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Nationalism is Europe's poison

… and Giorgia Meloni and her friends are demonstrating it to the entire world

Nationalism is a dangerous beast, and historically, it has not boded well for Europe. At a time when Europe's peace is threatened by various geopolitical challenges, certain nationalist puppeteers among European leaders attempt to pull strings to safeguard their national interests, often at the expense of the general European good. Upon closer analysis, this attitude is not only flawed but outright dangerous, even contradictory. While they often attack the EU, nationalists are frequently forced to cooperate closely with it.

Giorgia Meloni is the most fitting example of this hypocrisy. Her electoral campaign was marked by an anti-European and strongly sovereigntist stance, distancing herself from the world of high finance and other elites that symbolise power. And yet, her electoral success and support in Italy is only minimally tied to her proclaimed anti-European and anti-establishment stance. Meloni's broad success seems to stem – according to several Italian analysts – from various other factors, most notably the fact that her party has not held executive power since Berlusconi's last government. In other words, for many, Meloni was the sole option, as the only one who hasn't governed in recent years. And yet, contrary to what non-Italians often assume, Meloni's electoral base is also made up of moderate centre-right entrepreneurs and representatives of trade associations like Confindustria and Confartigianato who benefit to great deals from the status quo. These entrepreneurs are certainly not willing to forgo the benefits of the single market, a common currency, integrated banking, and much more. This electorate understands that Meloni cannot abandon the EU and instead promises a more business-friendly Europe, with fewer climate restrictions and regulations that hinder Italy's typically small to medium-sized industrial fabric. Nevertheless, the largest electoral base of Fratelli d´Italia is still composed of post-fascists who are entirely anti-European.

At this point, it is evident that Meloni's remarkable achievement of going from four per cent of the vote in 2018 to 26 per cent in 2022 has brought with it some side effects. Having created a fragmented electorate

composed of both centre-right entrepreneurs and fascist extremists, the prime minister is finding it difficult to satisfy both poles. While poll data seems to contradict this claim (Meloni's approval rate continues to increase) the facts speak for themselves. Two and a half years of Meloni government show that the absurd statements she made during the election campaign remain devoid of tangible outcomes. Meloni in fact, has been forced to engage seriously and respectfully with the European institutions. Her good relations with Commission President Ursula von der Leyen seem to go beyond mere diplomatic ties. And in the name of national interest, Meloni worked to secure an important portfolio, 'Cohesion and Development', for the Italian Commissioner Raffaele Fitto.

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Naturally, some questions arise: why this inconsistency among sovereigntists? Why do they not genuinely attempt to reform this EU which, they claim, hinders them so much? The answer is simple: in the 21st century, European states alone stand no chance in modern geopolitical challenges because they are dwarfed by superpowers like the US, Russia, China and India. So while Meloni is well aware that she cannot disappoint her voters, she also needs to work with the EU to strengthen alliances in order to safeguard national interests. There is simply no room for a lone-wolf approach. Meloni and her allies cannot deny the pressing need for a united Europe today, yet, they cannot appear overtly pro-European either. The result of this inconsistency: Meloni finds herself immobilised, resorting to mere declarations without taking concrete action.

Missing a great opportunity

This Melonian inertia is squandering a newfound political stability that could return Italy to a period of greater political splendour, positioning it as a leader in the European and global context. To its credit, the Italian right has achieved a balance rarely seen in Italian institutions: the Meloni government is among the longest-lasting in the Italian Republic. Despite internal differences and divisions, the strong leadership of the prime minister keeps the group remarkably united. This internal cohesion is even more evident on the international stage, with many prestigious media outlets, although critical of Italy's actions, acknowledging its increased prestige and stability compared to previous years. However, as a

well-known Italian saying goes, not all that glitters is gold. If Meloni were truly forward-thinking, she would seize the moment of weak and absent Franco-German leadership to transform the Italian Republic into a beacon for the continent. Indeed, although one of the founding countries of the EU, Italy has never truly managed to assume a leading role. But her ostentatious anti-Europeanism ties the Italian government's hands, preventing it from strongly supporting the European cause at a historic moment when it could represent a positive revolution for all EU states.

The examples of Melonian sovereigntism's failures do not stop at the eastern shores of the Atlantic but extend across the ocean. In the context of evident deterioration in EU-US relations, Meloni's friendship with Elon Musk and Donald Trump is a great example. If it is clear that Meloni is incapable of thinking in Europeanist terms, at the very least, Italy, her beloved homeland, should benefit from some privileged treatment. The tariffs issue alone suffices to understand how ridiculous and ineffective the sovereigntist logic is since Italy will not actually benefit from any tariff reductions. On the contrary, as the second-largest exporting European country to the US, it will suffer an enormous impact that will be hard to bear for the small and medium-sized enterprises that make up the country's economic fabric — and Meloni's voter base. Independent Italian institutes like SVIMEZ estimate a best-case scenario outcome: GDP contraction of 0.09 per cent and in the worst-case scenario of 0.18 per cent, with job losses ranging from 27 000 to 76 000. Similarly, on the issue of the war in Ukraine, Meloni has not benefited from any privileged dialogue with the United States.

In the words of Alcide De Gasperi: 'Europe is not a utopia, but a necessity.'

On 17 April, Meloni and Trump met at the White House to discuss precisely these issues (especially tariffs): the prime minister explicitly presented herself as a 'Western nationalist', a leader who, therefore, wants to build bridges between the Atlantic shores in a moment of fracture. And yet, nothing concrete was achieved. The meeting was almost embarrassing, with Trump showering the Italian leader with compliments and her, promising an Italian investment of €10 billion in the US and the purchase of additional liquefied natural gas, obtaining a mere promise of a meeting in Rome, at which the European Commission also appears to be present, in return. Meloni returned to Europe promoting a great success in mediation, but the truth is that there are no

concrete or favorable results. It seems that, ultimately, this sovereigntist network yields little for national interests. Meloni teaches Europe and the world that shouting for greater sovereignty in 2025 is a waste of breath. The best you can hope for is a few words of praise from some aspiring autocrat (Trump, in Meloni's case), which, however, do not translate into any actual advantage. Meloni's narrative of Italy's new-found international fame is (unfortunately) destined to materialise in nothing, or rather in total isolation, in a reality composed of many nationalist bullies who safeguard their own interests. And if it is true, as the great Italian and European Alcide De Gasperionce said 'Europe is not a utopia, but a necessity' (and we have every reason to believe it is so), there is no place for sovereigntism today. The great histories of European nations risk crumbling if they lack the strength to unite to face the world's great challenges. It is better that this awareness reaches as many people as possible before nationalism becomes an incurable poison. Fortunately, Giorgia Meloni and her friends are providing an excellent example of how this approach is failing.



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