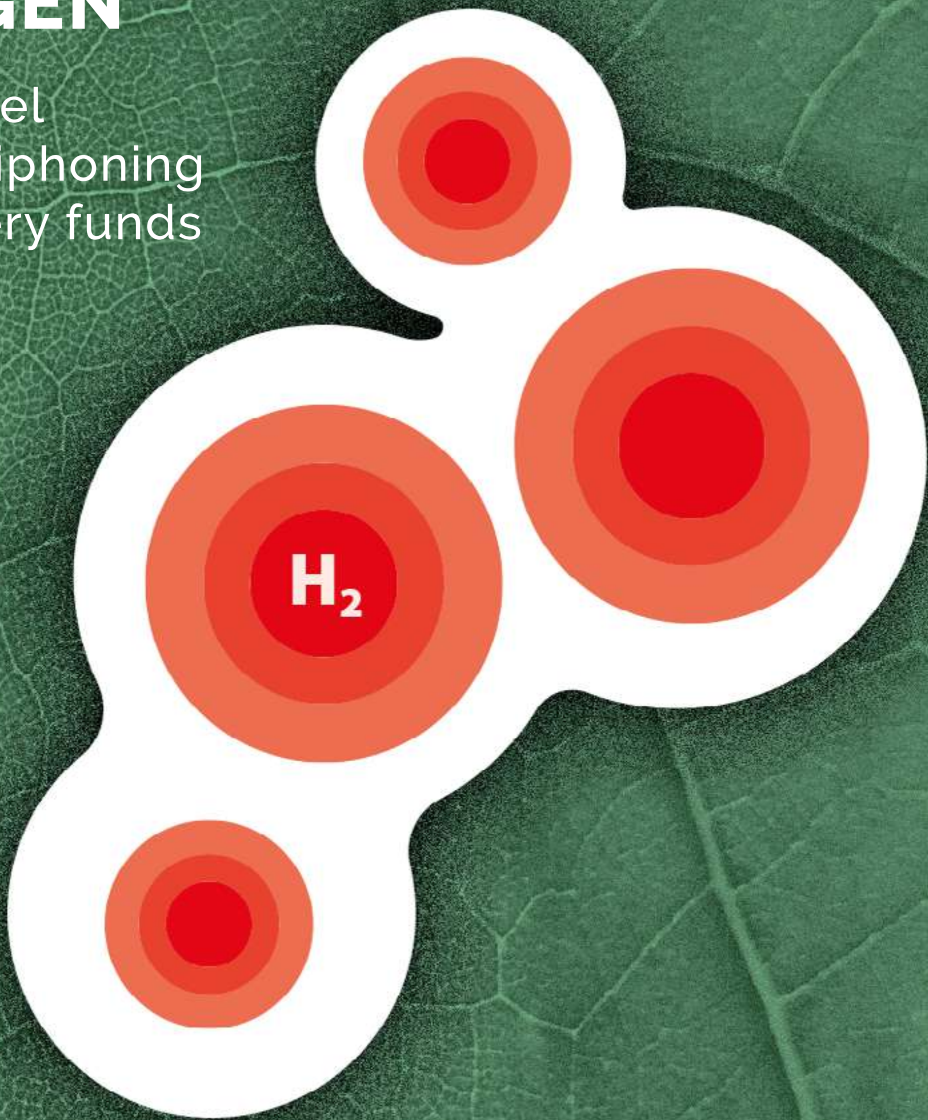
Recovery Watch

HIJACKING THE RECOVERY THROUGH HYDROGEN

How fossil fuel lobbying is siphoning Covid recovery funds



ENCO
EUROPEAN NETWORK OF CORPORATE OBSERVATORIES

FOSSIL FREE POLITICS

A COLLABORATIVE PROJECT
BETWEEN THE EUROPEAN NETWORK
OF CORPORATE OBSERVATORIES
AND THE FOSSIL FREE POLITICS CAMPAIGN

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Summary

EU Covid-19 recovery funds are supposed to drive the 'green transition' and move us beyond fossil fuels – but industry lobbying at both national and EU level has ensured oil and gas firms and utilities remain some of the biggest beneficiaries in Italy, the Spanish State, Portugal and France.

The European Commission said it wanted to avoid giving billions in bailouts to the fossil fuel industry. Despite sending mixed signals, to its credit, in these four cases it has tried to exclude direct financing for fossil fuel projects. However, the hugely outsized role for hydrogen and renewable gases in national recovery plans has thrown a lifeline to the fossil fuel firms involved, as well as their main product: fossil gas. Fossil fuel companies are already involved in more than 80% of Europe's renewable-based hydrogen projects and see the technology as a trojan horse to usher in fossil-based hydrogen.

At least €8.3 billion is available for hydrogen and renewable gas projects across the four countries, thanks to a concerted lobbying effort by the fossil fuels industry including a prolific number of lobby meetings, high-profile events with decision makers and actually being invited to draft – and implement – national recovery plans. Not only is this handing public money to an industry notorious for trying to block and delay climate action, but an over-emphasis on hydrogen could lock Europe into decades of fossil fuels.

In Italy:

— Spending on hydrogen in the recovery plan quadrupled between drafts thanks to fossil fuel lobbying for 'blue' fossil hydrogen with carbon capture and storage (CCS), before the Commission pulled EU funding for fossil fuel projects. However the Italian government is expected to still fund them.

— The government is spending more than €4.5 billion of EU funds on hydrogen and biomethane but only €4 billion on improving Intensive Care Units (ICUs) and medical equipment.

— The Italian government had at least 100 meetings with the fossil fuels industry regarding the recovery funds, with Eni, Enel and Snam accounting for half of them.

— Eni has been lobbying for 'blue' fossil hydrogen to decarbonise transport, but in fact admitted it would use the fuel in its refineries, ie. to create petrol and diesel.

In the Spanish State:

- The Renewable Hydrogen Roadmap has €1.6 billion dedicated to it, 50% more than the budget for improving the national health system. But overall, companies could look for funding for hydrogen projects from a pot of €17.8 billion (not specifically dedicated to hydrogen but open to it).
- The Big Four accountancy firms have been involved in drafting how the recovery funds will be spent at national level and will now be involved in implementing plans. As their clients include the same big energy companies applying for funds, this represents a glaring conflict of interest.
- Endesa, Naturgy and Iberdrola alone have proposed projects worth €53 billion, which if built would account for more than 70% of Spanish recovery funds.
- The drafting of the spending plan has excluded civil society while the result is strikingly similar to the draft proposed by the country's main business lobby.

In Portugal:

- The implementation of the national recovery plan, which was drafted by an oil and gas executive, will now be overseen by that same executive.
- Only 18.4% of Portugal's recovery plan is specifically targeted towards a 'green transition', despite the government and EU claiming a total of 38%.
- The high frequency of meetings between the country's biggest fossil fuel firms and ministers raised enough suspicion to open a criminal investigation into one of the biggest proposed hydrogen projects.

In France

- According to the President of France Hydrogène, the main trade group coordinating hydrogen lobbying in France, "the key aspects" of its hydrogen-heavy recovery plan roadmap "were taken up by the French government".
- Lobby spending by France Hydrogène has doubled year-on-year since 2017, reaching €200,000-€300,000 in 2020, while yearly registered lobby activities around hydrogen have increased five-fold from 9 in 2017 to 47 in 2020.
- France is not spending any of its EU recovery funds on additional renewable electricity to meet the demand from its 'green' hydrogen programme.
- The fossil fuels industry is playing a major role in France's recovery plans and is strongly behind hydrogen, thanks to the government creating numerous public-private partnerships such as the all-industry National Hydrogen Council.

At the EU level:

- Fossil fuel lobby groups in Brussels are making extensive use of the revolving door, hiring staff previously with the European Commission, European Parliament and EU Permanent Representations.
- The industry has been pushing the Commission to adopt a 'technology neutral' approach to recovery fund spending so their pet projects, like CCS and 'blue' fossil hydrogen, can receive public money.
- Despite the Commission u-turn on allowing EU funds for Italian 'blue' fossil hydrogen with CCS, EU Commissioners for Climate and Energy have both publicly backed the technologies.
- Freedom of Information requests have revealed that high-level European Commission staff and the EU Recovery Task Force team have been regularly sharing platforms with the oil and gas industry, as well as encouraging their participation in the recovery funds.

As the report shows, industry has been aggressively lobbying at the national and EU level not just for 'green' hydrogen and biomethane but also for 'blue' hydrogen and CCS. And despite the Commission appearing to exclude them from EU recovery funds, there are still other European and domestic funds available to support these fossil fuel projects. Expect lobbying at the national level to intensify, with recovery funds being released by the EU from the second half of July.

The only path to a fossil-free recovery that prioritises social and environmental justice, rather than pouring more public funds into polluting corporations' pockets, is to cut the fossil fuel industry out of public decision-making processes at the national, EU and international level, similar to existing restrictions on the tobacco industry.

1

INTRODUCTION:
HOW THE 'GREEN RECOVERY' IS BEING SUBVERTED

The EU's Covid-19 recovery package is supposed to address the climate crisis as well as the socio-economic consequences of the pandemic. To get hold of funds from the €672.5 billion Recovery and Resilience Facility, member states have drafted national recovery plans. In these 'National Recovery and Resilience Plans', 37% of planned investments are supposed to tackle climate change, with the rest doing no harm to the climate.[1] Even if they're not aimed at climate mitigation, they still must not harm the climate or hinder the green transition.[2]

Part of the rationale for this, EU officials have said, is to avoid repeating the mistakes made after the 2008 financial crisis, when billions of euros of public money went to bailing out the fossil fuel industry.[3] Despite this, at national and EU level, fossil fuel companies and their lobby groups have been allowed to shape the recovery agenda and national recovery plans, funneling public recovery funds to fossil fuel companies.

Our October 2020 report revealed how polluters were profiting from pandemic bailouts in Italy, the Spanish State, Portugal and France,[4] and the picture has not improved. From a prolific number of lobby meetings and high-profile events with decision makers to actually being invited to draft – and implement – national recovery plans, the fossil fuel industry is still trying to co-opt a recovery that's supposed to be about preventing climate crisis.

Through promoting hydrogen and renewable gases, oil and gas companies like Italian Eni or French Total are funnelling public money to an industry notorious for trying to block and delay climate action, while an over-emphasis on hydrogen could lock Europe into decades of fossil fuels – doing significant harm to the climate in the process.

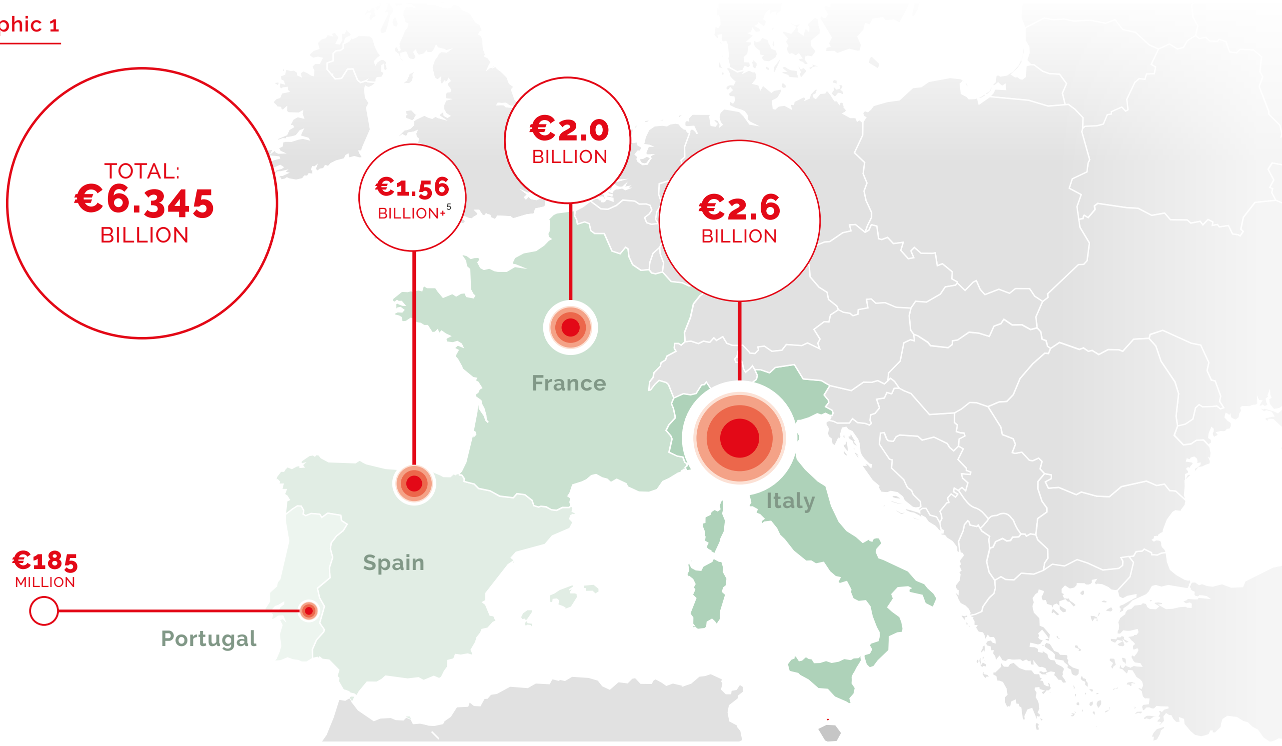
This is why, now more than ever, we need fossil free politics: the only way to get a fossil free recovery is to have a fossil free decision-making process.

2

THE NEW GREENWASH: HYDROGEN AND OTHER FALSE SOLUTIONS

HOW MUCH MONEY FOR HYDROGEN IN NATIONAL RECOVERY PLANS?

Graphic 1



The national recovery plans of the Spanish state, Italy, Portugal and France have all dedicated millions and billions to hydrogen projects. While biogas features strongly, the 'race for hydrogen' has been made central to these plans.

Fossil fuel lobbies promote hydrogen as a climate solution,[6] but not all hydrogen is equal:

— **'Grey hydrogen',** which accounts for almost 80% of global production, is made from fossil gas, aka methane, with CO2 emissions released into the atmosphere.[7] Methane itself is a short-lived greenhouse gas 86 times more powerful at trapping heat in our atmosphere than CO2 over a 20 year period.[8] Both drilling for and transporting methane leaks it into the atmosphere, meaning it is as bad for the climate as coal.[9] Meanwhile gas extraction continues to wreck local communities and ecosystems, as we see from Cabo Delgado in Mozambique to Vaca Muerta in Argentina.[10]

— **'Blue' hydrogen** – fossil gas hydrogen with **carbon capture and storage (CCS)** – has been heralded by industry and decision-makers alike as a vital stepping stone on the way to 'green' hydrogen. But it still relies on gas extraction and the devastating social, environmental and climate consequences (see above), while CCS is a risky, costly technology that remains unproven at scale.[11]

— **'Green' hydrogen** – made through electrolysis from renewable electricity – currently represents less than 0.1% of hydrogen produced in Europe.[12] However it is serving as the distant promise that justifies new and prolonged investments in 'hydrogen ready' gas infrastructure, but with a high risk that they will continue to be used for fossil gas, 'blue' hydrogen or simply become stranded assets.[13]

While many national recovery plans ostensibly focus on the development of 'green' hydrogen, the energy companies that are proposing projects to access those funds (and the lobby groups that represent them) have made it quite plain in Brussels that they want fossil hydrogen to also be eligible, rebranding it 'low-carbon' or 'clean' hydrogen. The European Commission has given mixed signals: 'blue' fossil hydrogen with CCS was rejected from the Italian recovery plan, despite senior officials welcoming industry's requests.

Energy Commissioner Simson said in April 2021 that 'blue' hydrogen will be "necessary" while 'green' scales up and costs come down,[14] but Shell, whose 'green' hydrogen project was praised by the Commission as a coronavirus recovery 'success story',[15] has other ideas. In that same month its Vice President said that large-scale 'blue' hydrogen will be needed even if 'green' hydrogen becomes cheaper. There won't be enough renewable energy available to decarbonise the power sector and produce hydrogen, he said, which is why he is "calling on governments not to rule out the use of blue hydrogen", as "large volumes" may still be needed.[16]

For the fossil fuel industry, 'green' hydrogen is their very own trojan horse, which is why so many companies are pushing it. By hyping hydrogen as a silver bullet to decarbonise the economy, fossil fuel companies are betting on demand outstripping a very limited supply of 'green' hydrogen. That would leave us relying on fossil hydrogen. And don't forget, the oil and gas industry is one of the biggest industrial consumers of hydrogen, and would happily use publicly-funded 'green' hydrogen to refine its crude oil into petrol. According to lobby group Hydrogen Europe, whose members include oil and gas majors Total, Shell, Equinor and Galp, "In terms of [megawatts], so called "fossil fuel" companies are involved in 81% of the total electrolysis projects in the EU, EFTA and UK region."[17]

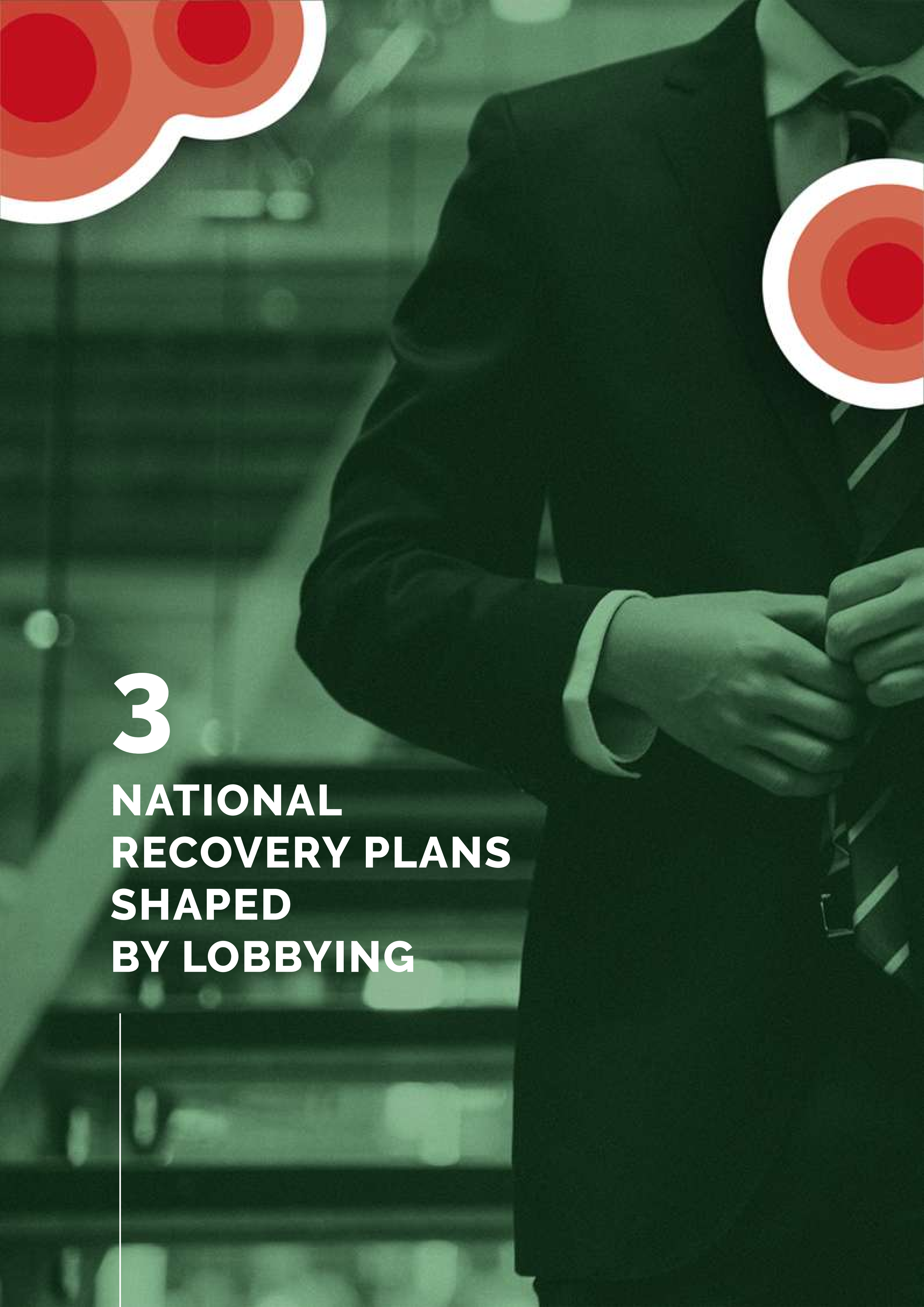
Another way the fossil fuel industry is set to benefit from hydrogen is through 'blending' it into the fossil gas network, which could negate any benefits of even 'green' hydrogen. Support for 'blending' throws a lifeline to the fossil gas network and its operators, while the blended hydrogen would essentially be wasted. Not only would it do very little to lower emissions from the use of fossil gas, it would be a waste of scarce 'green' hydrogen.[18] Portugal's National Strategy for Hydrogen, which has now been integrated into its recovery plan, intends to blend 'green' hydrogen into the fossil gas grid up to 15%.[19]

Unfortunately Europe's energy ministers agreed on 11 June 2021 that retrofitted gas pipelines can carry fossil gas 'blended' with renewable gases like hydrogen or biomethane until December 31st 2029, with EU funding ending in 2028.[20] If agreed by the European Parliament and the Commission, this would mean additional EU funding sources beyond the recovery funds, like the Connecting Europe Facility, could also keep propping up the fossil fuel industry. The Connecting Europe Facility is also funding cross-border CO2 infrastructure, which is essential for CCS, and the finance flows are expected to expand.[21]

An analysis of over 200 hydrogen lobbying documents in December 2020 showed that support for carbon capture and storage (CCS) was one of the most repeated demands by many fossil fuel companies and their lobby groups.[22] Aside from the role of CCS in making 'blue' hydrogen from fossil gas, the failed technology has been promoted by the fossil fuel industry for decades as a way to reduce emissions while not leaving fossil fuels in the ground. It has already received decades of wasted public subsidies: CO_2 capture rates have been poor, leaks can occur once stored, and vast amounts of (dirty) energy are used to capture and store CO_2 in the first place.[23] It is the future promise used by industry to justify the continued extraction and burning of climate-wrecking fossil fuels today. 'Blue' fossil hydrogen with CCS featured heavily in Italy's recovery draft plan until it was removed at the last minute, but is still expected to be funded through other domestic and European sources such as the €1 billion EU Innovation Fund.[24]

Other supposedly 'renewable' gases such as biomethane are also being funded as projects for climate transition – but they come with their own problems. Italy, Spain[25] and Portugal's national recovery plans, for example, allocate money for 'renewable gases'. At EU-level, Eurogas has pushed for biogas to be part of the recovery,[26] while a recent oil and gas-funded report on hydrogen also promoted EU investment into climate-wrecking bioenergy with CCS, known as BECCS.[27]

While the gas industry presents renewable gases like hydrogen and biomethane as their ticket to addressing climate change while keeping their business model – and their gas infrastructure – intact, producing biomethane at scale could lead to the same land-grabs and competition with food crops seen when the EU tried to stimulate agrofuel production. A likelier outcome is that token renewable gas projects will be used to justify the continued use of fossil gas infrastructure and fossil gas itself, but with a veneer of sustainability (and access to public funding).[28]

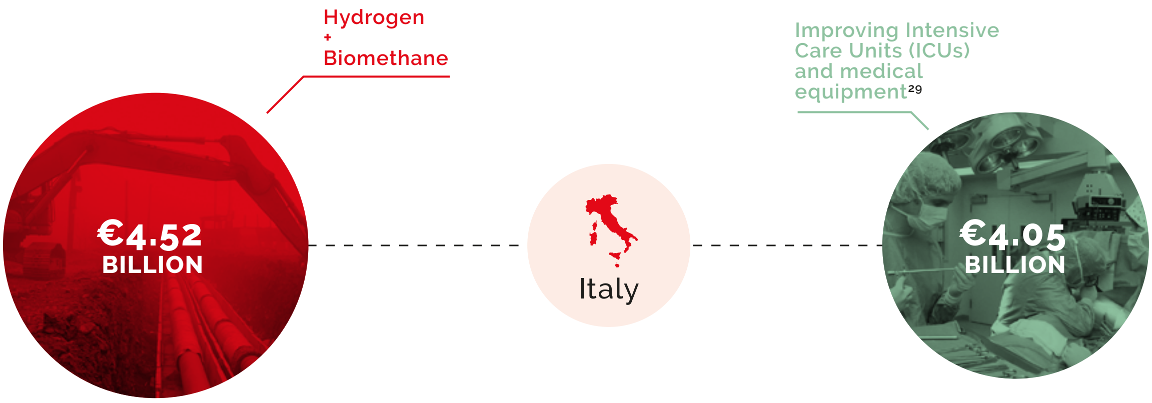


3 NATIONAL RECOVERY PLANS SHAPED BY LOBBYING

3.1 Italy

HYDROGEN OVER HEALTHCARE

Graphic 2



Italy is the biggest single recipient of EU recovery funds, accounting for 35% of the total. Investments allocated to hydrogen increased by four times from the first to the almost-final version of the national recovery plan, and was only rolled back at the last minute following an intervention by the European Commission. Lobbying by the fossil fuel industry led to this steep rise in hydrogen funding, which grew from an initial €1 billion to over €4 billion (see Infographic 1). The increase was driven by the inclusion of 'blue' hydrogen (see Section 2), strongly advocated for by oil and gas companies. These companies have enjoyed an open door at the Ministry of Ecological Transition, which held on average three meetings per week with the fossil fuels industry since its creation in February 2021.[30]

These same companies waged a massive lobby effort to shape Italy's national recovery plan and get their hands on EU money, organising at least 100 meetings with key ministry officials. The lobby push was led by oil and gas giant Eni, gas transporter Snam and electricity and gas utility Enel, who alone accounted for half of the meetings. 20 of the meetings were attended by Minister Cingolani himself, who also participated in a hydrogen webinar sponsored by the fossil fuels industry.[31] And on top of all the meetings, fossil fuel lobbies have attended a dozen parliamentary hearings[32] on the recovery plan to advance their proposals, which were fully endorsed by the Italian Parliament and integrated into the final plan by Prime Minister Draghi's government, before the European Commission's intervention to exclude funding for 'blue' fossil hydrogen.

The first draft of Italy's recovery plan[33] focused on the production of green hydrogen to decarbonise the steel industry,[34] but after an industry consultation on the development of Italy's National Hydrogen Strategy[35] – which the fossil fuel industry participated in heavily (see Infographic 1) – the next drafts of the national recovery plan broadened the scope for hydrogen in line with the industry proposals, making transport and refineries priorities.

Despite the Commission's last minute changes to what can and cannot receive EU recovery funds, funds for hydrogen and biogas in Italy's national recovery plan are still set to massively benefit the country's fossil fuel industry. Equally, additional financing is likely to come from complementary domestic funds that are not subject to environmental and climate criteria, and can therefore support what has been excluded from the plan ie. false solutions like 'blue' hydrogen, CCS and fossil gas. Even without 'blue' hydrogen funding, EU money dedicated to hydrogen and biogas in Italy's recovery plan is still more than the money allocated for improving Italy's intensive care units (ICUs) and medical equipment. Italy has one of the lowest ICU accessibility rates in Europe, and one of highest rates of obsolete medical equipment, but is prioritising hydrogen and biogas.

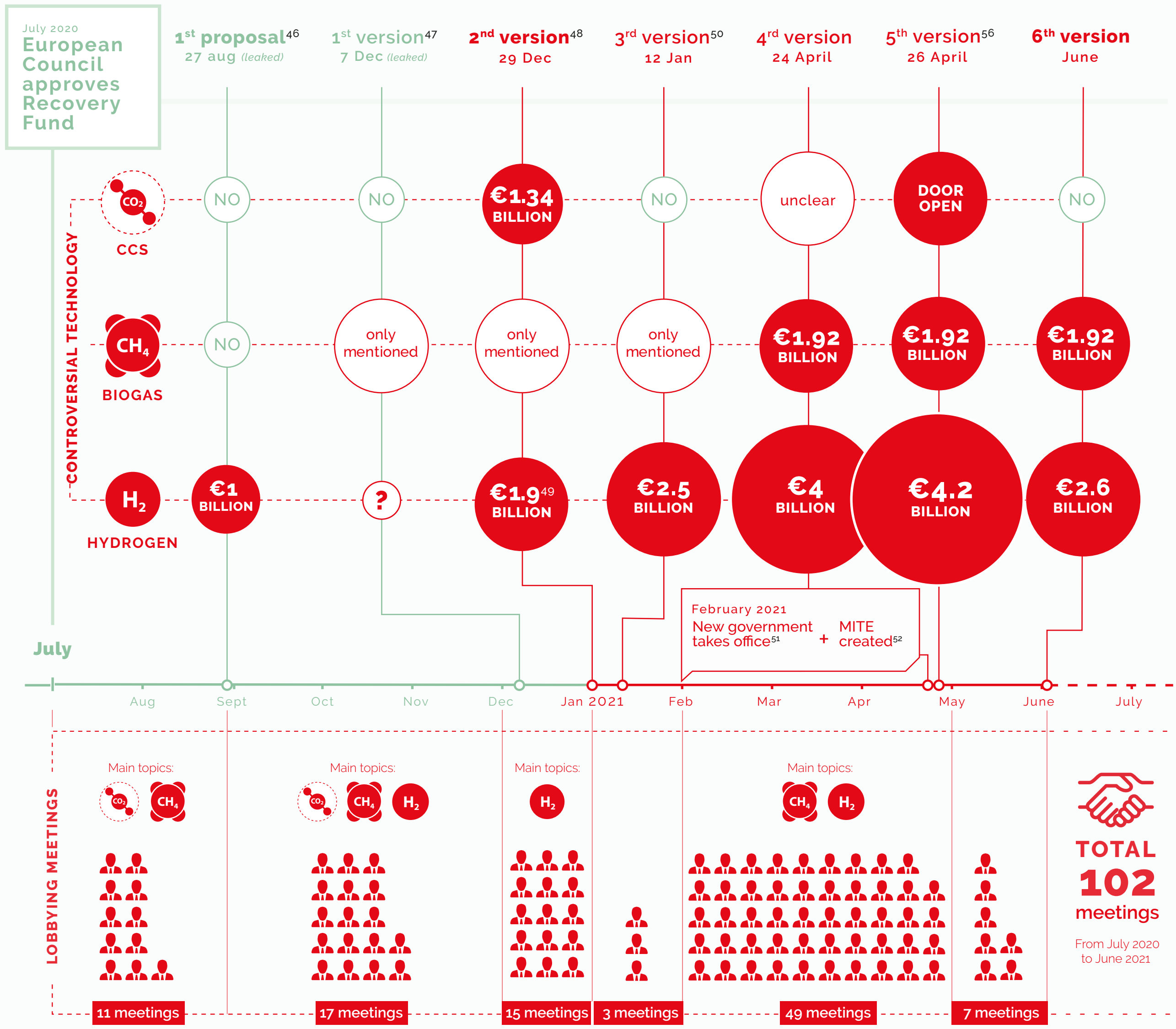
Claudio Descalzi, CEO of Eni, has repeatedly persuaded Italian MPs that hydrogen is the best solution to decarbonise the transport sector, but recently gave away his plan by revealing that he does not believe Eni will sell any 'blue' hydrogen in the near future, but rather use it in its petroleum refineries.[36] Rather than decarbonise transport, this means Eni would use the hydrogen to produce fossil fuel-based transport fuels like petrol and diesel. Essentially, under the guise of "decarbonising the economy," oil and gas companies like Eni are seeking to make the public pay for upgrading their fossil fuel infrastructure.

Box 1: CCS through the back door

In April 2020 Eni announced it was developing the world's largest CCS plant off the coast of Ravenna, in the Adriatic Sea.[37] The project initially aims to capture CO_2 from the local industrial district, where one of Eni's refineries is located, but eventually turn the area into a CO_2 hub, connecting the plant to its other facilities in Italy and abroad via a network of pipelines, ships, trucks and trains.[38] In July 2020, Eni's CCS project was publicly endorsed by then Prime Minister, Giuseppe Conte,[39] and in December 2020 was included in a leaked version of Italy's national recovery plan. The Ravenna plant had €1.3 billion earmarked for it, while six more of Eni's projects, related to its refineries and petrochemical plants, were set to receive an additional €1.3 billion.

Following a backlash from civil society,[40] and, it seems, objections by the European Commission,[41] the Ravenna project was left out from subsequent versions of the national recovery plan. Over the following months, however, Eni kept lobbying for the inclusion of its CCS project, holding meetings with the newly-founded Ministry of Ecological Transition, and advocating for it during parliamentary hearings. Eventually, in early May 2021, the new Minister for Ecological Transition, Roberto Cingolani, re-opened the door for the project, citing Commission Vice President Timmermans' support for the financing of CCS (see Section 4).[42] However, when the final plan was approved on Tuesday 22 June, 'blue' hydrogen (which depends on CCS) was explicitly excluded, and the pot of recovery money for hard to abate sectors was substantially reduced from €2 billion to €400 million. The Italian government is still likely to fund the project using the €30 billion 'Complementary Fund', created to bypass the conditions attached to the Recovery Fund such as environmental ones.[43] Eni has also submitted the Ravenna CCS project to the €1 billion EU Innovation Fund.[44]

TIMELINE OF ITALY'S NATIONAL RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE PLAN (NRRP) VERSIONS AND FOSSIL FUEL LOBBYING[45]



December
All fossil fuel industry demands accommodated in NRRP: hydrogen investments doubled and focus shifted, biomethane more prominent.

February
Parliament starts **round of consultation** on the draft NRRP, and the fossil fuel lobby appears at a dozen Parliamentary hearings, demanding a bigger role for fossil hydrogen with CCS, increased investments in biomethane, a roll back of regulation, public guarantees, and incentives.

16th March
Under-Secretary of Ecological Transition states, in a webinar, that Italy must prioritize blue hydrogen and gas.[53] At a parliamentary hearing, Minister Cingolani says blue hydrogen is needed for the coming years.[54]

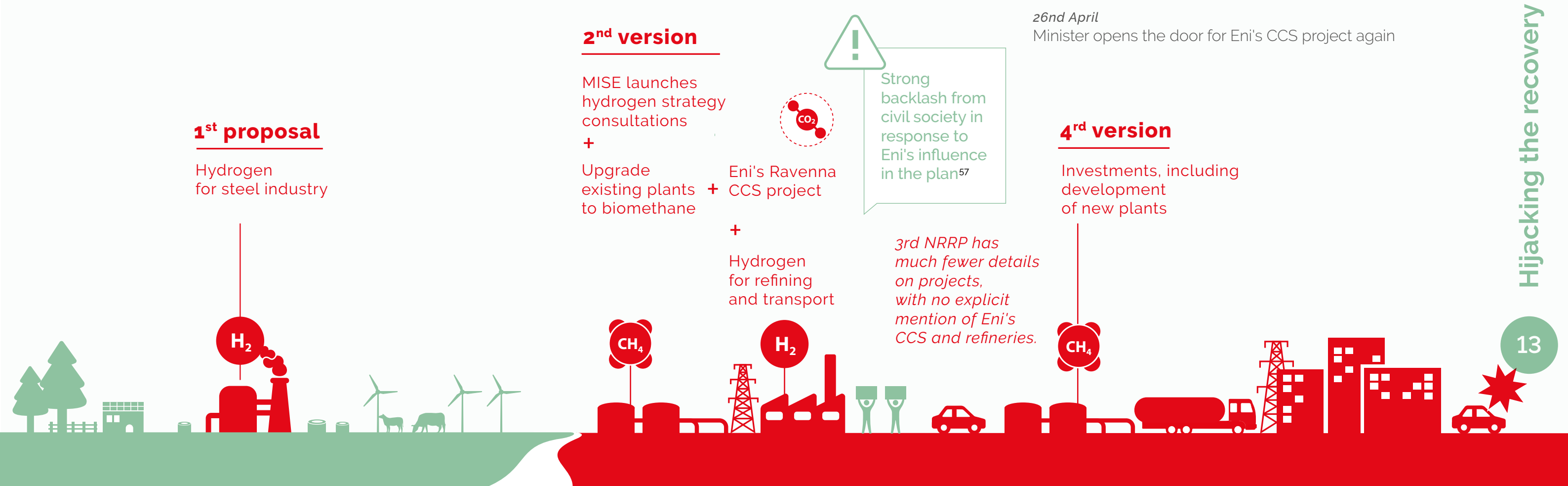
22nd March
Energy Commissioner Kadri Simson's head of cabinet attends a webinar organised by major Italian fossil fuel companies.

30th March
After completing consultations, the Parliament issues a report advocating for a more explicit inclusion of blue hydrogen in the NRRP, and a larger role for biomethane.

Minister Cingolani participates in a webinar on hydrogen attended and sponsored by Italy's biggest fossil fuel companies.

22nd April
In a TV interview Minister Cingolani replies to a question on CCS by stating that "natural CO2 sinks are not enough.[58]

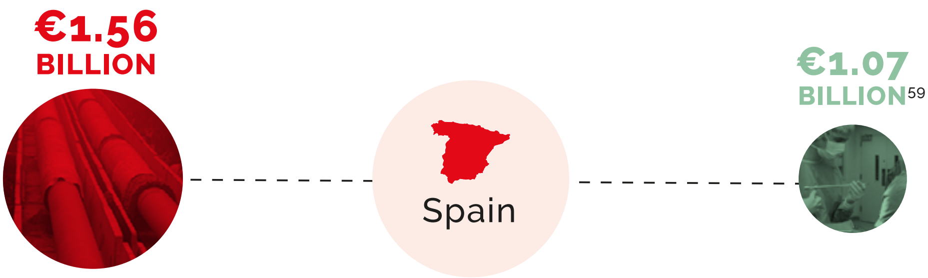
26nd April
Minister opens the door for Eni's CCS project again



3.2 Spanish state

HYDROGEN OVER HEALTHCARE

Graphic 3 **Spanish state gives 1.5 times more to hydrogen than healthcare**



In October 2020, the Spanish state approved its Renewable Hydrogen Roadmap,[60] which sets out its national strategy to develop renewable hydrogen, including biogas, biomethane and 'green' hydrogen. The Spanish state has set itself the objective of installing 4GW of electrolysers for the generation of 'green' hydrogen by 2030 (which is 10% of what the EU proposed in its European Hydrogen Strategy[61]), as well as promoting hydrogen in the transport sector; €8.9 billion of public investment is envisaged to achieve this. The roadmap describes the "opportunities" of developing hydrogen, many of which have a notably similar logic to those used more than a decade ago for the promotion of fossil gas (e.g. reducing energy dependence, promoting innovation, creating highly qualified jobs, turning the Spanish state into one of Europe's main energy hubs).

The Spanish national recovery plan (España Puede) has thirty investment and reform components that are eligible to obtain €69.5 billion of EU grants.[62] One of these investment components is earmarked for the Renewable Hydrogen Roadmap, with nearly €1.6 billion. The recovery plan has five lines of action planned for the implementation of this roadmap[63] though it doesn't specify how the €1.6 billion fund will be distributed between them. In addition to this €1.6 billion, however, hydrogen projects can also benefit from five other components, which are not specifically dedicated to hydrogen but open to it, and together add up to €17.8 billion.[64] This is a marked contrast with the five investment components earmarked for strengthening the care economy and the basic services that have been shown to be so vital during the pandemic, which come to only €7.6 billion.[65] The €1.6 billion pot of grant money dedicated solely to the Spanish Hydrogen Roadmap is nearly 50% bigger than the €1.1 billion pot dedicated to improving the national health system.[66] And hydrogen projects could be eligible for billions more than that, through the other five components.

Corporate interests in the Spanish state have not been shy in lobbying to obtain recovery funds, and their input has been welcomed with open arms. Funds are supposed to be distributed according to the newly-drawn up Royal Decree, but its drafting has been opaque and lacking civil society or citizens' participation. However the Spanish employers' association Confederación Española de Organizaciones Empresariales (CEOE) and the Big Four consultancy firms (KPMG, Deloitte, PWC and EY) have all been in direct and constant contact with the Spanish government during the drafting process.

The final version of the Royal Decree, approved by the government in December 2020, is strikingly similar to the one presented by employer group CEOE, whose members include Enagás, Endesa, Iberdrola, Naturgy and Repsol.[67] The Big Four, meanwhile, have not only been involved in drafting the Decree, they will also be involved in implementing it through their involvement in the 'España Puede' recovery plan. It should not be forgotten who the clients of the Big Four are: Endesa, Repsol and the other IBEX-35 companies that make up the Spanish stock exchange;[68] the very same firms with the capacity to lobby for and manage the mega-projects that will be supported by recovery funds. Hence, IBEX-35 companies have presented projects worth more than €100 billion for Spanish recovery funds,[69] €53 billion of which were proposed by Endesa, Naturgy and Iberdrola alone.[70] This represents a glaring conflict of interest for the Big Four and the Spanish government's reliance on them. But it is not the only advantage being used by Spanish fossil fuel companies to secure public funds. Iberdrola recently appointed Emma Navarro to its executive board less than three months after leaving her post as Vice-President of the European Investment Bank (EIB). While there she oversaw the Bank's lending in Spain, including to Iberdrola.[71]

The final version of the national recovery plan, over 2,000 pages long, was only published on the Spanish government's websites after the fact, without the possibility of a public debate on its content. What's more, the Royal Decree should ordinarily have been open to amendments for ten days after its approval by the Spanish Parliament in January 2021, but this has not yet been completed. Until this opportunity for amendments happens, the Royal Decree deciding how funds are spent is the same one drafted in collaboration with big business group CEOE and the Big Four.

3.3 Portugal

In the summer of 2020, Portugal appointed oil and gas CEO António Costa Silva to draft the Strategic Vision for its national recovery plan.[72] By the time the national recovery plan was finalised in April 2021,[73] the total amount explicitly aimed at the climate transition (which should represent 37% of the total, according to EU rules), amounted to just 18.4% of the total (€3.05 billion out of €16.64 billion).[74] The €3 billion shortfall was made up by claiming other components, such as housing or spending on the National Health Service, would also have significant climate-related investments.

€185 million is dedicated to 'hydrogen and renewable gases'[75] (including biomethane) – which will all be going to private companies, as there are no public companies involved. Another €715 million is allocated to 'industry decarbonization',[76] which, of all twenty investment areas, has by far the least amount of detail and could be another potential avenue for 'blue' hydrogen and CCS. Portugal's fossil fuel industry-shaped National Strategy for Hydrogen is explicitly mentioned in its national recovery plan, and its 2030 goals to begin integrating 'green' hydrogen across the economy, including blending into the fossil gas network, have become part of the national recovery plan.[77] What the goals don't seem to take into account is where all the renewable energy for the 'green' hydrogen will come from – important in light of Portugal's 2030 National Plan for Energy and Climate, which has a goal of only 80% renewable electricity by 2030. In other words, there will not be enough renewable energy to meet all of Portugal's electricity needs, let alone an additional renewable capacity exclusively dedicated to the generation of green hydrogen.

Energy companies with huge fossil fuel interests appear to have had great influence over the formation of Portugal's National Strategy for Hydrogen. As the CEO of Portuguese oil and gas company Dourogás said two months before the strategy was adopted, "Gas companies will lead the hydrogen drive, not electricity companies".[78] The text of the hydrogen strategy specifically says that Portugal's 2030 National Plan for Energy and Climate[79] proposals "were excessively based on pure electrification, thus raising some pockets of resistance in the gas sector", and that "the market pointed out the existence of a flaw that can be efficiently supplied by the production of hydrogen."[80]

In early 2019, the Portuguese government had, as yet, very little interest in hydrogen, as indicated by the government's National Plan for Investments 2030 released that year,[81] which only makes passing references to it.[82] Hydrogen remained a distant concern for both large energy companies and the government until summer 2019, when things began to change quickly. Between July 2019 and October 2020, the Secretary of State for Energy, João Galamba, had 50 meetings on hydrogen, and near the end of that period, on 30 July 2020, the National Strategy for Hydrogen was approved.[83]

EDP, Portugal's largest energy company, unexpectedly announced in mid-2020 that its coal power plant in Sines would close by January 2021,[84] leaving the Sines region – Portugal's most industrialised area – worried about the future of the power plant's workers. Soon after, however, came the news of a large hydrogen project that claimed it would create massive numbers of jobs, named 'H2Sines'. Backed by

EDP, as well as oil and gas major Galp and gas and electricity grid operator REN, the project was supposed to export 'green' hydrogen to the Netherlands,[85] and was presented by the Portuguese government as a candidate 'Important Project of Common European Interest' (IPCEI). If it gained IPCEI status it would be eligible for large sums of public money, including recovery funds (see box in Section 4).

However, an investigation has since been opened by the Central Department of Investigation and Criminal Action into undue favour surrounding the consultation process of H2Sine after suspicions were raised by the frequent meetings of all three energy firms with the Secretary of State for Energy in the formative months of Portugal's new hydrogen strategy.[86]

Meanwhile, despite the flagrant conflict of interest in hiring a fossil fuel executive to draft their recovery plans – and vocal criticism of the move[87] – Costa Silva has since been appointed to preside over the Portuguese commission that will supervise the implementation of its national recovery plan.[88] The first meeting of this commission took place on 20 May 2021, presided by Costa Silva, with Prime Minister, António Costa, in attendance.[89]

3.4 France

France's national recovery plan allocates €2 billion to hydrogen. According to the president of France Hydrogène – the key trade group coordinating hydrogen lobbying in France, which published a "manifesto" in July 2020 with its proposals for the French recovery plan[90] – "the key aspects of this roadmap were taken up by the French government".[91] France Hydrogène's president, Philippe Boucly, comes from French gas pipeline operator, GRTgaz (a subsidiary of gas utility Engie). The lobby group is supposed to represent the whole hydrogen sector, but virtually all the key positions on its board are held by nuclear giant EDF, Engie, tyre-manufacturer Michelin and industrial gases multinational Air Liquide. In 2020, France Hydrogène declared €200,000-300,000 lobbying expenditure in France, meaning its spending has doubled year-on-year since 2017.[92] According to the French register, lobbying around hydrogen has increased five-fold over the past four years, rising from 9 registered lobbying activities on the topic in 2017 to 47 in 2020[93] (see graphic 4).

The recent acceleration in lobby spending and the number of meetings with French decision-makers mirrors the fact that, like in Portugal, before the pandemic, hydrogen was not a central priority for French authorities or big business, which focussed instead on electrification (from nuclear energy), biogas and agrofuels. All of this changed rapidly with the Covid-19 crisis, because of the renewed focus on the emissions of the transport sector, and in September 2020, France announced a €7.2 billion hydrogen plan and published a "national strategy for low-carbon hydrogen".[94] €2 billion of that is now secured through the French national recovery plan, which will mostly be allocated through tenders and calls for projects – so it is not yet known which specific projects will be funded, although the European Commission is calling for safeguards to be put in place during tendering. 'Blue' hydrogen could still be financed through the remaining €5.2 billion, however the hydrogen projects that are being developed tend to focus on 'green' or 'low carbon' (nuclear) hydrogen, or relate to the refining/chemical industries or the manufacture of transport fuels including aviation. Total and Engie, for example, have a 'green' hydrogen project in La Mède,[95] and Air Liquide is developing large hydrogen projects with Siemens.[96]

Like Portugal, the glaring omission from France's recovery plan is money for additional renewable electricity to meet the growing demand from 'green' hydrogen. The government has assured the European Commission that it will be covered by other funding streams,[97] but a powerful domestic industry has been keen to promote nuclear 'low carbon' hydrogen rather than sourcing it from renewables. This is particularly problematic as France is set to miss its 2020 renewable energy targets by 30% and will need to double its current capacity to meet its 2030 target.[98]

France's recovery plan was developed through a close collaboration between government and industry (including consultative body Conseil national de l'industrie and trade association France Industrie, whose members include Air Liquide, Engie and Total[99]), which has become closer than ever during the pandemic.[100] This synergy between the French government and the private sector is reflected in the creation of Conseil national de l'hydrogène (National Hydrogen Council) in January 2021, an exclusively industry body including top executives of Total, Engie, Air Liquide and others, tasked with advising the government and helping coordinate France's hydrogen strategy.[101]

The relatively sudden focus on hydrogen in France reflects how it serves as a common ground for keeping all major industrial sectors happy, by being compatible with the interests of nuclear, gas and fossil fuels, automotive and aeronautics industries.

In 2019, President Emmanuel Macron launched the 'Pacte productif', a public-private process to design France's economic strategy, which included a report drafted by a group of experts chaired by Air Liquide's CEO Benoît Potier, which features hydrogen heavily in its Transition chapter. A specific "hydrogen task force" also seems to have been set up as part of this process, led by Air Liquide,[102] one of many public-private partnerships established around France's recovery plan.

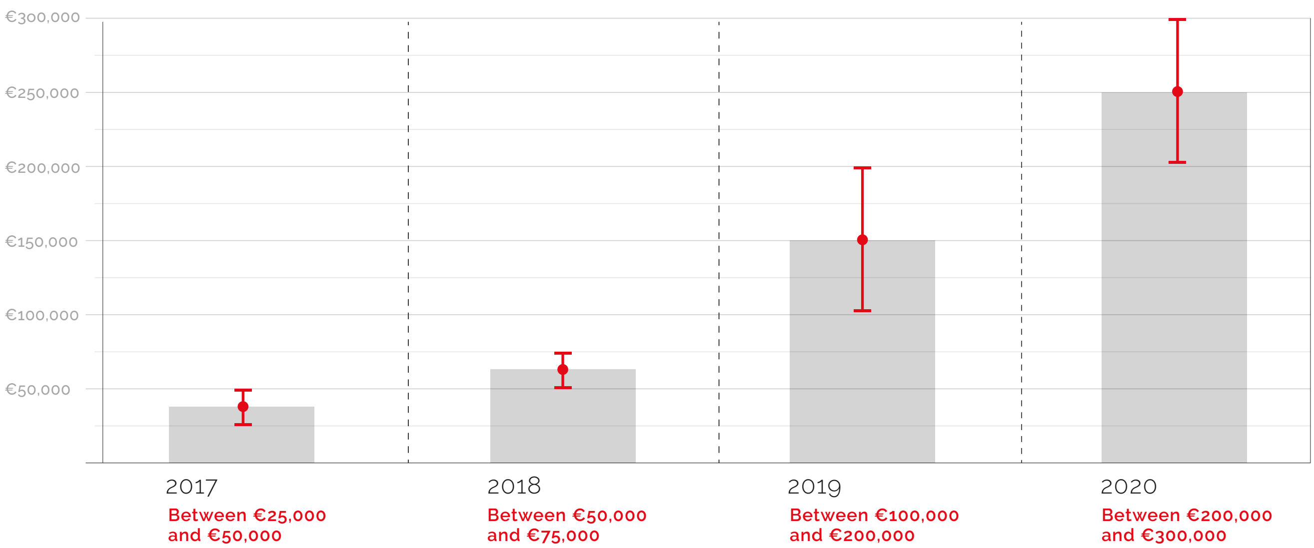
The organisation of public events by fossil fuel companies is a classic lobby strategy to try to influence decision-makers on the recovery. A key facilitator of this kind of lobby event in France is M&M Conseil, a division of one of France's largest lobbying firm, Boury Tallon. Since the start of the pandemic, several conferences have been organised focussing on the energy sector and on the decarbonisation of transport, sponsored by Total, Engie or gas industry trade group Coenove.[103] The principal aim of these events is to gather decision-makers and industry representatives on the same stage, and most of these fossil-fuel sponsored events focused heavily on gas, and hydrogen in particular.

HYDROGEN LOBBY ACCELERATES IN FRANCE

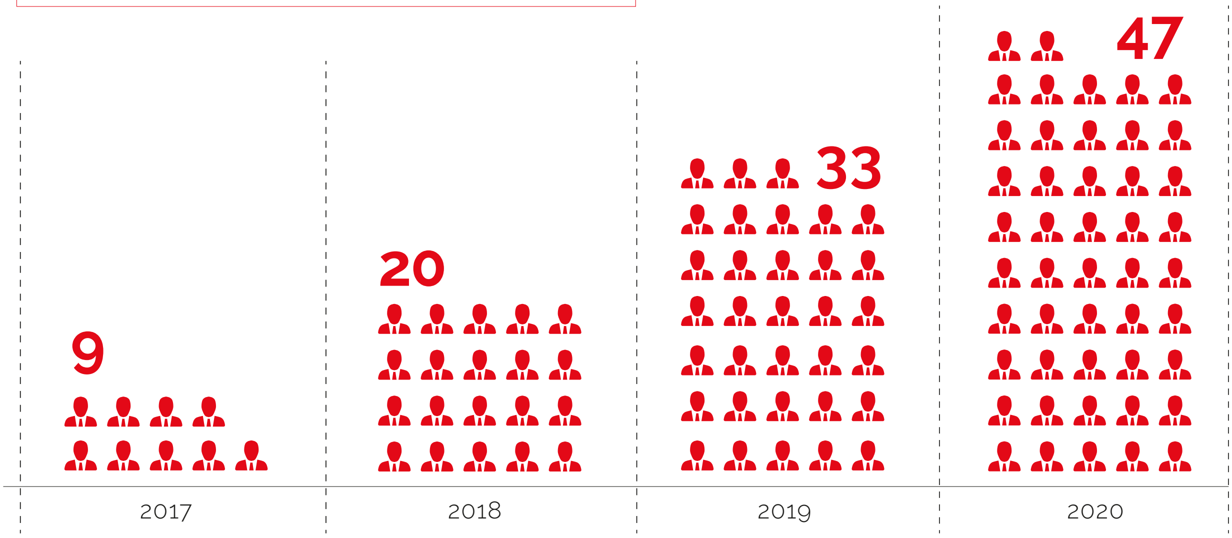
Graphic 4

The French lobby register shows how

The spending of France Hydrogène doubled year-on-year



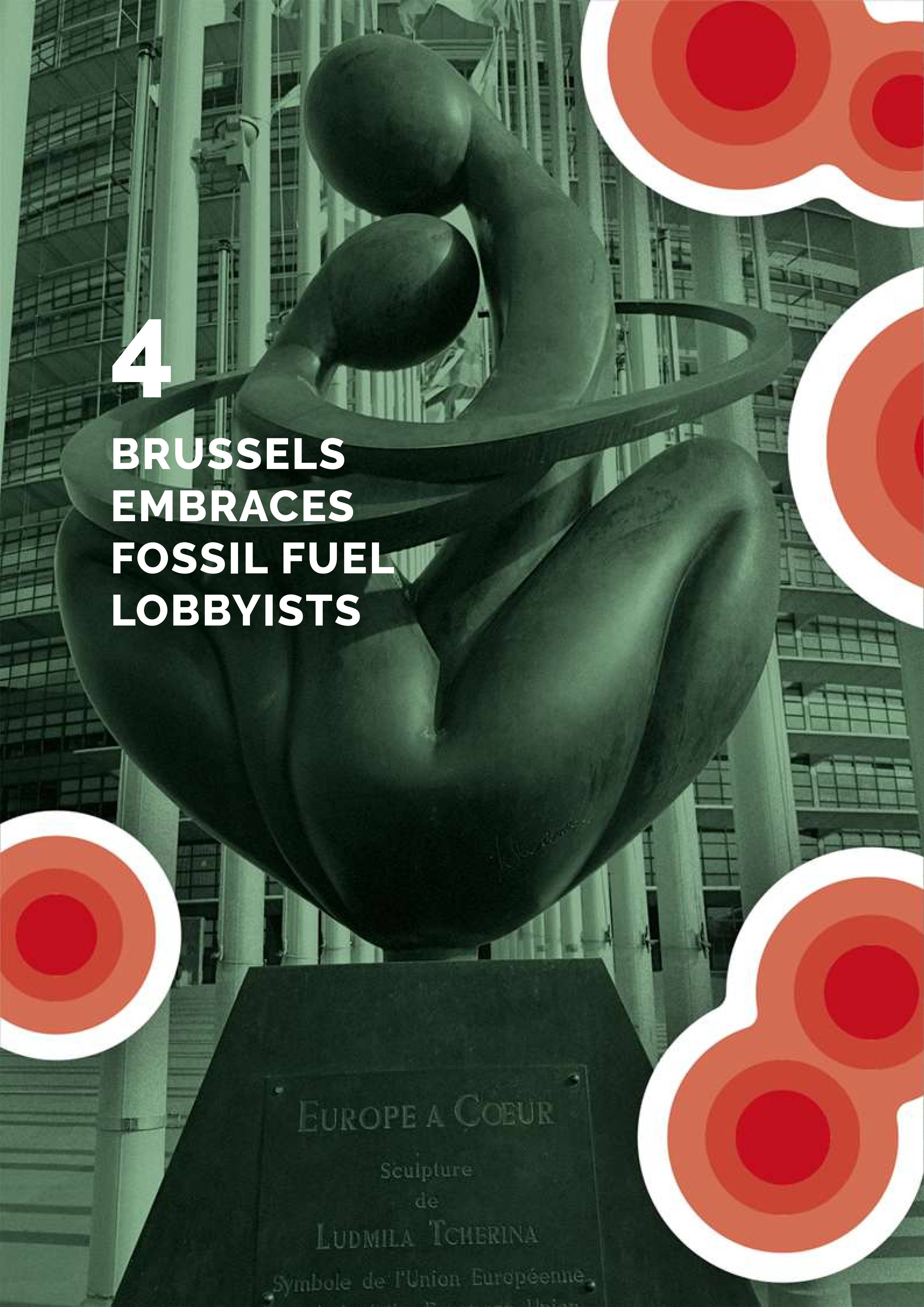
Out of **109** declared lobbying activities **including the term "hydrogen":**



Source: https://www.hatvp.fr/le-repertoire

4

BRUSSELS EMBRACES FOSSIL FUEL LOBBYISTS



Many of the fossil fuel companies and lobby groups active in the countries covered by this report have also been actively lobbying on the recovery in Brussels, including via their EU trade associations. They are often aided by lobbyists that have come through the revolving door from the European Commission, European Parliament or member states' permanent representations (perm reps) to the EU. For example, Italian gas transporter Snam's head of European affairs used to be an MEP adviser,[104] French gas utility Engie's EU affairs director is a former energy advisor at the French perm rep in Brussels,[105] while one of Spanish utility Iberdrola's EU lobbyists used to be an Energy Programme Manager at the European Commission.[106] Italian oil and gas major Eni's top EU lobbyist used to be part of Italy's perm rep to the EU,[107] Brussels lobby group Hydrogen Europe is led by a former MEP who sat on the Industry, Technology, Research and Energy (ITRE) Committee,[108] and the International Association of Oil and Gas Producers' (IOGP) lobby team includes a former Commission policy officer and a "gas market specialist" who helped set up the Commission's influential advisory group, the 'Gas Coordination group'.[109]

EU officials and politicians have not been shy about speaking at events on the recovery organised by or with the fossil fuel industry. Freedom of information (FOI) requests revealed that the Commission's Recovery taskforce, which is in charge of recovery funds' implementation, accepted an invitation to speak at an event on the "Green Recovery" organised by Energy Solutions,[110] an MEP-industry network whose members include French nuclear and fossil fuel utility EDF, German utility E.ON and Norwegian oil and gas major Equinor.[111] The "invite-only" discussion with its "corporate members and MEPs," in March 2021 featured the Recovery taskforce's principal advisor speaking alongside E.ON and Equinor. At the "high-level debate", Equinor shared how its "technological solutions" (ie. hydrogen and CCS) could contribute to a green recovery.[112] Energy Solutions has publicly stated that EU recovery plans should prioritise investments in CCS.[113]

Minutes of meetings reveal that in November 2020 European utilities lobby Eurelectric met with the Commission's Recovery taskforce to promote a "technology-neutral approach" as a principle for the recovery[114] – a Big Energy euphemism for giving fossil fuels with CCS (and other false solutions) an equal footing for public funding as clean, renewable electricity generation. FOI requests reveal that Endesa, EDP, Engie, Enel, Iberdrola, Edison, Naturgy and EDF were present at the meeting.[115]

Oil and gas producers lobby group IOGP – whose members include Eni, Repsol and Total, as well as Equinor, BP, ExxonMobil and Shell[116] – has also been pushing for support for 'blue' hydrogen. To give just a few examples, IOGP met the Commission's Directorate-General for Climate Action in May 2020 to present how "their work on hydrogen and CCS [is] contributing to the green recovery".[117] In the same month IOGP published a statement on the recovery plan promoting CCS and fossil gas-based "clean hydrogen" as climate solutions and their hope that recovery funds will consider "the full array of gas technologies."[118] In February 2021, IOGP met DG Climate Action again to present "preliminary findings" of its 'Hydrogen for Europe' study that it commissioned alongside Hydrogen Europe, which found that 'blue' hydrogen "will enable the creation of hydrogen infrastructure and will be cheaper than 'green' hydrogen (produced with renewable energy) until about

2040".[119] Notes from the meetings say the Commission "welcomed" the work of IOGP on "blue hydrogen".

Brussels' main hydrogen lobby group, Hydrogen Europe – whose members include Air Liquide, BP, Enagás, Engie, E.ON, Equinor, Galp, Gasunie, GRT Gaz, Shell, Snam and Total[120] – spoke alongside Air Liquide and Energy Commissioner Simson at the Portuguese presidency's High-Level Conference on Hydrogen in April 2021.[121]

REVOLVING DOOR CASES

Graphic 5

Groups that represent fossil fuel companies and lobby groups at EU level have also actively lobbying on the recovery in Brussels.

European Commission

Marta Navarrete-Moreno Energy Programme Manager at the European Commission	→	Iberdrola's EU lobbyist
Jorgo Chatzimarkakis MEP who sat on the Industry, Technology, Research and Energy (ITRE) Committee	→	Hydrogen Europe Secretary-General
Domenico Maggi MEP adviser	→	Snam's head of European affairs
Guillaume Gillet Energy advisor at the French perm rep in Brussels	→	Engie's EU affairs director
Luca Giansanti Italy's perm rep to the EU	→	Eni's top EU lobbyist
Iskren Kirilov Commission policy officer a "gas market specialist" who helped set up the Commission's influential advisory group, the 'Gas Coordination group'	→	IOGP's lobby team

Hydrogen Europe used the opportunity to present its "Hydrogen Act",[122] a policy paper that emphasises the need for both renewable and "low carbon" ie. 'blue' hydrogen. It calls for an EU-wide agreement on the definitions of "renewable and low carbon hydrogen, including CCS", and says the "CertifHy threshold should be taken as a starting point for the development of a low carbon hydrogen threshold".[123] CertifHy, however, is an industry-stakeholder project[124] which defines low carbon hydrogen at a level that allows far more CO2 per ton of hydrogen than other proposed EU rules. This could open the door to more fossil-based hydrogen, either through electrolysers powered through a dirty electricity grid, or simply from fossil gas with CCS, but so far the Commission has stuck to a lower threshold and in the case of Italy explicitly excluded CCS and 'blue' hydrogen from recovery funds. However, there are other pots of money available and industry lobbying shows no sign of slowing.

European Commission woos the fossil fuel industry

In July 2020, after the publication of the EU's Hydrogen Strategy – which included 'blue' hydrogen thanks to industry lobbying[125] – European Commission Vice President Frans Timmermans told the press he could not give a specific date for an end to EU support for investments in fossil gas and CCS infrastructure.[126] In the same month, Timmermans (together with the Directors-General of DG Energy and DG Clima) met with the Zero Emissions Platform (whose members include BP, Equinor, Shell and Total[127]), who presented him with "shovel-ready" CCS projects that could "support Europe's post-pandemic recovery". Timmermans expressed the Commission's support for CCS, adding that post-covid funds should be used "to promote a set of technologies that can lead the transition to climate neutrality by 2050. We need to move along quickly on CCS. CO2 storage needs extra attention including mobilisation of investments."[128]

Timmermans and the Recovery Taskforce have been very clear in their efforts to woo the fossil fuel industry and get them behind hydrogen. Speaking at a Euronews debate[129] in February 2021 organised with the European Round Table of Industrialists, a powerful Brussels lobby groups whose members include BP, Eni, Total and Shell, Timmermans praised the speed with which the "incredible" energy sector "understands it needs to change" and the "speed at which hydrogen is coming into the game, across the board". He added that "the European Commission will be on your side to try to shape things".[130] That same month, at the EU Industry Days hosted by the Portuguese Presidency, featuring speakers from Iberdrola, Enel, Shell Chemicals and Hydrogen Europe,[131] Timmermans said that regarding action on climate, CEOs do not need to be told, "they know exactly what needs to be done".[132] The Head of the Commission's Recovery taskforce also featured in the programme, telling industry that it was "very much counting on you and your contribution for success".[133] A month later, when speaking at the Eurogas annual conference in March 2021, Timmermans told the industry lobby group, whose members include Engie, Eni, Repsol, Shell and Total,[134] that the recovery funds represented a big opportunity and that he "trusts" their investment decisions to reflect that hydrogen and biomethane are not just a "fig leaf or a side activity".[135]

Therefore even if EU recovery funds do not go directly to 'blue' hydrogen and CCS in the four countries looked at in this report, the fossil fuel industry can still count on future Commission support, both financial and political.

Box 2: Important Projects of Common European Interest

Many national recovery plans mentioned 'IPCEIs' ('Important Projects of Common European Interest'), particularly in relation to hydrogen projects. And many energy companies and fossil fuel lobby groups are keen on using IPCEIs to funnel public money to hydrogen and CCS projects.

IPCEIs allow state aid rules be relaxed for "key strategic value chains", letting member states fund projects up to 100% from public money (as asked for by energy companies[136]). An industry-dominated 'Strategic Forum for Important Projects of Common European Interest', which included Hydrogen Europe and Italy's Confindustria, was instrumental in identifying hydrogen as a "key strategic value chain",[137] meaning hydrogen projects look set to soon be eligible for IPCEI status.[138]

According to minutes of a video call between Hydrogen Europe and the European Commission, the industry lobby group sees IPCEIs as a key way to "drive the investment agenda" but admits that "a hydrogen IPCEI will be much more complex than the previous IPCEIs and requires a significant effort to coordinate."[139]

As IPCEIs have to involve more than one Member State, a 'match-making' procedure has been launched in Europe to connect different projects and companies together to form IPCEIs.[140] If approved, the projects will be eligible for large amounts of funding either through recovery plans channelled via member state budgets, or other public and private channels. Germany, for example, has allocated a significant portion of its national recovery plan budget to hydrogen IPCEIs in collaboration with France,[141] while the two are keen to include 'blue' hydrogen and nuclear-based hydrogen, respectively.[142] France and its corporations are also putting a lot of focus on the prospect of an IPCEI on hydrogen as a way to channel public money to industry, and France's recovery plan earmarks some of its hydrogen funds for a future IPCEI. Air Liquide is seeking IPCEI status for a project in Normandy on "low carbon hydrogen" for refineries and chemical plants.[143] Portugal's national recovery plan, meanwhile, also flags 'Hydrogen and other renewable gases' as being eligible for IPCEI status.[144] It is still to be seen whether the Hydrogen IPCEI will be strictly for 'green' hydrogen or also other shades and flavours.

CONCLUSION

The fossil fuel industry has a long history of capturing public funds in times of crisis, co-opting climate policy processes and weakening environmental rules in their favour, and the EU recovery funds are no exception. The European Commission is trying to ensure EU recovery funds are not spent directly on fossil fuels, but thanks to the cosy relationship between decision-makers and that industry, national recovery plans of the four countries covered in this report – Italy, the Spanish state, Portugal and France – have all dedicated billions to the fossil fuel industry's current silver bullet: hydrogen and renewable gases.

Despite a last minute intervention by the Commission, Italy is still allocating more of its EU Covid-19 recovery funds to hydrogen and biogas than to improving ICUs and medical equipment. Similarly, the Spanish state is dedicating 1.5 times more to its Renewable Hydrogen Roadmap than to improving its national health system. Portugal has given the oil and gas executive it hired to draft its national recovery plan oversight of its implementation. And public-private bodies with fossil fuel ties have got too much influence over the implementation of France's recovery plans, including the hefty €2 billion for hydrogen.

Behind these investment decisions are dozens of lobby meetings, webinars, events and revolving doors involving the fossil fuel industry and its allies.

The only path to a fossil-free recovery that prioritises social and environmental justice, rather than pouring more public funds into polluting corporations' pockets, is to cut the fossil fuel industry out of public decision-making processes at the national, EU and international level, similar to existing restrictions on the tobacco industry. The EU recovery funds will be allocated to projects that are going to develop the energy transition across Europe, shaping our energy model for the next decade: it is vital that these decisions put climate justice – not the fossil fuel industry – first. That's why we need fossil free politics.

That means governments and democratic institutions must:

1

INSTITUTE A FIREWALL TO END FOSSIL FUEL INDUSTRY ACCESS TO DECISION-MAKING:
no lobby meetings; no seats in expert and advisory bodies; no role in public research bodies.
In particular, decision makers must end lobby meetings with the fossil fuel industry, as well as interactions with organisations or individuals that work to further the interests of the fossil fuel industry, such as consultancies, law firms, think tanks and public relations firms.

2

ADDRESS VESTED INTERESTS:
no conflicts of interest, no revolving door between public office and the fossil fuel industry; no industry side jobs or placements; no hiring of industry consultants.
In particular, decision makers must close the revolving door by introducing restrictions on moving from the public sector to the fossil fuel industry or vice-versa.

3

END PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT OF THE FOSSIL FUEL INDUSTRY:
no more subsidies or incentives for the use of fossil fuels or activities that promote or prolong the use of fossil fuels; no involvement in climate negotiations; no place on government delegations to international negotiations or trade missions.
In particular, the EU must not sanction – and national governments must not provide – any public subsidies, recovery funds or other incentives – including favourable tax regimes or state aid rules, or environmental deregulation like fast-tracking procedures – for the use of fossil fuels or activities that promote or prolong their use, or to fossil fuel companies.

4

REJECT PARTNERSHIPS WITH THE FOSSIL FUEL INDUSTRY:
no hosting or attending of industry events; no sponsorships or partnerships; no sharing platforms with industry representatives; no party or candidate donations.
In particular, public authority representatives must not appear at fossil fuel sponsored events, debates or activities and not share platforms with the fossil fuel industry.[145]

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