

Fascist Giorgia Meloni heads new Italian government

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23 October 2022

Giorgia Meloni, leader of the fascist Fratelli d'Italia, is the new head of the Italian government. State President Sergio Mattarella swore in Meloni and her 24-member government Saturday morning. On Sunday, former Prime Minister Mario Draghi handed over the reins to her. Confirmation in parliament, scheduled for early this week, is considered a formality.

It is the first time since World War II that a party with fascist roots has led the government in a major European country. Such parties have been involved in governments, such as the predecessor of the Fratelli in Italy from 1994, but they have never provided the head of government. So far, a comparably right-wing government exists only in Hungary, where Viktor Orbán prides himself on having established an “illiberal democracy.”

Orbán was then also among the first to congratulate Meloni. “Today is a great day for the European right,” he tweeted. Marine Le Pen, leader of France’s far-right Rassemblement National, also sent congratulations. “All over Europe, patriots are coming to power and with them the Europe of nations we hope for,” she wrote.

The fact that Meloni’s assumption of power falls almost exactly on the centennial of Benito Mussolini’s seizure of power on October 30, 1922, who exercised a brutal dictatorship against the working class for the next 22 years, gives it additional explosiveness.

Meloni, now 45, had joined at age 15 the Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI), which had upheld the tradition and memory of Mussolini since the end of the war and was implicated in the far-right terrorist attacks of the 1960s and 1970s. After the MSI renamed itself Alleanza Nazionale in 1994 and eventually dissolved into Silvio Berlusconi’s Forza Italia, Meloni and others formed Fratelli d'Italia in 2012 to continue the MSI’s tradition.

Because they were the only party represented in parliament not to participate in Mario Draghi’s all-party government, the Fratelli, which had received only 4.3 percent of the vote in 2018, became the strongest party in the September election with 26 percent.

Meloni, meanwhile, presents herself as a pragmatic conservative politician and declares fascism, from which she

has never distanced herself, to be a historical issue. But this is pure tactics. This is demonstrated not only by their party’s close ties to neo-Nazi organizations such as CasaPound, violent soccer hooligans, Mussolini admirers, right-wing networks in the state apparatus, and international far-right parties such as Spain’s Vox and the Trump wing of the US Republicans, but also by their appointments to top state and government posts.

Already last week, the Fratelli and their alliance partners, the far-right Lega and Berlusconi’s Forza Italia, elected longtime neo-fascist Ignazio La Russa to the second-highest state office, as president of the Senate.

The politician, born in 1947, whose middle name is Benito, was active in the MSI for decades and was one of the founders of the Fratelli with Meloni. His private apartment is decorated with busts, medals and photos of Mussolini, which he proudly presented in a video. Just days before the September election, he had declared: “We are all heirs of the Duce.” La Russa was Italian defense minister from 2008 to 2011. He is said to have convinced head of government Berlusconi to join the war against Libya, a former Italian colony.

Lorenzo Fontana, a right-wing extremist, was also elected to head the second chamber of parliament, the Chamber of Deputies. The 42-year-old Lega deputy is a member of an arch-Catholic sect and a supporter of the fascist theory of “population replacement,” according to which a conspiracy is trying to replace the majority European population with immigrant Muslims. He calls same-sex marriages a “mess that we don’t even want to hear named.”

Unlike Germany, for example, Italy does not have a written coalition agreement. But the composition of the new government, in which the Fratelli hold nine posts, the Lega and Forza Italia five each, and nonpartisan experts another five, makes its political orientation clear.

Meloni was guided by two criteria in selecting ministers. On the one hand, she tried to reassure the financial markets and prevent them from giving the thumbs down to her government, as in the case of Liz Truss in the United Kingdom.

Given the country’s high level of debt and the €200 billion it is entitled to from the so-called EU reconstruction fund, the financial markets would hardly accept Italy leaving the war alliance against Russia and the European Union. The rise in

yields on Italian government bonds had already contributed significantly to the euro crisis in 2010.

Foreign and economic policy departments were therefore filled with ministers who have good international connections.

Antonio Tajani (Forza Italia), a close Berlusconi henchman, is the new foreign minister. Tajani spent almost his entire political career in Brussels. He was president of the European Parliament and the European People's Party (the umbrella group of right-wing parties) and has excellent connections in other European capitals.

The economic and financial portfolio went to Giancarlo Giorgetti (Lega), a friend and kindred spirit of the previous head of government and former ECB banker Mario Draghi. Giorgetti is expected to ensure that government spending is further reduced and to continue Draghi's policy of social cuts.

The Ministry of Defence is taken over by Guido Crosetto (Fratelli d'Italia), an arms lobbyist and manager of a defense company who has the confidence of the military. He is supposed to guarantee NATO that Italy remains firmly behind the war course against Russia—a stance that is controversial within Forza Italia and the Lega.

Domestically, Meloni has also sent clear signals to her fascist following, appointing notorious right-wingers as ministers and even renaming some ministries to underline her nationalist course.

Thus, the Ministry of Economic Development is now called the "Ministry of Business and Made in Italy"; the Ministry of Agriculture is also responsible for "sovereignty over food" (the preference for Italian products) and the Ministry of the Family for "natality," for birth promotion.

Eugenia Roccella (Fratelli d'Italia), the Minister for the Family, is considered a member of the "Theocons," the advocates of ultraconservative family policies. She agitates against abortion, homosexual partnerships, artificial insemination and living wills.

The Interior Ministry will continue the rabid anti-migration policies for which Lega leader Matteo Salvini, who headed the department from 2018 to 2019, is notorious. Meloni did prevent Salvini, considered her fiercest competitor and political rival, from making his mark again as interior minister, fobbing him off with the infrastructure ministry. She justified this by saying that Salvini is still on trial for abuse of office for illegally blocking refugee ships. He could face up to 15 years in prison. His former cabinet chief Matteo Piantedosi (nonpartisan) became interior minister in his place.

Meloni filled other posts with loyal followers. For example, her brother-in-law, Francesco Lollobrigida, a great-nephew of the famous actress, is responsible for agriculture in the government. His wife, Meloni's sister Arianna, advances to the top of the party.

The takeover of the government by a fascist in the third largest country in the EU was met with serenity and open approval in Europe.

"I am ready and happy to work in a constructive way with the new Italian government to find answers to the challenges we face," tweeted Ursula von der Leyen, president of the EU Commission, who congratulated Meloni as the "first woman to hold this position."

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz also wrote on Twitter: "I look forward to continuing to work closely with Italy in the EU, NATO and G7." Petr Fiala, the Prime Minister of the Czech Republic, which currently holds the EU presidency, said: "I know their position on European integration and I believe that good cooperation is possible."

French President Emmanuel Macron will be the first foreign politician to meet the new head of government. Macron, who was baptized a Catholic at the age of 12, travelled to Rome on Sunday for a Catholic meeting, where he will meet with the pope as well as Meloni.

Meloni's rise and the response she is meeting in Europe is part of a worldwide shift to the right by the ruling elites. They respond to the growing resistance of the working class against social cuts, war and pandemic with two methods. On the one hand, they are trying to sabotage and paralyse it with the help of the corporatist unions. On the other hand, they strengthen ultra-right parties—such as the Spanish Vox, the German AfD or the French RN—and the state apparatus in order to intimidate and suppress the opposition.

Meloni, unlike Mussolini a hundred years ago, cannot rely on a mass fascist movement of Blackshirts. It owes its electoral success to the vacuum left by the bankruptcy of the so-called center-left parties and their pseudo-left appendages. These have played the leading role in attacking the living standards of the working class over the past three decades, supporting NATO's imperialist wars and co-sponsoring a pandemic policy that has cost the lives of 180,000 people.

Fierce resistance is developing against this. The number of strikes and protests is increasing noticeably. But militancy alone is not enough to defeat the threat of fascism and war. The Italian working class needs independent political leadership and perspective. It must combine the struggle to defend its social gains with an international socialist perspective against war and capitalism. This requires the establishment of an Italian section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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