

# Italy: Conte wins vote of confidence

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On Monday and Tuesday, the Italian parliament voted confidence in the new government headed by Giuseppe Conte. The 66th post-World War II Italian government will continue the anti-working-class policies of its predecessors. In doing so, it will play into the hands of Matteo Salvini of the far-right Lega, who on Monday demonstrated together with fascists in the Palazzo Montecitorio, the seat of parliament, calling for fresh elections.

In both the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate, the delegations of the Five Star Movement (M5S) and the Democratic Party (PD) voted almost unanimously for Conte's new cabinet. The supposedly "left" splits from the PD also agreed unreservedly. The largest of these, *Liberi e Uguali* (Free and Equal, LeU), had already been involved in government talks last week. The new health minister, Roberto Speranza, comes from its ranks.

Speranza belongs to the *Articolo Uno* party, which derives its name from the first article of the Italian Constitution ("Italy is a democratic republic founded on labour"). It is an amalgamation of former PD politicians who originally came from the Stalinist PCI (Italian Communist Party) and who separated from Matteo Renzi in 2017, including Pier Luigi Bersani, Massimo D'Alema and Guglielmo Epifani.

Typical is the comment of another *Articolo Uno* representative, Ernesto Abaterusso, who showered the new government with praise: Finally, there is "reasonable hope that something new will be created in Italy in the long term," said Abaterusso. This would "hinder the racist and coarse Salvini right wing in the realisation of its plans."

Such extravagant hopes are completely unfounded. The Conte II cabinet will not depart from the right-wing course of the previous government. On the contrary, it will continue the murderous refugee policy, advance the militarisation of society both internally and externally, and impose the austerity dictates of the European Union (EU) and Italian banks.

In his statements in both chambers, Conte made a clear

commitment to the EU, emphasising, "We must do everything we can to improve cooperation in Europe." In order to finally boost economic growth in Italy, it was necessary to "strengthen the instruments and economic governance of the European Union," he said.

The clearest commitment to the EU is the election of the new economics minister, Roberto Gualtieri (PD). He is the head of the Economic and Monetary Affairs Committee in the European Parliament and one of the EU's three chief negotiators on Brexit. It will be up to him to present a budget in October for the next year that finds favour with the EU. This means it must enforce austerity measures of at least €23 billion.

Gualtieri's appointment was "a blessing for Italy and for Europe," commented Christine Lagarde, the former International Monetary Fund director and soon-to-become head of the European Central Bank. To top things off, on Tuesday, the EU Commission president designate, Ursula von der Leyen, appointed former Italian Prime Minister Paolo Gentiloni, a close associate of Gualtieri, as the incoming EU economic commissioner.

The banks reacted with noticeable relief. On the Milan stock exchange, the so-called "spread"—the gap between Italian and German government bond rates, considered to be the measure of Italian financial policy's resilience—immediately improved. When Gualtieri's name was announced, the spread halved to 150 points.

Among the 21 ministers in the cabinet that was sworn in on September 5 are nine Democrats and nine Five-Star politicians, one from *Articolo Uno* and two non-partisan members.

Lorenzo Guerini, the new defence minister, is also considered a reliable guarantor of the Italian state. Like Matteo Renzi, he belongs to the Catholic wing of the PD and comes from the Christian Democratic Margherita, which united with the PCI successor PDS in 2007 to become the Democratic Party (PD). From 2014 to 2017, Guerini was Renzi's right-hand man and deputy party leader. Guerini is expected to adopt a more distanced posture in relation to Russia. The closeness of Lega chief

Salvini to Vladimir Putin had been considered a threat to the military interests of Italy and the EU.

In his speeches in the Chamber of Deputies and in the Senate, Conte announced a “new humanism.” However, he immediately made it clear that this did not mean a more humane refugee policy. He called for a “modification” of the Dublin Treaty, the establishment of “European humanitarian corridors” and “more cooperation with countries of origin and transit to tackle trafficking and illegal immigration.” He made clear that “A sovereign state has the right to regulate access to its borders and repatriations [i.e., deportations].”

What that means in concrete terms was made clear on the day the new interior minister, Luciana Lamorgese, was sworn in. The non-party politician, who has been working for the Interior Ministry for 30 years in various functions, responded to a request by the NGO ship Alan Kurdi, asking whether the landing ban in the last Salvini law was still in force, with the succinct words: “Good morning. We inform you that Decree 53/2019 remains valid. Best regards.”

The Alan Kurdi, owned by the Sea-Eye organisation in Regensburg, had rescued 13 castaways 10 days ago. Two teenagers had already tried to commit suicide and throw themselves overboard. Finally, on Tuesday evening, the Maltese Coast Guard brought the last refugees ashore, while another ship, the Ocean Viking, owned by Doctors Without Borders and SOS Méditerranée, with 50 migrants on board, was still waiting for a safe harbour. They are still not allowed to land in Italy.

The “Sicurezza bis” law, which Salvini had adopted with the full support of the Five-Star Movement, thus remains in force and continues to threaten those conducting maritime rescues with fines of up to €1 million, as Lamorgese unequivocally confirmed. The new interior minister was not only the prefect of Venice and Milan, but also the office manager of PD Interior Minister Marco Minniti, who had sealed off the Mediterranean even before Salvini and had concluded contracts with the Libyan government for the use of its Coast Guard.

The right-wing course of the new government will not only intensify the suffering of refugees, it will also make life for the Italian working class increasingly unbearable as a result of new austerity measures. In this way, the government is strengthening the right-wing opposition of Lega, Forza Italia and Fratelli d’Italia. Lega boss and former Interior Minister Matteo Salvini will be the prime beneficiary. The new government is making it possible for him to present himself as a defender of democracy and

free elections.

During the debate and vote of confidence on Monday, Salvini called for a protest in front of the Palazzo Montecitorio, the seat of the Chamber of Deputies, together with the fascist Fratelli d’Italia. As a result, Lega and fascist politicians kept switching between delivering fiery speeches in parliament and on the stage outside, where the words “in the name of the sovereign people” were placed on a large banner under the hashtag “we want to vote.” The crowd waved flags with the national colours red, white and green and roared out the national anthem.

Recently, Salvini appealed to the security forces in the state apparatus and wrote on Facebook, “Law enforcement officers and soldiers think like us. ... I am waiting for the day when they come onto the street with us.”

Salvini has called for a national demonstration in Rome on October 19 to protest against the “government [that functions] on behalf of Berlin, Paris and Brussels.” This demonstration, which is expected to coincide with the adoption of the new austerity budget, recalls Mussolini’s “March on Rome” in October 1922. “Mussolini also did a lot of good,” Salvini told *Corriere della Sera* in May .

The government crisis in Italy displays pathological features: One wing of the ruling class (embodied in the new Conte Cabinet) is desperately trying to stem the banking and EU crisis and place the burden on the working class. The other group (led by Salvini) is mobilising right-wing forces in the state and the fascist dregs of society to quell growing opposition among workers and youth.

What unites both is their support for authoritarian forms of rule and their fear and hatred of the working class. As the *World Socialist Web Site* wrote: “The conflicts between Salvini’s Lega, Renzi’s PD and the other establishment parties are purely tactical. They revolve around how best to enforce social attacks on the working class.”



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