

THE 2024 EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT ELECTIONS
PAPER – 5 JUNE 2024

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1. Political and institutional framework

Italy is going through a phase of major institutional reforms. To tell the truth, the issue of reforms has been running through the political life of the country for more than 40 years¹, but in the last period there have been some important evolutions: Constitutional Law No. 1 of 2020² reduced the number of Parliamentarians, both in the Chamber of Deputies (from 630 to 400) and in the Senate of the Republic (from 315 to 200); Parliament is discussing – and everything suggests that the operation has a good chance of coming to realization – a reform that will involve the direct election of the Prime Minister, determining a real revolution in the Italian form of government³. Moreover, this intervention on the form of government travels together with the implementation and strengthening of the so-called differentiated regionalism⁴, which aims to confer special forms of autonomy to certain regions that – possessing certain characteristics – request it, pursuant to Article 116, c. 3, Const.

¹ Const. bill. C 2613 B, “Provisions for overcoming equal bicameralism, reducing the number of parliamentarians, containing the operating costs of institutions, abolishing the CNEL and revising Title V of Part II of the Constitution”.

² See Const. law. Oct. 19, 2020, No. 1, “Amendments to Articles 56, 57, and 59 of the Constitution regarding the reduction of the number of parliamentarians”, published in GURI No. 261, Oct. 21, 2020.

³ The Italian literature on the subject is, as understandable, boundless. For some commentary in English on the first proposal for direct election of the Prime Minister, see A. DE PETRIS, *Looking at Berlin, Ending up on Capitol Hill*, in *Verfassungsblog*, 13 november 2023; C. FUSARO, *Between Recalibration and Distortion*, in *Verfassungsblog*, 15 november 2023; S. CIVITARESE MATTEUCCI, *Paving the Way to Autocracy? On the Meloni Government’s Attempt to Shift the Constitutional Architecture of Italy*, in *Verfassungsblog*, 16 november 2023; E. CATERINA, *Prize and Premiership*, in *Verfassungsblog*, 23 november 2023.

⁴ “Differentiated regionalism” is the formula used in Italian debate to mean the introduction of forms of asymmetry in the regional state form. Even in this case, the literature is very extensive. For insights in English, see B. BALDI, *Exploring Autonomism: Asymmetry and New Developments in Italian Regionalism*, in *Revista d’estudis autonòmics i federals*, 32, 2020, pp. 15-44; S. RAGONE, *Territorial Politics of Regionalism in Italy Between Integration and Disintegration*, in M. BELOV (eds), *Territorial Politics and Secession. Federalism and Internal Conflicts*, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2021, pp. 191-214; E. ARBAN, G. MARTINICO, F. PALERMO (eds), *Federalism and Constitutional Law. The Italian Contribution to Comparative Regionalism*, Routledge, London and New York, 2021; E. HAPPAHER, *New Developments in the Italian Multilevel System: the “Differentiated Regionalism”*, in *ZöR Zeitschrift für öffentliches Recht*, 2, 2020, pp. 447-469.

Italy's is now a parliamentary republic in which the government is appointed by the President of the Republic⁵ and enters into full office after obtaining a vote of confidence from the Houses of Parliament. It is the President of the Republic who, on the basis of the electoral result and, consequently, on the forces in Parliament, identifies the person with the best chance of having and maintaining a parliamentary majority, which is necessary to govern. In the event that confidence from the Houses of Parliament is lost, it is up to the President of the Republic to identify a new personality who is able to enjoy the support of the parliamentary majority and, on that basis, form a government capable of gaining confidence.

The President of the Republic therefore has a crucial role in the process of forming the government: when faced with clear electoral results, he has been limited to a formal role of appointing the personality indicated by the majority groups; when – much more often, in the Italian context – either the electoral result or the parliamentary dynamics have not determined the clear emergence of a specific person, he has been called upon to engage in an active role of mediation between the different groups, oriented toward the identification of an exquisitely political formula, or the proposal of “*technical*” governments around which to assemble functional majorities, so as to have given way to doctrine to coin expressions such as “*government of the President*” et similia.

The Chambers respond to a model of equal and perfect bicameralism: they are composed according to an almost identical formula⁶, have the same powers and perform the same functions; both are required to grant confidence to the Government. If confidence is lost in even one branch of Parliament, the Executive would be required to resign.

The current electoral law⁷ – named Rosatellum bis – is based on a mixed system equal for both chambers, with some minor distinctions due to the requirement to respect the regional base in the Senate. It states that 61 percent of the seats (245 in the House and 122 in the Senate) will be allocated by a proportional system⁸, articulated in multi-nominal constituencies with blocked lists, while 37 percent (147 deputies and 74 senators) will be established by a single-round majoritarian system with uninominal constituencies; the remaining 2 percent (8 deputies and 4 senators) is reserved for the four proportional constituencies for Italians abroad. Votes given in the proportional also automatically go to the uninominal candidate; conversely, votes given to the uninominal candidate without an indication of the list supporting him or her are apportioned pro rata among the lists, according to the total votes obtained in the constituency.

⁵ Art. 92 Const.: “*The President of the Republic appoints the Prime Minister and, upon his proposal, the Ministers*”.

⁶ Art. 57 Const.: “*The Senate of the Republic is elected on a regional basis, except for the seats allocated to the Overseas Constituency*”.

⁷ Law No. 165 of November 3, 2017, “*Amendments to the system of electing the Chamber of Deputies and the Senate of the Republic. Delegation of power to the government for the determination of uninominal and plurinominal electoral constituencies*”.

⁸ There are different bar thresholds: 3 percent national for single lists in both the House and Senate; 10 percent national for coalitions (with at least one list at 3 percent).

The form of government now described has characterized the Italian legal system ever since the Constitution came into force: the existence of a not particularly strong government and a split Parliament was not originally a dysfunction of the system, but a precise choice made by the Constituent Fathers, who opted for the definition of a constitutional arrangement capable of warding off any vague desire to centralize powers by the executive. After all, as is well known, Italy had just emerged from the two decades of Fascism, and the need to equip the system with effective antibodies to authoritarian drifts was felt very strongly.

The existence of weak governments – structurally and especially in terms of duration – was counterbalanced for decades by a very strong party system, structured within the more complex framework of an international situation in which the world was divided into two blocs. For decades, therefore, Christian Democracy (DC), the Communist Party (PCI) and the Socialist Party (PSI) represented the three main political forces that, together with other smaller but constantly present parties, ensured the formation of governments based on the balance whereby the DC was always part of the executive while the PCI was practically permanently outside it.

It would have little effect to have weak governments when faced with parties so structured at the top and rooted in the territory.

The collapse of the Berlin Wall – a true watershed in contemporary history – broke down the reasons for compromise that guaranteed stability in the system.

With the collapse of the parties of the so-called “*First Republic*”, the weakness of the executive began to be a problem for the effectiveness of government action. The advent of the Berlusconi era brought about a redefinition of the party system, transforming it into a bipolarism previously unknown to the Italian experience.

This new set-up, based on coalitions of parties polarized on two opposing fronts, made the topic of granting more power to the government progressively more urgent: its effectiveness, in fact, had to reckon with continuous negotiations within majorities. A negotiation that was no longer taking place between party currents, but between allied parties that could drop confidence and potentially, but not only, accord it to different political formulas. The weakness of the government was becoming a problem of organization of the majority itself, and it is no coincidence that strengthening the executive was one of the leitmotifs of the presidency of Silvio Berlusconi, who attempted a constitutional reform (also) in this sense in 2005, clashing with rejection by the electoral body, on the occasion of the constitutional referendum.

Strengthening the effectiveness of the executive had also become a necessity because of the evolution of the European integration process: the European Union is an increasingly protagonist in the lives of

Member States. In order to contribute to the determination of common medium and long-term policies, there is a growing need for governments of legislature, which are able to bring coherent demands over a congruent period of time.

The end of the Berlusconi era in November 2011 opened a phase of further uncertainty and instability, leading to the end of bipolarity: difficulty in identifying a political formula for government and frequent recourse to “*technical*” Prime Ministers and majorities “*constructed*” by the President of the Republic after elections. It is no coincidence that the only political government with a constant majority in the 2011-2022 period, the one led by Matteo Renzi, also attempted constitutional and electoral reform in order to ensure greater stability for the executive.

The difficulty in rationalizing the system has led governments to adopt pathological distorting behaviors such as, above all, frequent recourse to the “*decree law-conversion law with maxi amendment and question of confidence*” scheme. This dynamic has led to a mortification of Parliament, which has downsized its ability to exercise legislative power, essentially maintaining, even in terms of direction, the sole task of giving confidence to the government.

The reduction in the number of parliamentarians that occurred with Constitutional Law No. 1 of 2020 has further aggravated the situation of the Chambers, which are now not only weakened in their power relationship with the government, as they can no longer control it, but also understaffed in relation to the functions they should or could perform.

The constitutional bill under discussion aims to strengthen the level of legitimacy and effectiveness of the government through the direct election of the Prime Minister. He will be elected by universal and direct suffrage and, if he loses the confidence of the Chambers, he could call for their dissolution. If he doesn't, the President of the Republic could identify another parliamentarian elected in conjunction with the outgoing Prime Minister and give him the task of forming a new government. This eventuality, however, could occur only once in the course of the legislature.

Scholarship is questioning, with different positions, about the ability of this bill to achieve the purpose of effectively strengthening government action declared by its proponents⁹. Instead, the political debate is likely to move toward its final stage after knowing the results of the June 8 and 9 European elections.

⁹ As mentioned, the literature is obviously very broad. For the sake of completeness of argumentation, we point out the recent A. POGGI, *Le “virtù” del premierato. Sistema politico e forma di governo in Italia*, Giappichelli, Turin, 2024, where the author evaluates the conditions where direct election of the Prime Minister can be consistent with the parliamentary form of government--specifically Italian--and the goals of majoritarian democracy. For a broader overview of the different positions of Italian doctrine on the direct election of the Prime Minister and methods of rationalizing the form of government, see G. PITRUZZELLA, A. POGGI, F. FABRIZZI, V. TONDI DELLA MURA, F. VARI (eds.), *Riforme istituzionali e forme di governo*, Giappichelli, Turin, 2023.

Regarding the form of state, the territory is divided into 19 regions and 2 autonomous provinces. The Italian regional system envisaged in the 1948 Constitution was then actually activated in 1970. It was initially a regionalism that granted a limited level of autonomy to the regions, both in terms of functions and revenues. In 2001, the reform of Title V of Part II of the Constitution completed a five-year period of progressive regional strengthening operated through primary legislation. Among the many changes to the state's orderly structure – including, for example, the introduction of the Metropolitan Cities – the reform redefined the distribution of legislative powers between the State and the Regions in favor of the Regions, which not only gained concurrent competence in so many important matters, but also – an also symbolically relevant element – residual competence for all matters not expressly assigned to the State. In more than two decades of implementation of this important reform, Italian regionalism has experienced alternating phases, from moments of marked autonomism to others of strong re-centralization of competencies, powers and resources. The 2001 reform also included hypotheses for the differentiation of Italian regionalism. In particular, Article 116, third paragraph, of the Constitution regulates the possibility of granting special forms and conditions of autonomy to regions with ordinary statutes that, in possession of certain requirements, apply for it. The issue has come into focus following the initiatives taken by Lombardy, Veneto and Emilia-Romagna in 2017 and has now become of particular pivotal importance due to the commitment by the second governing force – the Lega – which was originally born as a quasi-regional political party, rooted exclusively in the North, but which has maintained, despite its transformation into a nationwide party, a marked vocation toward supporting forms of strong autonomy for sub-state entities.

The institutional debate is thus monopolized by these two issues: premierate and differentiated regionalism. Manner and timing of their eventual implementation will also depend on the outcome of the European Parliament election vote: will the governing parties emerge stronger? Will the power relations within the majority change?

From a political perspective, Italy's Parliament today is characterized by a center-right majority that was established in both chambers in the 2022 general elections. Under the previously described electoral system, center-right lists won 237 seats in the Chamber of Deputies (including 119 Fratelli d'Italia) and 115 seats in the Senate (including 65 Fratelli d'Italia, the leading party). The President of the Republic took note of the election result and appointed Hon. Giorgia Meloni as Prime Minister, the first woman to serve as head of government. Meloni accepted the post without reservation, directly presenting the list of ministers, using a formula seen on only three other occasions in the history of the Republic¹⁰.

¹⁰ These are the Pella and Berlusconi IV governments, on which, E. VERDOLINI, *Il Governo Pella come esecutivo degli affari correnti: le interpretazioni inedite delle prerogative del Capo dello Stato nella fase del consolidamento della Repubblica*; F. SAVASTANO, *Le*

The party expressing the Prime Minister is the legacy of the Italian right-wing tradition, particularly the Movimento Sociale, which later became Alleanza Nazionale and finally merged into Silvio Berlusconi's "Popolo della Libertà".

After the fall of Berlusconi, the right wing of the old coalition reorganized under the old symbol of AN, choosing the name "Fratelli d'Italia", which evokes the national anthem. The coalition supporting the government is also made up of "Lega", the former federalist and separatist movement – now a populist right-wing – led by Matteo Salvini, as well as "Forza Italia", the moderate party created by Silvio Berlusconi and now managed by former European Parliament President Antonio Tajani. From a political point of view, the two main challenges of this government concern the deployment of the "PNRR" – the Italian plan for the implementation of the Next Generation EU – and the management of the economic consequences of other recovery measures adopted because of the Covid-19 pandemic, above all the so-called *superbonus*¹¹.

At the international level, despite the intentions of discontinuity, the position taken is decidedly European and Atlantic¹², in the wake of the Draghi Government, but also of those that preceded it. This applies both to the stand taken on the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, with support for Kiev's positions, and to what is happening in the Middle East, with solidarity with the Palestinian cause balanced by continued attention to protecting the State of Israel from the risk of isolation.

Even on more specific topics, such as the Stability Pact or the issue of migrants, the government's action has been in continuity with what has been done by previous governments: the same demands have been brought and the focus has been on reaching European compromises aimed at softening some of the critical issues of the Italian situation¹³.

The only real point of misalignment with European policies concerns the ecological transition, where, moreover, controversies have begun to appear in several Member States¹⁴.

Apart from the policies pursued, it is of greater interest from a constitutionalist perspective to analyze what the Meloni Government's attitude has been on the institutional level. From its inauguration in October 2022 until mid-May 2024, the Meloni Government has posed a total of 52 questions of confidence for the approval of bills: only Renzi (68) and Draghi (55) governments have done more, but

elezioni politiche del 2008 e la formazione del Governo Berlusconi IV, both in B. CARAVITA, F. FABRIZZI, V. LIPPOLIS, G.M. SALERNO (eds), *La nascita dei Governi della Repubblica (1946-2021)*, Giappichelli, Turin, 2022, 117-131 and 941-959.

¹¹ It had been reported early by A. POGGI, *Dal governo Draghi al governo Meloni: diversa maggioranza stessi problemi. Anzi, forse, qualcuno in più*, in *federalismi.it*, n. 21, 2023, pp. iv-xii.

¹² N. FASOLA, S. LUCARELLI, *The 'pragmatic' foreign policy of the Meloni government: between 'Euro-nationalism', Atlanticism and Mediterranean activism*, in *Contemporary Italian Politics*, n. 2, 2024, pp. 198-213.

¹³ See A. BARAGGIA, *The Italian Right-Wing Government and the EU: an Interesting Case Study*, in *The Italian Review of International and Comparative Law*, 3(1), 2023, pp. 207-213.

¹⁴ See E. PIZZIMENTI, *The Meloni government and the challenge of ecological transition*, in *Contemporary Italian Politics*, n. 2, 2024, pp. 183-197.

with different durations. Looking at the average number of questions of confidence asked per month, the Meloni Government (2.83) is third behind Monti (3) and Draghi (2.89): both technical governments led by heterogeneous political majorities.

What reveals a great deal about the government's centralizing attitude is the relationship between confidence questions and laws passed: 44 percent of the total legislative acts have passed with the question of confidence, in several cases, asked in both chambers.

Data seems to be normalizing compared to the beginning of the government's experience: March 2024 was the first month without questions of confidence since November 2022, but the figure is still significant, both in relation to the way the government exercises the legislative function, and in relation to the overall evolution of the Italian form of government, which is increasingly unbalanced in favor of the executive, and increasingly marginalizing towards Parliament¹⁵.

The main opposition parties are the Democratic Party (PD) and the 5 Star Movement (M5S). The PD has been the heart of the Italian center-left and the reference point of the reformist and progressive world for years. Born out of the need to counter Berlusconi's dominance by uniting the moderate and socialist souls of the center-left, while also meeting the exigencies of the electoral system at the time, the PD seemed destined to establish itself as the new undisputed leader of Italian politics. In fact, after the fall of Berlusconi, it repeatedly established itself as the first party but without ever increasing its consensus. This has allowed it to remain always at the center of the system, participating in most of the government formations, but succeeding only in one legislature to express the Prime Minister, moreover replacing him several times because of changes in internal balances. The PD entered the European elections led by Elly Schlein, who won the primary election against Emilia-Romagna Regional President Stefano Bonaccini. Thus was born an unprecedented competition in the Italian political scene, where the main parties vying for the country's government are led by women, although profoundly different in the interpretation – and perhaps effectiveness – of their leadership¹⁶.

The other major opposition party is the 5-Star Movement, founded by comedian Beppe Grillo but now transformed into a real political party under the leadership of Giuseppe Conte, Head of Government during the pandemic and, starting from that position, gradually becoming party leader¹⁷.

¹⁵ On which see, recently, F. FABRIZZI, *il Parlamento nella «democrazia decidente»*, il Mulino, Bologna, 2024. The author also reports data on the legislative output of the Meloni government to support his reasoning on the evolution of the role of Parliament in the form of government (p. 59).

¹⁶ See A. DONÀ, *Elly versus Giorgia? The political leadership of Elly Schlein and Giorgia Meloni between myth and reality*, in *Contemporary Italian Politics*, 2, 2024, pp. 152–166.

¹⁷ On the transformations and evolutions of M5S, see G. PICCIRILLI, *The Five Star Movement and its challenge to the pluralistic foundations of Italian democracy*, in B. CRUM, A. OLEART (eds.), *Populist Parties and Democratic Resilience. A Cross-National Analysis of Populist Parties' Impact on Democratic Pluralism in Europe*, Routledge, London, 2023, pp. 159–176.

While marking their differences, the Democratic Party and the 5-Star Movement attempt to coordinate their opposition action through collaboration that has often resulted in genuine alliances during regional or local election rounds.

Among other political forces, there is the significant presence of Italia Viva, the movement of former Prime Minister Matteo Renzi, which intends to use the European vote to revive its position, which is being rebuilt after its separation from the PD.

The European election round will be an important test for the government and will be decisive for the future developments of its political direction. President Meloni will have three types of feedback: that on herself, that on relations within the government majority, and that on the persistence of a gap between majority and opposition. The outcome of this test will have an impact on the composition of the government, the directions it intends to pursue, and the manner and strength it deems appropriate to possibly do so.

2. Parliamentary seats and electoral system

The electoral system for the elections of the European Parliament in Italy is governed by Law No. 18 of 1979, insisted upon by several amendments, most notably Law No. 10 of 2009, that introduced the bar threshold, and Law No. 65 of 2014, that instead provided for measures to balance gender representation. We are dealing with a pure proportional system, with a 4 percent bar threshold and the possibility of indicating three preferences, with alternating gender constraints. The single national electoral district is divided into five territorial constituencies: Northwest¹⁸, with twenty seats available, Northeast¹⁹, fifteen seats, Central²⁰, also fifteen, Southern²¹, eighteen, Insular²², eight, for a total of 76 seats up for grabs²³.

Seats are allocated nationally using a system of whole quotients and largest remainders: once the seats obtained are counted, therefore, they are reallocated to constituencies in proportion to the votes obtained in them, and then there is the assessment of the preferences expressed in each constituency.

In detail, the national electoral figure of each list is determined, making the total sum of the votes obtained; lists below 4 percent are excluded; the figures of the admitted lists are added together and the total obtained is divided by the number of seats to be allocated, obtaining the national quotient; the national figure is divided by the national quotient, so as to have a number of seats for each list; the remaining seats are allocated using the method of the highest remainders, rewarding those with the

¹⁸ Piedmont, Aosta Valley, Liguria, Lombardy.

¹⁹ Veneto, Trentino-Alto Adige, Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Liguria, Emilia-Romagna.

²⁰ Tuscany, Umbria, Lazio, Marche.

²¹ Abruzzo, Molise, Campania, Apulia, Basilicata, Calabria.

²² Sardinia, Sicily.

²³ Decision (EU) 2023/2061.

highest national figure in case of a tie. We then proceed by calculating preferences and running down the lists: candidates elected in more than one constituency must declare which constituency they choose to the National Election Office within eight days of the last proclamation. In case of no option, the National Election Office proceeds by drawing lots.

Lists of candidates must be signed by not less than 30,000 and not more than 35,000 voters. Subscriptions are not required (Art. 12, c.4, l. 18/1979) for political parties and groups that: are constituted as a parliamentary group in the current national legislature at the time of the convocation of the polls even in only one of the two chambers, or that in the last national political election have presented candidacies with their own mark and have obtained at least one seat in one of the two chambers; in the previous elections have obtained at least one seat in the European Parliament; in the last election of the Chamber of Deputies, have submitted lists for the allocation of seats in the proportional quota even when they have not obtained any seats, provided that a candidate who was elected in a uninominal constituency has been linked to these lists, albeit under a different mark; lists marked by a composite mark, in which is contained that of a political party or group that is exempt from the burden of signing the candidacies, do not have to collect signatures either. For political parties or groups expressed by the French-speaking minorities of Valle d'Aosta, the German-speaking minorities of the province of Bolzano, and the Slovenian-speaking minorities of Friuli-Venezia Giulia, there is the possibility of linking up with another list in the same constituency submitted by political party or group that is present in all constituencies with the same mark. Each list must consist of not less than three and not more than the number of MEPs to be elected in the constituency, and upon submission, in each list, candidates of the same sex may not be more than half, rounded up to the unit, and that the first two candidates on the list must be of different sexes. Eligible to vote are all Italian citizens who have reached the age of 18 and are registered on the electoral rolls, as well as EU citizens residing in Italy who have applied by the 90th day prior to the election, as provided by the Treaties. Italian citizens residing in another EU State may decide whether to participate in the elections in that State or to take part in the election of Italian representatives at specially established polling stations there.

Decree Law 7 of 2024 introduced the possibility for students away from home to vote in their place of residence: only 4 percent of eligible voters actually applied to vote without returning to their place of residence.

Eligible to be elected are citizens holding the right to vote who have reached the age of 25 as well as citizens of other Member States who meet the eligibility requirements in their home State. It is possible to stand as a candidate in more than one constituency, but not in more than one State, and one cannot simultaneously hold the office of Member of the European Parliament and that of Member of Parliament;

the offices of President, Assessor and Regional Councilor, President of the Province and Mayor of cities with more than 15 thousand inhabitants are also incompatible.

3. The 2019 European elections

European Parliament elections have represented in recent rounds an opportunity to strengthen the executive's position. This was the case in 2009, when the sum of the votes obtained by the three lists supporting the Berlusconi IV Government even broke through the 50 percent ceiling²⁴; it happened in 2014, when Matteo Renzi's Democratic Party achieved its all-time record with 40.81 percent nationwide²⁵; the trend was somehow repeated in 2019²⁶, with the affirmation of Matteo Salvini's Lega – then in the Conte I Government team – as the first party with 34.26 percent of the vote.

The 2019 elections in Italy saw competition among 18 admitted lists, only five of which were able to pass the threshold.

Matteo Salvini's Lega won as the first party, taking an impressive 28 seats, up from the 5 it held in the previous European legislature. This great leap determined for the first time in Italy the affirmation of a party that did not identify itself with one of the two main European political families. In fact, the Lega was not part of either the EPP or the PES, and its MEPs joined the Identity and Democracy group together with Marine Le Pen. Because of the high number of MEPs destined for Italy, the result was bound to have a significant impact on the overall balance of the European Parliament, again determining the necessity of an EPP-PSE agreement to form a majority that would keep the European Parliament safe from the advance of euroskeptic forces.

The Democratic Party gained 19 seats, twelve fewer than in 2014, but it looked back with satisfaction at the result, which represented a sign of recovery from the 2018 domestic electoral disaster. In contrast, the 5-Star Movement had seen a drop in its support both compared to the national figure and to the 2014 elections, standing at 17.06 percent.

An interesting data point is provided by reading the result of Fratelli d'Italia: after remaining below the threshold in 2014, Meloni's party came from a 4.33 percent obtained in the 2018 national elections that left more than a few perplexities about the possibility of actually passing the bar. The 6.46 percent of the vote obtained in 2019 was therefore welcomed with great satisfaction. Yet another proof of how electoral

²⁴ M.G. RODOMONTE, G. ROSA, A. STERPA, *Italia, il bipolarismo tiene alla prova delle elezioni europee*, in B. CARAVITA (ed), *Le elezioni del Parlamento europeo del 2009*, Jovene, Naples, 2009, pp. 129-146.

²⁵ See S. CECCANTI, *Le elezioni dei quattro vincitori e le possibili conseguenze nel futuro prossimo*, in B. CARAVITA (ed), *Le elezioni del Parlamento europeo del 2014*, Jovene, Naples, 2015, pp. 13-16; A. VUOLO, *La transizione italiana nella tornata elettorale europea del 2014*, in B. CARAVITA (ibid.), 257-270.

²⁶ See A. VUOLO, *La crisi italiana e l'elezione del Parlamento europeo*, in B. CARAVITA (ed), *Le elezioni del Parlamento europeo del 2019*, Giappichelli, Turin, 2019, pp. 381-408.

trends in Italy since the fall of Berlusconi have been characterized by a very strong volatility, making it possible to alternate fast affirmations and equally resounding débâcles.

Particularly significant is the data on turnout: in 2019 a negative record was set with 54.5 percent of eligible voters actually going to the polls. Abstentionism, after all, has continued to characterize other successive rounds of elections in Italy. What is striking about this figure is, on the one hand, that it is grafted into a context in which traditionally the level of political participation was very high²⁷, and on the other hand, that it ran counter to the rest of the Member States, where the average turnout, in 2019, had increased.

List	EU Party	EP Group	Votes	%	Seats
Lega Salvini Premier (LSP)	ID	ID	9 175 208	34,26	28
Partito Democratico - Siamo Europei (PD-SE)	PSE	S&D	6 089 853	22,74	19
Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S)	–	NI	4 569 089	17,06	14
Forza Italia (FI)	PPE	PPE	2 351 673	8,78	6
Fratelli d'Italia (FdI)	ECR	ECR	1 726 189	6,44	5
Südtiroler Volkspartei (SVP)	PPE	PPE	142 185	0,53	1

Tab 1 - 2019 EP Elections in Italy Results

4. Electoral campaign and competing political forces

The lists of parties and movements competing in the European elections have been submitted to the Ministry of the Interior on April 21 and 22, 2024. A total of 42 markings were deposited, 34 of which were admitted. The lists of candidates were submitted on April 30 and May 1, 2024 at the chancelleries of the courts of appeals of the district capitals.

There are fifteen lists admitted, four of which have submitted their candidates only in some constituencies.

As has been pointed out, European elections have often been a midterm test for the incumbent government and, above all, an excellent opportunity for parties to “count” their votes. The proportional system and the possibility to partially break away from the dynamics regarding the formation of the national government push parties to present lists with the ambition of measuring their absolute electoral strength. The result is usually decisive in guiding the choices that the party will follow at the national level, both in terms of action and political positioning.

²⁷ In 1979, 85.7% of the eligible voters in Italy voted in the European elections, against an EU average of 62%. This dynamic was confirmed in the next two elections: in 1984 the turnout was 82.5%, in 1989 it was 81.1%. Since the 1990s, the decline in turnout has increased: in 1994, participation fell to 73.6%, in 1999 to 69.8%, while in 2004 there was a slight upturn, to 71.7%. The downward trend was accentuated in subsequent elections: in 2009, the turnout fell to 66.5%, in 2014 to 57.2%, and in 2019 to 54.5%.

The parties supporting the Meloni Government will come up with three autonomous lists, each linked to a different European-level political party.

Fratelli d'Italia (FdI) is the Prime Minister's list and presents itself with its own name and symbol, welcoming within it "Rinascimento", Vittorio Sgarbi's movement, and Rotondi's Christian Democracy; it is part of the Party of European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR), in which it has long played a leadership role, that these elections could further strengthen. An alliance has been cemented here with the right-wingers of Vox, in Spain, and Law and Justice, in Poland. Meloni has chosen to run as a chief candidate in all constituencies. A choice that has caused discussion for two reasons: the first is that it is clearly a fictitious candidacy, since Giorgia Meloni will not give up her positions to represent citizens in the European Parliament; the second is the choice to present herself as "*Giorgia Meloni known as Giorgia*", inviting citizens to write on the ballot paper only her first name – Giorgia, precisely – thus launching a personalistic electoral campaign, based on consent to the "*woman of the people*" that she has remarked that she is and wants to remain.

The electoral program is titled "*With Giorgia, Italy Changes Europe*" and declares the intention to "*defend the identity of European peoples and nations*", with a view to a Europe that "*represents the founding core of the Occident, that space in which in history the values and principles on which our civilization is based took shape: freedom, equality, democracy, law, the encounter between faith and reason embodied in our classical and Judeo-Christian roots*".

The text of the program is 20 pages long and is divided into 15 chapters. It ranges from "*Labor Europe*" to "*Health, Rights and Freedoms*", via the "*Birthrate Goal*" and "*Overcoming Austerity*". For the rest, FdI's election campaign is marked – as could be expected – by the celebration of the government's successes at both the national and European levels: there is a strong focus on the desire to "*change Europe*", modeling what has been done internally and proposing a vision of a Europe that is a brake on the pursuit of domestic policies that, without it, would have been more effective. The campaign messages touch on topics concerning agriculture, health care, the cost of raw materials, and the labor market, claiming that these are issues in which the government has done much despite Europe and, indeed, defending Italy from Europe. Without, of course, going into the sifting of political issues, however, it is necessary to note how the campaign did not touch on any specific measures, but merely took big themes as a jumping off point.

The Lega Salvini Premier (LSP) list has lost a lot of consensus in the years of government in favor of FdI, and it has made an electoral platform that accommodates several right-wing movements, including from the South. Salvini's party has marked an electoral campaign on gathering the most extreme votes. Prominent among the candidates is Roberto Vannacci, a former general of the Italian army, who has been a protagonist in the public debate for a book-scandal in which he advocates discriminatory and

xenophobic positions. The Lega's positions are also markedly Eurocritical: the slogan is *"More Italy, less Europe"*, the same one used by Forza Italia for the 2014 European elections, and the campaign is avowedly set on the theme of *"defense from Europe"* (another more explicit slogan is *"in defense of your house and your car"*). The Lega's program is 18 pages long and is divided into ten short chapters. These include *"The protection of freedoms and the defense of our values"*; *"Overcoming the Green Deal, the return of common sense"*; *"Ending austerity policies: increased purchasing power and full employment"*; and *"Protecting Italian production chains"*. On defense, the Lega says it opposes the creation of a common European army, but favors *"supporting Ukraine's right to self-defense, with the understanding to pursue, at the same time, all diplomatic efforts to arrive at a shared solution and end the conflict rather than encouraging reckless military escalations"*. Lega MEPs will converge in the group of *"Identity and Democracy"* (ID), the European-level political party that brings together several far-right sovereignist movements, including Marine Le Pen's *Rassemblement National*.

Forza Italia - Noi Moderati (FI-NM) is the third government list and brings together the successors of Silvio Berlusconi, who continue to hold together a heterogeneous group of moderates and former Christian Democrats that, despite declining support, stands as the point of reference of the EPP in Italy, whose symbol is present in the election mark. The campaign is still marked by the figure of Berlusconi, whose name stands out in the symbol on the ballot and whose image is used in the posters. The attitude is quite different from its government allies: Forza Italia's policies have always been consistent with the guidelines of the European People's Party, and its current leader, Antonio Tajani, has been president of the European Parliament and figures as a leading candidate in all constituencies except the island one, where it is located outgoing MEP Caterina Chinnici, a Magistrate and daughter of Rocco Chinnici, a judge assassinated by the Mafia in 1983. Forza Italia and Noi Moderati presented a 17-page long program based on ten *"priorities"*, from *"building common defense and security"* to *"reforming the European treaties"*.

The European election round is also an important test case for oppositions, always in the context of redefining internal power relations and the extent of their effectiveness in monitoring the government.

The Democratic Party (PD) is the Italian point of reference for the European Socialist Party, and it is the list that has chosen the highest-profile names on the political level. Secretary Elly Schlein will be the leading candidate in two constituencies, while in the remaining three they have identified the names of Stefano Bonaccini, who emerged defeated in the fight for the leadership of the party precisely against Schlein; Lucia Annunziata, a historic left-wing journalist who marked her profile during the years of the media struggle against Silvio Berlusconi; and Cecilia Strada, former president of Emergency, the humanitarian association founded by her father, Gino Strada. The lists are then completed by other personalities such as Alessandro Zan, known for a bill on same-sex marriage, and high-profile mayors and local administrators, such as Dario Nardella (Florence) or Antonio Decaro (Bari).

The Democratic Party has been in a crisis of consensus since it failed to take advantage of Berlusconi's collapse to establish itself firmly as a majority party capable of governing independently. After the fall of the Renzi Government, due to internal rifts, it found itself at the center of the political system, organizing and taking responsibility for government always in contexts of compromise and alliances that were not entirely solid. This dynamic was accompanied by the persistent difficulty in finding a shared internal political synthesis, and led to a hemorrhaging of consensus in favor of other emerging progressist forces, particularly the 5 Star Movement. The Pd crisis also brought about a form of left-wing abstentionism previously unknown to the Italian experience. Traditionally, in fact, leftist forces have always had a great capacity to move the electorate: low turnout meant that only the left had voted, and in fact socialist and progressive movements had better results. Today, the Pd's urgency is to return to soliciting and engaging the leftist electorate, which, according to the data, has the same abstention rate as the rest of the voters. The PD's program for the European elections is divided into five chapters. The first three contain proposals for making the European Union more "*Social*", "*Sustainable*", and "*Democratic*". The fourth chapter is devoted to "*Reforms for Political Europe*", while the fifth and final chapter is entitled: "*The Peace Project*". Here, among other matters, the PD argues that we need to create a common European army and "*support the resistance of the Ukrainian people in the face of Russian aggression*". At the same time, the EU must deploy "*every diplomatic and political effort aimed at creating the conditions for ending the conflict and building a fair, secure and sustainable peace*".

The other major opposition force is the 5-Star Movement, the party founded in 2009 by comedian Beppe Grillo and entrepreneur Gianroberto Casaleggio, which has undergone several evolutions over the years, transforming from an anti-system party to a party of government, going so far as to express the Prime Minister, in the figure of Giuseppe Conte, who is now the leader of the movement.

The program is titled "*Italy That Counts*" and is an impressive 102 pages long. As usual, it was submitted to members for approval in an online vote on the SkyVote platform. The text is structured in chapters, including a call to "*Bring peace back to Europe*" through the creation of a "*peace conference to stop the war in Ukraine*". The program also explicitly takes a position in favor of EU recognition of the State of Palestine. Other chapters are devoted to European treaty reform, immigration, artificial intelligence, energy, climate and sustainable mobility.

Regarding candidates, the Movement has decided not to nominate people who will then give up their seats. For this reason, Giuseppe Conte will not be a head candidate or nominee in any constituency: all candidates are actually running for a seat in Parliament. The frontrunners are the outgoing Maria Angela Danzi, Sabrina Pignedoli, former female soccer player Carolina Morace, Pasquale Tridico, and Giuseppe Antoci, former director of the Nebrodi Natural Park, in Sicily.

In the last legislature, 5 Star MEPs did not join any parliamentary group, appearing as non-attached. They have been conducting negotiations with several groups for the past year, but will opt for a choice only after the elections, also because it is likely that they will have enough representatives to form the nucleus around which they can build an autonomous group.

Interesting choices were made in the other candidate lists.

The “United States of Europe” (SUE) list combines the Italia Viva movement of former Prime Minister Matteo Renzi and +Europa of historic former radical Emma Bonino. Renzi’s campaign is strongly pro-European, and the former Pd leader has decided to focus on the European elections to relaunch himself on the Italian political scene. He has also decided not to run as a leading candidate, since he would not go for the post of MEP, but he has nonetheless put his name at the bottom of the lists in several constituencies. Interesting is the decision to nominate Graham Robert Watson, a British politician with Italian citizenship, as the chief candidate in the Northeast: a highly symbolic choice both for the presence of a British candidate despite Brexit and for the option in itself to push for the presence of different nationalities on candidate lists. United States of Europe is part of Renew Europe, the European group that rose from the ashes of ALDE, the historic alliance of liberals.

Also in Renew Europe, and with a program very close to SUE’s, is the list of “Action”, with Giorgio Calenda as the leading candidate in all constituencies except one, where former minister Bonetti is listed. Other candidate lists that have outgoing MEPs are “Green-Left Alliance” (AVS) and “Peace Land Dignity” (PTD), both placed in the European Green/ALE area: among the candidates prominent are the names of Ilaria Salis (a Milanese schoolteacher currently under arrest in Budapest), and former mayors Marino, Lucano and Orlando, for AVS; and journalist Michele Santoro, for PTD.

Additional lists presented are those of Alternativa Popolare (AP), the right-wing movement led by Terni Mayor Stefano Bandecchi; Freedom (L), of Cateno De Luca, whose lists include former Minister Castelli and Sergio De Caprio, known in the chronicles for the arrest of Totò Riina, under the pseudonym Capitano Ultimo; Italian Animalist Party-Italian Italexit for Italy (PAI-IpI); and Sovereign and Popular Democracy (DSP). Then appear the two lists of linguistic minorities, particularly that of the Südtiroler Volkspartei (SVP), which also has an outgoing MEP, and the Rassemblement Valdôtain (RV).

Lista	Nord-occidentale	Nord-orientale	Centro	Sud	Isole
Lega Salvini Premier (LSP)	Silvia Sardone	Paolo Borchia	Roberto Vannacci	Roberto Vannacci	Annalisa Tardino
Partito Democratico (PD)	Cecilia Strada	Stefano Bonaccini	Elly Schlein	Lucia Annunziata	Elly Schlein
Forza Italia - Noi Moderati (FI-NM)	Antonio Tajani	Antonio Tajani	Antonio Tajani	Antonio Tajani	Caterina Chinnici
Fratelli d'Italia (FdI)	Giorgia Meloni	Giorgia Meloni	Giorgia Meloni	Giorgia Meloni	Giorgia Meloni
Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S)	Maria Angela Danzi	Sabrina Pignedoli	Carolina Morace	Pasquale Tridico	Giuseppe Antoci
Alleanza Verdi e Sinistra (AVS)	Ilaria Salis	Cristina Guarda	Ignazio Marino	Mimmo Lucano	Leoluca Orlando
Azione - Siamo Europei (AZ-SE)	Elena Bonetti	Carlo Calenda	Carlo Calenda	Carlo Calenda	Carlo Calenda
Stati Uniti d'Europa (SUE)	Emma Bonino	Graham Watson	Gian Domenico Caiazza	Enzo Maraio	Rita Bernardini
Pace Terra Dignità (PTD)	Michele Santoro	Raniero La Valle	Michele Santoro	Michele Santoro	Michele Santoro
Alternativa Popolare (AP)	Stefano Bandecchi	Stefano Bandecchi	Luca Palamara	Stefano Bandecchi	Stefano Bandecchi
Libertà (L)	Cateno De Luca	Cateno De Luca	Cateno De Luca	Cateno De Luca	Cateno De Luca

Tab 2 Headed in all constituencies