that the most beneficial way of analysing pledge-making would be to include all the manifestos of *the same parties* across years, this thesis will concentrate the attention on the ruling party specifically (based on a year) and on the additional parties which gained 30+ seats. This is due to the fact that the thesis is concentrated on the pledge-making of parties with the most support and due to limited data availability, which does not allow to access all the manifestos of the same actors. This is one of the limitations of the paper.

³ Council of Europe. n.d. "Collection of Electoral Data on Serbia - Electoral Assistance." Accessed June 1, 2024. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/electoral-assistance/elecdata-serbia>.

The main database of party manifestos used is the Manifesto Project. The database contains the majority of necessary manifestos, and the rest will be found manually in Serbian language on the websites of parties and in other Internet sources.

The analysis of manifestos will be focused on the finding of the environmental pledges, which could additionally include the promises to adhere to the standards of the EU for the accession (as these standards include environmental ones). The primary methodology will be qualitative content analysis. This methodology allows for a selection of texts and other sources without the need for randomisation as in quantitative methods. Qualitative content analysis is a peculiar tool and can be used in a variety of ways. As Holsti (1968) defines it, qualitative content analysis is “any technique for making inferences by systematically and objectively identifying special characteristics of messages”. Thus, qualitative content analysis allows to perform and structure research in a unique way, preferred by the author. For this thesis, the usage of this methodology instead of a quantitative one is justified by the necessity to connect the information in the text to the context. Numerical analysis of the number of pledges, for example, will not provide profound answers, as it is also important to distinguish between the simple inclusion of the environmental agenda in the manifesto and the pledge, which are different.

Therefore, this thesis will perform the qualitative content analysis in the following way: 1) find relevant manifestos 2) choose the parts with discussions of environment or EU accession (which are relevant to the environment) using keywords 3) assess whether the discussion is a pledge (and rank them) 4) trace the changes. It is also essential to note that the researcher will use translation applications and websites which might limit the fully correct understanding. The third part - the decision of whether a statement is a pledge or not will follow partially the methodology of Fornaciari et al. (2021). In their work, they identify the words and phrases that make a statement

pledge-worthy. These include the direct indication of an action in the future: «will be set», «shall be done», «will be launched», «in 5 years», etc. (ibid). Simply discussing the environmental-related problems or discussing previous results will not be considered a pledge. Based on the results, which this work will provide in a table and the discussion form, the researcher will move to the second part.

The second part of the work will explore whether the environmental pledges were implemented in reality. For this reason, one shall use a variety of website sources of International and European agencies, governmental and intergovernmental reports, national reports and informative articles or news published on the websites of political parties and the Government. The primary source used will be the annual Progress Reports of the European Commission, which will also allow to analyse the extent of the EU influence. For each term of the government, the Reports of the respective years will be applied. In the absence of the environmental initiatives in the Progress Reports, the researcher will use other Internet sources to check the fulfilment. The research will be performed using content analysis, where the researcher will concentrate on finding the description and discussion of the adoption of policies, numerical and other kinds of results. The researcher will be finding policies in accordance with the chronological periods and the results of the first part of the work (analysis of party manifestos). Then, a comparison between pledges and results will be made, taking into account a broader context (internal and external events and processes). The decision of whether a pledge was fulfilled or not will be nuanced. It is challenging for such qualitative work to include fully objective analysis. Therefore, this thesis will apply the same method of classifying the pledges as fulfilled, partially fulfilled or not fulfilled for all pledges and periods to reduce the bias. This is particularly relevant for broader pledges which do not contain precise promises. In this case researcher will classify the pledge as fulfilled only if the government made significant

efforts which were *recognised as* sufficient by European and international agencies. The partially-fulfilled status will be granted in case there was some action by the authorities but it was recognised that more measures are needed. Not fulfilled status will be granted in case the results do not any progress or there were no initiatives related to the pledge in that period of time.

Characterisation of main political parties

As a result of preliminary analysis, the main actors of interest are SNS Coalition and SPS Coalition. In none of the Serbian elections in the studied period, a single-party government was formed. In these years more parties were part of the government, but their influence has not been significant. SNS and SPS were the parties that made up the majority in parliament and were the key actors from 2012 to 2022. The only exception was in 2008, when the government was formed by the Democratic Party (DS), SPS and other smaller parties.

- SNS Coalition (The Serbian Progressive Party) has been the ruling party since 2012. It split in 2008 from the Serbian Radical Party⁴ and was formed as a separate party by Tomislav Nikolić and Aleksandar Vučić. The Party was winning the elections because of its populist stance⁵. Moreover, the Party was able to contain two peculiar elements - pro-European ideology and simultaneously strong national stance on Kosovo. As for this thesis, the important pre-known details are 1) support for economic neo-liberalism 2) EU accession support 3) legislative control and democratic backsliding.

Name	Year	Seats won (out of 250)	Who is in the coalition
*part of SRS	2008	78	SNS is part of the Serbian Radical Party

⁴ The Serbian Radical Party was founded in 1991 and is characterised as a far-right ultranationalist party. It advocates for the Greater Serbia idea and goes against European integration. This party is important only for 2008 as in the later periods it was not able to get a significant number of seats (following its split from SNS). Given its ideology, the likelihood of discussions of the environment and especially pledges is very low. The party has not been in the government even in 2008.

⁵ Spasojević, Dušan. 2024. "From Radical to Mainstream: The Ruling Populists in Serbia." The Loop. February 9, 2024. <https://theloop.ecpr.eu/from-radical-to-mainstream-the-ruling-populists-in-serbia/>.

«Let's Get Serbia Moving»	2012	73	Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), New Serbia (NS), Serb Strength Movement (PSS) and the Socialist Movement (PS)
«Future we believe in»	2014	158	the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), New Serbia (NS), the Serbian Renewal Movement (SPO) and the Socialist Movement (PS)
«Serbia wins»	2016	131	Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), the Party of United Pensioners of Serbia (PUPS), the Social Democratic Party of Serbia (SDPS), New Serbia (NS), the Serbian Renewal Movement (SPO), the Movement of Socialists (PS), the Strength of Serbia Movement (PSS-BK), the People's Peasant Party (NSS), and the Serbian People's Party (SNP)
«For our children»	2020	188	Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), the Party of United Pensioners of Serbia (PUPS), the Social Democratic Party of Serbia (SDPS), New Serbia (NS), the Serbian Renewal Movement (SPO), the Movement of Socialists (PS), the Strength of Serbia Movement (PSS-BK), the People's Peasant Party (NSS), and the Serbian People's Party (SNP), the United Peasant Party (USS).
«Together we can do everything»	2022	120	Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), the Party of United Pensioners of Serbia (PUPS), the Social Democratic Party of Serbia (SDPS), the Serbian Renewal Movement (SPO), the Movement of Socialists (PS), the Strength of Serbia Movement (PSS-BK), the People's Peasant Party (NSS), and the Serbian People's Party (SNP), the United Peasant Party (USS), Better Serbia (BS).

Table 1. SNS Coalition's results in Parliamentary elections over the years.

Source: the Inter-Parliamentary Union (n.d.)

- SPS Coalition (The Socialist Party of Serbia) was established in 1990 and was initially led by Slobodan Milošević. Since 2006 and in connection with the appointment of Ivica Dačić as the leader, the Party has been shifting its focus to a pro-European ideology. From 2008 to 2012 SPS was in coalition with SNS (but still remained its partner), and later created its own coalition with other parties, including the Greens of Serbia. Now the party is characterised by its centre-left position⁶. During all the years from 2008 to 2022, the party has been in the government. For this thesis, these facts could mean the expectation of this party to take a stronger environmental stance, and given its relative success in the elections, adopt them.

⁶ Stojić, Marko, Stojić, and Finotello. *Party Responses to the EU in the Western Balkans*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

Name	Year	Seats won (out of 250)	Who is in the coalition
SPS-PUPS-JS	2008	20	Socialist Party of Serbia - Party of United Pensioners of Serbia - United Serbia (SPS-PUPS-JS)
SPS-PUPS-JS	2012	44	Socialist Party of Serbia - Party of United Pensioners of Serbia - United Serbia (SPS-PUPS-JS)
SPS-PUPS-JS	2014	44	Socialist Party of Serbia - Party of United Pensioners of Serbia - United Serbia (SPS-PUPS-JS)
SPS - JS - Dragan Markovic Palma	2016	29	the Social Party of Serbia (SPS, led by Mr. Ivica Dacic), the United Serbia (JS, led by Mr. Dragan Markovic Palma) and the Greens of Serbia (ZS)
SPS - JS - Dragan Markovic Palma	2020	32	Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS), United Serbia (JS) the Communist Party (KP) and the Greens of Serbia (ZS)
SPS Coalition	2022	31	Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS), the United Serbia (JS) and Greens of Serbia (ZS)

Table 2. SPS Coalition's results in Parliamentary elections over the years.
Source: the Inter-Parliamentary Union (n.d.)

Important parties to mention:

ZES (NDS/SDS/IZBZ) was a party that won 102 seats in 2008. It was led by Boris Tadić and was dissolved in 2011. Tadić later founded a new party, IZBZ, which won 23% of seats in 2012 (the Inter-Parliamentary Union n.d.). IZBZ, also called Choice for a Better Life, took a similar pro-European stance and its ideology was social liberal. However, since 2012 parties led by Boris Tadić have not been in the government.

UZPS (The United for the Victory of Serbia) was an opposition party founded in 2021 to challenge the SNS Coalition in the 2022 elections. In recent years the alliance has organised mass anti-governmental protests. In the 2022 elections, the party won 14% or 38 seats in the Parliament (the

Inter-Parliamentary Union n.d.). However, due to internal dynamics, the party was soon dissolved.

This party is mentioned because of its electoral success.

Chapter 1. Identification of pledges: qualitative content analysis of party manifestos and other campaign documents

1. 2008 Parliamentary elections

Name of the party (2008)	Environmental pledges/EU accession pledges
ZES (For a European Serbia)	no environmental pledges, just the general goal of joining EU
SPS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To establish legal regulations of water, forestry, protection from hail and natural disasters. 2. to modernise of irrigation system, hail and floods protection 3. the water supply projects were to be done in line with the sustainable development standards 4. to ban unauthorised sale of natural resources
The Democratic Party of Serbia - New Serbia	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To harmonise legal regulations with the EU 2. to protect environments from emissions in the listed areas (Bor, Majdanpek, Pancevo, Kostolac, Obrenovac, Lazarevac, and others) 3. to use renewable energy sources (in line with ecological standards) 4. to ensure gasification to reduce the usage of electricity for heating (to reduce emissions) 5. to preserve and develop forests (mainly for economic goals) 6. to explore and exploit underground waters, provide citizens with healthy drinking water 7. to introduce monitoring systems of environmental protection
SRS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To introduce a variety of laws (Law on Agriculture, Law on Food Safety, Law on the Protection of Plants, Law on the Welfare of Animals, Law on Natural Disasters, Animal Husbandry Law, Law on Hunting, Law on Agricultural cooperatives, Law on Forests, Law on Water, Law on Food for livestock, etc.) 2. to develop water and sewage network

Table 3. Environmental pledges in 2008 Parliamentary elections.

Source: Party manifestos downloaded from the Manifesto Project database (n.d.)

The first step of the analysis is the identification of environmental pledges by parties in each election period.

The content analysis of election documents will start with the 2008 Parliamentary elections. These elections followed the Kosovo crisis and its link to EU accession. PM Kostunica condemned the recognition of Kosovo by several European states and argued that it is necessary to cut ties with

the EU. The other members of the coalition government disagreed on such a radical stance on EU accession and the snap elections of 2008 were triggered⁷. The main parties winning 30+ seats in the elections were ZES, SRS and DSS-NS (the Inter-Parliamentary Union n.d.). However, the parties that formed the government were the ZES coalition and with SPS coalition, which is why this thesis will also include the analysis of SPS documents. ZES's main party DS got the Ministries of Environment and Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management.

To begin with, it is important to say that the party ZES (For a European Serbia), which won 102 seats, had a very short and concise party manifesto (Manifesto Project Database included only the economic programme of the party). In the absence of a party website and because not a lot of party campaign documents were available, it is difficult to check whether the party indeed had a detailed section on the protection of the environment. The information bulletin indeed contained a section on the protection of the environment but it did not contain pledges as such. In any case, the campaign was centred around the application for EU membership.

SPS 2007 manifesto included precise environmental pledges. In particular, the party focused on establishing regulations for water, forestry, and protection from hail and natural disasters. Withal, the water supply projects were to be done in line with the sustainable development standards. The European orientation of the programme was manifested in the discussion of the necessity to align Serbia's agricultural sector with EU standards.

The Democratic Party of Serbia in coalition with New Serbia in their manifesto had the most extensive discussion of environment and environmental pledges related particularly to the EU

⁷ Inter-Parliamentary Union. 2013. "Serbia Elections Report 2008." Accessed June 1, 2024. http://archive.ipu.org/parline-e/reports/arc/2355_08.htm.

accession. These pledges included the comprehensive promise of harmonisation of legal regulations with the EU. More particular environmental pledges included the protection of environments from emissions in the most polluted areas, pledge to develop renewable energy sources, gasification to reduce the usage of electricity for heating (to reduce emissions), preserve and develop forests (mainly for economic goals), explore and exploit underground waters, and to introduce monitoring systems of environmental protection.

The Serbian Radical Party, which later became SNS, also had rather a precise discussion of environmental protection. The party in its manifesto refers to the Reports of the European Commission, saying that the governmental activity has not been enough in the environmental sector. Moreover, there has not been harmonisation with the European regulations, and the government is responsible for such failure. As for the pledges as such, the party promised to introduce a variety of laws. In the additional documents, namely the party newspaper editions of May 2008, the party emphasised the need for the development of water projects and sewage networks.

It is possible to make several inferences. The parties which *formed the government* were EU-oriented. Even though the extent to which the environmental pledges were made differed, all the parties included environmental pledges in their party documents. The EU orientation of the formed government suggests that it can be expected that the environmental promises will be aligned with the EU standards. This supports the hypothesis about the significant EU milestones influencing environmental pledges. Even in the year when the most significant topic of the elections was the Kosovo crisis, EU environmental pledges were still made.

2. 2012 Parliamentary elections

Name of the party (2012)	Environmental pledges/EU accession pledges
SNS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. the need for solution of the slaughterhouse waste problem, recultivation of landfills, efficient waste management 2. to implement the list of new strategies and laws for energy enhancement and a greater use of alternative energy sources, economical and purposeful use of fossil fuels 3. to increase energy efficiency by 30-45% in four years and to reduce pollution 4. to improve the efficiency of environmental inspections (and punishments policies similar to the 'polluter pays' principle in the EU), risk prevention mechanisms 5. to create 'green' jobs and to establish the National Body for the implementation of clean development mechanism projects 6. to improve infrastructure which would have direct influence on the environment 7. to introduce environmental education (namely animal welfare) in the school curriculum 8. to harmonise with the EU legislation(over 300 legal acts and 80 directives) and hold a general institutional reform 9. to construct animal welfare protection system 10. financial subsidies for 'green' technologies
Choice for a better life	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. to pass the Law on Rational use of energy 2. to support the initiatives in recycling, sustainable production and tourism using the Environmental Protection Fund sources.
SPS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. to support the environmental movements 2. to support eco-friendly agricultural production 3. to improve energy efficiency 4. to support the sustainable agriculture producers with loans and fiscal policy measures 5. the exemption from taxes for renewable energy technologies 6. to pay attention to the environmental education and to develop further environmental science

Table 4. Environmental pledges in 2012 Parliamentary elections.

Source: Party manifestos downloaded from the Manifesto Project database (n.d.)

The parliamentary elections in 2012 were held together with presidential elections, which were won by Tomislav Nikolić, the head of SNS Coalition which split from the Serbian Radical Party after the 2008 elections. He changed his position from anti-EU to pro-EU for the 2012 elections. SNS Coalition won the 2012 elections with 73 seats (the Inter-Parliamentary Union n.d.). As noted by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (2013), for the first time all major parties supported the EU path. The other parties which won seats were SPS and Choice for a better life (successor of For a

European Serbia). The main parties which formed the government were SNS and SPS. The SPS leader Ivica Dacić became the Prime Minister. The Ministries of Environmental Protection, Natural Resources, Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management were taken by SNS.

The environmental pledges were present in all three parties' documents. The SNS Coalition in 2011 prepared a comprehensive party programme where it put environmental protection among the most important principles. The party prepared very punctilios policy goals which covered a great range of environmental issues, from waste problems to green jobs and environmental education. An emphasis is put also on energy efficiency and renewable energy regulation improvement. An important feature is the harmonisation with the EU legislation and general institutional reform. Thus, the party indeed made extensive and significant environmental pledges which were closely connected to the EU standards and the whole process of the accession.

The party Choice for a Better Life included the discussion of renewable energy sources and pledged to pass the Law on the rational use of energy. Other pledges were related to the Environmental Protection Fund and the initiatives in recycling, sustainable production and tourism.

Finally, the SPS party which formed the government with SNS, had prepared a programme in 2010. This programme is still listed among the most important party documents on their website, which can be interpreted as one of the guiding documents of the party which contains the most important policy areas for the party irrespective of the elections. The party states to support the environmental movements (which is going to be interesting to observe in the future sections of the thesis because of the environmental movements in 2021-22), eco-friendly agricultural production, energy efficiency (both development of alternative energy sources and the saving of the existing

sources). For renewable energy, socialists pledged the exemption from taxes for these technologies. Additional more precise financial pledges include loans and fiscal policy measures for the sustainable agriculture producers. Similar to SNS they promised to pay attention to environmental education and also included the necessity to develop further environmental science.

To infer, all the main parties now take the pro-EU stance, and the parties which formed the government incorporated the necessity to align with EU standards. It is also interesting that all three parties made energy-related pledges which puts this issue in the centre of environmental discussions of that period. The coalition between SPS and SNS and the inclusion of environmental pledges potentially means that the formed government is expected to integrate environmental policies into its agenda and implement them.

3. 2014 Parliamentary elections

Name of the party (2014)	Environmental pledges/EU accession pledges
SNS	Pledge to foster EU integration and to adopt EU legislation No environmental pledges (they might have decided to use the programme of 2012)
SPS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. to continue creating ways of recycling waste to considerable reduce the usage of landfills and close those which do not comply with the standards 2. to establish a monitoring system of greenhouse emissions 3. to create a financing mechanism for environmental protection 4. to develop a more specific taxation system on pollution (by vehicles, factories, etc.). 5. to pay special attention to risk reduction and disaster management because of floods by increasing institutional capacities and management of the Department of Emergency Situations 6. development of the national climate policy which would be in line with the EU standards

Table 5. Environmental pledges in 2014 Parliamentary elections.

Source: Party manifestos downloaded from the Manifesto Project database (n.d.)

The Parliamentary elections in 2014 were early elections triggered by the disagreements in the coalition government. SNS Coalition won again but this time they got the majority - 158 seats(the Inter-Parliamentary Union n.d.). Apart from the Progressives, only the SPS Coalition could receive more than 30 seats. The government was formed from SNS, SPS and other smaller coalition partners (ibid.). In particular, SPS got the Ministry of Agriculture and Environmental Protection and the Ministry of Mining and Energy, which is why looking at their pledges would be valuable.

To begin with, SNS Coalition's programme was developed for the 2012 elections and was very comprehensive in nature. The Manifesto Project Database contains only the February 2014 SNS party newspaper. Further exploration activity did not result in finding the new comprehensive programme. This might be because the previous programme was designed for 2012-2016 and party members retained their goals for new elections.

SPS in 2014 prepared a manifesto with a detailed explanation of the direction of policy-making in various areas for the period 2014-2020 (which is still listed on their website as one of the most important documents)⁸. As for the future pledges, the party makes a clear pledge to improve waste management. Moreover, SPS in 2014 repeated the 2012 pledge of SNS of creating a monitoring system of greenhouse emissions and added a more specific pledge of developing a more nuanced taxation system on pollution (by vehicles, factories, etc.) instead of one pollution payment, which shows that party developed more profound and more climate-change related pledges than in comparison with 2008. Indeed, the party also promises to develop a national climate policy and create a fund for environmental protection (as the Environmental Fund terminated work in 2014). It is essential to mention that all of the pledges include the component of EU influence as the party

⁸ Socialist Party of Serbia. n.d. Accessed June 1, 2024. <https://www.sps.org.rs/>.

emphasises the need for alignment with EU standards. Moreover, it is directly written in the manifesto that the EU expects Serbia to perform certain activities in the environmental sector. This already partially supports the hypothesis of the thesis.

Thus, the inference is that the SPS party in 2014 produced very specific EU-oriented policy pledges, which demonstrates a continuity of loyalty to the EU accession process traced across all the previous and these electoral periods. 2014 was the year of the opening of the accession negotiations, which is why it was important to show to the public the strong commitment to the EU integration and the direct promises which were aimed at facilitating the integration. In comparison with previous periods, the party's pledges have become more climate change and waste management-oriented. In the absence of a comprehensive SPS manifesto, it is challenging to see how pledge-making changed across all major parties. An important emphasis made by the Socialists in the party manifesto can also explain partially why they got the Ministry of Agriculture and Environmental Protection when they formed the government.

4. 2016 Parliamentary elections

Name of the party (2016)	Environmental pledges/EU accession pledges
SNS	no environmental pledges, just the general goal of reaching the European standard of living
SPS	no environmental pledges (programme of 2014 was active until 2020)
Green (in coalition with SPS)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. formation of a special Ministry of Environmental Protection 2. introduction of Ombudsperson for environmental protection 3. formation of the Environmental Protection Fund 4. prohibition of GMOs 5. ban for 20 years the construction of nuclear energy facilities 6. establishment of 'polluter pays' principle and other penalties 7. facilitation of the building of water supply, wastewater treatment, sewage systems and regional landfills for recycling 8. recultivation of old mines 9. improvement of animal welfare

Table 6. Environmental pledges in 2016 Parliamentary elections.

Source: Party manifestos downloaded from the Manifesto Project database (n.d.)

The 2016 Parliamentary elections were also snap elections. SNS similarly won with a majority (the Inter-Parliamentary Union n.d.). This was a year when any other party could not get 30 seats. Still, SNS formed a coalition with SPS for the formation of government. An unusual feature of these elections was that for the first time Green party got a seat through minority lists. SNS got the Ministry of Agriculture and Environmental Protection. Green party got one seat in coalition with SPS and did not get any Ministry.

The programme of SNS in 2016 concentrated on four main elements: new jobs, education, healthcare and the rule of law. The manifesto did not include environmental pledges. At the same time, the programme highlighted the general goal - reaching the European standard of living. The programme once mentioned the protection of the environment which is not possible to classify as a pledge.

The SPS programme did not contain any environmental pledges. Yet, this may be due to their adherence to the programme of 2014, which was aimed to be active until 2020. Moreover, they created a coalition with the Greens, whose manifesto expectedly contained environmental pledges, which could be promoted by the SPS party. The next section of the thesis will check whether it was indeed true.

Therefore, for 2016, there were no significant environmental pledges by the main parties, which supports partially the hypothesis. 2016 was more of a transition year as negotiations were already open, but the funds of the IPA programme were not yet distributed for the environment specifically, which is why the EU might not have any special expectations in terms of the environment.

5. 2020 Parliamentary elections

Name of the party (2020)	Environmental pledges/EU accession pledges
SNS	1. the water and sewage problems 2. investments in renewable energy
SPS	no environmental pledges
JS (in coalition with SPS)	to pass the laws on the protection of mineral resources and ban on their privatisation.

Table 7. Environmental pledges in 2020 Parliamentary elections.

Source: Party manifestos downloaded from the Manifesto Project database (n.d.)

The 2020 Parliamentary elections were postponed because of Covid-19. When they finally happened in June 2020, the party campaigns were centred around the pandemic. SNS Coalition won the record 188 seats while SPS Coalition got 32 seats (the Inter-Parliamentary Union n.d.). SNS got all the Ministries related to environmental protection.

The SNS manifesto was mainly based on the discussion of past successes. This feature has also characterised the programmes of parties of the last year of analysis (2022), which will be shown further. There were almost no environmental discussions except for the resolution of the water and sewage problems and investments in renewable energy projects. Water pollution and sewage problems are listed as one of the most severe by international and European agencies⁹¹⁰. Moreover, they are widely covered by the press, which is why the majority of the population is likely to be aware of them. Taking into account that the SNS party is often characterised as populist, it becomes clear why the party chose this rhetoric¹¹. The last comprehensive environmental discussion and pledge-making were in 2012, which shows the decreasing party interest in the matter. This idea

⁹ Economic and Trade Office Embassy of Belgium. 2017. *Water Sector in Serbia*. Report.

¹⁰ OHCHR. n.d. *Report of the Republic of Serbia for the Special Rapporteur on the Right to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitary Conditions*.

¹¹ ECPS. 2023. "Balancing on a Pin: Serbian Populists, the European Union, and Russia." *ECPS*. March 29, 2023.

also is supported by the fact that many of the environmental protesters of 2021-2022 were coming with anti-governmental banners and posters¹².

SPS's manifesto does not contain environmental pledges even though their comprehensive programme ended in 2020. Only their coalition members, JS, which did not receive any Ministry, stressed the need to pass laws on the protection of mineral resources and ban their privatisation.

Thus, even though in 2020 the EU Green Agenda was adopted, party manifestos did not contain a sufficient number of environmental pledges (as was expected). The primary reason is Covid-19 which took the attention of citizens for at least a year. In addition, given that party manifestos are produced mainly for the electorate (and not the EU) and assuming that 'strategic party behaviour' (Downs 1957) is valid for this case, as SNS are populists, it may be argued that the SNS-led coalition was not motivated to include specific EU-related pledges (such as the discussion of Green Agenda) in their party programme. This is because public opinion of 2020 shows that only 46% of the electorate support the EU accession, only 9% see it as the main foreign policy goal and only 3% know that EU was the largest donor in the country (CeSID 2020). Thus, SNS and SPS as the main parties choose to focus on more traditional topics, such as poverty and economic development.

However, it is also possible to assume that even though the pledges were not made, parties may have just concentrated on the implementation of environmental policies prescribed directly by the EU without the inclusion of them in party documents (which will be checked in the next chapter).

¹² Tepavac, Tara. 2021. "People in Serbia Are Standing Up for Environment and Democracy." *Medium*.

6. 2022 Parliamentary elections

Name of the party (2022)	Environmental pledges/EU accession pledges
SNS	mainly discussion of successes the only pledge is to finish the projects started in the previous election term
SPS	no environmental pledges, discussion of successes
United for a Victory of Serbia	no environmental pledges

Table 8. Environmental pledges in 2022 Parliamentary elections.

Source: Party manifestos downloaded from the Manifesto Project database (n.d.)

The last elections analysed in this thesis will be from 2022. These elections are particularly interesting to look at because of the environmental protests which started in 2021. The protests started because of the given permission to build the lithium mine and the adoption of two laws, the Expropriation Law and the Referendum Law, connected to the construction. As reported by various media sources¹³, the protesters have been concerned with the severe air pollution as well as general neglect of environmental protection. As already discussed, this points to the fact that the governmental actions regarding the environment have not been sufficient for the public. The Ministry of Internal Affairs called the protests illegal but has made concessions about the laws and the mine. Vucic tried to talk with the protesters but people were interested in the results, not talks¹⁴. They see the bigger environmental problem related to democratic decline. Thus, it is logically expected that the 2022 manifestos should include environmental pledges.

As for the elections themselves, the SNS party won 120 seats, which is 66 seats less than in the previous term (the Inter-Parliamentary Union n.d.). SPS won similar for them 31 seats. An opposition party, United for a Victory of Serbia, won 38 seats, which is an unusual result given

¹³ *ibid.*,

Dragojlo, Sasa. 2021. "Serbia Eco Protests to Continue Despite Backdown Over Disputed Laws." *Balkan Insight*.

¹⁴ *ibid.*

the trend of the last several terms (ibid.). Thus, protests have indeed shown that the public has lower trust in the government if a new party is able to get significant support. As for the content, SPS's programme concentrated on social policy, while SNS's manifesto focused on the economy. However, contrary to the expectations, the manifestos did not contain the environmental pledges. Instead, there was a detailed discussion of the previous results of the parties regarding the environment. For example, the SPS manifesto gave the exact numbers of built water and sewage supply systems. SNS Coalition's manifesto was called «We did it together» and was technically classified as a report to the citizens. The report similarly listed the successes of the past in various environmental protection fields - water, air, and soil, and provided various figures about the investments and other policy actions. The promises of the party listed in the programme were connected mostly to already established projects which are in the process of construction. The United for a Victory of Serbia manifesto did not have the environmental pledges in its manifesto but the party was not included in the government and was soon dissolved after the elections.

Thus, the major parties indeed included extensive environmental discussions in their manifestos, however, surprisingly, these were in the other form - not as pledges. There are several possible explanations (mostly from the 'demand' side) connected with each other. Firstly, given the scale of the environmental protests and the fact that the government had to make concessions, it can be claimed that parties did not want to make new clear promises not to break them again. Comparing the pledges across the years, it is visible that water and sewage problems have been lasting for many years, which shows that it is a deep problem. The difficult resolution may be due to insufficient action from the government, but in any case, the major parties cannot make pledges for the next term to resolve such a significant issue. Secondly, as parties still need to address the environmental issues to appeal to the voters by showing their concern and understanding of the

issue, they focus on showing the achievements, which create a more positive image. Thus, the ruling parties, especially SNS, acknowledged public scepticism and decided to pursue a more flexible and safe approach.

Inferences

The table below summarises the main sub-directions of environmental pledges over the years of analysis. The table includes particularly the pledges of the parties which both formed the government and were in the opposition, but *which gained 30+ seats*(which is why it does not include the pledges of Greens) in order to trace the changes specifically in the main parties' documents. The condition of democracy, which characterised Serbia before 2012, allows, thus, to include the pledges of non-governmental parties in 2008 and 2016. Therefore, to trace the changes in the pledge-making of the major parties, it is possible to make several conclusions.

2008	2012	2014 (only SPS)	2016	2020	2022
Water (general, underground waters, drinking water)				Water (infrastructure)	
Forestry					
Natural disasters		Risk reduction and disaster management mechanism			
Energy (renewable energy, gasification)	Energy (law on energy enhancement, alternative sources, energy efficiency, law on rational use of energy, tax exemption for renewable energy technologies)			Energy (renewable energy)	
Agriculture (laws)	Agriculture (support sustainability with loans and fiscal policy)				
Animals (laws)	Animal welfare protection				
Waste (sewage)	Waste (slaughterhouse waste, recycling, landfills recultivation)	Waste (recycle, reduce usage of landfills, close landfills)		Waste (sewage)	
Environmental protection (emissions reduction, monitoring systems)	Environmental protection (inspections, punishments, sustainable production and tourism, Clean Development Mechanism)	Environmental protection (monitoring system of emissions, financing mechanism, specific taxation system on pollution, national climate policy, subsidies)			
	Green jobs				
	Green infrastructure				
	Environmental education and science				
	Environmental movements				

Table 9. Environmental pledges over the years.

Source: Party manifestos downloaded from the Manifesto Project database(n.d.)

The simplest observation of the number of environmental pledges made during election periods shows that 2008 and 2012 were the years with the most environmental pledges. 2008 was the year when Serbia signed the Stabilisation and Associated Agreement, which dictated its further

determination to align with EU's laws and follow recommendations. Indeed, already in 2009, Serbia applied for EU membership and in 2012 was granted candidate status. Thus, the broad direction of the pledges and their number compared to the later periods is indeed in line with the hypothesis of the EU's influence in times of the most important milestones. 2012 pledges touched upon additional fields – green jobs, education and movements – were not included in the later manifestos.

The main sub-fields which persisted across several terms were waste, environmental protection and energy. The lesser emphasis on water was surprising given the fact that the issue is so often raised by the media¹⁵. Moreover, from 2008 to 2014 it is visible that the pledge-making was becoming more specific, which can be explained by the fact that the attention to the environment and the subsequent profound work on the environmental sector has begun and authorities were able to see more clear and precise needs. This is most likely to be affected by the close engagement with the EU and their direct recommendations.

It is also visible that from 2016 environment has almost disappeared from the manifestos, except for 2022, which was provoked by the environmental protests. This puts the evidence in line with the theoretical framework and the idea of the responsiveness of the party to the needs of the electorate. However, what is necessary to emphasise is that parties did not respond in the form of pledges but in the form of discussions in 2022, which is a safer approach.

¹⁵Vrbica, Aleksandar, and Smaragda Mandilara. 2023. "Serbia Struggles with Access to Clean Drinking Water." *Euractiv*. August 28, 2023. <https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/news/serbia-struggles-with-access-to-clean-drinking-water/>.

Đorđević, Nemanja. 2021. "Pollution in Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina Threatens Water Supply." *Emerging Europe*. February 5, 2021. <https://emerging-europe.com/news/pollution-in-the-western-balkans-is-threatening-the-regions-water-supply/>.

Overall, the shifts between specific pledges and broader pledges, the simple discussions of results seem to be indeed a strategic choice to send particular political messages to the electorate and in the case of 2008-2014 (when all the efforts were aimed at showing the commitment) to the EU. The lower instances of environmental pledge-making in 2016-2020 might indicate that main political parties started seeing less need for the inclusion of environmental agenda into manifestos and preferred to concentrate on the ‘traditional’ fields of economy and social welfare, while in 2022 they chose a safer option of discussing the environmental policy successes.

Chapter 2. Analysis of the fulfilment of pledges

The previous part of the analysis focused on the pledge-making of parties in their campaign documents. This part will move further and examine whether these environmental pledges were implemented in reality. The analysis was based on the chronological periods when the government was active. However, it is important to mention that the implementation of some pledges was checked not only during the period when the formed government was active, but translated to the next period with the next government. The reason for this decision was the fact that in 2014 SNS party and in 2016 SPS party did not issue new programmes as these elections were snap elections and the previous party programmes of 2012 and 2014 respectively were prepared for a four-year, not two-year period of government activity. To add to validity, the main parties SNS and SPS were the most influential actors in the formed governments in almost all periods of analysis¹⁶ (except for 2008) and could have relied on their previous manifestos as they were very comprehensive and concerned multiple spheres of life.

Moreover, for 2008-2012 the analysis will also include pledges of parties which received 30+ seats but did not form the government because of the assumption of democracy in that period and the capacity of the opposition to influence pledge-implementation. More detailed results of the pledge fulfilment will be presented in the form of tables (Annex).

To begin with, the majority of the pledges were indeed partially-fulfilled or fulfilled over all the years of analysis. The problem consisted more of the decreased *pledge-making*. It is not possible to show a significant trend of decreasing or increasing compliance. The fulfilment also does not

¹⁶ Friedrich Naumann Foundation. n.d. "Serbia: All Our Divisions." Accessed June 1, 2024. <https://www.freiheit.org/western-balkans/all-our-divisions>.

seem to be based on the characteristic of the pledge, broad or specific. It is important here to clarify that the majority of environmental problems, reflected in pledges, require long-term solutions, which makes it difficult for governments to *fully* fulfil the pledges. However, this work relied on the EU assessment, which in some periods was very positive and indeed recognised significant governmental efforts, which is why those pledges gained the status of being ‘fulfilled’ for that period, even though it is understandable that the environmental problem might not have been completely resolved.

Comparing pledge-fulfilment between the parties, it can be seen that in 2008-2012 the major parties’ pledges were mostly fulfilled or partially-fulfilled, including parties in opposition. However, in the next electoral period of 2012-2014 that was not the case anymore (Choice for a Better Life party). The next periods from 2014 to 2022 show that the majority of only SNS or SPS pledges were fulfilled, not even of the smaller parties in their coalition (JS or Greens, for example). This demonstrates that in Serbia the real power is held exactly by the two main parties, SNS and SPS.

Continuing with the characteristics of fulfilled pledges, the most problematic areas judging by the pledge-fulfilment were water and waste management. The success in these fields was seen mainly in adopting the legislation and not the implementation of the reforms. Indeed, many of the pledges in the first half of the period (2008-2014) were related to the legislative and administrative reforms and were closely tied to the accession to the EU, which was not visible during the second half (2016-2022). This shows the overarching influence of the EU in a particularly important accession period – the beginning of the profound EU-Serbian relations.

Moving further, as already discussed, it is noticeable that the pledges were not only decreasing in number, but they were becoming more vague starting from the 2016 electoral period and not tied to the EU accession process. This might be due to the fact that the public opinion polls indicate the lowering support for the EU accession and a growing number of those who would oppose the accession (Ministry of European Integration 2022). This may be caused, among other factors, by the prolonged negotiations, with people expecting to get the most tangible benefit of the EU faster. Nevertheless, the work of the government on the environmental sector was not diminishing in the period from 2016 to 2022, even though it was not reflected in pledges in that period. The engagement has become more technical and was not significantly demonstrated to the public. Based on the analysis of the Progress Reports of the European Commission and additional documents of various initiatives in the region, this research claims that the cooperation in the sector indeed persisted as Serbia followed the recommendations over the years. The Reports especially highlight the dedication to improve alignment with the *acquis* and adoption of various programmes in cooperation with the EU and other actors. These efforts constitute the majority of implemented recommendations, as emphasised in the reports of 2023, 2022, 2021. Nevertheless, the European Commission pays attention to the problem of implementation of the adopted policies. Thus, Serbia is visibly experiencing problems in particularly the execution stage. The major obstacles are institutional – insufficient effectiveness and lack of transparency. These problematic factors make the ‘competition’ of EU path and democratic decline more visible as the efforts to show the commitment to the EU accession process are continuing but domestic processes make it impossible to facilitate the negotiations.

Applying the external incentives model and the EU milestones of recent years, it is visible why Serbia’s dedication to the EU accession process persisted even in the conditions of declining

democracy and intensified criticisms. The application of the theoretical framework of the four factors which affect the compliance to the Serbian case shows the following scenario:

- 1) Determinacy of conditions. Progress Reports which are published annually by the European Commission (except 2018) clearly define the recommendations for Serbia for the following year (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2004). The adoption of the Green Agenda in 2020 provided Serbia with consulting services on the implementation of environmental policies in line with the EU standards. The opening of Chapter 27 in 2021 is another step. These examples show the continuous nature of the collaboration with constantly updated clear recommendations, which increased the likelihood of compliance.
- 2) Speed and size of rewards. Large EU financial assistance programmes for the field of the environment were provided over the years: among others, these are the 2014 Flood Relief assistance, 2017-2018 IPA funds for the environment, and 2021 Green Agenda funds. Thus, the EU has been showing serious commitment to the Serbian environmental policy field, which made Serbia adopt the recommendations of the EU.
- 3) Credibility of conditionality. The example is the conditional provision of the IPA II funds, which were to be contracted only after approval of the details of policy implementation by the EU Delegation (GTAI 2017). This shows that the financial assistance is closely connected to implementation of EU's requirements, making Serbia comply if it wanted financial assistance.
- 4) Domestic veto players and adoption costs. The veto players (other parties, nationalist interest groups), who are against the EU integration, can affect the implementation of EU policies. However, still in the environmental sphere the attempts of the EU to mitigate these effects though the adoption of various joint programmes are visible. Moreover, the *non-*

adoption of the EU policies in environmental terms would have been more costly to Serbia as less assistance of various kinds would be available to address urgent environmental problems.

Taking into account the continuous EU influence, it is peculiar that the main parties have chosen not to include some of the environmental pledges in their manifestos in recent years (2022, in particular) as they were seen to be succeeding in *implementation* of some of the EU's recommendations. The reason for this may be the fact that these pledges could seem not enough for the electorate. Instead, the parties chose to show already achieved successes without making promises.

Thus, taking all observations about implementation of environmental policies in Serbia into account, one can note the persisting rate of implementation(full and partial) of environmental pledges. However, their number has been declining over time. The influential role of SNS and SPS is visible while smaller parties in coalition and opposition parties had a smaller chance of advancing their policies. The environmental issues which were identified in manifestos over the years and which had the most difficulty to be implemented are water and waste system improvements, which shows that they are deeply entrenched problems and need more action and resources to be resolved. The influence of the EU has been significant despite the decision of the main parties not to include environmental pledges and not to connect them with accession to the EU in their manifestos. The analysis of Reports by the European Commission shows the determination of Serbia to adopt the recommendations, yet the implementation has indeed been problematic.

Conclusion

The goal of this paper was to identify whether the environmental pledges of the main political parties in Serbia have been implemented and to what extent the process of accession to the EU has played a role in the adoption of environmental policies. As the literature on pledge implementation often uses the responsible party model for various case studies, this thesis also adopted this theoretical lens to check its applicability to the Serbian case. Moreover, as the thesis also investigates the influence of the EU, it is necessary to adopt an additional theoretical framework for its assessment. The external incentives model checks the conditionality status between the European Union and the candidate country and is helpful in providing the context of the complex relationship between the two actors.

Thus, in order to answer the research question, the first part of the analysis was aimed at identifying environmental pledges in the party manifestos of the main parties in the period of analysis. Here a significant constraint was the fact that neither the database nor the party websites or other Internet resources did not contain all the party manifestos even though the researcher searched for materials both in English and Serbian. Nevertheless, it was possible to provide an extensive overview and the consequent analysis of the pledges in Chapter. The main results of the manifesto analysis depicted the significantly increased environmental pledge-making in the first half of the period (2008-2014) in comparison to later periods, which is attributed to the politically crucial moment for Serbia in terms of its EU accession process. The influence of the EU on pledge-making in the same period was particularly manifested in either the direct indication of the necessity of reformation which would be in line with EU requirements or the pledges were provided in the context of EU accession. As for the type of environmental problem, waste management pledges

were among the ones which persisted over the several electoral terms which shows that the problem has been considered urgent by the electorate. The second half of the period (2016-2023) has revealed a much lower number of pledges which can be attributed to the parties' decision to concentrate on more traditional topics of economy, social policies, etc.

The second part of the analysis was concentrated on finding out whether the pledges were indeed implemented or not. As the majority of Serbia's Parliamentary elections in the period were snap elections, the implementation of some pledges was also checked for the following period (if no new party manifesto was not introduced). The analysis has shown that the pledges generally have been respected by the government over the years. The most problematic areas indicated are waste and water management as they have not only been included in manifestos in several electoral periods which demonstrates that they are deep issues, but also as the difficulty of their resolution was highlighted in the several Progress Reports documents of the European Commission. Indeed, the fulfilment of water and waste pledges has varied, with a more positive assessment of governmental actions in the first periods (more related to creating legislation). As the identified pledges in the second period of analysis (2016-2022) were very limited in numbers and were not sufficiently linked to the EU, it was difficult to assess the EU accession process' influence. This is why the hypothesis was only partially correct. However, further analysis of the Environment sections in the Progress Reports in this period has demonstrated that the joint work in the sector persisted, especially in periods close to the major milestones, which supports the hypothesis. Applying the external incentives model with the discussions of the main milestones allows to see why the influence persisted. The recommendations and the requirements of the European Commission and other EU actors have been clearly defined, the rewards have been significant and have been provided multiple times, conditionality has been credible and the non-adoption costs

were high. Undoubtedly, the domestic actors and the processes of democratic decline have been challenging the negotiation process, but they were not able to erode the path to the EU in the environmental sector. The 'EU agenda' visible to the electorate has been decreasing, yet for the environmental sector, the work has been continuing.

As for further research, it should be based on filling the gaps caused by the lack of all the necessary manifestos. Moreover, for a more comprehensive study of EU accession influence, further research should possibly provide a comparison with another candidate country's path.

Annex

Name of the party (2008)	Environmental pledges/EU accession pledges	
ZES (For a European Serbia)	no environmental pledges, just the general goal of joining EU	
SPS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To establish legal regulations of water, forestry, protection from hail and natural disasters 2. to modernise irrigation system, hail and floods protection 3. the water supply projects were to be done in line with the sustainable development standards 4. to ban unauthorised sale of natural resources 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. fulfilled 2. partially fulfilled 3. partially fulfilled 4. not fulfilled
The Democratic Party of Serbia - New Serbia	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To harmonise legal regulations with the EU 2. to protect environments from emissions in the listed areas (Bor, Majdanpek, Pancevo, Kostolac, Obrenovac, Lazarevac, and others) 3. to use renewable energy sources (in line with ecological standards) 4. to ensure gasification to reduce the usage of electricity for heating (to reduce emissions) 5. to preserve and develop forests (mainly for economic goals) 6. to explore and exploit underground waters, provide citizens with healthy drinking water 7. to introduce monitoring systems of environmental protection 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. fulfilled 2. not fulfilled 3. partially fulfilled 4. partially fulfilled 5. fulfilled 6. not fulfilled 7. partially fulfilled
SRS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To introduce a variety of laws (Law on Agriculture, Law on Food Safety, Law on the Protection of Plants, Law on the Welfare of Animals, Law on Natural Disasters, Animal Husbandry Law, Law on Hunting, Law on Agricultural cooperatives, Law on Forests, Law on Water, Law on Food for livestock, etc.) 2. to develop water and sewage network 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. fulfilled 2. partially fulfilled

Table 10. Pledge-fulfilment in 2008 Parliamentary elections.

Source: Party manifestos downloaded from the Manifesto Project database (n.d.), Progress Reports of the European Commission, and additional Internet resources.

Name of the party (2012)	Environmental pledges/EU accession pledges	
SNS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. the need for solution of the slaughterhouse waste problem, recultivation of landfills, efficient waste management 2. to implement the list of new strategies and laws for energy enhancement and a greater use of alternative energy sources, economical and purposeful use of fossil fuels 3. to increase energy efficiency by 30-45% in four years and to reduce pollution 4. to improve the efficiency of environmental inspections (and punishments policies similar to the 'polluter pays' principle in the EU), risk prevention mechanisms 5. to create 'green' jobs and to establish the National Body for the implementation of clean development mechanism projects 6. to improve infrastructure which would have direct influence on the environment 7. to introduce environmental education (namely animal welfare) in the school curriculum 8. to harmonise with the EU legislation(over 300 legal acts and 80 directives) and hold a general institutional reform 9. to construct animal welfare protection system 10. financial subsidies for 'green' technologies 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. partially fulfilled 2. partially fulfilled 3. <i>(cannot be checked in this period)</i> 4. partially fulfilled 5. partially fulfilled 6. partially fulfilled 7. not fulfilled 8. partially fulfilled 9. partially fulfilled 10. fulfilled
Choice for a better life	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. to pass the Law on Rational use of energy 2. to support the initiatives in recycling, sustainable production and tourism using the Environmental Protection Fund sources. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. not fulfilled 2. <i>(cannot be checked in this period as Fund was abolished)</i>
SPS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. to support the environmental movements 2. to support eco-friendly agricultural production 3. to improve energy efficiency 4. to support the sustainable agriculture producers with loans and fiscal policy measures 5. the exemption from taxes for renewable energy technologies 6. to pay attention to the environmental education and to develop further environmental science 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. partially fulfilled 2. not fulfilled 3. partially fulfilled 4. not fulfilled 5. partially fulfilled 6. not fulfilled

Table 11. Pledge-fulfilment in 2012 Parliamentary elections.

Source: Party manifestos downloaded from the Manifesto Project database (n.d.), Progress Reports of the European Commission, and additional Internet resources.

Name of the party (2014)	Environmental pledges/EU accession pledges	
SNS	<p>Pledge to foster EU integration and to adopt EU legislation</p> <p>No environmental pledges (they might have decided to use the programme of 2012)</p> <p><i>Using the 2012 programme:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. the need for solution of the slaughterhouse waste problem, economical and purposeful use of fossil fuels, efficient waste management 2. to implement the list of new strategies and laws for energy enhancement and a greater use of alternative energy sources 3. to increase energy efficiency by 30-45% in four years and to reduce pollution 4. to improve the efficiency of environmental inspections (and punishments policies similar to the 'polluter pays' principle in the EU), risk prevention mechanisms 5. to create 'green' jobs and to establish the National Body for the implementation of clean development mechanism projects 6. to improve infrastructure which would have direct influence on the environment 7. to introduce environmental education (namely animal welfare) in the school curriculum 8. to harmonise with the EU legislation (over 300 legal acts and 80 directives) and hold a general institutional reform 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. partially fulfilled 2. partially fulfilled 3. not fulfilled 4. partially fulfilled 5. fulfilled 6. partially fulfilled 7. not fulfilled 8. not fulfilled
SPS	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. to continue creating ways of recycling waste to considerable reduce the usage of landfills and close those which do not comply with the standards 2. to establish a monitoring system of greenhouse emissions 3. to create a financing mechanism for environmental protection 4. to develop a more specific taxation system on pollution (by vehicles, factories, etc.) 5. to pay special attention to risk reduction and disaster management because of floods by increasing institutional capacities and management of the Department of Emergency Situations 6. development of the national climate policy which would be in line with the EU standards 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. not fulfilled 2. partially fulfilled 3. fulfilled 4. not fulfilled 5. partially fulfilled 6. partially fulfilled

Table 12. Pledge-fulfilment in 2014 Parliamentary elections.

Source: Party manifestos downloaded from the Manifesto Project database (n.d.), Progress Reports of the European Commission, and additional Internet resources.

Name of the party (2016)	Environmental pledges/EU accession pledges	
SNS	no environmental pledges, just the general goal of reaching the European standard of living	
SPS	<p>no environmental pledges (programme of 2014 was active until 2020)</p> <p><i>Using the 2014 Programme:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. to continue creating ways of recycling waste to considerable reduce the usage of landfills and close those which do not comply with the standards 2. to establish a monitoring system of greenhouse emissions 3. to create a financing mechanism for environmental protection 4. to develop a more specific taxation system on pollution (by vehicles, factories, etc.) 5. to pay special attention to risk reduction and disaster management because of floods by increasing institutional capacities and management of the Department of Emergency Situations 6. development of the national climate policy which would be in line with the EU standards 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. not fulfilled 2. partially fulfilled 3. fulfilled before 4. not fulfilled 5. partially fulfilled 6. partially fulfilled
Green (in coalition with SPS)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. formation of a special Ministry of Environmental Protection 2. introduction of Ombudsperson for environmental protection 3. formation of the Environmental Protection Fund 4. prohibition of GMOs 5. ban for 20 years the construction of nuclear energy facilities 6. establishment of 'polluter pays' principle and other penalties 7. facilitation of the building of water supply, wastewater treatment, sewage systems and regional landfills for recycling 8. recultivation of old mines 9. improvement of animal welfare 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. fulfilled 2. not fulfilled 3. fulfilled 4. not fulfilled 5. not fulfilled 6. not fulfilled 7. not fulfilled 8. not fulfilled 9. partially fulfilled

Table 13. Pledge-fulfilment in 2016 Parliamentary elections.

Source: Party manifestos downloaded from the Manifesto Project database (n.d.), Progress Reports of the European Commission, and additional Internet resources.

Name of the party (2020)	Environmental pledges/EU accession pledges	
SNS	1. the water and sewage problems 2. investments in renewable energy	1. not fulfilled 2. fulfilled
SPS	no environmental pledges	
JS (in coalition with SPS)	to pass the laws on the protection of mineral resources and ban on their privatisation	1. partially fulfilled

Table 14. Pledge-fulfilment in 2020 Parliamentary elections.

Source: Party manifestos downloaded from the Manifesto Project database (n.d.), Progress Reports of the European Commission, and additional Internet resources.

Name of the party (2022)	Environmental pledges/EU accession pledges	
SNS	mainly discussion of successes the only pledge is to finish the projects started in the previous election term	(too broad and vague to check)
SPS	no environmental pledges, discussion of successes	
United for a Victory of Serbia	no environmental pledges	

Table 15. Pledge-fulfilment in 2022 Parliamentary elections.

Source: Party manifestos downloaded from the Manifesto Project database (n.d.), Progress Reports of the European Commission, and additional Internet resources.

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