

Regional Practices and Challenges of Italy's Climate Diplomacy

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Abstract

Climate change poses multiple challenges to Italy's ecosystems, economic structure, and social stability, elevating the status of climate governance within the national strategy. Italy regards the Mediterranean coastal countries and the African continent as the core regions of its climate diplomacy, actively participating in and promoting climate cooperation and emissions reduction efforts in neighboring areas. However, there remains a significant gap between Italy's strategic vision for climate diplomacy and its practical implementation. Domestic political instability, economic resource constraints, and the slow pace of energy transition have collectively exposed clear deficiencies in its climate diplomacy regarding issue prioritization, policy coherence, and implementation capacity. Under the dual pressures of a global economic downturn and the European energy crisis, the contradiction between Italy's capabilities and its vision has become more pronounced. The current government's prioritization of "energy security first" and "economic development first" has objectively marginalized climate diplomacy within the national foreign strategy.

Keywords

Italy, Climate Change, Climate Diplomacy, Mediterranean Climate, Energy Security

1. Introduction

Climate change is one of the most pressing challenges currently faced by the international community. The intensification of extreme weather events, sea-level rise, and ecosystem degradation is exerting profound impacts on global political, economic, and social structures. The Mediterranean region is among the areas most severely affected by the adverse consequences of climate change: according to the Sixth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC),

the pace of climate change in the Mediterranean significantly exceeds the global average, and by 2050 the region's temperature is expected to be 20% higher than the global average increase (Ali et al., 2022). As a Mediterranean littoral state, Italy faces not only environmental pressures from climate change, but also grave challenges to its economy, energy sector, infrastructure, and regional security and stability, which impose higher demands on its climate strategy. Leveraging its unique geographic position, Italy has engaged in climate diplomacy across the Mediterranean and Africa, building cooperative frameworks in an effort to play a larger role in global climate governance and enhance its geopolitical influence. However, in advancing its climate diplomacy, Italy also confronts a series of practical challenges: the need to balance energy security and economic development, the difficulties of reconciling EU-level pressures with domestic policy coordination, and divergences and capacity shortfalls in international action that hinder the effective implementation of its climate diplomacy strategy.

2. The Impact of Climate Change on Italy

For a long time, climate change did not occupy a central place on Italy's political agenda. It was not until 2014 that Italy released its first scientific assessment report on the impacts, vulnerabilities, and adaptation related to climate change, providing a comprehensive analysis of the climate risks the country faces and, at the national level, formally recognizing climate change as an "existential threat" to national security (Castellari et al., 2014). In recent years, the frequency and severity of natural disasters within Italy have continued to rise. Coupled with risk-rating reports released by international research institutions, this has significantly heightened the attention of the Italian government and all sectors of society to the issue of climate change. According to a survey by the European rating agency Scope Ratings on the climate risk resilience of major European economies, Italy will be the country in Europe most at risk from the impacts of climate change in the coming decades. Under an extreme scenario, climate change is expected to cause cumulative economic losses of up to €17.5 trillion in Italy between 2020 and 2050, equivalent to 14.5% of its total GDP.

At present, Italy is confronting multiple crises triggered by climate change: first, climate change is significantly exacerbating Italy's environmental vulnerability. Rising sea levels and frequent extreme weather events pose severe challenges to the survival security of Italian cities and to economic security. Italy's sea level is accelerating upward at an average rate of 1.64 millimeters per year. According to official data from Venice, the city has experienced at least 187 severe flooding events over the past three decades. In 2019, it was hit by catastrophic floods, with total losses exceeding €1 billion (Zampano, 2019). Second, climate change continues to undermine Italy's agricultural economy. Rising temperatures in the Mediterranean have normalized extreme weather events in parts of Italy, and the country loses 8.7% of its GDP each year due to drought (Reguly, 2024). The persistent rise in temperatures also poses a serious threat to agricultural production and agri-

food supply chains, triggers illegal imports in the agriculture and food sectors, and undermines national economic security. Third, climate change poses multidimensional threats to Italy's energy security. Extreme weather events undermine the stability of the power grid across northern and southern Italy; drought reduces Italy's hydropower output and increases the operation and maintenance costs of photovoltaic systems; and climate change-induced shifts in wind speeds across the Mediterranean may diminish Italy's medium- to long-term wind power generation capacity (Bonanno et al., 2023). Finally, climate change has intensified the social and political pressures in Italy stemming from migration issues. As a "transit hub" in Southern Europe, Italy saw approximately 180,000 migrants arrive via the Mediterranean in 2016 (International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2017). By 2070, Italy is expected to host more than ten million lawful immigrants, with climate migrants accounting for a significant proportion, making Italy the world's fourth-largest immigrant-receiving country. The influx of climate migrants not only intensifies local resource competition but also serves as a tool in political struggles. Italy's right-wing coalition has leveraged this to reinforce its anti-immigration and racist positions, and by implementing the "Cutro Decree" has weakened legal protections for climate migrants, potentially further fostering more extreme eco-fascist tendencies within Italian society (Bettini & Casaglia, 2024).

The deepening of multiple crises has heightened Italy's awareness of the systemic risks posed by climate change, prompting it to elevate the response to climate challenges to a core national strategic priority and to demand more forceful policy action from decision-makers. To this end, Italy has, on the one hand, systematically linked climate change with traditional security issues such as conflict and migration through political statements on the international stage, thereby underscoring the urgency of addressing climate change. In 2019, at the UN Climate Action Summit in New York, Italian President Sergio Mattarella stated that "we may be the last generation capable of stopping the climate crisis", binding climate change to intergenerational responsibility. At the 2020 United Nations Security Council open debate, Italy emphasized the impact of climate change on peace and security and the multidimensional challenges it poses, particularly noting that intensified competition over water resources in the Sahel has exacerbated terrorism and large-scale migration in the region, threatening security in the Mediterranean. Based on this, Italy also supports the integration of climate risk assessments into peacekeeping operations by the United Nations Security Council (United Nations Security Council, 2023). Following the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, climate change has been linked to other security issues of broad national concern—such as the economy, politics, and the energy transition—thereby increasing public recognition in Italy of the necessity of taking climate governance action and securing social acceptance and support for formulating and implementing climate governance strategies. In the latest surveys, more than two-thirds of Italian respondents believe the country should make climate adaptation a priority; moreover, over half of respondents consider it necessary for Italy to take action to sup-

port global efforts on climate adaptation and to help the most vulnerable countries cope with the intensifying impacts of climate change (European Investment Bank, 2024). Furthermore, Italy's policy actions have extended the impacts of climate change beyond the singular environmental dimension to encompass core national security areas such as public health, cultural heritage, and economic stability (Butti & Rizzo, 2015). Through some national security strategy documents, such as 2023-2025 Multi-Year Defence Programmatic Document and *Relazione Annuale Sulla Politica dell' Informazione per la Sicurezza 2023*, Italy continues to emphasize the wide-ranging impacts of climate change as a "threat multiplier" on sensitive areas such as geopolitics, food security, water resources, the economy, and society. This highlights the urgency and necessity of advancing climate action and provides a policy basis for Italy to optimize its climate governance pathways and carry out climate diplomacy.

Currently, climate change has profoundly shaped Italy's concept of national security and its foreign policy orientation, prompting it to integrate climate governance into its core policy agenda. Against this backdrop, Italy is actively constructing regional cooperation frameworks and advancing multilateral climate initiatives, seeking to transform climate challenges into opportunities for enhancing its international influence. However, multiple constraints—including domestic political volatility, dependence on its existing energy structure, and the need for policy coordination with the European Union—also introduce significant uncertainty into the practical advancement of its climate diplomacy.

3. The Regional Practices of Italy's Climate Diplomacy

Italy regards Mediterranean littoral states and the African continent as the core strategic regions of its climate diplomacy. Climate change and its spillover effects pose severe challenges to regional security and stability. Against this backdrop, Italy seeks to integrate the goals of addressing climate change and safeguarding national security as the central practice of its climate diplomacy in these regions. By actively advancing cooperation in climate governance, accelerating technology transfer and the sharing of best practices, and strengthening policy dialogue and coordination, Italy is committed to mitigating the migration pressures, resource scarcity, and social tensions arising from global warming, and to promoting a multilateral cooperation framework grounded in climate security.

3.1. Building a Mediterranean Climate Security Community

The Mediterranean region is not only a sensitive zone for global climate change but also a focal point where migration flows, resource competition, and environmental pressures intersect. Climate security in the Mediterranean bears directly on the peace and stable development of neighboring countries. In 2024, the leaders of the MED9 issued a statement pledging to strengthen cooperation with southern neighbors on protecting their shared environment and advancing climate adaptation, and to enhance the resilience of societies, ecosystems, and infrastructure to the

impacts of climate change (MED Leader's Summit, 2024). As a key region for Italy's climate diplomacy in practice, Italy actively promotes the building of a Mediterranean climate security community by establishing a multi-level cooperation framework.

First, Italy relies on multiple Mediterranean climate research institutions to conduct monitoring and integration of regional climate data, strengthen the scientific consensus on climate change among Mediterranean countries, and raise the level of attention paid by littoral states to climate issues, thereby facilitating policy uptake. For example, by establishing and funding the Euro-Mediterranean Center on Climate Change (CMCC), Italy provides scientific products and technical support for domestic and various regional climate activities, and organizes participation in climate risk assessment initiatives such as the Adriatic Forecasting System (AFS) and water resource management and climate adaptation in the Adriatic-Ionian region, supplying policy recommendations and coordination for cooperation and action among the relevant countries. In addition, Italy provides financial support to the network of Mediterranean Experts on Climate and Environmental Change (MedECC), which, through the publication of the Mediterranean Assessment Report on Climate Change Risks (MAR1), has revealed the pressing reality that temperatures in the Mediterranean are rising far faster than the global average. As the coordinating body for the Mediterranean chapter of the IPCC report, MedECC integrates regional research findings into the global climate assessment framework, ensuring the visibility of Mediterranean issues in international negotiations (MedECC, 2018). Secondly, Italy further reinforces the securitization narrative in its climate diplomacy by integrating climate conflict prevention issues into its foreign policy. Mitigating resource conflicts is an important component of Italy's Mediterranean climate security strategy. With financial support from the Ministry for the Environment, Land and Sea (MATTM), Italy has incorporated "climate change adaptation" and "climate resilience" into its development aid for Libya and Tunisia. By implementing water resource management projects, such as the construction of a seawater desalination plant in Tunisia, it aims to alleviate social tensions arising from resource competition. In addition, Italy has promoted the active participation of the military sector in climate security governance. By cooperating with NATO to conduct climate risk assessments in the Mediterranean region and incorporating factors such as sea-level rise into naval base protection standards, it has enhanced the climate resilience of military facilities (ECCO, 2023).

Finally, by participating in or leading multiple regional cooperation mechanisms, Italy has established the institutional framework for a Mediterranean climate security community to balance the energy transition with security. In March 2023, Italy, France, and Greece jointly collaborated to advance carbon capture and storage technology, developing related infrastructure in the Mediterranean region in accordance with the Trans-European Networks for Energy (TEN-E) Regulation. This effort aims to maximize synergistic effects and promote the industrial decarbonization process in the Mediterranean region by supporting projects that

include the Callisto CO2 network. At the same time, as a founding member of the East Mediterranean Gas Forum (EMGF), Italy is committed to building a secure and mutually beneficial regional gas market, balancing natural gas resource development with the low-carbon transition. By adding member states from outside the region and attracting relevant countries and institutions such as the United States, the European Union, and the World Bank as observers, it has formed a platform for regional energy security dialogue. Furthermore, Italy is leveraging its unique position spanning the Eastern and Western Mediterranean to sign agreements with other Mediterranean coastal nations to jointly establish an offshore renewable energy alliance. This initiative plans to construct an offshore grid corridor with a total capacity of 8.5 GW, accelerating clean energy interconnection ([Italian Ministry of the Environment and Energy Security, 2024](#)).

3.2. Establishing a Climate Security-Sustainable Development Synergy Mechanism for Africa

Security, migration, and climate change are shared challenges facing Italy and African countries. Therefore, establishing an integrated mechanism linking climate security and sustainable development in Africa holds significant strategic importance for Italy. On the one hand, helping African countries improve their climate mitigation and adaptation policies and strengthen their capacity to address climate change can effectively alleviate the impact on Italy's border security and social systems caused by migration pressures intensified by climate change. On the other hand, the region's abundant natural gas and renewable energy resources make Africa an important partner for Italy in enhancing the diversification and stability of its energy supply and accelerating its energy transition. To this end, Italy has actively promoted the creation of a linkage mechanism between climate security and sustainable development through various means, including financial investment, project cooperation, and technology sharing.

Economic assistance, knowledge sharing, and conflict prevention are the primary means by which Italy supports African countries in enhancing their climate action capacity and achieving sustainable development. First, Italy provides financial support to African countries through multiple channels to strengthen capacity building in climate mitigation and adaptation. For example, between 2015 and 2022, Italy contributed a total of USD 71.65 billion to the Adaptation Fund to support climate mitigation and adaptation efforts in small island states and vulnerable regions in Africa ([Adaptation Fund, n.d.](#)). In addition, Italy has contributed €4.7 million to the Africa Climate Change Fund (ACCF) to assist recipient governments in strengthening capacity building and attracting investment from international climate funds, thereby promoting sustainable development on the African continent. Secondly, Italy, in collaboration with international institutions and regional organizations, promotes knowledge sharing with African nations in the climate sector to enhance regional capacity for sustainable development. In 2019, Italy partnered with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Food

and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to establish the Africa Centre for Climate and Sustainable Development. This center integrates experience in African climate adaptation and agricultural transformation to advance regional information sharing. It focuses on developing sustainable solutions for food security challenges induced by climate change and promotes innovative practices, particularly in the agricultural modernization of the Sahel region (BIZ Community, 2019). At the same time, Italy is providing approximately 14 million USD to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) through the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR). This funding supports climate risk early warning management and sustainable development projects in the sub-Saharan region, aiming to reduce cross-border security risks and impacts triggered by climate change (News Now, 2023).

Italy is working to build a linked mechanism for energy security and sustainable development centered on the “Mattei Plan”, focusing on cooperation with African nations in the areas of energy supply and clean energy transition. The “Mattei Plan” is Italy’s first systemic policy for cooperation with Africa released since the Cold War and is the flagship project of Italy’s current diplomacy toward Africa. Officially proposed in January 2024, the plan focuses on five major areas: energy, agriculture, infrastructure, digitalization, and environmental protection. Its goal is to promote economic ties between Italy and Africa through “non-charitable cooperation”, creating a European energy hub while also addressing the issue of illegal immigration. Energy sustainability also occupies an important position in the “Mattei Plan”. Of the €5.5 billion in initial funding provided for Africa under the plan, €3 billion comes from Italy’s national climate fund, indicating the core status of the energy transition (Fattibene & Manservigi, 2024).

Through the “Mattei Plan”, the Italian government shares clean energy transition technology with African nations, providing support to enhance energy efficiency and promote the use of renewable energy in the region. Initial pilot projects include a renewable energy training center in Morocco, an agricultural monitoring project in Algeria, and the construction of a water network in the Republic of the Congo. To realize the strategic objectives of the “Mattei Plan” in this domain, the Italian government has collaborated with the African Development Bank (AfDB) to establish a multi-donor fund. Italy has pledged 150 million USD in concessional loans and grants to finance joint development projects and is encouraging countries such as the United Arab Emirates to co-finance this initiative. At the same time, Italy is also guiding private enterprises to participate in Africa’s energy transition projects, leveraging private capital through green bonds and blended financing to support the sustainable development of Africa’s energy sector. To this end, Italy has introduced the “Growth and Resilience in Africa platform” (GRAf) and the “Plafond Africa” special fund to promote Italian foreign direct investment in Africa through equity investments, financing, and technical assistance (Hogan Lovells, 2024). Furthermore, Cassa Depositi e Prestiti (CDP) has signed multiple memoranda of understanding with African multilateral development banks. This

cooperation builds upon previous partnerships established between CDP and African financial development institutions, covering the development of sustainable projects in areas such as renewable energy and energy efficiency. It also supports Italian export credit agencies in providing guarantees and business matchmaking services for the energy construction projects of Italian companies in Africa (CDP, 2024).

4. The Challenges on Italy's Climate Diplomacy

Leveraging its unique geographic position and security considerations, Italy has constructed a multi-layered climate diplomacy strategy, extending from international initiatives to regional practices. However, the implementation of this strategy faces a complex web of internal and external challenges. Constrained by multiple domestic political and energy structure limitations, Italy's capacity to formulate coherent climate policies and its determination to accelerate the clean energy transition have been weakened to a certain extent. Furthermore, Italy confronts severe challenges in key areas such as financial support, policy coordination, and multilateral dialogue. These issues not only restrict the practical implementation of its strategic vision but also make it difficult to effectively translate its cooperative initiatives into concrete actions. This, to a degree, undermines Italy's credibility and leadership image within the international climate governance system, affecting the public trust and sustainable impact of its global climate diplomacy.

4.1. Multiple Constraints from the Domestic Political Structure and the Energy Crisis

Italy's climate diplomacy strategy is constrained in its formulation and implementation by complex domestic political and energy-structure issues. On one hand, frequent government changes and partisan disagreements over climate issues have increased uncertainty in advancing Italy's climate strategy and raised the risk of insufficient policy continuity. On the other hand, a high dependence on fossil fuels places Italy in a dilemma between energy security and energy transition, reducing its capacity to advance its climate diplomacy strategy further.

First, Italy's frequent government changes have undermined the coherence of climate policy and impeded the advancement of the green transition. Between 2018 and 2023, Italy's government shifted from Giuseppe Conte to Mario Draghi and then to Giorgia Meloni. Although Italy's overall climate strategy is, in framework, aligned with the EU's green transition objectives, the priority given to climate issues has varied across administrations, resulting in difficulty sustaining policy formulation and implementation and delaying Italy's green transition. For example, while the Conte government clarified emission reduction targets centered on renewable energy through the National Energy and Climate Plan (PNIEC) and sought to align national policy with the European Green Deal, the succeeding Draghi government did not continue that strategy. Under his leadership, Italy's climate adaptation plan was not approved by the government, and in the face of the dual shocks

of the pandemic and the Russia–Ukraine conflict, “ensuring energy security” and “stabilizing energy prices” became the government’s short-term core objectives, causing many policies intended to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to be weakened or postponed (Liberti, 2022). The Meloni government, meanwhile, further adjusted its policy direction, downgrading the priority of climate action on the government’s agenda. She openly criticized the EU’s emission reduction targets as “climate fundamentalism”, adopted an ambiguous stance on “climate change”, and argued that the European Green Deal and its promoted “ideological approach” would bring “disastrous consequences” for Europe, advocating for a re-examination and adjustment of the agreement subject to the priority of protecting national economic development. These policy shifts and disagreements have not only directly delayed the implementation of green projects but also increased uncertainty among stakeholders regarding the future policy environment, posing risks to Italy’s achievement of long-term sustainable development goals.

Secondly, the profound divergence between Italy’s left and right-wing parties on climate policy exacerbates the vacillation in the formulation and execution of its climate diplomacy strategy. Unlike center-left parties, which generally acknowledge the urgency of climate change and advocate proactive positions such as promoting specific climate policies and strengthening international cooperation, right-wing parties typically adopt a more conservative and inward-looking stance on climate and energy issues. While they do not entirely deny the existence of climate change, they tend to frame it as a domestic issue, deliberately downplaying the connection between immigration and climate change to avoid addressing the global and structural challenges posed by climate change. They seek to decouple climate governance from transnational cooperation while reducing recognition of the European Union’s pivotal role in managing the climate crisis (Clean Energy Wire, 2024). This tendency echoes the broader rightward shift in Europe’s political climate in recent years. Following the 2024 European Parliament elections, while the rise of far-right populist forces has not yet shaken the overall dominance of mainstream parties, the decline of the Greens and center-left forces has prompted a noticeable recalibration of the EU’s overall climate policy. The new European Commission has shifted its core focus from “climate neutrality” to being “centered on growth and investment”, explicitly prioritizing the goal of “building a strong and secure, prosperous and competitive Europe” (European Commission, 2025). Although the commitments of the European Green Deal have not been abandoned, climate policy has shifted from a comprehensive strategy to a tool serving economic competition and security objectives, a transformation that has, to some extent, fueled a political atmosphere of “green backlash” at the member-state level. Against this backdrop, the Meloni government’s actions reflect this strategic orientation of Italy’s current right-wing parties. In its 2024 election platform, the right-wing coalition introduced the slogan “Beyond the Green Deal, back to common sense”, criticizing so-called “climate ideology” and “climate alarmism”. It clearly prioritizes national energy security and disaster risk management, relegating the reduc-

tion of greenhouse gas emissions to a secondary position (Bettini & Casaglia, 2024). The claim to “nationalize” the issue of climate change reduces the impetus to construct and refine a climate diplomacy strategy and simultaneously limits the capacity to undertake cross-border climate governance cooperation. An increasingly inward-looking and conservative climate strategy prevents Italy from playing a more leadership role in Europe’s green transition and weakens its standing in international climate negotiations, leaving it passive in the field of international climate cooperation.

Finally, Italy’s energy supply structure constrains its ability to accelerate the clean energy transition, and its “energy security first” strategy has led to questions about the sincerity of its climate diplomacy. Traditional fossil fuels remain the primary source of energy in Italy, with natural gas, oil, and coal holding significant positions in its energy mix. This high dependence on imported energy makes the country vulnerable to external disruptions, potentially triggering energy supply crises and subsequent energy inflation. In 2022, Italy’s energy import dependency rate reached 79%, well above the EU average of 63%. Notably, its natural gas import dependency stood at 39%, the highest among EU member states (Eurostat, 2024). The Russia-Ukraine conflict once drove Italian natural gas prices to surge by 96.5% year-on-year, well above the eurozone’s 77.6% increase; as a result, Italy’s peak electricity price rise reached 199%, compared with the eurozone average of just 45.6% (Nascia et al., 2023). The crisis has compelled Italy to prioritize the diversification and security of its energy supply, attempting to address the reduction in Russian gas supplies by increasing natural gas imports from Africa. To this end, Italy is building new energy partnerships with African nations through multiple channels to ensure it can effectively utilize Africa’s abundant energy resources. Against the current backdrop of a widespread European pursuit of energy security, expanding Italy’s role as a Europe-Africa gas hub and consolidating its strategic position in Europe-Africa energy cooperation have become priority strategic goals for the Italian government. Italy’s support for the actions of its largest energy group, Eni, to expand development investments in Algeria, Libya, and Egypt to boost fossil fuel production contradicts the initiatives in its “Mattei Plan” to strengthen cooperation with African countries on climate adaptation and mitigation. This diverts Italy’s attention from energy transition cooperation while further fueling distrust among African nations regarding Italy’s “equal partnership” and criticism of “neocolonialism” (Climate Home News, 2024). The theoretical core of this criticism originates from the concept of “green colonialism” or “eco-colonialism”, which posits that developed countries, under the guise of climate governance, continue to control and exploit the natural resources of Global South countries through investment and technological means. This asymmetrically transfers environmental costs and development burdens to developing countries, disregarding the development needs and environmental justice of local communities, thereby perpetuating historical structural inequalities (Claar, 2022). Within this framework, Africa faces the risk of being locked in as a primary energy supplier for Europe’s green

transition, making it difficult to achieve a truly autonomous, sustainable, and just energy transition. Angelo Bonelli, a representative of Italy's Greens and Left Alliance, pointed out that the Mattei Plan proposes converting over one million hectares of land in Africa, originally used for food production, to biofuel crops. These same regions are currently facing severe malnutrition and hunger (Notizie.it, 2024). Such energy transition cooperation, which ignores the actual needs of African nations, could cause the distrust of African countries toward Italy to continually rise, thereby hindering the further advancement of cooperation.

4.2. Internal Pressures and Policy Coordination Dilemmas within the European Union

Italy's climate diplomacy strategy is rooted in the European Union's climate governance framework. Its domestic and foreign climate actions are both constrained by EU law and supported by relevant EU funds. However, a gap persists between Italy's current emissions reduction progress and the targets required by the EU. At the same time, Italy's interests diverge from those of the EU on global climate governance policy, which further complicates policy coordination between the two parties.

First, a significant gap exists between the implementation of Italy's emissions reduction policies and the EU's reduction targets. Although Italy's overall reduction target is aligned with the EU's, the intensity of its existing policies is insufficient to support the achievement of its climate objectives. Furthermore, Italy lags behind other major EU economies in setting its renewable energy transition targets. Despite the government's active promotion of emissions reduction and green transition policies under the Recovery and Resilience Plan, coupled with increased economic investment, projections from Italy's Ministry of Energy indicate that these policies are still inadequate to meet the EU's previous 33% emissions reduction target, let alone the updated 43.7% target. The latest assessments show that Italy's current reduction measures could lead to its 2030 greenhouse gas emissions exceeding its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) target by approximately 16% and could exhaust its allowable emissions budget for achieving the 1.5°C temperature control goal before 2036 (FTSE Russell, 2024). Furthermore, Italy lags behind other major EU economies in its ability to set and implement targets for promoting the energy transition. Taking the decarbonization of the power system as an example, to help the EU achieve its goal of a fully decarbonized power system, member states have respectively set targets for the share of renewables in their electricity mix by 2030. Although Italy has raised its target from 55% to 65%, it is still generally lower than the targets previously set by major EU countries like Germany and Spain. In terms of action, the construction of renewable energy generation infrastructure in Italy has been slow. In 2023, Italy's new renewable energy installed capacity was nearly 6 GW. However, to achieve its 2030 target of 131 GW of renewable energy, Italy needs to add 10 - 11 GW of new renewable installed capacity annually, indicating that its progress is severely behind schedule. These issues highlight Italy's implementation shortfalls in climate action, requiring it to

further strengthen policy design and introduce more systematic and effective solutions (ECCO Climate & E3G, 2024).

Secondly, Italy has disagreements with the European Union regarding the use and allocation of EU climate-related funds. In recent years, the EU has adopted an allocation mechanism for climate funds, such as green funds, based on rigorous data assessments and uniform standards. For example, the European Green Deal explicitly stipulates the proportion of funds that member states must use toward low-carbon transition goals and determines allocations based on each country's economic structure, emissions levels, and regional development status. However, this mechanism often overlooks the funding needs of some economically weaker regions during the recovery process, leading to an imbalanced allocation of funds. Taking the EU's "Recovery and Resilience Facility" (RRF) as an example, although Italy is the largest recipient country, receiving approximately 26.1% of the total funds, over 39% of this funding is designated for addressing climate change. But because the facility's aid mechanism dictates that Italy must achieve specific reform and investment targets as planned before it can receive the next phase of aid funds, Italy—currently in urgent need of economic recovery, social stability, and energy security—is caught in a dilemma between green initiatives and development. Against this backdrop, Meloni has publicly expressed doubts about the scale of EU financing for the green transition, hoping to reallocate a portion of the Recovery and Resilience Facility funds intended for climate change and the energy transition to the areas of economic development and energy security (POLITICO, n.d.). This has further slowed Italy's progress in advancing the green transition within the EU framework and has affected its close cooperative relationship with the EU on climate issues.

Finally, Italy and the European Union have conflicting interests regarding certain key emissions reduction policies. To ensure that emissions reduction targets are met on schedule, the EU has formulated and introduced a series of policies aimed at accelerating the pace of the green transition. However, while these policies promote sustainable development, they may also conflict with Italy's core interests, such as industrial competitiveness and economic recovery. For example, to mitigate the impact of the transportation sector on the EU's greenhouse gas emissions, the EU has vigorously promoted the adoption of new energy vehicles, particularly electric vehicles. In March 2023, it formally passed a regulation stipulating that from 2035, all new cars and vans sold in Europe must be zero-emission. However, the measure has faced strong opposition from the Italian government, with Prime Minister Meloni even calling it a "self-destructive" policy (Harici, 2024). The Italian government argues that the EU's approach fails to adequately account for the specific challenges Southern European countries face in economic recovery and industrial restructuring. A rapid shift to electric vehicles would severely impact Italy's automotive sector and the broader economy, not only resulting in the loss of tens of thousands of jobs but also weakening the competitiveness of the traditional car manufacturing industry. At present, the conventional automotive industry makes

a significant contribution to the Italian economy, directly or indirectly employing 270,000 workers. Accelerating the phase-out of internal combustion engines could force a large number of small and medium-sized suppliers reliant on fuel engines out of the market amid the green transition, further exacerbating economic pressures. At the same time, Italy has taken a cautious stance toward the European Union's Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM). On the one hand, Italy is concerned that CBAM's implementation will weaken the international competitiveness of its firms, inflicting significant negative impacts on high-carbon-emission sectors that depend on imported raw materials—such as steel, aluminum, and cement—thereby subjecting Italy's traditional industries to higher cost pressures and a loss of market share. As key pillars of the industrial economy, if these sectors are hit, domestic employment and industrial stability will be further threatened. Meanwhile, the additional carbon charges introduced by the policy may further raise the prices of Italian exports, causing them to lose competitive advantages in global markets and thereby exerting long-term effects on an export-oriented economy. On the other hand, against the backdrop of high energy costs and a sluggish economic recovery, Italy believes that mandating CBAM will further complicate its recovery process. The implementation timeline is overly compressed, leaving relevant industries without sufficient time to adapt and adjust, which could trigger severe turbulence in the economy and industrial structure. Overall, compared to the European Union's ambition to accelerate the green transition and its emissions reduction plans, Italy is more inclined to prioritize economic and industrial recovery, adopting a more gradual strategy to address climate change. This difference in objectives highlights their divergent priorities and could lead Italy to downgrade the priority of climate security in its climate agenda. In terms of climate policy coordination, Italy leans towards a more pragmatic stance, but this position is in deep conflict with the EU's vision for emissions reduction, further exacerbating the coordination dilemma between the two parties in the field of climate diplomacy.

4.3. Lack of Action and Leadership in International Cooperation

International cooperation is at the core of Italy's climate diplomacy. Although Italy has attempted to strengthen international action and enhance its own international influence through various channels, its policy proposals and specific actions still reveal a real lack of capacity for action and a deficit in leadership in the implementation of its climate diplomacy strategy. First, Italy has a low rating for its implementation of international climate policy, and its policy targets and emission reduction effectiveness have been consistently questioned. This uncertainty makes it difficult for Italy to effectively foster trust from the international community regarding its climate commitments. In the 2025 Climate Change Performance Index (CCPI), Italy ranked 43rd, with an index score below the EU average and a position in the lower-middle tier of the overall rankings (CCPI, n.d.). Beyond the fact that its emission reduction targets do not fully align with EU requirements,

Italy has been slow to accelerate the deployment of renewable energy and to phase out fossil fuels, repeatedly delaying its coal phase-out plan. The latest plan indicates that Italy aims to phase out coal-fired power generation between 2026 and 2028, but Sardinia is excluded from the national plan. Italy has also not incorporated its commitment to decarbonize the power system by 2035 into national legislation, nor has it included this commitment in its revised National Energy and Climate Plan, leaving its actions without formal legal binding force and undermining the credibility of the commitment. As previously mentioned, Italy's policy of approving new fossil fuel projects to break its energy dependence on Russia, coupled with its insufficient efforts in developing renewable energy, has further exacerbated concerns about the credibility of its climate commitments and its long-term emissions reduction capabilities. The convergence of these issues has led the international community to question Italy's resolve and capacity to decisively address climate change, thereby diminishing its influence in global climate action.

Secondly, Italy exhibits significant shortcomings in its capacity to support international climate finance. Climate finance is not only a crucial measure for assisting developing countries in addressing climate change but also a key channel for Italy to conduct climate security cooperation with relevant nations. However, Italy's performance in mobilizing funds has struggled to meet international expectations. The Italian Climate Fund, established through Italy's 2022 Budget Law and considered its core tool for mobilizing climate finance, will allocate €840 million annually until 2026, providing a total of €4.2 billion in climate funding, primarily to support climate-related bilateral cooperation with other countries. Additionally, Italy has provided €300 million in dedicated funding to the United Nations Green Climate Fund, of which €100 million is for the Loss and Damage Fund (*Ministero dell'Ambiente e della Sicurezza Energetica, n.d.*). Even so, these financial contributions fall far short of the financing requirements for Italy proposed under the New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) at COP29. According to the draft negotiation text, Italy is required to contribute approximately €47 billion towards a total goal of \$1 trillion, with funds designated for uses including Official Development Assistance (ODA), refinancing for multilateral banks and the Green Climate Fund, climate debt swaps, as well as loans, bonds, and other private financial instruments. However, Italy currently still faces an annual funding gap of about \$95 million, presenting a severe challenge to its fund mobilization capabilities. In 2025, Italy cut the Ministry of the Environment's budget by 9.4%, leaving little room for any further increases in climate finance. Continued fiscal tightening not only weakens Italy's voice in international climate cooperation, but also directly undermines its capacity to conduct global and regional climate cooperation through climate finance. In the realm of regional cooperation, Italy likewise faces a shortage of financial support. In 2023, Italy reduced its bilateral funding to African countries by 32%. Its "Mattei Plan" relies entirely on existing funds, has failed to attract additional investment, and has performed poorly in mobilizing foreign capital and private-sector investment. This funding squeeze not only lim-

its Italy's ability to provide assistance in Africa, but also undermines its efforts to advance its international strategy through climate cooperation, further weakening the role and influence of climate finance as a geopolitical tool.

Finally, Italy lacks leadership capacity in international climate governance cooperation, and its influence in international climate negotiations is relatively limited. Constrained by multiple factors—including its level of economic development, the strength of its emissions reduction efforts, and insufficient capabilities in energy transition—Italy more often plays the role of project implementer and conference host in international climate cooperation, rather than that of rule-maker or strategic leader. It also lacks the ability to set agendas and steer discussions in international negotiations. Although Italy increased the international visibility of climate security issues in the Mediterranean while holding the presidencies of the UN Security Council and the G7, its domestic policy domain has consistently failed to systematically integrate climate change responses with security risks, resulting in initiatives that lack concrete policy support and are difficult to implement in practice, preventing it from becoming a frontrunner and leader in climate governance. In addition, Italy has put forward relatively few innovative proposals at UN climate conferences and has been comparatively passive in advancing the global climate agenda. For example, in COP26, which it co-hosted with the United Kingdom, Italy primarily assumed coordination and organizational responsibilities rather than leading the push for specific outcomes. The final results largely depended on the core actors in global climate governance—such as the European Union, the United States, and China—while Italy's independent role was limited, operating mostly within the framework of the EU's positions.

5. Conclusion

Climate change has become a significant issue in Italy's diplomatic strategy. As one of the Mediterranean countries most profoundly affected by climate change, Italy not only faces increasingly severe climate threats but also seeks to transform these challenges into opportunities for shaping international influence through diplomatic means. Leveraging its geopolitical advantage as a Mediterranean nexus, Italy promotes regional climate diplomacy practices to build a "Mediterranean Climate Security Community", accelerating cooperation on technology transfer, financial support, and migration governance. Through this series of strategic designs, Italy attempts to deeply integrate national security with climate governance, constructing a climate diplomacy framework with Italian characteristics.

However, a significant gap persists between Italy's strategic vision and its actual execution. Affected by domestic political instability, insufficient economic resources, and slow progress in its energy transition, Italy's climate diplomacy strategy formulation and implementation have revealed problems such as diminished issue priority, a lack of policy coherence, and insufficient execution capability. Under the dual pressures of a continued global economic downturn and the European energy crisis, the contradiction between Italy's capabilities and its vision is particularly

prominent. The current Italian government's policy orientation of "energy security first" and "economic development first" further marginalizes climate diplomacy within its national diplomatic strategy. It is worth noting that Italy's regional practices in climate diplomacy also face considerable controversy. For instance, in its cooperation with African nations, to secure its own energy needs, Italy may steer cooperation intended for clean energy technology transfer and development more towards serving domestic energy interests, failing to fully address the development demands of its partner countries. This limitation not only risks undermining Italy's commitment to "non-predatory cooperation" with African nations but could also erode their trust in its regional climate cooperation plans, casting a shadow over long-term cooperation in climate governance. Concurrently, this policy path could weaken the original intent of Italy's climate adaptation cooperation—to mitigate the impact of climate migration on its social stability—further limiting the effectiveness of its climate diplomacy strategy. These challenges do not exist in isolation; they are interwoven and mutually reinforcing. Domestic political volatility leads to a lack of coherence in climate policy, weakening the implementation of emissions reduction and the energy transition. The strategic prioritization of energy security further limits Italy's international credibility in promoting a clean energy transition. Meanwhile, internal divisions and financial constraints within the European Union exacerbate Italy's passive position in transnational cooperation. Together, these factors constitute a systemic barrier that not only diverts policy resources and political will but also makes it difficult for Italy to formulate a unified, efficient, and sustainable strategic response to climate change. This severely constrains the effectiveness of its climate diplomacy and the exercise of its regional leadership.

Italy urgently needs to achieve breakthroughs in enhancing policy coordination effectiveness, strengthening regional cooperation, and optimizing resource allocation to address the complex threats posed by climate change. On one hand, Italy must deepen internal policy integration within the EU framework and further strengthen collaboration with various EU climate funds, achieving more efficient use and output of capital through technological innovation and clearer burden-sharing mechanisms. On the other hand, Italy should also place high importance on the actual needs of its partner countries, demonstrating greater transparency and fairness in financial support, technology sharing, and policy coordination to ensure that cooperation genuinely serves the sustainable development of its partners while achieving Italy's own energy transition goals. Only by ensuring cooperation on the basis of equality and reciprocity can Italy truly consolidate its regional influence through its climate diplomacy strategy and secure a more significant position in global climate governance.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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