

Italy at the Brink of a Political Landslide

The possible Impact of a Centre-Right Victory in the Parliamentary Elections on Italy and the EU

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The most recent electoral polls hypothesise a probable victory of the centre-right coalition in the next Italian parliamentary elections: however, although presenting themselves united, the parties of this alliance show differences in their programmes and strategies that could affect the action of the coalition government in the event of its victory.

- ▶ The mixed (majoritarian+proportional) electoral system may produce different effects from those indicated in the surveys
- ▶ An eventual government led by Eurosceptic and sovereignist right-wing parties could find stringent limits both in the domestic and European/international political context
- ▶ The severe economic crisis in which Italy finds itself depends on both internal (very high public debt, low wages, low employment) and external factors (pandemic and energy crisis)
- ▶ Temptations to follow anti-European and sovereignist positions could lead Italy to political and economic isolation, similar to what has been observed in the relationship between EU and Hungary
- ▶ For these reasons, the possibility of Italy joining the sovereignist anti-EU front seems slim even in the event of a victory for the centre-right coalition

Content

1	Introduction	3
2	The current electoral system	3
2.1	Characteristics of the electoral system	3
2.2	Constraints and thresholds	4
3	Parties and Coalitions	5
4	Party positions on international politics, migration and Europe	7
4.1	Foreign Policy	9
4.2	Migration	10
4.3	Europe	10
5	Political outlook according to opinion polls	12
6	Who is Giorgia Meloni and what her government would mean for Italy and Europe	15
7	Conclusions	18

Tables

Table 1:	Foreign Policy, Migration, European Policies	7
Table 2:	List preferences survey 7.9.2022 (%).....	13
Table 3:	Seats Chamber of Deputies according to survey 7.9.2022.....	13
Table 4:	Senate of the Republic seats according to survey 7.9.2022.....	14

1 Introduction

On 25 September 2022, Italy will vote for the renewal of Parliament. The appointment is of particular importance both for the electoral system used¹, a mixture of majoritarian and proportional, both due to the fact that following a constitutional reform that came into force in October 2020², the number of members of the two Houses was reduced by approximately one third: the Chamber of Deputies went from 630 to 400 members, and the Senate of the Republic from 315 to 200. The combined effect of these two elements will probably tend to favour the stronger parties, while it will significantly reduce the presence in Parliament of lists with smaller percentages of votes.

Italy unexpectedly arrives at the vote, following a refusal to take part in the vote of confidence in the Draghi government by the Lega, Forza Italia and Movimento 5 Stelle, three parties that until a few days before had instead been part of the majority that had supported the executive led by the former ECB president since February 2021³.

The most recent electoral polls hypothesise a likely victory of the most extreme forces within the centre-right coalition, but while presenting themselves as united, the parties of this alliance show differences in their programmes that are worth highlighting, as they could be reflected in the coalition's governing action in the event of its victory.

This cepAdhoc presents in its first parts the parties and coalitions running for election, the characteristics of the current electoral system, the strategic and programmatic differences between the various candidates on the most important European and international issues; in subsequent parts, it outlines what political scenarios might occur in Italy in the aftermath of the elections, what room for action a future sovereignist and Eurosceptic government might have and what all this might mean for Italy's internal and external balances in the near future.

2 The current electoral system

The electoral system that will be used for the 25 September elections includes a combination of majoritarian and proportional elements, in different proportions and with different thresholds⁴.

2.1 Characteristics of the electoral system

- 37% of the seats (147 in the Chamber of Deputies and 74 in the Senate) are allocated with a single-round majority system in an equal number of uninominal constituencies: in each constituency the candidate with the most votes is elected;
- 61% of the seats (245 in the Chamber of Deputies and 122 in the Senate) are divided proportionally between the coalitions and individual lists that have exceeded the thresholds set at the national level;

¹ Modifiche al sistema di elezione della Camera dei deputati e del Senato della Repubblica. Delega al Governo per la determinazione dei collegi elettorali uninominali e plurinominali, [GU n.264 del 11-11-2017](#).

² Legge Costituzionale 19 ottobre 2020, n. 1, Modifiche agli articoli 56, 57 e 59 della Costituzione in materia di riduzione del numero dei parlamentari, [GU n.261 del 21-10-2020](#).

³ Hannah Roberts, [Mario Draghi faces the end after Italy's coalition refuses to back him](#), Politico.eu, 20.7.2022.

⁴ Alessandro Chiaramonte/Roberto D'Alimonte, The new Italian electoral system and its effects on strategic coordination and disproportionality, *Italian Political Science*, 1/2018, 8-18.

- the distribution of seats is carried out at a national level for the Chamber of Deputies and at a regional level for the Senate: for this purpose, multi-nominal constituencies are established, in which the lists are presented in the form of blocked lists of candidates;
- 2% of seats (8 deputies and 4 senators) are reserved for the vote of Italians living abroad, who vote by letter, and use a proportional system divided into 4 constituencies⁵ and the possibility of expressing one or two preference votes among the candidates on the list of their choice, according to the number of seats allocated to their constituency⁶.

2.2 Constraints and thresholds

- each list must present its own programme and indicate its own political leader, as well as the possible affiliation with one or more lists to create a coalition: a single coalition at the national level obliges the cohesive lists to present only one candidate in each single-member constituency;
- there are various thresholds, i.e. percentages of votes below which one is not allowed to participate in the distribution of seats in multi-nominal constituencies. The thresholds are:
 - 3% of the votes obtained at national level, valid for single lists;
 - 20% of the votes obtained at regional level, valid only for the Senate, for single lists;
 - 20% of the votes obtained at the regional level, or election of two candidates in single-member constituencies, valid alternatively for lists representing recognised linguistic minorities presented exclusively in Regions with a special statute where special protection is provided for such minorities;
 - 10% of the votes obtained at the national level, valid for coalitions, provided they include at least one list that has exceeded one of the other three thresholds.
- the votes in favour of linked lists that have not obtained at least 1% of the votes at the national level, or, for the Senate only, 20% at the regional level, or, only for lists representing recognised linguistic minorities presented exclusively in Special Statute Regions where special protection is provided for such minorities, 20% at the regional level or the election of two candidates in single-member constituencies, do not count towards determining the coalition's electoral result (and therefore towards the attainment of the 10% threshold, if required);
- the lists linked in a coalition that does not reach the 10% threshold are nevertheless eligible for the distribution of seats if they have exceeded, in the various cases, at least one of the other envisaged thresholds;
- preference votes may not be cast between the candidates on a list: therefore, in the plurinominal constituencies, once the number of elected members pertaining to each list has been determined, the candidates are elected on the basis of the order in which they appear on the list;
- disjoint voting is also not allowed: therefore, it is not possible to vote at the same time for a candidate in a constituency with the uninominal vote and for a list not connected to him with the proportional vote.

⁵ Europe, including Russian Federation and Turkey; South America; North and Central America; Africa, Asia, Oceania and Antarctica.

⁶ Two seats are assigned to the Europe, South America and North America constituencies for the Chamber of Deputies, and two seats to the Europe and South America constituencies for the Senate; all other constituencies are assigned one seat.

3 Parties and Coalitions

The electoral system favours the formation of coalitions, thanks to lower thresholds than those required for lists running individually. For this reason, many parties have decided to present themselves within a coalition, instead of running individually.

The line-ups that could gather the most support are two alliances, one centre-right and one centre-left. The centre-right alliance includes four parties: Fratelli d'Italia, Lega, Forza Italia and Noi Moderati. Fratelli d'Italia (Fdi) is a right-wing party founded in 2012 and chaired since 2014 by Giorgia Meloni. It is described as a national-conservative party, with a strong nationalist, traditionalist, post-fascist and sovereignist matrix. Its symbol includes the tricolour flame, which was also used as a symbol by the Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI), a party with neo-fascist roots. In the 2013 and 2018 general elections, Fdi had presented itself in coalition with the Popolo della Libertà (later Forza Italia) and Lega Nord, only to separate from them in the course of the legislatures, having decided to remain in opposition.⁷

According to a poll of 9 September⁸, Fdi could turn out to be the most voted party in the next elections: it is credited with 27% of the consensus, and its leader Giorgia Meloni (15.1.1977) in case of victory could become the first woman Prime Minister in Italy. Giorgia Meloni comes from radical right-wing circles, started her political career in the Fronte della Gioventù, the youth organisation of the MSI, and has already been Minister of Youth from 2008 to 2011, in the IV Berlusconi government⁹. In the European Parliament, Fdi is a member of the group of the Party of European Conservatives and Reformists, which Meloni herself chairs and which belongs to the Eurosceptic right-wing area. Fdi remained in opposition throughout the 2018-2022 legislature.

Lega, whose full name is currently Lega per Salvini Premier, replaced the Lega Nord per l'Indipendenza della Padania in 2019. Lega was initially founded as a secessionist party, then as a party for the transformation of the Italian state into a federal one, to obtain greater political and fiscal autonomy for the northern regions. In recent years, it has tried to establish itself as a national party, accepting its conservative, pro-Catholic, populist and Eurosceptic matrix. Its current leader is Matteo Salvini (9.3.1973), who has been its secretary since 2013, and since 2004 he has alternated between the posts of Italian MP and MEP. From 2018 to 2019, in coalition with the 5 Star Movement, he was Minister of the Interior in the Conte I government. In recent years he has been criticised for his closeness to neo-fascism¹⁰ and to Vladimir Putin¹¹. Lega was also part of the majority supporting the Draghi government until July 2022. In the European Parliament, Lega is part of the right-wing nationalist group Identity and Democracy.

Forza Italia (FI) is a centre-right party, founded in 1994 and inspired by the principles of modern moderate liberal conservatism. In the European Parliament it is part of the European People's Party (EPP). Its leader is Silvio Berlusconi (29.9.1936), first an entrepreneur in the fields of construction, publishing,

⁷ Sofia Ventura, [Giorgia Meloni und Ihre Partei Fratelli d'Italia. Eine personalisierte Partei zwischen rechtsextrem und rechtsradikal](#), Friedrich Ebert Stiftung Italia, August 2022.

⁸ Michela Morsa, [L'ultimo sondaggio prima dello stop: Fdi vola al 27% e stacca il Pd, il M5s raggiunge la Lega](#), Open.online, 9.9.2022.

⁹ Giorgio Ghiglione, [How Giorgia Meloni became the star of Italy's far right](#), Financial Review, 18.8.2022.

¹⁰ Franco Battel, [Rechtspopulismus in Italien. Matteo Salvinis fragwürdige Nähe zum Neofaschismus](#), SRF 8.5.2019.

¹¹ Giovanni Savino, [The Italian Russophile Rightist Parties: a New Love for Moscow?](#), RUSSIAN ANALYTICAL DIGEST No. 167, 6.5.2015, 8-11.

media and sport, then entered politics in 1994 and four times Prime Minister. In 2013, he was sentenced for tax fraud and false accounting to four years' imprisonment, three of which were pardoned as a result of the pardon provided by Law 241 of 2006¹².

Noi Moderati (NM) is a union of lists with a conservative liberal orientation.

Four parties are united in the centre-left coalition: the Partito Democratico (PD), +Europa, Alleanza Verdi/Sinistra, and Impegno Civico. The PD is a centre-left party founded in 2007, reformist, pro-European, anti-fascist and close to social democratic positions. In the European Parliament it is part of the European Socialist Party. Its leader Enrico Letta (20.8.1966), from a Catholic-democratic background, was Prime Minister from 2013 to 2014, as well as several times Minister and Euro MP from 2004 to 2006¹³.

+Europa (+Eu) is a party with a pro-European and liberal orientation, in favour of the creation of a United States of Europe, the European Parliament's propositional legislative capacity, the establishment of real European ministers and the direct election of the President of the European Commission. In the European Parliament he is a member of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe. Its Leader is Emma Bonino (9.3.1948), European Commissioner for Consumer Policy, Fisheries and Humanitarian Aid from 1995 to 1999, a minister several times in various centre-left governments and known for her liberal positions, in favour of euthanasia, the liberalisation of soft drugs and regulated access to voluntary termination of pregnancy, among others¹⁴.

Alleanza Verdi/Sinistra (AVS) is a list uniting the Europa Verde (Green Europe), an environmentalist party, and Sinistra Italiana (Italian Left), close to socialist, progressive, anti-fascist and moderately pro-European left-wing positions.

Impegno Civico (IC) is the movement founded in July 2022 by Luigi Di Maio (6.6.1986), a former leading member of the 5 Stars Movement, Minister in the two Conte governments from 2018 to 2021 and Foreign Minister in the Draghi government. IC was founded as an expression party of the parliamentary group *Insieme per il Futuro*, which was born in June 2022 in dissent with the 5 Stars Movement's failure to support the Draghi government with respect to sending arms to Ukraine and Italy's commitment to NATO¹⁵.

The so-called (self-described) Terzo Polo is an alliance that unites Antonio Calenda's Azione (Az) and Matteo Renzi's Italia Viva (IV). Azione is a party with a social-liberal, strongly pro-European and anti-populist orientation. Its leader and founder Carlo Calenda (9.4.1973), after a long managerial career was Minister of Economic Development in Matteo Renzi's government from 2016 to 2018, and has been an MEP since 2019. He left the Partito Democratico in September 2019 in disagreement with the party's decision to enter the government in coalition with the Movimento 5 Stelle. In August 2021, after an initial coalition agreement with the Partito Democratico, Calenda withdrew because the alliance would also have to include the Greens, Sinistra Italiana and Luigi Di Maio's party¹⁶. Italia Viva is a liberal, reformist, pro-European and Atlanticist party, opposed to nationalist and populist positions. The party was founded in 2019 by Matteo Renzi (11.1.1975), former Prime Minister and Secretary of

¹² [Silvio Berlusconi sentenced for tax fraud](#), BBC.com, 26.10.2012.

¹³ [Italien: Letta neuer Chef der Sozialdemokraten](#), bote.ch, 14.3.2021.

¹⁴ Cristina Cabrejas, [Bonino on the danger of the Italian right and the M5S to Europe](#), Euractiv.com, 22.2.2018.

¹⁵ Chiara Albanese, [Draghi's Coalition Roiled as Minister Quits Party on Ukraine](#), Bloomberg.com, 21.6.2022.

¹⁶ [Italy's centre-left suffers blow as centrist party quits electoral pact](#), Euractiv.com, 8.8.2022.

the Partito Democratico. Renzi was one of the architects of the end of Government II in January 2021, which was followed by the birth of the Draghi government in the following February¹⁷.

The 5 Stars Movement (M5S) is a party founded in 2009 by comedian Beppe Grillo and digital entrepreneur Gianroberto Casaleggio. It presented itself as a 'non-party', refusing to define itself as right-wing or left-wing, and aiming at direct participation of members and sympathisers using the web, in polemic with the oligarchies and lack of transparency of traditional parties. The five stars contained in the party's name represent five key points for the movement, namely: common goods, integral ecology, social justice, technological innovation and eco-social market economy¹⁸. The current political leader of the M5S is Giuseppe Conte (8.8.1964)¹⁹, formerly a lawyer and professor of civil law at the University of Florence, then Prime Minister from 2018 to 2019 in coalition with Lega²⁰ and from 2019 to 2021 with the PD, IV and the left-wing party Liberi e Uguali.

4 Party positions on international politics, migration and Europe

Although we are aware that election programmes are not always fully reliable for understanding the actual positions on individual programmatic points, it was considered appropriate to recall the main positions of the parties on three specific thematic areas: foreign policy, migration and Europe.

There are two reasons for this choice: firstly, because the three areas indicated are the most useful for understanding what effect the different parties and coalitions may have on the future international and European dimension, as well as on the regulation of an issue as central to international relations as the management of migratory phenomena. Secondly, by highlighting the positions of the parties in these areas, it is easier to highlight not only the strategic differences between the two coalitions and the parties running alone, but also the inconsistencies, which do exist, between movements that belong to the same coalition, and which in the event of victory would be called upon to be part of the same government. For this reason, the table below highlights both the proposals attributable to the coalitions, and those presented by the individual parties that are part of them: in some cases, as will be seen, the individual proposals are not always homogeneous, but rather divergences are noted that raise legitimate doubts on the effectiveness of government action should that coalition win the elections and assume the government of the country.

Table 1: Foreign Policy, Migration, European Policies

Issue	Party/Coalition	Position
Foreign Policy	Centre-right - Cdx (Fdl, Lega, FI, NM)	Protection of the national interest and defence of the Fatherland (Cdx)
		Respect for NATO commitments, including support for Ukraine and diplomatic solutions to the conflict (Cdx)
		Reaffirming Italy's centrality in the Mediterranean (Cdx)
		Defence of Europe's classical and Judaeo-Christian roots (Fdl)
		Diversification of foreign sources of energy supply, exploitation of the Mediterranean corridor and transformation of Italy into the European energy hub (Fdl)
		Strengthening relations with the United States (FI)

¹⁷ Hannah Roberts, [Matteo Renzi pulls party out of Italian government](#), Politico.com, 13.1.2021.

¹⁸ Raffaele Alberto Ventura, [What is the meaning of the Five Star Movement?](#), opendemocracy.net, 1.5.2018.

¹⁹ [Italy: Conte to lead 'government of change'](#), Ansaamed.info, 1.6.2018.

²⁰ [Five Star and League: Italy populist leaders close to government deal](#), BBC.com, 10.5.2018.

	Centre-left - Csx (PD, AVS, +Eu, IC)	<p>EU, NATO and UN as a reference for Italy (PD / IC)</p> <p>Strongly pro-European foreign policy (PD)</p> <p>Full support for Ukraine in the conflict with Russia (PD)</p> <p>Promotion of a common European defence (PD)</p> <p>Increase in development cooperation spending to 0.7% of GDP (PD)</p> <p>Reform of the global architecture of finance within the G7 and G20 (AVS)</p> <p>Introduction of European fiscal instruments to compensate for economic imbalances (AVS)</p> <p>Relaunch of the objectives of the Paris Agreement on climate change (+EU)</p>
	Terzo Polo (Az, IV)	Supporting European strategic autonomy and adopting a common foreign policy
	5 Stars Movement (M5S)	Confirmation of NATO and EU membership
Migration	Centre-right - Cdx (Fdi, Lega, FI, NM)	<p>Extraordinary European plan for Africa's development (Cdx)</p> <p>New European Pact on Immigration and Asylum (FI)</p> <p>EU-run hot-spots in non-European territories to assess asylum applications (Cdx)</p> <p>Strengthening the Memorandum with Libya and the Libyan Coast Guard (Fdi / Lega)</p> <p>Naval blockade (Fdi / FI)</p> <p>European partnership agreements on immigration with countries of departure and transit (Lega/ FI)</p> <p>Restoration of bans on foreign NGOs' entry, stay and transit in national waters (Lega)</p> <p>Expansion of the list of Safe Countries to facilitate expulsions and agreements with countries of origin for repatriations (Lega)</p>
	Centre-left – Csx (PD, AVS, +Eu, IC)	<p>Putting Africa on the priority agenda (+EU)</p> <p>Overcoming the Dublin Regulation (Csx)</p> <p>Widening humanitarian corridors (PD / AVS)</p> <p>Close agreement between Italian and Libyan governments (+Eu / AVS)</p> <p>Creation of a Migration Policy Coordination Agency (PD)</p> <p>Activate agreements to certify migrants' skills in their countries of origin (+Eu)</p> <p>0.70% of Gross National Income for partnerships to support development and poverty eradication by 2030 (+Eu)</p> <p>Re-establish rules for entry of skilled labour into companies (IC)</p>
	Terzo Polo (Az, IV)	<p>Overcoming the Dublin Treaty and the Common European Asylum System</p> <p>Cooperation agreements with countries of origin and transit and planning of regular migration flows according to labour market needs</p> <p>Distinction between humanitarian refugees and economic migrants</p> <p>Guaranteeing the rescue of refugees at sea at all times</p>
	5 Stars Movement (M5S)	<p>Adoption of an EU mechanism for migration flow management and first response operations and subsequent reception, distribution and distribution among EU countries</p> <p>Combating human trafficking</p>
Europe	Centre-right – Cdx	Full membership of the EU integration process (more political and less bureaucratic EU) (Cdx)

(Fdi, Lega, FI, NM)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revision of the Stability Pact and economic governance (Cdx) Promotion of a common European defence (Cdx) Reform of the European Green Deal and Fit For 55 (Lega) Relaunch of European integration for a Europe of Homelands (Fdi) Maintaining unanimous voting in the EU Council (Lega) Moving from unanimity to qualified majority voting for EU Council decisions (FI)
Centre-left – Csx (PD, AVS, +Eu, IC)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reform of the EU Treaties, abolition of the right of veto (PD / +EU) Revision of the Stability Pact in the sense of a new Sustainability Pact (PD / CI) Effective centrality of the European Parliament without national vetoes (AVS) Reform of the Treaties in accordance with the Future of Europe Conference (AVS) Enlargement of the EU towards neighbouring countries, starting with the Balkans (PD) Relaunching the Mediterranean and cooperation institutions against regional and systemic crises (PD) Creation of a European Confederation of the 27 member states with the candidate countries (PD) Direct election of the Commission President using the 'Spitzenkandidaten' method (+EU) Combine the roles of President of the Commission and President of the EU Council (+EU) Support the creation of the United States of Europe (+EU)
Terzo Polo (Az, IV)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Federalisation of the European Institutions Reform of the EU decision-making process and abolition of unanimous decision-making
5 Stars Movement (M5S)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reform of the Stability Pact with revision of the current parameters and removal of green investments from the deficit calculation Energy recovery fund financed by common European debt issuance, modelled on the Next Generation EU Make common European debt issuance permanent

4.1 Foreign Policy

Regarding foreign policy, both the Centre-Right and Centre-Left declare allegiance to NATO and ties with the West: however, while Forza Italia and Fratelli d'Italia reaffirm Italy's closeness to the US and intend to respect Italy's commitments also in Ukraine, Lega has repeatedly questioned the effectiveness of sanctions against Russia, fearing that their effects are excessively penalising for Western economies²¹. On the other hand, in the common programme of the centre-right there are several references to the protection of the national interest and the 'defence of the homeland' - a terminology that has long been present in the political lexicon of Fratelli d'Italia and Lega, to which we will return later -, from which it can be deduced that at least for the Italian Right, membership of the Atlantic alliance does not exclude potential divergences of the Western consensus with respect to Italy's interest, which Fdi and Lega intend to champion in the near future. The same approach of 'competitive membership' in NATO is not, however, shared by Forza Italia, which in its programme hopes instead for a strengthening of relations with the United States. To the general proposal of the centre-right to support the

²¹ Hannah Roberts, [Italy's Salvini says West should rethink sanctions for Russia](#), 4.9.2022.

centrality of Italy's role in the Mediterranean, Fratelli d'Italia adds the idea of creating an energy corridor in the Mediterranean of which Italy should become the privileged hub with respect to Europe.

More consistent are the positions within the centre-left as far as foreign policy is concerned: the centrality of the Atlantic alliance and full support for Ukraine are in no way questioned, while the centrality of Europeanism in international relations is reaffirmed. On the other hand, there are also calls for the creation of a common European defence system (Partito Democratico), a reform of global financial governance within the G7 and G20, as well as the use of European financial instruments to combat economic inequality in the old continent (Alleanza Verdi/Sinistra), and a more stringent implementation of the measures required by the Paris agreements to combat climate change (+ Europa).

Also along the same lines are the Third Pole and the 5 Star Movement: to the adhesion to the Atlantic alliance, shared by both movements, the Third Pole adds the will to commit to the realisation of an effective common and cohesive European foreign policy.

4.2 Migration

In Italy, migration management is one of the most heartfelt specific issues in terms of international relations, given the strong influx of migratory flows, especially from North Africa, to Italian shores observed in recent years. The issue has been a bone of contention between national political forces and European institutions, accused - especially by the nationalist right, but also by centre-left exponents such as Matteo Renzi - of not having done enough to reduce the weight of these migratory flows on the reception capacities of Mediterranean countries alone, starting with Italy. It is not surprising, therefore, that the issue has gained considerable relevance in the current election campaign, even in the face of an increase in migrant landings from the coasts of North Africa in the summer of 2022 compared to the years 2019-2021²².

A point that is substantially shared by all the political candidates concerns the will to 'Europeanise' migration management, with the effective involvement of all the EU member states and the overcoming of the Dublin agreements. Greater diversifications concern the attitude to be taken towards the migrants currently attempting to reach Italian shores by sea: the centre-right parties hope for a fight against landings through greater involvement of Europe (Forza Italia), the closure of ports to ships bringing migrants (Lega) or the implementation of a 'naval blockade' (Fratelli d'Italia). The naval blockade should be understood as 'a European mission to stop departures, in cooperation with the Libyan authorities'²³, on the model of the agreement between Europe and Turkey to stop migrants from the east, with a simultaneous opening on African territory of hotspots where migrants could be identified, distinguishing real refugees from illegal immigrants by welcoming only the former in the EU member states²⁴. In fact, the proposal to make agreements with non-EU countries to facilitate the management of migration flows is also present in the programmes of the centre-left, such as +Europa, the Third Pole and the 5 Star Movement.

4.3 Europe

On Europe, the positions of the centre-right coalition are largely homogeneous, but there is no lack of substantial strategic differences between its individual parties. In fact, if on the one hand a general

²² Frédéric Bobin, [Italy again becomes main entry point for migrants arriving in Europe](#), Le Monde, 29.8.2022.

²³ [Italian leadership nominee calls for blockade on Libya to stop migrants](#), Lybiaupdate.com, 8.8.2022.

²⁴ [Sbarchi irregolari, Meloni: "Blocco navale con missione europea"](#), Adn Kronos, 5.8.2022.

adhesion to the European integration process emerges, in favour of a more political and less bureaucratic EU, and everyone in the coalition declares that they want a revision of the stability pact and economic governance (without, however, specifying what kind of changes should be introduced) and a common defence policy (also in this case without clarifying how the sector should be governed and financed), on the other hand there are significant differences on what is proposed to become the future regulation of Europe.

The leader of Fratelli d'Italia Giorgia Meloni, in particular, imagines an Italy as a protagonist in Europe and in the world, and envisions a revision of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (the Italian instrument for implementing the Next Generation EU)²⁵ and on European funds to make more efficient use of European funding, although for the moment she does not specify what changes should take place. This suggests a purely instrumental vision of Europe for Italy, a source of resources that the national government should be free to use as it sees fit, without taking too much account of the demands for reform that Brussels has attached to the granting of funding. Meloni also speaks of a 'Europe of the Homelands' and 'of the Peoples', which would place the nation states at the centre of the European decision-making process, consequently resizing the spaces of intervention of the community institutions: a substantially confederal Europe, and much less integrated than e.g. as imagined by the Conference on the Future of Europe²⁶. Lega is also in favour of a scaled-down EU in its decision-making capacity, especially in its most recent programmes, such as the Green Deal and the Fit for 55, which it considers excessively invasive and dangerous for Italy's national interests²⁷. These distinctions could create a contrast with Forza Italia, which is tied to more purely pro-European positions, being e.g., in favour of a majority European vote in the European Parliament. In fact, its leader Berlusconi - in line with his European position in the EPP - has reacted to these anti-EU resistances by foreseeing a possible exit from the coalition if, once in government, Meloni and Salvini were to take excessively Eurosceptic and nationalist positions²⁸.

The EU as imagined by the centre-left, on the other hand, certainly appears more integrated and democratic, with treaty reforms to move as far as possible to majority voting, to reduce the risk of block votes from individual member states, and a greater decision-making weight of the Europarlament compared to the role of the Council. The Stability Pact should be reformed to adapt it to the economic and structural needs of the moment, transforming it into a more solidarity-based Sustainability Pact, which would decouple spending on ecological transition and development from the calculation of the budget deficit. The PD would also like to see the introduction of European tax resources, such as the global minimum tax on multinationals and the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism, i.e. the duty on the import of goods that are produced without complying with EU environmental standards, to avoid unfair competition towards European companies obliged to reduce their emissions or pay for those produced²⁹. The most openly pro-European proposals come from +Europa, which advocates the direct election of the President of the Commission with the 'Spitzenkandidaten' method, to accentuate the democratic nature of the choice, to merge the roles of President of the Commission and President of the EU Council, for greater outward unity of European governance, and to support the creation of the United States of Europe, in a fully European federalist sense³⁰. With respect to possible reforms of the

²⁵ European Commission, [Italy's recovery and resilience plan](#).

²⁶ Conference on the Future of Europe, Report of Final Outcomes, May 2022, v. in part. proposte 20-25.

²⁷ [ELEZIONI 2022/ Salvini \(Lega\): alle imprese serve la pace, cambiamo Green Deal e patto di stabilità](#), Il Sussidiario, 1.9.2022.

²⁸ Giampaolo Grassi, [Berlusconi nella corsa Meloni-Salvini: "Agganciati all'Ue o io fuori"](#), Ansa.it, 15.9.2022.

²⁹ Roberto Castaldi, [Il Partito Democratico: argine europeista al nazionalismo sovranista](#), Euractiv.it, 22.8.2022.

³⁰ Roberto Castaldi, [Più Europa chiede gli Stati Uniti d'Europa](#), Euractiv.it, 2.9.2022.

Treaties, the other allies of the centre-left coalition are also strongly in favour of a strengthening of European governance, and they hope that the proposals of the Conference on the Future of Europe will be adequately taken into account: therefore, a possible centre-left government would have less difficulty holding the coalition together than the centre-right.

Also along the same lines are the Third Pole, which calls for a federal turn in the EU and wants to overcome unanimity voting, and the 5 Star Movement, which - like the PD - calls for a reform of the stability and growth pact with the revision of the current parameters and the separation of green investments from the deficit calculation. The 5 Stars also propose an 'Energy Recovery Fund' financed by the issuance of common European debt, on the model of the Next Generation Eu, to support families and businesses against the consequences of the energy crisis and to encourage investments in renewable sources. The difference between Centre-Left and 5Star is sharper with respect to the European commitment in Ukraine: Giuseppe Conte's party is in fact against sending more weapons to Kiev, while a common European defence project for peace and security should be supported - even if it is not specified how this should happen³¹.

5 Political outlook according to opinion polls

In Italy, it is forbidden to publish election polls in the 15 days preceding elections. Therefore, the latest data on the basis of which it is possible to make predictions on the outcome of the vote are those collected between 7 and 10 September.

According to a poll published in the *Corriere della Sera*, as of 7 September, the centre-right coalition would collect 46.6% of the consensus, against 27.2% of the centre-left, 6.7% of the Terzo Polo (Action + Italia Viva) and 14.5% of the 5 Star Movement. Within the two coalitions, Fratelli d'Italia on the right (25.1%, likely first party) and Partito Democratico (20.5%) prevail, with Lega estimated at 12.5%, Forza Italia at 8%, + Europa at 2.5% and Impegno Civico at 0.8%. Voter turnout is estimated at 66.6%, with 10.1% of voters still undecided on which party to vote for³².

The percentage data on the preference for individual parties is not sufficiently indicative for an adequate perspective on the actual outcome of the vote: in fact, as has been indicated above, with the proportional vote only 61% of the seats available in the two chambers are allocated in multi-nominal constituencies (i.e. 245 out of 400 in the Chamber of Deputies and 122 out of 200 in the Senate of the Republic respectively), while 37% (147 in the Chamber and 74 in the Senate) are allocated by the majority method in uninominal constituencies. Since the two votes are not separable, voting for a candidate in the uninominal constituency simultaneously attributes the vote to one of the lists of the coalition to which he or she is linked, and vice versa: by voting for one of the lists of a coalition, one attributes the vote in the majority quota to the corresponding candidate, while it is not possible to express preferences for individual candidates in the proportional quota in the lists of competing parties.

This means that the so-called 'pull effect' of the list vote may be reflected on the majority vote, but also the opposite: a party's following in a constituency may benefit the candidate in the uninominal quota even if he or she does not belong to the strongest party in that coalition. E.g. in a constituency where Fratelli d'Italia is the strongest party in the centre-right coalition, this may favour the election of a candidate in the uninominal quota even if this is not an expression of Fratelli d'Italia, but repre-

³¹ Roberto Castaldi, [Europa: quello che il Movimento 5 Stelle non dice](#), Euractiv.it, 9.9.2022.

³² [Balzo di Fdi al 25,1%, cala il Pd. I 5 Stelle sopra la Lega](#), corriere.it.

sents Lega or Forza Italia. In conclusion, there could be a multiplier effect on the proportional consensus of the individual parties, which could see a higher number of MPs elected than they are entitled to on a proportional basis, precisely because of the double proportional + majoritarian system adopted on this occasion.

Table 2: List preferences survey 7.9.2022 (%)

Coalitions/Lists							
Centre-right		Centre-left		M5S	Terzo Polo	Others	
Fratelli d'Italia	25,1	Partito Democratico	20,5	14,5	6,7	Italexit	3
Lega	12,5	+Europa	2,5			Unione Popolare	1
Forza Italia	8	Verdi/Sinistra	3,4			Altre liste	1
Noi Moderati	1	Impegno Civico	0,8				
Total	46,6	Total	27,2			Total	5

Source: Opinion Polls Corriere della Sera 7.9.2022

The same Corriere della sera poll makes projections on the basis of the list preferences indicated by the demoscopic survey analysed, and highlights the possible multiplier effect just mentioned: in the Chamber of Deputies, the centre-right coalition would obtain 249 seats out of 400, against the 82 of the centre-left, the 26 of the 5 Star Movement and the 17 of the Terzo Polo, plus 11 seats to other lists, while in the Senate the coalition led by Giorgia Meloni would obtain 121 seats out of 200, the centre-left 43, the 5 Star Movement 18 and the Terzo Polo 9, plus 4 seats for the Italexit party³³.

The reason for this discrepancy lies above all in the peculiarity of the majoritarian system, where, as is well known, a relative majority is sufficient to obtain the seat up for grabs: that is to say, the success of a list, even a minimal one, may allow the corresponding coalition to obtain a majority in the constituency and elect its own representative, even if belonging to a party other than the 'leading' party of the coalition.

Table 3: Seats Chamber of Deputies according to survey 7.9.2022

	Majority seats	Proportional seats	Abroad seats
Fratelli d'Italia	69	64	2
Lega	34	32	1
Forza Italia	20	20	1
Noi Moderati	6	0	0
Total Centre-right		249	
Partito Democratico	11	56	2
+Europa	1	0	0
Verdi/Sinistra	2	9	0
Impegno Civico	1	0	0
Total Centre-left		82	
Movimento 5 Stelle	0	36	1
Terzo Polo	0	17	1
Italexit	0	8	0
Others	3	3	0

Source: Opinion Polls Corriere della Sera 7.9.2022

³³ In addition to these, there are 8 seats in the Chamber of Deputies and 4 in the Senate assigned through the two foreign constituencies, in which Italian citizens living abroad vote: in the Chamber of Deputies, 2 would be assigned to Fratelli d'Italia, 2 to the Democratic Party, and one each to the Lega, Forza Italia, Impegno Civico, and Terzo Polo. In the Senate, on the other hand, 1 seat would be allocated to Fratelli d'Italia, 1 to the Lega, 1 to the Partito Democratico, and 1 to the 5 Stars Movement.

Table 4: Senate of the Republic seats according to survey 7.9.2022

	Majority seats	Proportional seats	Abroad seats
Fratelli d'Italia	32	31	1
Lega	16	16	1
Forza Italia	11	10	0
Noi Moderati	3	0	0
Total Centre-right		121	
Partito Democratico	6	29	1
+Europa	1	0	0
Verdi/Sinistra	1	5	0
Impegno Civico	0	0	0
Total Centre-left		43	
Movimento 5 Stelle	0	18	1
Terzo Polo	0	9	0
Italexit	0	4	0
Others	4	0	0

Source: Opinion Polls Corriere della Sera 7.9.2022

In any case, it should be recalled that the poll on the basis of which the indicated projections were made was conducted on 7 September, more than two weeks before the elections: a significant time interval for an electorate such as the Italian one, which in the past has always proved very fluid and difficult to predict.

In 2018, for example, the last polls available before the vote proved to be unreliable, as for all the candidate parties there was an over- or underestimation of the figure indicated by the polls. Considering the conditions leading up to the 25 September elections, and the profound changes in the Italian party system that have taken place in recent weeks, it is quite likely that such deviations may be repeated this time as well³⁴.

A recent study³⁵, conducted after the 10 September stop to the polls, highlights another very important aspect: the combination of the majority and proportional vote is such that, according to the most reliable estimates, to obtain an absolute majority in both chambers the centre-right coalition would have to achieve a consistent victory both in the list vote and in the uninominal constituencies. In particular, if the centre-right were to obtain e.g. 42% of the seats (not the votes) in the proportional quota, it would have to win in 65% of the uninominal constituencies to achieve an absolute majority in both chambers, whereas if it were to obtain 45% of the proportional seats, 60% of the uninominal seats would be sufficient. Concretely, the 45+60 scenario would mean a victory in 44 out of 74 uninominal constituencies: a prospect only possible if the political opponents picked up small consensuses and only in certain areas of the country. The centre-left, for example, can win in several constituencies in regions that tend to be progressive such as Tuscany, Emilia-Romagna, Trentino-Alto Adige and in large cities, but if it were the only real competitor of the centre-right, one could expect an exploit of the coalition led by Giorgia Meloni in the rest of the country, both in proportional and in majority seats.

As is well known, in majoritarian systems, the candidate with the most votes (first-past-the-post) wins even if the gap with the second is minimal, and a single contender (party or coalition) can achieve a

³⁴ Massimo Taddei, [I risultati delle elezioni del 2018 sono stati diversi rispetto a quanto previsto dai sondaggi](#), La-voce.info, 11.8.2018.

³⁵ [Reddito di cittadinanza, la variabile che rende contendibili nove collegi del Sud](#), Huffingtonpost.it, 21.9.2022.

great victory even with a limited advantage over its competitors, if the gap is well distributed throughout the country, so as to win (albeit by a small margin) in many constituencies. Now, assuming that the centre-left manages to prevail only in the regions and areas indicated, the centre-right's large victory would only occur if there were no other competitor capable of contending for it in some constituencies in the rest of the country. In the last few days, according to the aforementioned analysis, there has been a growth in the consensus of the 5 Star Movement in various regions of Southern Italy: a consistent affirmation that, in the uninominal constituencies, could be decisive for the assignment of some majority seats. If such a scenario were to occur, the necessary condition for the centre-right to win an absolute majority would therefore no longer be so easily achievable, and the forecasts on the possible future political order in post-vote Italy would also have to be revised.

If the majority share of the seats were no longer so favourable to the centre-right, the number of seats allocated in the proportional share, which are in any case two-thirds of the total, would once again become predominant. Here the results achieved by the individual parties, also within the individual coalitions, will have to be taken into account in order to understand which political direction Italy might take after 25 September. Paradoxically, a great affirmation of Fratelli d'Italia might then not be enough to bring Giorgia Meloni to the head of the government, in the event that her coalition partners do not achieve consistent results in their turn, especially if at the same time their adversaries obtain shares of consensus not too far from those of the centre-right. In the final analysis, a big Meloni victory could even be counterproductive for her government ambitions if it is achieved by taking votes away from her main partner, Matteo Salvini's Lega.

For all these reasons, it is advisable that when the official results of the Italian vote are available, one should take a close look at the performance of all the parties in the race, not just the top vote-getters, both outside and inside the coalitions.

6 Who is Giorgia Meloni and what her government would mean for Italy and Europe

Giorgia Meloni is undoubtedly the political personality on whom most attention is focused in the upcoming elections. There are several reasons for this: on the one hand, Meloni represents the party that is credited with gaining the most support at the ballot box, and she is the first woman who could probably become Prime Minister in Italy. On the other hand, Meloni's party is known to have maintained an at least ambiguous relationship over the years, if not in certain cases of suspected contiguity, with the period of the Fascist dictatorship: it is no coincidence that the Tricolour Flame still stands out on the symbol of Fratelli d'Italia, in deliberate continuity with the Movimento Sociale Italiano, a party that arose in the aftermath of Italy's defeat in World War II and declared its intention to preserve the legacy of the National Fascist Party in the nascent Republic.

Furthermore, Giorgia Meloni has distinguished herself in the recent past for having shared openly sovereignist positions, on several occasions questioning the usefulness for Italy to be part of international and supranational fora such as NATO, the European Union and the Single Currency.

During the election campaign, however, Meloni went to great lengths to reassure national and international public opinion that, in the event of victory, her government would remain loyal to the Atlantic alliance and the European Union. On the other hand, as is also well indicated in her party's programme, an eventual centre-right government would have to review the role of the EU in order to "re-launch

the system of European integration, for a Europe of Homelands, founded on the interest of peoples and capable of facing the challenges of our time."³⁶

'Fatherland' is a fundamental word in the current political communication of Giorgia Meloni, who defines the supporters of her party as 'patriots': she emphasises how, for her, Italy's interest should always prevail over international and EU ties, with the consequence that the obligations associated with EU membership should only be binding to the extent that they are compatible with national interests. This is a strategic choice, rather than a lexical one: if the 'true patriots' are those who share Giorgia Meloni's positions, in her eyes those who propose different relations with the EU are not patriots, and therefore do not effectively defend the national interest.

That Meloni's relationship with Europe has been rather confrontational in the past is nothing new: only in 2018, Fratelli d'Italia had presented in Parliament a proposal for constitutional reform³⁷ aimed to introduce "the principle of sovereignty with respect to the European Union order": more specifically, the proposal aimed at replacing a part of the current art. of the 117 Constitution ("Legislative power shall be exercised by the State and the Regions in compliance with the Constitution, as well as with the constraints deriving from the Community order and international obligations") with the formula "legislative power shall be exercised by the State and the Regions in compliance with their competences", deleting the whole part relating to international and European obligations. Another proposed amendment concerned Article 11 of the Constitution, which currently reads 'Italy repudiates war as an instrument of offence against the freedom of other peoples and as a means of settling international disputes; it consents, on an equal footing with other States, to the limitations of sovereignty necessary for an order that ensures peace and justice among Nations; it promotes and encourages international organisations directed to that end.' To this formula, Fratelli d'Italia proposed to add the following paragraph: "The rules of the Treaties and other acts of the European Union are applicable on equal terms and only insofar as they are compatible with the principles of sovereignty, democracy and subsidiarity, as well as with the other principles of the Italian Constitution."³⁸

In recent months, and especially in the last few weeks, Meloni has strongly downgraded this Eurosceptic orientation, which in previous years had brought her very close to Marine Le Pen, Jarosław Kaczyński and Viktor Orbán, as well as to Lega leader Matteo Salvini himself, in a joint front that made no secret of wanting to change the European order in such a way as to increase the decision-making weight of the member states with respect to the constraints currently provided for by the Treaties.³⁹

In fact, during the current election campaign Meloni has used much more condescending tones towards the EU, at least in her television encounters: instead, during the rallies where she meets her supporters, the leader of Fratelli d'Italia dusts off her traditional sovereigntism, stating verbatim: 'They say that in Europe they are worried about Meloni. What will happen? That the funnies are over and Italy too will defend its national interests⁴⁰, foreshadowing possible clashes with other member states, accused of unilaterally defending their own interests to the detriment of those of the rest of the EU - and of Italy.

³⁶ [Programma Fratelli d'Italia 2022](#), p. 37.

³⁷ [Proposta di legge costituzionale nr. 291/18](#), Modifiche agli articoli 11 e 117 della Costituzione, concernenti l'introduzione del principio di sovranità rispetto all'ordinamento dell'Unione europea.

³⁸ Cataldo Intrieri, [È la democrazia, Crosetto. Il piano di Meloni per far uscire l'Italia dall'Unione europea \(e la dissimulazione dei suoi su Twitter\)](#), Linkiesta.it. 16.8.2022.

³⁹ Georgi Gotev, [Orbán, Le Pen, Salvini, Kaczyński join forces to impact on the future of EU](#), Euractiv.com, 2.7.2021.

⁴⁰ [Meloni: "L'Europa è preoccupata? È finita la pacchia"](#), La7.t, 12.9.2022.

During the pandemic, the Italian Eurosceptics had come to an abrupt halt when the EU had made over €190 billion available to Italy through the Next Generation EU⁴¹. However, the National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR), the instrument with which Italy has committed itself to implementing the reforms required by the EU for the disbursement of funds, has become in the electoral campaign the object of the desires of most of the political forces, who would like to modify it according to the needs of their respective groups of voters.

Fratelli d'Italia is no exception, and in fact its programme calls for a targeted update of the PNRR in the light of the crisis triggered by the conflict in Ukraine and the rise in commodity prices, "proposing to the Commission to make specific changes within the limits of what is set out in Article 21 of the European Regulation on the Next Generation EU"⁴².

The most problematic part of the PNRR does not actually concern the remodulation of the PNRR funds, which in truth is not at all easy in itself, but the implementation of a series of structural reforms that the EU is asking for in order to be able to continue to provide the planned funding: it is a plan of no less than 63 reforms of varying scope, which concern central political, economic and institutional spheres such as the judicial system, public administration, regulation of competition, and many others⁴³.

These are reforms that involve significant interests of the economic, social, and political structure of the country, which do not always agree with what is required by Brussels to follow up on the funding until 2026. It is therefore conceivable that, in the event of Meloni's victory, a government led by her would adopt conflicting positions with respect to European constraints, especially with reference to the idea that the quality of the national reforms implemented must be assessed and approved by Brussels in order to be fully effective. This would be a scenario not very dissimilar to the long-standing Hungarian dispute with the European institutions, which culminated in the European Parliament's recent approval by a large majority of the motion⁴⁴ condemning the Hungarian government's "deliberate and systematic attempts" to undermine European values and calling for the implementation of the procedure under Art. 7 TEU⁴⁵, resulting in the suspension of the payment of EU funds to Budapest.

It is therefore no coincidence that representatives of Meloni and Salvini's parties voted against this motion in the European Parliament, and indeed in a note the delegation of Fratelli d'Italia in the European Parliament justified their vote against it by stating: "In fact, the report is based on subjective opinions and politically distorted statements, such as in some points in which it raises cases that were resolved long ago by the competent bodies, or that concern issues that are the exclusive competence of the member states. Added to this is the request for the Commission to continue blocking Next Gen Eu funds intended for Hungary, in violation of the regulations, which provide for this only in the case of risks of violation of the rule of law related to the use of those funds. This is yet another political

⁴¹ [NextGenerationEU: European Commission endorses Italy's €191.5 billion recovery and resilience plan, European Commission](#), 22.6.2021.

⁴² [NextGenerationEU: European Commission endorses Italy's €191.5 billion recovery and resilience plan, European Commission](#), 22.6.2021.

⁴³ [Programma Fratelli d'Italia 2022](#), p. 7.

⁴⁴ [MEPs: Hungary can no longer be considered a full democracy](#), European Parliament, 15.9.2022.

⁴⁵ This is the article providing for the possibility of suspending "the rights of membership of the European Union (e.g. voting rights in the Council) in the event of a serious and persistent breach by a member country of the principles on which the Union is founded (liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law)".

attack on the legitimate Hungarian government, in a difficult phase for Europe in which at all levels one should pursue the path of unity and not that of polarisation for ideological reasons"⁴⁶.

It is likely that in the Hungarian affair the Italian sovereignists see an anticipation of the relations that could also be established between the European institutions and an Italian government led by a centre-right majority. On the other hand, the very firmness with which the European institutions have reacted to the executives of Budapest and Warsaw (whose prime minister, as recalled, is a faithful ally of Meloni and Salvini in the European forum), suggests that there is no compromise on the fundamentals of the European integration process.

Certainly, Italy's specific weight in the European chessboard is of great importance, and yet in Brussels and Strasbourg it is well understood that differences in treatment cannot be allowed when the founding principles of the Union are at stake. In addition, as the Hungarian affair shows, any Italian resistance would lead to delays and, in the worst case, to the cancellation of payments of the Next Generation EU funding tranches: resources that the Italian economy, burdened not only by the crises linked to the pandemic, the war in Ukraine and the rise in energy costs, but also by a very heavy public debt, cannot afford to do without if it really wants to fuel a recovery in production and employment.

The Italian entrepreneurial structure is largely made up of small and medium-sized enterprises, gathered in well-defined geographic areas of the nation, and largely in the North East: traditionally, the owners and employees of these companies represent a significant share of the centre-right electorate, having over the years supported first Forza Italia, then Lega, and lately Meloni's party. A freeze on relations with Brussels and its funding would be a huge obstacle to the economy of this sector, so it is likely that the voters concerned are not necessarily interested in an open battle with the EU (and the ECB).

Add to this Forza Italia's 'dissenting' position on relations with Europe: Silvio Berlusconi does not like a centre-right government to be in conflict with Brussels, and has already declared that 'our presence in the government is an absolute guarantee that it will be liberal, Christian, pro-European and Atlanticist. If these gentlemen, our allies, whom I trust and respect, were to go off in different directions we would not be in it'⁴⁷.

7 Conclusions

It is extremely likely that the centre-right coalition will win the elections, and that within it the Euro-sceptic coalition will play a preponderant role in shaping the future government. Imagining that this would put Italy on the same front as Poland and Hungary with respect to European constraints seems unlikely, however, for a number of reasons: firstly, because within the coalition not everyone is fully aligned on a sovereignist strategy: it is likely that Meloni and Salvini want to follow this line, but much will depend on the specific weight of each party within the coalition and Parliament. Should Forza Italia's result prove decisive for the formation and subsequent holding of a parliamentary majority, Meloni and Salvini's sovereignist impulses will clearly not be able to have too much space, lest they risk yet another government crisis and a possible change of majority. Secondly, Brussels has shown that it has very effective tools at its disposal towards member states that wish to escape European constraints: it is likely that the firmness shown towards Orban is also intended as a warning to other governments wishing to follow in his footsteps. Finally, and this is no small factor, the Italian economy

⁴⁶ [Pe-Ungheria, Fdi-Ecr: ennesimo attacco politico, ora serve unità europea](#), 15.9.2022.

⁴⁷ [Berlusconi nella corsa Meloni-Salvini: "Agganciati all'Ue o io fuori"](#), Ansa.it, 15.9.2022.

cannot do without full financial support from the EU at this stage, and friendly and trusting relations with the ECB. Any ruptures with Brussels and Frankfurt would cast strong doubt on the recovery of production and employment in important sectors of the economy, with consequent negative effects in terms of consensus for the responsible political forces.

Paradoxically, it is precisely the serious structural difficulties afflicting the Italian economy (starting with the enormous public debt) that represent the greatest obstacle to any eventual sovereignist temptations of a future Meloni government. The Italian economy can only hope to recover from the complex crisis in which it finds itself if it remains anchored to the system of European financial support: structural funds, Next Generation EU funds, and the ECB's willingness to purchase Italian government bonds also in the future represent indispensable tools for Italy's economic and employment recovery. This is an aspect that is well known to the many small and medium-sized Italian companies, which are usually oriented in favour of the centre-right, but which would hardly agree with a confrontational policy of Rome towards Brussels and Frankfurt, since this would lead to an economic isolation of Italy with respect to European and international markets, where these companies under normal conditions sell substantial shares of their industrial and manufacturing production. The Hungarian vicissitude, once again, can be seen as an excellent example with respect to the scenarios that Rome would also have to face, should Meloni decide to follow in Orban's footsteps in the event of conquering the government.

Added to this would be the paradox of a Eurosceptic government that, at the same time as it calls for greater autonomy of member states with respect to EU constraints, as Meloni and Salvini - but not Berlusconi - demand in their programmes, accuses the EU of not doing enough to support national economies, e.g. by agreeing on a cap on the European gas price⁴⁸. A further paradox, certainly not solvable by exasperating the current sovereignist impulses of the Italian right, once in power.

It is also worth remembering how, also on the strength of his authority at international level, during his government Mario Draghi managed to establish himself as a credible and authoritative representative of Italian institutions abroad. The images last June of his train journey to Kiev together with Emanuel Macron and Olaf Scholz to meet Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky have become a symbol of a possible enhanced cooperation of Italy, France and Germany for the European Union of the future. After the Franco-German Treaty of Aachen in January 2019⁴⁹ and the Franco-Italian Treaty of the Quirinale in November 2021⁵⁰, there has long been talk of 'closing the triangle' with a similar agreement between Rome and Berlin as well, capable of 'finally initiating structured cooperation between the three leading European countries'⁵¹.

It is legitimate to wonder how the now certain change at the top of the Italian executive will impact a development on which there was a consolidated consensus in the three countries involved. A possible halt in the negotiations, however, would be much more of a problem for Italy than for France and Germany, which have all the regulatory, institutional and political tools at their disposal to continue

⁴⁸ [Elezioni 2022, Meloni: "Contro caro energia tetto Ue a prezzo gas"](#), Adnkronos, 15.9.2022.

⁴⁹ Laura-Theresa Krüger, Julie Vaillé, [The Treaty of Aachen of 2019: Opportunities to strengthen Franco-German Cooperation on Sustainable Development](#), German Development Institute / Deutsches Institut für Entwicklungspolitik, Briefing Paper 3/2020.

⁵⁰ Sandrine Amiel, [Quirinale treaty: Will a new French-Italian pact shift the balance of power in Europe?](#), Euronews, 26.11.2021.

⁵¹ Gabriele Carrer, [Dopo il Trattato del Quirinale, quello italo-tedesco? Diplomazie al lavoro](#), Formiche.it, 1.12.2021.

their enhanced cooperation on a bilateral basis, without excluding the involvement of other national partners interested in participating.

For these reasons, any anti-European temptations that a future Italian government might nurture would likely find internal and external curbs capable of greatly reducing their effects. It is highly advisable that everyone within the centre-right coalition is sufficiently aware of this, and that an opportune 'self-restraint' will be reached with which to follow through on its electoral programme, according to the canons proper to a mature European democracy, as Italy has so far always shown itself to be.



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