

Italy's Giorgia Meloni: The Great Replacement Moves In

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Demographic angst is a terrifying thing, especially to leaders concerned about poor returns from horizontal folk dancing. Viktor Orbán of Hungary is particularly apprehensive that precious Hungarian blood is not being propagated, facing dilution, if not disappearance, from hordes of swarthy immigrants from the Middle East and Africa.

In Italy, the country's imminent first female prime minister is much of that same view. Giorgia Meloni speaks about being a "woman, mother [and] Christian" with messianic purpose: [to defend](#) "God, country and family". The stress is on mother virtue rather than female rights, the latter only being relevant when it comes to highlighting migrant violence in fits of what has come to be known as [femonationalism](#).

Unlike other conservatives and those of the Right in the Anglo-American tradition, welfare, in her political constellation, is not ill-fare. People – provided they come from a certain traditional demographic and background – should be supported and encouraged by the state. What matters is that they are the right sort of people.

To that end, Meloni insists on a pro-natalist platform to arrest Italy's demographic decline, including reducing VAT rates on nappies, baby bottles and formula; increasing child benefits; and making childcare free.

The spectre she claims to combat is that of the Great Replacement, a view promoted by the French novelist and critic Renaud Camus. In his essay, "Le Grand Remplacement", he describes a process of colonisation in reverse, with native "white" Europeans deluged and eventually overcome by black and brown immigrants. "You have one people, and in the space of a generation you have a different people," [he warns](#) threateningly.

The corollary of such natalist welfare is a deep suspicion of the dark forces of the market and the sinister elements that operate beyond government control. In this, Meloni shares ground with those on other sides of the political aisle concerned about the more destructive effects of predatory capital and its handmaidens.

On such policies as unwanted refugees, she sounds awfully like her counterparts in other parts of the European Union and the EU-exited Britain. While governments in Copenhagen and London have put forth programs to process asylum seekers in third countries, notably Rwanda, aping the grotesque Australian model of offshore processing, Meloni has repeatedly promoted much the same thing in the lead up to the 2022 elections.

She has even [advocated](#) the use of a “naval blockade” to halt illegal immigration, justifying it as a humanitarian gesture to prevent deaths at sea. In this, she could hardly improve on Australia’s own justifications for its Pacific concentration camps on Nauru and Manus Island. We will bar you, detain you, and torture you in order to save you.

Meloni has managed to weave a number of themes in a populist narrative she delivers with the subtlety of a sledgehammer, [claiming](#) that Italy’s liberals have facilitated “the project of ethnic substitution of European citizens, desired by big capital and international speculators”. Like her Hungarian counterpart, she has [pointed the finger](#) at the financing activities of George Soros, drawing heavily from the anti-Semitic trope of the Jewish usurer.

Allegations abound that the leader of the Fratelli d’Italia (Brothers of Italy) is a fascist. Given that the Italian constitution openly prohibits “the reorganisation in any form of the dissolved Fascist Party”, this would be a remarkable coup indeed. That said, the party can be said to be the spiritual heir to Movimento Sociale Italiano (Italian Social Movement), a creation of Benito Mussolini’s supporters after the Second World War.

In an [interview](#) with Corriere Magazine, Meloni explained how she had a “serene relationship with fascism”. Mussolini, she conceded, had made “several mistakes”. Despite producing “a lot”, this fact did not “save him.”

In 1995, MSI joined a larger agglomeration of parties to become the Alleanza Nazionale (National Alliance). AN, in turn, joined Silvio Berlusconi’s centre-right People of Freedom party in 2009, where Meloni found herself Minister for Youth. Three years later, she was part of a splinter group that ultimately became the Brothers of Italy. Italian politics remains, as it has been for decades, populated by changelings.

It would be far from accurate to claim that Italian voters have somehow lost their marbles and lent dramatically rightwards in a fit of absentmindedness. The formula is common to that of other elections witnessed since the election of Donald Trump in 2016: despair and disgust, tempered by considerable apathy.

The continued rule of Orbán, and Meloni’s victory, are also points of transatlantic celebration. Former US Secretary of State was full of congratulation, [claiming](#) that, “Italy deserves and needs strong conservative leadership.”

Another former US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, forgot her political stripes in also [cheering](#) the prospect of a Meloni victory, showing that smashing glass ceilings is far more important than a sound reading of history. “The election of the first woman prime minister in a country always represents a break with the past, and that is certainly a good thing.”

In forming a government, Meloni will have to keep a close eye on the antics of prospective coalition partner and perennial Eurosceptic Matteo Salvini of Lega, who is hankering for his old post at the interior ministry. His message on decentralising power jars with the centralist sentiments of Meloni’s. With 66 MPs and 29 senators, he is mischief-bound as, for

that matter, will be others seeking a position in government.

The program of Italy's new government will be troubling to immigrants, minorities, women, the LGBT community and all groups that do not hum the regressive tune of the Brothers. But it is hard to see what those in Brussels will or can do. The EU is as complicit as any in the undermining of rights when it comes to, for instance, irregular migrants, keeping up barriers as much as possible, repelling the unwanted (Ukrainians excepted). An ugly continent, politically speaking, just got uglier.

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