

The politics of the European Green and Fair Transition: Italian parties' voting behaviour in the European Parliament

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Abstract

The consequences of increasing temperatures and of weather-related environmental disasters have become globally evident, including in the European Union (EU), where countries such as Italy have been recognized as being particularly vulnerable to climate change. As a response to these threats, the European Commission (EC) launched the European Green Deal in 2019 with the ambition of transforming the EU into a 'fair and prosperous society with a modern, resource-efficient and competitive economy' through a 'socially just ecological transition' by 2050 (EC 2019: 2). New policy instruments have been discussed and adopted at the European level to attain a Green and Fair Transition (GFT), such as the Social Climate Fund (SCF) created to support member states' reduction of carbon emissions in the transport and building sectors. Despite a growing academic interest in the SCF in assessing the EC's proposal and its environmental and social features, knowledge on the politics of the SCF remains limited. Building on research analysing the structure of party competition in the European Parliament (EP), this article investigates inter-party competition and coalition making on the adoption of the SCF. It does so by analysing voting behaviour on the SCF (draft and adopted) regulation, as discussed and voted for in the plenary sessions of the EP. The empirical focus is placed on Italian political parties, Italy being one of the major beneficiaries of the SCF but at the same time having recognised climate-related weaknesses and a lack of reform ambition on climate policies. Providing novel data on the politics behind the SCF, the article sheds light on the supporting coalitions as well as on the conflicts and synergies between Italian and other European political parties on green and fair transition matters.

1. Introduction

The Green Transition (GT) – the transition to a climate-neutral economy – is increasingly at the centre of the agenda in both national and European Union (EU) politics. In the last few years there has been considerable debate about the need for effective policies to reduce emissions while protecting vulnerable groups. This has led to talk of a Green and Fair Transition (GFT) (EC 2019). While much has been written about the EU strategy to address climate change and the transition to a zero-emission economy, much less is known about the politics of the GFT itself. The present article addresses this issue with the aim of contributing to the systematisation of

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empirical evidence on the EU politics of the green and just transition while investigating the complex interaction between national and European political dynamics. We do this by focusing our analysis on the most recent and, to some extent, ambitious programme passed by the EU as part of the implementation of the European Green Deal (EGD), the Social Climate Fund (SCF), supporting member states' reduction of carbon emissions in the transport and building sectors. We look at the European Parliament (EP) where the different political groups debated and voted on the regulation of the SCF. The research question at the core of the article is about the type of political coalition that supported or opposed the adoption of the SCF, with a focus on the voting behaviour of the Italian Members of the European Parliament (MEPs).

The analysis of the Italian MEPs is of relevance, given that Italy is one of the major beneficiaries of the SCF, with a 10.8% share of the total member states' allocation (EP 2023b: Annex II). At the same time, Italy is considered to be among the EU laggards in adopting environmental policies at a national level, with Italian governments showing little ambition with regard to green reforms (Cotta and Domorenok 2022).

To better understand the coalitions of political parties voting for the adoption of the SCF in the EP, the article reviews the literature on the politics of the GFT in two ways. On the one hand, we look at the main hypotheses developed by authors who have analysed the political dynamics of the green transition, which assume that green parties and parties on the left of the political spectrum are the main promoters of GFT policies. On the other, we refer to the main contributions on EU politics and multilevel governance, which assume interrelations between EU and national politics with parties and their coalition strategies resulting from a mix of different goals at different governance levels. The SCF and its approval in the EP provide us with the opportunity to analyse the alignment between different political groups in the EP on the policies to fight climate change and uncover the complexity and the conflicts that the definition of GFT policies entails. This alignment challenges some of the main hypotheses proposed in the literature. By analysing the voting behaviour of European political parties, and providing a text analysis of the amendments discussed in the EP's plenary sessions when the SCF draft regulation was debated, we show that together with the mainstream parties supporting the Commission's EGD agenda, namely the group of the European People's Party (EPP), Renew Europe (RE) and the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D), parties on the right of the policy spectrum have also played a key role in the adoption of the SCF. This is particularly the case for the Italian delegations of *Fratelli d'Italia* (Brothers of Italy, FdI) and the *Lega*, who voted for the regulation and contributed to the approval of the SCF.¹

The article is structured as follows: Section 2 provides a brief review of the literature on the coalition strategies of parties and the complex interaction of EU and national party politics. It also sheds light on the politics of the GFT. Section 3 provides key information on the SCF, its set up and approval through a long legislative process. Section 4 analyses the plenary votes on the SCF between 2022 and 2023 to provide

¹ We acknowledge the scholarly debate on the ideological position of FdI, a party which is labelled by some authors as 'national-conservative' rather than 'radical right' or 'far-right' (see Vassallo & Vignati 2024). Given the focus of this article, we do not enter into this debate, but use the label 'most right-wing' or 'far-right' to simply identify those groups or parties spatially placed on the right of the policy spectrum (and on the right of the EPP) in the EP.

evidence of the voting behaviour of the parliamentary groups, their cohesion and defections, and the winning coalitions. Section 5 provides concluding reflections on the SCF supporting coalitions, the multilevel politics of GFT policies and the voting behaviour of Italian parties.

2. The politics of Green and Fair Transition

In December 2019, the European Commission led by Ursula von der Leyen presented the EGD as an economic growth strategy that aimed to transform the EU into a fair and prosperous society, becoming the first carbon-neutral continent by 2050. Early studies on this policy document have highlighted its explicit recognition of a synergic integration between environmental and social policy goals and its attention to the potential trade-offs that may arise from this integration (Sabato and Fronteddu 2020; Mandelli 2022). Such policy has been complemented with additional instruments such as, for example, the Just Transition Fund (JTF) and the SCF. Existing research has provided a historical excursus on the development of these GFT policies stressing the political conflicts between political actors and the contentious discussions on their adoption. Recent studies have shown how the EGD has provided the grounds for gaining the support of the EP and legitimising Ursula von der Leyen as President of the EC (Graziano 2024), while at the same time inter-institutional debates have shaped the adoption of JTF and the SCF (Crespy and Munta 2023; Sabato and Mandelli 2023). Among the studies on the SCF, contributions have particularly highlighted how conflicts emerged as confrontations between EU institutions, and mostly between the co-legislators, i.e., the EP and the Council (Kyriazi and Miró 2022; Crespy and Munta 2023), as well as struggles on the amounts of resources allocated to the EU member states and between EU net-budget contributors and recipients (Crespy and Munta 2023; Sabato and Mandelli 2023).

The politicisation of environmental and welfare policies has characterised ideological conflicts along the left/right political spectrum. The research on public opinion policy orientation documents a correlation between individuals' pro-welfare positions and egalitarian ideology, beliefs about social justice and social mobility (e.g., Calzada *et al.* 2014). Other research explores the salience of environmental issues in public opinion with pro-environmental positions leaning towards the left side of the political spectrum (e.g., McCright *et al.* 2016). Among those studies addressing the GFT, contributions have focused on public opinion on synergies and trade-offs between environmental and social policies (e.g., Jackobsson *et al.* 2018; Armingeon and Bürgisser 2021; Emilsson 2022) and identified several attitudinal groups that supported or opposed these policies (e.g., Otto and Gugushvili 2020). Recently, research has also begun to investigate questions about social and environmental attitudes, values, practices, and policy preferences to better understand individuals' dispositions on these policies (e.g., Fritz and Eversberg 2024). Only a few contributions have analysed the political preferences and ideological orientations of political parties on GFT policies. With the aim of determining the logic of action of political parties, Mandelli (2023) reviews contributions that point to left-wing political parties as promoters of welfare interests, together with trade unions, and to single-issue green parties (e.g., Folke 2014)

and left-libertarian parties (e.g., Huber *et al.* 2021), together with environmental movements (e.g., Carter and Little 2021), as promoters of environmental reforms.

Recent research has pointed also to the ideological conflicts riddling the adoption of the SCF. Crespy and Munta (2023) offer a contextual account of the divisions within the EP on the adoption of the SCF, stressing how far-right parties were initially sceptical of this initiative but also how the text was in the end adopted by an ‘overwhelming majority’ of MEPs (Crespy and Munta 2023:246). Building upon this analysis, in this article we seek to understand the coalition strategies of political parties supporting the SCF. Following Strom (1990) and Natali and Rhodes (2004), we thus see parties as: *vote-seekers*, in trying to gain votes and control government, *office-seekers*, in expanding their control over political office in their quest for benefits and private goods, and *policy-seekers*, in their quest to represent groups and their demands, in line with social or other kinds of cleavage.

The complexity of the political strategies of parties and their representatives is further increased in the context of the EU. The latter is in fact a multilevel governance system where political parties organise themselves at two different political levels: the domestic and the EU level (for an overview, see Wolfs and Bressanelli 2023). Political groups in the EP are composed of national delegations (or national parties), maintaining significant autonomy in their political choices. In fact, while internal coordination between the national delegations within the major political groups has strengthened over time – although there is little comparable to the party whips in parliamentary systems – the smaller groups, particularly on the right of the policy spectrum, have a very decentralised decision-making system. This is confirmed by analyses of the voting cohesion of the groups, showing the (remarkably) lower cohesion of the more extreme groups on the left and especially on the right (see further below). Within the EP, therefore, to pursue their policy and vote-seeking goals, national parties do not necessarily align with their own political group, as the costs of defection are low and the sanctions weak or non-existent (Bressanelli 2022). This explains our choice, in what follows, to focus both on the EP groups and the national (Italian) delegations.

Another aspect which is worth emphasising concerns the behaviour of the political groups (and member parties) placed at the (far) right of the political spectrum. Normally, the EP – i.e., its mainstream groups – applies a *cordon sanitaire* vis-à-vis the most Eurosceptic groups, excluding them from internal decision making and office appointments (Ripoll-Servent 2019). Yet there are different types of Euroscepticism and opposition within the EP (Brack & Behm 2022). In an institutional context where different majorities feature in different policy areas, political groups and national parties to the right of the EPP should not be expected to necessarily oppose but could be part of the *ad hoc* coalitions supporting specific policies.

3. The Social Climate Fund

Since the launch of the EGD, an increase in the number of EU initiatives tackling a nexus between environmental and social policy goals is clearly perceivable (Sabato *et al.* 2023). As noted by eminent observers (Crespy and Munta, 2023; Mandelli *et al.* 2023), the SCF is a flagship policy of the EU strategy for a green and fair transition. The novelty of the SCF is the direct link between a carbon-tax instrument (the recast Emission Trading

System directive – ETS2) and measures to compensate affected low-incomers. Indeed, the SCF has a redistributive aim, i.e., promoting a rebalancing of the ‘transition burden’ between higher polluters (i.e., the ‘polluter pays’ principle) and disadvantaged social sectors. In the SCF, the environmental and social nexus is also pursued, on the one hand, via measures aimed at directly reducing emissions through technological upgrading and the reduction of pollutant mobility (i.e., the ecological goal). On the other hand, the SCF provides direct support, incentives and mobility solutions in order to accompany vulnerable consumers towards a zero-emission society, preventing the transition from impacting predominantly on them (i.e., the social goal) (European Commission 2021). The operative link between climate and social objectives is also demonstrated by the fact that the SCF will enter into force in 2027, together with the ETS2, and will be financed by the revenues obtained from the ETS2 allowances. Lastly, the innovative feature of this instrument is also due to its greater financial equipment in comparison with other GFT initiatives by the EU. Indeed, the SCF budget will be up to €65 billion (for the period 2027-2032), almost double the latter. Moreover, member states will have to formulate National Social Climate Plans and co-finance them by 25 percent, with the total amount of mobilised funds for all member states amounting to €86 billion.²

3.1. The legislative process: from proposal to adoption

Due to its innovative features and unprecedented financial equipment, the legislative process which led to the approval of the final regulation was far from simple. The EC launched a legislative proposal in July 2021. In the autumn, the EP assigned this file jointly to the Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (ENVI) and the Committee for Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL). The appointed co-rapporteurs were David Casa (from Malta) for the EMPL committee and Esther De Lange (from the Netherlands) for the ENVI committee, both members of the EPP. They published a joint draft report in February 2022 (European Parliament 2023a). The joint report was subject to a very high number of amendments, (more than a thousand – precisely 1115). In May 2022, 75 compromised amendments were finally approved. In the end, after intensive revision, the co-rapporteurs drew up the final committee report for the plenary session.

In the plenary session of 8 June 2022, 172 other amendments were put to vote, 34 of these by roll-call. Nine of these 34 amendments were rejected, while overall, 161 amendments were adopted. The final vote on the amended text was scheduled for the subsequent plenary session of 22 June 2022, when it was adopted at first reading. The text was then referred back to the responsible Committees for the inter-institutional negotiations with the Council. Trilogue negotiations were concluded on 18 December 2022 with a provisional agreement, which was formally endorsed by the EP on 18 April 2023 in its plenary session (European Parliament 2023b) and by the Council on 24 April of that same year.

² Note that the Commission’s original proposal of 2021 would have allocated a total of €72.2 billion with the Multiannual Financial Framework and the direct contribution of 50 percent provided by member states (European Commission 2021).

4. Empirical analysis

The legislative process points to the complexity and political importance of the SCF, observable both in terms of MEPs' activism (e.g., the number of amendments presented), and the involvement of two Committees on equal footing, with the appointment of two co-rapporteurs (interestingly, from the same political group). In what follows, we delve deeper into the analysis of the voting behaviour of MEPs – looking first at political groups, then at the Italian party delegations – based on the roll-call votes cast in the two EP plenaries of 8 June 2022 (providing the mandate for the inter-institutional negotiations) and of 18 April 2023 (voting on the final text). We observe the position taken by each political group and the Italian parties, with the aim of highlighting both the level of consensus on the SCF, and the degree of political conflict both within groups and across political parties. The focus on plenary votes – collected from the official website of the EP which makes them available in two separate files ('results of votes' and 'roll-call votes') – is necessary to capture the position of all Italian parties: i.e., not all of them are represented at Committee level, or are represented by one MEP only.

4.1. A super-grand coalition supporting the Social Climate Fund

In the first instance, the configuration of the voting behaviour of the EP groups on the whole text of the regulation (see Table 1) shows a large consensus regarding the SCF, with a super-grand coalition supporting it. This is far from being an exceptional outcome – politics in the EP is often based on oversized majorities (e.g., Hix *et al.* 2007) – but it is well worth noting that the SCF does not seem to defy the usual patterns.

In the first vote on the whole text of the regulation, the winning coalition is the same one supporting the von der Leyen Commission i.e., EPP, S&D and RE, *plus* the groups expected to be the most committed to GFT initiatives, like the Greens – European Free Alliance (G-EFA) and The Left. Moreover, there was also additional support from MEPs from the non-attached members (NI) and the European Conservative and Reformists (ECR) group. These were MEPs from *Fratelli d'Italia* (Brothers of Italy, FdI) in the ECR group, together with MEPs from the Italian *Movimento Cinque Stelle* (Five Star Movement, M5S), the Spanish *Junts per Catalunya* (JC) and the Hungarian *Fidesz* in the NI group.

In the final vote on the regulation of 18 April 2023 – following inter-institutional negotiations – the groups' positions display some adjustments. While the super-grand coalition supporting the regulation remains broadly the same, several other opposition parties converge towards supporting it. In particular, the Czech Civic Democratic Party (ODS) in the ECR group, and the Italian *LeGa* in the ID group vote with the supporting majority. In sum, these votes show a large basis of support for the SCF.

Table 1: Roll-call votes on the Social Climate Fund (whole text)

	First reading: 22 June 2022			Final regulation: 18 April 2023		
	Approve	Reject	Abstain	Approve	Reject	Abstain
EPP	154	0	6	151	2	4
S&D	129	0	5	133	1	0
RE	80	11	6	80	11	6
G-EFA	67	0	0	67	0	0
The Left	31	4	1	31	2	1
NI	16	10	1	24	11	2
ECR	6	42	8	15	13	30
ID	0	36	21	21	35	0
Total	483	103	48	522	75	43

Source: own elaboration. Note: EPP = European People's Party; S&D = Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats; RE = Renew Europe; G-EFA = Greens – European Free Alliance; NI = Not-attached members; ECR = European Conservative and Reformists; ID = Identity and Democracy.

Moving the focus to intra-group dynamics, Table 2 shows that only the EPP, the S&D, and especially the G-EFA display a strong internal cohesion, as measured by the Agreement Index (Hix *et al.* 2007: 91).³ Cohesion levels are lower for The Left, and especially for RE where some important national delegations – the People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) from the Netherlands and the Freedom Democratic Party (FDP) from Germany – did not follow the group line. On the opposite side, as already mentioned, both within the ECR and the ID groups some national delegations split and decided to side with the majority.

Table 2: Voting cohesion (Agreement Index) of the political groups (whole text).

	First reading: 22 June 2022	Final regulation: 18 April 2023	Overall cohesion: (2019-2022)
G-EFA	1	1	0.97
EPP	0.94	0.94	0.92
S&D	0.94	0.98	0.96
The Left	0.79	0.86	0.81
RE	0.73	0.73	0.92
ECR	0.62	0.27	0.76
ID	0.44	0.43	0.64

Source: own elaboration. Note: G-EFA = Greens – European Free Alliance; EPP = European People's Party; S&D = Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats; RE = Renew Europe; ECR = European Conservative and Reformists; ID = Identity and Democracy. The Overall cohesion scores (on final votes) are from Bressanelli & De Candia 2023, 19.

Zooming in on the behaviour of the Italian MEPs and parties (Table 3), the most surprising finding is the convergence with the majority of both FdI and *Lega*, the former in both votes, the latter only on the final agreement. All Italian parties supported the

³ The index is equal to 1 if all the members of the group vote the same way and 0 if MEPs are equally divided among the three voting options.

final regulation, with all MEPs casting their vote without a single exception and approving the regulation in the plenary vote of 18 April 2023.

Table 3: Italian party delegations: roll-call votes on the Social Climate Fund (whole text)

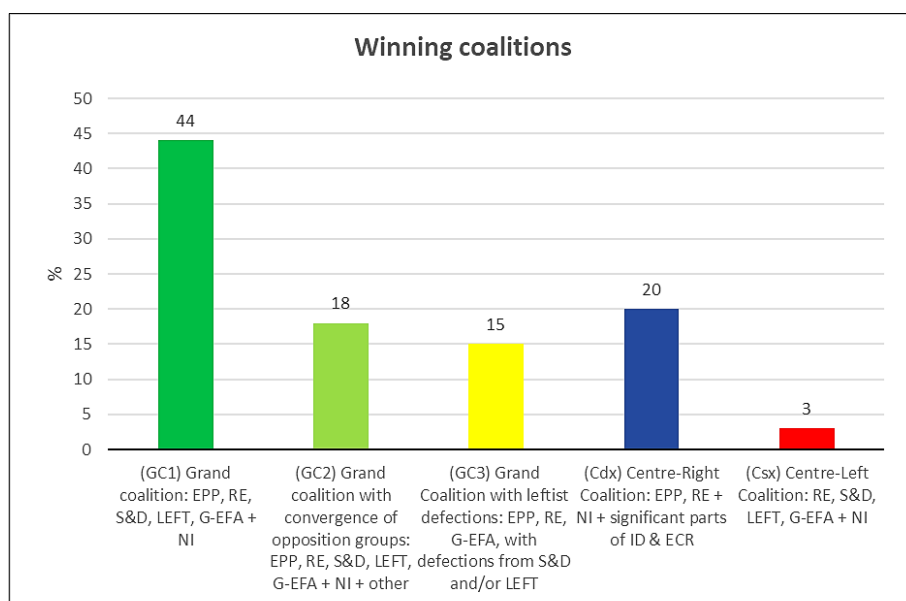
	First reading: 22 June 2022			Final regulation: 18 April 2023		
	Approve	Reject	Abstain	Approve	Reject	Abstain
PD (S&D)	15	0	0	17	0	0
FI (EPP)	9	0	0	8	0	0
Fdi (ECR)	6	0	2	8	0	0
M5S (NI)	6	0	0	6	0	0
Az (RE)	1	0	0	1	0	0
IV (RE)	1	0	0	1	0	0
Ver (G-EFA)	1	0	0	0	0	0
Lega (ID)	0	0	21	21	0	0
Total	39	0	23	62	0	0

Source: own elaboration. Note: PD = Democratic Party; FI = Forza Italia; Fdi = Brothers of Italy; M5S = Five Star Movement; Az = Azione/Action; IV = Italia Viva; Ver = Verdi/Greens.

4.2. Analysing amendments: winning coalitions and defections.

Beyond the votes on the whole text, we have deepened our analysis by observing how the EP's political groups positioned themselves on the 34 amendments votes – by roll-call – taking place in the plenary of 8 June 2022. Figure 1 shows that the most frequent winning majorities (44 percent of votes) are represented by a super-grand coalition (GC1) that includes EPP, S&D, RE, and left-wing groups (G-EFA and The Left), with the additional support of some other delegations sitting among the NI (usually the Italian M5S and the Spanish JC). The second most frequent configuration is a coalition of all centre-right parties (Cdx), namely EPP and RE, supported by several delegations of the ECR and ID, occurring in 20 percent of the votes and, particularly, for cases of rejection of amendments proposed by leftist and green MEPs. Another frequent configuration is a super-grand coalition (GC2) occurring in 18 percent of the votes and comprising all GC1 parties with the convergence of consistent parties from the right side of the political spectrum, mainly from the ECR group. Another configuration is the grand coalition occurring in 15 percent of the votes and comprising all groups with sizeable leftist defections (GC3), namely from S&D and/or The Left. A winning coalition of centre-left parties (Csx) comprising S&D, RE, The Left and G-EFA groups (with NI members) has occurred only once (3 percent of votes), in the case of a rejection of an amendment proposed by the two co-rapporteurs from the EPP group.

Figure 1: Winning coalitions in the plenary of 08 June 2022 (amendments)



Source: own elaboration. Note: EPP = European People's Party; S&D = Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats; RE = Renew Europe; G-EFA = Greens – European Free Alliance; NI = Not-attached members; ECR = European Conservative and Reformists; ID = Identity and Democracy.

Table 4: Political groups: participation in the winning coalition majority

	Winning	Losing	% Winning
RE	34	0	100
EPP	33	1	97
G-EFA	28	6	82
S&D	24	10	70.5
The Left	24	10	70.5
NI	15	18	44
ECR	13	21	38
ID	11	23	32

Source: own elaboration. Note: EPP = European People's Party; S&D = Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats; RE = Renew Europe; G-EFA = Greens – European Free Alliance; NI = Not-attached members; ECR = European Conservative and Reformists; ID = Identity and Democracy.

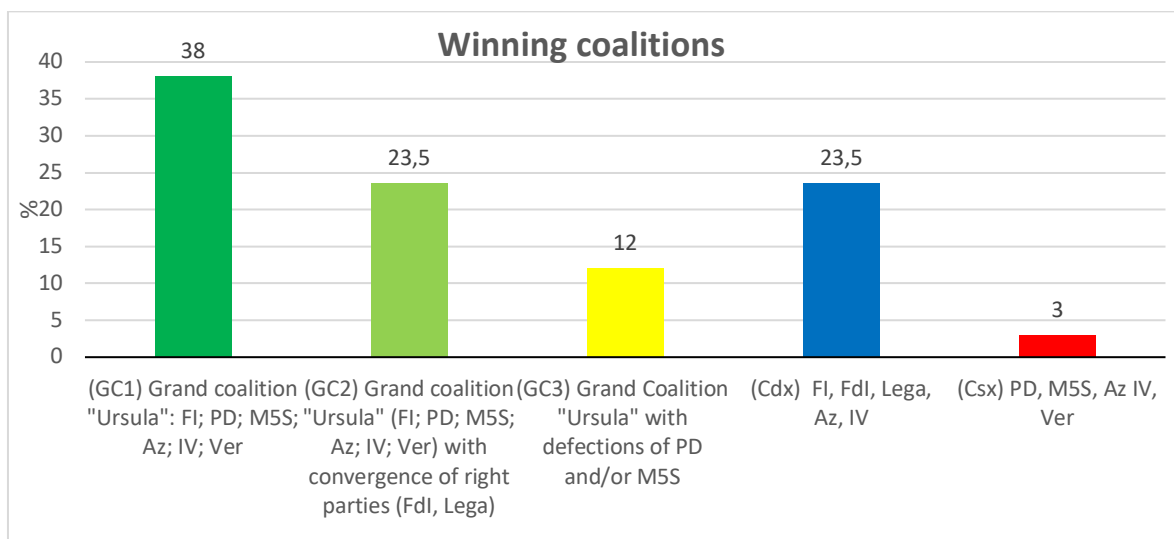
Table 4 counts the number of votes in which each group was part of the winning coalition majority, showing the key role played by the more centrist groups (the EPP and RE), while centre-left political groups (S&D and The Left) were relatively less decisive.

In Figure 2, we replicated the same analysis on the amendments for the EP groups but this time focusing on Italian parties. The identified winning coalitions show a very similar pattern to that observed for the EP groups in Figure 1. The most frequent coalition is again the grand coalition supporting the von der Leyen Commission (in Italian called *Maggioranza Ursula*), which represents the 38 percent of votes (GC1) comprising FI (EPP), PD (S&D), Az and IV (RE), Ver (G-EFA) with the M5S (NI). Compared to the broader coalition configurations displayed above (cf. Figure 1), the

Italian most right-wing parties converged more frequently with the majority, as shown by the bars for GC2, which comprises all parties in GC1 ‘enlarged’ to include FdI and *Lega*, and the right-wing coalition (Cdx) with 23.5 percent of votes in both cases.

As regards participation of the Italian party delegations in the winning majority in Table 5, there are only a couple of notable deviations from the patterns displayed for the political groups (cf. Tb. 4). First, the *Lega* demonstrates more collaborative behaviour than the ID group, being part of the winning majority in 13 votes (compared to 11 for the ID group). Second, the M5S often votes with the majority (70.5 percent of the time) showing its commitment to the *Maggioranza Ursula*.

Figure 2: Italian parties and winning coalitions in the plenary of 08 June 2022 (amendments)



Source: own elaboration. Note: PD = Democratic Party; FI = Forza Italia; FdI = Brothers of Italy; M5S = Five Star Movement; Az = Azione/Action; IV = Italia Viva; Ver = Greens.

Table 5: Italian party delegations: participation in the winning coalition majority

	Winning	Losing	% Winning
Az	34	0	100
IV	34	0	100
FI	33	1	97
Ver	28	6	82
PD	24	10	70.5
M5S	24	10	70.5
FdI	13	21	38
Lega	13	21	38

Source: own elaboration. Note: PD = Democratic Party; FI = Forza Italia; FdI = Brothers of Italy; M5S = Five Star Movement; Az = Azione/Action; IV = Italia Viva; Ver = Verdi/Greens.

4.3. In-depth analysis: observing coalitions in key amendments.

The in-depth analysis of some politically important amendments voted in the plenary session provides further insights into the logic behind coalition making in the EP. To

start with, Table 6 shows how Italian parties behaved in the eight votes where parties in the *Maggioranza Ursula* converge with the more right-wing parties i.e., FdI and *Lega* (GC2 in Fig. 2). If some amendments are strictly technical (i.e., 102/1, 158D and 159D), others show a more significant political content. Amendment (AM) 15/1 is about the possibility to introduce further fiscal or stimulus measures to support vulnerable households, while AM 54 is about the definition of energy poverty. Together with AM 125/1 – including a reference to the ‘impact of the transition towards climate neutrality’ – they generally demonstrate the political commitment of the Italian centre-right parties (FdI, FI and *Lega*) to tackle the impact of the green transition on the most vulnerable groups.

Table 6: Voting behaviour of Italian parties in the *Maggioranza Ursula* with convergence of the more right-wing parties

ID	Amendment content	FdI	FI	Lega	PD	M5S	Az	IV	Ver
AM 15/1	Possibility to introduce further fiscal or stimulus measures to support vulnerable households.	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W
AM 28/1	Setting the necessity to connect direct income support with long-lasting structural investment measures targeting the same beneficiaries.	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W
AM 40/2	Members must co-finance the measures included in their Plans to at least 60 % for temporary direct income support and at least 50 % for targeted structural measures and investments.	W	W	L	W	L	W	W	W
AM 54	Definition of energy poverty.	L	W	W	W	W	W	W	W
AM 102/1	Link to the already established rules about the use of revenues.	W	W	L	W	W	W	W	W
AM 125/1	Inclusion of the reference ‘impact of the transition towards climate neutrality’	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W
AM 158D AM 159D	Deleting an annex on the methodology of calculation of the amount of financial resources for each Member.	W	W	W	W	W	W	W	W

Source: own elaboration. Note: W = Winning side; L = Losing side. For Italian parties: PD = Democratic Party; FI = Forza Italia; FdI = Brothers of Italy; M5S = Five Star Movement; Az = Azione/Action; IV = Italia Viva; Ver = Verdi/Greens.

Furthermore, Table 7 displays the voting behaviour of the Italian centre-right coalition of parties comprising FI, FdI, *Lega*, Az and IV (i.e., Cdx in Fig. 2) which in three cases supported the amendments while in five cases – when the proposal came from the G-EFA and The Left groups – rejected them. Among the rejected amendments, amendments 161, 162 and 164 are purely technical, but the others have relevant political content. Amendment 160,

proposed by the G-EFA, attempts to link the support for small enterprises with the decoupling of their activities from the use of fossil fuels. It was rejected by a centre-right majority composed of the EPP and RE with convergence of the ECR and the majority of NI. Interestingly, in this case FdI voted (jointly with Az and IV) in line with the ECR and the EPP while on the losing side the *Lega* voted with the ID together with the M5S, the PD and the *Verdi*. At the same time, the rejection of Amendment 163 – linking member state funding to their legislative commitment to reach net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050 – shows that right-wing parties are wary of introducing ‘conditions’ that are too harsh and push the green agenda too far. Lastly, with the rejection of Amendment 169, the centre-right majority also shows little inclination to encourage participation, and thus democratisation, in the construction phase of the National Social Climate Plans.

Table 7: Voting behaviour of Italian centre-right coalition of parties

ID	Amendment content	FdI	FI	Lega	PD	M5S	Az	IV	Ver
AM 15/2	Excluding ‘small enterprises’ from the possibility to be beneficiaries of ‘further fiscal or stimulus measures’.	L	W	W	L	W	W	W	L
AM 28/2	Direct income support for vulnerable households provisions and % limits.	W	W	W	L	L	W	W	W
AM 40/3	(Clause of % share of Members co-financing the total costs of their National Plans). Amendment on the possibility that direct income support could NOT only be temporary.	L	W	W	L	L	W	W	W
AM 160 (rejected)	Other Union and Member State sources of funding should be mobilised to support vulnerable small enterprises and mitigate the impact of the increase in the price of fossil fuels by providing long lasting solutions to cut their dependence on fossil fuels.	W	W	L	L	L	W	W	L
AM 161-162 (both rejected)	(In order to ensure consistency and synergies with other sources of Union funding) measures excluded from the scope of Regulation of Just Transition Fund should not be supported by the SCF.	W	W	W	L	L	W	W	L
AM 163 (rejected)	Member States shall only be eligible to receive funding if they have enshrined into law an objective of economy-wide net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.	W	W	W	L	L	W	W	L
AM 164 (rejected)	Access permission to public actors to review procedures related to the National Plans and possibility for court of law or other independent bodies to challenge the substantive or procedural legality of decisions, acts or omissions.	W	W	W	L	W	W	W	L
AM 169 (rejected)	Member States should ensure that the public is given early and effective opportunities to participate in and to be consulted on the preparation of the Plans.	W	W	W	L	L	W	W	L

Source: own elaboration. Note: W = Winning side; L = Losing side. For Italian parties: PD = Democratic Party; FI = Forza Italia; FdI = Brothers of Italy; M5S = Five Star Movement; Az = Azione/Action; IV = Italia Viva; Ver = Verdi/Greens.

Table 8: Split votes on sub-amendment AM 28/3: voting behaviour of EP groups and Italian parties

EP group	Winning or losing side?	Italian party	Winning or losing side?
ECR	L	Fdl	L
ID	L	Lega	L
EPP	W	FI	W
S&D	L	PD	L
NI	L	M5S	L
RE	W	Az	W
		IV	W
G-EFA	W	Ver	W
The Left	L	-	-

Source: own elaboration. Note: W = Winning side; L = Losing side. For EP groups: EPP = European People's Party; S&D = Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats; RE = Renew Europe; G-EFA = Greens – European Free Alliance; NI = Not-attached members; ECR = European Conservative and Reformists; ID = Identity and Democracy. For Italian parties: PD = Democratic Party; FI = Forza Italia; Fdl = Brothers of Italy; M5S = Five Star Movement; Az = Azione/Action; IV = Italia Viva; Ver = Verdi/Greens.

An analysis of the dynamics behind the request for separate votes ('split votes') on specific parts of the amendments shows other interesting patterns. Amendment 28 specifies the possibility to provide direct income support measures for vulnerable households (see Table 1 in the Appendix). The S&D and The Left groups asked to split the vote in three parts (AM 28/1-2-3). The most relevant in understanding the split vote between groups and Italian parties is the third part (AM 28/3) shown in Table 8. With this sub-amendment, the EP's left-wing groups aimed to remove the limits on the percentage share of the total costs that can be allocated with direct support in the member states' National Social Climate Plans (*'Such direct income support should be limited to up to 40% of the total estimated cost of each Plan'*). This sub-amendment was approved by a centrist majority that included EPP (for Italy, FI), RE (Az and IV) and G-EFA (Ver), showing by contrast how EP groups (ECR, ID, The Left, S&D and NI) and Italian parties (Fdi, Lega, PD and M5S) both on the left and the right of the policy spectrum supported a more ambitious measure in terms of social protection.

5. Conclusions

In the literature on the politics of GFT, the more common coalition that promotes policies for the GFT is that between left-wing and green parties. Yet the analysis of the main votes on the SCF in the EP between 2022 and 2023 shows that the behaviour of different parliamentary groups in the EP is peculiar in many respects. While it is not surprising to find a large majority in the EP supporting the SCF, the composition of the majority coalitions have seen the addition of both left- and right-wing MEPs (especially from NI, The Left, G-EFA, ECR, and ID groups) to the more usual 'Ursula' grand coalition (i.e., EPP, S&D, RE) that shaped EU politics and policies in this legislature. Particularly surprising is the frequent vote of far-right parties in the SCF's first reading votes and amendments (Tb. 1 and Fig. 1), while left-wing and green parties have been less decisive, albeit with a strong internal cohesion (cf. Tb 2).

The empirical analysis of the votes supports the hypothesis that these peculiar coalitions behind GFT policies could be the result of *policy-* and *vote-seeking* strategies: centre and right-wing parties support the SCF with the aim of protecting those social and

electoral constituencies that represent an interesting electoral target like the potential losers of the green transition, e.g., small and medium size enterprises, workers of the brown energy sectors and citizens who may suffer from the increased costs of public transportation and fuel. Consequently, the far-right parties challenged the more traditional supporters of the GFT, namely the green parties and the left, which conventionally represented the interests of environmental organisations and the working class. This confirms that the policies to achieve carbon neutrality in Europe are not the exclusive domain of left and green parties.

The voting behaviour of Italian MEPs on the SCF has shown some convergence of the most right-wing parties (FdI and *Lega*) with the coalitions supporting the SCF (cf. Tb 3 and Tb. 5). While supporting or rejecting specific amendments to the SCF text, the voting behaviour of FdI and *Lega* has revealed the commitment of these parties to tackling the negative consequences of the green transition together with milder positions on pro-climate measures and the protection of the interests of enterprises (cf. Tb 7). This may point to the existence of a social coalition bringing together quite different electoral targets, such as transition losers, vulnerable groups and enterprises, that might entail conflicts or at least trade-offs between electoral demands and have repercussions on the policy-seeking and vote-seeking strategies of these parties. For instance, speaking in the EP plenary on behalf of the ID group, a member of the *Lega* called for a ‘new legislative proposal by the Commission, endorsing the climate targets, but also supporting enterprises with a better time management and accompanying them in this transition’ (European Parliament, 2023d). While one of the rapporteurs acknowledged that the SCF ‘had one of the weirdest majorities possible [...] the idea to really focus the spending more on investment measures rather than general income support [...] was something that was supported in particular by the EPP, the Greens and ID, and not the parties in between’ (European Parliament, 2023c).

Of course, this article has focused on a single, albeit important, case. We only analysed the plenary votes, rather than the process – both inside the EP (i.e., at committee level) and across institutions (i.e., the negotiations between the EP and the Council) – leading to the agreement on the SCF. Further research on the GFT is much needed, on the one hand, to ‘solidify’ our conclusions and make them more generalisable, and on the other, to explain how party coalitions have come to support the SCF and the GFT more broadly.

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6. Appendix

Table A. Recital 17 of the SCF Regulation: original and amended version

Original text	Amended text
<p>Pending the impact of those investments on reducing costs and emissions, well targeted direct income support for the most vulnerable would help the just transition.</p> <p>Such support should be understood to be a temporary measure accompanying the decarbonisation of the housing and transport sectors. It would not be permanent as it does not address the root causes of energy and transport poverty.</p> <p>Such support should only concern direct impacts of the inclusion of building and road transport into the scope of Directive 2003/87/EC, not electricity or heating costs related to the inclusion of power and heat production in the scope of that Directive.</p> <p>Eligibility for such direct income support should be limited in time.</p>	<p>Direct income support when combined with long-lasting structural investment measures targeting the same beneficiaries, will contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the Fund.</p> <p>Pending the impact of those investments on reducing costs and emissions, well targeted direct income support for vulnerable households in energy poverty or mobility poverty would contribute to reduce energy and mobility costs and support the just transition while waiting for more structural investments to take place.</p> <p>Such support should be understood to be a temporary measure accompanying the decarbonisation of the housing and transport sectors. It would not be permanent as it does not address the root causes of energy and mobility poverty.</p> <p><i>Such direct income support should be limited to up to 40% of the total estimated cost of each Plan for the period 2024-2027 and should be set for the 2028-2032 period in accordance with a country-by country assessment by the Commission of the efficiency, added value, continued relevance and required level of direct income support in light of the progress and effect of the implementation of structural investments and measures, with a view to phasing out such support by the end of 2032.</i></p>

Source: European Parliament (2022). Note: in bold the amended parts. In italics the parts subject to sub-amendments 28/2-3