

Rearmament, Fortress Europe and authoritarian rule

Merz and Meloni forge a new Berlin–Rome axis

Johannes Stern
26 January 2026

Shortly after German Chancellor Friedrich Merz and Italy’s far-right Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni smiled demonstratively for the cameras last Friday at the German-Italian government consultations, another resident of Minneapolis was killed in the United States by agents of the immigration enforcement agency ICE. The nurse Alex Pretti was effectively executed during a raid—another killing in the course of the escalating fascist offensive of the Trump administration.

Neither the German government nor any other European government condemned this crime. This despite the fact that transatlantic tensions have recently escalated sharply, particularly in connection with the imperialist conflicts over Greenland and the Arctic. This silence is no diplomatic oversight. It is the expression of a profound political convergence.

On the one hand, the European powers are deliberately holding back criticism of Washington. They want to preserve the alliance with US imperialism for as long as possible, until they themselves are fully rearmed and able to play an independent role in the imperialist redivision of the world. On the other hand—and this is the more fundamental point—they share the core of Trump’s policy: militarism abroad, authoritarian rule at home and brutal repression against refugees.

This convergence was openly on display at the German-Italian government consultations.

Merz articulated particularly clearly the claim of Germany and Italy to act as leading powers of a militarized Europe. At the joint press conference, he declared:

At this moment in history, Italy and Germany have a very special responsibility to bear, in terms of their weight, their leadership role, and so on. We are two important nations in Europe. We are among the founding states of the European Union. We are part of international dynamics. We have production-based and industrial systems that are very closely interconnected.

He continued:

This is also about a shared vision with regard to some of the strategically important tasks. We have the same goal in mind: to build a conscious Europe, a Europe that is capable of fulfilling its own role in the world, that is strategically autonomous in the global scenario, a Europe in which common sense plays an important role.

These statements leave no doubt as to what is meant. When Merz speaks of a “leadership role,” “strategic autonomy,” and the ability to “fulfill its own role in the world,” he is referring to nothing less than the claim of the European great powers to act militarily, economically and geopolitically independently of—and, if necessary, even against—the United States.

The “common sense” invoked by Merz is a euphemism. It does not stand for reason or peace, but for the imperialist interests of the ruling class. What is meant is the readiness to massively militarize Europe, to drive forward rearmament and preparations for war, and to impose this policy against the resistance of the population.

The emphasis on “closely interconnected” and “complementary” industrial systems points directly to the economic foundation of this strategy: the tight integration of German and Italian arms, energy and industrial corporations, which profit from war and are pushing for new markets, resources and spheres of influence.

This leadership claim is inseparably linked to the escalation of the NATO war against Russia. Merz and Meloni unequivocally committed themselves to further military support for Ukraine. “In these particularly bitter days of a winter war, we are strengthening our assistance for Kyiv and for Ukraine,” Merz declared. Both heads of government emphasized their close coordination within NATO and rising military expenditures.

Particularly explosive were the joint statements on the Arctic. Merz stressed that the region is “increasingly coming into the focus of geopolitical interests” and that Europe must be “capable of acting” there. Behind this language lies the aggressive advance of European imperialism into a strategically central region rich in resources, directly claimed by Trump and at the center of the military confrontation with Russia and China.

The Arctic offensive follows the same logic as the rearmament in Eastern Europe: Europe is to assert itself as an independent world power, with military presence, access to raw materials, and

strategic control over trade and transport routes.

Alongside the war policy, Merz and Meloni announced a deepening of cooperation between their security apparatuses. Specifically, they spoke of a bilateral police agreement and an intelligence-cooperation pact. Italy will thus become the first non-adjacent country with which Germany concludes such a special police agreement, as Merz emphasized. According to the German Interior Ministry, this is part of a broader “action plan” intended to more closely integrate “security, defense and resilience issues” between the two states.

No contract texts for either the police agreement or the intelligence cooperation have yet been published, but it is clear that this concerns the creation of a European police-military state. In this context, Merz spoke of a “comprehensive concept of security” that links defense policy, police cooperation and intelligence services into a unified security framework between Germany and Italy.

These measures are integral to the policy of war and rearmament and are directed against the population itself. They serve to prepare for social unrest, strikes and protests against war, rearmament, mass layoffs and impoverishment. As in the United States, the expansion of police and intelligence powers is first deployed against migrants, before being turned against the entire working class.

The political convergence between Merz and Meloni was also particularly explicit in migration policy. Meloni declared:

There is an absolute harmony between the convictions of the Federal Chancellor and myself. It is about combating human trafficking and illegal mass migration. The entire system of returns should be strengthened, and stronger cooperation with countries of origin should be established.

Italy was trying, she continued, “to launch a new model of cooperation with the African continent in this sense” and wanted “to strengthen this new approach together. Thanks to our governments, this approach is asserting itself throughout Europe.”

Behind these words lies a murderous reality. “Returns” mean mass deportations. “Cooperation with countries of origin” means collaboration with authoritarian regimes and dictatorships in Africa that, on behalf of the EU, intern refugees, abuse them, or abandon them in the desert to starve. The so-called “fight against irregular migration” means the further expansion of “Fortress Europe,” which has already claimed the lives of tens of thousands of people in the Mediterranean.

That this policy is being pursued in close cooperation with the Meloni government is no coincidence. With roots in the Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI), Meloni comes from a party that emerged directly from the tradition of Italian fascism. She herself has praised Mussolini and continues to surround herself with open admirers of the Duce. The Fratelli d’Italia founded by her maintains close ties to neo-Nazi organizations such as CasaPound, violent hooligan groups, fascist networks within the state apparatus, and international far-right parties.

The new German-Italian axis is also a warning from a historical standpoint. On the eve of and during the Second World War, Nazi Germany and fascist Italy formed a close alliance. On November 1, 1936, Mussolini first spoke of the “Berlin–Rome Axis.” With the so-called Pact of Steel of May 22, 1939, both fascist regimes sealed their military cooperation and explicitly committed themselves to mutual support in wars of aggression. Subsequently, Italian fascism was a central ally in the Nazis’ war of annihilation against the Soviet Union and in the persecution and murder of Europe’s Jews.

For all the differences, today’s alliance between Berlin and Rome stands in this continuity. Once again, it is about militarization, about imperial expansion through genocidal methods—as in the genocide against the Palestinians in Gaza actively supported by Berlin and Rome—and about the construction of authoritarian forms of rule to impose this policy on the population.

The sought-after “strategic autonomy” of Europe is directed not only outward, but inward as well. Rearmament on a scale of trillions ultimately means the destruction of all remaining social and democratic rights. Harsher police and intelligence laws, brutal repression against migrants, and the militarization of public life are components of the war policy.

By courting the Meloni government, Merz and his coalition of the CDU/CSU and the Social Democrats are not only legitimizing fascism in Italy but also strengthening the far right in Germany. Central demands of the AfD are already being implemented by the government, and the possible inclusion of the fascists in government is being prepared more or less openly.

The demonstrative embrace between Merz and Meloni is a serious warning. In order to push through their war and rearmament offensive against growing resistance from below, the ruling classes in Europe—just as in the United States—are accelerating the construction of authoritarian and fascist forms of rule. But resistance is growing on both sides of the Atlantic, and this dangerous course can and must be stopped: through the independent mobilization of the working class, in Germany, Italy, throughout Europe and internationally, on the basis of a socialist program.



To contact the WSWs and the
Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact