# Italy Leads Opposition to EU’s 2035 Ban on Fossil-fuel Cars


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Italy ramped up its protests against European Union (EU) plans to criminalize the sale of new petrol and diesel cars in 12 years, with the transport minister lambasting a quick switch to electric vehicles as “suicide” and a “gift” to Chinese industry.

February 14 this year saw the European Parliament voting — 340 in favor, 279 against — for legislation to wind down the sale of gas and diesel vehicles by 2035. The vote promoted a compromise agreement already inked by the European Council in October 2022, which outlined a blueprint for phasing out fossil fuel-powered vehicles by 2050 on Europe’s roads.

According to the new rules, manufacturers will have to meet a 100-percent $CO_2$ emissions reduction in new vehicles sold by 2035, together with new regulations in store for tracking the amount of emissions.

Moreover, the new legislation will also speed up emission cuts before the deadline, with cars manufactured in 2030 legally mandated to have cut emissions by 55 percent, which is more than the hitherto agreed-upon 37.5 percent, from 2021 levels.

Notably, luxury car manufacturers were omitted from the legislation on the pretext that they produce lower quantities of cars compared to other manufacturers.

Such a plan has been decried in Italy, home to brands such as Fiat and Alfa Romeo, where the car industry is still mainly focused on combustion engine technology.

“We all care about water, air quality and a cleaner environment … but that does not mean laying off millions of workers and shutting down thousands of businesses,” declared Transport Minister Matteo Salvini, who leads the League party.

“The ideological fundamentalism of electricity alone is suicide and a gift to China,” he elaborated. He contended that the deal would only benefit China in the long term by undermining the European car industry. Additionally, Salvini argued that lawmakers were pressured by Chinese lobbyists, while alluding to the Qatargate scandal and the role of foreign lobbyists.

Salvini, who is also deputy prime minister, announced that more time and funding were required to facilitate a seamless transition.

Also, Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani previously said that Rome would seek to dilute the target.

“Italy will put forward its own counter-proposal: to limit the reduction to 90%, giving industries the chance to adapt,” Tajani was quoted as saying by *Corriere della Sera*.

More than 270,000 people work in Italy’s domestic automotive industry, an industry that is responsible for more than five percent of the country’s gross domestic product, based on data from automotive association ANFIA.

Sales of fully electric cars dropped 27 percent last year in Italy, accounting for just 3.7 percent of total new car registrations, ANFIA stated.

Although individual ministers authorized the deal in principle last October, they will have to legislate for the new regulations individually and get final clearance from the European Council.

Final approval is expected for the deal and could come as early as March of this year. Supporters of the law hope that the move will help contribute to the bloc becoming carbon-neutral by 2050 as part of the EU’s broader plan for a transition to a “green” economy.

The European Parliament’s EPP group slammed the deal, saying it does not permit adequate technological diversity.

“Today’s deal slammed shut the door to new technological developments and put all the eggs in one basket. This is a mistake,” Jens Gieseke MEP, the EPP Group negotiator, declared in a statement.

“With today’s agreement, a ‘Havana effect’ is becoming more realistic. After 2035, our streets might become full of vintage cars, because new cars are not available or not affordable,” cautioned the German conservative MEP.

“The Europe of today is different from the Europe of one and a half years ago when we started with the ‘Green Deal’ legislation. Still, there has been no reality check today. Exploding energy prices and enormous supply problems, especially of raw materials, which are critical for electric car production, played no role in today’s decision. Nor did the fact that the argument of the long-term price advantage of electric cars, which has been put forward again and again, has become invalid. The future abolition of state subsidies and high electricity prices threaten to turn the electric car into a slow seller,” Gieseke noted.

“The EPP Group’s commitment was and is clear: emissions in the transport sector must come down. That is why we supported the reduction targets for 2030 and high reduction targets for 2035. But a complete ban of one technology in particular is going too far. A voluntary regulation for climate-neutral biofuels and synthetic fuels would have been better in order to preserve technological openness and a certain flexibility for the producers,” she added.

“For our European producers, the transition will be a major challenge. Chinese and American manufacturers in particular are ready to take over the European market for electric cars. That is why it is even more important to increase the speed of infrastructure development and ensure that emissions are not simply shifted elsewhere — either to other sectors or even to other regions. As long as the production of vehicles or the electricity for charging is not emission-free, an electric car is not climate-neutral either. In order to be able to consider and compare the actual emissions of vehicles more realistically in the future, a life cycle analysis has to be introduced. That is why the EPP Group calls on the Commission to draw up a proposal on this,” Gieseke continued.

In turn, the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) and Identity and Democracy (ID) EU parliamentary groups, and factions within the conservative EPP bloc, also vehemently contested the aforementioned plans.

Furthermore, the International Road Transport Union (IRU) has warned that the freight industry is not prepared for total electrification by 2035, which could deal a blow to logistics and costs. A recent industry-penned open letter called for policymakers to contemplate combustion engine technology as compatible with EU climate goals, as long as fossil fuels are replaced with low-carbon and net-zero liquid fuels, such as biofuels and e-fuels. A statement from the letter read: “Heavy-Duty transport is a vital sector for the functioning of the internal market and a suitable regulatory framework shall support the development of clean vehicles using different technologies and fuels. Decarbonisation is an immediate challenge and all options that can have a rapid impact need to be enabled.”

Brussels has taken an increasingly tough stance on cutting road transport emissions, illustrated in its successful efforts to bar the sale of new petrol and diesel cars by 2035.

To boot, EU electric car makers have been pressured by the American Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), which pledges billions of dollars in subsidies for U.S. renewable car manufacturers, with observers cautioning a potential trade war.