

# Prime Minister of Italy Refused to Condemn Fascist Salutes But Supports NATO

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*If one is to believe part of the Western press, **Giorgia Meloni**, who has been serving as the Prime Minister of Italy since October 2022, is some kind of outcast within Western power structures - maybe a thorn in the side of Euro-Atlantic high officials. This is not necessarily so.*

Meloni is not quite a Fascist herself, but her party certainly tolerates neo-Fascism, and some members of it have [publically brought back the Roman salute](#), as seen during a memorial in Rome in January. The fact that she did not become politically isolated after such a scandal is quite remarkable. She is herself a former member of the Youth Front, a group whose origins can be traced back to Italian neo-Fascism - despite these far-right connections (past and present), Meloni has condemned Fascism and could perhaps be thought of as yet another example of that broad category which is European populism.

Italian courts have ruled the Roman salute is only punishable when it is a risk to public order, which gives a lot of room to interpretation. On Wednesday, in any case, NATO **Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg** met with Meloni and commended the Italian Prime Minister for the country's contributions to the Atlantic Alliance - Italy regularly takes part in NATO maritime operation and Baltic Air Policing. Unlike other "populists" leaders in Europe, Meloni has always been an avid supporter of the Alliance. In July 2023, she used the topic of immigration from across the Mediterranean to [press US president Joe Biden for a larger NATO role in Africa](#). In February, Ukrainian **President Volodymyr Zelensky and Meloni** signed a bilateral security agreement.

None of that is surprising. Back in October 2022, the then new Prime Minister issued a statement saying that

“Italy, with its head high, is part of Europe and the Atlantic alliance. Whoever doesn’t agree with this cornerstone cannot be part of the government, at the cost of not having a government.”

Her remarks were aimed at the Forza Italia party and former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, who passed away in June 2023. At the time, some of Berlusconi’s pro-Putin remarks were leaked, and this was quite a scandal, prompting Meloni to [threaten to block talks to form a new government](#) -

“I intend to lead a government with a clear and unequivocal foreign policy line”, she stated.

The message was duly noted and the Forza Italia party distanced itself from its founder **Silvio Berlusconi**, who then happened to make things easier for everybody by dying (of leukemia) the next year. Italian press had reported Meloni was considering appointing **Antonio Tajani** (Forza Italia’ national coordinator) as Foreign Affairs Minister in 2022, but had doubts about it after the aforementioned Berlusconi’s scandal. Tajani was eventually appointed and today is Meloni’s deputy (colloquially known as Vice-Premier), together with **Matteo Salvini**.

It would be interesting to compare Meloni with Marine Le Pen (defeated French presidential candidate in 2022). The latter [promised to pull Paris out of NATO](#), claiming the alliance “perpetuates the anachronistic and aggressive logic of the Cold War bloc”. Le Pen was defeated and Meloni won.

I’ve written on how [Neo-Mccarthyist wave](#) in Europe has been persecuting dissident leaders and political parties, a phenomenon I’ve called the “[Maidanization](#)” of Europe: it includes [banning Soviet and Russian flags in Victory Day](#), [criminalizing pro-Palestine protests](#), and, of course, persecuting or even banning “pro-Russian” political parties in a neo-Mccarthyist way, as seen in France, [Poland](#), and Ukraine itself, which has [banned at least 11 political parties](#) so far.

Such persecution of “populism” can be [quite selective](#) - parties such as the AfD and leaders such as Le Pen are targeted, while Meloni is not at all and Poland’s Law and Justice (PiS) party not really. It is not hard to see what the criteria is.

Much of the rising popular European opposition to further supporting Ukraine has nothing to do with being “pro-Russia” or “pro-Putin” and rather has a lot to do with the costs and risks of getting the country involved in such a conflict. As I [wrote](#) before, with an unwinnable war haunting the continent, and rising energy prices, one should expect European “populism” and the far-right to gain more and more political influence: these movements have been increasingly capitalizing growing popular grievances with NATO and with the European Union bloc itself. Unfortunately, opposition to the US-led Atlantic Alliance and suicidal energy and economic policies have been [largely marginalized](#) in Europe to the point of almost becoming a monopoly of so-called extremist discourse. So much for “[strategic autonomy](#)”.

Back to Meloni, **her statements on the pressing social issue of migration do indicate deep disunity within the European establishment** - in September last year the Italian Prime Minister said preventing migrants from entering the continent should be the main task for European heads of state.

At the same time, President of the European Commission **Ursula von der Leyen** was emphasizing the need to democratize the access of potential migrants to (legal) migration channels within the bloc. But even on that topic Meloni has disappointed anti-migration voters, with Italy currently seeing the largest (illegal) flow of migrants, a phenomenon that fuels xenophobia, cultural shocks, and frustration among working-class Italians. The truth is that the European economy largely relies on cheaper migrant labor and rhetorical points will not necessarily materialize into concrete policies.

All of that shows the limits of European so-called "populism". Moreover, to sum it up, Fascist-leaning and far-right leaders and coalitions (even with public Fascist salutes and so on) are welcomed within European power structures – as long as they remain loyal to NATO. In the same way, blatant armed [neo-Nazism is routinely white-washed](#) in Ukraine itself.

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