

# The European Green Deal in the face of rising radical right-wing populism

## • Executive summary

The continuous implementation of the European Green Deal will take place in an increasingly challenging geopolitical, social, and economic environment. Meanwhile, radical right-wing populist parties are gaining ground across the Union. Above the factors that traditionally have explained the *populist moment*, the success of these political forces today is part of a very specific European context characterised by a strong pessimism about the socio-economic situation as a result of the consequences of recent health, geopolitical and energy crises.

In this context, the strengthening of the radical right can partially be interpreted as an expression of mistrust in institutions and traditional political parties' ability to respond to citizens' fears in the face of both domestic and international insecurities. Implementing the European Green Deal will require substantial transformations of our fossil-based societies, which can create high levels of uncertainties among the population (concerning jobs, mobility, affordability, quality of life, etc.). The radical right's increasing instrumentalization of energy, climate and environmental policy for electoral purposes can be understood against this background.

In the face of uncertainties and fears, the radical right weaves opposition towards the European Green Deal into their nationalist, anti-immigration, and identity narratives. They furthermore put a strong emphasis on negative distributional impacts that green policies could have. Lessons from Member States with a strong presence of radical right populist parties show that their rise is partly an expression of political frustration in the face of deteriorating living conditions as well as the fear of downward social mobility. In response, radical right parties turn the regard inwards

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#EuropeanGreenDeal  
#populism  
#Fitfor55

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towards the protection of national interests and against ‘Brussels interference’. These positions are reflected in votes on European Green Deal files in the European Parliament by the two party groups that gather the conservative and radical right, European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) and Identity and Democracy (ID).

**As recent elections in Member States indicate further strengthening of the radical right ahead of the European Parliament elections in June 2024**, heads-of-states, and the European People’s Party have shown signs of increasing ambivalence towards the European Green Deal’s ambition and implementation. However, to prevent further instrumentalization of green policies by the radical right and ensure continued climate ambition, **it is urgent to develop an alternative narrative for the European Green Deal accompanied by concrete policy responses centred on building trust**. In the face of Eurosceptic discourses, the EU needs to show that it contributes, together with the Member States, to provide solutions through joint responses based on solidarity. Here, it is essential to initiate policies and governance mechanisms that are able to ensure that citizens and stakeholders can trust that individual and collective concerns are acknowledged by EU policymakers to confidently engage in the green transition.

**To that end, the European Green Deal should better integrate mechanisms for support, protection, and dialogue<sup>1</sup>** to improve the effectiveness and legitimacy of climate and energy policies and build trust in our collective ability to realise a mutually beneficial green transition. This policy paper recommends the implementation of mechanisms to:

- I. **Offer support and protection based on differentiated capacity to change, and differentiated impacts of the transition**, including through an increased EU budget to fund clean infrastructure programmes, a truly European green industrial policy, and to strengthen support for vulnerable households and regions, as well as an active employment and skills policies.
- II. **Develop more open, interactive, and inclusive governance to favour quality dialogue<sup>2</sup>**, including through enhanced access to quality energy data supporting quality policy evaluation, improved stakeholder dialogues with policymakers to provide policy input from the ground, and citizen assemblies as a way to keep exploring socially acceptable green policy designs.

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1 Such as citizen dialogues, which were the predecessor to the Conference on the Future of Europe and citizen panels, or Clean Transition Dialogues launched by President von der Leyen in Fall 2023 with industrial stakeholders. These dialogues, meant to provide an interface between citizens or other stakeholders, and policymakers, should be better tied to the EU decision-making process.

2 To see the policy recommendations, go to page 24.

## • Introduction

Since the European Green Deal's introduction in 2019, the EU has made significant legislative progress towards its 2050 climate neutrality objective, including through the adoption of the Fit for 55 climate and energy package, which is now entering its implementation phase at the national level. **The current context is characterised by high inflation, a cost-of-living crisis, geopolitical insecurities, threatened competitiveness, and an increasing strain on public budgets.** The implementation of the Green Deal is thus taking place in an increasingly challenging environment.

**EU citizens are expressing a particularly strong pessimism regarding the current socio-economic situation.** This can be seen, for example, in the results of the latest Parlemeter, which identified the fight against poverty and social exclusion (36%) and public health (34%) as the top priority issues. In addition, more than a third of Europeans (37%) have difficulty paying their bills, either temporarily or most of the time<sup>3</sup>. Adding to this, **green policies adopted at the EU-level could have negative distributional impacts<sup>4</sup> that could further complicate their implementation and create social-backlash<sup>5</sup>.**

This occurs at a time when **radical right-wing populist parties are gaining ground in the EU**, illustrated by recent elections in, for example, Sweden, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands. This rise can partially be explained by mistrust in institutions and traditional political parties' ability to respond to citizens' fears in the face of both domestic and international insecurities. The climate and energy transition will require a large societal transformation, which could create high levels of uncertainty for the population (concerning jobs, mobility, affordability, quality of life, etc.). In this context, **green policies are increasingly instrumentalised by these parties to provoke resentment and frustration among parts of the population who are, or feel threatened by, the changes required to achieve the climate objectives<sup>6</sup>.**

Additionally, the rise of the radical right appears to contribute to an **increasing ambivalence towards the Union's green ambition from centre-right parties, both in Member States and in the European Parliament.** These trends could foreshadow a shift in priorities away from the European Green Deal ahead of the European Parliamentary elections in 2024. **This comes at a time when achieving EU climate ambitions by 2030 and 2050 is a battle far from won.** As an illustration, EU Member States need to further increase their ambition, as current national measures are not sufficient to reach the 55% reduction target until 2030<sup>7</sup>.

To prevent further instrumentalization of green policies of the radical right and ensure continued climate ambitions, this paper aims to develop **an alternative narrative for the European Green Deal centred on building trust, based on three pillars: support, protection and dialogue, in order to enhance the legitimacy and effectiveness of green policies.**

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3 Eurobarometer. (2023). [European Parliament Autumn 2023 Survey: six months before the 2024 European Elections](#). These two were followed by action against climate change and support to the economy and creation of new jobs (both 29%).

4 Stenning, J. et al. (2021). ['Exploring the tradeoffs in different paths to reduce transport and heating emissions in Europe'](#). *Final report*, Cambridge: Cambridge Econometrics.

5 Defard C. (2022). ['The need for a socially-just European Green Deal. Lessons from the Yellow Vests movement'](#), *Policy paper*, Paris: Jacques Delors Institute, June.

6 De Meyer, K. (2023) ['A six mois des européennes, l'UE face à une poussée de l'extrême droite'](#), *Les Echos*, 23 November. (Accessed: 01 December 2023).

7 European Commission. (2023). [EU wide assessment of the draft updated National Energy and Climate Plans](#). COM(2023) 96 final.

**Part I** introduces the economic, social and geopolitical headwinds that the implementation of the European Green Deal is facing, including the rise of radical right populist parties and their resistance to green policies.

**Part II** illustrates headwinds that the European Green Deal is facing in Member States, through case studies on positions and influence of radical right-wing populist parties in Sweden, Germany, Italy and Poland.

**Part III** outlines headwinds in the European institutions, that show signs of increasing ambivalence towards the Union’s green ambitions among heads-of-states and in the European Parliament as a response to the strengthening of the radical right.

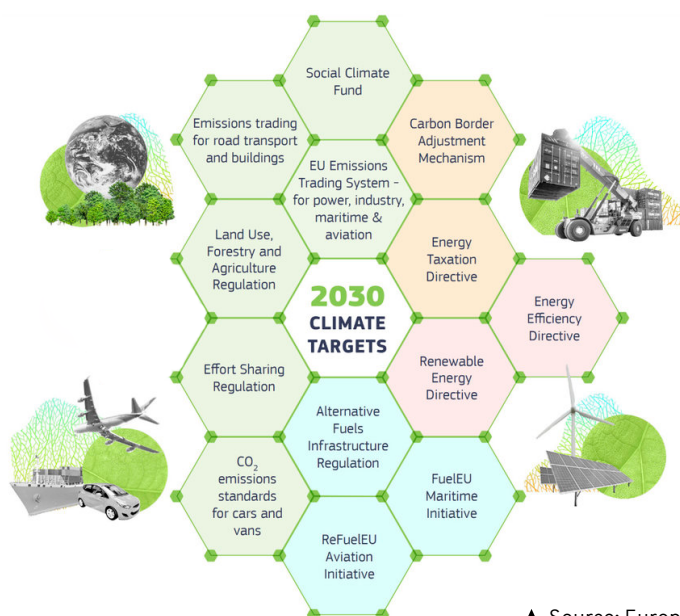
**Part IV** suggests an alternative narrative for the European Green Deal with concrete policy recommendations on how the European Green Deal could better integrate mechanisms for support, protection, and dialogue to improve the effectiveness and legitimacy of climate and energy policies in order to build trust for the green transition.

## I • The European Green Deal implementation challenges and surging radical right-wing populism: general elements

### I THE FIT FOR 55 IMPLEMENTATION CHALLENGES

The centrepiece of the European Green Deal is the **Fit for 55 package** that updates the 2030 energy and climate regulatory framework. It raises EU targets for renewable and energy efficiency deployment, strengthens the existing carbon market for large emitters, and introduces a ban on the sale of new internal combustion engine cars by 2035. Additionally, it creates new policy tools, such as the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism, the second carbon market on heating and road transport, and the Social Climate Fund to support the energy transition for vulnerable households<sup>8</sup>.

**FIGURE 1.** The Fit for 55 Package

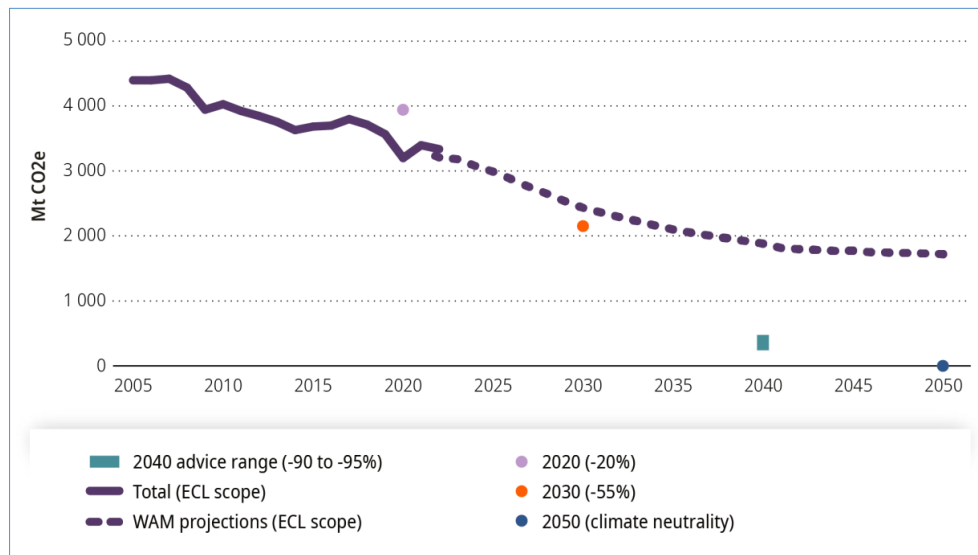


▲ Source: European Union (2021).

<sup>8</sup> See upcoming infographic from Jacques Delors Institute on the Fit for 55 package.

To achieve the 2030 objective of 55% emission reductions by 2030, the rate of annual emission reductions must triple<sup>9</sup>. Without even mentioning the biodiversity issue, and besides the need to address the increasing challenges on renewables deployment, Member States need to initiate the massification of deep renovation programmes for housing, deploy infrastructure and policies favouring low carbon mobility such as public transport, cycling, car-sharing, and support the electrification of applications in buildings, mobility and industrial sectors.

**FIGURE 2.** Overall progress towards the EU's 2030 and 2050 objectives since 2005<sup>10</sup>



▲ Source: ESABCC (2024).

The legislation adopted at the EU-level will have different impacts in terms of costs and benefits across households, businesses, industries, regions, and Member states that could further complicate their implementation and create backlash<sup>11</sup>. Together with the Social Climate Fund mentioned above, the Just Transition Fund is a tool to support vulnerable regions in the transition, and primarily those that are coal-dependent, but also those dependent on carbon-intensive industries like steel or chemicals. However, the envelopes of these funds still remain modest in comparison to the challenges they are meant to tackle<sup>12</sup>.

Successfully implementing the Fit for 55 regulations at the national level will require additional policy effort to provide financial, technical, and human

<sup>9</sup> European Commission. (2023). *EU Climate Action Progress Report 2023*. COM(2023) 653 final.

<sup>10</sup> European Scientific Advisory Board on Climate Change. (2024). *Towards EU climate neutrality Progress, policy gaps and opportunities. Assessment report*. "WAM: projections 'with additional measures'. These reflect the expected impacts of existing policies and additional ones that Member States were expecting to adopt at the time the projections were made. The projections do not necessarily reflect all the recently adopted elements of the Fit for 55 package. The 2040 range corresponds to the 90-95% reduction compared to 1990 recommended by the Advisory Board. Except for the 2020 target, the scope considered for the GHG emissions includes all domestic emissions and removals, 64% of the international maritime emissions reported in the GHG inventory, and all international aviation emissions reported in the GHG inventory. The 2020 target includes gross domestic GHG emissions (excluding LULUCF) and international aviation".

<sup>11</sup> Defard C. (2022). 'The need for a socially-just European Green Deal. Lessons from the Yellow Vests movement', *Policy paper*, Paris: Jacques Delors Institute, June.

<sup>12</sup> Go to part III for an in-depth analysis.

**resources that are currently lacking**<sup>13</sup>. At present, public financing for the energy and climate transition is barely sufficient at EU level and will clearly fall short when Next Generation EU ends in 2026<sup>14</sup>. Despite the sometimes-large subsidy programmes that exist, the remaining costs to access clean solutions are still high for many households<sup>15</sup> and businesses. Administrations, especially at the local level, lack the human and technical capacity to successfully implement green projects<sup>16</sup>, while the private sector is facing green skills shortages.

**Geopolitical and geoeconomic tensions create significant additional EU public financing needs** to increase the resilience of the European transition and economy. Additional financing is particularly needed to fulfil REPowerEU's objectives on phasing out Russian fossil fuels before 2030, especially in Member States with less fiscal space,<sup>17</sup> and to scale up European cleantech manufacturing<sup>18</sup>. In addition, the implementation of green policies will take place in an unfavourable social and economic context after years of hesitation and lack of political will.

**At the same time as the transition needs to speed up, Europe is facing the economic impacts of the energy and cost-of-living crisis** triggered by Russia's gas supply manipulation and invasion of Ukraine. Together with high energy costs and lack of skilled workers, uncertainty linked to geopolitical turmoil acts as a deterrent to green private investment.<sup>19</sup> Public budgets are strained<sup>20</sup> due to the large national emergency support programmes that were introduced during the energy price crisis<sup>21</sup>. Despite policy efforts, the pandemic and energy crisis disproportionately affected poorer, younger, and less educated citizens<sup>22</sup>, and energy poverty has increased<sup>23</sup>. Meanwhile, energy intensive industrial activities were negatively impacted by the energy crisis, especially in Europe's industrial powerhouse: Germany<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> Defard, C. (2023). 'Energy Union 2.0. to deliver the European Green Deal'. *Report*, Paris: Jacques Delors Institute, November.

<sup>14</sup> Pisani-Ferry, J., Tagliapietra, S., Zachmann, G. 2023. 'A new governance framework to safeguard the European Green Deal'. Bruegel. Policy Brief.

<sup>15</sup> As showed by a study on access and adequacy of French subsidies for deep energy renovation and electric mobility, Vailles, C., Ousaci, S., Kessler, L. 2023. 'Is the transition accessible to all French households?'. *Climate report*, Paris. I4CE.

<sup>16</sup> EIB. (2023). *Investment Report 2022/2023: Resilience and renewal in Europe*.

<sup>17</sup> Buck, M., Duslot, A., Hein, F., Redl, C., Graf, A., Holl, M., Sartor, O., Baccianti, C. (2022). Regaining Europe's Energy Sovereignty. *15 Priority Actions for REPowerEU*. Agora Energiewende. Report.

<sup>18</sup> Agora Energiewende and Agora Industry. (2023). *Ensuring resilience in Europe's Energy Transition: the role of EU clean-tech manufacturing*.

<sup>19</sup> EIB. (2023). *Investment Report 2022/2023: Resilience and renewal in Europe*.

<sup>20</sup> Zettelmeyer, J., Claeys, G., Darvas, Z., Lennard, W., Zenios, S. (2023). 'The longer-term fiscal challenges facing the EU'. *Policy Brief*, Bruegel.

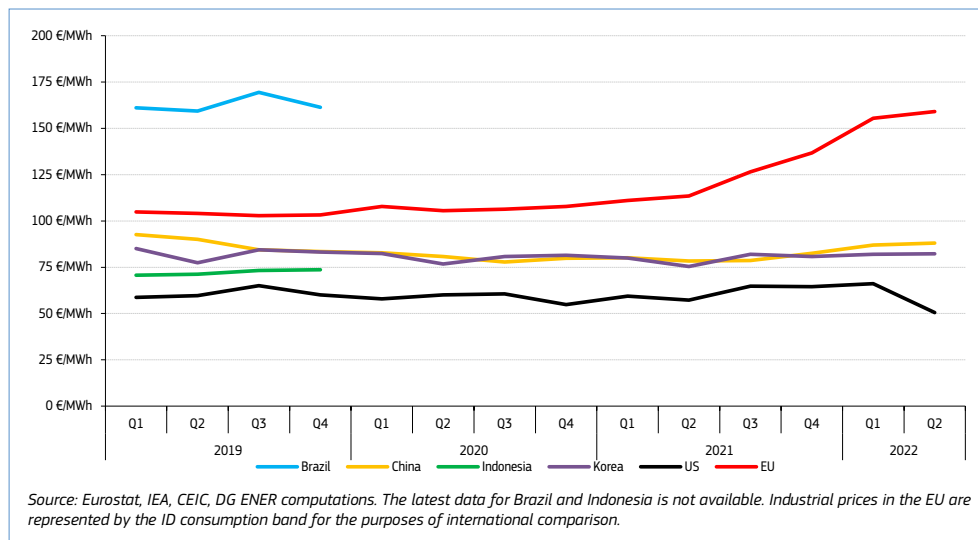
<sup>21</sup> Brezovska, R., Zachmann, G., Pellerin-Carlin, T. Nguyen, P.V., Leuser, L., Thalberg, K., Panzeri, D. Galindo, J. 2022. *United in diversity? National responses to the European energy crisis*. AMO, Bruegel, JDI, ECCO, EsadeEcPol, AMO.CZ. *Climate paper no.16*.

<sup>22</sup> EIB.(2023). *Investment report 2022/2023: resilience and renewal in Europe*.

<sup>23</sup> European Commission. (2023). *Energy poverty*. (Accessed: 4 January 2024).

<sup>24</sup> Agora Energiewende. (2023). *Germany's CO2 emissions drop to record low but reveal gaps in country's climate policies*.

**FIGURE 3. Retail electricity prices paid by industrial consumers in the EU and some of its trading partners<sup>25</sup>**



▲ Source: European Commission (2023).

**EU industries are also facing an adverse environment** due to heightened international competition. One example is the US adoption of the Inflation Reduction Act in August 2022, a massive subsidy programme for cleantech manufacturing with protectionist features. As another an example, the risk of China taking over the electric vehicle market is real, with Chinese car exports surpassing German ones for the first time in 2022. Some argue that the deindustrialization risks in Germany are equivalent to the ones that hit the US Rust Belt.<sup>26</sup> This could have potentially dramatic social and political consequences, as adverse labour market development have been found to fuel political polarisation in a number of advanced economies, including the US and Sweden<sup>27</sup>. Moreover, the European Central Bank’s rate hikes deteriorate lending conditions for all actors, with a special impact on small businesses’ access to finance, in the context of an increasing reluctance of investors to take on risks.

**An ambitious implementation of the European Green Deal could contribute to increasing the EU’s long-term resilience, security, and prosperity.** The stakes are high, and so are the social, economic, and geopolitical challenges. In addition, rising radical right populism could further complicate the continuous ambition and implementation of the Fit for 55 and European Green Deal. The next section will outline the core characteristics of populist parties, specify some of the reasons behind the strengthening of the radical right, and explain how their resistance towards energy and climate policy could add to the difficulty to the transition.

<sup>25</sup> European Commission. (2023). *Quarterly report on EU electricity markets Q3 2022*.

<sup>26</sup> Marin, D. (2023). 'L'Allemagne doit éviter les conséquences négatives d'un « choc chinois »'. *Le Monde*, 16 June. (Accessed: 4 January 2024).

<sup>27</sup> Rodrik, D., Sabel, F. C., 2019. *Building a Good Jobs Economy*. Harvard Kennedy School Faculty. Research Working Paper.

## I A CONTEXT OF SURGING RADICAL RIGHT POPULISM

### – Populist parties' characteristics

**Firstly, at its core, populist rhetoric polarises *the elite against the people*<sup>28</sup>, and uses this polarisation to support policy claims.** Populists mobilise people with the aim of reviving the feeling of a lack of representation of their interests and their identity: from a moral point of view, populists target *the corrupt*; from a political and socio-economic point of view, there is the traditional polarisation of the elites; from an ethnic point of view, attacks are made against people considered as *foreign*.

**Secondly, beyond the anti-elitist element, populism is typified by a kind of anti-pluralism.** Populists claim that they represent the will of the *true people*, often distinguished by belonging to a certain social group or nation. However, democracy relies on pluralism. Therefore, populism even tends to be anti-democratic<sup>29</sup> and should not necessarily be seen as a useful correction to liberal democracy<sup>30</sup>.

**Thirdly, populists favour popular sovereignty and criticise the checks and balances which form the core of political liberalism<sup>31</sup>.** Submission to popular sanction can lead to governments adopting short term decisions, contrary to the general interest. Independent institutions should, in order to protect the minority, serve as a safeguard against the excesses of a government, even if it is democratically elected. History has taught us not to believe that every action taken by a democratically elected government is necessarily legitimate. Independent institutions are a component of our democracies as is the rule of law that serves as their foundation<sup>32</sup>.

**The revival of populism is a strong symptom of the political crisis ongoing in Europe and, more specifically, of the crisis of liberal democracy.** One facet of this crisis is the **mistrust in institutions** and traditional political parties' ability to respond to citizens' fears in the face of both domestic and international insecurities. Various national elections are confirming the strength of radical right populist parties. These parties are asserting themselves in public debate with a discourse whose core comprises anti-establishment critique, economic and cultural protectionism, as well as national identity. **In spite of the national diversity of populism, some explanations can be offered to provide coherence for these political developments.**

### – Why are populist parties on the rise?

**The return of populism has been linked to the negative socio-economic impacts of the financial crisis of 2008<sup>33</sup>,** as the case of Greece showed during the subsequent eurozone crisis in 2009. Parties on the radical right in Europe have increasingly

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28 Mounk, J. (2018), *The People vs. Democracy. Why Our Freedom Is in Danger and How to Save It*, Harvard University Press.

29 Müller, J.-W (2016), *What is Populism ?* University of Pennsylvania Press.

30 Mudde, C. and Rovira Kaltwasser, C. (2013). (eds.), *Populisms in Europe and the Americas: Threat or Corrective for Democracy?* New York, Cambridge University Press.

31 Mény, Y. and Surel, Y.. (2002). *Democracies and the Populist Challenge*, New York, Palgrave. Populism is not necessarily incompatible with liberalism in all forms as far as its economic component and its "neo-liberal" variation are concerned, as shown by some examples in Latin America where neoliberal populism has been discussed. Cf. Weyland, K. (1996), "Neopopulism and neoliberalism in Latin America: Unexpected affinities", *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 31/1996, 3-31.

32 Issacharoff, S. (2015), *Fragile Democracies*, New York, Cambridge University Press.

33 Funke, M., Schularick, M., Trebesch C. (2015). *Going to Extremes: Politics after Financial Crisis, 1870-2014*, Center for Economic Studies (CES) / Institut IFO.



become the voice of political exasperation and social anger that have been ignored for too long. Persistent socio-economic difficulties, including unemployment and social vulnerability from low-paying jobs or weak employment security, can partially explain their increasing popularity.

**The rise of populism is therefore linked to a feeling of economic destabilisation through the impacts of globalisation<sup>34</sup>, as well as an identity crisis in the context the development of a post-industrial society** over the last 40 years. From a domestic point of view, this expresses itself in hostility towards foreigners and a return to a xenophobic narrative in some countries, where foreigners are portrayed as responsible for economic and social ills such as insecurity. From an external point of view, there is a return to national border controls in response to the refugee crisis and terrorist attacks.

From a political perspective, the exasperation of many citizens regarding financial, tax and corruption scandals feeds anti-establishment criticism and is furthermore at the heart of the populist narrative. More fundamentally, **the rise of populism reflects a crisis of representation and mistrust in institutions**. In this context, many citizens feel that the traditional political shifts and the consensus between parties on the left and the right neither can provide an alternative to the status quo nor respond to fears in the face of insecurities. Here, populist parties appear as a means to disrupt the traditional political system by offering a political alternative.

In the current context of inflation and stagnating economic activity resulting from the energy crisis, **public opinion is expressing strong pessimism about the socio-economic situation and deteriorating living standards<sup>35</sup>**. This economic and social dimension is combined with a very strong political and emotional dimension linked to fear, impoverishment, and loss of influence in a world that seems out of control. If these fears are not properly addressed, they can be transformed into feelings of powerlessness and anger, which are a major and obvious part of the political expression in the rise of populism and extremes. Previous studies have underlined that high shares of radical right populist party votes in socio-economically disadvantaged regions have been found to correlate with a sense of political abandonment<sup>36</sup>. A strong correlation has furthermore been found with perceived downward social mobility<sup>37</sup>.

**It is possible to distinguish between three main forms of populism<sup>38</sup>:**

- First, the radical right, is characterised by authoritarian nationalism, an emphasis on immigration, insecurity, national identity issues and, traditionally, hostility towards the EU.
- Second, left-wing populism, adopts a political narrative characterised by a binary opposition between the people and the elite, a sacralisation of the popular will

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<sup>34</sup> See: Vries de, C. and Hoffmann, I., *Fear not Values. Public opinion and the populist vote in Europe*, Bertelsmann Stiftung / eupinions, 2016 / 3 Rodrik, D. (2018). "Populism and the economics of globalization", *Journal of International Business Policy* 1(S1); see also, Colantone and Stanig (2017) in Rodrik, D., Sabel, F. C. 2019. Building a Good Jobs Economy. Harvard Kennedy School Faculty Research Working Paper.

<sup>35</sup> See the [Parlemeter](#), December 2023.

<sup>36</sup> Defard C. (2022). 'The need for a socially-just European Green Deal. Lessons from the Yellow Vests movement', *Policy paper*, Paris: Jacques Delors Institute, June.

<sup>37</sup> NB. This correlation was only found for men, not women. Baudour, A. (2023). [What kind of economic relation impacts right-wing populist vote?](#). Sociology. Institut d'études politiques de Paris - Sciences Po.

<sup>38</sup> Ivaldi G. (2019), *De Le Pen à Trump : le défi populiste*, Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles.

and criticism of the EU, even if this is traditionally combined with an internationalist culture.

- Finally, there are populist movements that neither belong to the right nor the left, which focus on anti-elite and anti-establishment themes, denunciation of corruption and recourse to direct democracy.
- Why does the radical right resist EU climate and energy policy?

**This policy paper focuses on radical right-wing populist parties, as they are more likely to embrace climate change scepticism and obstructionism in comparison to left-wing or centrist populist parties<sup>39</sup>.** While their attitudes range from explicit rejection to an affirmative stance towards the scientific mainstream, including delay, disengagement, or cautiousness<sup>40</sup>, when in government positions in the EU, these radical right-wing parties have been found to have decisive negative impacts on greenhouse gas emissions reductions and energy and climate policy ambition so far<sup>41</sup>.

Climate and energy are generally not core issues for the radical right. Yet, **there is reason to believe that the European Green Deal could be among the top polarising topics for the radical right ahead of the European Elections in June 2024.** The profound economic disruptions in the past years are concerning. Lessons from the recession in 2008 have shown that trust in European institutions among groups with lower levels of education and income have still not risen to pre-recession levels.<sup>42</sup> There is thus a **risk of further erosion of trust in democratic institutions if the EU and its Member States fail to adequately facilitate the deployment of clean solutions and green jobs**, as the transition is starting to more directly impact citizens' everyday lives. The socio-economic challenges of the transition are already put forward by the radical right in their opposition against energy and climate policy.

**Beyond socio-economic concerns, radical right populist parties embrace a nationalist ideology<sup>43</sup>.** Radical right populist parties commonly present the climate and energy agenda as being carried primarily by a liberal, cosmopolitan elite that stands in direct opposition to national economic interests and national sovereignty<sup>44</sup>. The radical right generally portrays the European Institutions as part of this elite, which underlines their Eurosceptic identity. Looking back at the last European Parliament mandate (2014-2019), **populism and euroscepticism were found to be the most significant factors to explain MEP's opposition to energy and climate policy<sup>45</sup>.**

<sup>39</sup> Lockwood, B. and Lockwood, M. (2022) 'How do right-wing populist parties influence climate and renewable energy policies? Evidence from OECD countries', *Global Environmental Politics*, 22(3), pp. 12–37; Jahn, D. (2021) 'Quick and dirty: How populist parties in government affect greenhouse gas emissions in EU member states', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 28(7), pp. 980–997.

<sup>40</sup> Schaller, S. and Carius, A. (2019). 'Convenient Truths: Mapping climate agendas of right-wing populist parties in Europe'. Berlin: adelphi.

<sup>41</sup> Macro-comparative study analysing 28 EU member states from 1990-2018. Jahn, D. (2021) 'Quick and dirty: How populist parties in government affect greenhouse gas emissions in EU member states', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 28(7), pp. 980–997. Small N-study comparing six West European countries 2008-2018. Četković, S. and Hagemann, C. (2020) 'Changing climate for Populists? examining the influence of radical-right political parties on low-carbon energy transitions in Western Europe', *Energy Research & Social Science*, 66.

<sup>42</sup> Jansen, J. (2023). "When trust becomes a luxury: How economic crises undermine political trust among the most disadvantaged". Policy Brief. Berlin: Jacques Delors Centre/Hertie School, June.

<sup>43</sup> In Eastern-European countries this link was found to be weaker. Kulin, J., Johansson Sevä, I. and Dunlap, R.E. (2021) 'Nationalist ideology, rightwing populism, and public views about climate change in Europe', *Environmental Politics*, 30(7), pp. 1111–1134.

<sup>44</sup> Kulin et al. 2021; Lockwood 2018.

<sup>45</sup> Buzogány, A. and Četković, S. (2021) 'Fractionalized but ambitious? Voting on energy and climate policy in the European Parliament', *Journal of European Public Policy*, 28(7), pp. 1038–1056. doi:10.1080/13501763.2021.1918220.

Radical right-wing populist parties are particularly critical towards decision-making that relies heavily on science and expertise. This applies to EU decision-making in general, but energy and climate policy is especially vulnerable due to its complex and scientific nature.<sup>46</sup> Post-factual political communication, or ‘fake news’, through social and alternative media is often used by the radical right to spread critiques against climate science and fuel mistrust towards decision-makers, including the EU institutions<sup>47</sup>. While EU climate policy overall appears to have large public support<sup>48</sup>, it remains vulnerable to legitimacy challenges, especially regarding transparency and inclusion in decision-making, that must be better taken into consideration to counter further polarisation<sup>49</sup>.

## II • Headwinds in Member States: The green transition under influence of radical right parties in Sweden, Germany, Italy, and Poland

### I THE SWEDEN DEMOCRATS: SWEDEN’S NEW CLIMATE PARTY?

From their entry into the Swedish Parliament in 2006, the radical right party Sweden Democrats (SD) is now the second biggest party in Sweden. During the last decade, the party put a lot of effort into cleaning up its image<sup>50</sup>, and in the electoral campaign in 2022, for the first time, the traditional right-wing block said they were open to collaborating with them. This happened at a time when the SD’s anti-migration and tough security stances had become more and more normalised in the political debate after the 2015 migration crisis and increasing problems with gang violence.

In the September 2022 elections, SD (part of the ECR group in the European Parliament) won 20.54% of the votes<sup>51</sup>. Despite being the second biggest party, they did not obtain any minister posts. Instead, a minority government was formed by the Conservative Party (EPP), whose leader Ulf Kristersson is prime minister, the Christian Democrats (EPP) and the Liberals (Renew). The minority government secured support from SD<sup>52</sup> through negotiations that resulted in the *Tidö-agreement*, which specifies the government’s political priorities<sup>53</sup>. Since the government is dependent on SD to rule, SD’s positions have had a large impact on these political priorities, especially on migration, integration, and security policy.

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46 Von Homeyer, I., Oberthür, S. and Jordan, A.J. (2021) ‘EU climate and energy governance in times of crisis: Towards a new agenda’, *Journal of European Public Policy*, 28(7), pp. 959–979.

47 Fraune and Knodth (2018).

48 European Commission (2023) Special Eurobarometer 538 Climate Change.

49 Von Homeyer et al. 2021.

50 The party has had a zero-tolerance policy for racism and extremism since 2012 and has for example published a white book that aims to make up with its history and ideological roots in ethnonationalism and strong ties with the racist and nationalist ‘Preserve Sweden Swedish’ movement, see: Björkman, F. (2023) ‘SD:s vitbok snart klar – visar vad SD var när Åkesson gick med’, *Aftonbladet*, 21 August. (Accessed: 18 December 2023).

51 Going from 63 to 72 (of 349) seats in parliament. Since 2006, the party has steadily increased their voter turnout in the national elections. The same trend can be seen in the European Parliament elections, where the party entered in 2014.

52 The cooperation between the Sweden Democrats and the Liberal Party was heavily criticised by the European Renew group in the European Parliament that the Liberals belong to, see: Jacqué, P. and Hivert, A.-F. (2022) ‘Swedish Liberals’ participation in radical right-backed government causes turmoil in European Parliament’, *Le Monde*, 19 October. (Accessed: 18 December 2023).

53 Moderaterna. (2022). *Tidöavtalet - Överenskommelse för Sverige*. Accessed 18/12/2023. The Tidö agreement was updated in the beginning of December 2023, see: SVT (2023). *Uppgifter - här är frågorna i det uppdaterade tidöavtalet*. Accessed 18/12/2023.

**Siding with SD instead of seeking a large centre-right coalition has also had important impacts on Swedish climate and energy policy, which has seen a shift away from previous ambitions<sup>54</sup>.** During the election campaign that took place during the peak of the energy price crisis, the parties tried to win votes with promises on lowering electricity and fuel prices<sup>55</sup>. This heavily influenced subsequent priorities and decisions of the government, which makes Sweden's policies currently insufficient to meet domestic emission reduction targets for 2030 and 2045, as well as the EU 2030 targets<sup>56</sup>. Some examples include lowering taxes on petrol and diesel<sup>57</sup> and lowering the reduction obligation<sup>58</sup>. These two measures are core priorities for SD, and represent their sole priorities related to the energy and climate transition<sup>59</sup>.

**While SD is no longer opposed to the Swedish EU-membership, the party is the most Eurosceptic in the country.** It argues that membership is too costly and that too much power from the national level is transferred to Brussels, especially related to energy, climate, and migration policy<sup>60</sup>.

**SD favours low climate ambitions.** SD was the only party that did not sign the Swedish Climate Policy Framework in 2017<sup>61</sup>. During the previous mandate period (2018-2022) SD's members of the national parliament consistently voted to lower the ambition of Swedish energy and climate policy<sup>62</sup>. Before the 2022 elections, the SD leader Jimmie Åkesson stated: "climate policy is very much symbolic, it does not do any real good"<sup>63</sup>. While SD's climate policy previously was characterised by denialism, the party has shifted its stance. The party now stands behind international targets but does not believe that Sweden should be an international forerunner in emissions reductions at the price of domestic measures that hit 'ordinary people'<sup>64</sup>. Now that SD have secured their core priorities - cheaper fuels - supporting an abstract 2045 target appears as a small compromise. Yet, **SD's positioning highlights that the domestic social aspects of the transition need to be accounted for; otherwise, climate policies will remain an easy target for radical right populist parties.**

**At the same time as SD has shifted to support the 2045 target, the intermediate goals are being toned down by the government in the new Swedish climate action**

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<sup>54</sup> The previous energy and climate agreements, from 2016 and 2017 respectively, were agreed on by broad consensus.

<sup>55</sup> See: Thalberg K. (2022). "The Swedish energy transition. A race far from won", *Policy brief*, Paris: Jacques Delors Institute, 9 September.

<sup>56</sup> Swedish Environmental Protection Agency. (2023). *När Sverige de nationella klimatmålen?* (Accessed 18/12/2023.)

<sup>57</sup> The Swedish Government (2023). *Sänkt skatt på bensin och diesel och förstärkt skattenedsättning för jordbruksdiesel även under 2024*. (Accessed 18/12/2023).

<sup>58</sup> This entails blending of biofuels with petrol and diesel. The Swedish Government (2023). *Regeringen går vidare med förslaget om sänkt reduktionsplikt*. (Accessed 18/12/2023).

<sup>59</sup> Key priorities for the Sweden Democrats are, among other things, to keep fuel prices low and not implement any new restrictions on speed limits, see: Sverigedemokraterna. (n.d.). *Bil och bränsle*. (Accessed: 18 December 2023). Furthermore, their electorate cares the least for climate and environmental concerns among the Swedish parties, with only one in four voters claiming that they are concerned about the climate. Crime is their top priority. See: Rohwedder, M. (2023) 'SD-väljare oroar sig mest – men inte för klimatet', *Aftonbladet*, 17 April. (Accessed: 18 December 2023).

<sup>60</sup> Åkesson, J. (2023) 'EU är på väg att bli en tvångströja för Sverige', *Aftonbladet*, 2 May. (Accessed: 18 December 2023); Söder, B. (2020) 'EU:s gröna giv – ett monster under utformning', *Alltinget*, 31 May. (Accessed: 18 December 2023).

<sup>61</sup> Report of the Committee on the Environment and Agriculture 2016/17: MJU24. *Ett klimatpolitiskt ramverk för Sverige*.

<sup>62</sup> Naturskyddsföreningen. (2022). *Granskning: Vilka partier har varit bäst och sämst för miljön?*. (Accessed: 18 December 2024).

<sup>63</sup> Own translation. Londen, M. and Dawod, N. (2022). 'Jimmie Åkesson: Fler dör av kyla än värme', *Aftonbladet*, 15 August. (Accessed: 18 December 2022).

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

plan<sup>65</sup>. In the action plan, the previously agreed upon intermediary targets, such as the goal of 70% emissions reductions for domestic transport by 2030 compared to 2010, appear to have been removed. Instead, focus lies on reaching the 2045 climate neutrality objective and the EU's targets while avoiding measures that will raise domestic fuel prices and threaten domestic competitiveness. An alternative policy measure proposed is to buy emissions rights from Member States with lower objectives under the Effort Sharing Regulation. However, this lowering of domestic ambitions could prove to be a costly endeavour; Sweden is likely to not be the only Member State to choose this strategy as emission reduction targets increase.

## I THE GERMAN RADICAL RIGHT'S POLITICISATION OF GREEN TECHNOLOGY

**The radical right-wing party Alternative for Germany (AfD) has seen its influence grow steadily in German state elections over the past year.** The party that previously had its strong-hold in former East Germany has now started to gain ground in Western states of the Federal Republic<sup>66</sup>. This comes at a time when the core concerns of AfD's electorate including migration, economy and security, have made a return into the public debate<sup>67</sup>.

**When the big debate over the federal government's proposal for a Building Energy Act<sup>68</sup> to ban gas and oil boiler installations from 2024 broke out during the summer of 2023,** AfD (which belongs to the Identity and Democracy group in the EP) quickly turned to capitalise on the electorate's fears of social and economic downscaling in the context of high inflation<sup>69</sup>. The heat pump, which is the green alternative, currently costs roughly double compared to a gas boiler in Germany<sup>70</sup>. In the midst of the political debacle, the radical right used the heat pump as a symbol for the Government's unaffordable energy and climate policy<sup>71</sup>.

**The debate led to a two-to-four-year push back of the gas boiler phase-out.** The legislation was furthermore revised to only cover new heating systems in new buildings, in certain areas. This revision means that the climate targets for the building sector are likely to be missed.<sup>72</sup> This has been called a missed opportunity for the German energy and climate transition<sup>73</sup>, where heating makes up 40% of emissions<sup>74</sup>.

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65 The climate policy action plan is a missive (SE: *skrivelse*) from the government to the parliament, which does not generate any decision-making on the part of the parliament. The Swedish Government. (2023). *Regeringens klimathandlingsplan – hela vägen till nettonoll*. *Skrivelse 2023/24:59*.

66 Ziener, M. (2023) 'Germany bewildered about how to halt the rise of the AfD', *Politico*, 3 October. (Accessed: 18 December 2023).

67 *Hessenschau* (2023) 'Warum so viele Hessen ihre Kreuze bei der AfD machten', 9 October. (Accessed: 18 December 2023).

68 Bundesregierung. *Climate-friendly heating: new Building Energy Act to be implemented*. 19 April. (Accessed: 18 December 2023).

69 The majority of AfD's electorate appear to be part of the middle class, who are particularly afraid of social and economic downscaling. See: Cohen, D. (2021). *Ökonomisches Risiko und die elektorale Anziehungskraft der AfD*. In: Weßels, B., Schoen, H. (eds) *Wahlen und Wähler*. Springer VS, Wiesbaden.

70 Including subsidies, see: Bundesverband Wärmepumpe (2023). *Darum Wärmepumpe Gut für Sie...* (Accessed: 18 December 2023).

71 Mathiesen, K. (2023). *How the far right turned heat pumps into electoral rocket fuel*. *Politico*, 4 October. (Accessed: 18 December 2023).

72 With exceptions for fossil fuel boilers beyond those dates if they are adapted for hydrogen. See: Agora Energiewende. (2023). 'Scaling up heat pumps in Germany'. *Presentation*, 23 July.

73 European Environmental Bureau. (2023). *German building law puts Europe's heating transition on shaky grounds*. 8 September. (Accessed: 18 December 2023).

74 IEA. (2020). *Germany 2020 Energy Policy Review*.

Mid-mandate, the German social democrat-liberal-green coalition government<sup>75</sup> is facing public discontent that risks further slowing down its ambitious climate plans<sup>76</sup> in a similar manner as the fossil boiler ban. Meanwhile, a December 2023 poll showed that AfD had the record support of one in five German voters<sup>77</sup>.

**As climate and energy policy is starting to affect people's daily lives, the radical right is not shy to capitalise on the public concern that it creates.** AfD, which is the only party in the German parliament that denies that human activities have an effect on climate change, is now weaving climate policy together with migration and Euroscepticism into its anti-elitist narrative<sup>78</sup>. The party's main objection is that no alternative has been presented to the government's energy and climate policy and that the measures place an excessive burden on citizens that are already affected by the current inflation<sup>79</sup>. Local elections are part of the party's core strategy to normalise its political presence in hopes that it may no longer be refused as a coalition partner by mainstream parties in future national elections (see the section on the Sweden Democrats)<sup>80</sup>. With upcoming local elections in June and September 2024, the party's recent success and poll trends raise cause for concern.

**During the German 'boiler war', critiques were also directed towards Brussels** and the introduction of stricter eco-design regulations on heating systems under the European Green Deal<sup>81</sup>. The regulation would ban 'stand-alone' fossil fuel boilers from the market by 2029<sup>82</sup>. A tabloid article claimed that the EU could overturn the weakening of the newly adopted German law. In response, the European Commission's representation in Germany published a 'debunk' of the article<sup>83</sup>. This anti-Brussels media controversy feeds into the Eurosceptic narrative of AfD. Maximilian Krahn, AfD's lead candidate for the 2024 European elections, rejects the European Green Deal as a form of supranational dominance that is directly harmful for Germany, will lead to European deindustrialisation and should therefore be abolished<sup>84</sup>. With the rising number of supporters in recent German polls, AfD could see its seats in the European Parliament increase in the upcoming elections.

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<sup>75</sup> Leuser, L., Delair, M. and Pellerin-Carlin, T. (2022). 'Climate policy of the new German Government. Do provisions meet its ambitions?'. *Policy brief*, Jacques Delors Institute, February 16th.

<sup>76</sup> Wettengel, J. (2023). *Public discontent with government risks slowing Germany's climate effort*. *Clean Energy Wire*, 10 August. (Accessed: 18 December 2023).

<sup>77</sup> Politico. (2023). *Europe Poll of Polls - Germany*. (Accessed: 18 December 2023). Compared to around 30% in former East Germany, see: McGuinness, D. (2023). *Germany's radical right AfD wins first city mayor election*. *BBC*. 18 December. (Accessed 18 December 2023).

<sup>78</sup> Frymark, K. (2023). *Too green, too fast, too dear. The AfD is gaining popularity in Germany*. Centre for Eastern Studies, 20 June. (Accessed: 18 December 2023).

<sup>79</sup> Making a reference to Chancellor Angela Merkel's measures adopted during the Eurozone crisis. AfD was established in 2013 as a response to the EU bailouts of southern Europe.

<sup>80</sup> McGuinness, D. (2023). *Germany's radical right AfD wins first city mayor election*. *BBC*, 18 December. (Accessed 18 December 2023).

<sup>81</sup> Kurmayer, N.J. (2023). *Boiler wars: German spat over fossil heating ban comes to Brussels*. *Euractiv*, 13 June. (Accessed: 22 December 2023).

<sup>82</sup> European Commission. (N.D.). *Ecodesign for Sustainable Products Regulation*.

<sup>83</sup> See X/Twitter: *Europäische Kommission - Vertretung in Deutschland*. 7 June, 2023. (Accessed: 22 December 2023).

<sup>84</sup> Wettengel, J. (2023). *radical right AfD lead candidate for EU election rejects Green Deal*. *Clean Energy Wire*, 31 July. (Accessed: 22 December 2023).

## I DISTRIBUTIONAL CONSEQUENCES OF CLIMATE POLICY IN THE CONTEXT OF ITALIAN RADICAL RIGHT POPULISM

Radical right populist and anti-establishment parties have taken a major lead in Italy in recent years, culminating with the electoral success of the Brothers of Italy (Fdi) in 2022<sup>85</sup>. In the early parliamentary elections in September 2022, Fdi (which belongs to the European party group ECR) gained the largest share of votes (26%), and their leader, Giorgia Meloni, was appointed Prime Minister<sup>86</sup>, forming a government with League (ID), Forward Italy (EPP), and a number of independent MPs. Their success comes after brewing radical right sentiment throughout the 2010s due to several overlapping crises: rising unemployment, low levels of trust in institutions and parties, and the perception of immigrants and refugees as a threat<sup>87</sup>.

It was on this basis that Matteo Salvini's party League<sup>88</sup> had already taken a strong hold in Italian politics during the 2018 general elections. The party became the largest party at the time with a vote share of 17.4%, and in the 2019 European Parliament elections it gained 34.3% (23/76 seats). In addition to promoting anti-immigration and Eurosceptic policies, League's influence set the stage for strong opposition to climate initiatives from the radical right, both at the national and European level<sup>89</sup>.

An important example of this is the Area B policy that was introduced in July 2018 in Milan, which is one of the cities with the highest levels of air pollution in Italy<sup>90</sup>. The policy was an effort to ban polluting vehicles from an area that covers 70% of Milan which holds 97% of the population. The policy faced backlash, as car owners felt it was too costly and disturbed their day-to-day lives in the absence of easily accessible alternatives. Moreover, there was a sentiment among citizens that they were being made to feel guilty and being unfairly forced to share the brunt of implementation costs. In an attempt to remedy this, a compensation plan was put in place, which was first only offered to low-income car owners and, later, to all residents. However, the policy was still harshly criticised among citizens. The issue was brought into political debate across the country and even affected the 2019 European elections and the 2022 national elections<sup>91</sup>, of which the outcome is described above.

While radical right-wing politicians in Italy have not always explicitly put climate, energy, and environmental issues at the centre of their campaigns, they have often adapted their stances on issues such as carbon pricing or emissions regulations to the opinions of their constituent base. In the case of Area B, politicians from League claimed that the policy "would place a disproportionate burden on the shoulders of relatively poorer citizens"<sup>92</sup>. The tendency of League to focus on the suffering, inconveniences, and *real needs* of Milan's citizens seemed to resonate within the target public. Thus, it was found that car owners who incurred significant

85 Voce, A. and Clarke, S. (2022). [Italian election 2022: live official results](#). *The Guardian*, 26 September. (Accessed: 28 December 2023).

86 Donà, A. (2023). The 2022 Italian general election and the radical right's success. *European Journal of Politics and Gender*, 6(2), 295-297.

87 Halikiopoulou, D. and Vlandas, T. (2022). Understanding radical right populism and what to do about it. *IPPR Progressive Review*, 29: 138-146. <https://doi.org/10.1111/newe.12309>

88 Matteo Salvini is transport minister in Meloni's government.

89 Castaldi, R. (2022). [Italy's League: sovereignty without constraints, with EU money](#). *Euractiv*, 23 September. (Accessed: 28 December 2023).

90 See: IQAir. [Air quality index and PM2.5 air pollution in Italy](#). (Accessed: 28 December 2023).

91 Colantone, I. *et al.* (2023) 'The political consequences of green policies: Evidence from Italy', *American Political Science Review*, Cambridge University Press, pp. 1-19. doi:10.1017/S0003055423000308

92 *Ibid.*

economic losses due to the policy were significantly more likely to vote for League in the next elections. On the other hand, those for which the additional compensation worked well were not as likely to switch their voting pattern, which shows the **direct link between environmental policy implementation and citizen political voting decisions**.<sup>93</sup>

**Current Prime Minister, Meloni, called the European Green Deal ‘climate fundamentalism’ in the months leading up to her election**<sup>94</sup>. With large domestic agricultural, microelectronics and car industries, she has been tough on European energy and climate legislation. After the flash floods in northern Italy in 2021, she furthermore blamed climate policy for hindering the construction of necessary infrastructure to protect citizens. However, after the scorching hot summer of 2022 in Italy, which is one of the European countries that is most vulnerable to climate change, she has tried to rebrand ecology as a ‘right-wing issue’<sup>95</sup> to primarily promote national energy security<sup>96</sup>. Nonetheless, Meloni’s stance on meeting Italy’s climate and energy objectives remains unclear. While being internationally vocal on the need to fight global warming, she keeps a low profile domestically. As climate policy generally has been portrayed as forced by Brussels and threatening national interests, this will be a difficult balance-act for Meloni ahead of the European elections 2024.<sup>97</sup>

## I THE LEGACY OF RADICAL RIGHT-WING RULE ON THE POLISH ENERGY AND CLIMATE TRANSITION

**After eight years of heading the Polish government, the national-conservative Law and Justice (PiS) party had to step down after the parliamentary elections in October 2023.** While PiS got the highest number of votes, they were unable to form a coalition to stay in power<sup>98</sup>. The new centre-right coalition government<sup>99</sup> took office on the 13th of December under Prime Minister Donald Tusk from the Civic Coalition party (EPP), former European Council President (2014-2019) and Polish Prime Minister (2007-2014). The new government wants to speed up the energy and climate transition in Poland, which historically is among the most sceptical EU Member states with regards to climate and energy policy<sup>100</sup>. Another key priority in their coalition agreement<sup>101</sup> is to unlock EU funds that have been blocked by the European Commission due to rule of law breaches<sup>102</sup>. However, the new coalition is in for a tough task, as PiS still holds the Presidential office until 2025 which sits on a legislative veto<sup>103</sup>.

<sup>93</sup> Colantone *et al.* (2023).

<sup>94</sup> Il Fatto Quotidiano. (2022). [Riscaldamento globale? Per Meloni quello del Green deal è “fondamentalismo climatico”](#). E se la prende con Greta Thunberg. 18 June. (Accessed: 28 December 2023).

<sup>95</sup> Traditionally, nature protection has been a core question for the radical right, appealing to the connection between the land, the identity, and the homeland. See: Buzogány, A. and Mohamad-Klotzbach, C. (2022) ‘Environmental Populism’, in M. Oswald (ed.) *The Palgrave Handbook of Populism*. Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 321–340.

<sup>96</sup> Di Sario, F. (2022). [Italy’s Meloni aims to make climate change a right-wing issue](#). *Politico*, 20 October. (Accessed: 28 December 2023).

<sup>97</sup> Giordano, E. and Mathiesen, K. (2023). [Beset with fire and heat, Meloni’s government flirts with climate denial](#). *Politico*, 2 August. (Accessed: 28 December 2023).

<sup>98</sup> Strzelecki, M. (2023). [Poland election: how and when will a new government be formed?](#) *Reuters*, 7 November. (Accessed: 17 January 2024).

<sup>99</sup> The coalition government consists of the Civic Coalition (led by Donald Tusk), the Third Way (a grouping of the Poland 2050 party and the Polish People’s Party) and the New Left.

<sup>100</sup> Buzogány and Četković (2021).

<sup>101</sup> See: [The Coalition Agreement](#). (N.D.). (Accessed: 29 December 2023).

<sup>102</sup> Cienski, J. (2023). [Poland bids bye-bye to PiS and hello to Donald Tusk](#). *Politico*, 11 December. (Accessed: 29 December 2023).

<sup>103</sup> Macek, L. “A Pyrrhic victory for the “illiberals” opens the way to Poland’s European reengagement”, *Blogpost*, Jacques Delors Institute, October 2023.



**With its coal-based economy<sup>104</sup>, the Polish energy and climate transition is a great challenge.** Instead of adopting a constructive stance that would take into account valid concerns over the distribution of costs and uneven capabilities to undertake the transition<sup>105</sup>, PiS (which belongs to the European party group ECR) has largely served as a blocking force to the national transition and the European Union's ambitions<sup>106</sup>. In the summer of 2023, the Polish government even filed complaints to the European Court of Justice to cancel three of the Green Deal's key legislative files that set out to increase Member states' emission reduction targets, the ban on internal combustion engines by 2035 and the reform of the Union's carbon market. They argued that these legislative files should have been adopted unanimously and that they threaten both national energy security and risk worsening social inequality<sup>107</sup>, in hopes that other Member states would join. However, it is unlikely that this will have any impact. It can rather be seen as an electoral campaign strategy that fit into PiS's nationalist rhetoric to show that it defends Polish businesses and citizens from Brussels' interference<sup>108</sup>.

**During PiS's rule, energy policy was often instrumentalized for short-term political objectives, and high electricity prices have been solely blamed on EU energy and climate policy ambitions and Putin.** At the same time, the lack of a coherent national vision for the energy transition has arguably had a negative impact on Polish electricity prices<sup>109</sup>. However, while PiS started out with an openly hostile position towards both EU and national climate policy, it has moderated its position over time (like the Sweden Democrats and Italy's Prime Minister Georgia Meloni). While continuing to emphasise negative economic effects of EU energy and climate policy on domestic industry, jobs, citizens' daily lives and loss of national sovereignty<sup>110</sup>, the pragmatic wing of the party managed to introduce a partial liberalisation of the ban on new onshore wind power projects<sup>111</sup>. Other examples are the subsidy schemes for some clean technologies, such as rooftop solar photovoltaics and heat pumps.<sup>112</sup>.

**The new coalition government has promised to build even more clean energy infrastructure and cut carbon emissions more quickly than before, especially by cleaning up Poland's coal-heavy power sector. However, the legacy of PiS rule, proves to be a challenge.** Challenges related to the rule of law and holding the previous government accountable for anti-democratic legislation will likely keep the new government busy for quite some time, which will impact the government's

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<sup>104</sup> International Energy Agency. (N.D). [Poland: Key Energy Statistics 2020](#). (Accessed: 29 December 2023).

<sup>105</sup> See for example the challenges of Poland's coal-regions: World Bank. (2022). [Support for Polish Coal Regions in Transition](#). 14 December. (Accessed: 29 December 2023).

<sup>106</sup> Poland, under PiS rule, was for example the only country to not support the European climate neutrality objective until 2050.

<sup>107</sup> Abnett, K. (2023). [Poland asks EU's top court to cancel three climate policies](#). *Reuters*, 28 August. (Accessed: 29 December 2023).

<sup>108</sup> Elissaiou, A. et al. (2023). ['See you in court': Poland's political bluff on EU climate laws](#). *Euractiv*, 29 August. (Accessed: 29 December 2023).

<sup>109</sup> Kardas, S. (2023). [From coal to consensus: Poland's energy transition and its European future](#). *Policy brief*, European Council on Foreign Relations, 27 September.

<sup>110</sup> Huber, R.A., Maltby, T., Szulecki, K., Četković, S. (2021). Is populism a challenge to European energy and climate policy? Empirical evidence across varieties of populism, *Journal of European Public Policy*, 28:7, 998-1017.

<sup>111</sup> The ban was imposed in 2016. See, Kardas, S. (2023). [From coal to consensus: Poland's energy transition and its European future](#). Policy brief, European Council on Foreign Relations, 27 September.

<sup>112</sup> Poland saw the biggest growth in the heat pump market in 2022 in the EU. See: European Heat Pump Association. (2023). [Port PC: 2022 was the Year of Heat Pumps in Poland](#). (Accessed: 29 December 2023).

**priorities and capacity to act.** Moreover, PiS' presidential veto (at least) until 2025, will likely create additional barriers for the Polish transition. In Brussels, hopes are high that Tusk will restore the Polish position with the EU mainstream, leaving PiS' ally in the European Council, Hungarian Prime Minister Victor Orbán, out in the cold. However, in a deeply divided country, Tusk<sup>113</sup> nonetheless has to appeal to a broad public, saying that: “[...] I sought victory in these elections, so that Poland would again influence the decisions of Europe, and not the other way around”<sup>114</sup>, which is vaguely reminiscent of PiS's anti-Brussels stance.

## I CONCLUSION

**The rise of radical right populist parties is partly an expression of political frustration in the face of deteriorating living conditions and the fear of downward social mobility (all countries).**

Energy and climate policies is starting to impact the daily lives of citizens more directly, which is illustrated by the debates on the fossil boiler ban in Germany and the Area B policy in Milan. Even though energy and climate policy are not core concerns of radical right parties, **insufficient consideration of the social aspects of the transition leads to an easy instrumentalization of green policies by these parties to win votes** (Sweden, Italy, Germany). Opposition towards energy and climate policy is integrated into their anti-elitist and Eurosceptic narratives.

**The radical right parties described above often fail to adopt constructive positions on how to achieve a socially just climate and energy transition: their opposition can be described as delay at best or obstruction at worst.** Even though their positions on renewable energy (Poland), agreed upon national and international climate targets (Sweden) and the impacts of global warming (Italy) tend to be moderated once in/close to power, this failure or unwillingness to come up with constructive proposals risks adding further delay to the transition when radical right populist parties come closer to power.

**The legacy of radical right rule, such as rule of law breaches, can produce challenges for succeeding governments to constructively tackle other large challenges, such as the energy and climate transition (Poland).**

## III • Headwinds in the European Institutions

### I THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

The European Parliament currently holds the status of ‘environmental champion’ among the European institutions. However, during the past year, the Parliament's green status has been challenged from within. In September 2022, **the European People's Party group (EPP) called for a moratorium on green legislation for two to three years to avoid putting an extra burden on industry**<sup>115</sup>. Despite being part

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<sup>113</sup> Poland, under Tusk's previous mandate, showed great foresight in already starting to diversify its Russian gas supply in 2010, succeeding to reduce dependence from 90% to 55% in 2020. Poland could thus become a key actor to look out for in terms of making energy security a mainstream narrative in the EU. See, International Energy Agency. (2022). [Poland 2022 Energy Policy Review Report](#).

<sup>114</sup> Moens, B. *et al.* (2023). [The second coming of Donald Tusk](#). *Politico*, 8 December. (Accessed: 29 December 2023).

<sup>115</sup> [How to tackle skyrocketing energy prices?](#) (2022). EPP Party. 19 December. Available at: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AOvkCg3OxLk&ab\\_channel=EPPGroup](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AOvkCg3OxLk&ab_channel=EPPGroup) (Accessed: 01 December 2023).

of the alliance that ensured the adoption of ambitious legislation to fulfil the Union's climate and energy objectives, the EPP is now adopting a more reluctant stance towards additional regulations, especially on environmental and agricultural files<sup>116</sup>.

**One of the most emblematic events in this regard was the negotiation on the Nature Restoration Law.** The proposed legislation is a key pillar of the European Green Deal that aims to restore the EU's land and sea ecosystems, which are crucial for achieving climate mitigation and climate adaptation objectives as well as for enhancing biodiversity<sup>117</sup>. During the months ahead of the vote, the EPP Party leader Manfred Weber led a campaign arguing that the proposal would destroy the livelihoods of farmers, and thus endanger European food security and economy by taking away land from farmers. **EPP, supported by the conservative and radical right, ECR and ID, managed to greatly weaken the proposal**, which was finally passed through the Parliament with a narrow majority<sup>118</sup>.

However, so far **during the European Parliament mandate period (2019-2024), the big coalition (EPP, S&D and Renew) has been most frequently used to adopt legislative amendments on European Green Deal files.** In the event that the big coalition breaks, the left-wing alliance (S&D, Renew, Left and Greens) has been the most successful in adopting or rejecting amendments. However, **in some cases, a right-wing coalition led by EPP and supported by ECR and ID has succeeded.** Overall, on Green Deal legislation, the EPP has been supported by ECR and ID in a vast majority of amendment votes.<sup>119</sup>

**One big success for the right-wing coalition was the report on the use of pesticides<sup>120</sup>,** a topic that also has big impacts on European agriculture. The scope of the report was significantly reduced through amendments pushed by the EPP, supported by ECR and ID. The success of the right-wing coalition also highlights divisions within Renew and S&D, where MEPs from certain Member States (notably, German and Czech liberals and Romanian socialists) deviated from the party line and sided with the EPP which ensured the alliance's success. The divisions within S&D and Renew might become even more pronounced as the elections approach, considering the current polarised debates around the European Green Deal.<sup>121</sup>

**In recent polls<sup>122</sup>, ECR and ID show signs of strengthening at the expense of right, centre, green and liberal parties.** If such a scenario materialises, and divisions among liberals and socialists continue, the right-wing coalition might have even more success in the political cycle to come, which could endanger the continued ambition of the Green Deal.

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<sup>116</sup> For an overview of voting behaviours in the EP (2019-2024) see, Marié, A. and Brack, N. (2024). *Coopération entre le PPE et ECR : une analyse des votes au Parlement européen.* Note, Jacques Delors Institute, *Forthcoming*.

<sup>117</sup> European Commission. (N.D). [Nature Restoration Law](#).

<sup>118</sup> The text now falls short of the 30% ecosystem restoration target agreed under the International Montreal Agreement and includes an 'emergency break' for farmers if food security is threatened. See: <https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-conservatives-anti-green-deal-push-falls-short-parliament/>; <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/nov/10/eu-strikes-landmark-deal-nature-restoration-law>

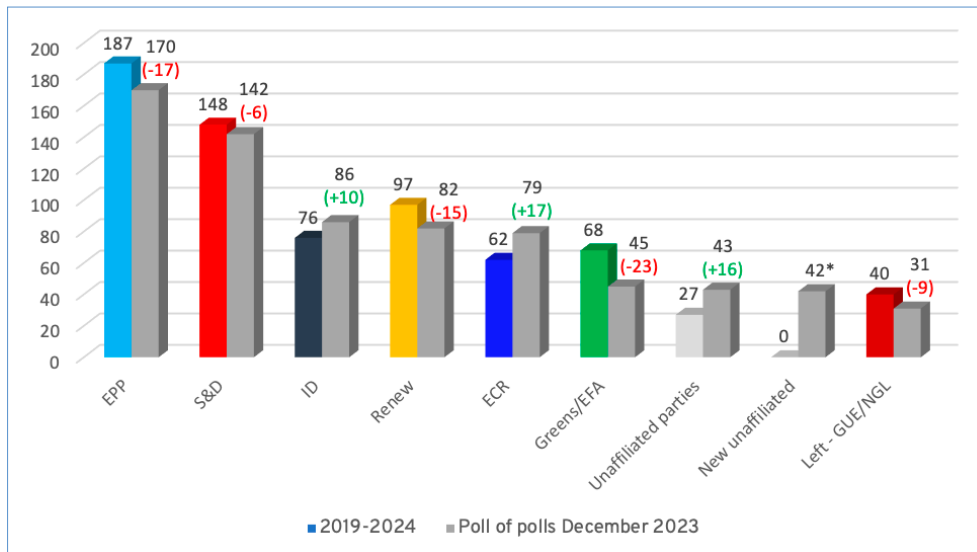
<sup>119</sup> Marié, A. and Brack, N. (2024). *Coopération entre le PPE et ECR : une analyse des votes au Parlement européen.* Note, Jacques Delors Institute, *Forthcoming*.

<sup>120</sup> See, Dahm, N. and Foote, N. (2023). *EU ministers determined to advance pesticide law despite uncertainty.* *Euractiv*, 12 December. (Accessed: 22 December 2023).

<sup>121</sup> Marié, A. and Brack, N. (2024). *Coopération entre le PPE et ECR : une analyse des votes au Parlement européen.* Note, Jacques Delors Institute, *Forthcoming*.

<sup>122</sup> The results of this poll should be interpreted with care. Politico. (2023). [Europe Poll of Polls](#). December. (Accessed: 28 December 2023).

**FIGURE 4.** Politico Europe's Poll of Polls, December 2023.



## I THE EUROPEAN COUNCIL

EPP's proposition for a 'moratorium' was later mirrored by France's President Emmanuel Macron that called for a European 'regulatory break' on environmental rules for the next EU political cycle<sup>123</sup>. This comes at a time of economic downturn, when the European Green Deal is increasingly contested by the traditional right and the radical right with a rhetoric that is pitting environmental objectives against, for example, national industry<sup>124</sup>, national agriculture<sup>125</sup>, and the cost of living for 'ordinary people'<sup>126</sup>.

The statement of Emmanuel Macron, echoed by other heads-of-state<sup>127</sup>, illustrates an ambivalence and uncertainty on how to respond to the radical right's strengthening and rhetoric on environmental, energy and climate policy ambitions ahead of the European Elections in June 2024. In reality, the reasoning behind Macron's regulatory pause raises important questions about the financing challenges that the implementation of the Green Deal is facing. He underlined the risk of losing support from all actors by continuing to raise ambitions without having secured an adequate financing strategy at the EU-level. This was further stressed by Stéphane Séjourné in January 2024, then Renew group President, when he declared that setting up new financing was a precondition to further regulatory ambition<sup>128</sup>. While the French President's reasoning raises crucial concerns, his statement cannot be seen as neutral in the current political context. At worst, it could serve to normalise populist discourses and attacks on the European Green Deal.<sup>129</sup>

<sup>123</sup> Carraud, S., Lamy, M. and Hubert, A. (2023). 'Avec sa « pause réglementaire », Macron se projette déjà après les européennes de 2024', *Contexte*. (Accessed: 31 May 2023).

<sup>124</sup> See case study on Italy.

<sup>125</sup> The Netherlands, see: Gijs, C. and Brzenzinski, B. (2023). 'Europe's right wing piggybacks on Dutch farmer protests', *Politico*, 29 July. (Accessed: 01 December 2023).

<sup>126</sup> See case study on Sweden.

<sup>127</sup> Malingre, V. (2023). 'European Green Deal: More leaders call for "a regulatory pause"', *Le Monde*, 4 July. (Accessed: 01 December 2023).

<sup>128</sup> *Contexte*, (2024). *Stéphane Séjourné veut conditionner la poursuite du Green Deal aux investissements*. *Briefing Environnement*, 10 January. (Accessed: 15 January 2024).

<sup>129</sup> For a detailed analysis, see: Nguyen P-V. (2024). 'Pacte vert: vers une pause réglementaire européenne?'. *Décryptage*, Jacques Delors, Institute.

To secure the European Green Deal's ambition, given the current circumstances, it appears crucial to develop an alternative political narrative with concrete policy responses to counter radical right populist discourses on the green transition.

#### **IV • Building trust: A new political narrative with recommendations for the European Green Deal to counter populism**

##### **I A. POLITICAL NARRATIVE WITH CONCRETE POLICY RESPONSES CENTRED ON SUPPORT, PROTECTION, AND DIALOGUE TO BUILD TRUST AND ENABLE THE EUROPEAN GREEN DEAL**

**Putting the EU on the path to climate neutrality is a battle far from won. More resources will be needed to make the European Green Deal a reality on the ground.** The scale and pace of this energy transition is unprecedented. Additional EU financing and improved governance mechanisms are required to support national policy efforts and compliance with new targets<sup>130</sup>.

**In addition, economic, social, and geopolitical vulnerabilities need to be addressed, properly anticipated, and mitigated if the European Green Deal is to succeed.** Large job losses in high emitting sectors without alternative good employment opportunities for workers, unaffordability of both fossil and clean energy services for some households, or over-reliance on one single supplier for clean tech supply chains, could respectively fuel political frustration, social backlash, or economic disruptions, slowing down the transition and increasing its cost.

**In the face of these vulnerabilities, the radical right weaves opposition towards the European Green Deal into their nationalist, anti-immigration, and identity narratives.** Feelings of impoverishment and fears of deteriorating living conditions for significant parts of the population provide a fertile ground for such narratives. More broadly, failure to consider the differentiated capabilities and vulnerabilities of stakeholders (be they Member States, sectors, businesses, regions, or households) during implementation could further fuel discontent against green policies across the EU. This could contribute to strengthen populism and lower climate ambitions, as showed in the Member State case studies.

**The success of populist parties can be interpreted as an expression of mistrust in institutions and traditional political parties' ability** to protect citizens from economic and social insecurity. This is a major issue for the European Green Deal, as lack of trust contributes to fuelling fears against change, at the very time where large green transformations are necessary to mitigate climate change and ensure long-term prosperity.

**It is urgent to develop an alternative narrative for the European Green Deal centred on building trust to prevent further instrumentalization of green policies by radical right-wing populism,** as well as creating a positive perception of the green transition in Europe. In the face of the radical right's Eurosceptic discourses, the EU needs to show that contributes, together with the Member States, to provide solutions through joint responses based on solidarity<sup>131</sup>. Beyond emergency responses to shocks, such as the EU recovery plan Next Generation EU, it is essential to initiate policies and governance mechanisms that are able to ensure that citizens and stakeholders can trust that both individual and collective constraints

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<sup>130</sup> Defard, C. (2023). [Energy Union 2.0 to deliver the European Green Deal](#). Report. Jacques Delors Institute.

<sup>131</sup> Chopin, T. (2024). [Quel projet politique pour les élections européennes ?](#) *Telos*, 12 January.

and concerns are acknowledged by EU policymakers to confidently engage in the green transition.

**To that end, mechanisms for support, protection, and dialogue should be integrated into the European Green Deal to improve the effectiveness and legitimacy of climate and energy policies.** To build trust for the green transition EU policy makers should: I) Offer support and protection depending on the differentiated capacity to change, and the differentiated impacts of the transition; and II) Develop more open, interactive, and inclusive governance. If the European Green Deal toolbox is complemented with such policy measures, it could have the potential to contribute to addressing the political frustration and fears that are partly responsible for the rise of radical right populism. Forces that currently are threatening the cohesion of our societies and the robustness of our democracies, as much as the green transition and future prosperity.

## • Policy recommendations

### I. AN EFFECTIVE AND LEGITIMATE TRANSITION THAT ADDRESSES DIFFERENTIATED CAPACITY TO CHANGE AND DIFFERENTIATED IMPACTS OF THE TRANSITION

- Financial solidarity at EU and household level to support green investments and protect citizens from carbon lock-in

**Be it for governments, businesses or citizens, turning the transition from a perceived constraint to an opportunity calls for active policies** that consider stakeholders' differentiated capacity to act. Many Member States do not have enough fiscal space to achieve EU climate targets under the current fiscal framework<sup>132</sup>. The ongoing reform of the Stability and Growth Pact is unlikely to remedy this issue<sup>133</sup>.

**Without additional resources (technical, human, financial), it will be difficult for Member States to implement the European Green Deal** and further strengthen the regulatory framework<sup>134</sup>. This includes, investing in green skills, steering private investments toward cleantech manufacturing and clean solutions deployment, and creating a high-quality pipeline in public clean infrastructure projects that will be the backbone of EU's future competitiveness, jobs, and well-being.

**Additional EU-level green financing would ensure that a minimum level of funding is available to all Member States and that European Green Deal objectives are adequately supported**<sup>135</sup>. One of the key elements of an alternative narrative for the European Green Deal ahead of the next European election is to highlight the added value of European unity and solidarity in the face of large external threats in an increasingly unstable world<sup>136</sup>. EU funding could improve coordination and could allow for the introduction of stricter conditionality on the quality of green investment and measures undertaken by Member States. Among others, this could allow

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<sup>132</sup> Mang, S., Caddick, D. (2023). Beyond the bottom line. How green industrial policy can drive economic change and speed up climate action. New Economics Foundation.

<sup>133</sup> Eisl, A. (2024). [European fiscal framework reform - a compromise, for better or worse](#). Policy Brief. Jacques Delors Institute.

<sup>134</sup> Nguyen, P.-V. (2024). [Pacte vert: vers une "pause réglementaire européenne"? Décryptage](#), Institut Jacques Delors.

<sup>135</sup> Abraham, L., O'Connell, M., Oleaga Arruga, I. (2023). [The legal and institutional feasibility of an EU Climate and Energy Security Fund](#). Occasional Paper Series. ECB. Defard, C. (2023). [Energy Union 2.0 to deliver the European Green Deal](#). Report. Jacques Delors Institute.

<sup>136</sup> Chopin, T. (2024). [Quel projet politique pour les élections européennes ?](#) *Telos*, 12 January.

for the emergence of a truly European green industrial policy favouring the development of new cleantech manufacturing projects that would bring local economic development, job opportunities, and contribute to increased resilience, while feeding a positive narrative for the transition.

**Supporting green investments at the EU level would contribute to protecting citizens from high exposure to fossil fuels and carbon lock-in** while creating local jobs, for example through deep renovation programmes. Conversely, failure to provide the resources for the European Green Deal implementation would make it an easy target for radical right-wing parties, which could blame ‘Brussels for imposing rules’ that are difficult to comply with because of insufficient resources for anticipation and support.

**Recommendation n°1: Develop an EU Clean Investment Plan and increase the EU budget to provide additional grants to support the European Green Deal implementation in an adverse geopolitical context.** Options to increase the EU budget include the creation of new Own Resources, the issuance of EU green bonds, i.e. another round of common borrowing, or pooling more EU carbon market revenues at EU level. These options could be combined.

**68% of Europeans think the transition can only succeed if it addresses inequalities<sup>137</sup>.** Low-income households are more vulnerable to high energy prices since it represents a higher share of their income. Renewed attention should be given to ensure adequate financial and technical support to make alternatives to fossil fuels both attractive and easy to adopt.

**To support change at the household and local level and protect vulnerable citizens from the worst impacts of green policies, one key innovation of the Fit for 55 package is the Social Climate Fund (SCF).** The SCF will finance social compensation and green investments targeted to housing and mobility decarbonisation projects, to the benefit of the most vulnerable citizens. Its financial envelope is expected to be around € 65 billion<sup>138</sup> between 2026 and 2032. Yet, the financing needs to eradicate energy poverty through deep renovation by 2030<sup>139</sup> would represent over five times the amount of the SCF<sup>140</sup>, not to mention the mobility transition needs in rural or peri-urban areas with low access to alternatives to individual cars. Although the SCF will not be the only financing stream for ensure social fairness in the transition, the proposed amount falls short of what is currently needed.

**Recommendation n°2: Increase the support targeted towards vulnerable households by raising the financing envelope for the Social Climate Fund, for example through the earmarking of more revenues from the European carbon markets.<sup>141</sup>**

<sup>137</sup> European Investment Bank. (2023). [2023 - 2024 EIB Climate Survey](#).

<sup>138</sup> With an additional 25% of national co-financing, or a total expected of € 81 billion.

<sup>139</sup> Energy poverty rose to over 9% in 2022, with 41 million citizens unable to keep their home adequately warm in 2022. EPRS. (2023). [Energy poverty in the EU](#). Briefing.

<sup>140</sup> Defard, C. (2023). [Energy Union 2.0 to deliver the European Green Deal](#). Report. Jacques Delors Institute.

<sup>141</sup> Defard, C. (2022). [The need for a socially-just European Green Deal](#). Policy paper. Jacques Delors Institute.

- Support and protection in the face of differentiated employment impacts: anticipating and accompanying labour market changes while creating new opportunities for quality jobs

To respond to fears of economic destabilisation created by the green transition, there is a need to develop efficient employment strategies at national and regional/local levels. While at a macro-level, green policies should yield moderately positive employment impacts<sup>142</sup>, at the micro-level, **job losses are likely to hit certain regions and sectors disproportionately**. Public action will thus be paramount to mitigate these adverse consequences on workers and territories and create new opportunities that arise from the transition. In addition, job gains should be more dispersed across regions<sup>143</sup> than job losses, which will likely be highly localised. This probable **mismatch** between job losses and new job opportunities is thus calling for focused regional and local action, especially **economic planning and targeted labour and social policies**.<sup>144</sup>

The **Just Transition Fund (JTF)** was created as part of the European Green Deal, to support economic diversification and reconversion - e.g. employment and training-related policies - of the territories concerned, mostly coal-dependent regions. While the initiative is welcome, it falls short of the just transition challenges<sup>145</sup> and would require significant scaling-up (incl. in terms of financing<sup>146</sup>, scope and time-frame) or better mainstreaming across EU policies (incl. enhanced coordination with other EU funds), as well as improved monitoring<sup>147</sup>. In addition, sectors beyond the coal and fossil fuel industries are likely to experience important disruptions in the years to come and would benefit from EU support to better anticipate and support the changes brought by the transition to a carbon neutral economy.

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**142** Although there is no clear consensus on projected figures regarding the impact of EU green policies on employment, especially due to uncertainty in future policy choices, level of implementation, etc. Eurofound. (2023), [Fit for 55 climate package: Impact on EU employment by 2030](#), Publications Office of the EU, Luxembourg, 25 October.

**143** Although “positive employment effects are projected in southern European countries (in particular, Spain and Italy) and regions with natural endowments (wind and sun), developing energy efficiency infrastructure and capacity to manufacture renewable energy equipment”, see: Eurofound. (2023).

**144** *Ibid.*

**145** For more details on why the Just Transition Fund will fall short, see Marty, O. (2020). What should we make of the Just Transition Mechanism put forward by the European Commission? Fondation Robert Schuman.

**146** The JTF initially consisted of a financial envelope of €8.5 billion (~1 billion per year), these are still modest amounts compared to the estimated additional investment requirement of €477 billion per year until 2030 to achieve the objectives of the Net-Zero Industry Act. See: European Court of Auditors. (2023). [Special report 18/2023: EU climate and energy targets](#); European Commission. (2023). [Staff working document on investment needs to strengthen EU’s Net-Zero technology manufacturing capacity](#). SWD(2023)68.

**147** European Court of Auditors. (2022). [EU support to coal regions Limited focus on socio-economic and energy transition](#). Special Report 22. 9 November.



**Recommendation n°3: Increase the support to territories/regions and people who will suffer from the negative distributional impacts of the green transition by creating opportunities.** This could be done by extending the Just Transition Fund (JTF) to the automotive industry, which will undergo an important disruption in the coming years with highly localised job losses and massive retraining needs. Taking stock of the lessons learnt from the current JTF in coal regions (especially regarding funding timeframe, scope, and measured impact) will be necessary to ensure that allocated funds have long-lasting positive socio-economic impacts in the affected regions (quality job creation, reskilling/upskilling, career guidance etc. - before displacement). Anticipating and ensuring economic diversification of territories and regions that will be impacted negatively is needed through reindustrialisation policies and investments (e.g. in the Green Deal Industrial Plan including the Net-Zero Industry Act).

**Recommendation n°4: Improve intelligence on skills and employment needs related to the sectoral and geographical impacts of the transition, taking into account the entire value chain.**

Major transformations within and between sectors are also call for **increased action and investment in education and training, including re/upskilling of workers.** On the one hand, employment gains will disproportionately occur in the construction sector<sup>148</sup> as well as in low-carbon technologies. This means that, without dedicated public action, existing widespread shortages in construction and engineering craft occupations<sup>149</sup> could worsen significantly in the years to come and hinder the implementation of European Green Deal. On the other hand, workers in the automotive<sup>150</sup> and fossil fuel industries will likely face displacement or will need to adapt and undergo major reskilling/upskilling in order to take up entirely new positions with new job profiles within the same industry. For instance, 2.4 million workers in the European automotive industry would need to be retrained in the context of the shift to electromobility.<sup>151</sup>

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**148** Hurley, J. (2023). *Building back better: Construction essential for EU green transition*, Blogpost, Eurofound, 25 October.

**149** Fondazione Giacomo Brodolini. (2023). *EURES Report on labour shortages and surpluses 2022*. European Labour Authority, Publications Office of the EU.

**150** Labour intensity of e-vehicles is lower than that of a diesel car. Source: Galgóczi, B. et al. (2023). *On the way to electromobility – a green(er) but more unequal future?* European Trade Union Institute, 4 April.

**151** Kuhlmann, K et al. (2021). *Is E-mobility a Green Boost for European Automotive Jobs?* Boston Consulting Group, July.

**Recommendation n°5: Ensure an adequate training offer to address green skill shortages.** This should be done through an enhanced coordination between public employment services, regional and local administrations, companies, vocational education and training (VET) providers, universities, and social partners. A good example of an EU-level initiative in this regard is the Pact for Skills. This also requires stepping up public and private investment in education and training, in particular for critical occupations facing significant labour and skills shortages (e.g. in construction and engineering). There is also a need to provide (more) incentives for VET and apprenticeships and strengthening public-private partnerships especially in sectors like construction.

**Recommendation n°6: Increase the attractiveness of critical transition occupations** by improving working conditions, wages, occupational health and safety, social protection, workers' rights through social dialogue and co-determination, etc., as well as by improving their image within society (more positive and future-oriented framing, focusing on the green transition, but also targeting broader groups, including women).

## II. ENHANCED LEGITIMACY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF GREEN POLICIES THROUGH MORE OPEN, INTERACTIVE, AND INCLUSIVE GOVERNANCE

**Improving the knowledge infrastructure around energy transition policies is a key precondition to build trust for the European green transition<sup>152</sup>** and counter post-factual political communication from the radical right. Given the high distributive issues associated with the transition, designing appropriate support and protection from adverse impacts requires an improved knowledge base on the impacts of climate policies on emissions, social inequalities, and local development. This would also favour more fact-based debates. The EU is lacking up-to-date, reliable energy data, which currently prevents ex ante and ex post policy evaluation, increasing the risk of low effectiveness of policy designs.

**Recommendation n°7: Enable quality policy evaluation through good quality open data at the EU level and more granular surveys on social determinants of the support for the transition.** The EU should incentivise national governments to provide clear, complete, timely, reliable, and relevant public sector data. This could be done through the creation of a European Energy Information Service within the European Environment Agency, or by the creation of an EU Energy Agency, where information should be easily accessible and transparent for citizens. The EU should furthermore support the conduction of granular surveys on the social determinants of the support to precise policy measures, both at the national and EU level, taking the [IFOP/RTE study on French citizens decision mechanisms on energy consumption](#) as a best practice example.

**Greater effectiveness of green policies calls for higher administrative capacity to support, effective implementation, and greater compliance.** The greater role of public actors to implement vast transition programmes and massify building and road transport decarbonisation calls for appropriate human resources to perform increased tasks. A study on 21 OECD-countries shows that countries with higher administrative capacity fare better at coming up with appropriate policy designs to

<sup>152</sup> Dechezleprêtre, A., Fabre, A., Kruse, T., Planterose, B., Sanchez Chico, A., Stantcheva, S. (2023). Fighting climate change: international attitudes towards climate policies. National Bureau of Economic Research.

address environmental problems<sup>153</sup>. This illustrates the need for an adequate strengthening of administration capacity to conduct the transition (foresight, strategy, implementation) at all levels: EU, national, and local. The Local Staff for Climate Report from Energy Cities show that 241 000 new additional local employment positions are required by 2030 to achieve building renovation targets<sup>154</sup>.

**Recommendation n°8: Develop and expand support programmes to ensure sufficiently staffed and skilled teams in the public sector, especially at the local level** to guarantee the implementation of the transition on the ground. The Technical Support Instrument developed by DG REFORM could support these efforts<sup>155</sup>.

**In addition, improved dialogue between stakeholders and policy makers could contribute to the emergence of quality project pipelines.** To that end, the EU needs enhanced multi-level interactive democratic processes, with better public and stakeholder participation in local and national energy and climate planning. Permanent Energy and Climate Stakeholders' Dialogues at the national, regional, and local levels have the potential to create a space where local authorities, civil society organisations, businesses and industries, investors and other relevant stakeholders can engage and discuss energy and climate policies, review implementation progress, and interact with decision-makers.

**Recommendation n°9: Support a more interactive governance through permanent Energy and Climate Stakeholder's Dialogues at all levels** to create spaces where public authorities, civil society organisations, industries, startups, SMEs, investors, and other relevant stakeholders can discuss energy and climate policies and review the implementation progress of the EU Green Deal. Such platforms could support policy efforts to reduce bureaucracy and facilitate green investments, among others. The European Commission could investigate options to deliver financial and technical support for the early stages of the establishment of such Energy and Climate Stakeholders Dialogue platforms, for example through a dedicated facility.

**Lastly, the question is not if we should have climate policies, it is how.** 93% of Europeans believe that climate change is a serious problem<sup>156</sup>. **Deliberative democracy could prove particularly useful to keep exploring socially acceptable green policy designs.** If done right, it could improve the democratic quality of EU decision-making processes and outcome,<sup>157</sup> be a useful complement to representative democracy<sup>158</sup>, and contributed to addressing political frustration and mistrust among citizens.

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<sup>153</sup> Fernandez-i-Marín, X., Knill, C., Steinebach, Y. (2021). *Studying Policy Design Quality in Comparative Perspective*. American Political Science Review. 115.

<sup>154</sup> Energy Cities, 2022. *Human Capacity in Local Governments : the bottleneck of the building stock transition*. Study.

<sup>155</sup> For more initiatives, see Covenant of Mayors - Europe. (2023). *Local staff for the energy and climate transition: what is needed and how do we get there ?*

<sup>156</sup> European Commission. (2023). *Special Eurobarometer 538 Climate Change*.

<sup>157</sup> Offe 2014, Fishkin 2014, in Cengiz, F. (2023). Dilemmas of deliberative democracy in the EU: why (not) and how (not)? in Bremberg, N. Norman, L. (Eds) *Dilemmas of European Democracy. New Perspectives on Democratic Politics in the European Union*. Edinburg University Press.

<sup>158</sup> Franco-German working group on EU institutional reform. (2023). "Sailing on high-seas – reforming and enlarging the EU for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century". Report.

The deliberative process makes space for open discussion, hearing diverse and opposite arguments from experts and their fellow citizens. **Citizens are expected to re-evaluate their initial perspectives and collectively come to a fresh, shared understanding, which forms the basis for the legitimacy of the deliberative process's outcomes.** Experience has shown that participants are both capable and likely to change opinion,<sup>159</sup> even on contentious topics, like climate change mitigation. In addition to the power of argumentation and balanced debate, other citizens are more likely to trust decisions taken by non-professional politicians, shielded from party agenda, re-election motives, revolving doors, or large private interests.

**A permanent EU citizen assembly on climate could meet annually, building on the priorities identified by national and regional citizen agora,** and feeding into the consultation mechanism on the annual Work Programme of the Commission. It should be tied more closely to EU decision-making, for example through legally binding follow-up by EU institutions which would have to provide written feedback on the adoption or rejection of citizens' proposals<sup>160</sup>.

**Recommendation n°10: An EU Citizen Assembly on Climate.** Given the political challenge and uncertainty surrounding the implementation of the European Green Deal, an EU citizen assembly on climate closely tied to EU decision-making could enhance the legitimacy of the additional policy effort required for the European Green Deal implementation. It could contribute to cool down the debate and contribute with fresh and shared understanding of the highly political issues at stake. It could for example discuss some of the other recommendations of this paper, such as new EU Own Resources.

## • Conclusion and summary of recommendations

The rise of mistrust in institutions and traditional political parties' ability to respond to citizens' concerns in an increasingly challenging economic, social, and geopolitical context is fuelling the rise of populism in Europe. Citizens' experiences and worries of impoverishment and deteriorating living conditions nourishes fears towards change. Since the energy and climate transition unavoidably requires large transformations of our fossil-dependent societies, the radical right is currently drawing on these fears by integrating a strong opposition to national and European green policies into their Eurosceptic, anti-immigration and identity discourses. This stance is equally reflected in the voting behaviours of the conservative and radical right, ECR and ID, in the European Parliament on European Green Deal files. Additionally, the traditional right, EPP, is getting closer with ECR on votes that particularly relate to environmental and agricultural policy. This coalition's success on certain files, has equally shown division within the liberal and social democratic groups.

The rise of the radical far right ahead of the European Parliament elections in June 2024 thus risks endangering the implementation of the European Green Deal and making it void of adequate regulation and enabling policies. Therefore, there is a need to develop an alternative narrative and associated policy recommendations for the energy and climate transition based on building trust. To that end, the European Green Deal needs to better integrate mechanisms for **support, protection, and dialogue** to improve the effectiveness and legitimacy of climate and energy policies.

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid

<sup>160</sup> Scholz, H. (2021). *Report on Citizens' dialogues and Citizens' participation in the EU decision-making* (2020/2201(INI)). European Parliament.

## I ENABLING THE TRANSITION THROUGH FINANCIAL SOLIDARITY

**Recommendation n°1: Develop an EU Clean Investment Plan and increase the EU budget** to provide additional grants to support Member States with the European Green Deal implementation in an adverse geopolitical and economic context. Part of this could support recommendations n°2 and n°3.

**Recommendation n°2: Increase the support targeted at vulnerable households by raising the financing envelope for the Social Climate Fund**, for example through the earmarking of more revenues from the European carbon markets.

**Recommendation n°3: Increase the support to territories/regions and people who will suffer from the negative distributional impacts of the green transition by creating opportunities, including through the Green Deal Industrial Plan.** This could be done by extending the Just Transition Fund (JTF). Anticipating and ensuring economic diversification of territories and regions is also needed through reindustrialisation policies and investments.

## I ENABLING THE TRANSITION WITH GREEN SKILLS AND GOOD GREEN JOBS OPPORTUNITIES

**Recommendation n°4: Improve intelligence on skills and employment needs related to the sectoral and geographical impacts of the transition**, taking into account the entire value chain.

**Recommendation n°5: Ensure an adequate training offer to address green skill shortages.** This should be done through an enhanced coordination between public employment services, regional and local administrations, companies, VET providers, universities, and social partners.

**Recommendation n°6: Increase the attractiveness of critical transition occupations** by improving working conditions, wages, occupational health and safety, social protection, workers' rights through social dialogue and co-determination, etc, as well as by improving their image within society.

## I DESIGN MORE EFFECTIVE AND LEGITIMATE GREEN POLICIES

**Recommendation n°7: Enable quality policy evaluation through good quality open data at the EU level and more granular surveys on social determinants of the support for the transition.** The EU should incentivise national governments to provide clear, complete, timely, reliable and relevant public sector data. This could be done through the creation of a European Energy Information Service within the European Environment Agency, or by the creation an EU Energy Agency.

**Recommendation n°8: Develop and expand support programmes to ensure sufficiently staffed and skilled teams in the public sector, especially at the local level** to guarantee the implementation of the transition on the ground. The Technical Support Instrument developed by DG REFORM could support these efforts<sup>161</sup>.

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<sup>161</sup> For more initiatives, see Covenant of Mayors - Europe. (2023). [Local staff for the energy and climate transition: what is needed and how do we get there?](#)

**Recommendation n°9: Support a more interactive governance through permanent Energy and Climate Stakeholder's Dialogues at all levels** to create spaces where stakeholders can discuss energy and climate policies, and review the implementation progress of the EU Green Deal. The European Commission could investigate options to deliver financial and technical support for the early stages of the establishment of such Energy and Climate Stakeholders Dialogue platforms, for example through a dedicated facility.

**Recommendation n°10: An EU Citizen Assembly on Climate.** Given the political challenge and uncertainty surrounding the implementation of the European Green Deal, an EU citizen assembly on climate closely tied to EU decision-making could enhance the legitimacy of the additional policy effort required for the European Green Deal implementation. It could contribute to cool down the debate and contribute with fresh and shared understanding of the highly political issues at stake.

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