

Italy's Influence in the EU after the Vote: Which Role for Meloni?

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- ▶ Approximately 2/3 of the 76 Italians elected to the European Parliament will be in this role for the first time: around 30% of them are women and only 5 will be under 35. The three parties of the current governing majority (Fratelli d'Italia - 24 MEPs (ECR), Forza Italia-SVP - 9 MEPs (EPP) and Lega - 8 MEPs (ID)) have often been able to reconfirm outgoing MEPs or have largely drawn on their own representatives with regional or local administrator roles for the newly elected ones.
- ▶ The oppositions (Partito Democratico - 21 MPs (S&D), Movimento 5 Stelle - 8 MPs (NI) - Alleanza Verdi-Sinistra - 6 MPs (The Left/Greens)) will be represented by a significant percentage of newly elected members, whilst two Liberal lists failed to pass the 4% barrier and will have no seats.
- ▶ Forza Italia brings 8 MEPs to the EPP and could get a vice-presidency of the largest group in the new European Parliament.
- ▶ Compared to 2019, Lega considerably reduces its influence the Identity & Democracy group. Alleanza Verdi/Seft list elects six MEPs in Brussels, three of whom would go to the Greens-ALE group and three to the Left group.
- ▶ Despite being the second most voted party, the Partito Democratico is likely to exert some influence in the next European institutions, while although Fratelli d'Italia will enjoy the largest Italian delegation in Bruxelles, it is by no means certain that Giorgia Meloni will be able to exert effective influence in the next European Parliament, while it is possible that she will become more important in the European Council, especially if Le Pen should win the next general election in France.

Introduction

Before assessing Italy's ability to influence the next European Parliament, it is necessary to explain the timeline for the composition of parliamentary groups in Brussels. Elected MEPs have to communicate by 15 July 2024 which group they intend to be affiliated to. It should also be noted that according to Rule 33 of the Rules of Procedure of the European Parliament¹, at least 23 MEPs from at least 7 Member States are required to form a group. It should also be borne in mind that the individual groups are defining their composition at different times: according to the provisional calendar that regulates group formation procedures, the first to proclaim its official composition was the European People's Party (EPP) on 18 June. In the following days it should be the turn of the Greens/Ale, while in the following week it should be the turn of four other groups to make their affiliations official. In particular, on 25 June it should be the turn of the Socialists and Democrats (S&D) and the Left, while on 26 June information on the composition of the groups of the Renew Europe Liberals and the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR) is awaited. The far-right group² Identity and Democracy (ID) should close the calendar, whose constituent meeting is expected on 3 July: the meeting is also decisive to clarify the question, still undefined at the moment, of the possible readmission or definitive exclusion of the Germans of Alternative für Deutschland³.

Many new faces in Strasbourg

Even though some of the new Italian MEPs have yet to be definitively confirmed, due to both the all-Italian peculiarity of candidates who had already foreseen renouncing their eventual office but nevertheless wanted to measure their popularity with voters at this juncture, and the electoral rules that allow the same person to stand as a candidate in different constituencies, the current data allow some initial considerations regarding some of the figures that are most likely to influence the new European legislature.

As is almost traditional in European elections in Italy, one must once again start from the observation that around 2/3 of the 76 elected to the European Parliament will be filling this role for the first time and will therefore have more initial difficulties in familiarising themselves with the mechanisms of this institution. The representation of women will be around 30% and only 5 out of 76 will be under 35.

The three parties of the current governing majority in Italy (Fratelli d'Italia - 24 MEPs (ECR), Forza Italia-SVP - 9 MEPs (EPP) and Lega - 8 MEPs (ID)) have often been able to reconfirm outgoing MEPs or have

¹ European Parliament, Rules of Procedure of the European Parliament, [Art. 33](#).

² In the Italian political context, the terms 'right-wing' and 'extreme right-wing' are not easily contextualised: in fact, the two political spheres are characterised by certain common elements, such as the need to maintain order in society, economic liberalism and adherence to a very conservative conception of Catholicism. It is possible to distinguish the extent to which other characteristics are present in the two areas: e. g., the extreme right maintains a very strong ideological link with the fascist past, which the right expresses less but does not formally reject; the extreme right fights against the protection of gender diversity, while the right is less radical on this aspect; the far right expresses a very radical sense of nationalism, leading, for example, to a rejection of Italy's membership of supranational organisations such as NATO and the EU, while the right avoids adopting such extreme positions, although it too adopts the slogan "Italians first"; finally, the far right displays racist features in some of its positions, which the right does not usually adopt. The boundaries are therefore blurred and it is not always possible to exclude the presence of certain more radical positions in the more 'moderate' of the two. For these reasons, it is not yet possible to say exactly how the position of the Italian right and the extreme right will differ in the next European Parliament: they will probably work together on some dossiers and split on others.

³ F. Baccini, [Groups, committees, and plenary. All the dates for the establishment of the new European Parliament](#), Eunews.it, 13.6.2024.

largely drawn on their own representatives with regional or local administrator roles for the newly elected ones⁴. However, two newly elected MEPs stand out in particular and for different reasons. The currently disciplinarily suspended General and Chief of Staff of the Land Operations Forces Command, Roberto Vannacci⁵, frontman of the Lega's election campaign, who has caused much discussion on the basis of particularly extreme positions, aimed in particular at immigrants and the LGBT+ community, and then, Letizia Moratti, candidate from Forza Italia, belonging to one of Italy's most important business dynasties among others, former President of RAI (the Italian Public Broadcasting Company), Minister in governments led by Berlusconi and Mayor of Milan⁶.

Considering that the two parties of liberal-democratic inspiration (Stati Uniti d'Europa and Azione), which would have opted for the European group Renew Europe, despite the efforts of several influential candidates failed to pass the threshold, the Italian opposition (Partito Democratico - 21 elected members (S&D), Movimento 5 Stelle - 8 MPs (NI) - Alleanza Verdi-Sinistra - 6 MPs (The Left/Greens)) will be represented by a significant percentage of newly elected members⁷. These include some well-known figures who are also running as 'independents'. Prominent among these personalities are the President and daughter of the founder of the NGO Emergency, Cecilia Strada, the former President of INPS, Italy's main pension institute, Pasquale Tridico and an iconic figure in the commitment to the integration of migrants, Mimmo Lucano⁸, Mayor of Riace, as well as Lucia Annunziata, one of the most authoritative faces of Italian television journalism. An affair that has received a lot of media coverage is that of the now parliamentarian, Ilaria Salis, who thanks to her election has now been able to leave Hungary where she was accused and detained for 18 months for an alleged assault on extreme right-wing militants⁹.

Another Italian peculiarity is that preference choices, made directly by citizens on ballot papers, have resulted in the election of numerous mayors or former mayors who, together with other types of regional or local administrators, are by far the most rewarded category. It is followed by the category of journalists.

Among the most experienced MEPs and also based on the CVs of some of the new ones, some specific thematic expertise can also be identified, such as that of Brando Benifei, former rapporteur of the new European regulation on AI, along with a number of different expert figures, particularly in the environmental or agricultural fields. Salvatore De Meo is very likely to be reconfirmed as chair of the EP Commission responsible for Constitutional Affairs. Also returning to the EP is Italian Sandro Gozi, formerly a member of the Italian government as undersecretary for European affairs, but elected in France in the ranks of Renaissance¹⁰.

⁴ Beyond the results obtained by the individual parties, it should be noted that the turnout in the European elections in Italy stood at 49.7 per cent of the eligible voters.

⁵ A. Brezar, [Who is Roberto Vannacci, Italy's favourite far-right general?](#), euronews.com, 7.6.2024.

⁶ G. Bonezzi, [Letizia Moratti: "La mia vittoria alle Europee nel nome di Berlusconi, non lo scorderemo mai"](#), Quotidiano Nazionale, 11.6.2024.

⁷ F. Baccini, [Toia, Mussolini, Bartolo out. Salis, Vannacci, Bonaccini elected. Tops and flops of the European elections in Italy](#), Eunews, 13.6.2024.

⁸ S. http://www.worldmayor.com/contest_2010/comments-riace.html or <https://fortune.com/ranking/worlds-greatest-leaders/2016/domenico-lucano/>

⁹ G. Peseckyte, [Newly elected MEP Ilaria Salis returns to Italy from detention in Hungary](#), Politico.eu, 16.6.2024.

¹⁰ M. Rizzini, [Parla Sandro Gozi, unico italiano eletto che siederà nel gruppo Renew](#), ilfoglio.it, 11.6.2024.

The significance of Italian MEPs in the next European Parliament

On 18 June, the EPP announced that it had welcomed a further 14 new MEPs from six national delegations to its group in addition to those already affiliated to the European People's Party¹¹, followed by the departure of two MEPs from the group¹², thus consolidating the EPP's position as the largest group in the new European Parliament, with 188 members. The 14 new MEPs come from the Netherlands, Denmark, Germany, the Czech Republic and Hungary: in particular, the 7 Hungarian MEPs belong to the centre-right opposition party Respect and Freedom (TISZA), led by Péter Magyar.¹³ The EPP reconfirms Bavarian Manfred Weber as group president and elects Massimiliano Salini of Forza Italia as one of the 10 vice-presidents.¹⁴ There are nine Italian MEPs in the EPP: eight from Forza Italia and one from the Südtiroler Volkspartei party of the German-speaking minority in South Tyrol.

In the Socialists & Democrats (S&D) group, the Partito Democratico brought 21 MEPs, making it the largest national delegation. According to the conventions in force in such cases, the party currently led by Elly Schlein should take advantage of this result and obtain the chairmanship of the S&D Group, but the latest rumours indicate that under pressure from Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez, the Spanish Iratxe Garcia Perez, who led the group throughout the previous legislature, could be reappointed as chairwoman.¹⁵ Schlein, who has a past as an MEP in 2014-2019, seems to have taken direct control of the nomination negotiations, and in exchange for Garcia Perez's reappointment she could obtain the chairmanship of some parliamentary commissions for PD MEPs. In addition, should the practice be reconfirmed, Schlein could obtain for her party the same presidency of the European Parliament in the middle of the legislature, when - by convention - the usual turnover with the EPP-led presidency should take place, which should initially go to outgoing president Roberta Metsola.¹⁶

The largest Italian delegation to the European Parliament will be that of the Fratelli d'Italia of MEP Giorgia Meloni, which with 28 MEPs is the largest delegation in the Group of Conservatives and Reformists (ECR). On 19 June, the new composition of the group was formalised, which welcomes 11 more members in addition to those already affiliated¹⁷ and is currently in third place with 83 seats.¹⁸ Thanks to the weight of FdI MEPs in ECR, it is to be expected that Meloni will have a strong influence in the area of the European right in Brussels. However, it is not yet possible to estimate exactly how much influence Meloni

¹¹ F. Baccini, [The Populists formally welcome 14 new members to the EU Parliament. EPP group rises to 190 seats](#), Eunews.it, 18.6.2024.

¹² The two MEPs are the Belgian Yvan Verougstraete of Les Engagés (who will ask to be admitted to the liberal group Renew Europe) and the Hungarian György Hölvényi of the Christian Democratic People's Party (Kdnp), who had maintained ties with Victor Orban's Fidesz party even after his expulsion from the EPP in 2021, s. F. Baccini, [Weber reappointed leader of EPP group, vice presidents include Salini. Metsola nominated for President of the EU Parliament](#), Eunews.it, 20.6.2024.

¹³ M. Gwyn Jones, [Orbán ally-turned-rival Péter Magyar joins centre-right EPP group in the European Parliament](#), euronews.com, 18.6.2024.

¹⁴ [Ue: Massimiliano Salini \(Fi\) eletto vice presidente gruppo Ppe](#), affaritaliani.it, 19.6.2024.

¹⁵ Simone De La Feld, [PD, risk of a Pyrrhic victory. First party in EU Socialist group, but Schlein could give up chairmanship](#), eunews.it, 18.6.2024.

¹⁶ J. P. Cordina, [Metsola confirmed as EPP nominee for EP president](#), newsbook.com, 17.6.2024.

¹⁷ The 11 new MEPs from Ecr are Kristoffer Storm from the Danish Democratic Party (Danmarksdemokraterne); Ivaylo Valchev of the Bulgarian 'There is such a people' party; Aurelijus Veryga of the Lithuanian Union of Farmers and Greens party; Claudiu-Richard Tarziu, Gheorghe Piperea, Maria-Georgiana Teodorescu, Adrian-George Axinia and Dimitrie Sturdza of the Alliance for the Union of Romanians, and finally the French Marion Maréchal, Guillaume Peltier and Laurence Trochu, who left the Reconquête party to form a new conservative party together with Nicolas Bay, former member of the ECR group, s. R. Angelini, [Ecr con 11 nuovi eurodeputati accolti diventa il terzo gruppo del Parlamento europeo](#), ilsecolo.it, 19.6.2024.

¹⁸ R. Angelini, cit.

will have in the next European legislature, since it is not yet clear whether rumours¹⁹ about a possible alliance between Meloni and Le Pen for the creation of a right-wing parliamentary 'supergroup' based on the merger of ECR with some components of Identity and Democracy (ID), led by Le Pen, will materialise.²⁰

The Lega elects 8 MPs out of the 58 that should make up the Identity & Democracy group, considerably reducing its influence capacity compared to 2019, when it had as many as 28 seats. The Green/Left Alliance list, based on a collaboration between environmentalists and left-wing movements, elects six MEPs in Brussels, which, however, are reportedly to be split: four would go to the Green-ALE group and two to the Left group. That leaves the non-attached MEPs, who currently number eight, but whose number could change as a result of affiliation decisions or departures from other groups in the coming days.

Given the possible alliances between the various internal groups in the European Parliament, in the situation known at the end of June 2024, the Italian MEPs with the greatest chance of influencing the future institutional balance should be those of the Partito Democratico. Since Ursula von der Leyen seems determined to include the European Socialists & Democrats in the majority that should support her reconfirmation as President of the Commission, in fact, the 21 Italian MEPs present in that group could have a relevant weight in the choice of the leadership of the next Commission. On the other hand, it seems more uncertain whether the MEPs of Fratelli d'Italia and Lega are likely to have any relevance: The former, currently considered to be part of the ECR group, could be involved in a possible reconfirmation of von der Leyen²¹ firstly if the latter expressed a willingness to accept the delegation of Meloni's party among the MEPs disposed to vote for her, and secondly if the MEPs of the other groups of the current 'Ursula majority' (EPP, S&D and Renew) were willing to accept the representatives of Fratelli d'Italia in their majority: a hypothesis that is currently quite unlikely, as it is easy to understand. Even more implausible is the possibility of a deciding role for the members of the Lega, who, belonging to the ID group, could only have their say on the presidency of the Commission if an alternative majority to the one that brought von der Leyen to Brussels in 2019 were to be formed: however, the current numbers say that an EPP-ECR-ID alliance would arrive at 330 MEPs, 31 fewer than those needed to elect the Commission presidency. It is true that there are still 90 MEPs not affiliated to groups: if some 30 of them chose to support a right-of-centre majority, the conditions could be created to bring von der Leyen back to Brussels, but this would imply the willingness of the entire EPP group to vote together with the ECR and ID, plus at least another 30 or so currently unaffiliated MEPs: a hypothesis that is difficult to achieve, considering that many of the ECR and especially ID MEPs at national level are in open political competition with parties to which many EPP MEPs belong.

Meloni's New Role in the European Council

In conclusion, one fact of some curiosity stands out from the European elections in Italy: on the one hand, despite being the second most voted party, the Partito Democratico and its secretary Elly Schlein are likely to exert a certain influence both in the next European Parliament and with respect to the other European institutions, since; on the other hand, despite her party being the most voted party and the delegation of Fratelli d'Italia the most numerous in the next Europarlament, it is not so sure that Giorgia

¹⁹ F. Baccini, [Everyone is looking for Meloni. After von der Leyen, Le Pen is also pushing for a \(difficult\) alliance in the EU Parliament](#), Eunews.it, 27.5.2024.

²⁰ L. Abboud, A. Kazmin, B. Hall, [Meloni and Le Pen: the relationship at the heart of European politics](#), Financial Times, 4.6.2024.

²¹ B. Moens, J. Barigazzi, [Round 2! Von der Leyen, Meloni and the battle for Brussels top jobs](#), politico.eu, 21.6.2024.

Meloni will be able to exert an effective influence in the legislature that is about to start in Brussels. On the other hand, the Italian Prime Minister could play a major role in the European Council as well as for other EU nominations²²: as the head of government of one of the most important Member States, Meloni will certainly be able to have a major influence on the general orientations and priorities of the EU for the coming years, especially if Le Pen wins the French parliamentary elections in July. In that case, in fact, although French President Macron would continue to participate in Council meetings, he would not be able to ignore the views of the French government, even if it were led by a radical right-winger like Marine Le Pen. This would clearly indirectly strengthen Meloni's position in the Council, and thus on the EU's future strategic agenda.

²² F. Baccini, [Meloni's wait for EU nominations. She doesn't contest leaders' proposals, but her turn will come in the EU Parliament](#), eunews.it, 18.6.2024.



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