

# Italy: US Pressure to Exit the Chinese “Belt and Road”. To Stay or Not to Stay in the BRI?

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## Background of Italian Recent Politics

*In October 2022 Ms. Giorgia Meloni, became Prime Minister of Italy. Her extreme right-wing party, Brothers of Italy (Fratelli d’Italia), won the September 2022 elections with 26% of the vote, even though it had polled only 4.3% four years earlier. Ms. Meloni co-founded the party in 2012 and led it since 2014. See [this](#).*

Such an increase in voters meant that Italians were sick and tired from the so-called “democratic” neoliberalism coming out of the EU in Brussels, notably out of the non-elected dictatorial European Commission (EC), known to most serious analyst to be but a lackey of Washington’s.

But Italians had also enough of the steady NATO influence of Italian politics. Italy is currently arguably the country in Europe with most US / NATO military bases. Most Italians are strong NATO opponents.

In brief, Italians welcomed the promising “new wind” coming out of the newly elected right-wing party – expecting a departure from the ongoing US / EU – submissive neoliberal Italian politics.

In October 2022, Italian President Mattarella appointed Giorgia Meloni as Italy’s first female Prime Minister, following the resignation of Mario Draghi amidst a government crisis and as a result of the September 2022 general election. Messrs. Mattarella as well as Draghi are affiliated to the “Independent” party. Mr. Draghi is a former president of the European Central Banks, and a close ally of the WEF’s CEO, Klaus Schwab.

Sergio Mattarella OMRI, an academic and lawyer, has served as President of Italy since 2015. The attribute OMRI stands for **Order of Merit of the Italian Republic** and might be considered the Italian equivalent of knighthood.

## Back to Giorgia Meloni

A clue to her priorities came in an animated speech she gave in Spain last June.

“Yes to the natural family, no to the LGBT lobby, yes to sexual identity, no to gender ideology... no to Islamist violence, yes to secure borders, no to mass migration... no to big international finance... no to the bureaucrats of Brussels!”

In another well-quoted speech from 2019 she said: *“I am Giorgia, I’m a woman, I’m a mother... I’m Christian.”*

For the role of Italy’s new family and birth rate minister, she has picked Eugenia Roccella who has spoken out against abortion and threatened to reverse recently agreed rights for same-sex parents.

Nevertheless, Ms. Meloni has promised to govern “for everyone”. She had to assure Italy’s allies in both NATO and the EU that there will be no change in direction in foreign policy. This is an important point, as both her coalition partners, Matteo Salvini, heading the *League* and the late Silvio Berlusconi’s center-right party, *Forza Italia*, have been strong supporters of Russia’s Vladimir Putin.

“Giorgia Meloni comes from a post-fascist cultural background but recently she’s taken a very moderate position and stated she won’t change [predecessor Mario] Draghi’s policy on Ukraine,” Italian political scientist Prof. Roberto D’Alimonte told the BBC. “She did this because she had to build her credentials to be a legitimate candidate for prime minister.”

## Recent - Italy-China Relations

On February 17, 2023, President Mattarella met with China’s Mr. Wang Yi, in Rome. Mr. Wang Yi is a member of the Political Bureau of China’s Communist Party (CPC) Central Committee. He is Director of the Office of the Central Commission for Foreign Affairs, basically acting as Foreign Minister.

It was a most cordial and what looked like a constructive and productive meeting. They were talking about strengthening their relations through BRI (Memorandum of Understanding [MOU] signed in 2019) and jointly promoting multilateralism.

Conveying President Xi Jinping’s warm greetings to President Mattarella, Wang Yi said that China will bring new opportunities for China-Italy cooperation. He noted that China and Italy should resume exchanges at all levels in an all-round manner, and promote mutually beneficial cooperation across the board. Wang Yi stressed China and Italy are natural partners in Belt and Road, a strong impetus for further development of their bilateral relations.

This left a positive signal for strengthening China-Italian BRI relations – Italy being the only EU and G-7 member as part of the BRI.



## Recent Events

At the recent NATO summit in Vilnius, Lithuania (11/12 July 2023), Ms. Meloni confirmed in a press conference from Vilnius, that at the invitation of President Biden she will travel to Washington to meet with the US President on 27 July 2023.

The Italian PM highlighted Rome's support to the NATO Alliance and to Kyiv's accession to NATO. She praised NATO's "important steps forward [towards Ukraine's] future accession to the Alliance. She stressed this point by mentioning Italy's leadership in 2024 of the G7. *"NATO mustn't lose focus on its Southern Flank and the Global South."*





Ms. Meloni went even further in supporting the warrior alliance, NATO, saying that “Our freedom has a cost. What we invest in defense comes back tenfold in terms of defending our national interests.”

She further argued for increased cooperation among NATO Allies, a drive that must extend to Indo-Pacific matters and, most notably, China, noting the importance of tackling the “systemic rival” holistically – i.e., considering issues such as supply chain security, especially in the field of critical raw materials, and safeguarding technological advantage.

These considerations come as her government tends to dropping out of China’s BRI, a matter that will certainly come up in her forthcoming Washington visit. For more details see [this](#) (12 July 2023).

This is a 180-degree turn-around from Ms. Meloni’s earlier position on NATO and from President Mattarella’s discussion in February 2023 with Mr. Wang Yi from China. It also demonstrates the US / EU pressure the Italian Government is under.

Clearly, Ms. Meloni is not free to follow her campaign promises and even her party’s ideology – of cooperation for multilateralism, a departure from the neoliberal globalist dominance exerted by Washington, EU, the WEF and the entire bought and corrupted UN system throughout the world.

Italian freedom, national sovereignty – has been flushed down the drain, like that of so many other nations – and that against the will of most of the concerned nations’ people.

## **To Stay or Not to Stay in the BRI**

Ms. Meloni’s government under pressure from the US, but also from the EU, is leaning towards exiting the Belt and Road. In a recent article by the Chinese state-owned *Global Times*, Beijing expresses its concern about Italy’s abandoning the BRI cooperation agreement with China.

The BRI-Agreement is based on a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) of 2019 which is set to be auto-renewed in March 2024, unless one of the parties resigns from the agreement three months prior to the deadline.

This gives Ms. Meloni enough time to present the case to the Italian Parliament, to transfer this decision and responsibility to the presumably democratic parliamentary body.

When putting this possibility forward, Ms. Meloni also said that one could have “*excellent relations with China without being part of a strategic plan*” such as the BRI.

To add fuel to the fire, Italy’s Enterprise Minister Adolfo Urso told *Radio24* that the Meloni government “is not being pressured by the US, nor China, on the [BRI] Memorandum.” But he added that since the MOU was signed, “*our trade with China has worsened considerably, in contrast to what has happened with France or Germany, which have instead implemented [new] business with China. This should give us pause for thought.*”

In the meantime, China is seeking alternative means to promote commercial and cooperation opportunities directly with the Italian business community.

For more details, see [this](#) (30 June 2023).

## Taking BRI to the Italian Parliament

Senator Stefania Craxi, member of the governing coalition party *Forza Italia* and chairwoman of the Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, said she would support the full involvement of Parliament on the BRI decision.

She praised PM Meloni's "institutional" approach, "which recalls the need to involve Parliament on a sensitive issue such as the BRI MOU, whose approval at the time impacted on the dynamics of our country's strategic alliances". She remarked that the MOU was not presented to Parliament for approval before signing.

Senator Craxi added that the BRI *"clearly doesn't only have commercial implications" - as some had depicted it when it was signed in 2019. Proof of this is the fact that despite being the only Western European country to have signed it, Italy's trade with China is less than that of other EU nations.*" She implied that signing it was a mistake, as it brought only negative consequences.

When PM Meloni recently spoke to Parliament, she reiterated that Italy could have "excellent relations with China, "without being part of a strategic plan", meaning BRI. But she also said, the decision had not yet been made, that evaluations are under way - and that the final say would be that of the people, *"seeking solutions in view of our interests"*.

With a significant Parliamentary mandate of her party, Ms. Meloni - leaning towards exiting BRI - would make the decision as one of the Italian people.

For more details, see [this](#) (29 June 2023).

In the five months before the deadline to decide on the ceasing or continuing the BRI-MOU, it is time now for the Chinese business community to enter into direct contact with the Italian Business community to either lobby for staying in the BRI, or to establish solid commercial and business relations with Italian entrepreneurs outside of BRI.

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*Featured image: Meloni speaking at the 2022 Conservative Political Action Conference in Florida*

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