

Meloni's Italy: A Viable "Radical Model" for the European Union?

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Abstract. A U.S. administration led by Donald Trump, with its unilateral approach, preference for bilateral relations with allies, and focus on restoring supposed American greatness through a reduction in the costs associated with maintaining the international order, may find it advantageous to promote a "Meloni political model" within the European Union (EU). This perspective helps explain the activism of Elon Musk in Europe, as he acts as a catalyst for the trans-nationalization of far-right actors across the continent, a project previously attempted (though ultimately unsuccessful) by Steve Bannon during the first Trump administration. On the other hand, the Meloni government may gradually abandon its current "dual-track" approach, which has thus far combined pragmatism in foreign policy with symbolic "culture wars" domestically, toward a fully radical stance. In this context, the so-called "external constraints" (NATO, EU institutions, and financial markets) that are often cited as limiting factors may even serve as facilitators. Ultimately, the culmination of a process that began with Berlusconi in 1994 in Italy's political landscape could be the establishment of a radical political model, an "Italian model" that could potentially be applied throughout the European Union.

Keywords: Italy's Meloni government; Radical Right; European Union; Elon Musk; Transatlantic relations; Donald Trump; External constraints.

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Introduction

This chapter seeks to examine how recent international and regional dynamics could push the Italian government toward political radicalism, arguing the Meloni executive's model of radical politics (an "Italian model") could potentially be applied throughout the European Union (EU), in the coming years. In this paper, we proceed with the following structure:

(a) We begin by outlining the strategy of Italy's current government, which we characterize as a dual-track approach. This strategy involves pragmatically balancing controversial domestic policies, particularly in areas such as immigration and justice, with a moderate international stance; (b) Next, we delve into the debate surrounding the perceived radicalization of Italian politics, asserting that the current political configuration represents the culmination of a long-term process that began under Silvio Berlusconi in 1994; (c) We then analyze the radical orientation of the Meloni government at the domestic level, contrasting it with the more moderate approach taken in international and EU affairs; (d) Moving to the international stage, we examine recent developments, such as Donald Trump's victory in the U.S. and the influence of Elon Musk in Europe, suggesting that these events may align with the promotion of an "Italian model" within the EU, a model centered on radical politics. In the conclusion, we present a set of potential limitations and counterarguments to the thesis proposed in this paper.

Italy is currently governed by a radical right government led by PM Giorgia Meloni, emerged by the victory at 2022 general election by the Italian right-wing coalition composed by *Fratelli d'Italia* (Fdi, Brothers of Italy), *Lega per Salvini Premier* (Lega, League) and *Forza Italia* (FI). The coalition government has so far been particularly stable, an uncommon peculiarity for

Italian politics. In almost three years the Meloni executive has adopted a "dual-track approach", balancing controversial domestic policies, particularly in areas such as immigration and justice, with a moderate stance in foreign policy.

1. Research questions and main argument

The main argument of the paper is that Italy may lean toward a more radical political direction in the near future and that radicalism may be used as a model at the EU level. To say so we consider both internal and external political factors that may push the country toward adopting more radical policies. Why the Meloni government, that since its formation carefully balanced a range of controversial domestic priorities, often aligning with right-wing populist ideologies on issues such as immigration and national sovereignty, with a relatively moderate position on the international stage, abandon this stance? If this approach has been so far useful for the government, with opinion pools giving Meloni and the party FdI unprecedented consensus, why it should opt for more radicalism? Moreover, what about navigating complex relationships with the European Union, NATO, and key global players, as international financial markets?

The point this chapter aims to advance is that Italy's stance internationally (including at the EU level) has been often been linked to limitations posed by external subjects (alliances, regional and international institutions). An Italian government as the current one makes no exception to the rule: after having won the election in late 2022 had to deal rather quickly with the so called "vincoli esterni" (external constraints). However, what would happen if the constraints themselves start gradually shifting towards new equilibria that are ideologically or

pragmatically sympathetic the Italian government? Could they work no more as “external constraint” but as *facilitator*, instead?

Shifts in international politics, including EU politics, have begun reshaping the context in which Italy operates, with the liberal world order undergoing major changes (Parsi, 2021)². The rise of populist radical right figures like U.S. President Donald Trump, the political instability and the lack of leadership supply faced by major European powers, above all France and Germany, have already shifted the balance of power within the EU.

As these shifts unfold, Italy’s role in global politics may turn increasingly relevant. With the EU in a long phase of vacuum in terms of leadership supply (Macronism being at a dead-end in France, Germany still not able to move on Merkel’s era), Italy’s position as a key partner of the U.S. grows, and so its ties with rising and consolidating far right political forces throughout Europe. These elements may encourage the country to adopt a more radical stance domestically and at the EU level.

The influence of external actors, including techno billionaire as Elon Musk, whose political views and global reach have sparked significant attention, adds another layer of complexity to Italy’s political future (Palano, 2024)³. Musk’s endorsement of right-wing populist figures and ideas, combined with the

² The foundational principles of this order, such as multilateralism, democracy, and free trade, have been increasingly undermined by both external challenges and internal contradictions. The rise of populist and nationalist movements, along with shifting geopolitical power dynamics, has contributed to the unraveling of the post-World War II liberal framework (Parsi, 2021, among others).

³ See Palano (2024) on the role of political parties, civil society, and the public in shaping Italy’s democratic system, considering the impact of Meloni’s government on the balance between traditional political structures and newer, more radical forces.

growing popularity of radical right-wing movements across Europe and the U.S., signals a global trend that may further push Italy toward radicalism. As Italy grapples with these shifting dynamics, the Meloni government must navigate a European and international context where the “old external constraints,” such as NATO obligations and European Union institutions, are now witnessing the emergence of new political balances. These new balances, increasingly aligned with the radical right, present both opportunities and challenges for Italy’s role in Europe and on the global stage. In this delicate moment, the Meloni government faces the challenge of navigating between maintaining Italy’s traditional alliances and adapting to the changing political realities in Europe and beyond. The pressures of political instability within the EU, coupled with the growing prominence of figures like Donald Trump and Elon Musk, suggest that Italy may be pushed further toward a more radical political stance (see also Clementi, Haglund and Locatelli, 2017). This shift is not merely a response to domestic concerns but is also deeply intertwined with broader geopolitical changes, especially in the context of transatlantic relations and the evolving role of the radical right within European politics. As the article will demonstrate, the current political moment in Italy, shaped by these global trends, may push the government to adopt more radical policies that redefine its position both within the EU and on the international stage.

2. On the “dual track” and pragmatism (2022-2024)

While the Meloni government continues to navigate a complex European and international landscape, it faces mounting pressures that could lead to a greater embrace of radical right-wing ideologies. With the rise of global populist movements and

shifting political balances within the EU, Italy's political future is increasingly uncertain. The growing influence of external actors, including Donald Trump and Elon Musk, further complicates the situation, making it clear that Italy's political trajectory may veer towards a more radicalized stance. This article will explore how these changes may impact Italy's domestic and foreign policies, reshaping its role within the European Union and its position on the global stage.

The Italian right-wing coalition, which won the 2022 election (Bruno, 2022), represents a very interesting case study for analyzing how radical right-wing political parties, and their leaders, flexibly adapt to a rapidly evolving international context. To date (2022-2025), the Meloni executive and her party, *Fratelli d'Italia* (FdI) has worked on a “dual track” (*doppio binario*): on one hand, domestic policies have shown some elements of radicalism, on issues like immigration and justice; on the other hand, in European and international affairs, a pragmatic and moderate approach was used, mainly due to the constraints imposed by alliances and membership in the European Union (EU). Many analysts have noted that while domestically the government has adopted symbolic policies focused on “culture wars,” emphasizing border defense, the fight against illegal immigration, and the promotion of traditional values, in foreign policy, it has followed the path set by previous governments (with the notable exception of the Conte I government), not least the Draghi government, in this sense Meloni supported Ukraine against Russian aggression, maintaining a strong transatlantic stance.

3. *The issue of the radicalization of Italian politics (2011-2022)*

The issue of the supposed ongoing radicalization of Italian politics is complex. There has clearly been a major transition from Berlusconi's dominated era and right-wing coalitions (1994-2011) to the rise of new leaders like Salvini and Meloni. But has this moved the center of gravity of the center-right towards more radical positions? Has this been a gradual and incremental change or a radical shift. According to Bruno, Downes and Scopelliti (2024) the shift happened but does not necessarily represent a mass radicalization of Italian society.

The 2011 *crisi dello spread* is identified as a turning point that led to Berlusconi's decline and opened the way for new political forces within the center-right, a process of gradual radicalization over the last decade, led by the new or renewed parties, FdI or Salvini's Lega (2011-2022). The "post-Berlusconi" coalitions show a change in the balance of power among the parties. While Berlusconi had already mainstreamed the Italian Social Movement (MSI) by including it in his coalition, the new coalitions have seen a greater influence from parties like the League and FdI, which hold more radical views on issues such as immigration, gender rights, and economic *souverainism*.

While both parties are considered part of the radical right, FdI has a deeper historical and ideological tradition, linked to the MSI and National Alliance (AN), whereas the League has a more recent history and is often driven by a more pragmatic and populist approach. FdI has adopted an increasingly ambiguous stance toward its fascist heritage (Bruno and Downes, 2023).

Following Berlusconi's decline, Matteo Salvini's League experienced a rapid ascent, briefly becoming the leading

force within the right-wing coalition. This period was characterized by a populist and *souverainist* rhetoric. The League changed its name from Northern League to League Salvini Premier. The League's dominance was short-lived. Fratelli d'Italia led by Giorgia Meloni, eventually rose to become the dominant force in the center-right. Despite the changes, the sources highlight elements of continuity, such as the constant presence of the radical right in Italian politics since 1990. The sources also note a shared populist and *souverainist* rhetoric among various leaders.

A number of scholars have highlighted a complex picture in which Italian politics has been influenced by the rise of populist and radical right parties, the financial crisis of 2011, and the increasingly widespread use of social media, emphasizing that political dynamics are constantly evolving, with a continuous repositioning of the forces at play (Albertazzi and Zulianello, 2022; Albertazzi et al. 2018; 2021). In this sense, the rise of the radical right should be seen not a sudden phenomenon, but rather part of a broader trend of normalization, which is facilitated by the use of social media and the blurring of lines between the traditional right and the radical right (Pirro 2023)⁴.

Bruno et al (2021) emphasize that there is a process of radicalization of traditional political forces and, consequently, a “normalization” of far-right ideas. This is evident in the use of symbols, slogans, and languages that tend to blur the lines between the moderate and radical right. Castelli Gattinara and Froio (Castelli Gattinara and Froio 2021), among others, analyze the dynamics among the various

⁴ Pirro (2023) in particular discusses the significance of the term “far-right” as an umbrella concept, suggesting that this is a useful framework for understanding a variety of different right-wing political parties and movements.

parties of the Italian right, including the tensions and collaborations between Forza Italia, the League, and Brothers of Italy (FdI), as well as their differing ideological and strategic positions. Casteli Gattinara, Froio and Pirro (2021) have also investigated possible factors behind mobilization of radical right and far right, in particular focusing on grievances, opportunities, and resources. These elements interact in complex ways, shaping the extent and nature of radical right mobilization. Grievances encompass economic struggles (e.g., high unemployment), cultural tensions (such as increased migration), and institutional dissatisfaction (e.g., discontent with democracy). Opportunities refer to favorable political and discursive conditions, such as a fragmented government or access to public platforms. Resources include both the organizational capacity of the group and its material and symbolic assets. Notably, these factors do not function independently but interact to either amplify or diminish mobilization.

4. *"Culture wars" at home*

It is possible to say that since the 2022 victory at the Italian general election, the rightwing coalition led by Giorgia Meloni and her party FdI, has been following a playbook based on highly controversial policy issues, with the aim to politicize areas with crucial symbolical importance. In this sense we may speak of culture wars⁵.

⁵ The concept of "culture wars" was first popularized by American sociologist James Davison Hunter in his 1991 book *Culture Wars: The Struggle to Define America*. Hunter used the term to describe the growing ideological divide in the United States between conservative and progressive values, particularly regarding issues like abortion, education, religion, and LGBT rights.

Migration and social are policy areas that have provide some fertile ground. With the Albania Agreement, the Meloni government established a protocol with Albania to process asylum seekers outside the European Union. This approach faced legal challenges, with Italian courts blocking the rapid expulsion of asylum seekers to Albania, questioning the legality of processing asylum applications outside EU borders. With the asylum Status Revocation the government initiated measures to remove asylum status from individuals who had previously been granted international protection, particularly targeting foreigners with criminal convictions. With the Surrogacy Ban Extension, in October 2024, the Italian Senate voted to extend the country's ban on surrogacy to include couples who travel abroad for the procedure. Critics argue that this policy disproportionately affects same-sex couples seeking to become parents.

To these, we may add the so called “Premierato”. It refers to a proposed constitutional reform in Italy aimed at strengthening the powers of the Prime Minister. Under this reform, the Prime Minister would be directly elected by voters, and the winning coalition would be guaranteed 55% of the seats in parliament. This initiative is a priority for Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni's government, which argues that it will provide greater political stability and more effective governance. However, the proposal has sparked significant controversy. Critics contend that the “Premierato” could disrupt the balance of power within Italy's political system, potentially leading to an excessive concentration of authority in the executive branch. Concerns have been raised that such a shift might undermine

democratic checks and balances, echoing historical instances of authoritarianism in Italy⁶.

5. *Between pragmatism and "external constraints": moderation abroad*

At the European and international level, the current Italian executive under Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni has largely embraced a path of moderation and pragmatism. This approach has been particularly evident in Italy's engagement with key international and European frameworks, reflecting a continued commitment to both the European Union and NATO. In terms of foreign policy, Italy's position under Meloni has been one of cautious consistency, seeking to balance national interests with its role in the global order. This is notably reflected in Italy's response to the war in Ukraine, which offers a clear example of continuity with the policies of the previous government (see for instance Isernia et al. 2024; Vignoli and Coticchia, 2024; Zavershinskaia, 2025; Zavershinskaia and Spera, 2024). As Bruno and Fazio (2023) have observed, despite initial concerns and skepticism regarding Meloni's foreign policy direction, especially given her party's historical associations with more Eurosceptic and nationalist positions, there has been little to no disruption in Italy's stance on critical international issues, particularly when it comes to supporting Ukraine in its struggle against Russian aggression.

⁶ As of June 2024, the Italian Senate approved the initial stages of this constitutional reform. The process of amending the constitution requires either a two-thirds majority in both houses of parliament or a majority approval in a popular referendum. Given the opposition from various political parties, it is anticipated that the reform will ultimately be decided through a referendum.

Although Meloni and her coalition were initially viewed with some uncertainty by international observers, particularly with regard to their potential approach to European unity and international alliances, the reality has been one of significant alignment with broader European and transatlantic positions. Under the leadership of Meloni, Italy has reaffirmed its commitment to Ukraine, continuing to support military and economic aid, as well as endorsing EU sanctions against Russia. This continuity can be understood not only as a reflection of Meloni's strategic decisions but also as a result of the constraints posed by Italy's international commitments. Italy, being a member of both the European Union and NATO, has faced a clear responsibility to align with the broader Western coalition. This geopolitical positioning has pushed the Meloni government to adhere to Italy's longstanding alliances, regardless of the party's more populist rhetoric.

Additionally, the Meloni administration has underscored Italy's role within the EU, repeatedly emphasizing its integration with European institutions. The government has made it clear that Italy's future is firmly anchored in Europe, demonstrating a pragmatic understanding that the country's national security, economic interests, and political stability are closely tied to European cooperation. Despite early fears that the new government might seek to take a more isolationist or critical stance toward the EU, the government has largely adhered to EU policies and priorities, particularly those related to the war in Ukraine. This approach also highlights a broader trend of pragmatism, as Meloni's government has not pursued drastic shifts in policy, but instead focused on sustaining Italy's strong role within the Western alliance. Again, this commitment to moderation and continuity reflects a broader tendency of Italian political leaders to prioritize stability and predictability in foreign policy, regardless of domestic political shifts. Even

though Meloni's rhetoric has sometimes emphasized nationalism, the structure of Italy's external relations (based on "vincolo esterno", external constraints) has effectively limited the scope for radical departures from established policies. This continuity in Italy's foreign policy suggests that the government, despite its political differences from the Draghi administration, has found it essential to uphold Italy's longstanding international relationships, particularly with the EU and NATO. In this context, Meloni's leadership has not only focused on preserving Italy's credibility within these organizations but has also positioned the country as a reliable partner in addressing global challenges, from security threats to economic crises.

6. Goodbye to the "dual track" (2025-). Toward radical positions?

More recently, due to an international and European context shaped by the Trump victory in the United States and the political crises in France and Germany, the Italian government and its leader, PM Giorgia Meloni, are often pointed to as a potential "political model" for the entire EU. In this sense, a revision of the strategy employed so far by the Italian government, which we have defined as the "dual track" (i.e. moderate internationally, less moderate domestically), may take place.

At the international level, the triumphant return of Donald Trump in the United States will certainly have a significant impact on liberal democracies and old allies. The previous Trump presidency (2017-2021) showed a preference for bilateral relations with individual countries rather than multilateral institutions, an approach that will redefine transatlantic dynamics. In this context, Italy could emerge as a privileged partner for the

United States, given the political alignment between the two leaders. Meloni's invitation to the inauguration of Trump's second term is a signal of this potential partnership. At the European level, it is undeniable that the EU is going through a crisis in terms of political leadership supply: France and Germany, for different reasons, seem unable to provide viable leadership options. The combination of political instability and economic fragility in these countries represents a significant challenge and could have repercussions for the entire EU.

In France, although the presidency has been held by Emmanuel Macron since 2017, the political situation remains fluid and precarious, unable to express the leadership desperately needed within the EU. Elected in the months following Brexit (and the first Trump victory) with great hopes from supporters of the European integration project, Macron has failed to maintain the hopes of a renewed Europeanism. His leadership has been significantly weakened in recent years, amidst social protests, rising public debt, and great political fragmentation. While it is true that, at least for now, the radical right led by the *Rassemblement National* has not prevailed in decisive elections, the trend in political support is certainly unfavorable to the current president.

Likewise, Germany seem incapable of providing any reassurance in terms of political leadership for the EU, as it awaits the outcome of the federal elections in Germany on February 23 to elect members of the new parliament. Since 2022, "orphaned" by Angela Merkel's chancellorship (2005-2021), it is now grappling with a deep economic-political crisis, rather surprising given its position as the EU's leading economic power and one of the world's top manufacturing and exporting countries. While the party *CDU/CSU* is still in the process of reorganization after Merkel's era, the *SPD* party of current Chancellor Scholz, seems unable to pick up Merkel's baton, neither

in Germany nor in Europe. At the same time, an Eurosceptic and extreme-right party, unthinkable only a few years ago, the *Alternative for Germany* (AfD), is on the rise.

7. An Italian model for the EU: The case of the re-migration policy

An interesting case of how Meloni's Italy could be seen as a "political model" for the EU can be seen in the policy field, in particular referring to re-emigration policy. The Italian government under PM Giorgia Meloni has implemented a migration policy involving an agreement with Albania to process asylum seekers outside the European Union's borders. This policy has been lauded by EU top officials (AP News, 2024) and EU member states' leaders, but also criticized within Italy.

In November 2023, Italy and Albania signed a protocol allowing Italy to transfer up to 3,000 migrants per month to Albanian processing centers. These centers, funded by Italy, are designed to handle asylum applications of individuals rescued in the Mediterranean. The agreement aims to alleviate the migration burden on Italy by outsourcing parts of the asylum process. However, its implementation has faced significant legal challenges. Italian courts have repeatedly blocked the transfer of migrants to Albania, citing concerns over the legality and human rights implications of the arrangement. As of February 2025, the European Court of Justice is reviewing the plan to determine its compliance with EU law. The Italy-Albania migration policy has received mixed reactions from European leaders and institutions. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen recognized the agreement as a potential model for EU migration management. The German Chancellor has not publicly commented directly on Italy's agreement

with Albania. However, Scholz has been actively engaged in Germany's internal debates on migration. In a recent televised debate, he and opposition leader Friedrich Merz discussed immigration policies and their stance against the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) party. Scholz emphasized the importance of maintaining a firm stance on migration while rejecting any collaboration with the AfD. The leader of the latter, Alice Weidel, has clearly stated that it looks to the Italian government and Giorgia Meloni's leadership as a model, especially regarding immigration policies (LaPresse, 2025).

In this sense it is possible to say the Meloni government's approach to certain contentious policy areas, particularly migration, has positioned it as a model for some European leaders and right-wing political movements. This perception arises because Meloni has successfully implemented policies that resonate with a broader European trend toward stricter migration control and national sovereignty, key issues in contemporary political debates. Beyond migration, the Meloni government is perceived as an interesting model in other politicized policy areas, such as economic nationalism, cultural identity, and EU relations. Meloni balances a nationalist, sovereignty-driven rhetoric with pragmatic engagement with EU institutions, an approach that appeals to both right-wing governments and conservative opposition parties across Europe. Germany's AfD and France's National Rally (RN), as we have seen, have looked at Meloni's strategy as a way to gain mainstream credibility while maintaining a tough stance on key issues like migration and national identity. Moreover, while Meloni shares certain nationalist views with Hungarian PM Viktor Orbán, she has taken a more cooperative approach with Brussels, making her a potential bridge between sovereigntist and mainstream conservative forces.

8. Italy and the role of Elon Musk in the EU: a far-right catalyst

To the potentially favorable international and European context for a “radical political model” represented by Italy and its executive, we may add another element that could possibly act as a catalyst: the role played by Elon Musk. Recently, Musk expressed support for a “Make Europe Great Again” movement in Europe, echoing the MAGA slogan that made Trump famous. A similar project was attempted, and failed, at the dawn of the Trump era, when Steve Bannon was sent to Europe to try to unite and federate European far-right parties into a single project (Fazio, Bruno and Kaunert, 2023).

Bannon had emerged as a pivotal figure in the transnational political landscape, playing a key role in shaping and influencing the far-right movements both in Europe and the United States. His efforts were instrumental in facilitating the alignment of far-right political parties and extremist groups across these regions, promoting a shared ideological agenda that has allowed these disparate factions to coalesce into a transnational movement. Through his connections and strategic efforts, Bannon played the role of a “facilitator of transnationalization,” bridging the gap between various far-right entities and fostering a common narrative that spans multiple continents. One of his most significant achievements was his involvement in the formation of the political bloc known as Identity and Democracy (ID) in the European Parliament in 2019. By leveraging his relationships with key far-right leaders such as Nigel Farage in the United Kingdom, Marine Le Pen in France, Viktor Orbán in Hungary, and Matteo Salvini in Italy, Bannon helped unite these political figures under a common banner, enabling them to exert more influence within the European political sphere. This collaboration marked a decisive moment in the

consolidation of far-right politics at the European level, with Bannon playing a central role in uniting parties that were once ideologically fragmented⁷.

Bannon's ambition, however, extended beyond mere political cooperation. His establishment of the "Academy for the Judeo-Christian West" at the Trisulti Monastery in Italy is perhaps one of the most emblematic aspects of his efforts to shape the future of far-right politics. The academy was conceived as an educational institution aimed at training the next generation of far-right leaders, offering a space where young political leaders could be indoctrinated with a vision that aligns with Bannon's nationalist and anti-liberal values. His initiative was seen as a direct counter to liberal institutions, particularly those associated with George Soros, whose vision for global governance Bannon and his allies vehemently opposed. The strategic choice of Italy as the location for this academy was no accident. Italy's history, including its association with fascist ideologies during the 20th century, made it a symbolic and strategic ground for the cultivation of far-right ideas. Bannon considered Italy to be a crucial center for driving political change, not only within Europe but also globally. He envisioned Italy as the epicenter of a new transnational far-right movement, with the potential to spread these nationalist and anti-globalist values across borders, challenging the established political order.

Bannon's project in Europe, aimed at uniting far-right parties under a single political platform, failed for several reasons⁸.

⁷ Traditional liberal democracies are undergoing significant transformation, with elites sometimes reinforcing democratic norms and at other times undermining them (see among others Campati, 2022).

⁸ Although Bannon's vision for the academy ultimately faced significant opposition, leading to the shutdown of the institution, the impact of his ideas did not dissipate in Europe (let alone the US). Bannon's influence continues

The main ones were the deep ideological and strategic differences between the leaders of various nationalist parties, each focused on the interests of its own country. Furthermore, opposition from some European governments and the lack of clear economic and organizational support limited the project.

After Bannon's experience was archived, Musk seems to have adopted the above mentioned highly ambitious political project "MEGA" In this sense, the owner of Tesla appears determined to use the Meloni government model as an example for the entire EU⁹. The techno-billionaire, who has been appointed by Trump as the head of the Department of Government Efficiency (DOGE) is currently under EU investigation into X regarding concerns over content moderation and the dissemination of misinformation (Chambers, 2025). Likewise, Musk has faced criticism for his endorsement of far-right political parties in Europe, notably the AfD, described as "the last spark of hope for this country" in a December 2024 editorial (Politico, 28 December 2024). Musk's remarks have elicited responses from European political figures. In Germany, Chancellor Olaf Scholz remarked that many individuals on social media seek attention through provocative slogans, emphasizing

to resonate, particularly in Italy, where he has successfully brought his ideological framework to several Italian political leaders. His role in fostering these connections and advancing a transnational far-right agenda highlights the growing influence of such movements in shaping the future of global politics, with Italy serving as a key focal point in this larger ideological struggle.

⁹ After all, the AfD, recently supported by Musk with great fanfare, has often stated that it looks to the Italian government and Giorgia Meloni's leadership as a model, especially regarding immigration policies (LaPresse, 2025). In the past, top officials of the EU institutions and of the German government, including Von der Leyen and Olaf Scholz, had expressed interest in the model proposed by Italy. For a review of the EU policies on migration, see Ceccorulli, Fassi and Lucarelli (2020).

the principle that “one should not feed the troll.” Friedrich Merz, likely to become the next chancellor, succeeding Olaf Scholz, called Musk’s piece “intrusive and presumptuous” in a social media post. In the United Kingdom Musk has been outspoken in his criticism of British Prime Minister Keir Starmer, asserting that those who propagate falsehoods and misinformation on a large scale are not concerned with the victims but with their own interests. These developments underscore Musk’s increasing influence on European political discourse and raise broader questions about the role of major technology platforms in shaping public debate and the dissemination of information. Furthermore, Musk has previously expressed strong opposition to left-leaning political leaders, including Olaf Scholz himself, whom he has referred to in derogatory terms.

9. Possible setbacks and backlashes to Italy’s model

Elon Musk’s activism in Europe is a catalyst for a wide project. It seeks to replicate Trump’s victory by pushing Meloni as a viable “political model” at the EU level. The gamble could, however, face a series of resistances and obstacles:

(i) The first concern pertains the methods used by Musk. His highly direct and polarizing interventions on key political issues come with risks: whether it is the politicization of the judiciary in Italy (concerning Italian immigration centers in Albania) or supporting the AfD in Germany (where he urged Germans not to feel guilty for the sins of their parents or grandparents), Musk has often been accused of interfering in the affairs of sovereign countries, causing strong political reactions. It cannot be ruled out that Musk’s interference in other countries’ affairs could lead to backlash, using economic means to

strike at his interests (e.g., Tesla and Starlink); (ii) A second risk concerns the relationship between Musk and Trump, which is currently very strong but could easily take a turn for the worse in the future. If Musk were to fall out of favor with Trump, the MEGA project concerning the far-right and extreme-right in Europe could suffer a fatal blow, as evidenced by Bannon's case; (iii) Finally, the possible "political model" of Italy for the EU, which Musk and Meloni seem determined to follow, carries an element of risk also due to potential "overestimation" by the Italian government. Excessively radical positions (both as narratives and policies) could provoke an unexpectedly strong political and judicial backlash, as the case of Libyan general Njeem Osama Almasri seems to indicate. Accused by the International Criminal Court of war crimes and crimes against humanity, Almasri was arrested in Turin on January 19, 2025, and released few days later, due to a presumed procedural error before being deported to Libya. This led to investigations by the Rome Public Prosecutor's Office against PM Meloni and other government members for aiding and abetting and embezzlement.

9. Conclusions

The Meloni government finds itself at a critical juncture, with the opportunity to shape itself as a potential "political model" for the European Union in the years ahead. This possibility is made all the more tangible by shifting political and economic dynamics both within Europe and across the Atlantic. In particular, the rising influence of figures like Donald Trump, should he secure a second term in office, coupled with the growing economic power of individuals such as Elon Musk, could further solidify a political climate in the EU increasingly

favorable to radical-right ideologies. Such a political shift at the EU level could create a scenario where Meloni's government and like-minded forces find themselves in a classic "win-win" situation, advancing their agenda while aligning with broader geopolitical trends.

However, the path forward is not without significant risks for both Meloni's government and its international allies. The Italian government's future decisions, especially regarding domestic policy, will be crucial in determining whether it continues with its current "dual track" strategy (balancing more moderate and radical policies) or takes a more decisive turn toward extreme positions. Such a shift could trigger stronger opposition both within Italy and across the European Union, potentially destabilizing its political footing. On the other hand, a second term for Trump would present him with limited time to push through his political agenda. His ability to advance this vision, particularly in the face of potential resistance from both domestic political opponents and EU leaders, is far from certain. Furthermore, while Trump's relationship with high-profile figures like Elon Musk has thus far been politically advantageous, there are signs that this alliance could become a double-edged sword in the future, especially as Musk's own influence and business interests may complicate the political calculus. Lastly, when considering the broader implications of the "MEGA" project, Bannon's ill-fated attempt to spread right-wing populism throughout Europe, it is important to remember that similar efforts have ended in failure in the past, underscoring the risks involved in pursuing such an ambitious political agenda.

In conclusion, while the Meloni government and its international allies face a potential window of opportunity to advance a radical-right agenda within the EU, they must tread carefully, balancing ambition with pragmatism in order to

avoid (1) alienating key domestic and European stakeholders (2) align a range political and economic entities that oppose the aforementioned project, yet are currently isolated. The risks of overreach could undermine their long-term goals, making the future uncertain for all parties involved.

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