

Migration Policy Shifts at the National and Regional Levels of the Italian Republic in the Years 2017-2020

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Over the past few years, migration policy has remained one of the most pressing, tense and controversial problems for Italy. Many factors play a role here: the geographical position of Italy, the political and economic situation in Africa (in particular, in Libya — one of the main migration platforms Italy made agreements with in order to combat illegal migration), Euroscepticism, fake news spread, deepening differences in education, international terrorism, financial crisis in general; personalistic (non-pluralist political parties focused on their leader instead of paying attention to people's opinions) and constantly switching (lack of positions' stability) internal Italian politics (as it happened, for example, with Lega Nord, which replaced the separatist discourse with the federalist one), in particular [n3].

However, the author decided to focus on one of the aspects related. As a result, the research question is: what is the impact of far-right and populist political parties on the Italian migration policy?

The author explores this issue from two perspectives: static (Italian political and administration system as a structure with its own logic and arrangement) and, what is even more important, dynamic (in the context of discourse formation and policy-change processes); but these two dimensions never go alone — they are interdependent.

Starting with structure, for the purpose of research modeling the author would systemize the main actors into two notional clusters: centre-left cluster (reasonable migration control — Partito Democratico, Articolo Uno, Democrazia Solidale, etc.) and far-right, anti-migration populist cluster (Movimento 5 Stelle, Lega Nord, Fratelli d'Italia, etc.) [n6]. It needs to be noted that the government coalitions (Gentiloni and Conte Cabinets) do not match with these groups formed solely on the basis of actors' migration policy positions.

What rhetorics do these actors use in order to express their positions and to influence public opinion.

Since the fact that Europe has been facing the great migrant crisis is recognized worldwide [n8], and Italy is at its forefront due to the geographical location, no political actor in the country would actually deny the fact how heavy this burden is for the Italian budget and for Italy as a whole.

However, while talking about the substantial differences, we can learn a lot. If the author points out the most opposing concepts, the political vector of the first group of actors would include pro-Euro position, social justice, equality, ecopolitics, etc. [n4], while the second group's — nationalism, Euroscepticism, protectionism and — in the context of its populist part — anti-elite views and strategies [n5]. But generally all the actors should be placed somewhere in-between these two poles.

The area of possible solutions and decisions regarding the main subject — migration policy — depends on which actor (or actors) would advocate and express its values more successfully. Liberals, focusing mainly on providing the Italian citizens with more economic opportunities, of course, oppose mass and illegal immigration. And so does the right-wing group of actors,

with the difference that it does not take into account the human rights aspect of the problem and aims to achieve the so-called 'zero-landing' level from the Mediterranean area — the most problematic one [n7].

The author has to highlight that although political struggle is definitely based on belief systems and ideals, it can be carried out only with certain amount of resources. That is why the 'main actors' concept is used — for this research, the author picked only those who achieved a certain level of public support. In the case of migration policy in Italy, the main struggle was (and still is) fought for parliamentary and government seats, providing actors who have already obtained the power of influencing public opinion (to different extent, of course), with access to financial, information, administrative and military resources, as well as giving them the needed legitimacy and credibility.

The Conte I Cabinet, formed by the Parliament of the XVIII convocation, replaced the Gentiloni Cabinet, which resigned on March 24, 2018. As a result of the parliamentary election, not a single political party or coalition received an absolute majority of seats in any of the chambers; due to this, negotiations on the formation of a new government dragged on [n1]. On May 18, 2018, delegations of two parties led by their leaders Di Maio and Salvini agreed on the so-called 'Contract for the formation of a government of change' — the main program document of the coalition cabinet concerning specifically migration rules tightening [n2]. The term 'change' here represents the policy shift whose direction and effectiveness has yet to be assessed.

The coalition government worked for a little over a year and collapsed after the Lega Nord leader Matteo Salvini withdrew his support. The new cabinet, escaping the possibility of early elections, was proclaimed in September 2019, and the government coalition of, it seemed, implacable opponents — left-centrists and populists — was formed. Matteo Salvini, who claims to be the only true and morally justified nation leader, has already won some regional elections. But since February 2020 he has been facing the risk of being prosecuted for the migration policy implemented by him as interior minister last year [n9]. The question is how would the far-right supporters advocate their interests now, bypassing the new Conte Cabinet, and how would that affect the issues of migration.

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