

Fact Sheet

Italy's shifted Role in the European Union

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1. Italy's role in the EU prior to the Meloni government

As one of the first Members of the EEC Italy is fully embedded in the heart of the EU or was it at least for the last years.

Before the governmental change to the right, the fundamental position of the Draghi government stood for a high point of pro-European integration contrasting sharply with the prior populist governments' bilateralism with Russia and China. (Atlas Institute,2021)

By building a strong relationship with the Franco-German partnership, Draghi was able to mediate between the Mediterranean states. Italy is leveraging €191.5 billion from NextGenerationEU through its National Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR) to finance structural reforms and investments in the green transition, digitalization, and infrastructure. Originally negotiated by the Conte II government in 2020 as part of the EU's Recovery Fund deal. Italy's PnRR was finalized and approved under Draghi and is now being revised and implemented under the Meloni government. (Reuters,2020)

This era stood for collective strength and sovereignty, with Draghi describing the decision to adopt the euro as "irreversible" and advocating for deeper fiscal union within the EU. (eunews,2014).

On Russia's invasion on Ukraine the government provided not only weapons but also supported sanctions in EU coordination. They also played a crucial role in granting a European candidate status to the Ukraine and with this providing the prospect of a Ukraine embedded in the European culture and being protect by the status of a European member. (LeMonde, 2022) As a concrete reaction of the renunciation of Russian gas a diversification of this energy supplier was granted with Algeria/Qatar/Congo/Angola deals, compensating volumes and maintaining 2021 import levels into 2022. (Aleanna, 2024)

EU relations emphasized unity a proactive Strategic Compass input highlighted Mediterranean Southern flank on migration and environment, complementing NATO Eastern deployments. Even if Draghi promoted renewables, primarily framed for the security aspects and only secondary for climate, the rollout lagged. (Renewable Matter, 2025)

2. The Position since Giorgia Meloni's Government

In October 2022, Meloni took office as Italy's first female prime minister, leading a right-wing coalition consisting of Fratelli d'Italia (Fdi), Lega, and Forza Italia. The past rhetoric about Euroskeptic disruption stemming from her party's prepared one for a very EU-critical government, which, however, never came to be that extreme. Instead Meloni adopted a certain "nationalist Euro realism" which is characterized by pragmatic cooperation within EU rules while trying to assert national sovereignty on migration, energy, and competitiveness. This is pushed by the idea of a Europe between states instead of a supranational institution. (Bastasin,2024). The Government is also trying to build an own transatlantic relationship with the US, and trying to become a negotiator between the EU and US. With this position threatening the Unity of the Union as an important economic force in it.

2.1 Early Continuity: Ukraine and Energy

Meloni's first Brussels visit signaled commitment to EU and NATO alignment, dispelling alarms that Italy might pivot towards a more Russia friendly stance after Draghi. On Ukraine, she extended military aid through 2023, condemned the invasion, and coordinated sanctions and weapons deliveries with EU partners, which even Russian officials later admitted had caught Moscow off guard (Lavrov). (Goretti and D'antimo, 2023) Rather than Meloni herself adopting pro-Russian rhetoric, the incoherence lies within the governing coalition. Lega and Matteo Salvini have long cultivated ties and a softer narrative towards Moscow, while key portfolios such as Foreign Affairs (Forza Italia's Antonio Tajani) and Defence (Fdi's Guido Crosetto) are firmly anchored in a pro Ukraine, pro NATO line. This division illustrates how the government communicates mixed messages domestically, yet ultimately upholds Euro Atlantic commitments in practice. (The Economist, 2025) Eventually the Government is building on Draghi's Kyiv trip, Italy hosted 161,000 Ukrainian refugees (European Council,2024) via Temporary Protection Directive while rejecting Russian narratives. Also, the Energy policy mirrored Draghi's positions. Algeria became Italy's top gas supplier after 2021 (replacing Russia due to EU sanctions) with Meloni's Algiers and Tripoli visits launching the 'Mattei Plan' for expanded African gas supplies and migration control pacts. By late 2022, imports matched 2021 volumes despite Russia cuts, while renewables lagged (4 GW added vs. 10+ GW PNRR target) and remained framed mainly as security tools (ECCO, 2025).

2.2 Migration Pivot

On the issue of migration, often propagated by all parties in the right-wing coalition, measures were taken that led to various difficulties for the EU, but also for the country itself. In 2022 the government imposed such strict guidelines for NGO vessels that it nearly equaled a ban. This action taken led to straining France and Germany ties. (Goretti and D'Antimo, 2023).

Finally, Meloni joined von der Leyen in terms of “externalization” by entering into partnerships with third countries (Tunisia, Libya, Egypt) for repatriations, thereby strengthening her influence in the EU during the negotiations on asylum reform. Even though the externalization of borders since 2020 has not prevented irregular migration on the central Mediterranean route from increasing sharply once again. (ECFR, 2023)

A central element of Meloni's migration policy was the “Albania model”, which aimed to take in boat refugees in Italian-run external camps in Albania before they entered Italy and to examine their asylum applications there. The Italian government described them as an innovative model project for EU migration management. (Human Rights Watch, 2024) Ursula von der Leyen herself described the protocol with Albania as a learnable model for other member states. (The Guardian, 2024)

Nevertheless, the camps remained largely empty, as Italian courts repeatedly blocked the transfer of asylum seekers to Albania on constitutional and EU legal grounds. Rome recently revised the concept so that those whose applications had already been rejected in Italy could be transferred to Albania. (Amnesty, 2025) Not only was the first idea of the program illegal, but also a financial disaster. The costs for the construction and operation of the two centers were originally estimated at around €650 million. Non-governmental organizations and media reports often cite significantly higher range of total costs between €800 million and almost €1 billion. (TheGuardian, 2024) This project was closely monitored in the EU, especially by the right wing. The current silence on this issue could be a strategy to avoid talking about the failure. This also shows very clearly that certain

2.3 EU Institutional Engagement

Post-elections, Meloni backed von der Leyen's re-election, securing ECR influence and thus initiate a shift to the right. (euronews, 2024) Within the Centre-right European People's Party (EPP), Meloni (ECR leader) is seen as a pragmatic figure, even if her stance often veers into Euroscepticism. This shows EPP prefers cooperating with ECR conservatives over the left, extending a hand to Meloni while relying on the EPP-S&D-Renew majority (euronews, 2024)

Support for Ukraine endured, including Italy's share in EU military aid packages exceeding €1 billion annually (e.g., €1.5–2 billion via EPF in 2023–2025) alongside humanitarian/financial packages totaling €69+ billion EU-wide through 2025.

Meloni linked Kyiv to EU security, rejecting boots on the ground as security guarantees but backing "coalition of willing" regeneration forces and Article 5-style guarantees. (TheConversation, 2025 August 20)

Meloni criticized the Green Deal for industrial harm and adding that the Deal led to a catastrophic result caused by the ideological approach. With this showing clearly that the biggest fear is the industry and ignoring importance of actions against climate change, by facilitating the whole issue as an ideology. A narrative that has been told by the right wing for years. (Euractiv, 2024)

3.0 Risks and Future Outlook

Italy's course in the EU is in a delicate balance, with the pragmatic “nationalist Euro-realism” pursued by Meloni's government since 2022 either consolidating its influence or crumbling under growing pressure. Building on Draghi's era of deep integration and the reforms driven by NextGenerationEU, Meloni has maintained continuity in key areas such as support for Ukraine, extending aid, accepting refugees, and coordinating sanctions, while pushing ahead with the diversification of energy supplies through the Mattei Plan. However, this approach is faltering if the externalization of migration does not take place within the framework of legal requirements and agreements.

Economic weaknesses increase the urgency of a policy of action. Meloni cites strong domestic GDP growth (4.2%) at the beginning of 2024 in comparison to the pandemic recession in 2020. Even so this number is higher than the the European average (3.5%) it lacks as proof of the nationalist policy style. During the pandemic, Italy received a high number of financial resources from the EU in grants and transfers. All fiscal support combined will result in an amount accounting for 10% of GDP in March 2024. Showing that it was the European fiscal support which lead to this numbers. Nonetheless, Italy's cumulated growth over the past four years has been only 0.7% higher than the euro-area average (0.17% per year), falling short of justifying the notion of a new Italian economic miracle. (Bastasin, 2024)

From a geopolitical perspective, Italy's position as a bridge between the US and the EU amid Trump's conservatism is a test of loyalty. This is particularly true in a new world in which the EU is being portrayed as an adversary of the US and a union of European states is being called for to counter transatlantic sanctions tariffs.

Ultimately, Meloni's vision of a “Europe of states” depends on her rhetoric translating into results and her ability to combine sovereignty and solidarity in a crumbling union. The future will show whether a Europe of individual states will really have a stronger position in an increasingly authoritarian world, or whether this very fragmentation and nationalization is a weakness.

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