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Italy**Climate Change, Renewable Energy Top Priority List, but Instability Clouds Picture**By Eric J. [Lyman](#)

ROME—Climate change and renewable energy will be Italy's top environmental concerns in 2013, according to an informal survey of government policymakers, environmental lobby groups, and other expert observers, with land use issues and waste disposal following close behind.

Transportation, air quality, and agricultural issues were also mentioned as important areas of concern.

However, political instability has clouded government priorities for this year. Mario Monti, who took over as head of a technocrat government in November 2011 with Italy at risk of falling victim to the European debt crisis, stepped down Dec. 21, paving the way for elections as early as February.

The most likely figures to become prime minister—a group that could still include Monti—will likely have varying environmental priorities. But Environment Minister Corrado Clini is likely to stay on at the ministry in some capacity. Clini was previously the ministry's director general—the top nonpolitical post—and speculation is that he would return to that role if he were not asked to stay on as minister.

Flooding Enforces Climate Concerns

Clini made headlines in November when he authored an op-ed piece in *Corriere della Sera*, Italy's largest newspaper, saying the country would make climate change its top political priority and would act as a protagonist in the European Union process for confronting climate-related risks. When interviewed a month later, Clini said the issue remained the most important one for the country.

Clini said the issue has become more important to the public because of severe flooding in September, October, and November in central and northern Italy thought to be tied to climate change, as well as recent devastating storms in the United States and the Philippines.

"We have to strive to approve a national plan to reduce CO₂ and other greenhouse gases," Clini said. "Until now we have had an ad hoc approach to the problem, in which different areas each did what they could. But to go further, we need a coordinated strategy."

Under the Kyoto Protocol's burden-sharing policy, Italy was obligated to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by an average of 6.5 percent over the 2008-2012 commitment period compared to 1990 levels. However, figures Italy submitted to the U.N. Framework Convention on Climate Change indicate a reduction of about 3.5 percent at best for the period. Final figures will not be available until the end of 2013.

"Italy has the potential to do much better than it has done in this area," Clini said. "And it must do so."

Renewables Show Promise

According to other leading players in the environmental sector, Italy can best mitigate climate change by making renewable energy more attractive. Italy's UNFCCC submissions showed that despite an overall drop in emissions between 1990 and 2010, emissions from energy barely changed.

"The renewable energy sector is still being threatened by a national energy strategy that still favors fossil fuels rather than incentives to increase energy efficiency and renewable energy," said Vittorio Cogliati Dezza, president of the Italian environmental lobby group Legambiente.

Angelo Spena, an expert on environmental science with the University Tor Vergata in Rome, agreed. "We have to define the strategic direction for industry, particularly in relation to the development of the green economy and clean energy sources," he said.

Land Use Blamed in Flooding

The late 2012 flooding also moved land use issues higher on the public agenda.

"A lack of management of lands at risk for landslides, the absence of an early warning system and contingency plans, and overdeveloped land that has lost its ability to absorb such intense rainfall are all factors that differentiate between a violent storm and a tragedy," Legambiente's Cogliati Dezza said.

According to Stefano Leoni from WWF-Italia, market mechanisms such as incentives and tax breaks can make a big difference in promoting sound agricultural policies.

"It is necessary to follow up on the first steps taken by Minister [of Agriculture and Forest Policy Mario] Catania, who said we have to guard against overbuilding and the loss of land through inefficient agricultural policies by using fiscal incentives to reward constructive policies," Leoni said.

Waste Management Woes

While a garbage crisis in Naples has been largely solved, observers said waste management remains a high priority with inadequate disposal options for Rome, Italy's largest city, and overtaxed disposal infrastructure elsewhere in the country. In 2010 and 2011, garbage was piled high on Naples' streets due to an inadequate collection system and a shortage of landfill space and incinerator capacity.

"This is a kind of emergency that is ridiculous for a developed country," said Rosa Filippini, president of Friends of the Earth in Italy. "A mix of bad laws, administrative incapacity, uninformed political policies, and a lack of understanding by the public means that in 2013 major metropolitan areas like Naples and Rome, among others, have to pay to export their waste abroad. Changing this has got to be a top priority."

Government Spending Cut

According to Niccolò Cusumano, an environmental policy expert with the Bocconi University School of Management in Milan, the waste issue is made more difficult by the financial crisis that has forced Italy to cut government spending

by as much as 20 percent since the start of 2010.

"In the past years, faced with budgetary issues, the state has reduced funding in this area [waste management] to regional and local authorities, while city councils have used these [remaining] funds like ATMs for their pet projects," said Cusumano. "We could see a crisis over the next two years in the areas of water and waste unless steps are taken."

Air Quality Worsening

Some observers said transportation should also be an area of focus, particularly because it offers a relatively low-cost way to make an environmental impact.

"The easiest useful investment that could be made to make our cities more livable and more efficient is in the area of mobility, which would provide faster, safer, and more sustainable transport than the current models," said Cogliati Dezza of the environmental lobby group Legambiente. He suggested that a first step could be London-style fees for vehicles entering congested areas to raise revenue and reduce access.

According to the Ministry of Environment's technical wing (ISPRA), air quality in Italy has been worsening over the past decade, judging by an increasing number of unhealthy-air days in a growing number of cities. For Clini, the minister, improvement in this area goes hand in hand with confronting climate change.

"A gradual shift to renewable energy sources and a renewed emphasis on energy efficiency will do a great deal to improve the situation," Clini said.

Agricultural Policy Expected

According to WWF Italia's Leoni, 2013 will be a "decisive" year for agricultural policy in Italy and across Europe. The European Union is expected to issue a Common Agricultural Policy by March.

"This will have an impact on farmers' incomes and will also include important measures to address climate change, renewable energy, water management, and the conservation of biodiversity," Leoni said.

Fears agreed. "Anyone looking for an area where significant reforms will have an impact on multiple areas need not look beyond transport and agricultural policy," he said.

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ISSN 1522-4090

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