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# **Energy transformations and path dependency: The post-accession development of Bulgaria and Romania's renewable sectors**

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## **Abstract**

This paper explores the energy transformations in Bulgaria and Romania through the development of the wind and solar sectors in both countries during the post-EU accession period. The paper identifies two distinct periods in the development of the two sectors: 1) of rapid growth between 2007 and 2011; and 2) of backtracking and reversal of incentives between 2011 and 2015. The development of the wind and solar sectors in both countries is discussed in the context of EU accession, Europeanisation and energy transitions. The paper examines the drivers for the dynamics within the two periods, and the extent to which the rapid switch in policy can be accredited to and explained by the process of Europeanisation. Ultimately, the paper aims to explain what kind of transitions are taking place within the energy sectors of both Bulgaria and Romania.

**Keywords:** Renewables, wind and solar, Europeanisation, transitions, compliance, EU

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## 1. Introduction

By joining the EU in January 2007 Bulgaria and Romania have begun a process of energy transformation,<sup>4</sup> underpinned by EU energy and climate change directives, and foreign policy, which challenged international allegiances and power relations within their own territories. Although the energy sectors in both countries were subject to deep structural, albeit gradual, transformations in their transitions to post-socialism since the early 1990s, this period was dominated by sustained efforts to join the EU. Moreover, the time between accession and 2014 has been one of the most dynamic periods of change for the energy sectors of both countries. Most significantly, this involved periods of rapid growth of renewable energy, which involve predominantly wind and solar photovoltaic (PV). The rapid increase in these new renewable energy capacities has created conditions for (re)negotiating the socio-technical regimes of energy in both countries.

Although the discussion focuses on the period of accession until 2015, the development of renewables is also discussed in the context of the countries' energy mix before accession and during the socialist regimes. During the latter period, a significant number of large national infrastructure projects were constructed in both countries – including nuclear, gas, coal-fired and hydro power plants –thus creating powerful lock-ins for the two countries' energy production and use. The paper examines the drivers behind the impetus for “new” less carbon intensive futures and the dynamics within the renewable sectors in both countries.

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<sup>4</sup> Which, due to accession conditionality and the adaptation to EU legislation, started several years before 2007.